

# Getting Volunteer Teachers and Urban Parents to Work Together: a Study of an Effort to Establish a Partnership

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BOSTON COLLEGE  
Lynch School of Education

Department of Educational Administration

GETTING VOLUNTEER TEACHERS AND URBAN PARENTS TO  
WORK TOGETHER: A STUDY OF AN EFFORT TO ESTABLISH A  
PARTNERSHIP

Dissertation  
by

INGRID W. TUCKER

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

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Getting Volunteer Teachers and Urban Parent to Work Together: A Study of an  
Effort to Establish a Partnership

Ingrid W. Tucker

Dissertation Director: Robert Starratt, Ed.D.

ABSTRACT

Parent involvement is critical to student success. Many schools across the nation are making a concerted effort to establish relationships between teachers and parents. There are a myriad of barriers that prevent those relationships from occurring. The challenge is even greater in urban schools.

This qualitative case study examines the impact of volunteer teacher perceptions and attitudes on establishing relationships with urban parents at an all girls' middle school in the inner city. The study specifically investigated the beliefs of volunteer teachers before and after their participation in the study. The study will also examine whether teachers considered parents as an integral part in supporting their children's learning as a result of their participation in the study.

Five volunteer teachers, a master teacher and the parent coordinator participated in the study over the course of a year and a half. The data from this study showed that despite cultural and socio-economic differences, volunteer teacher can work with urban parents. The findings indicate volunteer teachers do value parental involvement. Teachers believe with continued professional development, they can establish authentic

relationships with parents. Teachers in the study reported that parents want the best for their children. Teachers indicated that their relationships with parents are critical to student success. The findings of this study will provide implications for educational practice, policy, future research and researchers' leadership.

Limitations to the study include a small sample size, the duration of the study and the role of researcher as Head of School.

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## CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

### *Introduction*

The achievement gap between urban and suburban students continues to soar. Attempts to close the achievement gap between suburban and urban students are related to another gap: Poor students are enrolled in schools that not only receive fewer dollars but also have fewer qualified teachers (Howey, Post & Zimpher, 2006). In urban schools across the country, teachers are inundated by a myriad of challenges (e.g., a lack of financial resources, lack of teacher preparation, and nominal parental support).

At the school that is the focus of this study; volunteer teachers comprise 80% of the staff. Although these teachers are committed to the school's mission--providing a quality education to inner city students from socio-economically disadvantaged families--they are not arriving at the school with adequate teacher training and experience to work effectively in a diverse, high-need environment. Consequently, teachers are not confident in the classroom and do not feel comfortable interacting with and engaging parents. These teacher deficits can and do impact student learning.

### The School's History

The Urban Hope Middle School was inspired by the Mission Hope School in New York City. A prominent New Yorker was a volunteer at the latter school and returned to a nearby city to found Hope Scholars School for boys. A local nun from Holy Family Church admired Hope Scholars for boys and asked the question, "What about the girls?" In 1993, Monsignor William Bennington and Sr. Kathleen Sullivan founded the Urban Hope Middle School for girls, grades five through eight.

Since its inception, the mission of the school has been to provide a quality education that develops the potential of each student and prepares her to succeed in a competitive secondary school. Urban Hope's sixty middle-school students come from an urban environment in the Northeast. Over half of Urban Hope Academy's students are first-generation children of immigrants from countries such as Vietnam, Haiti, Trinidad, Cape Verde, and the Dominican Republic. To qualify for admissions to the Academy, families must be eligible for heating assistance and support the school's mission; girls must demonstrate interest in learning. As the girls matriculated, administrators at the school realized there was a need to provide educational opportunities for the girls' families.

Now, Urban Hope Enterprise has three components: The Academy, an After-school Program and an Adult Education Center. Urban Hope's tuition-free, after-school program serves twenty-five third and fourth grade boys and girls who are residents of the community or have a sister enrolled in the Academy. The goal of the program is to prepare the fourth grade girls for admission into the Academy.

Adult family members also take advantage of the learning opportunities by enrolling in Urban Hope's Adult Education program, which offers the girls' parents, family members and adults from the community classes in English as a Second Language, General Equivalency Diploma (GED), Computer Literacy, and tutoring in all subjects. All of the programming at Urban Hope Enterprise is designed to empower people with limited financial resources so that they can support their children's education and gain access to social mobility. The Academy, which emphasizes academic, social, emotional and spiritual development of girls, is the focus of this study.

### *Description of School*

Urban Hope is located in a Northeast inner-city. The average income per family is \$19,979. English is the second language for 51% of the students in the Academy, 79% of the students enrolled in the Adult Education Program and 47% of the Shining Star after-school students.

The average class size at Urban Hope is fifteen. Urban Hope is one of 64 schools in a network of schools whose missions are similar: to serve underprivileged students in urban environments. The administrative structure at Urban Hope is quite similar to most schools. The Principal leads a staff of fifteen, including a vice-principal, a master teacher, graduate (alumni) and parent support coordinator, two part-time veteran teachers and ten volunteer teachers. Seven out of ten volunteer teachers are recent college graduates. One volunteer teacher had previous work experience in a non-profit organization in another major urban hub. She graduated from college four years ago. The remaining two volunteer teachers are middle-aged career changers who live at home with their families. All but one of the ten volunteer teachers self identifies as white middle to upper class. One volunteer teacher is a person of color from an inner city neighborhood in another major city. She identifies as middle class. The principal, vice-principal and master teacher are also white and middle class. The graduate/parent support coordinator is a woman of color who is middle class as well. The two part-time teachers are veterans who are white and middle class.

The parents at Urban Hope fall slightly above the poverty level, on average they have completed their junior year in high school, and half speak English as a second

language. Sixty percent work more than one job, eighty-two percent are single parent households and ninety nine percent are people of color. All of the families qualify for free lunch.

The family demographics are as follows:

Table 1.1: Urban Hope Family Demographics

Percentage of population	Ethnicity
41%	Latino
19%	Cape Verdean
15%	Haitian Creole
12%	African American
10%	Caribbean (West Indian)
2%	Asian
1%	Caucasian

### *Volunteer Teachers*

Volunteerism is central to the school’s mission. Volunteers comprise forty percent of the staff in all three programs. Urban Hope Academy is committed to hiring volunteer teachers. There are ten volunteer teachers in the Academy. The volunteer teacher model has existed since the school opened fifteen years ago. Urban Hope has been successful in attracting young and enthusiastic teachers. Every year a new group of volunteer teachers is hired. The volunteer teachers make a two-year commitment to the school in exchange for an opportunity to learn about teaching. In addition, they receive a \$300 monthly stipend, health and dental benefits, free room and board at a school-owned residence on

campus, and as much as \$10,000 from Americorps that they can apply towards their college loans. The volunteer teachers are predominantly white, recent college graduates whose families are typically affluent. The volunteer teaching staff engages students in a rigorous program of academics, athletics and social experiences.

First-year volunteer teachers arrive at the school in mid-August for an intensive two-week teacher induction program to become acclimated to teaching and the school. They work closely with the school's principal, vice-principal, and master teacher on curriculum, assessment, and classroom management. Although they are exposed to a wealth of information, they do not have time in a classroom setting until school begins in September. Teachers must adapt quickly to the neighborhood, located in the heart of the inner-city.

When the school year begins, volunteer teachers are expected to manage a demanding teaching schedule and meet the needs of students and parents. The transition is challenging. The culture of the school, created by the nuns, is for all staff to give selflessly and freely of their time and talent and to work long hours daily and on weekends.

Volunteer teachers, along with the school's administrators, are responsible for building skills and confidence in the students as well as preparing them to succeed in competitive high schools and colleges. The school's administrative structure includes a head of school, principal, vice-principal, master teacher, and a graduate/parent support coordinator. Volunteers are primarily responsible for teaching their own classes. Many of them do not have any teaching experience and therefore must learn a tremendous amount of information within a short amount of time.

It has been a challenge for administrators to invest time and energy annually in a new set of volunteer teachers whose time at the school is limited. It is difficult to assess volunteer teacher training because each year the composition changes. Many of the volunteers are new to the profession and have no experience working with parents and students of color. Most of the volunteer teachers did not major in education; this deficit creates a steep learning curve in basic pedagogy. Since the group has not had any exposure to the classroom, the professional development focus has been on teaching techniques as opposed to building relationships with parents.

Although their academic knowledge base is significant, their lack of classroom experience coupled with their lack of experience in a diverse setting is problematic. They do not quite grasp the information shared during the summer until they are into their third or fourth month of teaching. By this time they are able to delve more deeply into discussions about teaching and learning but remain uncomfortable working with parents. It appears that many of the first-year teachers are overwhelmed. While second-year teachers have become familiar with the school culture, they also are overwhelmed.

#### Statement of the Problem

Urban Hope has prepared girls to enter competitive high schools and colleges since it opened its doors. Its graduates defy the statistics on high school and college graduation rates for inner-city youth. One hundred percent of the young women completing Urban Hope go on to excellent high schools, finishing in four years. Approximately 94% of the graduates attend two and four year colleges, graduating from prestigious schools all over the country. That success can be attributed to several factors: a caring and committed faculty and staff, financial support from donors, and dedicated parents.



The role of parents at Urban Hope has evolved over the years. While Urban Hope recognizes that parent involvement is absolutely critical to student success, the school is keenly aware of the obstacles facing parents, which often result in a lack of parent participation. All of the parents are from low-income households where, for the majority (51%), English is not the primary language. In addition, the highest level of educational attainment for parents is high school, while 37 % did not matriculate past the tenth grade.

Urban Hope administrators assured the parents that their girls would receive a great education. They also told the parents that the girls would receive support which would contribute to their success in secondary schools. Urban Hope provided each graduate with ongoing support throughout her educational journey. Assistance came in the form of strong ties and accessibility to the faculty who helped with everything from taking the girls on interviews to secondary schools, completing high school and college applications, to taking girls shopping to furnish a college dorm. Financial help with books, laptop computers, and even clothing was provided when necessary. The level of support available ensured that each of the graduates would have every possible opportunity to realize her dreams.

Although Urban Hope has countless success stories, it is important to acknowledge some of the challenges the girls have faced during their transition to high school. While most of the secondary schools reported that the students performed well academically, they were less impressed with parental involvement of Urban Hope parents. This outcome may be the result of the strong system of ongoing support Urban Hope has had in place for each girl and the relationship between parents and teachers and between students and teachers. This study will focus primarily on the faculty's role in

this outcome, examining specifically what barriers prevent faculty from optimizing parents' role in supporting the educational achievement and development of their children. The themes include but are not limited to teachers' background, teachers' preparation, volunteer model, and teachers' capacity to engage parents in their children's education.

It has been a challenge shifting the role of parents at Urban Hope from passive to active. Urban Hope has worked closely with parents since the school was founded. The relationship was mutually beneficial. The school had an opportunity to educate, nurture and secure admission into highly competitive secondary schools for the girls. Parents were able to send their daughters to a tuition-free school where the girls spent almost twelve hours a day attending chapel, learning actively in challenging classes, participating in afternoon activities, receiving hot meals and completing their homework in evening study, a study hall designed to provide a quiet space to complete assignments and receive extra help. A former Urban Hope parent said she always knew her daughter would be well taken care of. Unfortunately, it was a huge adjustment once they transitioned to high school. There were no nuns or encouraging people to help them. As in any new organization, roles are not always clearly defined; rather they evolve over time. This is especially true at Urban Hope.

Parents who may not have known the language or the system knew that Urban Hope was a place where they could receive assistance. The graduate (alumni) support program encourages students to use Urban Hope as a resource, and communicates regularly with the graduates so that they know they are always welcome and are encouraged to remain a part of the Urban Hope family. Urban Hope has a tradition of

focusing on the family, committing itself to providing educational opportunities to the girls as well as to their families.

One of the most important issues facing the school administration at Urban Hope Academy is helping the volunteer teachers understand how their unexamined beliefs and pre-conceived attitudes impact their relationships with students and their parents. Surfacing these beliefs and attitudes are essential to building successful relationships between parents and adults in the school community. While volunteer teachers are generally caring and committed individuals, many are working with a diverse population for the first time and do not understand how the impact of their words and behavior affect students and parents. Some parents have expressed feeling a lack of support or distance between themselves and the volunteer teachers. Since the role of the teacher in many classrooms is that of an authority figure, these feelings interfere with effective communication between home and school. Parents also are less likely to be involved if there is no relationship between home and school. Parental involvement at Urban Hope has been a challenge.

Urban Hope works tirelessly to improve parent involvement. The school strongly encourages parents to participate in their children's learning. Urban Hope strives for parental engagement in the life of the school. Urban Hope involves parents by offering them workshops on homework assistance, encourages them to participate in family projects, classroom visits, parent education workshops and monthly informal parent-teacher meetings.

Although one-third of the parent body is involved in the educational process, two-thirds of the parent participation has been minimal at best. At Urban Hope, parents are

required to earn twenty parent participation credits each year, which is equivalent to three hours per month. Ten of the twenty credits must be earned by a parent or guardian. The credits can be earned in a variety of ways. Parents may volunteer at the school before, during or after school hours, serve as an officer on the Parent Association, attend the parent education workshops, enroll in the Adult Education program, and attend meetings and conferences. They may also chair a committee or activity, chaperone events, and assist with administrative duties, such as helping with mailings and offering assistance with translating for Urban Hope teachers and parents.

Volunteer teachers at Urban come to the school with the expectation that they will be able to work effectively with students and parents. However, they are laden with attitudes and perceptions that often are inaccurate and that adversely affect their relationships with students and parents. According to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), the teacher is regarded as “all-knowing and the students as know-nothings or at least as know-very-littles.” This relationship is exacerbated in classrooms of minority students. The teacher may assume that because of poverty, language or culture, the students know little that is of value in a classroom setting (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In order for teachers to improve the relationships that they have with parents, teachers will need to examine their own identities independent of and relevant to the classroom. At Urban Hope, volunteer teachers have demonstrated their commitment to the population of students they serve. Their choice to volunteer in an urban setting speaks volumes about their character and commitment. While they do not demonstrate the attitudes Ladson-Billings references, unpacking their privileges will help them to better understand themselves and the families they serve.

Volunteer teachers' commitment to "give back to the less fortunate" also creates tension between them and parents. These attitudes and perceptions often affect the teachers' ability to develop authentic relationships and work collaboratively with parents. Despite the teachers' commitment to the school's mission, parents often feel that teachers are approaching their commitment as a charity. Parents express concerns about teachers not fully understanding their struggles. Parents who feel comfortable in a school setting are much more apt to be involved (Weiss & Dearing, 2007). They have a greater comfort level with the school, are more invested, and are often supportive of the school.

The volunteer teacher model exacerbates this issue. First, the volunteers are new to the profession. According to John Saphier (1997), teaching is one of the most complex human endeavors imaginable. A good teacher is a skillful practitioner, adept at certain specifiable, observable actions. Skillful teachers are made, not born (Saphier & Gower, 1997). Volunteer teachers at Urban Hope are simultaneously learning about the teaching profession and the community in which they serve throughout their two-year commitment. They spend their first year learning the culture of the school, classroom management, and what constitutes good teaching. By the time teachers have developed a sense of community with one another and the families, their tenure is up. The transient model does not allow teachers and families an opportunity to develop authentic long-term relationships, which is critical to high levels of parental engagement and involvement.

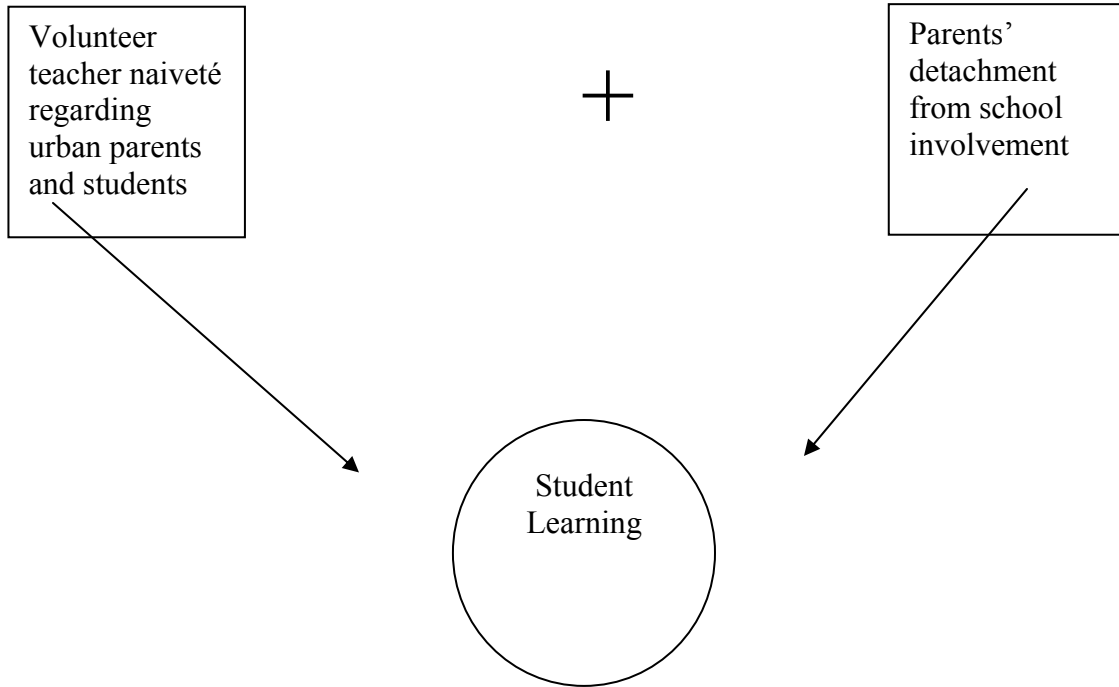
While people often admire the school's diverse tapestry, the racial, ethnic, linguistic, socio-economic, and educational background differences among the teachers, students, and their parents have also been barriers to effective collaboration in the best interest of students. These barriers affect communication between parents and teachers

including an understanding of how the school works, the expectations one has of one another, and mutual trust.

Urban Hope was challenged with empowering parents to become more involved in their daughters' learning. Urban Hope also needed to prepare new teachers to become better practitioners in their profession as well as help them to become more culturally aware and understand the challenges urban parents and students face. Once teachers develop a better awareness and sensitivity they will view parents as co-partners in the student's educational journey. The diagram on the next page gives a visual representation portraying the problem.

**DIAGRAM 1**

I. Problem



## Description of Project

In an effort to address these issues, Urban Hope implemented two initiatives that included the following: 1) collaboration with Families First; 2) advisory program.

### *Families First*

Urban Hope collaborated with Families First, a local non-profit group whose primary focus is to help organizations build relationships with parents. Urban Hope and Families First provided a series of workshops on communication, limit-setting, self-esteem, and cultural awareness to help teachers and parents develop a trusting and mutually supportive sense of community that further enabled teachers to develop authentic relationships with parents. Over the course of the school year, Families First's workshops sought to help Urban Hope teachers unpack their privileges by engaging with each other, and ultimately with parents in meaningful conversations about their cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Families First began training teachers during the two-week summer teacher induction program. As a pre-cursor, teachers were required to read and discuss with Family First and administrators, Beverly Daniel Tatum's *"Why Do All the Black Kids Sit Together in the Cafeteria?"* They participated in a two-day workshop that focused on building bridges through establishing a protocol for communicating with parents. Urban Hope administrators met with teachers weekly to assess communication between teachers and parents. Teachers had an opportunity to meet with Families First monthly to engage in conversations about teaching and learning, community building and cultural diversity, and utilized several professional development days throughout the year to discuss progress and reflect on their teaching practices



### *Advisory System*

As Urban Hope created opportunities for parents and teachers to work collaboratively, the expectation was that more parents would become involved. Urban Hope began an advisory program that connected an adult from the faculty or staff to a particular student and their family. The purpose of the advisory program was to provide families with a direct link to the school.

Advisory responsibilities included student advocacy, parent partnership, community building, relaxing and unwinding. Advisors were expected to advocate for students by offering care and support; monitoring student progress; facilitating goal setting, reflection, self-assessment; and academic planning. Advisors also kept parents informed of students' progress, listened and responded to parent concerns, completed weekly check-ins when appropriate and scheduled meetings when necessary. The advisor also distributed and collected information and feedback related to daily school life. Advisors were responsible for creating a family-like atmosphere within the broader community by facilitating conversations around community and other issues and concerns. In addition, advisors provided an opportunity for planned and informal social interactions and activities. Over time, the advisor earned the trust of the student and the family by building an authentic relationship between home and school.

Twelve Urban Hope administrators and volunteer teachers were designated advisors. The volunteer teachers were paired with an administrator. They each acted as co-advisors to the students. They shared mutual responsibilities. Together, they met with students formally once per week for 30 minutes and scheduled individual informal time

with students as needed. Advisors were assigned to a group of six students in grades six through eight. Each advisory group had two students from each grade.

The advisory was used in a variety of ways. During the first month of school, the majority of time was devoted to getting to know one another and the school. Throughout the year advisors addressed social and academic issues. Advisors met with parents at the beginning of the school year and prior to parent-teacher conferences. Advisors were encouraged to visit students and their families in their homes. Advisors and parents had informal opportunities to connect with each other by attending student activities, field trips, grade meetings, and parent meetings. Advisors scheduled advisory group gatherings with students and parents.

The Advisor was instrumental in problem solving with students and parents. During weekly meetings the advisors were asked to address social and academic challenges middle school students face. Advisors were assigned the same advisory group each year until the student graduates. This arrangement enables advisors, parents and students an opportunity to build trust, familiarity, and comfort.

The advisory system and collaboration with Families First included the following goals:

- To enhance the spirit of family between parents, families, students, teachers, the administration and the board;
- To support the school's mission, parents and teachers, the staff and the activities of the entire organization;
- To provide a forum for the exchange of information, where issues and concerns can be discussed;
- To provide a networking mechanism through which families can meet, connect and support each other;
- To encourage parental interest and to encourage more effective parental participation;

- To organize programs and activities for students, families and the school, and to act as a resource for Urban Hope.

Both initiatives helped the school improve parent involvement and created opportunities for teachers and parents to become better acquainted. The two initiatives were an attempt to build community and eliminate barriers between parents and teachers.

As part of Urban Hope's commitment to improving parental partnership, the school implemented the use of enrollment contracts as a vehicle. In order for students to succeed at Urban Hope, parents committed to being an active participant in their daughter's education. More specifically, they agreed to fulfill the twenty credit parent points by assisting their daughters in homework at least two nights per week, attending parent conferences, attending a certain number of school activities and visiting a class at least once per term or three times per year. Teachers and parents agreed that this would engage parents in the educational process.

Urban Hope scheduled parent conferences, homework workshops, portfolio conferences and informal gatherings with the parents throughout the school year. The initiatives helped teachers become more culturally aware of their attitudes and beliefs about the population they taught. They also provided them with the tools necessary to forge authentic relationships with parents thus enhancing their role in supporting their children in the learning process.

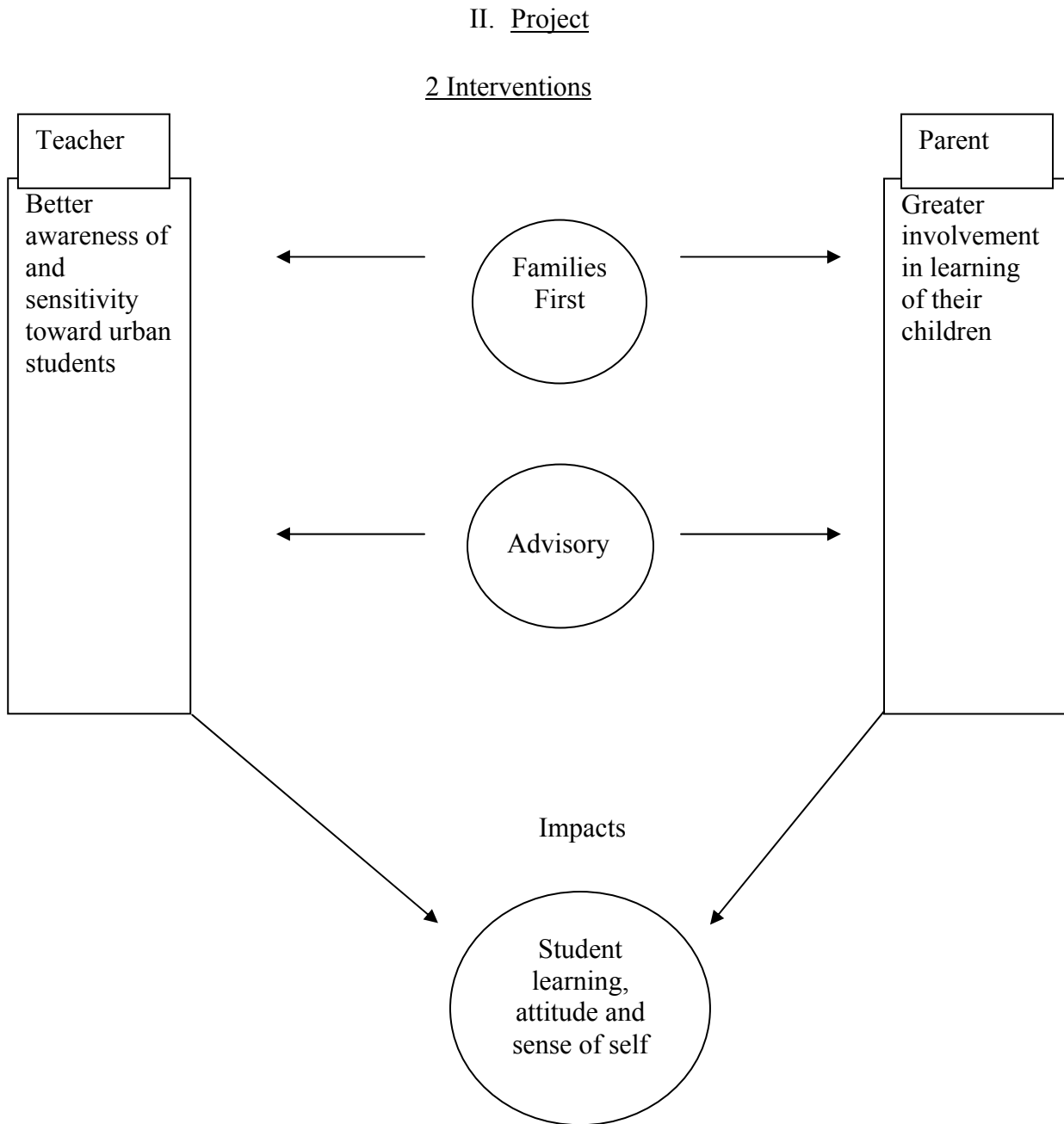
In weekly faculty meetings teachers had an opportunity to discuss their attitudes and beliefs. Teachers kept journals and shared feedback during the monthly meetings facilitated by Families First. Teachers and administrators continued to engage in meaningful conversations about challenges and victories with parents and students.

These conversations allowed them to evaluate progress in classroom and extracurricular activities.

The conversations and collaborative initiatives improved teachers' attitudes and perceptions about parents and students and increased parental engagement and involvement in their child's educational journey. The initiatives helped teachers to develop a cross-cultural and cross-racial understanding of the students and their parents. Teachers felt more connected to parents and less inhibited in their interactions with them. Parents felt valued and respected. The volunteer teachers developed a greater sense of efficacy, "their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required attaining designated types of performances" (Pajares, 2002). Albert Bandura's research (1997) on efficacious families and schools concluded that parent involvement is a distinguishing feature in successful school models.

The diagram on the following page gives a visual representation summarizing the project and its attempt to respond to the problem.

**DIAGRAM 2**



## Focus of Study

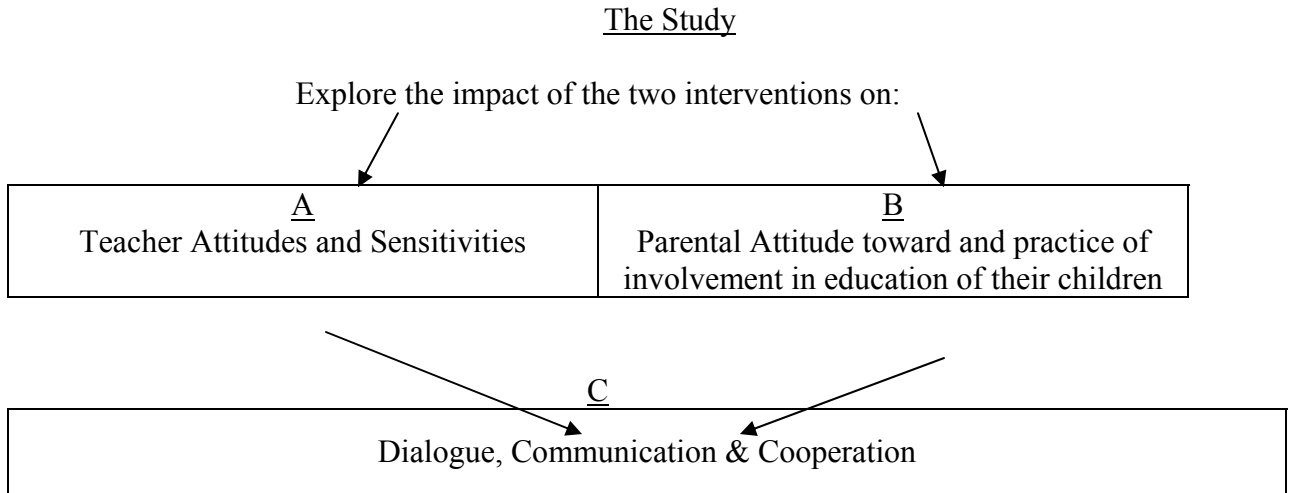
The researcher explored the impact of the two initiatives on teachers' attitudes and perceptions and their understanding of urban students and parents. The researcher studied volunteer teachers' attitudes and perceptions based on their own cultural, educational and socio-economic backgrounds and examined the impact it had on forging authentic cross-cultural and cross-racial relationships with parents. The researcher also explored whether teachers' perceptions changed about the role parents could play in their child's educational achievement and development. The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which participation in this project influenced the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of the volunteer teaching staff and their ability to forge authentic relationships with parents.

The researcher explored four themes: teachers' backgrounds, teachers' preparation, volunteerism, and parent engagement and involvement. The researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How did initial conversations with Families First impact teachers' perceptions of their role as volunteer teachers at Urban Hope School?
- 2) How did participating in the Families First project and the advisory program impact the teachers' perception of cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding in their interactions with parents?
- 3) How did the two initiatives impact teachers' perception of the significance of parents' role in the educational achievement and development of their children?

The diagram on the next page gives a visual representation of the study.

**DIAGRAM 3**



Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical rationale for this study is based on several key concepts. First, parent engagement and involvement are critical to student success especially in schools where low income and students of color are the majority. When schools like Urban Hope make a concerted effort to reach out to parents, it empowers parents to be more involved in their child’s education. As a result, students, parents and teachers greatly benefit. Parent involvement has been a hot topic of discussion in schools across America. Low-income families are less likely to be involved in their children’s education because of language barriers, socio-economic status, educational background and a lack of connection to the school (Epstein, 1995). These barriers make it difficult for parents and teachers to work collaboratively. Research over the past 30 years has shown that parents are critical contributors to student achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Throkeildsen & Stein, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1994.). Even before resources for public schools became scarcer, the role of the parent had been understood as an integral factor in student success (Coleman, 1981).

Sociologists and some economists have recognized that the societal relations that exist in the family or in the community outside the family also constitute a form of social capital, generating obligations, trust, and norms, all of which function as resources upon which an individual can draw in time of need (Coleman, 1981). Social capital is a significant contributor to a child's education. It exists within the family and between the school and the family but also outside the family and in the community.

When schools create authentic cross-cultural relationships between teachers and parents, they are able to integrate cultural relevance, a key factor in successfully educating low-income and minority students. According to Gloria Ladson Billings (1994), the importance of cultural relevance that moves beyond language to include other aspects of student and school culture is a teaching pedagogy that not only empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes but also engages parents who feel disconnected in the American education system.

According to Michael Fullan (2001), nowhere is the two-way street of learning more in disrepair and in need of social reconstruction than the relationships between parents, communities and their schools. It is widely known that low-income urban parents are reluctant to be involved in their children's education due to three psychological factors: parents' perception of their role and responsibility in their child's education, parents' belief that they can make a difference in their child's education, and whether parents feel welcomed in a school community (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). Role theory in general suggests that roles are socially constructed sets of expectations held by groups for the behavior of individual members (e.g., a family's



expectations for a mother's behaviors, a school's expectations for the behavior of parents); they are also sets of behaviors characteristic of specific kinds of groups members (e.g., fathers of elementary school children) (Hoover-Dempsey, 1997).

There are a variety of reasons why low-income urban parents do not participate in their children's education, but the most prevalent are the cultural and communication differences between teachers and families. Teachers in urban settings often lack knowledge and skills in the ethnicities and cultures of the children they teach, a deficit which impairs their capacity to form respectful, authentic relationships with parents and students. This creates a "we vs. them" attitude between teachers and parents.

(McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). Many parents and educators and a host of theorists and researchers have asserted the value of positive, communicative home-school relationships if children are to receive maximum benefit from their education (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie, 1987). When parents believe they can be affective in their child's education, when the school demonstrates respect for the cultural practices and traditions of parents, when the school intentionally collaborates with parents, and when the school community is welcoming, parents are more involved.

Urban schools typically have teachers who have not received adequate teacher training. Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are enrolled in schools that not only receive fewer dollars but also have fewer qualified teachers. The current need for highly qualified teachers across the United States is substantial, and growing, due to a confluence of factors that includes higher demand, increasing retirement of existing teachers, and significant teacher turnover (Howey, Post & Zimpher, 2006). In urban schools the picture is much bleaker. New teachers are more likely to

work in high poverty districts. Typically these new teachers are unfamiliar with the culture, socio-economic class, and home context of the students and families whom they serve. Because of this gap between teachers and the populations they serve, teacher preparation is an essential tool for these teachers to successfully educate students in urban environments. Successful teachers in urban schools understand the impact of poverty and the various obstacles and conditions that their students face.

At Urban Hope School, all of the teachers are new to the profession. They are young, enthusiastic and willing to learn. Although these are positive characteristics, research on programs such as Urban Hope's volunteer teacher program and Teach for America, which is a non-profit organization whose mission is "to build the movement to eliminate educational inequity by enlisting our nation's most promising future leaders in the effort" (Kopp, 2003), suggests that certified teachers consistently produce significantly stronger student achievement gains than do uncertified teachers. Like Urban Hope, Teach for America (TFA) recruits recent college graduates to teach for two years in schools in low-income communities. The goal for "corp members" and volunteer teachers is not only to make a short-term impact on their students but also become life-long leaders in pursuing educational equality for all students.

While their commitment is admirable, a study conducted by Linda Darling-Hammond (2005) and several colleagues from Stanford University suggests that uncertified teachers are less effective than certified teachers. Darling-Hammond and colleagues examined questions that link student characteristics and achievement with data about their teachers' certification status, experience and degree levels. According to their study, there was a correlation between teacher education and teacher effectiveness.

Research on teacher education has suggested that teacher educational programs in universities should provide a knowledge base about cognitive and affective processes that influence learning and include information about metacognitive strategies to address the needs of differing abilities and backgrounds (Howey, Post & Zimpher, 2006). The volunteer teacher model at Urban Hope is unique. Most volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds with limited teacher training. Urban Hope should provide adequate teacher training that will ensure student learning, give teachers confidence in the classroom, and assist teachers in developing the skills necessary to build strong relationships with parents. Teacher training therefore is an essential key concept in addressing the current communication gap between parents and teachers.

For teachers to be effective practitioners, teacher training must include an emphasis on the cultural, racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds of their students. Culturally responsive teaching emphasizes the everyday concerns of students, such as critical family and community issues, and tries to incorporate these concerns into the curriculum (Stringfield & Land, 2002). Geneva Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them.

Most of the volunteer teachers at Urban Hope had not been exposed to minority/majority environments prior to their arrival at the school. Their success depended upon their ability to create authentic relationships not only with their students but also with parents. When teachers have examined their attitudes and beliefs about themselves, their students, and parents and they have access to resources to help assist

them in the classroom, they are more effective. Assumptions about connections among the intellectual capability, ethnicity, and gender and classroom adjustment of students attest to the tenacity of teachers' expectations, even in the face of contrary evidence (Gay, p.59).

Popkewitz (1998) contends that teachers have significant power in determining the success or failure of students. Popkewitz suggests "that ideas inscribe political projects, and that role of intellectual practices is to question the reigning dogma about intellectuals' signification of actors and the rules of progress" (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 7). He asserts that the role of the teacher in understanding how particular forms of knowledge qualifies or disqualifies students from action and participation in the learning process.

The fundamental assumptions that stood behind the study were that parents would be empowered and become more involved in their children's learning. Teachers would receive adequate training that has an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching. Their training would help them examine their perceptions and attitudes and empower them to forge authentic relationships with students and parents. Teachers would have a better understanding of their role as social change agents by having the belief that all students and parents bring value to the learning process. Teachers would also understand that their privilege in the context of constructing norms would exacerbate the gap between teachers and parents.

## Significance of Study

The significance of the study was to examine whether the school's initiatives would help teachers become more culturally aware of their perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about the population they taught and provide them with the tools necessary to forge authentic relationships with parents. The study examined whether the two initiatives would increase parental engagement and involvement in the educational process of their children.

When schools create authentic cross-cultural relationships between teachers and parents, they are able to integrate cultural relevance which is a key factor in successfully educating low-income and minority students. According to Gloria Ladson Billings (1994), the importance of cultural relevance which moves beyond language to include other aspects of student and school culture is a teaching pedagogy that not only empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes but also engages parents who feel disconnected in the American education system (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The researcher examined the impact of on-going dialogues between teachers and parents and their affect on teachers' perceptions about cross-cultural and cross-racial relationships.

### *Summary*

This dissertation is segmented into five chapters. This chapter presented an overview of this study. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature that further expands on the theoretical rationale undergirding the study. Chapter Three provides a description of the research methodology, research sample, research questions, data collection and analysis. Chapter Four presents the research findings. The dissertation concludes with Chapter

Five which presents a discussion of the research findings in light of the literature review, and provides the implications for policy, practice, future research and leadership.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Introduction*

For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that the achievement gap is not the primary topic; rather the focus is on potentially effective solutions to improved student learning. Hence, the study seeks to examine factors that contribute to the student achievement gap, including teacher's background, teacher preparation, and parental engagement and involvement. The fourth theme, volunteerism will also be discussed. This chapter will review literature that is directly related to these themes. As a prelude to the chapter, the researcher has highlighted James Coleman's research.

The chapter begins with the research from James Coleman. His research provided a context for the themes in this study. In addition to Coleman, the researcher included literature from Gloria Ladson-Billings, Joyce Epstein, James Comer, Ruby Payne, Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey, Geneva Gay, Linda Darling Hammond and Thomas Popkewitz. The researcher also included literature from additional researchers as well. Coleman identified several challenges in educating students from low-income and minority populations, similar to Urban Hope.

### *Coleman Report*

In 1966, James Coleman conducted the study on the Equality of Educational Opportunity, the second largest social science research project in history, involving 600,000 children in 4,000 schools nationally (Kahlenberg, 2001). Coleman's Report suggested that the achievement gap existed as a result of the funding differences between black and white schools. The "Coleman Report" contended that there were fundamental differences between the education of white and black and rich and poor students. First, the

disparities in funding between schools attended by blacks and whites were far smaller than anticipated. Second, funding was statistically not closely related to student achievement; family economic stability was far more statistically predictive. Third, a different kind of resource--peers--mattered a great deal (Coleman, 1966).

According to Coleman, attending school with middle-class peers was an advantage for those of lower socio-economic status (SES), while going to school with mostly disadvantaged peers was a disadvantage far beyond an individual family's circumstances. Coleman concluded the "social composition" of the student body is more highly related to achievement, independent of the students' own social background, than is any school factor (Coleman, 1966). Coleman found that family matters more than schooling and that "education spending is unrelated to achievement."

Coleman reported that facilities and curriculum, the characteristics that mattered the least, were the most equivalent between schools attended by blacks and whites. According to Coleman, the socioeconomic background of fellow students was the most unequally distributed. Coleman's report clearly implied school integration between racial and socioeconomic lines would increase student achievement amongst African American students, while policies for increasing non-personal resources in schools were less effective. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then a professor at Harvard, embraced Coleman's findings.

As a result of the Coleman Report, Coleman gained support from influential politicians and educators such as Moynihan, thus leading to an attempt to eradicate desegregation in America. Busing was implemented to help integrate the nation's public schools. Coleman would later question the efficacy of busing when confined to urban



districts by citing how “white-flight,” the departure of white families moving from the city to the suburbs, would create greater segregation. Thus, racial desegregation orders, prompted by *Brown vs. Topeka* schools, failed to promote either racial or economic integration. Most white students in the United States continue to attend schools that are predominantly white (Orfield & Eaton, 1996). Studies show racial and ethnic segregation continued to intensify throughout the 1990s (Orfield & Gordon, 2001).

Coleman argued that the American public education system was founded on the premise that all children from all economic backgrounds would attend a “common school.” Coleman was convinced that segregated school districts were a barrier to equal opportunity thus supporting “that every child has the full right and opportunity, unconstrained by residence or race, or transportation costs, or by artificial school district boundaries, to attend the school of his or her choice” (Coleman, 1981). Several educational theorists who contend schools are not created equal supported his findings. Inequality in education happens not by accident but by design.

Coleman’s research examined the benefits of attending private schools, particularly Catholic schools. Coleman’s research suggests Catholic schools have been successful in educating “disadvantaged and minority” students. In a study conducted by Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore (1982), the researchers found Catholic schools were more integrated economically and racially and produced greater academic achievement. According to the study, low-income and minority students in particular did better in Catholic schools than in public schools. Research shows Catholic schools have a long tradition of successfully educating low income and minority populations. “Catholic Schools are often the Church’s most effective contribution to those families who are poor

and disadvantaged, especially in poor inner city neighborhoods and rural areas” (Haney & O’Keefe, 2006, p. 2.). In spite of the success with a diverse population, Catholic Schools have also been affected by white-flight and a decline in enrollment. Shifting demographics and dwindling resources have forced the closure of many urban and rural schools (Haney & O’Keefe, 2006). Coleman’s research prompted many educators to think critically about integration and school choice.

In her research, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) states although integration was an attempt to level the playing fields for African American and socio-economically disadvantaged students, many inner city students already attend de facto segregated schools (Ladson-Billings, 1994). According to Ladson-Billings, public schools have yet to demonstrate a sustained effort to provide quality education for African Americans and other minority students (p. 4.). African American students make up only 17 percent of the public school population yet represents 41% of the special education population.

Ladson- Billings (1994) suggest that students of color from disadvantaged and middle class backgrounds have greater achievement in private schools. While 40% of public school teachers send their children to private schools, only 2% African American students attend private schools. Eighty-three percent of our nation’s teachers are white (Kunjufu, 2002). Ladson-Billings suggests that public schools have yet to demonstrate a sustained effort to provide quality education for African American and other minority students. African American students make up only 17 percent of the public school population yet represent 41% of the special education population. Despite the challenges students of color face in our nation’s public schools, they can achieve academic success

in environments where teachers have high expectations and the appropriate support systems are in place.

### *Parent Involvement*

Establishing positive parent-teacher relationships in urban schools across the country has long been a conundrum for administrators in urban districts who seek to address a widening achievement gap between their students and their suburban counterparts.

Researchers have conducted many studies that linked parent involvement with student achievement. Parent involvement is defined as parental participation in the educational process and experiences of their children (Jeynes, 2007). Parent involvement is more than a singular construct made up of certain activities (Jeynes, 2007). Researchers contend that it is a complex term, which varies in definition; however, they have identified several characteristics that hold across definitions: parental communication, obligations, expectations, participation in learning activities at home and in the community and decision-making (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). For the purpose of this study, parent involvement is a construct comprised of Joyce Epstein's six frameworks: developing parent skills, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with community.

Research over the past 30 years has shown that parents are critical contributors to student achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Throkeildsen & Stein, 1998: U.S. Department of Education, 1994.). Research indicates that American teachers and educational psychologists place great importance on parental involvement to elevate educational outcomes, particularly among students who face other disadvantages (Jeynes, 2007). The closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on a

child's development and educational achievement (Fullan, 2002). A key element in many of the most recent educational reform movements has been to increase parental involvement in the academic lives of children (Shepard & Rose, 1995).

While parental involvement benefits all students, in this study the research specifically targets low-income and minority students in urban schools. Coleman contends that parent involvement has a positive influence upon student progress and development. The home is one of several spheres that simultaneously influence a child. Parents are the central contributor to a child's education. The key to successful parental involvement programs is acknowledging all parents have hopes and goals for their children and encouraging them to use their voice in the partnership.

Research suggests that parent involvement has a positive impact on student achievement. Children whose parents help them at home and stay in touch with schools score higher than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved. Schools in which children are failing improve dramatically when parents are called in to help (Henderson, 1987). In multiple parent involvement studies conducted by Joyce Epstein, there were positive changes in student achievement, attitude, and behavior when parents were included in their child's education (Epstein, 1995).

Even before resources for public schools became scarcer, the role of the parent had been understood as an integral factor in student success (Coleman, 1981). Sociologists and some economists have recognized that the societal relations that exist in the family or in the community outside the family also constitute a form of social capital, generating obligations, trust, and norms, all of which function as resources upon which an individual can draw in time of need (Coleman, 1981). Researchers suggest that the

home functions as the most salient out-of-school context for student learning, amplifying or diminishing the school's effect on learning (Shepard & Rose, 1995). The home and community are integral to student success. Social capital is a significant contributor to a child's education. It exists within the family and between the school and the family but also outside the family and in the community. Research suggests greater educational attainment is determined by one's access to social capital (Shepard & Rose, 1995). There are many factors that affect parent involvement. Several researchers have identified social capital, socio-economic status, language, race/ethnicity, and parent education as important aspects of parental involvement.

### *Social Capital*

Successful parent teacher collaborations exist in schools where families feel connected, and they have social capital (Coleman, 1981). The nature of family-school relationships varies across individual children, families, schools and communities as participants seek to implement the most satisfactory education program within the confines of community expectations.

Social capital is a significant contributor to a child's education. It is a term that encompasses social networks, emotional bonds and habits of reciprocity that promote trust and cooperation (Coleman, 1981). Coleman understood social capital as "social-structural resources" that allowed individuals to gain access to otherwise unavailable resources through cooperative action in pursuit of individual goals (Coleman, 1990, p. 302). In his work with underprivileged groups from a large national sample of public school students in the United States, Coleman concluded by having social networks students were more than likely to finish school.

For many families of color, education has always been perceived as more than a means of personal and professional improvement. Because African Americans were denied access to formal education, the notion that literacy would alter their life's circumstances was reinforced. Underrepresented groups still view education as a necessity for social mobility, individual and collective improvement. Social capital is a major contributing factor to the success of underrepresented groups. Families of color in low-income environments may utilize their relationships to gain access to the most valued commodity for upward mobility: education.

In a study conducted by Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore (1982), students in Catholic and independent schools achieved at a higher level in verbal skills and math not because of greater curricular demands or anything else within the school, but rather the relationship that existed between the school and the parents. Although their parents were not considered affluent, the students benefited greatly from social capital, the comfortable relationship between home and school.

Social capital is an important concept because it helps explain some of the inequalities in organizations such as schools. All students arrive at school with various socially acquired resources. Families who know how to use the resources they have to advance their position or status have social capital. They not only gain a greater level of comfort between home and school, but the likelihood of their student's being academically successful is greater.

### *Challenges*

Unfortunately, societal changes have made it more challenging for low-income and minority families to successfully partner with schools, a factor which may impact student

success. Coleman suggests low-income and minority students would achieve academic success if their families felt connected to the schools. As the demands on working class families increase, the concept of social capital is now more important than ever. The role of parents has shifted over the years. Compulsory and formal education in the past 100 years has created a shift in societal influence over students' lives (Shepard & Rose, 1995). They contend that society's role in student education has increased while the parental role has decreased. They assert that parents became more reliant on the school's judgment and the school's attempt to understand their children's abilities, personalities and intellectual potential. Parental involvement has evolved from the deficit model in the 1960s to a difference model in the 1970s and early 1980s to the empowerment model, which exists today (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993).

The deficit model approach was based on the premise that "targeted" families failed to provide the skills, resources and stimulation necessary to prepare their children for school (Kelleghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993). They suggest this model placed the blame on parents, failed to consider contextual factors (community) and implied a belief that the schools' standards and values were superior to families receiving assistance. According to the researchers, the difference model began with the assumption that home and school cultures were often different and that children could be helped to adapt to this new culture by building on their styles and strengths (Shepard & Rose, 1983). These programs laid the foundation for the emerging empowerment model, which seeks to "empower parents to assume and perform their various roles more effectively" (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez & Bloom, 1993). The goal of empowerment is to provide families with the tools that will enable them to better manage their own lives

(Shepard & Rose, 1995). Families who are economically disadvantaged often struggle with the attitudes and perceptions of the very people and programs designed to help them, making them feel powerless and not in control.

Societal changes have transformed the educational landscape in America, especially among low-income families who must work in order to survive. The following changes have had a profound impact on poor families and ultimately on the education of their children (Coleman, 1981).

- A) More parents are working;
- B) Schools are not inviting; teachers are defensive;
- C) Increase in immigrant population, which creates a language barrier between parents and the school;
- D) Poverty - undereducated parents often do not know how to participate, especially in standards-based learning agenda.

All of these factors play a significant role in parental involvement. All parents want to ensure their children are successful adults. However, parents are often unaware of the importance of their role in their child's success. The life chances of young people from low-income backgrounds depend increasingly on attaining higher education (Coleman, 1981).

For years the middle-class myth suggested fathers went off to work while mothers stayed home to care for the household and the children. These mothers were home when their children arrived from school to assist them with homework and transition into their roles and responsibilities, providing not only human capital, their own educational background, but social capital as well (Coleman, 1988.) This has never been an option



for poor families whose adult household members, whether parents, older siblings or extended family members have had to work in order to provide the basic necessities: food, clothing and shelter. A growing number of women now participate in today's labor force. In 1999, 60 percent of women were working, up from just 43 percent in 1970 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). As more middle-class families have entered the labor force, this has dramatically impacted how the school, community and parents work collaboratively. (Learned & Johnson, 2004). It remains a particular concern among low-income families.

Promoting parental involvement is on the national policy agenda. It is now widely accepted by policy makers and educators that when parents are involved in their children's education, children are much more likely to succeed in school (Baker & Soden, 1998.) Unfortunately, many of our nation's low-income and minority communities struggle with this phenomenon while parents with more financial resources tend to be sophisticated advocates for their children.

The nature of family-school relationships varies across individual children, families, schools and communities as participants seek to implement the most satisfactory educational program within the confines of community expectations. Many parents and educators agree that in order to provide children with the best possible education, schools and families must work collaboratively (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie, 1987). Parents and educators, and a host of theorists and researchers, have asserted the value of positive, communicative home-school relationships if children are to receive the maximum benefit of their education. Hoover-Dempsey and associates suggested that school recognition of family strengths is integral to the development of sound educational

programs for children. Parent involvement is critical to the success of student learning. Hoover-Dempsey, Basslet and Brissie (1987) also contend that parent involvement improves student behavior, lowers student absenteeism, and improves homework habits. In studies conducted by Epstein (1991), surveys of parents, teachers and administrators supported parental involvement but agreed that parent participation was actually low.

Yale University researcher and psychiatrist, James Comer (1991), suggests that the changes in society have had a profound effect on nurturing children. His profound work in transforming inner-city elementary schools in New Haven, Connecticut, was the result of the triangulation of parents, students and schools working collaboratively. Comer believes while there are drastic changes impacting families, networks and communities, that the responsibility to provide all children with an optimal opportunity to learn depends upon the relationships schools have with students and parents. Comer's work in schools will be discussed later in this chapter. Researchers suggest there are many factors that affect parent involvement: socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, language, educational access or attainment and school climate.

#### *Socio-economic Status (SES)*

Parent involvement varies in different school environments. In their research, Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brassie contend that a family's socio-economic status (SES) plays a role in parent-teacher relations, but the direction of its influence is difficult to discern (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie, 1987). Socio-economic status, an indicator of economic and social position, is a social construct upon which individuals are assigned to a particular economic group of people based on actual access to resources. In the United States where economic class is a continuous line, the distinction is not

clear-cut. However, people from low-income households have low socio-economic status and are considered poor or impoverished. Although poverty is relative, in 2006, the poverty line for Americans was considered \$20,444 for a family of four. According to the 2006 census data, the median household income was \$48,451 and 19% of the U.S. households earned more than \$100,000 per year. For children under the age of 18, the poverty rate was 17.4% and for children under the age of 5, the rate was 20.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). There is a greater likelihood of African American and Hispanic children being poor than white children. The number of African American and Latino children living in poverty in 2006 was approximately 3.8 million (34%) and 4.1 million (27%) respectively.

Regardless of race or ethnicity, poor children are much more likely than non-poor children to suffer developmental delay and damage, to drop out of high school and to give birth during their teen years (Miranda, 1991). These are common obstacles children of poverty face, not to mention the stereotypes associated with these challenges.

To better understand students and adults from poverty, it is imperative to define poverty. Poverty is “the extent to which an individual does without resources” (Payne, 1996). In her research, Ruby Payne (1996) defines two types of poverty, generational and situational. Generational poverty is defined as having been in poverty for at least two generations; however, the patterns begin to surface much sooner than two generations if the family lives with others who are from generational poverty. Situational poverty is defined as a lack of resources due to a particular event such as death, chronic illness or divorce (Payne, 1996). The difference is in the former; often the attitude is that society owes one a living whereas in the latter the attitude is often one of pride and a refusal to

accept charity (Payne, 1996). Unfortunately, poverty, whether situational or generational, yields similar results: discrimination, especially in schools.

In determining one's SEC, there are a variety of resources including financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships, role models and knowledge of the hidden rules. When individuals have financial resources, they have the money to purchase goods and services. Emotional resources enable individuals to choose and control emotional responses to negative situations, without engaging in self-destructive behavior. According to Payne, this is an internal resource and shows itself through stamina, perseverance and choices. Mental resources ensure individuals have the mental abilities and acquired skills such as reading, writing and computing to deal with daily life. Spirituality provides individuals with purpose and guidance while physical resources are based on the individual's physical health and mobility.

Support systems are also an important because these external resources provide a level of comfort for individuals and help on emotional and financial levels. Having friends, family and "backup" resources available to access in times of need are vital. Relationships and role models with adults who are nurturing and make healthy choices are also considered a valuable resource. No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship (Comer, 1991).

Finally, being aware of the unspoken cues and habits of a group are particularly helpful. Since schools operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules of middle-class, it is an essential resource (Payne, 1996). Hidden rules exist across racial and socio-economic classes. However, in order to move successfully from one class to the next, it is important to have someone from a class to which you aspire model and

teach you the hidden rules (Payne, 1996). For students to be successful, schools must understand their hidden rules and teach them rules that will make them successful at school and work. Low achievement is closely correlated with lack of resources, and numerous studies have documented the correlation between low socio-economic status and low achievement.

### *Characteristics of Poverty*

The culture of poverty has universal characteristics. There are similarities in family structure, interpersonal relations, values, beliefs, spending patterns and the sense of community (Payne, 1996). Low-income families are more likely to be headed by a single parent, a parent with low educational attainment, an unemployed parent, a parent in a low-wage market, a divorced parent, or a young parent. These familial conditions may account in large measure for the association between low income and less favorable outcomes for children (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Greg and Maritato, 1997). Families living in poverty are constantly struggling for survival, working in low-wage jobs, unemployed and underemployed, and often face a shortage of cash to provide food, clothing, safety and shelter for their families.

Parents living in poverty will need most of their resources for economic survival and will have little time, money and energy left to invest in their children's human capital (Payne, 1996). This vicious, cyclical pattern amongst families living in poverty has adverse effects on both the parents and children. Studies have linked poverty to the emotional-well being of children. Susan Mayer (1997) suggests that the parental stress theory holds that poverty is stressful and that stress diminishes the parent's ability to provide appropriate and effective parenting. The "role model theory holds that because

of their position at the bottom of the social hierarchy, low-income parents develop values, norms and behaviors that cause them to be ‘bad role models for their children.’ One controversial version of the role model hypothesis contends that income transfers won’t change ‘values and behavior’ of those immersed in a culture of poverty” (Mayer, 1997, pp. 7-8).

### *Poverty and student achievement*

The concentration of students living in poverty within schools is negatively related to academic achievement even after accounting for individual-level variables, including family income (Lippman, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). Children raised in low-income families score lower than children from more affluent families on assessments of health, cognitive development, school achievement, and emotional wellbeing (Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne, Duncan, Greg, and Mariato, 1997). Poverty impacts learning, work habits and decision-making (Payne, 1996). In a national study conducted with low-income families with children, researchers found that only about one-third of children in low-income families received stimulation and support from their parents equivalent to that received by most children in families that were neither poor nor welfare dependent (Zill, 1993).

The key to fostering achievement for students living in poverty is creating relationships with them. The primary motivator for student success will be in their relationships (Payne, 1996). According to Payne, the most effective strategy in working with impoverished students is building relationships. The relationship occurs when emotional deposits are made to the student, emotional withdrawals are avoided, and students are respected. Although schools are responsible for establishing relationships with parents, parents need the skills to provide assistance, expectations, and support at

home. A diverse body of research suggests that early experiences have an important impact on children's later achievement in school (Payne, 1996). In addition to providing students with relationships; the quality of intervention plays a significant role. The Family and Child Experience Survey (FACES) contend that the quality of the pre-school program has a direct effect on children's growth and development (Zill, Resnick & McKey, 1999). The quality of pre-school and kindergarten programs are critical to the success of students living in poverty. By the time they reach middle school, the academic gaps continue to expand causing a wider academic disparity between them and middle class students.

The poorest parents are not aware of the impact their value on education has on their children. Students who live in chronic poverty are placed at risk by the challenges they face such as parents who are less health, both physically and emotionally, which leads to other stresses such as increased irritability and depressive symptoms. This additional strain may result in more contentious interactions with others, particularly schools or other authoritative figures, fewer parent-supported learning opportunities in the home (Balfanz, Ruby & MacIver, 2002).

### *Race/Ethnicity*

Race and ethnicity are not "natural" categories, even though both concepts are often represented as if they were (Lewis, 2004, p. 6). Race is about who we are, what we do, and how we interact. It shapes where we live, whom we interact with and how we relate to one another. It is also a commonly associated indicator of poor academic achievement and school failure (Stringfield & Land, 2002). Parents of children of color are often faced with the challenges of stereotypes regarding their involvement and their

child's academic performance. "All children can learn to high standards when there is a supportive environment, when high expectations are held by all stakeholders, and when there is clear accountability on the part of students, staff, families, and the community" (Stringfield & Land, p.7). In an ideal world, all children can learn; however, the power of stereotypes has a profound effect on student's ability and teacher's attitudes about expectations, making it difficult for teachers and parents to establish successful relationships.

The legacy of racial prejudice and discrimination continues to have an impact on people of color. Race, class and culture have been associated with learning and economic outcomes. While the three are often used interchangeably in social sciences, it is imperative to distinguish that race is a social construct (Jagers & Carroll, 2002).

In his research, Claude Steele (1992) suggests that negative stereotypes about African American and Latino students infringe upon their learning. Steele contends that both groups place an unwarranted burden on themselves to disprove negative judgments about all members of their respective groups, anxiety Steele labeled "stereotype threat." This threat has significant psychological effects on the students' ability to reach their academic potential because they too often place a tremendous burden on themselves to do well in school. They have internalized that somehow they represent their entire racial group and that their academic success or failure impacts not only them as individuals but their racial group. This anxiety interferes with their maximum achievement, which further widens the achievement gap (Steele, 1992). Steele suggests that the stigma associated with being African American or Latino has a connection to their achievement.



Steele contends that Blacks are devalued in American schools. His ideas are corroborated by researchers who support the notion of underachievement.

The history of discrimination in the labor force also plays an integral role in the effects of race on student achievement and developing relationships with parents from diverse racial groups. Race is a difficult construct to comprehend. One challenge is how to recognize race as “fluid, multiple relational, socially constructed and intersecting with other social positioning,” while recognizing it as socially “real” and determining life chances (Lewis, 2004, p. 7). According to Lewis, racial understandings are built in relation to the people and communities one has contact with as well as in relation to the social divisions, real inequities, images, representations and discourses one encounters in a local, national and global context.

Education is the key to success, opening doors to social mobility. It can determine where one lives and attends school. The economic disparity between African Americans, Latinos and Whites is striking and has significant educational implications. African Americans and Latinos are less likely to have the financial resources to afford to live in communities with high quality schools (Hoxby, 2000). African Americans and Latinos are twice as likely to live in poverty as whites (United States Census Bureau, 2005). According to the 2006 U.S. Census Bureau, African American and Latino students are more than likely to come from single parent households, a factor which places them at an academic disadvantage. Researchers contend that single parents do not have sufficient resources and often have to work additional hours to support their families (Roscigno, 1998). This reality hampers parents’ ability to provide their children with academic support and supervision. Conversely, white families have more financial

resources, which give them more power to choose where they live and where they send their children to school (Fuller, 2002).

### *Language*

Language plays a critical role in leveling the playing field for urban and suburban students. Language development is the principal medium of instruction in both written and spoken form (Menyuk & Brisk, 2005). It affects how students interact socially and developmentally. The acquisition of language has a marked effect on students academically and socially. Menyuk and Brisk assert that language development is the most important milestone of the pre-school years (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). Not all students enter school with the same skills that will ensure their educational success.

Children from low-income backgrounds and families whose first language is not English have distinctively different literacy experiences from their more advantaged peers (Menyuk & Brisk, 2005). In a longitudinal study, Hart and Risley (1995) found that by age 3, children in low-income families had significantly lower vocabularies than children in middle and upper income families. These findings were supported by a Carnegie Foundation Report: Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation (Boyer, 1991) which found 35% of children in the U.S. were entering school without the necessary language skills. Of this percentage, a disproportionate number were from low-income homes and homes where English is not the primary language (Boyer, 1991).

Establishing relationships with parents whose first language is not English and who come from low-income backgrounds can be intimidating. Parents may feel embarrassed to communicate with teachers for a variety of reasons. First, they usually do not have a high level of education and in most cases have been educated in schools that

are inferior. This fact may have a profound effect on their basic reading and writing skills. Students whose first language is not English and students for whom reading and writing are not ubiquitous are at a disadvantage. Studies show parents who read to their children, heard them read, and provided them with access to books at home have a positive effect upon their children's learning (Epstein, 2001). Cognition research and infant development studies show "that early language stimulation from the moment of birth influences brain development and later learning success" (Lewis, pp. 186-187, 1996).

### *Educational Access*

Another factor contributing to a gap in student achievement is a lack of access to excellent pre-schools and elementary schools. Parents from low-income households have fewer educational choices for their children. They are more than likely to send their children to a local neighborhood school for convenience. Typically, these schools' efforts to teach children to read, write, speak and listen are inadequate, a deficit which has a tremendous impact on student success (Lewis, 1996). Parents who struggle with reading and writing are also less inclined to read with their children or assist with homework. Parents often refrain from being involved for fear their skills are not sufficient. Research overwhelmingly demonstrates that parent involvement in children's learning has a direct correlation to achievement. (Baker & Soden, 1998.)

Parents may not realize the impact that their value on education has on their children. Students gain in personal and academic development when their families emphasize schooling, let their children know they do, and do so continually over the years (Epstein, 1988).

### *School Climate/Culture*

Low-income families are less likely to be involved in their children's education because of language barriers, socio-economic status, educational background and a lack of connection to the school (Epstein, 1995). In her research, Joyce Epstein contends that these barriers make it difficult for parents and teachers to work collaboratively. Epstein and her colleagues have conducted significant research on parental involvement. Her research suggest that there is consistent evidence that parents' encouragement, activities, interest at home and their participation at school affect their children's achievement, even after the students' ability and family socioeconomic status is taken into account (Epstein, 1995). Epstein identified a framework of six types of school and parent/community involvement that when combined improve student learning and adult engagement. The six types are:

1. Parent skills
2. Communication
3. Volunteering
4. Learning at home
5. School decision-making
6. Collaboration with community agencies

### *Parenting Skills*

According to Epstein, developing parenting skills helps families establish home environments to support children as students. Epstein believes that schools can work with families to improve home conditions that support the students' learning at each grade level. Epstein contends that parental education that includes services such as

General Equivalency Diploma (GED), college credit, family literacy, health and nutrition planning and financial literacy has a positive impact on parent involvement. Epstein contends that by developing certain skills, parents and students benefit greatly.

Developing parenting skills should be at the forefront of schools. A plethora of research data suggests that by developing parental skills, parents are empowered (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Researchers Swick and Graves (1993) summarize empowered parents as having the ability to make effective use of resources, to be effective problem-solvers, and to have productive interactions with others. Swick and Graves contend that in order for schools to assist parents in becoming more empowered that they must be firmly committed to several assumptions. First, they must acknowledge that parents are the child's principal educator and a respected partner within the relationship. Second, parents should be considered as the "best experts" about their children and viewed as a valuable source of information. Third, children should be viewed within the context of their current family, school, and community environment. Fourth, a family's strengths rather than deficits should be emphasized (Swick & Graves, 1993).

According to the recent review of research aimed at identifying factors which most influence student learning, researchers found that the home and community were significant contributors to student success (Shepard & Rose, 1993). They contend that "the home functions as the most salient out-of school context for student learning, amplifying or diminishing the school's effect on learning" ( p. 278). Shepard and Rose also contend that it is important to enable parents to have more control over their own lives.

The development of parenting skills sends a clear message to students that school is important to their parents and that education is a value. Students learn how to balance responsibilities between home and school. Parents benefit by having an understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school. Parents feel supported by the school when time and investments are made on their behalf. Teachers benefit from having information about families' culture, background, goals and perspectives. It also allows them to gain the families trust, which is critical in establishing relationships.

### *Communication*

The second framework Epstein suggests improves parental involvement is communication. According to Epstein (2001), when schools design effective forms of communication between home and school about the schools' programs and students' progress, parents are more likely to feel connected. Communication connects schools to families, students and the community. It is a multi-way channel of communication between all constituents (Epstein, 2001). Schools that provide parents with opportunities to meet with teachers to discuss student learning are sending positive signals to parents who may be distrustful of the school. Developing trust is essential to establishing relationships between parents and teachers.

Clear communication about courses, registration, policies, expectations, and student progress are all ways in which schools can effectively communicate with families. In a 1996 Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll of teachers, lack of parent support is the biggest challenge teachers' face in the classroom, particularly in urban schools. Typically in urban schools, there are many factors that contribute to a lack of parental

participation. Researchers acknowledge in order for schools to establish successful partnerships with parents, they must consider the barriers that prevent parents from being involved and proactively seek to include parents regardless of their work schedule, socio-economic status, fear that their own educational attainment may not suffice and language barriers (Sanders, Allen-Jones & Abel, 2002). In urban schools across the country, there are many students whose first language is not English. Schools can improve communication by thinking creatively about solving the language barrier. The use of translators in written and oral communication gives all parents the opportunity to learn about their child's learning experience. Researchers found that parental involvement improved when written communications with families were consistent, positive, and delivered in a language and at a reading level that families can understand (Caplan, Hall, Lubin & Fleming, 1997).

Effective communication benefits all constituents. Students are aware of their own progress and actions necessary to maintain or improve grades. They have an understanding of their role as partners in their educational journey and will take more responsibility for their learning when the school has been explicit about learning goals and student expectations. Parents should also understand their role as partners. Schools should recognize parents as the most important adult in the child's life. Parental love, affection, support, and approval are fundamental needs of all children (Canter & Canter, 2001). Parents have the greatest impact in influencing and motivating their children. As a result of their role, parents can monitor students' progress, respond to any problems that may arise, view the teachers as an ally and provide pertinent information about the child's home life and learning habits that may be helpful for teachers. Teachers benefit

tremendously from parental involvement. Teachers improve their own ability to effectively communicate with all parents. They become more aware and appreciate the role of parents. Teachers have a better understanding of their students and gain information that will enable them to provide the best possible the best learning environment for their students. When teachers and parents communicate, they combine knowledge of students' strengths and limitations, then work together to devise an approach that will lead to student success (Canter & Canter, 2001).

### *Volunteerism*

According to Epstein (2001), schools are more effective in building relationships with parents when there are opportunities for parents to volunteer. There are many ways parents can volunteer. Volunteering in the classroom, providing assistance for administrative work, serving on the parent-teacher association, or helping the school with fundraising or chaperoning are valuable customs for schools to establish. Epstein defines volunteerism as anyone who supports the schools' goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time -- not just during the school day and at the school building (Epstein, 2001). Epstein contends that minority families responded more positively to partnership events when there were "hands-on" opportunities to share information and experiences as opposed to reading hand-outs or hearing lectures. Volunteering is an excellent opportunity to increase parental involvement. Students benefit from parent volunteerism by receiving extra attention, increasing their learning skills and by building relationships with parents. Volunteerism gives teachers an opportunity to become better acquainted with the parents and helps them have a panoramic view of the whole student.



### *Learning at Home*

Learning at home is Epstein's fourth frame of parental involvement. Epstein (2001) asserts that learning at home requires schools to provide information to families that will help them assist their children with homework and other curriculum-based activities. When parents are actively involved in learning at home, students benefit greatly. In a longitudinal study, researchers Keith, Keith, Quirk, Sperduto, Santillo & Killings (1998) assert that parent involvement led to higher test scores for high school students, evidence which shows that there is a direct correlation between the amount of time a student spends studying and the degree to which parents are involved. The academic success of students is dependent upon high expectations and cooperation between parent, teacher, administrator, and student (Kunjufu, 2006). Research has shown that parents who are involved with student learning are more invested in their children's educational journey, particularly in the case of minority and poor children (Sanders, Allen-Jones & Abel, 2002). All parents want their children to succeed; many unfortunately do not have the tools and skills to ensure academic success. Developing the skills for parents to provide extended learning at home is an effective way to help them meet the educational needs of their children.

There are many advantages of learning at home. Parents learn how to support and encourage their children; they become engaged and are more aware of their children as learners (Epstein, 2001). Students gain skills, a sense of accomplishment and view their parents more similarly to the teacher, solidifying the alignment between home and school. Teachers gain a partner in motivating and reinforcing student learning which is necessary for student success.

### *Decision-Making*

Epstein's fifth frame of parental involvement is decision-making, a partnership between parents and schools that involves a shared view and action towards achieving common goals (Epstein, 2001). Epstein suggests that schools should include parents in school decisions and develop them as leaders because parents can be mobilized to help secure school funding or other needed resources as well as to identify issues or concerns that are most important to them. The more a person understands his or her role as a parent, the more successful the outcome.

The model of the parental involvement process suggests that parents' involvement in decisions and choices are based on several constructs drawn from their own ideas and experiences as well as other constructs growing out of environmental demands and opportunities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Their research contends that parents' decisions to become involved in their child's education is primarily a function of three constructs: the parents' construction of his or her role in the child's life, the parents' sense of efficacy in helping his or her child to succeed in school, and parents' experience interacting with the school. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) assert that the most important factor in parent involvement is the parent's decision to become involved.

Parents will become more invested if their involvement extends beyond a superficial level. Schools must move parents from moderate to high likelihood of producing positive involvement in decision-making. Researchers suggest that parents who believe the school values their involvement will be more active (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Parental efficacy is critical in parent involvement. Participating in the

decision-making process gives parents an opportunity to share their voice. It also creates a venue for parents to bond with one another and provides them with an awareness of school, district, and state policies (Epstein, 2001). Parent involvement is beneficial to teachers. Teachers have a window into the parental perspective in policy development and leadership roles. Students benefit from parental involvement. According to Epstein (2001), there are specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parents on behalf of the students.

### *Community Involvement*

The community plays an integral role in ensuring student success. Research during the last decade has expanded knowledge about the role of communities in children's learning (Sanders, Allen-Jones & Abel, 2002). Collaborating with the community is Epstein's sixth framework. She defines community as all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools (Epstein, 2001).

Collaboration between the community and schools is an effective method of improving student performance. Epstein (2001) asserts that the community is an excellent resource for materials and services to help strengthen student learning and development.

Communities are powerful entities that can be utilized to increase awareness of community resources to all parents, students, and schools. In poor and minority families, community involvement is detrimental. The popular slogan "it takes a village" makes reference to the importance of various constituents being involved in raising successful children. Research has shown partnerships between schools and community have a positive influence on all parents, including the ones who are hard to reach: poor and minority, working class and single-parent families (Stringfield & Land, 2002). This

research has helped to redefine family and community involvement that has led to successful partnerships. Community involvement has had a positive and significant influence on national education reform policies.

In his research, James Comer (1991) believes that schools should focus on the healthy development of children as they are the key to their academic achievement. Comer, a notable child psychiatrist and prominent educational reformer, helped transform urban schools with underachieving students through the School Development Program. It is a model that places the developmental needs of the student at the center of the school's agenda and established a shared responsibility among the school, students and parents. The School Development Model emphasizes the development of children's social skills and self-esteem. Comer believes that school climate is essential to student success and that developing a positive relationship between parents, students and schools promotes educational development.

Central to the School Development Program are basic founding assumptions that include:

Due to developmental lack of support, many students come to school with developmental gaps

In spite of experience deficits, all children are expected to meet high standards

Although some deficits inhibit student development, schools should not accept academic deficit theory that lowers expectations for students of color

All students can reach higher level of academic achievement

Academic learning rest on a foundation of solid development (six pathways-physical, psychological, language, social, ethical and cognitive)

Schools have to provide students with the developmental opportunities they lack

Schools must work with parents to help meet the developmental needs of students

(James Comer, 1991).

Research on Comer's School Development Plans indicates significant effects on school climate, student attendance and student achievement (Steinberg, 1989). Comer contends that the entire school community learns that the essential culture must be built upon a cooperative, learning, trying, experimenting attitude rather than an obstructive adversarial relationship. (1995)

### *Schools and Parent Involvement*

Although No Child Left Behind Act 2001 has mandated that schools create parent-involvement programs as a vehicle to ensure student success, some schools are not inviting and teachers are quite defensive especially in schools that serve predominantly minority and poor children (Baker & Soden, 1998), exacerbating the distance between families and schools. In effective parent-school partnerships, teachers must be familiar with how parents are involved in educating their children. Despite the importance of teacher knowledge of parent involvement it is often difficult to provide teachers with training to work with families. Baker and Soden suggest that the lack of on-site training for teachers is particularly noteworthy because teacher education programs do not provide professional development in this area.

Parents are aware and respond positively when teachers' efforts to involve them in learning are prevalent. In a statewide survey, Epstein (1988) found that 58% of parents reported never having received requests from the teacher to become involved in learning activities at home, while over 80% said they would help their children more at home with learning activities if they received specific instructions. Epstein suggests that schools would be more successful if teachers were more proactive with parent involvement practices. Language minority parents may face a number of challenges

when trying to communicate with their child's school. The ability to understand English, unfamiliarity with the school system, and differences in cultural norms can hinder parents from communicating or being involved in their child's school (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003).

Despite these barriers, parent partnerships can be successful when schools view parent involvement as meaningful. (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000) Lawrence-Lightfoot suggests that parent involvement can enhance the educational process of their children by contributing insights and knowledge that complements the professional skills of schools' staff in ways that strengthen academic and social programs. Successful parent involvement must occur collaboratively, bridging the two worlds: home and school. Lightfoot writes that schools need to find ways to cultivate partnerships between families and schools. (2000).

Effective parent partnerships require commitment of the schools and the parents. Schools have an opportunity to improve student learning by developing collaborations between teachers and parents. These collaborations should address the racial, cultural and socio-economic differences between the teachers and the parents. In their research (Weiss and Dearing, 2007) recommend the following strategies for parent involvement.

#### *Successful Strategies for Parent Involvement*

Weiss and Dearing (2007) state that successful parent involvement strategies for parents should include:

- 1.) Schedule time to participate in your child's education
- 2.) Volunteer at your child's school
- 3.) Communication

### *Implications for Practice*

Weiss and Dearing (2007) also state implications for practice

- 1.) Collect information about parents' work setting when inquiring Children's family and after school arrangements
- 2.) Create flexibility in the timing of school life and parental work
- 3.) Partner with community employers
- 4.) Provide Technologies at school that facilitate communication between teachers and parents
- 5.) Redefine and expand what family involvement means

In reviewing the literature, the concept of parent involvement has drawn national attention, particularly in schools where the population is from lower socio-economic backgrounds and the children are predominantly minorities. Parents often do not believe they could play an important role in their child's education. When schools value parental involvement, parents are more invested, have a greater comfort level with the school and are supportive.

Weiss and Dearing (2007) suggest that schools have a responsibility to schedule parent-school activities during convenient hours for parents. Schools should show genuine interest in what the family structure and life is like at home to maximize parental or family involvement in homework. This encourages parents to assume ownership of their child's educational process, which often leads to parental support, and confidence. Weiss and Dearing (2007) also suggest that schools should partner with community employers to receive additional support in the child's education. Communication is critical in building trust with parents. Communication can occur in many forms: technology, newsletters, parent bulletins, parent teacher conferences, portfolio conferences, special events and information sessions. When parents are informed, they

are more connected. Finally, parents and teachers must clearly define parent involvement and the expectations associated with their involvement.

Parental involvement gives parents a lens into the school and empowers them to ask questions, provide insight and problem solve with teachers. Parents also are confident in their ability to access resources and partner with teachers. Weiss and Dearing (2007) discuss strategies for teachers and parents that will create opportunities for collaboration. Weiss and Dearing (2007) suggest that parent involvement can take place in a variety of ways. Parents can be involved with their children's homework, attend school functions including meetings and other school events, and communicate with teachers as often as possible. While these suggestions are simplistic, often parents are not aware of the impact that these actions have on their child's education. These interactions with the school also provide teachers with a window into the child's life beyond the school day. The second theme, volunteerism, is discussed next.

### *Volunteerism*

In this second theme, the researcher further explored volunteerism in the United States, the connection between religion and volunteerism and examined the motivations of volunteers using research conducted by Thomas S. Popkewitz (1998), John Wilson and Janoski (1995) and E. Clary and colleagues (1998).

Popkewitz' research on volunteer teachers in the Teach for America Program is comparable to the Urban Hope School. His research provided context for the Urban Hope School model. In both programs, young volunteers were committed to improving the quality of education of low-income inner-city students. Teach for America extended their service to both urban and rural environments. The mission of The Urban Hope



School is to serve low-income students in the inner city. For the purpose of this study, the emphasis on Popkewitz' research will be on urban environments.

In his study on Teach for America, sociologist Popkewitz (1998) presented an ethnographic study of a national reform program that recruited teaching interns to teach in urban and rural schools throughout the United States. Popkewitz examined teachers' attitudes and beliefs about learning by exploring the patterns and ideas constructed by the teacher and how that affects power and equity. Further, his study explored what patterns of ideas constructed the teachers' pedagogical practices. Popkewitz contends that it is clear that schools, particularly in urban and rural environments, have historically deployed particular systems of thought and rules of reason that created limits and boundaries for student learning. Popkewitz suggests that teachers have the power to determine the success or failure of students through the process of normalization. This occurs when teachers place students into various distinctions, which can include or exclude their participation in learning. These distinctions or "spaces" suggests that students who are identified as outside the norm do not possess the same knowledge as the teacher and their peers whose reasoning skills mirror the teachers. Popkewitz' spacial politics of schooling is the production of moral order that is inclusive or exclusive. Through this process, the moral domains of the soul are the source of struggle. Popkewitz contends that while the efforts of Teach for America were commendable, there were ways in which the discursive practices of schooling were embedded in the program, thereby creating an unequal education. These practices determined whether students were qualified or disqualified from the educational process. Popkewitz is in favor of programs that mobilize for social change; however, he suggests that it is

imperative for these programs to recognize how their “good will” or pastoral power and knowledge are culturally constructed in ways that are not particularly conducive to the programs’ original intentions: to provide students with committed teachers who will deliver a quality education.

### *Overview of Volunteerism*

Volunteerism is the name given to that set of activities in which people engage, usually without pay, on behalf of others in need, such as assisting the elderly, providing staff assistance for neighborhood groups, or coaching a Little League Team (Wilson & Janoski, 1995). In this study, volunteering is defined as donated labor to organizations that provide goods and services to individuals and groups. Their research on the history of volunteerism and its connection to the church is significant, particularly as it related to this study.

Volunteering has a long and proud history in America. Some would say it dates back to the first pioneers, when colonists had to band together to overcome the challenges of adjusting to a new land (Points of Light Foundation, 2006). Others might say it dates back to biblical times when service to others was considered the ultimate holy and humbling act. The Golden Rule “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” has influenced individuals to lend a helping hand for quite some time. Regardless of how one interprets the history of volunteerism, Americans have volunteered to help each other in times of war, tragedy and need since Benjamin Franklin began the first volunteer fighting company. Wilson and Janoski (1995) suggest that volunteerism in America is higher than in any other country in the world. They found that there is a correlation between the very high levels of volunteerism and the levels of religious devotion.

While giving and volunteering occurs in most countries, and non-profits can be found around the world, nowhere else are the numbers, proportions and impact as great as they are in America (O'Connell, 1998). Various volunteer programs were created and defined by the social, economic, or political climate in a period of time by Presidents, community organizers and ordinary citizens. World Wars, The Great Depression, War on Poverty, Civil Rights Movement, and other defining moments in our history created a need for volunteerism.

Volunteerism has long been a staple in non-profit organizations. It not only helps the recipients of the donated labor but also provides meaning to people who want to make a difference. Wilson and Janoski (1995) contend that volunteerism rekindles a sense of community and bridges the gulf that exists within American society. Typically individuals move within relatively small spheres that are defined by race, class, age and location. Volunteering provides people with an opportunity to connect with others who are in different spheres. In a study conducted by the Independent Sector in 1993, researchers found that one of the most fundamental explanations for voluntary activity centers on religious expression and protection of that freedom. The same study, one of the largest ever conducted about volunteerism and the religious sector, shows that the role of religious congregations are the primary service providers for neighborhoods, especially poor neighborhoods where their presence makes a larger impact (Independent Sector, 1998).

#### *Religion and Volunteerism-Emerging Adults*

The connection between religion and volunteerism has a common moral thread and is closely linked. Researchers say that the connection between church membership, church

activism, and volunteerism depends on the theological interpretation of volunteering and the significance attached to church attendance (Wilson & Janoski, 1995). Researchers say the “Lord’s” work and one’s commitment to volunteering are inextricably linked (Ibid. 1995). People consider volunteering as their commitment to humanity and their civic duty.

Since this study focused primarily on volunteer teachers who recently graduated from college, the researcher examined volunteerism with a particular emphasis on emerging adults. Sociologists define emerging adults as young people between the ages of 18 and 25 (Barry & Nelson, 2005). They contend that this period is characterized by heightened risk-taking behavior and self-exploration of numerous domains, including one’s spirituality. For most emerging adults, religious identity development proceeds toward achievement during their college years (Barry & Nelson, 2005). During this period emerging adults question the beliefs with which they were raised, place greater emphasis on individual spirituality than affiliation with a religious institution, and pick and choose the aspects of religion that suits them best (Barry & Nelson, 2005). It is evident that religion is an important aspect of culture that can impact the experience of young people making the transition into adulthood (Barry & Nelson, 2005). They contend that college students whose religion is significant to their identity, and those students who attend religious institutions, are regularly exposed to the values and beliefs that have extensive hierarchies of authority and value the family and serving others, especially those less fortunate. In religious colleges and universities, particularly Catholic and Mormon, there is a deep commitment to foster students’ spiritual development and commitment to live according to God’s commandments and

reverencing life. Thus, volunteerism among college students may reinforce the values students already have or it may appeal to those who are trying to define their purpose in life. Although religious organizations have played an integral role in volunteerism, mutual dependence is also a factor.

### *Volunteer Motivations*

The United States is the most advanced country in philanthropy, in terms of percentage of income given to charities (Freedman, 1993). Volunteers choose to share their time, talent and treasure with many non-profit organizations. One of the most appealing opportunities for volunteerism is with youth, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Many Americans care deeply about the fate of young people growing up in poverty. Nowhere is this condition more troubling than in the case of inner-city youth, who confront far greater stress than their contemporaries of higher social and economic status (Freedman, 1993).

American volunteerism is more of a social identity that manifests itself in gestures of explicitly chosen commitment to many different religious, secular, private and public causes, ranging from social affiliation to the institutionalization of societal formations and general trends of privatization in a nation that values “civil society” and non-government organizations more highly than any other. Different varieties of volunteerism cut across all strands of U. S. society and influence the fabric of American society at every level (Freedman, 1993). The idea that an individual would make significant personal sacrifices for another person, particularly when that person is a stranger has long fascinated students of social behavior (Freedman, 1993).

Volunteerism is a rapidly increasing phenomenon. Every year, millions of

people devote substantial amounts of their time and energy to helping others. One important manifestation of human helpfulness is volunteerism, whereby people provide, among other services, companionship to the lonely, tutoring to the illiterate, counseling to the troubled, and healthcare to the sick, and do so on a regular, ongoing, voluntary basis, with their voluntary helping often extending over long periods of time. According to one estimate, 89.2 million American adults engaged in some form of volunteerism in 1993, with 23.6 million of them giving 5 or more hours per week to their volunteer service (Independent Sector, 1994).

Volunteerism in America has increased rapidly and steadily since 911, especially amongst colleges and universities. Volunteerism and community service by college students and recent college graduates have received increased attention in recent years. Although there was a general trend away from altruism during the 1970s and 1980s, Astin (2004) and Levine & Hirsch (1991) reported that an emerging trend towards increased social concern among students on college campuses. They concluded that participation in service activity is an essential part of a well-rounded education and suggested that students simply needed more guidance in this area.

Volunteers seek opportunities to help others but also it helps them fulfill a personal need. Often volunteers spend time deliberating how much time they will dedicate to a particular cause and whether that cause fits their own personal needs. Researchers attempted to answer the questions “why do people volunteer and what sustains them?” In their research, E. Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen & Miene, (1998) discuss the functional analysis of volunteerism, an approach that is explicitly concerned with reasons, purpose and goals being served by an individual

through volunteerism, explores the feelings and actions of volunteers (E. Clary, et. al, 1998) states that there are six functions of volunteerism.

### *Six Functions of Volunteerism*

The researchers identified the first function as an individual's need to express values related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others. The second function asserts that volunteering may also offer volunteers new learning experiences and the opportunity to exercise knowledge, skills and abilities that may otherwise go unpracticed.

Understanding is a function of volunteerism where people feel their knowledge and skills are being utilized, particularly for a good cause. The third function asserts that volunteerism provides opportunities for people to build relationships with others who share similar values. The fourth function asserts that volunteerism may enable volunteers to gain experience in a particular field they are interested. At Urban Hope, teachers volunteer in exchange for teacher training, critical to preparing one for a potential new career. The fifth function asserts that the motivation to volunteer may also involve "processes associated with the functioning of the ego" (Clary, et al. p. 1518).

The protective function is related to ego defensive or externalization concerns. Some people volunteer to escape negative feelings they have about themselves. Volunteerism gives them a chance to reduce the guilt over being more fortunate than others or to address one's own personal problems. The sixth function asserts that volunteerism may give people an extra "lift" in their moods. Research on moods suggests people use helping or volunteering as a means of maintaining or enhancing positive affect (Katz, 1960) The enhancement function involves a motivational process that centers on the ego's growth and development and involves positive strivings of the ego (Clary, et. al,

1998).

At Urban Hope, volunteer teachers often come to the school for a variety of reasons however most teachers come because of their good will. Although their intentions are admirable, sometimes they are laden with attitudes and perceptions that often are inaccurate. Their commitment to “give back to the less fortunate” created tension between teachers and parents. Initially, this affected the teachers’ ability to develop authentic relationships and work collaboratively with parents because parents often feel, despite the mission of the school, that the teachers are approaching their commitment as a charity. Parents expressed their concerns about teachers not fully understanding their struggles. An effective method of addressing some of the barriers between the perceptions and attitudes of both parents and teachers is through pedagogical training, specifically culturally responsive teaching; the third theme.

### *Culturally Responsive Teaching*

The achievement gap between white students and students of color continues to exist. While the achievement gap is real and exists for many reasons, teachers’ attitudes play an integral role in the success or failure of students. Often teachers have preconceived attitudes and beliefs that have a negative impact on teaching students of color. In order for teachers to address these challenges, significant changes needed to occur in their educational training. First, teachers must recognize that there are certain challenges associated with teaching students who are underachieving; second, they must recognize that all students can learn and that they bring value to the classroom regardless of their race, ethnicity or social status.

Teachers who make the most impact are those who have been able to make



authentic connections with students in and out class. They often demonstrate a genuine interest in the students' academic and social success. They acknowledge and value a curriculum that is reflective of multiple cultural lenses, not out of obligation but out of necessity. In her research, Geneva Gay (2000) contends that culturally responsive teaching is tantamount to reaching all students, particularly those from non-majority populations. Gay defines culturally responsive teaching as "the teachers' ability to use cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2000, pg. 29). Gay contends that "interactions between students and teachers as well as among students in the classroom are frequently identified as the "actual sites" where learning success or failure is determined. They are prominent among the major attributes of culturally responsive teaching. Gay suggest that teachers play a pivotal role in these interactions. S. Nieto simply defines culturally responsive teaching as "a method that necessitates inclusion and authenticity," emphasizing that all people, especially teachers should learn and respect themselves, one another, and all other people in honor of their many cultural characteristics (Nieto, 2003, p. 353).

#### *Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Teaching*

Culturally responsive teaching acknowledges the students' cultural heritage, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes and approaches to learning (Gay, 2000). Gay suggests that culturally responsive teaching builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school as well as academic abstractions and lived socio-cultural realities. In addition, culturally responsive teaching includes instructional strategies that serve various learning styles. Culturally responsive teaching - CRT,

teaches students how to embrace their own cultural heritage as well as their peers' cultural heritage. Gay (2000) asserts that multicultural information, resources, and materials in all subjects and skills are routinely taught in schools. However, it is important to note that successful schools are able to integrate multiculturalism in all aspects of school life including but limited to the curriculum.

Researchers (Gay, 2000 & Nieto, 2003) have asserted that the academic achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can be improved if classroom instructional practices were to take into consideration the cultural backgrounds of all students. Awareness of the need for culturally responsive teaching has occurred over the past few decades, as the shift in demographics has been dramatic. Demographic data indicate that more than one third of the children in our elementary and secondary schools are students of color (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996), one in five lives in poverty (Children's Defense Fund, 2001), and almost one in ten has limited proficiency in English. The sharp contrast exists with the teaching population.

In her research, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2001) states our teaching force remains overwhelmingly White, middle class, and monolingual English (Ladson-Billings, 2001). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), approximately 90% of public school teachers are European American (1993). Enrollment in schools, colleges and departments of education is 86% White, 7% African American, and 3% Latino (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Most of the White teachers come from White neighborhoods and attend predominantly White colleges and universities where they are taught by predominantly White teacher educators (Howard, 1999). The National Center

for Educational Statistics indicates that it is highly likely that Black children will experience mostly White teachers in their education (2001).

Research, based on current trends in public school enrollment and teacher characteristics, supports this finding. According to Howard (1999), a lack of multicultural competence can exacerbate the difficulties that novice and even more experienced teachers have with working with diverse students. Numerous researchers, including Delpit (1995), Foster (1995) and Irvine (1990), have warned educators about the dangers of narrowly defining good teaching (Cooper, 2003). They all contend that good teaching must take into account the attitudes and beliefs of the teacher and how that transfers into the classroom. Although researchers have long acknowledged the implications of school context on teaching, teacher-student interactions and the learning environment are two factors that individual teachers can reasonably control. In a study conducted by Gloria Ladson Billings (2001), the researcher studied the beliefs and practices of three White public school teachers of Black children. The teachers were considered effective teachers and were identified by their Black Principal and Vice Principal. The study focused on two essential questions: what were the beliefs and practices of the White teachers and how do their beliefs and practices compare and contrast to the effective teachers of Black children expressed in the literature? The study was based on two assumptions. The first was that White teachers were capable of effectively teaching Black students as long as the individual teachers are vital forces in and out of the classroom, and they have an understanding of what a community values in its teachers (Cooper, 2003). Irvine's theory of cultural synchronization, which is "rooted in the concepts of Afro centricity and the cultural distinctiveness of Afro-

American life” (Cooper, 2003, p. 23), accounts for and respects the style, language, behavior and tradition of Blacks. Irvine’s theory suggests the expectations are high and are seen as “powerful contributors” in effective teaching was the second assumption (Irvine, 1990, p. 61). Both assumptions provided a theoretical framework for the study.

Researchers contend that Black teachers of Black children significantly overlapped with Ladson-Billings principles of culturally responsive teaching and Irvine’s theory of synchronization (Cooper, 2003). There were common threads woven throughout the research on Black, White and Catholic School teachers where there was “unwavering refusal to accept Black children’s scholastic underachievement, their commitment to equal educational opportunity, and their deep respect for Black parents and the Black community” (Cooper, 2003). Although recent census figures indicated that children of color are the fastest growing segment of the population, currently representing 40% of all school age children (Cooper, 2003), the demographic challenges have been a part of the American educational system since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The problem lies not with the classroom composition but in the classroom teaching if the response is negative. Many researchers have challenged schools across the country to find creative ways to work with diverse students. Ladson-Billings, Irvine, Delpit and Gay all suggest that culturally relevant teaching results in academic success for all students without lowering academic standards or jeopardizing skills.

Ladson-Billings’ study on three effective White teachers of Black students supports the characteristics Gay states that are essential to culturally responsive teaching. Research conducted by Ladson-Billings contends that the following are characteristics of culturally responsive teaching:

1. When students are treated as competent, they are likely to demonstrate competence.
2. When teachers provide instructional “scaffolding,” students can move from what they know to what they need to know.
3. The focus of the classroom must be instructional.
4. Real education is about extending students’ thinking and abilities.
5. Effective teaching involves in-depth knowledge of both the students and subject matter. (Ladson-Billings, 2004, pp. 123-125).

Ladson-Billings says how teachers view themselves, their students, and the social interactions that take place within the classroom are all critical aspects of culturally responsive teaching. In her research, Ladson-Billings (2004) found that effective teaching practices are necessary to meet the needs of all students. She contends that teacher preparation and professional development is critical because of the power individual teachers have in the academic and social construction in their classrooms. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), the relationship between student and teacher is paramount. The relationship must honor students individually and within the group context. The “family” atmosphere provides comfort, encouragement, and collaboration that are essential to academic and social achievement.

Another researcher, Linda Darling-Hammond (2002) supports the research shared by both Gay and Ladson-Billings. She believes that teaching is a moral and political act and that teachers play a critical role in facilitating positive social change (Darling-Hammond, 2002). In her research, Darling-Hammond found that many teachers in university teacher training programs had “little personal experience with the issues of

inequity, marginalization, discrimination, and oppression that are regularly experienced by students whose race, income, language, sexuality, or learning abilities places them outside of the mainstream” (Darling-Hammond, 2002, pg. 2). According to Darling-Hammond these future teachers must be mobilized to address and prepared to work within this cultural framework. Darling-Hammond suggests that “crossing boundaries” is essential to social learning.

Darling-Hammond (2001) contends that the key to preparing effective culturally responsive teachers is for university education programs to become more conscious of the differences and life experiences that initially divide their participants and create a common ground in which these experiences can be shared. Darling Hammond’s research suggests that education programs reflect on their practices and values, an act which will require dialogical engagement and further self-discovery to actively produce agents of social change. In her research, Lisa Delpit (1995) argued that schools of education not only focus on teacher preparation but the need to acknowledge how students of color in these programs often feel silenced, as though their knowledge does not count. She contends that this is critical to developing culturally responsive teachers in education programs.

Darling-Hammond implores educators to internalize the notion that “failure is not an option” for diverse students. She asserts that educators must have an empathic disposition that allows them to authentically take on the perspective of other cultures, which can be defined as altruism. Altruism implies action on behalf or service to others needs (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). Researchers have noted that students, especially students of color, who have caring relationships with their teachers, are more motivated

and perform better academically than students who do not (Foster, 1995; Gay, 2000; Irvine, 1990). Empathy can foster openness, attentiveness and positive relationships. Their research contends that teachers are more successful when students feel connected to the learning and when their voices are valued. Finally, in a study conducted by Cruickshank (1990), teacher educators identified what they believed to be salient characteristics that comprise culturally responsive teaching. According to Cruickshank (1990) teacher educators believed that effective teachers are identified by their character traits, what they know, what they teach, how they teach, what they expect from their students, how their students react to them and how they manage the classroom.

Researchers found that the teachers' role is pivotal to student success and that culturally responsive teaching must be endemic in teacher training programs and classrooms throughout the country (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Delpit, 1995). One of the most important aspects of a culturally responsive classroom is the teachers' belief that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can learn. The second is that the instructional strategies and teaching behaviors used by the teacher can engage students and lead to improved academic achievement. Lastly, every teacher should strive to develop instructional programs and activities that prevent failure and increase successes in all of their students (Darling-Hammond, 2002). While this is true, in order for authentic reform to occur, real change must happen systemically in schools of education and in schools beginning at the primary level and extending to colleges and universities. This reform would require a significant transformation in attitudes and beliefs amongst educators and the willingness to have those attitudes and beliefs challenged so that they can serve the best interest of all students.

Close attention must also be paid to the attitudes and beliefs of African American students who have internalized negative images and stereotypes of their ability to learn. Academic achievement is largely effected by one's peer group (Horvart & Lewis, 2003). In their research on academic achievement among African American high school students, John Ogbu and Signithia Fordham (1986), support Coleman's idea that social composition is indeed significant. While social composition is imperative, Ogbu and Signithia suggest that peers of the same race, particularly African Americans, shared a common psychological pattern. According to Ogbu and Fordham, black students enter a stage in their racial identity development that makes them keenly aware of the systematic exclusion of black people from full participation in U.S. society. This realization leads to the development of a form of oppositional behavior. African American students from low-income, middle and upper middle class families achieve less in subsequent schooling than their white counterparts, regardless of the preparation (Steele, 1992).

In her research, Daniel-Tatum (2003) contends that in adolescence race becomes personally salient for black youth in finding the answer to the questions about what it means to be black and how students should act. Daniel-Tatum suggests that although black adult role models are prevalent, the last thing many adolescents want to do is emulate their parents, relatives, and other important adults. Instead, it is their peer group that helps them answer those questions. Ogbu's theory on oppositional behavior amongst black adolescents protects one's identity from the psychological assault of racism and keeps the dominant group at a distance. Daniel-Tatum asserts that culturally responsive teaching requires educators to be especially aware of their own values, beliefs and



attitudes while taking into account their students' internalized barriers that prevent them from being successful.

Although racial vulnerability at schools may undermine Black achievement, so many other factors contribute to underachievement such as poverty and some cultural norms. Steele (1992) supports the research of Daniel-Tatum and Ogbu. Steele contends that it is important to have a school climate that is conducive to the overall academic achievement of African American and other students of color. Steele suggests that schools should see the value and promise in Black children. According to Steele, this is "wise schooling." Steele referred to the term "wise" to describe people who are unaware of the stigmas attached to them as a result of their identification with a particular ethnic, racial or social group (1992). Instead of being stifled by the stigma, they are less vulnerable regardless of the thoughts --right or wrong, of others. They transcend racial vulnerability and are accepted by the majority.

James Comer's (1991) work in transforming schools also supports creating a climate where children are valued and can identify with learning. In his research, Comer emphasized the importance of a strong accepting teacher-student relationship. Comer placed the responsibility on the school to provide teacher training, parent involvement, and coordination of information about students. He is a proponent of placing value on students while recognizing the vulnerabilities as barriers to their intellectual development. Comer's emphasis on child development has similar characteristics of culturally responsive teaching. Comer's belief that schools have a responsibility to encourage positive relationships between home and school is a hallmark of the Comer School

Model. Comer is a proponent of validating the child's racial, ethnic or socio-economic background and integrating their culture into the curriculum.

It is important to note that Popkewitz' ideas are similar to Darling-Hammond's, Ladson-Billings' and Comer's. He suggests that African American students' needs are different from White students. According to Popkewitz (1998), African American children assume a certain unity based on population reasoning whereas the needs of White children are based on the notion of individualization. While these needs are different, school reform must take into account the idea of rescuing the children, combined with secular notions about the effects of poverty, class, and social/racial discrimination to produce pedagogical discourse in most "urban" schools. He suggested that there is a growing and important literature in education as well as in philosophy and sociology of knowledge that directs our attention to new forms of knowledge about the subjects and differences (Popkewitz, 1998).

Popkewitz asserted that educators must be cognizant of their privilege and power in the classroom and how that plays a significant role in student success. Research findings and classroom practices indicate that culturally responsive teaching does improve achievement (Gay, 2000). Gay (2000) asserts that if patterns of achievement among ethnic students of color are to be reversed, culturally responsive teaching preparation and practice have to be required of everyone. Culturally responsive teaching is a critical factor in student achievement. Teacher preparation, the fourth theme will be discussed next.

### *Teacher Preparation*

Education reform has had a tremendous impact on the teaching profession. The demands that are placed on teachers are extensive. In urban schools, the challenges are quite significant. Teachers are not only expected to raise the standards for all students but they are also expected to understand the socio-cultural context of their classrooms. Teaching is complex- especially as conducted in highly pluralistic or segregated school settings (Howey, Post & Zimpher, 2006). In their research, they assert that one key to effective teaching is knowing the students well. They contend that teachers who teach in high-poverty urban schools should be aware of the lives of their students in and out of the classroom. They assert that this should not lower the standards and expectations of the students they teach, rather teachers should be aware of their social norms, physical surroundings, language and culture, and what the implications are for how they should teach and engage their students (Howey, Post & Zimpher, 2006).

While this was previously discussed in the culturally responsive teaching theme, it is important to note that the majority of teachers in urban schools are white, middle class, and typically from suburban towns. Culturally responsive teaching is an integral part of teacher preparation. However, the researcher recognized the importance of culturally responsive teaching and teacher preparation and believed that each topic warranted its own theme.

Teachers in urban settings are not only expected to have cultural understandings of their students, but they are also expected to meet the academic teaching demands that schools place on them. These demands, coupled with a lack of administrator support and supervision, often leads to teacher turnover. According to the National Commission on

Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), urban schools suffer a high degree of teacher turnover as a result of increased demands and sparse support (2003). The severity of teaching shortages in urban schools often leads to hiring less effective teachers.

Researchers such as Jackie Jordan-Irvine, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Geneva Gay, among others contend that there is a correlation between teacher quality and student performance. According to their research, teacher quality can be defined as having the knowledge, skills and performances that are related to successful teaching in culturally diverse schools (Zeichner, 2003). Zeichner asserts that knowledge, performance and disposition are critical aspects of effective teaching. Zeichner defines knowledge as a teacher's understanding of their students' way of life, community, social interaction and learning. He defines performance as the teachers' ability to incorporate students' abilities, experiences, frames of references and community resources into the class in ways that enhance their learning. Zeichner defines disposition as the teachers' attitudes and perceptions about viewing student differences as a "value added" as opposed to problematic (Zeichner, 2003). For example, teachers who believe that they are responsible for making a difference have positive disposition.

Research shows that when schools provide new teachers with effective teacher induction programs, mentoring, support and professional development, new teachers are more inclined to stay in the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005). In a study on Teach for America, Darling-Hammond and her colleagues (1995) assert that teacher preparation is critical to the programs' success. Darling-Hammond supports policies that enable schools to develop and meet the intellectual demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. She contends that teacher preparation at the university

level is the key to student success. Research shows that the single most important determinant of student achievement is teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005). Darling-Hammond contends that there is a relationship between teacher education and teacher effectiveness. According to Darling-Hammond, the more the teacher knows, the higher the students' performance. Darling-Hammond suggests that effective teacher preparation is coherent, has organized course work and clinical experience around a vision.

Darling-Hammond and colleagues suggests that effective teacher preparation programs are not “just a random assortment of courses and experiences”. Darling-Hammond recommends that teacher preparation programs require master teachers to work closely with student teachers, providing an environment that is organized around teacher and student learning. Darling-Hammond believes that veteran teachers should mentor beginning teachers. According to Darling-Hammond, continuous professional development should occur for both the veteran and beginning teachers. She suggests that student teachers can gain tremendous insight and feedback by having a mentor.

Darling supports high standards for all teachers. According to the researcher, teacher quality can close the achievement gap. Darling-Hammond criticizes programs such as Teach for America and Urban Hope for their lack of teacher preparation. In her study on TFA the researcher found a correlation between student achievement and adequate teacher training. Darling-Hammond criticized the program for not having qualified teachers. According to Darling-Hammond, Teach For America and similar programs attract less effective teachers. Typically these programs are offered in the areas where teacher effectiveness is needed most, in urban and rural regions. Teach For America does

not offer new teachers an opportunity for mentoring and one-on-one training. Instead, new teachers are thrust into the classrooms without sufficient support. This can be extremely isolating for new teachers and lead to “burn-out.” Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2005) assert that there is a relationship of well prepared teachers to the length of time teachers stay in the profession. Those who go through summertime “learn to teach” routes have a much higher rate for leaving the profession than those who have high quality training. People who are underprepared are more likely to become discouraged.

### Conclusion

At Urban Hope, most teachers arrived with little or no formalized training. Hiring teachers new to the profession is central to the school’s mission. Urban Hope Teachers experienced similar challenges to new teachers in other urban schools. They balanced multiple demands and were faced with the challenge of acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to teach urban students. Urban Hope administrators made a concerted effort to provide volunteer teachers with an ideal learning environment where they received adequate teacher preparation and culturally responsive teacher training.

In reviewing the literature for this study, the researcher learned that the four themes were essential to exploring the establishment of authentic relationships between teachers and parents.

Chapter three provides a comprehensive outline of the methodology utilized in this study. The research design was based on a qualitative case study. Interviews, observations, journals and surveys were included in this research. The researcher provided an outline of the use of data collection instruments and an explanation of the

coding analysis that was conducted. In addition, a thorough explanation of the sample group and the rationale for the selection are clearly explained. Chapter three also explains human consideration implications and limitations to the study.

## CHAPTER THREE: DESIGN OF RESEARCH

### *Introduction*

The project under study involves two initiatives implemented at the Urban Hope School. A qualitative case study is the preferred method to gain the data needed to answer this study's research questions. This case study intends to present rich detail describing volunteer teachers' perceptions of their roles and of their relationships with their students' parents before and after the two initiatives. Both initiatives designed to address the perceived disconnect between parents and teachers at the school. This chapter will present the design and rationale for using a qualitative descriptive case study as well as the research questions, research methodology, sample, rationale for the sample, pilot test, the data gathering procedures, methods for data analysis, formats for reporting the findings, the limitations of the study and the frameworks for discussing the findings.

### Design and Rationale

This study is a qualitative evaluative case study of two parent-teacher initiatives at the Urban Hope School. Qualitative evaluative case studies involve descriptive data, explanation, and judgment (Merriam, 1998). Case study research provides thick descriptions of people's perceptions and understandings which attempt to illuminate tacit meanings people bring to and derive from their experiences (Merriam, 1998). The researcher chose to conduct an evaluative case study because this type of study weighs information and evidence to produce judgment about the effects of initiatives, which is the final and ultimate act of evaluation (Merriam). Since Urban Hope has recently embarked upon a Three-Year Strategic Plan, the school has specific goals involving teachers and parents that must be evaluated. This particular type of case study will allow



the researcher to determine whether the two initiatives have changed perceptions and attitudes toward empowered parent-teacher dialogue, influenced teachers' attitudes and sensitivity and increased teacher-parent involvement and communication. In this case study the researcher is both the primary researcher and a participant observer. The researcher's role will be to assess changes in volunteer teachers' attitudes as a result of participating in the project designed to improve parent-teacher relationships.

### Research Questions

This case study attempted to answer the following research questions as the parent involvement program completes the initial phase of implementation. The major research questions for this study were:

- 1) How did initial conversations with Families First impact teachers' perceptions of their role as volunteer teachers at Urban Hope School?
- 2) How did participating in the Families First project and the student advisory program impact the teachers' perception of cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding in their interactions with parents?
- 3) How did the two initiatives impact teachers' perception of the significance of parents' role in the educational achievement and development of their children?

### Research Methodology

Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were the main tools utilized to inform this study. The researcher was a participant observer. In reality, researchers are seldom total participants or observers. They are instead research participants, one "who participates in a social situation but is personally only partially involved so that he can function as a researcher" (Merriam, 1998, p.54). Merriam contends that the ideal in qualitative research is to get inside the perspective of the participants; full participation is not always possible.

Patton (1990) further explains that there is balance between being a participant and observer in qualitative research, “experiencing the program as an insider is what necessitates the participant observation.” He also explains the role of the observer as an integral part of this process and the “challenge to combine participation and observation and the capability of understanding the program as an insider participant while describing the problem for outsiders” (p.207).

Through qualitative research methods such as teacher interviews, observation of meetings, review of teacher journals, the researcher collected data that provides a focus on “naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings, so that we have a strong handle on what ‘real life’ is like (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.10). These methods provided the researcher access to teachers’ perceptions of the effects of the two parent involvement initiatives. Since the two initiatives were new to the school, qualitative evaluation was used to gather and analyze the data in order to assess the influence of these initiatives.

An extended study of the process experienced by volunteer teachers allowed the researcher to develop a depth of understanding of how and why things happened. It also provided the researcher data collected over a period of time that could be used to assess the effectiveness of the initiatives. This study examined changes in teachers’ attitudes, perceptions and beliefs over the course of a school year.

The researcher was present in most of the settings in which data was gathered. She observed behaviors that were more than likely natural since they occurred within their natural setting (Merriam, 1998). The researcher led and observed the group dynamics as a participant observer. The research was evaluative, as it sought to assess

the impact of the parent partnership initiatives and the impact it had on teachers' perceptions of the parents at Urban Hope. The researcher, as a participant observer, brought best practices, ideas and research to help catapult the initiatives. The researcher proposed the parent initiatives as a vehicle to provide teachers with the tools they needed to establish authentic relationships with parents. The researcher's emphasis on professional development for volunteer teachers gave them the confidence they needed to reach out to parents in and out of the classroom setting. The researcher hired Families First, an organization whose primary mission is to help non-profits work with diverse families by providing professional development to volunteer teachers and parents. Further, the researcher encouraged the principal to alter the schedule allowing volunteer teachers more time to reflect on teaching and learning and time to reflect on the impact their attitudes and perceptions could potentially have on establishing authentic relationships with parents. The Principal and Parent Coordinator provided volunteer teachers with on-going workshops with each other, parents, and administrators to help them to develop skills that allowed them to include parents in all aspects of learning including homework, parent conferences, special assemblies and curriculum. Volunteer teachers were given structured time to meet frequently with each other and administrators to assist them in achieving the school's strategic vision of improving relationships between teachers and parents.

The researcher was the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data. The researcher was involved in observations of the implementation process. The role of the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection provided flexibility for data collection and methods during the course of the study. According to Miles and

Huberman (1994) this flexibility increases the confidence that the study will reveal an understanding of what is going on. In order for the researcher to provide an accurate interpretation of others' views, the researcher must communicate clearly, empathize with respondents, ask good questions and be an effective listener (Merriam, 1998). The researcher gathered as much information about a problem with the intentions of theorizing and interpreting changes that can affect the outcome. The researcher provided responsiveness within the context of the study, which allowed for the researcher to adapt techniques, process data immediately, and explore anomalous responses (Merriam, 1998).

The researcher collected data from five volunteer teachers, a master teacher and the parent coordinator. Each participant kept journals, which were used for reflections throughout the school year. The researcher used pre and post interviews of each participant at the beginning and end of the school year. The researcher observed weekly teacher meetings, monthly parent-teacher meetings and random parent-teacher conferences. The Parent Coordinator assisted the researcher in data collection. From the start of data collection and throughout the study, the researcher attempted to discover what things meant to various participants in the project and noted irregularities.

The researcher used surveys to gain baseline data on participants. Over the course of an academic year, the researcher collected data from parents, teachers, and students. The fact that data were typically collected over a sustained period makes them powerful for studying any process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Merriam (1998) states that "case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent"

(p. 29). This study focused on the particular experience of teachers and parents at Urban Hope School and how the interventions impacted teachers' attitudes, parent involvement and parent-teacher relationships

### Sample and Rationale

This section describes the study sample and rationale for using this sample. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that a sample is a “frame to help you uncover, confirm, or qualify the basic processes that undergird your study” (p. 27). The study sample was purposeful and involved the participation of five volunteer teachers and two administrators. The participants included two first year volunteer teachers and two second year volunteer teachers, the master teacher, and the parent coordinator. Selected participants were invited to join the study through individual meetings with the researcher. All participants willingly signed a consent form that confirmed their participation in the program. The participants were made aware that confidentiality and anonymity would be honored throughout the duration of the study and that their performance evaluations or job status would not be affected as a result of their participation.

They were selected purposefully because of their positions and their comfort level with Urban Hope administrators (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). They represented a range of personal and professional experiences. Based upon past experiences with the participants, they were most likely to give honest feedback. The selection process was critical to the success of the study. The four volunteer teachers, master teacher and parent coordinator were selected based on their interest in the study, years of teaching experience, and diversity of life experiences and perspectives. The sample group selected reflects a diverse range of age, race, and experience. Two of the volunteer teachers are

Caucasian, two are teachers of color, one African American and one of International descent. The Master Teacher was Caucasian and the Parent Coordinator was African American. All study participants were female. The range in teaching experience was from 0- 20 years. The age range is from 22 – 58. The volunteer teachers were all recent college graduates. The Parent Coordinator and Master Teacher both had advanced degrees.

Merriam contends that there are no hard and fast rules determining the ‘correct’ number of participants to inform a study. According to Merriam (1998), utilizing teachers to gain insights into perceptions, attitudes and practices related to improving the relationships between parents and teachers will provide the researcher with a sample that provides the greatest opportunity to learn (1998). The participants comprised approximately 40% of the teaching staff.

#### Description of Sample

Two parent initiatives were developed in the spring of 2007. These initiatives, which included work with Families First, an advisory program and an emphasis on culturally responsive teaching, were developed in response to the school’s effort to improve relationships between teachers and parents. The entire staff was invited to participate in the year-long program. Although the volunteer teacher model required a staggered change in personnel every year, both first and second year teachers expressed an interest in participation. There were several first year teachers who were simply overwhelmed and opted not to participate. The participant profile is outlined in Table 3.1 listed on the next page. Names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

**Table 3.1- Study Participant Profiles**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age Range</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Years in Teaching</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>SES (Socio economic Status)</i>
Sandra	20s	Caucasian	Female	2	Volunteer Teacher	Upper Middle Class
Casey	20s	Caucasian	Female	2	Volunteer Teacher	Middle Class
Tracey	20s	Caucasian	Female	1	Volunteer Teacher	Upper Middle Class
Kimberly	20s	African American	Female	1	Volunteer Teacher	Middle Class
Dina	20s	International	Female	1	Volunteer Teacher	Middle Class
Katherine	40s	Caucasian.	Female	15	Master Teacher	Upper Middle Class
Doris	50s	African American	Female	22	Parent Coordinator	Upper Middle Class

Total Participants - 7

Once the researcher obtained permission from staff, the researcher’s institution and from participants, the researcher established protocols for interviews, journal entries and research instruments. The researcher submitted protocols to the sponsoring institution for Human Subjects Review.

## Pilot Test

The researcher utilized a pilot test to ensure the research instruments were clear enough to gain insight into teachers' perceptions and attitudes about parents and their involvement in their child's education. According to Merriam (1998), "pilot interviews are crucial to testing your interview questions. She highly recommends review and refinement of interview questions and research instruments. The researcher utilized a pilot test involving peer doctoral researchers. This helped clarify interview questions that needed additional rewording (p. 75). The researcher subjected the interview questions to peer and expert review. As a result of the feedback, changes were made to interview questions, and recommendations were made regarding the prompts in the journals as well as the length of interviews. The researcher was more specific in the original open-ended journal prompts, and the time allotted for interviews was reduced from ninety minutes to one hour. This feedback gave the researcher an opportunity to improve the data gathering tools.

## Data Gathering Procedures

The data collection procedures in this qualitative case study included the use of surveys, interviews with teachers and parents, journal reflections of teachers and observations of teachers during meetings with and without parents.

### Instrument #1- Survey

A survey was initially used to gain baseline data on participants before the first meeting of the researcher and participating volunteer teachers, the master teacher and the parent coordinator. The survey asked questions regarding their comfort level with parents, what barriers if any made it difficult for them to establish relationships with parents and their



understanding of their role in improving parental involvement as a result of reflecting on their cultural background. To gain this data, the survey used 10 questions. Participants were asked to respond to the survey and rate their responses using a Likert scale. A Likert scale was the preferred tool for gaining this data because it allowed attitudes and responses to be interpreted on a metric scale in order for a scientific study to be conducted (Uebersax, 2006, p6). The survey also included two open-ended questions which according to Merriam allows for varied perspectives (1992). The study participants were provided time to complete the survey which was administered at the onset of the program.

Sample participants met with the researcher monthly at The Urban Hope School. The first meeting occurred in the August shortly after the teacher induction program. The meeting was informal and was held in the researcher's office. The researcher led the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce participants to the proposed initiatives. The Principal, Parent Coordinator, and Master Teacher were all present. The Principal discussed the importance of establishing a partnership between teachers and parents. Once the Principal and researcher described the initiatives, the participants completed the pre-intervention survey and returned them to the researcher. The next meeting took place in the month of September once teachers began their classes and parents were present.

#### Instrument #2- Interviews

The researcher interviewed participants individually at the beginning of the initial phase of the program and at the conclusion of the program. Interviews were conducted to measure teachers' perceptions of the impact their attitudes have on the relationships they

have with parents. Person-to-person interviews provide a tool for researchers to acquire information as to what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 1990, p.2). The pre and post interview questions will be open-ended and interpretative to allow for various perspectives (Merriam, 1998). Merriam suggests that these types of questions are essential in providing the researcher with qualitative data that supports an evaluative case study approach.

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ensure consistency with all participants. The researcher provided the participants time during the day to be interviewed. Each participant was asked the same questions and given the same amount of time to respond. The purpose of asking participants the same questions helped reduce error in the research instruments which can sometimes occur when interviews are used (Merriam, 1992). The semi-structured nature of the interviews provided the researcher the ability to probe respondents with follow-up queries (Merriam, 1992). This allowed the researcher to gain more information without sacrificing consistency.

The researcher conducted these interviews in her office at the Urban Hope School. Each interview conducted by the researcher lasted a minimum of 45 minutes and a maximum of one hour. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Once the interviews were complete, the researcher provided the participants typed transcripts so that they could make any necessary corrections. The researcher discarded all tapes at the conclusion of the study. The tapes were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researchers’ office.

These transcripts were coded and analyzed by the researcher. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), codes are a “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p.56). They provide meaning to data and allow for analysis (Merriam, 1998).

#### Instrument # 3 - Participant Journals

The researcher provided each participant with a journal. They were given time to reflect weekly after their teacher meetings. Participants had prompts that served as a guide to respond to the discussions they have with parents, Families First and one another. The journals were used to determine how participants reacted during the course of the parental involvement initiatives. Participants responded weekly to a journal prompt posed by the researcher at the conclusion of their weekly meetings. These journals provided the researcher with insights into the participants’ understanding and attitudes regarding the establishment of a partnership between teachers and parents over the course of the initial phase of program implementation. The researcher collected journals at the end of each meeting and secured them in her office until the following journal entry was required.

#### Instrument #4 –Observations

The researcher observed participants in various meetings throughout the year of study. The observations were used to provide context of knowledge that related the study to specific incidents and behaviors, reactions and possible changes related to the study. The researcher observed participants and recorded their behaviors associated with working individually, within a team, whether they assumed responsibility, took initiative, handled conflict and received feedback. The researcher also recorded other observed behaviors.

LeCompte and Preissele (1993) refer to observational data as “the data that begins to emerge as the participant observer interacts in the daily flow of events and activities, and the intuitive reactions and hunches that participant observers experience as all these factors come together”(p. 200). Observations were made by the researcher on an on-going basis and maintained in an observation log. Observations were coded and used to inform the findings. The researcher kept the observation logs in a secured location.

#### Data Analysis

The collection of data through the surveys, interviews, journals, and observations and methods enabled triangulation of the data. According to Merriam (1998), triangulation establishes validity through multiple sources of data, multiple investigators or multiple methods that confirm emerging findings (p. 207). Through triangulation of findings, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that a strong level of understanding and high degrees of clarity is attained to inform the study. Merriam (1998)states the researcher’s ability to be embedded within the phenomenon being studied as a central reason for internal validity being a strength of qualitative research. Once data was collected, it was coded and analyzed under research questions and emerging themes. The researcher organized the data chronologically.

Data analysis involves making sense out of data collected. According to Merriam (1998), researchers must engage in consolidating, reducing and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and made sense of it. The researcher had to define various categories and themes that documented any recurring patterns throughout the study. Codes were developed to identify data from surveys, interviews, journals and observations. They were placed into categories that were constructed by the researcher.

Codes are “concepts indicated by the data” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p.36). Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the use of codes: they provide a means of assigning units of meaning to inferential information being studied (1998). Codes were devised according to research themes in order to answer the research questions. The themes were constructed as data were collected. With the data organized into codes, it could be analyzed.

While conducting observations the researcher developed a coding system that recorded teachers’ perceptions and attitudes. The researcher organized collected data from the surveys, interviews and reflective journals to best measure and understand patterns and themes being studied through the use of codes. These codes were used to record participant observations during meetings. The researcher assigned various codes to determine volunteer teacher perceptions including +TP for positive teacher perceptions and -TP for negative teacher perceptions. Similar codes were used for positive parental perceptions, +PP and –PP for negative parental perceptions. The code, PI referred to parental involvement, with +PI stipulating factors which stimulated this construct for sample members and –PI referring to factors which inhibited the involvement of parents. ER was a code to refer to established relationships. –ER was the code for measures negative established relationship. Code analysis was used to assess themes and compare and contrast results across themes. Moreover, theme analysis was used in order to draw attention to trends and uncharacteristic results.

Coding the data sources allowed the researcher to identify patterns and themes that emerged. Coding categories answered the research questions and provided clarity

for the purpose of the research. Data was analyzed chronologically and recorded over time. New codes were developed if necessary as the researcher sorted through the data.

#### Formats for Reporting Findings

The data reporting for this case study included text as the primary means used to report data. The data was reported sequentially by each research question and included pre and post intervention responses. The researcher used excerpts from participant journals, field notes and interviews to report the findings. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) words, especially when organized in narrative form, have a “concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often provides far more convincing evidence to a reader than pages of summarized numbers” (p.1). They contend that the use of words to describe phenomenon and themes helps the reader have a better understanding of the data. The use of text in narrative form provided the rich descriptive detail, which is essential in case studies.

Although text is vivid and meaningful, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that extended and unreduced text is not the best way to report data. In addition to rich text, the researcher used tables to summarize surveys. These tables provided the reader with a display of data that was clear and useful allowing the reader to better understand the relationships between variables. Miles and Huberman (1994) write that data displays must be focused enough to display a full set of data in the same location and be arranged systematically so that research questions can be answered.

## Discussions of the Findings

The study will be discussed in reference to the following research questions:

- 1) How did initial conversations with Families First impact teachers' perceptions of their role as volunteer teachers at Urban Hope School?
- 2) How did participating in the Families First project and the student advisory program impact the teachers' perception of cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding in their interactions with parents?
- 3) How did the two initiative impact teachers' perception of the significance of parents' role in the educational achievement and development of their children?

In reviewing the literature in Chapter 2, it was evident that relationships between parents and teachers will support the frameworks for discussing the findings of the study in Chapter 5. The researcher explores work from James Coleman, Joyce Epstein, Linda Darling Hammond, Gloria Ladson Billings and Geneva Gay.

### Study Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. The sample size was a limitation. Five volunteer teachers, a master teacher and the parent coordinator participated in the study. Although the staff was small, not every teacher's voice was heard. This resulted in generalization of the findings. In spite of the limitation, the researcher made a concerted effort to include a purposeful sample that included a diversity of teaching and life experiences.

Another limitation was researcher bias. The researcher's role included the development of the two parent initiatives with support from the Principal at Urban Hope. The researcher was completely committed to ensuring that the two initiatives improved relationships between teachers and parents. Thus, the researcher had a great deal at stake

in regard to creating successful initiatives. In the researchers' attempt to make the two initiatives a success, there was potential for the researcher to be subjective particularly since she was the primary instrument of data collection. Merriam (1998) asserts that "in qualitative research where the researcher is responsible for collecting and interpreting data, subjectivity and interaction are assumed" (p. 103). Merriam (1998) further states "some biases are not readily apparent to the researcher" (p. 216). The researcher provided the participants informed consent forms that assured the participants of the independence of the study from their employment status and that the information obtained by the researchers would remain confidential. The researcher discussed the potential for participant and researcher bias in the study design as an additional effort to reduce bias.

Participant bias also presents a limitation. Participants may not be completely forthcoming with the researcher because they may fear repercussions if they do not provide the researcher with the feedback they believe the researcher may want to hear. There is potential for participants to provide inauthentic information to the researcher. Since the participants are aware of their own participation, it is likely that they will behave in ways that are not genuine. Merriam (1998) refers to this as the "Hawthorne effect". The participants are not always honest in their reflections. The researcher addressed this limitation by administering consent forms to participants, which protected their names and positions and encouraged their honest participation. The researcher used various data sources to provide for triangulation of the findings to further reduce potential bias.



The duration of study was also a limitation. The study was completed in a single academic year. The primary focus was to assess how volunteer teachers' attitudes and beliefs about urban parents and students affected their ability to forge authentic relationships with students and parents and how that relationship changed their perceptions about the role of parents as partners in their child's education. One year did not allow for enough time to effectively capture changes in teachers' perceptions.

Race, class and culture are topics that are highly sensitive to many. The school's diverse cultures have always been celebrated; however, the study provoked discomfort for teachers and parents as well as the researcher. Participants were encouraged to share honestly with their peers and with the researcher who is not White. Initially, this infringed upon authentic exchanges between participants and the researcher. Merriam (1998) cites that when participants know they are being observed, they tend to behave in socially acceptable ways and present themselves in a favorable manner (p. 103). The researcher recognized that during initial conversations, all of the participants were very polite. Initially the participants were politically correct in their responses. As time progressed, the relationships became more authentic which resulted in more honest conversations. Unfortunately, this did not occur until towards the end of the study.

### Conclusion

The researcher used triangulation, peer examination and clarification of researchers' biases to reduce bias. According to Merriam, these three strategies used in data collection, data analysis and interpretation are used to enhance validity. According to Merriam, the strategies will mitigate study limitations and potential bias.

In Chapter four, information will be included in the review of related literature.  
Chapter four will provide a presentation of the data and findings from this research study.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### *Introduction*

Chapter four is focused on the findings of a study of a project that was conducted during the 2006-2008 school years at the Urban Hope Middle School. The study examined the impact of two initiatives the school implemented to help improve relationships between teachers, students and parents.

The initiatives included collaboration with Families First, a local non-profit group whose primary focus is to help organizations build relationships with parents. The second initiative was a student advisory program. The advisory program connected each student with a team of two adults at the school. An administrator and a volunteer teacher worked as a team to advocate for a small group of students. Every student and their family were assigned to an advisory team who served as their link between home and school.

Chapter four is designed to present the findings obtained in this study in response to the following three research questions:

1. How did initial conversations with Families First impact teachers' perceptions of their role as volunteer teachers at the Urban Hope School?
2. How did participating in the Families First Project and the advisory program impact teachers' perceptions of cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding in their interactions with parents?
3. How did the two initiatives impact teacher's perceptions of the significance of parents' role in the educational achievement and development of their children?

The data will be presented sequentially by each research question and include summaries of pre and post intervention responses and a summary at the end of each question. The researcher will summarize the study's overall findings and assess the impact of the interventions. The chapter was organized to reflect the progression of the data collection

process, beginning with the pre-intervention stage of the study, continuing with the intervention stage and culminating with a summary of the findings at the post intervention stage.

### *Pre-intervention Stage*

The researcher met with the sample participants three times prior to the implementation of the two initiatives. The first meeting was a general orientation. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an overview of the project and study. The researcher administered a survey to gain insight into the participants' attitudes and perceptions about the school's culture. During the second meeting, the researcher administered a second survey about communication. The researcher also conducted one-on-one interviews with each participant during the pre-intervention stage.

The researcher provided journals for the participants to further explore any ideas or comments from their discussions during the pre-intervention stage. The researcher collected the journals after the second pre-intervention meeting and kept them locked in a file cabinet until the beginning of the two initiatives. The researcher explored the way in which these pre-existing attitudes and perceptions influenced their relationship with their students' parents. To achieve triangulation of data, the researcher examined three sources of data during the pre-intervention stage:

- Researcher and Participant Journals
- Surveys
- Interviews

The researcher kept a journal throughout the study. In this first section, the researcher provides an excerpt from the researcher's journal kept during the pre-

intervention stage. The researcher's descriptive narration provides the reader with an overview of the participants' disposition prior to the study.

***Researchers Journal – September 2007***

*The initial meeting with the participants was a general orientation to the project. The researcher described the two initiatives, a collaboration with Families First and the advisory program. All seven participants arrived on time and with great enthusiasm. Although participation in the program was extended to everyone, the participants exhibited an air that they were “the chosen ones.” They seemed privileged to participate. While the sample was relatively small, there were sub-groups within the group. The first year volunteer teachers sat quietly amongst themselves while the second year volunteer teachers were extremely “chatty” and comfortable with their newly acquired sophomore status. They seemed more confident than their freshman counterparts. The first year volunteers seemed overwhelmed. They recently completed the two-week teacher induction program which is extremely time consuming and demanding. The parent coordinator and master teacher appeared to be the most confident and comfortable. They expressed their support of the school's initiatives but shared they were “cautiously optimistic.” They were perceived by the groups as the “elder stateswomen.” They seemed to enjoy this role and did not shy away from sharing their perspectives about previous initiatives at the school. The volunteer teachers were respectful of the master teacher and parent coordinator. Their participation is critical to the study. Each participant has a personal stake in the program. I could tell each group participant had a story to tell but not sure when or if that*

*would happen. The volunteer teachers seemed guarded with their responses. They were not very vocal during the discussions.*

Significant Data from the Pre-Intervention Stage

**Research Question One: How did initial conversation with Families First impact teachers' perceptions of their role as volunteer teachers at Urban Hope?**

Interviews

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with five volunteer teachers, one master educator and the parent coordinator during the first month of school. The participant responses in this section are based on interviews in the pre-intervention stage. While the participants were not specifically asked to answer research question #1, the researcher collected data that would provide the reader with an understanding of the participants' attitudes and perceptions prior to the study.

The researcher asked the following interview question during the pre-intervention stage:

*Many organizations have volunteer opportunities. Please share how you made your decision to volunteer at Urban Hope.*

The researcher selected the three most poignant participant responses.

Interview Responses- Pre-Intervention Stage

**Sandra- Fall 2007**

Sandra expressed her interest in volunteerism as an extension of her family's commitment to service. She said community service was a value her family shared. According to Sandra, her family always instilled the value of offering help in the form of time or treasure to people in need. Sandra's family volunteered at various non-profit organizations. She conveyed volunteerism was

always a part of her life and that her parents expected her and her siblings to “give back”. Her commitment to volunteerism continued in college. Sandra said she spent a significant amount of time volunteering during her four years at college. Sandra attributed the school’s mission to her decision to volunteer at Urban Hope. *“I am a firm believer that girls rule! Where else can you find such a commitment to girls, education and volunteerism?”* Sandra said she thought it was rare to find a place whose primary focus was to provide education to a population of students who might not otherwise have a chance. She said she loved the website and the warmth of the school. According to Sandra, her first impressions of Urban Hope were lasting impressions. When she arrived at the school, she was so impressed by the students’ poise and confidence; she could barely wait to see them in action. “They were so lively and intriguing that I could imagine myself teaching them the next day.” Sandra said she knew immediately that it was the right fit.

### **Casey - Fall 2007**

Casey was introduced to Urban Hope through the volunteer office at her college. She learned about Urban Hope at a volunteer fair and was “completely sold” on the mission of the school. Casey said her first visit to Urban Hope was quite memorable. Casey wanted to become a part of a community where she could offer her expertise as well as learn as much as possible. She knew the experience would make a major impact on her life. Casey’s interest in volunteer work preceded her years in college. She was involved in community service throughout middle and high school. Casey’s mother had a successful career in social services. According to Casey, *“the volunteer gene was part of her DNA.”*

Casey's family spent time volunteering at various local agencies. She selected her college based on the opportunities to help others. Casey was very interested in pursuing a service learning project upon graduating from college. She wanted to participate in a meaningful volunteer opportunity that would help make a difference in the lives of others.

When Casey visited Urban Hope, she was excited about everything the school offered. She said she immediately felt connected to the girls and the teachers. *"I knew it would be a place where I could roll up my sleeves and immerse myself in the culture of the school. It was intimate and warm."* Casey said everyone seemed happy to be a part of the community. She looked forward to teaching, learning and coaching. Casey said there were so many possibilities at the school and she could hardly wait to begin teaching. Casey said she was thrilled to be a part of the school and hoped she would be able to make a difference in the lives of the girls.

### **Tracey – Fall 2007**

Tracey expressed that she wanted an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of girls whose circumstances were completely different from hers. Tracey said volunteerism had always been important to her and her family. She said the mission at Urban Hope was of particular interest to her. Tracey believed education made a tremendous impact on people's lives. She said she thought the school's high quality "tuition-free" education was remarkable. She said if she could help teach girls in the inner city, she would be a part of something greater in society. Tracey also stated she was doing "God's work." She said Urban Hope



was a place where people's lives could be transformed. *"It is so exciting to help make a difference and gain valuable experience while doing it!"*

Next, the researcher administered a survey to the seven participants during the pre-intervention stage of the study. The purpose of survey was to gain a better understanding of the participants' attitudes, beliefs and values prior to the implementation of the two initiatives. This next section will provide the reader with an analysis of the survey which focused on the school culture at Urban Hope.

The researcher provided participants with instructions to complete the survey. The participants were directed to complete the survey during their second pre-intervention meeting. The researcher requested that participants return the surveys directly to the researcher before the beginning of the intervention stage. Each statement in the survey includes a table from the survey describing the responses from the seven study participants.

They were asked to rate each quality using the following rating system:

Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neutral  
Agree  
Strongly Agree  
Not Applicable

The survey included the following statements:

1. I understand and support Urban Hope's mission and vision
2. Diverse perspectives are valued and encouraged at Urban Hope
3. I communicate regularly with parents regarding students' progress and accomplishments

4. I have adequate information available which enables me to teach/administer/work effectively
5. The amount of work I am expected to do is reasonable

The following table, **Figure 4.1 titled Pre-intervention School Culture Survey** is a response to survey question 1. A summary analysis will be provided after the table.

**Table 4.1 Pre-intervention School Culture Survey- Fall 2007- Statement #1**

Frequency Analysis							
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%					
Disagree	0	0.00%					
Undecided	0	0.00%					
Agree	3	42.84%					
Strongly Agree	4	57.12%					
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>					

I understand and support Urban Hope's mission and vision

***Statement 1 - I understand and support Urban Hope's mission and vision***

Table 4.1 showed overall the group was supportive of the school's mission and vision as they understood it. The data showed four out of seven participants (57%) strongly agreed they understood and supported the school's mission. The remaining three participants (43%) agreed they understood and supported the mission. The four participants who strongly agreed with the school's mission varied by age, race and position. Two of the four participants who strongly agreed and supported the school's mission were first year volunteer teachers. The other two participants were the master

educator and the parent coordinator. The three participants who agreed with the school’s mission were all volunteer teachers. Two of the three participants were second year teachers while the third was a first year teacher.

Upon further analysis, the researcher noted the participants who strongly supported the school’s mission were either administrators or first year teachers. The next chart, Table 4.2 shows the results of question 2.

**Table 4.2 Pre-intervention School Culture Survey - Statement # 2**

Diverse perspectives are valued and encouraged at Urban Hope.

Frequency Analysis							
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Strongly Disagree	<b>1</b>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
Disagree	<b>2</b>	<b>28.56%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
Neutral	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>				
Agree	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>				
Strongly Agree	<b>4</b>	<b>57.12%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
N/A	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>				
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>					

***Statement 2 - Diverse perspectives are valued and encouraged at Urban Hope***

Table 4.2 showed the responses to survey question 2. According to the data, 58% of the study participants strongly agreed that diverse perspectives are valued and encouraged at Urban Hope while 28% disagreed and 14% strongly disagreed. It is interesting to note, the responses varied by race, and age. The study participant who strongly disagreed was African American. The two study participants who disagreed were African American and Caucasian. The Caucasian participant was in her forties.

The remaining four participants, all of whom were white volunteer teachers in their twenties, strongly agreed that diverse perspectives were valued. It is evident from the data that race and age play a significant role in the perspectives of the participants. While the majority (58%) of the participants strongly agreed diverse perspectives were valued, the remaining three participants (42%) shared a vastly different perspective.

The next chart, Table 4.3 shows the response to question 3.

**Table 4.3 Pre-intervention School Culture Survey - Statement # 3**

I communicate regularly with parents and students regarding students' progress & accomplishments.

Frequency Analysis				
	Answer	Count	Percent	
	1 Never	<u>1</u>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="text"/>
	2 Rarely	<u>3</u>	<b>42.84%</b>	<input type="text"/>
	3 Sometimes	<u>2</u>	<b>28.56%</b>	<input type="text"/>
	4 Often	<u>1</u>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="text"/>
	5 Always	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>	

***Statement 3 - I communicate regularly with parents regarding students' progress and accomplishments***

The data in table 4.3 showed communication between home and school seldom occurs. One out of seven participants (14%) reported they never communicated with parents regarding student's progress and accomplishments while three out of seven (42%) reported they rarely communicated with parents. Two out of seven participants (28%) reported in the survey that they communicated sometimes and one out of seven study participants (14%) reported she communicated often. The data revealed that many of the

participants reported they did not perceive parents as partners. The majority of the participants reported they did not communicate with parents.

The researcher noticed an interesting pattern in the responses. Four out of seven respondents who never or rarely communicated with parents were volunteer teachers. Of the four volunteer teachers, three were first year teachers and one was a second year teacher. Two study participants reported that they communicated with parents “sometimes”. The participants who responded that they communicated with parents “sometimes” included one second year volunteer teacher and the master teacher. It is interesting to note, the master teachers’ response. Her primary responsibility was to model effective teaching practices for new teachers. Her response conveys to volunteer teachers that communication between teachers and parents is not a top priority. The Parent Coordinator was the only participant who communicated often with parents. The researcher noted that it was her role to communicate with parents. The data showed age and experience were important contributing factors in the participants’ responses.

The next table 4.4 shows the responses to statement 4 in the pre-intervention survey on school culture.

**Table 4.4 Pre-intervention School Culture Survey- Statement #4**

I have adequate information available which enables me to teach/administer/work effectively.

Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>				
	Disagree	<u>2</u>	<b>28.56%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	Neutral	<u>1</u>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	Agree	<u>3</u>	<b>42.84%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	Strongly Agree	<u>1</u>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	N/A	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>					

**Statement 4 - I have adequate information available which enables me to teach/administer/work effectively**

The data showed that the study participants responded quite differently. One study participant (14%) strongly agreed she had adequate information available to enable her to teach effectively. Interestingly, she was a first year volunteer teacher. Three of the study participants (42%) agreed they had adequate information. Of the three participants, two were administrators and one was a first year volunteer teacher. Two study participants, both of whom were second year volunteer teachers (28%) disagreed. One study participant (14%) was neutral. She was a first year volunteer teacher.

The data showed that the second year volunteer teachers reported they did not receive adequate information to help them with their teaching. Interestingly, the first year volunteer teachers all responded differently. Once again the researcher noticed a pattern that experience was a factor in the participants’ responses. However, although the

data showed that more than half of the group (56%) agreed the information was adequate, 28% did not.

The responses varied among volunteer teachers. The second year volunteer teachers did not agree the school provided sufficient information while two out of three first year teachers agreed. The researcher noted that the second year teachers reported they did not have sufficient information even though they were there for a year longer than the first year volunteer teachers. The researcher also noted that the survey was administered shortly after the two-week teacher induction program.

The data showed that the seven participants shared various perspectives about the availability of information necessary to improve their teaching and administrative duties. It also revealed that the school needed to address the disparity in responses. It was evident in the data that the first year volunteer teachers' shared similar attitudes and perceptions about the resources available. They along with the two administrators agreed the information was sufficient to enable them to do their jobs effectively. Although the second year teachers did not agree with their freshmen counterparts, their responses were similar as well. One participant was neutral. She reported she needed more time to determine if the information was sufficient.

In the next table 4.5, the data will show the study participants response to question 5. The researcher provided a summary of the table.

**Table 4.5 Pre-intervention School Culture Survey - Statement #5**

The amount of work I am expected to do is reasonable

Frequency Analysis							
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Strongly Disagree	1	14.28%	<input type="text"/>				
Disagree	2	28.56%	<input type="text"/>				
Neutral	1	14.28%	<input type="text"/>				
Agree	3	42.85%	<input type="text"/>				
Strongly Agree	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>				
N/A	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>				
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>					

**Statement 5 - The amount of work I am expected to do is reasonable**

The faculty and staff at Urban Hope worked a minimum of 10 hours per day. The long hours are embedded into the school’s culture. According to the data in Table 4.5, the majority of the participants (43%) believed the workload was reasonable. A contrasting 43% of the participants thought the workload was too much. Of the three participants who responded the workload was not reasonable, one strongly disagreed while two disagreed. One study participant selected neutral. She clarified her response by acknowledging she had no previous work experience to make a comparison.

The data showed a range in perspectives. The study participant who strongly disagreed the workload was reasonable was the Master Teacher. A first and second year volunteer teacher disagreed that the workload was reasonable while another volunteer teacher was neutral. Contrarily, the Parent Coordinator, a first and a second year volunteer teacher agreed the workload was reasonable. Surprisingly, the Master



Teacher's response suggested the workload was too much while the Parent Coordinator shared a different perspective. In the previous survey questions, the Parent Coordinator and Master Teacher responded similarly as did the first and second year volunteer teachers. The data showed in previous survey questions, age and experience were factors that contributed to similar responses.

During the pre-intervention stage, the researcher requested that the seven study participants respond to the school culture survey questions in their journals if they wanted to further reflect on their responses. The researcher collected the journals after the second pre-intervention meeting. In the next section, the researcher provided excerpts from the respondents' journals. The journal excerpts are presented sequentially by survey statements.

### **Journals – Fall 2007: Selected Examples**

#### **Survey Statement #1 - I understand and support the school's mission**

All seven study participants supported the school's mission. None of the participants responded to this question in their journals.

#### ***Kimberly- Journal***

#### **Survey Statement #2 -Diverse perspectives are valued and encouraged at Urban**

#### **Hope**

*When it comes to issues of class and race the black perspective incites a self-fulfilling prophecy. When I encounter insult, I tend to expect it to be owing to blatant fault on behalf of the "perpetrator". Metaphorically speaking, in expecting to be blue, I render myself incapable of seeing any other color. My expectations make me colorblind to anything other than what I expect to see. I do*

*not filter out the orange, green, purple or other colors. Nor do I ignore its presence. It is as if I am not a factor. It's funny though, I am aware of everything. This fosters hostility and leads to an atmosphere of distrust. At times the lack of awareness on behalf of the staff fosters hostility in my ability to interact with my peers. As a black person, if I expect this ill treatment, and encourage such dynamics to engulf the realm of interpersonal relationships, it will come to pass. Perception and reality are completely different for me. If I say everything is fine, my reality changes. The fact of the matter is everything is not fine but everyone wants that to be our reality. We are not all the same nor do we think the same. White is right. Nothing else matters.*

#### ***Tracey - Journal***

*I have to believe we are all working toward a common goal. Everyone here wants the best for our students. The staff is diverse which is very nice. We have a great relationship with each other. My fear is that we are focusing too much on the differences and not celebrating our similarities. Sometimes tension is created as a result of our obsession with controversial topics. One of the many things I admire most about Urban Hope is diversity. This is a safe environment. I am sure if there were problems between teachers, parents or administrators, we would address them. It just doesn't seem to be an issue.*

It is evident from the journal reflections that the study participants offer two different perspectives. The first excerpt was written by a volunteer teacher of color. The second excerpt was written by a white volunteer teacher. It can be inferred race may have impacted the participants' responses.

### **Survey Statement #3 - I communicate regularly with parents regarding students' progress and accomplishments**

#### ***Casey - Journal***

*Parents scare me! It's not that I don't want to share information with them but I don't know how to. I want to make sure I say the right things when I meet with them. I know it makes perfect sense to let them know how their children are doing but I am not quite prepared to interact with them. I am afraid the conversation may evolve into something else that I might not be prepared to handle so I let the administrators communicate on my behalf.*

#### ***Dina***

*I think it is important to share information with parents. I do it sometimes but not enough. We usually see the parents in passing, like at dismissal. We've have such a long day that by the time the students get ready to go home, I am thinking about correcting a test for the next day or just finding the closest couch to curl up on. The few times I shared information with parents seemed helpful especially around parent teacher conferences. I had a student whose mother was very shy but when I told her that "Shelby" was doing great in my class, she didn't seem as shy anymore. I felt more comfortable telling her about Shelby's challenges as well and she didn't seem to mind.*

Both participants were volunteer teachers. The first participant was a second year teacher and the second participant was a first year teacher. The researcher noted that the first year teacher was a person of color. Race may have had an impact on the participants' responses.

**Statement 4 - I have adequate information available which enables me to teach/administer/work effectively**

**Kimberly- Journal**

*We have more than enough information. My learning curve is rather steep right now. There's so much to learn. I will need time to catch up at the rate we're going. I have all of the resources at my fingertips!*

**Sandra – Journal**

*We need more time to connect with each other and the administrators. Instead we have to fend for ourselves and that's a hard thing to do when you're not a trained teacher. After spending a year in the classroom, I've had time to think about what I need to make me a better teacher. I need to visit other classes and receive feedback to help me improve my technique.*

The journal excerpts are from a first year volunteer teacher and a second year volunteer teacher respectively. The researcher noted the difference in their perspectives. A further review of additional journals revealed the first year teachers thought they had enough information while the second year teachers reported they wanted more resources to create a “professional learning community.”

**Statement #5 - The amount of work I am expected to do is reasonable**

**Katherine - Journal**

*It is extremely difficult to provide teachers with the tools they need to be successful in the classroom. I find most of my time is spent putting out fires instead of assisting volunteer teachers. Their learning is just as important as the students. In my role as Master Teacher, I do not believe I am as effective as I could be because I have so many responsibilities. It's hard to balance the needs*

*of both the students and the volunteer teachers. Often, I will choose to assist a student because their needs seem so immediate. Urban Hope never sleeps. Everyone here has so much energy and stamina. I feel guilty for admitting I am tired and probably not performing as well as I should. I also think I have a very demanding role. My job is one of the most difficult. There just aren't enough hours in the day!*

### **Doris – Journal**

*I am exhausted at the end of the day but I realize the work needs to get done. As long as I can have time for myself when I need it, I don't mind the long hours. Besides, I have been working at this pace long before I arrived at Urban Hope. I didn't expect the work to decrease given our student population and mission.*

The responses of the Master Teacher and the Parent Coordinator were quite different. The Master Teacher expressed concern about the workload while the Parent Coordinator thought the workload was deeply embedded in the school's culture.

In the next section, the researcher summarizes the findings for Research Question #1.

### **Summary of Pre-Intervention Findings - Research Question #1**

#### ***How did initial conversations with Families First impact teachers' perceptions of their role as volunteer teachers at the Urban Hope School?***

It is evident in the data that volunteer teachers and administrators were enthusiastic about their collaboration with Families First. The study participants unanimously reported in the interviews, surveys and journals that they chose to volunteer or work at Urban Hope because of the school's mission. They reported in their journals that volunteerism was an essential value they shared prior to joining the staff at Urban

Hope. In addition, they reported in interviews that they thought their role as volunteer teachers was significant. In one journal entry, a volunteer teacher referred to their work as “*God’s work*”.

The participants expressed interest in working with Families First because they understood the school’s population of students. They reported in interviews that they thought the work with Families First would provide them with the tools necessary to help them serve their students more effectively. The teachers stated that they hoped Families First would help them address their cultural, racial and socio-economic differences by engaging in open and honest dialogue. The data revealed in the surveys and interviews that the participants thought their role in advancing the school’s mission was essential.

However, they reported in interviews and in their journals that they were not comfortable with sharing information with Families First initially. They reported in interviews and journals that they had not established a trusting relationship with Families First and therefore were reticent during their initial conversations.

Data collected during the pre-intervention stage for research question #2 follows. The researcher used interviews, surveys and journals to gather the information.

**Research Question # 2- How did participating in the Families First Project and the advisory program impact teachers’ perceptions of cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding in their interactions with parents?**

In the pre-intervention stage, the researcher asked the participants in one-on-one interviews the following question: *How do you interact with people from diverse cultures?*

Responses from all seven study participants follows.

## Interview Responses: Pre-Intervention Stage

### **Sandra**

*I try to find things that we do in common to make a connection. I have an open mind and try to express a real interest in learning more about them as individuals. I also want to learn as much as I can about their culture.*

### **Casey**

*I am very comfortable interacting with people from diverse cultures. I grew up in a neighborhood that was economically diverse and somewhat culturally diverse. I tend to relate to people who have more in common with me. For example, I was on financial aid while in college and it seemed as if I interacted more with other students on financial aid because we shared that bond. The group was racially diverse but the bond that tied us together was the fact that we weren't wealthy. My experience has been that people from different cultures have things in common with me and I typically try to find out what that is. I enjoy meeting all kinds of people.*

### **Tracey**

*I interact well with people from diverse cultures. I have a pretty diverse group of friends but most of them are international. Unfortunately I haven't had many opportunities to interact with a very diverse group. I grew up in a very homogeneous area and my college was basically the same. When I meet people from diverse cultures I express an interest in learning more about their backgrounds without placing too much emphasis on their differences. That can come across the wrong way so I am careful about what I ask.*

**Kimberly**

*I interact with diverse cultures very well. I've been diverse all my life so it's natural for me. I am quite comfortable meeting people from all walks of life. It makes me life more interesting. I have always been drawn to people who are different from me. For instance, if there are a group of people who are all the same, no matter what race or culture, I tend to gravitate to the one that is different. Maybe that's because I have always been that one who was different. I am eager to let them know that I want to get to know them better. I think that helps because the person feels valued. Life would be boring if we only interacted with the same kind of people all the time. I truly enjoy making friends with people from diverse cultures.*

**Dina**

*I interact with people from diverse cultures better than I do with the majority population. I never really thought about cultural diversity as an invisible obstacle to interacting with people from other cultures. When I came to the United States, it seemed to be a big deal to everyone. In my country, everyone is diverse and we interact with each other the same way we would if we were in a different country. I am still the same person when I came and I still interact with people the same way I did at home. It feels so divided here. People are people no matter what color your skin is or how much money you make or where you go to church. I interact with everyone the same; with respect.*



**Katherine**

*People are people wherever you go! I love meeting people from different cultures and I would like to think that I interact with them easily. However, I do not always know the right things to say. I never want to offend someone so I am careful about what I say. I was taught all people are the same but discovered the older I got, the less I believed it. It was never more apparent to me during my first job at an inner-city non-profit. It was quite clear that the clients were very different from me and I did not know how to interact with them in a way that made either of us feel comfortable. Once I get past the initial hurdle, I am very comfortable interacting with diverse cultures. It just takes a little time to do so.*

**Doris**

*Interacting with people from different cultures is a part of life. I really enjoy it because you gain tremendous insight. I have worked and lived in very diverse environments for most of my life so it certainly isn't a challenge. I view it as an opportunity. I am always true to myself and with those I interact. I am real with people regardless of their background. I think that most people would appreciate that.*

During the pre-intervention stage, the study participants expressed serious concerns about communication at Urban Hope. The participants reported that communication at Urban Hope was not effective and therefore could be a potential barrier from them establishing relationships with parents. As a result of their concerns, the researcher designed a survey to explore communication at Urban Hope. The researcher administered the survey to the participants after the end of their second

meeting during the pre-intervention stage. The researcher directed the participants to complete the surveys and return them to the researcher before the beginning of the intervention stage.

The survey was used to help formulate the participants' attitudes and perceptions in response to research question #2. The researcher asked the seven study participants to answer the following five questions in the communications survey.

The participants were asked to rate each quality using the following rating system:






Strongly Disagree  
Disagree  
Neutral  
Agree  
Strongly Agree  
N/A (not applicable)

The survey included the following statements:

1. I communicate effectively with others
2. I am comfortable discussing difficult topics
3. I am a good listener
4. I communicate well in groups
5. I can express my ideas freely

The remainder of this section will provide the reader with an analysis of the survey by each survey question. Each question will include a table from the communication survey and a summary analysis is provided after each table. The following table, Figure 4.6 titled **Communication Survey** contains responses to survey statement 1.

**Table 4.6 Communication Survey- Statement 1**

I communicate effectively with others							
Frequency Analysis							
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
 Strongly Disagree	<u>0</u>	<u>0.00%</u>	<input type="text"/>				
 Disagree	<u>1</u>	<u>14.3%</u>	<input type="text"/>				
 Neutral	<u>0</u>	<u>0.00%</u>	<input type="text"/>				
 Agree	<u>4</u>	<u>57.14%</u>	<input type="text"/>				
 Strongly Agree	<u>2</u>	<u>28.0%</u>	<input type="text"/>				
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>					

***Survey Statement 1 - I communicate effectively with others***






The majority of the study participants (85%) reported they communicated effectively. The data showed four out of seven participants (57%) agreed they thought they communicated effectively while two study participants (28%) strongly agreed. The remaining one participant (14%) disagreed she communicated effectively. The participant was a first year volunteer teacher.

The Parent Coordinator and a second year volunteer teacher strongly agreed they had effective communication skills. The Master Teacher, two first year and one second year volunteer teachers all reported they agreed with the statement. It is evident in Table 4.7 six out seven participants thought they communicated effectively. The evidence suggested experience may have contributed to the first year volunteer teachers' response, indicating she did not communicate effectively.

The next chart, Table 4.7 shows the results of communication survey question 2.

The researcher provided a summary analysis of the table.

**Table 4.7 Communication Survey - Statement 2**

I am comfortable discussing difficult topics								
Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	Strongly Disagree	<b>3</b>	<b>42.85%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	Disagree	<b>3</b>	<b>42.85%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	Neutral	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	Agree	<b>1</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	Strongly Agree	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>					

***Survey Statement 2 - I am comfortable discussing difficult topics***

The data showed six out of the seven study participants (85.7%) were not comfortable with discussing difficult topics. Half of the six participants (42.85%) strongly disagreed with the statement while the other three (42.85%) participants disagreed. Only one participant (14.28%), the Parent Coordinator, was comfortable with discussing difficult topics. The researcher noted the age and experience of the participant who was willing to discuss difficult topics. The Parent Coordinator has the most experience out of all the study participants and she was the oldest in the group.






Surprisingly, age and experience was not a factor in the Master Teacher’s response. She and two volunteer teachers disagreed with the statement that they were

comfortable discussing difficult topics. One of the volunteer teachers was Caucasian and in her second year of teaching. The other, was African American and in her first year of teaching. The remaining three participants who strongly disagreed with the question were all volunteer teachers. Two of the participants were first year volunteer teachers and one was a second year volunteer teacher.

It is evident based on the participants' responses in the survey, difficult conversations do not occur at Urban Hope. The Master Teacher reported she was uncomfortable engaging in difficult conversations and she was responsible for setting the faculty meeting agendas. Most of the participants, all volunteer teachers, shared her sentiment.

The next chart, Table 4.8 showed the results of survey question 3. The researcher provided a summary of the table and a brief analysis.

**Table 4.8 Communication Survey- Statement 3**






I am a good listener								
Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>				
	Disagree	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>				
	Neutral	<u>0</u>	<u>0.00%</u>	<input type="text"/>				
	Agree	<b><u>6</u></b>	<b>85.68%</b>	<input type="text" value="85.68"/>				
	Strongly Agree	<b><u>1</u></b>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="text" value="14.28"/>				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>					

***Survey Statement 3 – I am a good listener***

The data in Table 4.8 showed six out of seven participants agreed they were good listeners while one study participant strongly agreed. The study participant who reported she strongly agreed with the survey question is a first year volunteer teacher. The remaining participants, the Parent Coordinator, Master Teacher, two second year and two first year volunteer teachers also agreed they were good listeners. The research showed all of the participants reported they had good listening skills.

The next chart, Table 4.9 showed the results of survey statement 4.

**Table 4.9 Communication Survey- Statement 4**

I communicate well in a group setting								
Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	Strongly Disagree	0	00.0%	<input type="text"/>				
	Disagree	2	28.56%	<input type="text"/>				
	Neutral	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>				
	Agree	3	42.84%	<input type="text"/>				
	Strongly Agree	2	28.56%	<input type="text"/>				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>					

***Survey Statement 4 – I communicate well in group settings***






The data in Table 4.9 showed the majority of the participants (71%) thought they communicated well in group settings. Five out of seven participants reported they were comfortable communicating in groups while two study participants reported they were

not very comfortable at all. Of the five participants who reported they communicated well in groups, three (42%) agreed and two (29%) strongly agreed. The table showed two study participants (29%) strongly disagreed.

Upon further analysis of the data, the researcher noted the two participants who reported that they were uncomfortable communicating in group settings were first year volunteer teachers. While the two study participants who strongly agreed they communicated well in group settings were the Master Teacher and the Parent Coordinator. It can be inferred that experience and age played a significant role in the participants' responses. One can presume difficult conversations did not occur. Age and work experience appeared to influence the Parent Coordinator and Master Teachers' responses. Other factors to consider were familiarity within the group and personality.

The next chart, Table 4.10 shows the results of survey statement 5. The researcher provided a summary and brief analysis of the table.

**Table 4.10 Communication Survey- Statement 5**

I can express my ideas freely at Urban Hope								
Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
	Strongly Disagree	<u>1</u>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	Disagree	<u>2</u>	<b>28.56%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	Neutral	<u>0</u>	<u>0.00%</u>	<input type="text"/>				
	Agree	<u>4</u>	<b>57.12%</b>	<input type="text"/>				
	Strongly Agree	0	00.0 %	<input type="text"/>				
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>					

***Survey Statement 5 – I can express my ideas freely at Urban Hope***

The data in Table 4.10 showed participants were divided in their responses. A slight majority (57%) of the participants agreed they could express their ideas freely at Urban Hope while the remaining participants (43%) disagreed. Two volunteer teachers strongly disagreed they had the freedom to express their ideas. One was a first year teacher and the other was a second year teacher. The third participant who disagreed was also a first year volunteer teacher.

The Master Teacher, Parent Coordinator, first year and second year volunteer teachers agreed they could express their ideas freely at Urban Hope. The data revealed age and experience may have contributed to the administrators' responses. The two volunteer teachers who also agreed they could express their ideas freely may have been more comfortable in the setting than their counterparts who reported they could not.

Next, the researcher will provide excerpts from participants' journals. These excerpts are their responses to the Communication Survey. The information is presented sequentially by survey statement in journal form.

Journal Responses to Communication Survey

**Fall 2007**

***Survey Statement 1 - I communicate effectively with others***

The researcher reported none of the participants reflected on this survey question in their journals.

***Survey Statement 2- I am comfortable discussing difficult topics***



**Journal: Dina**  
**Winter 2007**

*I have a very hard time discussing difficult topics with people. I grew up in a quiet family that never talked about anything that would upset any of us. If my parents ever had any problems, my siblings and I didn't know about it. When I went away to college, I was surprised at how my roommates yelled at their parents, and how my friends talked about everything. In my culture, it is disrespectful to express anger or disappointment, especially with your elders. Certain things you just didn't discuss. I guess when something bothered me as a child or as a teenager; I would not say anything out of respect for the person. My culture has greatly influenced how I communicate with others. I doubt I will ever be comfortable discussing difficult topics.*

The researcher noticed similar responses in other participants' journals. They too reported they were uncomfortable discussing difficult conversations. Each of the participants, including the Parent Coordinator, cited their family background and cultural norms as a major factor in their responses. The Parent Coordinator expressed in her journal that she was amazed that she was the only participant comfortable discussing difficult topics.

**Survey Statement 3 – I am a good listener**

The researcher reported none of the participants reflected on this survey question in their journals.

**Survey Statement 4 – I communicate well in group settings**

**Journal- Kimberly**  
**Fall 2007**

*I always have a lot to say but I am never sure how my input will be received. It's easier to listen because no one will judge you. I would much rather write my thoughts on paper than verbalize them in a group. I need time to process conversations. Sometimes I won't know what to say until afterwards. By that time, it's too late. I'm not sure if I would open up even if I did know what to say. It's important for me to feel comfortable with the people in the group. I'm still trying to figure things out around here. It will take some time before I will take that risk. For now, I'll pass!*

Other study participants responded similarly. The participants' responses implied that they were not comfortable communicating in group settings.

**Survey Statement 5 – I can express my ideas freely at Urban Hope**

**Journal- Tracey**  
**Fall 2007**

*I don't feel comfortable sharing my ideas with people I don't really know. When I first arrived at the school I made a comment that didn't go over too well with the other teachers. Ever since then I have been hesitant to share my thoughts for fear that the groups won't accept me. I'll keep my opinions to myself. I usually play the devil's advocate which can be tricky at times. I realize if I play it safe instead I will have better relationships with my colleagues. I'm sure it will make my living situation a lot better. Two years is a long time to live some place without friends.*

***Journal- Dina  
Fall 2007***

*This is America! Everyone has the freedom to express themselves. I have never been surrounded by so many people who have such strong opinions about everything. I am overwhelmed by it but it is a welcome change from what I am used to. Just having that liberty is a privilege. I don't know how much I will share but it's nice to know I can.*

The participants' responses offer a conflicting perspective. The first response leads the reader to believe that people can share their ideas freely only when they are shared by the majority of the group. The second participant offered an opposing perspective based on cultural influence. She expressed people had the liberty to share their ideas but she refrained from doing so because of her cultural upbringing.

In the next section, the researcher summarizes the findings for Research Question #2.

*Summary Findings Research Question #2*

**How did participating in the Families First Project and the advisory program impact teachers' perceptions of cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding in their interactions with parents?**

The participants reported in interviews that they enjoyed interacting with people from diverse cultures. Two of the study participants reported in interviews that they thought interacting with diverse cultures was necessary and exciting. The Master Teacher and two Caucasian volunteer teachers echoed their colleagues' sentiment in their journals. However, they expressed concerns about their challenges of interacting authentically with people from diverse cultures. The Master Teacher reported in her journal that when interacting with people from diverse cultures, she was careful not to "offend" anyone and this often prevented her from getting to know people from different

backgrounds. Several of the volunteer teachers reported in interviews that they too were concerned about establishing authentic relationships because they did not want to offend anyone.

The participants expressed interest in collaborating with each other in the advisory program and working with Families First. They asserted both initiatives would give them scheduled time to devote to serving the needs of their diverse population of students and parents. The data revealed in the interviews and surveys that the study participants were aware of their cultural differences and were concerned how they would be able to effectively communicate with students and parents especially since they had not previously made it a priority. They reported in interviews that they thought the two initiatives would help them establish meaningful relationships by providing them with a framework for successful strategies as they embarked upon improving their relationships with students' and their parents.

Despite their enthusiasm about the two initiatives, the participants reported in interviews, surveys and their journals that they struggled with communicating cross-racially and culturally with each other because they had not established trusting relationships among themselves. One participant reported she did not want to share her ideas or opinions openly for fear that she would be excluded from the group. The data revealed participants acknowledged that they required significant cultural awareness and communication training in order for the initiatives to be successful.

Data collected during the pre-intervention stage for research question #3 follows. The researcher used interviews and journals to collect the data.

**Research Question # 3 - How did the two initiatives impact teachers' perceptions of the significance of parents' role in the educational achievement and development of their children?**

The researcher asked the following question in an interview conducted during the pre-intervention stage.

*We discussed the importance of creating more opportunities for teachers and parents to work more collaboratively. Please describe how the advisory program and the work with Families First could help or harm your teaching.*

The researcher provided the reader with three responses from one-on-one interviews with study participants. These responses represented multiple perspectives.

Interview Responses - Pre-Intervention Stage: Interview Question #3

**Kimberly - Fall 2007**

Kimberly expressed an interest in working closely with the parents. She said she thought the parents could be helpful in terms of supporting their daughters and also supporting her as a classroom teacher. *“If we can figure out a way to give parents more access to us, I think it would be a great partnership. I don't know the students well so the parents can help me get to know their daughters better,”* Kimberly stated in the interview she thought the advisory program would create opportunities for parents and teachers to establish more authentic relationships. Kimberly also reported she thought Families First would give teachers specific strategies on *“forging authentic relationships”* with parents. Kimberly said she thought overall the partnership would be helpful not only to her as a teacher, but to the students and parents as well.

**Sandra – Fall 2007**

Sandra said she was very interested in participating in the advisory program and the collaboration with Families First. She was excited about the advisory program

because it gave her a chance to have more informal time with students which, according to Sandra “*is when you learn a lot about them.*” Sandra said connecting with students was the best part of being a volunteer teacher. Sandra stated in the interview that she thought if you connected well with the students, you would also connect well with the parents. However, she said she was concerned about the amount of time she would have to devote to the initiatives. While she was committed to the initiatives, Sandra revealed partnerships with parents could potentially harm the classroom if there were no clearly established boundaries. Sandra said she was more concerned about becoming a better teacher. “*I care about parents but I need to focus on making my classroom better. I’m not sure how helpful they can be in the classroom.*” Sandra said she thought parents could be helpful in planning community activities and other school events.

#### **Katherine – Fall 2006**

In the interview Katherine stated it was very important for schools and families to work collaboratively. Katherine said she looked forward to collaborating with Families First because the school had not involved previously involved parents at the proposed level and currently, she needed “*as much help as possible*”. She thought the initiatives would help her provide teachers with the tools they needed in regards to working with parents. Katherine said the advisory program gave volunteer teachers and administrators a chance to work together in their role as advisors. According to Katherine, the advisory program gave her a chance to mentor the volunteer teachers. Katherine stated she was interested in more opportunities to mentor the volunteer teachers and the advisory program would allow her to do so. Katherine said a partnership between the school and parents would be “*terrific for everyone.*” She reported the parent partnership was long

overdue. Katherine agreed as an administrator she played a key role in establishing relationships between parents and teachers but asserted that “she fell short of the opportunities in the past”. According to Katherine, the “very public initiatives” would motivate teachers and administrators to make the initiatives successful.

### **Journal Responses - Pre-Intervention Stage: Interview Question #3**

**Journal: Dina**

**Fall 2006**

*I think the work with Families First is going to be challenging but it seems like it will help me in the classroom. I want the students and parents to know I want the best for them. As a new teacher, I need all the help I can conveying that message. Parents and schools should work together. I am not sure about the advisory program. I think it is a great idea as long as I have help from a colleague. It will give me a chance to get to know my students better outside of the classroom. I am looking forward to it!*

**Journal: Casey**

**Fall 2006**

*I look forward to working with parents. Last year, I was terrified of them because we rarely interacted with them. By the end of the year, I felt more connected with several parents. Families First will help us involve parents in and out of the classroom. I'm sure there will be some uncomfortable moments, but we have an opportunity to create the best possible learning environment for the girls. The first year teachers are lucky because they will have two years to work with parents. The advisory program is going to be awesome for everyone. I think the work with Families First and the advisory will help me become a better teacher.*

### Summary of Findings – Pre-Intervention Stage Research Question #3

Most of the study participants reported an interest in working collaboratively with parents. In the interviews conducted during the pre-intervention stage the data revealed that while participants were interested in working closely with parents, they did not have the skills or previous experience in doing so. In the school culture survey conducted in the pre-intervention stage, the participants reported they rarely communicated with parents regarding their daughters' academic progress. When asked to further elaborate their responses in their journals, several study participants admitted that they were “scared” of parents and that they avoided them. Many of the participants also acknowledged communicating with parents seemed to be an additional task and they reported concerns about having enough time to do so.

### Pre-Intervention Summary of Findings for Research Questions 1-3

According to the data, all of the participants affirmed that they supported the school's mission. Volunteer teachers reported in interviews that they thought they could make a difference in the lives of students who were “less fortunate” than they were. The perceptions and attitudes of Caucasian volunteer teachers regarding the school's culture were quite positive though quite naive. They reported in the school culture survey that diversity was an integral part of the school. They also perceived Urban Hope as a place where diversity of ideas, culture, race and ethnicities were encouraged and valued.

Their responses were dissimilar to the three participants of color, as well as the Caucasian Master Teacher, who was in her forties. In four out of five survey responses, the four participants responded similarly. The only time their responses differed was regarding workload.



Overall the Caucasian volunteer teachers shared comparable responses. Their attitudes and perceptions of the school's culture were similar while the two volunteer teachers of color expressed concerns about the difference in perceptions between them and their white counterparts.

The data showed the Caucasian volunteer teachers thought Urban Hope was a friendly environment where everyone was accepted. Contrarily, the volunteer teachers of color, along with the Master Teacher and Parent Coordinator offered opposing perspectives. They reported that while Urban Hope had great intentions, they thought significant work needed to occur in order to bridge a cultural gap among teachers, between teachers and students, and between teachers and parents.

As a group, the data clearly demonstrated the volunteer teachers' concerns about having access to adequate information and sufficient time and guidance from administrators to help them become more effective classroom teachers. It is evident in the data that culture, ethnicity, race, age and experience are significant factors in attitudes and perceptions of the participants. The researcher described the group as "cautious" during the pre-intervention stage in her journal. Although there was a level of comfort between the administrators, the volunteer teachers continued to express their desire to establish trusting relationships not only with their colleagues but also with each other.

The participants cited establishing trust and developing effective communication skills as important factors in the success of the program. The participants reported it was difficult for participants to engage in honest conversations with each other let alone with Families First. According to participants, it was challenging to create a safe environment especially in such a short amount of time. All of the participants came from different

racial, ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. They reported they needed more time to figure out how they could address their own differences before working with students and parents in the two initiatives.

### *Post Intervention Stage*

In the next section, the Post-Intervention Stage, the researcher presented the data collected during and after the project initiatives. To achieve triangulation of data, the researcher examined four sources of data during the intervention stage:

- Post Intervention Interviews
- Post Intervention Surveys
- During Intervention Journals
- During Intervention Field Notes

The researcher presents the data by research questions. The following section provides the reader with an analysis of the findings and a comparison to information gathered during the pre-intervention stage.

### Reporting of Significant Data- Post Intervention Stage

#### **Research Question One: How did initial conversations with Families First impact teachers' perceptions of their role as volunteer teachers at Urban Hope?**

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with the seven study participants at the end of the study. The participant responses in this section are based on interviews in the post-intervention stage. The researcher provides a sample of participant responses to research question 1. At the end of the participant responses to Research Question One, the researcher will provide a summary of the seven participant responses.

## Interviews

### Sandra

Sandra believed it was important to discuss the impact of teacher attitudes and perceptions of her role as a volunteer teacher at Urban Hope. Initially, she viewed her role as a volunteer teacher as “quite special.” She said she thought by being a volunteer teacher she would immediately make a difference in the lives of the girls. She asserted that she felt she had a lot to offer the students and once she began teaching, the students would learn “so much.” Sandra reported she could hardly wait to begin working at Urban Hope because she wanted to be a part of the girls’ success. She believed somehow she had the expertise to give the girls’ “what they needed” in order to help them compete in their secondary schools and beyond.

Sandra reported in a survey and in an interview during the pre-intervention stage that she did not have time to focus on anything “extra” besides the training that would make her a better teacher. She agreed that initially her perception of the volunteer teacher role had much more merit than any other position in the school. However, Sandra said once she began to engage in conversations with Families First, she realized her role was secondary to the parents and students. Sandra said *“I am here for them, not the other way around.”* While she believed her role was important she recognized that the school existed for the students and their parents. According to Sandra, once the group became more comfortable with each other, the conversations were much more meaningful. Sandra thought Families First provided the participants with an opportunity to engage in honest conversations that ultimately benefited the entire organization.”

## **Casey**

Casey approached her participation in the conversations with Families First with an open mind. She reported initial conversations with Families First about her role as a volunteer teacher were “*superficial.*” According to Casey, she did not want to admit any feelings of “superiority” as a volunteer teacher. Even though Casey considered herself culturally sensitive, she questioned her motives during initial conversations with Families First. In a discussion about Peggy McIntosh’s article *White Privilege; Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, Casey said she became brutally aware of the privileges she and her colleagues had in relation to the students and their parents and she reported “feeling guilty” in spite of the outwardly positive responses she provided during the conversations. Casey said even though she felt guilty; she did not want to share that with Families First. Instead, she was “politically correct” during the conversations.

During the pre-intervention stage, Casey reported in surveys and interviews that the work with Families First could have been more effective if the participants had time to establish trusting relationships.

## **Tracey**

Tracey said her opinion of the initial conversations with Families First were not positive because she thought they were trying to blame the faculty and staff for any existing challenges with the students and parents. “*At first I thought I was being negatively viewed by Families First and some administrators. I thought my perceptions and attitudes were being scrutinized.*” Tracey said these feelings of “*guilt and blame*” led her to silence. She chose to say very little during the initial conversations because she

worried that her perceptions about her role as a volunteer teacher would be misinterpreted.

In the pre-intervention stage Tracey reported in an interview that she thought her work as a volunteer was “*God’s work*”. In the same interview, she reported that “*it is so exciting to help make a difference and gain valuable experience while doing it.*” Tracey reported that as time progressed, she opened up more and that she learned a lot.” Tracey believed it would be hard for any new volunteer teacher to engage in honest conversations at the beginning but over time, they would establish trust with the group. She said her attitudes and perceptions of her role as an educator did not change but she was more aware of the impact she made on both students and parents. The research participants

In the next section, the researcher will summarize the findings from interviews for Research Question #1.

Summary of Interview and Survey Responses - Post Intervention Stage

### **Research Question 1**

#### **How did initial conversations with Families First impact teachers’ perceptions of their role as volunteer or teachers at Urban Hope?**

Overall, the study participants reported in their interviews that they were enthusiastic about their participation in the project. However, initial conversations with Families First could have been more effective. The participants reported in the interviews they thought that establishing trust and effective communication skills were essential to their initial conversations with Families First. While two out of seven (29%) participants were initially comfortable reporting their perceptions of their roles as teachers, the majority (71%) were not. The teachers reported that in their initial

conversations with families, their responses were “politically correct” since they had not established a trusting relationship with the group. The participants told Families First what they thought they wanted to hear.

Participants were initially reluctant to openly discuss their perceptions not only with Families First but also with each other. In a survey administered during the pre-intervention stage, only one of out seven (15%) participants was willing to engage in difficult conversations, which was the primary responsibility of Families First. However, in the same survey administered in the post intervention stage, study participants reported that they were more willing to engage in difficult conversations as a result of their participation in their conversations with Families First.

In an interview conducted by the researcher, all but one of the participants acknowledged the conversations with Families First helped them to understand the impact their perceptions of their role as volunteer teachers really meant in relation to the study. According to the researcher, six out of seven participants (85%) thought the initial conversations with Families First were helpful. One study participant (15%) thought Families First should have provided contextual meaning to the study. The participants reported that they needed more clarity about their role as well as Families First. According to the participant, *“it was not easy to talk about these topics without ground rules or a road map. I did not want to put myself out there not knowing the consequences. As a result, I shut down immediately.”*

All seven participants reported in interviews and journals that trust was one of the most essential factors in determining the success of the program. The majority of study participants (85%) agreed more time was necessary to engage in conversations which

according to the participants, would have eventually lead to trusting relationships. All but one participant believed the monthly meetings with Families First did not provide them with enough time to delve deeply into the work required of the study participants. Participants reported they initially scoffed at the once per month meetings but were disappointed when a couple of the meetings were cancelled. It was evident in the data that the participants thought initial conversations with Families First were not as effective as they could have been. However, over time the participants thought they were helpful once they felt more comfortable with each other. They also reported in interviews that the conversations helped them to better understand their role in interacting with parents.

In the next section, the researcher reports the findings for Research Question 2. The researcher used interviews, field notes and excerpts from participant journals. A summary analysis will conclude this section.

#### Post Intervention Findings for Research Question 2

##### ***How did participating in the Families First Project and the advisory program impact teachers' perceptions of cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding in their interactions with parents?***

###### Interviews

The researcher interviewed all seven participants. The researcher collected data from interviews with the seven study participants. The data revealed that the project had significant impact on six out of seven participants (86%). According to the data, the majority of the participants believed that their involvement in the Families First Project and the advisory program impacted their perceptions of cross-racial and cross cultural understanding in their interactions parents. They reported that the advisory program provided a curriculum to further engage students in meaningful dialogue about race class

and culture. They gave examples of topics discussed in advisory which were later shared with parents during advisor-parent meetings.

One out of seven participants (14%) believed that her perceptions of cross-cultural and cross racial-understanding had not changed. The majority of the participants reported that they recognized the impact their perceptions had in their interactions with parents. In a survey administered during the pre-intervention stage, six out seven participants reported they interacted with people from different cultures by establishing commonalities. However, only two of those participants reported they did so with ease. After their participation in the study, the majority of the participants said in an interview that they felt more comfortable connecting with parents because they could do so authentically. The participants reported that the advisory program was quite effective because it created opportunities for teachers and parents to communicate in person, over the phone and through e-mail. The participants reported that both initiatives provided them with a vehicle for communication between home and school. The participants reported in the interview that they thought they had a responsibility to be more culturally sensitive in an effort to connect authentically with parents and students.

The participants agreed that their participation in the Families First Project and the advisory program provided them with the skills necessary to establish authentic cross cultural relationships with each other and with parents. The participants reported that they thought the project not only enhanced their communication skills but also made them more effective teachers. Six out of seven participants agreed that they thought their cultural awareness was heightened and that they connected authentically to parents and students as a result of their participation in the project.



The researcher administered the following survey during the post-interventions stage. The purpose of the survey was to assess teacher engagement as a result of their participation in the two initiatives. The survey titled “**Teacher Engagement**” is a visual representation of participant responses from the following questions. Table 4.11 displays data below.

**Table 4.11 – Teacher Engagement- Post Intervention Survey**

*How do I engage others?*

Overall Matrix Scorecard								
	Question	Count	Score	1 Never	2 Rarely	3 Sometimes	4 Often	5 Always
1.	I use real-life situations in the context of teaching	7	3.857					
2.	I provide students opportunities to make choices about the activities and assignments they complete	7	3.428					
3.	I show an interest in students by attending their extra-curricular activities	7	4.428					
4.	I communicate regularly with my advisees teachers	7	3.142					
5.	I invite parents and colleagues to special classroom events	7	2.714					
<b>Average</b>			<b>3.509</b>					

In Table 4.11, the study participants were asked how they engaged others. The data in the chart reveals that participants scored the highest points in showing an interest in their students by attending their extra-curricular activities. It is evident from the data the participants demonstrated their interest in students beyond the classroom. The researcher inferred this interest may be a result of the advisory program.

According to the data in the table, teachers reported that they almost always attended extra-curricular activities. Study participants reported they incorporated real life

situations in the context of their classroom often. They reported in interviews and journals that they perceived greater student engagement when real-life situations were woven into the curriculum. The participants attributed the training with Families First to this cultural shift at Urban Hope.

The participants reported in an interview during the post intervention stage that the emphasis on creating culturally responsive classrooms encouraged them to value student choice in activities and assignments. This data suggested teachers paid closer attention to their students' learning style, culture and context in the classroom. The participants agreed this was a shift in their teaching practices.

Field Notes from an observation of a conversation between teachers and Families First revealed significant data. The discussion occurred at the beginning of the intervention stage. The group was discussing Peggy McIntosh's article: *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*.

Researcher Field Notes - Fall 2007

*The participants seemed uncomfortable in discussing the McIntosh article. The group was given the task by Families First to discuss the article and identify their individual privileges. The purpose of the discussion was for participants to understand their privileges and the impact their privileges whether race, class, culture or language had on the students and their families. The Master Teacher and Parent Coordinator discussed their privileges candidly. Three out of five volunteer teachers were relatively quiet. One of the study participants, Sandra, seemed particularly engaged and appeared to be deeply involved in the discussion. Sandra who was Caucasian and a volunteer teacher struggled with*

*identifying her privileges. She was aware that she belonged to the dominant culture and acknowledged how difficult it must have been for families at Urban Hope. However, she was quick to point out that she too faced challenges as a liberal white woman in a male dominated society. Sandra did not deny their challenges were real but struggled with the notion that her privilege could be a barrier between herself and the Urban Hope Community. She wanted everyone to realize that “we all had privileges even if we were unaware of them”. She gave an example of the Latino parents who spoke Spanish during meetings and in other forums at the school. Sandra said they had the privilege of speaking Spanish when the other parents did not which made others feel excluded. The group had very mixed reactions but only one participant responded. The Parent Coordinator politely reminded the group of the purpose of the conversation. The African American volunteer teacher seemed frustrated; however, she did not respond. While Sandra’s comments were powerful, the group did not further engage in what could have been a very enriching conversation. It was evident none of the participants were comfortable expressing their opinions in the initial conversations.*

In the next section, field notes deal with a discussion within the advisory groups about the concept of privilege from the Peggy McIntosh’s article. As part of the advisory curriculum, volunteer teachers and administrators engaged students in a discussion about privilege and power at Urban Hope. Although the students were not required to read the article, their advisors led them in a discussion that was somewhat similar to the participants’ discussion about the article that occurred in the spring of 2008.

Field Notes – Spring 2008

*I had the opportunity to observe the advisory program in action today. It was quite rewarding watching the volunteer teachers lead the discussion about privilege to a group of middle school girls who happened to be from low-income families. I visited the advisory groups of all of the study participants. I was particularly struck by the interaction in Tracey's and Sandra's advisories. They were both completely engaged in the conversation with their advisees. They both referenced the vocabulary they acquired while working with Families First. In Tracey's advisory, an eighth grader asked Tracey and Katherine, how they could afford to work at Urban Hope and made the assumption that it was because they had the privilege of being wealthy. At the beginning of the two initiatives, neither Tracey nor Katherine would have responded, allowing a teachable moment to escape. However, Tracey briefly engaged the advisory group in a lesson about stereotypes and how that could lead into misperceptions. Tracey admitted she had the privilege of volunteering at the school because her family could provide for her financially. Katherine explained to the students that she was a lay staff which meant she received a salary for her role as Master Teacher. The students were quick to point out that the nuns worked "for free."*

*The most compelling observation occurred while visiting Sandra's advisory. She and Doris shared an advisory. Sandra advisees were also using the common language that Families First established with the teachers. Sandra asked the students to write a list of privileges on a white board. One of her advisees listed "speaking in your own language." Sandra shared openly with her students, half*

*of whom were Latino, that initially she thought it was a privilege for Spanish speakers to converse in their native language at Urban Hope. However, in her conversations with Families First she explained as best as she could the concept of power and privilege in the context of Urban Hope and the larger society. Sandra said she could understand how that might be considered a privilege but encouraged her advisees to think more critically about the concept! It appeared through the researchers' observations that significant progress had been made in the impact of cross-cultural and cross-racial understanding of teachers in their interactions with parents.*

#### *Summary Findings for Research Question 2*

Overall, the study participants reported that they were more comfortable interacting with students and parents as a result of their participation in the study. Although the participants shared in their journals and in interviews that it was challenging for them to confront their pre-existing attitudes and perceptions, they discovered during the study that they transitioned from relative naivete and discomfort to improved confidence and skills.

The group also stated that the work with Families First and the advisory program were instrumental in helping them to build authentic relationships with students and parents. The participants reported in interviews and journals that their conversations with each other forced them to take ownership of their role in establishing authentic relationships with parents. Most of the participants agreed that the advisory program gave them a “safe space” for trial and error. According to the participants, the advisory program gave them an opportunity to engage students and parents in conversations that were similar to their conversations with Families First. They reported that the advisory

provided them with a forum to engage in meaningful conversations with their students and parents. The participants stated in an interview that they became more invested in their students and parents because they gained a better understanding of their challenges. The group expressed that their interactions with students and teachers improved. They also agreed that they thought they related to each other much better than before. Participants stated that they were “real” with each other which enabled them to establish trust as a group.

The researcher reports the findings for Research Question 3. In the next section. The researcher used interviews, field notes and excerpts from participant journals. A summary analysis concludes this section.

### *Findings for Research Question 3*

The next section, the researcher reports the findings for Research Question 3. The researcher used interviews, field notes and excerpts from participant journals. A summary analysis concludes this section.

***How did the two initiatives impact teachers’ perceptions of the significance of parents’ role in the educational achievement and development of their children?***

#### *Interviews*

During the pre-intervention stage the researcher asked the study participants the following question: *We discussed the importance of creating more opportunities for teachers and parents to work more collaboratively. Please describe how this could help or harm your teaching.*

In the pre-intervention stage, several study participants reported that they thought it was important for the school to create more opportunities for teachers and parents to work collaboratively. Two study participants, both of whom were volunteer teachers, reported concerns in the pre-intervention interview that the partnership could potentially

harm their classroom teaching if administrators did not establish clear boundaries for parents. The participants expressed that parents might challenge their skills as classroom teachers.

The same participants offered contrasting responses during the post-intervention stage. They stated in an interview that they thought a partnership between home and school was essential. The following journal excerpt provides supporting evidence that teachers valued a partnership with parents.

***Journal: Casey  
Spring 2008***

*We have spent so much time discussing ways to engage our students. I know the conversations about our individual backgrounds have had a tremendous impact on what happens in the classroom. I can see how the conversations have helped me with parents and in the classroom. I see our students for whom they are and the value they bring to the classroom. It seems so simplistic when you think about it. It really is a give and take. I am so surprised at how much better my classes are going just by involving students in the process. I value them. I also am pleased with the progress I've made with parents.*

***Journal: Dina  
Spring 2008***

*Participation in this project has been a remarkable journey of discovery. We all come from different backgrounds but shared the same goal: to help serve the students and their families. In my opinion, the school has an impressive track record for achieving the first part of the goal; to provide students with access and opportunity to a high quality education. However, we have not focused on*

*working with the families. I know there are a number of reasons why we have not done as well in that area. We learned there are many barriers that have prevented us from working with parents. Our students are the ones who suffer if we do not partner with their parents. I've never been opposed to working with parents, I just felt inexperienced. How can someone my age provide wisdom to parents about their children? I realized that parents do appreciate our feedback. When I made an effort to communicate more with parents, both parents and students seemed more engaged. My role as an advisor helped me connect with parents authentically and it made a difference!*

***Journal: Sandra  
Spring 2008***

*Initially I was concerned about what parents thought about my teaching. I did not want to involve them because I was uncertain of how they would view me. I guess I just needed some guidance. My view on parents during this project shifted several times. At times I empathized with them. Sometimes I became frustrated when our efforts seemed ineffective. My participation in this project has taught me that the relationship between parents and teachers can help me in my role as a teacher. Parents know more about their children than anyone else. They are the ones who can offer us information that will help us maximize their child's learning experience. I learned parents are absolutely significant to the educational achievement of their children. No matter how frustrated I became with their excuses for not showing up at conferences or not responding to my countless attempts to reach out to them, I know the partnership between home and school makes a tremendous impact of the child's educational achievement. All*



*parents at Urban Hope want what is best for their children. I have to believe if they didn't want what was best, their children wouldn't be here.*

The participants agreed that their attitudes about collaborating with parents shifted as a result of their participation in the study. In the pre-intervention stage, the respondents reported they thought collaboration with parents could potentially harm their teaching. The participants reported over time, they began to see the value in working with parents. The participants thought that a partnership with parents would have a positive impact on the overall academic achievement and development of students.

## **Journals**

### ***Casey – Journal Spring 2008***

*From the very beginning I knew this experience would require me to be more reflective and aware of my attitudes and perceptions. The Peggy McIntosh article was especially helpful for me because it put everything right in front of us. We have privileges that our families don't. Just recognizing that was huge for all of us. Even though we all want what is best for our families, we have to be cognizant of how our actions may affect the families we serve. In our meetings with Families First, we discovered we had a lot of work to do with each other. We learned we all had biases. At first, our biases prevented us from effectively communicating with each other so you can only imagine the impact it had on our interactions with parents. Even though the group is diverse, we have more in common with each other than we do with students and their families. Once we were able to get past that, the real work began. Discussions about race, class and culture helped us break down the barriers between the parents and us.*

**Kimberly - Journal**  
**Spring 2008**

*Families First forced all of us to think about the importance of cross-cultural and cross-racial relationships in our interactions with parents. There was such an invisible wall between some of us at the beginning of the project. I was nervous that we would not make any progress because people seemed so politically correct. Some of my white colleagues were in denial that any tension existed which made it more challenging for me to fully participate in discussions. Instead of expressing what I felt, I worked tirelessly to compensate in what I perceived as the school's inability to establish authentic relationships with each other and the parents. As I began to work more closely with the parents, I sensed resentment from a few teachers. I think they resented the fact that I was connecting with the parents just because I was black. What they didn't realize is the parents complained more about me than any other teacher. I had to work even harder to gain their approval, not because I am black but because it was not easy for me to be completely honest with the parents. I learned a lot about taking risks and putting myself out there during this process. Ultimately we determine the success or failure of the interactions we have with parents when we make the decision to be true to ourselves and to others.*

**Sandra**  
**Spring 2008**

*At first I didn't think my perceptions had any impact on how I interacted with parents. I cared about parents but my focus was primarily on teaching. In my mind, one had nothing to do with the other. I figured if I was successful*

*establishing relationships with the students, I would be equally successful establishing relationships with the parents. I didn't really consider my perceptions about the parents. I was optimistic about the school's ambitions to establish a partnership with parents but I had some reservations. I did not think the parents would have time for another school initiative. Once we made a concerted effort to engage the parents, I began to perceive them differently. I became more frustrated with them. I tried really hard to get them involved but to no avail. I could tell this was affecting how I interacted with them and sometimes with the students." I learned my silence further drove a wedge between us. It was good to have the advisory program and conversations facilitated by Families First as an outlet to process my frustrations because I could be authentic. Once I gave myself permission to "be real" I could see how my relationships with parents improved. The work we did with Families First trained us to continue our work in the advisory curriculum. We engaged our students in similar conversations with Families First only to discover the students also had their own perceptions and attitudes about us!*






In the next section, the researcher will provide further findings to Research Question 3. First the researcher will contrast the data from the pre-intervention and post intervention surveys. Then the researcher will look at data from three exemplary journals and then present exemplary quotes from teacher interviews. A summary analysis will conclude this section.

The researcher asked the participants to respond to the same school culture survey question #3 in both the pre and post intervention stages. The following tables provide

contrasting responses, and presents supporting evidence that demonstrates a change in their change in attitudes, perceptions and behaviors at the conclusion of the intervention.

**Table 4.12 Pre-intervention School Culture Survey- Question 3**

I communicate regularly with parents and students regarding students' progress & accomplishments.

Frequency Analysis							
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80% 100%
	1 Never	<u>1</u>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="text"/>			
	2 Rarely	<u>3</u>	<b>42.84%</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		
	3 Sometimes	<u>2</u>	<b>28.56%</b>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		
	4 Often	<u>1</u>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="text"/>			
	5 Always	0	0.00%	<input type="text"/>			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>				

In table 4.3, the researcher asked the participants if they communicated effectively with parents and students regarding students' progress and accomplishments. The majority of the participants reported they did not communicate student progress with students or parents.

In Table 4.12, the researcher asked the participants the same question in the Post Intervention Stage. The data showed six out of seven study participants communicated with parents about student achievement after the implementation of the three initiatives. Five study participants communicated “often” while one study participant communicated “always.” One study participant communicated sometimes. This represents a significant shift in communication between home and school.

**Table 4.13 Post-Intervention Survey - Communication**

I communicate regularly with parents and students regarding students' progress & accomplishments.

Frequency Analysis				
	Answer	Count	Percent	
	1 Never	0	0.0%	<input type="checkbox"/>
	2 Rarely	0	0.0%	<input type="checkbox"/>
	3 Sometimes	<u>1</u>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	4 Often	<u>5</u>	<b>71%</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	5 Always	<u>1</u>	<b>14.28%</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100%</b>	

The data revealed a 70% increase in communication about student progress and achievement initiated by teachers to parents from the pre to post intervention stages. In the pre-intervention stage, only one participant (14%) communicated with parents about student achievement. While the majority of the participants “never” or “rarely” did.

The next section provides journal excerpts from three study participants. The following journal excerpts are participant quotes from post-intervention interviews. Finally, the researcher provided Field Notes from Family Math Night. Math Night was a collaborative event planned by teachers and parents.

***Journal: Casey  
Spring 2008***

*I was so afraid of parents because I was young and not confident in my teaching ability. How can I tell a parent what's best for their child at 20 something. I felt too inexperienced to communicate with them. Most parents, if not all, want what is best for their children and I wasn't convinced I was the best, so I avoided them*

*altogether. I figured they could see right through me. Although I was passionate about my subject, I did not want the responsibility of communicating with parents. As time progressed, I became more comfortable with myself not only as a teacher but as an advisor. I realized how critical it was to have parents involved in the educational achievement of their students.*

***Dina: Journal  
Spring 2008***

*Participation in this project has been a remarkable journey of discovery. We all came from different backgrounds but shared the same goal; to help serve the students and their families. In my opinion, the school has an impressive track record for achieving the first part of the goal. However, we have not focused on working with the families. I suspect there are a number of reasons why we haven't done as well in that area. We learned there are many barriers that have prevented us from working with parents. Our students are the ones who suffer if we do not partner with their parents. The role of the parent is in many respects the most important of all. They are the ones who know the students best and can offer us information that will help us maximize their child's learning experience. When I made an effort to communicate more with parents, both parents and students seemed more engaged. My role as an advisor helped me connect with parents authentically and it made a difference!*

***Sandra: Journal  
Spring 2008***

*My view on parents during this project shifted from one of love to frustration but one thing remains steady. Parents are absolutely significant to the educational*

*achievement of their children. No matter how frustrated I became with their excuses for not showing up at conferences or not responding to my countless attempts to reach out to them, I know there is no way students could be successful without a partnership between home and school. All parents at Urban Hope want what is best for their children. Some more so than others. I have to believe if they didn't want what was best, their children wouldn't be here.*

The remaining four participants also shared the same sentiment as their colleagues. In an interview at the conclusion of the project, each of the participants shared personal reflections about the importance of parental involvement in student achievement. The participants reported they were initially uncertain about the commitment of the parents to get involved in their child's education.

Five out of seven (71%) participants reported they were frustrated because parents did not attend meetings and other events at the school. The participants, all of whom were volunteer teachers, said initially they secretly blamed parents for the “non-existent” parent teacher relationships. The researcher noted a shift in their attitudes towards the end of the project. The following quotes provided supporting evidence that study participants thought that the two initiatives impacted their perceptions of the significance of parents' role in the educational achievement and development of their children.

### ***Quotes***

“Parents matter! We can't do it without them.”

“They know more about educating their children than we do.”

“Parent involvement = student success.”

“This is a joint journey between home and school and parents are the key!”

“Students benefit when we work together, and lose when we don’t.”

“Just because they don’t show up, doesn’t mean they don’t care about their child’s success.”

“We have to work harder to involve them. The results will be remarkable.”

“Education is the great equalizer. All of our parents know that!”

“It’s not about our individual accomplishments. It’s about the achievements of the collective body; the teachers, parents and students.”

Field Notes provide an observation from Family Math Night. Math Night was a collaborative event planned by teachers and parents.

Researcher Field Notes: Winter 2008

*Family Math Night is a wonderful event for teachers, students and parents. Teachers and students work collaboratively to creatively showcase teaching and learning at Urban Hope. Each classroom was decorated differently by the students and teachers. One classroom was set up like a bedroom, another like a movie theater and one like a museum. There were numbers everywhere and prizes for all of the community members who attended the event in spite of an impending snow storm. Everyone seemed engaged. Parents were counting, siblings were adding, multiplying and dividing and teachers were jumping for joy whenever someone got the right answer. It was truly amazing to witness. The night was a huge success. Teaching and learning was fun. Parent and teachers were genuinely enjoying working collaboratively and students were able to demonstrate their superb math skills while having a great time with their families and teachers at their home away from home.*



*When the participants were asked in the final interview to identify an activity or event at Urban Hope that was the most meaningful and captured the essence of their participation in the project five out of seven reported Math Night. The remaining two participants said the Christmas Pageant. They reported feeling a sense of accomplishment with both events. According to one study participant, “there was a lot of love, learning, connection and pride!” Another participant said “the community was in sync. It was nice to see all the parts come together.”*

### Summary of findings for Research Question 3

The data indicates that the teachers’ participation in the two initiatives impacted their perceptions of parental involvement in the role of their children’s educational achievement and development as well as improved their understanding of students. In initial conversations with the participants, the communication between teachers and parents was almost non-existent. As time progressed, participants became more comfortable with their relationships with students, their role as teachers and the responsibility they shared in engaging parents. Teachers reported the advisory program provided them with a direct link to student and their families.

Although all seven participants believed all parents at Urban Hope wanted what was best for their children, their initial reaction was to blame the parents for not taking a more active role in their children’s education. The evidence in the data revealed teachers were initially apprehensive about communicating with parents. The participants’ reported a variety of reasons for not communicating with parents. They cited fear, lack of confidence in their teaching ability, ineffective communication skills, misperceptions about parental desire to participate and their youth. The participants reported that they

realized over the duration of the study that they played a critical role in including parents in the educational journey of their children.

#### Summary of findings for all Research Questions

In summary, the advisory program and the collaboration with Families First had a significant impact on the perceptions and attitudes of the majority of the study participants. The participation in the program required study participants to examine pre-existing attitudes and beliefs and the impact their perceptions had on their ability to forge authentic relationships with each other and ultimately with the parents. The participants learned that in order to establish relationships, they needed to be authentic and open in their communication. Establishing trust was an important element in their participation in this project. The participants agreed open and honest communication was central to the program.

According to the participants, the work with Families First was the most essential initiative. It required the participants, both volunteer teachers and administrators to engage in adaptive work. According to Ronald Heifetz (1994), in mobilizing adaptive work you have to engage people in adjusting their unrealistic expectations, rather than try to satisfy them with a technical or “quick fix” solution (Heifetz, p. 15). While the implementation of the advisory program was a necessary and helpful structure, it was more of a complimentary activity to communicate with parents. The ongoing engagement with Families First helped raise questions about people’s habits and perceptions. The participants agreed this was necessary for change.

## Conclusion

The chapter presented an analysis of the findings which were directly related to the three research questions. The researcher sought to answer the questions by using various data gathering instruments, including surveys, journal, interviews and field notes. The triangulated data tended to present a coherent picture. The findings were organized by research questions to present the participants' attitudes and perceptions both before and after the intervention. The summaries gathered the major influences that the collaboration with Families First and the advisory program had on teacher beliefs and attitudes towards parents and students.

Chapter Five will discuss the major findings in Chapter Four. The information will be compared and contrasted with previous research in the field. The researcher will connect the findings to the literature review in Chapter Two. The researcher will include a discussion of the potential implications of the study for educational practice, school policy and future research. Finally, the researcher will conclude the chapter by addressing the limitations of the study as well as lessons learned by the researcher about her leadership. Suggestions for further research and the researcher's reflections will conclude the chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### *Introduction*

Chapter five will conclude the study of the impact of initiatives to sensitize volunteer teacher attitudes and perceptions around relationships with urban parents. The chapter will begin with a summary of the study's findings as they pertain to the three research questions. Next, the researcher will discuss the findings in relation to the literature presented in chapter two. The chapter continues with the limitations of the study, implications for practice, and policy and for further research. A discussion of the leadership lessons learned as a result of the project concludes the chapter.

### *Summary of Findings to Question One*

Most of the participants conveyed that they became more aware of their perceptions, assumptions and attitudes during conversations with Families First. The seven participants reported in a survey that they chose to volunteer or work at Urban Hope because they strongly supported the school's mission. The volunteer teachers expressed in their journals that they thought their role as volunteer teachers was essential to advancing the school's mission. The participants expressed that they were aware of the diverse backgrounds of the students and thus they were willing to engage in conversations with Families First to help them to better serve the needs of their students. Despite their interest in participation in the project, volunteer teachers expressed they were insecure about engaging honestly and openly with each other and Families First during the initial conversations.

According to the participants, they thought it was best to say what they thought was expected of them. This resulted in the group's description of the conversations as

“politically correct.” While they reported subsequent conversations were enlightening, the teachers identified time as a critical aspect of the project’s success. The data revealed the participants needed more time to become comfortable with each other in order to delve deeply into conversations regarding their roles, perceptions and attitudes. They understood the tremendous impact their attitudes and beliefs had on establishing relationships with parents. However, the participants reported in a survey that they were reluctant to share those perceptions initially.

The participants reported in their journals that as time progressed they became more open with their perceptions about their role as volunteer teachers. They also reported in their journals that they thought conversations with Families First had a positive impact on helping them to establish relationships with parents. Participants reported in their journals and in interviews with the researcher that over time their attitudes and perceptions of the parents changed as they became more aware of their own privileges. The participants reported that Families First helped them to communicate more effectively through their use of an “engagement protocol” which helped establish ground rules, provided a context for their work and established shared goals for the group. The protocol also provided a common language for the participants, who reported that they struggled initially with the use of certain racial and cultural terms. The participants learned to listen more actively by following the protocol. They also reported they established close relationships by spending time together at monthly scheduled meetings. The participants reported that the meetings became a “safe haven” for the group. They reported they used the time to discuss individual and group successes and challenges with each other. The seven study participants stated the conversations

remained difficult. However, the conversations provided them an opportunity to engage in critical dialogue that was necessary for them to begin establishing authentic relationships with the parents. They agreed that the conversations were challenging but provided the context for discussions that led to more personal reflection and deeper understanding of differing perspectives. According to the study participants, the diversity within the group was significant because they represented various racial, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

It was evident the participants shared very different perspectives about the culture at Urban Hope. The perceptions of any existing tension regarding race, class and culture were divided along racial lines between volunteer teachers. The conversations allowed the volunteer teachers to become better acquainted which helped them to establish trusting relationships with each other. For example, in the pre-intervention stage, teachers wrote about their perceptions in their journals about the culture at Urban Hope. While they reported contrasting perspectives, by the time they were immersed in the intervention stage, the participants reported having a better understanding of each other's journeys. Although their perspectives were quite different, they reported they were much more willing to acknowledge their individual points of view, which demonstrated tremendous growth since the pre-intervention stage. According to the participants they learned to embrace difficult conversations as a "teachable moment".

A review of the data revealed the initial conversations with Families First began their journey of conversations that would prove beneficial to the volunteer teachers as they began to embark upon establishing relationships with parents. The conversations were perceived by volunteer teachers as difficult but necessary. They were pushed in

ways they had not been previously. The conversations encouraged the participants to learn about themselves as well as the other participants. Initially they viewed their participation in the conversations as an additional responsibility. However, over time they became more invested in the project. They reported they looked forward to the meetings with Families First and became more empathetic and supportive of each other. They agreed their participation in the project would be pivotal in establishing relationships with parents. Volunteer teachers agreed the conversations forced them to reflect on their attitudes and beliefs, especially in their role as volunteer teachers.

#### *Summary of Findings for Question 2*

The data showed that participants believed their partaking in the Parent Involvement Project with Families First and the advisory program made them more keenly aware of the importance of connecting cross culturally and racially. Although every participant reported that they struggled with engaging in conversations about race, class and culture, they agreed it was necessary in order for them to learn more about the students and their families. Interestingly, the data revealed the participants learned a great deal from each other as well.

The participants reported that the time they spent with Families First and with students as advisors in the advisory program was beneficial. According to the participants, Families First encouraged the participants to extend their conversations beyond the “superficial” engagement and closely examine their attitudes and beliefs authentically with each other, the students and the parents. According to the participants, this work was extremely challenging because the volunteer teachers feared the reactions of the parents and students. The majority of the volunteer teachers initially expressed

concern about not having the skills to effectively communicate with a diverse group. They reported they did not want to “offend” their students or their parents and thus needed to begin the process of cross-cultural and cross-racial engagement.

The advisory program gave the participants an opportunity to interact more closely with students and parents in a more intimate setting. It provided participants with a platform to connect with both parents and students more authentically. The participants reported the advisory program helped them to learn more about students outside of class which helped them to forge relationships with parents. The advisory program encouraged volunteer teachers and administrator to engage students in meaningful conversations about various topics such as race and the schooling of students of color and privilege. According to the study participants, the advisory program mirrored the work the volunteer teachers were engaged in with Families First.

The participants reported that the advisory program gave them an opportunity to meet students weekly which helped them to establish better relationships with their students. The study participants reported in a survey that they were invested in their advisee’s lives beyond the classroom for example in attending their students’ extra-curricular activities. The participants reported that their connection with their advisees was one of the highlights of their roles as volunteer teachers. In an interview with the researcher, the volunteer teachers reported the advisory program as an effective tool to bridge the racial, ethnic and cultural gap that existed between them and their students and their parents. The participants asserted that while they learned a lot about their students in the small class sizes at Urban Hope, they learned even more about them during their



weekly advisory meetings. Their interest in their students' lives outside of the classroom demonstrated to parents the volunteer teachers' commitment to the students.

According to the study participants, time was a major factor to the development of authentic relationships. They reported that, by spending time with each other and with their advisory, they became more connected in ways that were described as authentic. They also understood the same would need to occur with establishing authentic relationships with the parents. The data revealed that most of the study participants had not connected with the parents for a myriad of reasons including the teachers' lack of experience, fear, and youth. When the participants had the opportunity to explore these barriers during conversations with Families First, they discovered that their perceptions not only had an impact on establishing relationships with the parents but also with each other.

Initially the group stated that the exploration of the barriers resulted in a flurry of emotions among volunteer teachers which were evident only among themselves. The volunteer teachers reported feelings of guilt, shame and blame. Once they became more connected and felt comfortable communicating with each other, they had a better understanding of their role in establishing relationships with the parents. Participation in Families First and the advisory program made them more keenly aware of the need to interact cross-culturally and cross racially. According to the participants, both initiatives provided them with the tools to enhance their communication skills including their ability to interact with parents cross-culturally and cross-racially.

### *Summary of Findings for Question Three*

All of the participants in the study reported that the initiatives had an impact on their perception of the parents' role in the educational achievement of their children. They reported the time spent with parents enabled them to view parents from a different lens. The findings revealed that the participants all grew to believe the parents wanted what was best for their children in spite of their limited involvement in the school. The volunteer teachers became more aware of the barriers such as language and work schedules that prevented parents from becoming more involved. Although the participants initially expressed frustration with the parents, they came to realize that the parents played a significant role in the educational achievement of their children. The participants perceived a change in the behavior and participation of students whose parents visited classrooms or chaperoned field trips.

The participants deepened their belief that student success was attainable when they partnered with parents. During the two initiatives, volunteer teachers realized that in order for them to make a difference in the classroom, they needed support from the parents. The support did not necessarily have to come from parents being physically present, as long as communication was occurring between home and school. The two programs helped volunteer teachers learn how to communicate effectively with parents. Their stress on cultural sensitivity enabled them to establish authentic relationships with parents and students. The conversations with Families First provided the participants with the tools to initiate conversations with greater ease. The advisory program helped teachers to establish trust with parents thus helping them to create authentic relationships with the parents. Both initiatives emphasized cultural sensitivity. Study participants

reported that through their efforts to establish a partnership with parents, that they understood their role was far greater than “making a real difference” in the classroom. In contrast to their initial attitudes and perceptions the group saw that they were responsible for involving parents in the educational process of their daughters and for helping parents believe that their children had tremendous potential for academic success at Urban Hope and beyond.

### *The Findings in Relationship to the Literature*

The literature review presented in Chapter Two, revolved around four themes: 1) *volunteerism*, 2) *teacher preparation*, 3) *culturally responsive teaching*, and 4) *parent involvement*. The researcher will discuss how the findings of this study relate to that literature.

#### *Volunteerism*

Volunteerism has a long and proud history in America. Researchers contend volunteerism rekindles a sense of community and bridges the gulf that exists within American society (Wilson & Janoski, 1995). Volunteering provides people with an opportunity to connect with others who are different from them. In his research about volunteerism, E. Clary and colleagues (1998) suggests that people volunteer for a variety of reasons. Clary cites the following six functions of volunteerism:

- **Altruism/Humanitarian** - individuals need to express values related to concern for others;
- **Understanding** - ability to utilize knowledge and skill set for a good cause;

- **Relationships** - opportunity to build relationships with others who share similar values;
- **Experience** - opportunity to gain experience in a particular field they are interested;
- **Protective**- ego driven; volunteerism gives them opportunity to overcome “guilt”;
- **Enhancement**- gives people a “lift” in their moods.

The researcher’s findings correspond to Clary’s research. At Urban Hope, volunteer teachers often come to the school for a variety of reasons. At the beginning of the study, the participants stated the school’s mission was central to their decision to work at Urban Hope. They also expressed their desire to “help those who were less fortunate.” According to Clary, this is an altruistic function of volunteerism. While the volunteer teachers had great intentions, their commitment to “give back to the less fortunate” creates tension between them and the parents because often the parents feel the teachers are approaching their commitment as a “charity” case.

Clary’s research on the six functions of volunteerism supports the findings of the attitudes and perceptions discovered in the study. The evidence suggests that several volunteer teachers could also identify with the protective function of volunteerism. The participants reported they wanted to give back to people who had less because they felt guilty for having more. The teachers also expressed a desire to feel good about themselves by sacrificing two years of their time for a good cause. Clary’s research supports this evidence. He states that volunteers seek opportunities to help others but also to fulfill a personal need. Volunteer teachers at Urban Hope also come to the school

to gain experience in teaching. According to Clary, people volunteer as an opportunity to gain experience in a particular field of interest. The findings in this study thus coincided with Clary's six functions of volunteering. The participants reported at least one of the functions as their interest in volunteering.

For many of the volunteers, particularly in schools such as Urban Hope, there is a religious association with their volunteer commitment. Urban Hope has a strong Catholic foundation and volunteerism is central to its mission. Hence, the school attracts people with similar values, norms and expectations. Often they are enthusiastic and compassionate. However, they arrive at the school with attitudes and perceptions that often prevent them from connecting authentically with the parents. When asked by the researcher to describe their role as volunteers, one of the participants in the study described the volunteer teacher role as "God's work." The participant was committed to helping "low-income girls because they really "needed it".

In his research on a study of Teach for America, Thomas Popkewitz (1998) is in favor of programs that mobilize for social change; however he suggested that it is imperative for these programs to recognize how their "good will" or pastoral power and knowledge are culturally constructed in ways that are not particularly conducive to the programs' original intentions: to provide students with committed teachers who will deliver a quality education. Popkewitz believes that educators must be cognizant of their privilege and power in the classroom and how that plays a significant role in student success.

The findings in this study support Popkewitz' research. For example, one of the most powerful discussions with Families First was a conversation based on Peggy

McIntosh's article *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack (1988)*. It was during this discussion that many of the participants openly discussed the privileges in relation to their roles at Urban Hope. They reported that the discussion quite useful in the context of the two initiatives. Several of the teachers had not previously considered themselves privileged hence reported the conversation as enlightening. The researcher observed volunteer teachers engaged in a similar conversation with students during an advisory meeting. Students shared their perceptions of privilege with their advisors which resulted in a very powerful exchange. Teachers reported that it was a sobering experience. Volunteer teachers were surprised by the students' comments however; they recognized the importance of engaging in a meaningful dialogue with them. This also demonstrated tremendous growth in their ability to discuss difficult topics such as the politics of power and privilege.

### *Teacher Preparation*

Research reveals that the single most important determinant of student achievement is teacher initial preparation in university (Darling-Hammond, 2002). She contends that there is a relationship between teacher education and teacher effectiveness. According to Darling-Hammond, the more the teacher knows, the higher the students' performance. The findings reveal the concerns that study participants shared regarding their preparation. The Communication survey revealed that one of the major barriers that prevented these teachers from communicating with parents was their lack of confidence in their teaching ability. These volunteer teachers had not been prepared in a university teacher licensure programs. They reported that they refrained from communicating with

parents because they did not have sufficient preparation to help them adequately perform their duties as teachers.

The volunteer teachers also reported in the survey that they did not find the master teacher role helpful. Darling-Hammond recommends that teacher preparation programs require master teachers to work closely with student teachers, providing an environment that is organized around teacher and student learning. The findings in this study support her research. Many of the study participants, including the Master Teacher, agreed that there was not much modeling occurring between the Master Teacher and volunteer teachers. According to study participants, they were immersed in the classroom after a two-week intensive teacher induction program with very little time for discussing teaching and learning with each other. They reported having to teach alone was a disadvantage. The two second year volunteer teachers expressed a desire to have more time to engage in discussions about teaching and learning with their colleagues and administrators.

According to study participants, they were encouraged to seek professional development opportunities outside of Urban Hope. However, the opportunities did not always connect to their teacher training. Darling-Hammond (2002) suggested that effective teacher preparation programs are not “just a random assortment of courses and experiences”. Further, her research also suggested education programs reflect on their practices and values, an act that requires dialogical engagement and further self-discovery to actively produce agents of social change. Darling-Hammond (2002) recommends that educators have an empathic disposition that allows them to authentically take on the perspectives of other cultures. The findings in this study support her research. In their

training with Families First, it became apparent that volunteer teachers began to place a tremendous value not only on their teacher-training but also on the importance of establishing cross-cultural and cross-racial understanding.

### *Culturally Responsive Teaching*

In her research on culturally responsive teaching, Geneva Gay (2000) acknowledged that the achievement gap still existed between white students and students of color, particularly low-income and minority students. Gay attributes the achievement gap to a variety of reasons but believes teachers' attitudes and beliefs have an integral role in the success or failure of students. Gay believes teachers often have preconceived attitudes and beliefs that have a negative impact on teaching students of color. According to Gay, in order for teachers to address these challenges, significant changes need to occur in their educational training.

According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive teaching is essential to effective teaching. The findings in the study support Gay's research. Volunteer teachers reported that although they arrived at the school without teaching experience, which initially made them feel inadequate in the classroom, they thought that the work with Families First and the advisory program provided them with a platform and curriculum framework that helped them to engage in meaningful conversations with each other, their students and their parents. The participants reported that their work with Families First helped them to engage in difficult conversations about race, class and culture. The advisory program provided an extension of those conversations between teachers, students and their families. The participants reported that both initiatives helped them gain a greater understanding of their students' backgrounds and educational needs. They reported that



it became easier for them to acknowledge their students' academic potential and cultural backgrounds.

In her research, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) states that culturally responsive teaching requires teachers to establish authentic relationships with their students as well as honor students individually and within the context of the group. According to Ladson-Billings, the “family” atmosphere provides comfort, encouragement and collaboration that are essential to social and academic achievement. The findings in the study support her research. Volunteer teachers reported that both initiatives created a “family” atmosphere where they established trust and improved their communication skills. Further, her research stated that in order for teachers to positively impact the relationship they have with parents, it is important for them to examine their own identity independent of and relevant to the classroom. Participants reported that conversations with Families First gave volunteer teachers and administrators an opportunity to examine their identities. The participants' reported that this part of the project was crucial in their ability to establish authentic relationships with parents and each other.

In her research, Lisa Delpit (1995) contends that students, especially students of color, who have caring relationships with their teachers, are better motivated and perform better academically than students who do not. She suggests that teachers are more successful when students feel connected to the learning and when their voices are valued. In a survey, teachers reported that they connected with their students beyond the classroom on a daily basis. Participants stated that the school's advisory program, long days and high expectations gave them an opportunity to connect authentically with their

students beyond the classroom. All of the participants worked with the students in the afternoon program.

According to Delpit (1995) the teacher's role is pivotal to student success and thus culturally responsive teaching must be a characteristic of teacher training. Delpit contends that a transformation of attitudes and beliefs by teachers and the willingness to have those attitudes and beliefs challenged is necessary to serve the best interest of all students and classrooms throughout the country. Teachers reported that their participation in the project forced them to exit their comfort zones and challenged their attitudes and perceptions. While it was uncomfortable for most, the participants agreed it was in the best interest of the students to engage in classroom practices that embodied culturally responsive teaching. They reported that the advisory program did not incite feelings of insecurity in their teaching; rather, it gave them a chance to connect with students and their families in a non- threatening forum.

One of the most important aspects of culturally responsive classrooms is the teachers' belief that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can learn. Volunteer teachers reported that they believed every student had the potential to learn. In a study conducted by Cruickshank (1990), effective teachers are identified by their character traits, what they know, what they teach, how they teach, what they expect from their students and how their students react to them when they are managing the classroom. Although teachers did not have significant teaching experience, they believed that participation in the project helped to yield effective results in their teaching and learning.

### *Parent Involvement*

In his study, James Coleman (1966) established that the “social composition” of the student body is related to achievement. He believed successful parent teacher collaborations exist in schools where families feel connected and share social capital with the school. According to Coleman social capital is a significant contributor to a child’s education. Coleman suggested that social capital as “social-structural resources” allowed individuals to gain access to otherwise unavailable resources through cooperative action in pursuit of goals (Coleman, 1990, p.302). In his study, students in Catholic and independent schools achieved at a higher level not only because of greater curricular demands but through the relationship that existed between the school and the parents.

At Urban Hope, the entire student body is comprised of low-income and minority students. The school struggled with similar demographic challenges to other urban schools; no middle class peers and inexperienced teachers. However, findings in this study correspond with Coleman’s research. According to participants, the advisory program gave parents a direct link to the school which created a form of social capital. The participants reported that the two initiatives created an opportunity for parents and teachers to develop a relationship that would help with the educational development and academic achievement of the students. Social capital is an important concept because it creates a greater level of comfort and consistency between home and school and the likelihood of student success.

In her research, Joyce Epstein (2001) suggested that there was consistent evidence that low-income families are less likely to be involved in their children’s education because of language barriers, socio-economic status, educational background and a lack

of connection to the school. While there are a variety of reasons why urban parents do not participate in their children's education, the most prevalent reason is the cultural and communication differences between teachers and parents. The findings in this study supported Epstein's research. The majority of the participants reported that they were reluctant to communicate with parents because it was challenging.

According to Epstein (2001), teachers in urban settings often lack knowledge and skills the ethnicities and cultures of the children they teach, a deficit which impairs their capacity to form respectful, authentic relationships with parents. The participants agreed that they lacked the knowledge and skills to effectively communicate with parents. The findings in the study supported Epstein's research. Despite the barriers, volunteer teachers reported that their work with Families First helped them to gain the skills they needed in order to interact with the parents.

As they continued their participation in the project, volunteer teachers began to realize that parents wanted to be more involved but they did not know how to. In her research Epstein conveyed that parents wanted to have information about how they could best support their children. The advisory program gave parents and teachers a vehicle to share information with each other. According to participants, the advisory program was helpful to parents because advisors worked with parents to advocate for their children. A study by Epstein (2001) contends that students are best served when the home and school are working together.

In her research, Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey (1997) stressed the need for parents to have a solid understanding of their role in their children's educational development. At Urban Hope, the role of the parents was evolving. According to participants, they did not

reach out to parents despite the school's effort to improve parental involvement. In a survey conducted during the study, the Master Teacher also stated that she rarely communicated with parents. This was a key point made during a discussion with Families First. The volunteer teachers received mixed messages about the school's commitment to improving parent involvement. Neither the teachers nor the parents had clearly defined roles in the project in regards to collaboration. Hoover-Dempsey's research (1997) highlighted the importance of parents understanding their role in their child's education as critical to student success.

Hoover-Dempsey also suggested that schools need to make parents feel welcomed. While the volunteer teachers understood the significance of establishing positive relationships with parents, they reported that they were uncertain of their ability to do so. As a result, they opted not to make an effort. Conversely, this may have created a wedge between teachers and parents. Volunteer teachers reported that their participation in the project helped them to take a more active role in making parents feel more welcomed at the school. According to participants, the advisory program helped them to create authentic ways to connect with parents at the school and made parents feel welcomed. Further, the participants reported that their work with Families First helped them to recognize that their attitudes and beliefs played a significant role in the success or failure of establishing partnerships with parents. In a post-intervention interview, participants conveyed that they appreciated the chance to engage in challenging and on-going dialogue with each other and parents.

These findings are supported by the research of Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot. Lightfoot (2001) suggested that schools that address racial, cultural and socio-economic

differences between parents and teachers are more likely to establish effective parent teacher partnerships. The study participants attributed the work with Families First and participation in the advisory program as meaningful and necessary. The findings by and large were what one might have expected from the research cited in chapter two.

### *Limitations of the Study*

There were several limitations to this study. To begin, the sample size is a limitation.

Five volunteer teachers, a master teacher and the parent coordinator comprised the sample. The size of the group makes it impossible to generalize the findings.

“Generalizability refers to the extent to which the research findings can be credibly applied to a wider setting than the research setting” (Bickman & Rog, 1998. p.34).

The researcher in this case study was an administrator at the school which could lead to researcher bias. The researcher’s role included the development of the two parent initiatives with support from the Principal at Urban Hope. Merriam (1998) contends that “in qualitative research where the researcher is responsible for collecting and interpreting data, subjectivity and interaction are assumed” (p. 103). The researcher’s commitment to the success of the program may lead to biased interpretations of the data since there was a great deal at stake. The researcher was herself an instrument of data collection which could lead to subjectivity in interpreting and reporting the data. It was important that the researcher understand the impact she had on the relationships with the participants.

Bickman and Rog (1998) warned “your relationships with the people in your study can be complex and changeable, and these relationships will necessarily affect you as the research instrument, as well as have implications for other components of your research design” (p.86).

Participant bias also presents a limitation. Participants may not be completely forthcoming with the researcher because they may have feared repercussions if they did not provide the researcher with the feedback the researcher may have wanted to hear. There is potential for participants to provide inauthentic information to the researcher. Since the participants were aware of the impact of their participation in the study, they may have behaved in ways that were not genuine. Merriam (1998) refers to this as the “Hawthorn effect” (1998). The participants may not be honest in their reflections. In an effort to reduce participant bias, the researcher engaged in conversations with participants encouraging them to be honest and assuring them their honesty would not jeopardize their employment at the school. The researcher implemented various data sources to provide for triangulation of the findings to further reduce potential bias.

The researcher used triangulation of data sources and colleague review of data analysis and interpretations as a means to mitigate potential bias. Participation in the study was also voluntary. Participants could withdraw from the study at any given time. In addition, the researcher guaranteed participant anonymity.

The duration of the study was also a limitation. The study was conducted in a single academic year. The primary focus of the study was to assess the impact of two initiatives on volunteer teacher attitudes and beliefs about their relationship with parents and whether they perceived the parental role significant to the educational development of their children. One year does not allow for enough time to effectively measure the permanence of any changes in teachers’ perceptions.

The topics of discussion of race, class and culture are highly sensitive to many. The study may have provoked discomfort for teachers. The participants were encouraged

to share honestly with their peers and the researcher. Three of the study participants and the researcher were people of color. This may have infringed upon authentic exchanges between the participants and the researcher. Merriam (1998) cites when participants know they are being observed they tend to behave in socially acceptable ways and present themselves in a favorable manner (p. 103). Participants may have chosen to be politically correct instead of authentic.

Another limitation of the study was the designing of data gathering instruments. The surveys, interview protocols, and journals were created by the researcher. This could result in a threat to internal and external validity of the instruments. In an effort to diminish these threats, the researcher sought approval from the researcher's colleagues and dissertation chair. Further, the researcher used triangulation, member checks, peer examination and clarification of researchers' biases to reduce bias. According to Merriam (1998), these four strategies used in data collection, data analysis and interpretation were used to enhance validity. Merriam contends the strategies will help mitigate study limitations and potential bias.

#### *Implications for Practice and Policy and Further Research*

As a result of the findings in the study, the researcher offers various suggestions for teachers and school leaders who are seeking to effectively establish relationships between volunteer teachers and urban parents. The researcher suggests implications for practice and policy through the following themes, volunteer teacher model, teacher preparation and parent involvement.



### *Volunteer Teacher Model*

At Urban Hope, volunteerism is central to the school's mission. Every year the administration hires a new group of volunteer teachers. The volunteer teachers are typically recent college graduates who are seeking an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. Volunteers agree to make a two year commitment to the school in exchange for room, board and the opportunity to learn about teaching. While they bring exceptional enthusiasm and dedication to the school, their time at the school is limited which can be challenging for the relationships they build with students, parents and colleagues as well as the curriculum. Often the volunteer teachers are expected to not only teach but also add to the curriculum of the classes they teach. Their learning curve is tremendously steep, often arriving at the school with no formalized teacher preparation. They are expected to teach a minimum of two classes on their own. Based on the study's findings, the researcher recommends Urban Hope restructure the volunteer teacher model in order to ensure they receive sufficient support and training.

### *Restructure Volunteer Model*

Restructuring the volunteer teacher model into a triad for learning involves placing a first year and a second year volunteer teacher in the classroom with a Master Teacher. This will provide ongoing functional opportunities for growth and development by increasing interaction between volunteer teachers and the Master Educator. The model will help volunteer teachers develop a more personal understanding of the learners and promote a deeper understanding of the curriculum. It will also provide greater opportunities to facilitate discussions about teaching and learning between volunteers and master teachers. The researcher recommends hiring an additional master teacher.

The role of the Master Teacher will become critical to the development of volunteer teachers. Volunteer teachers reported in the study that they needed more support from the Master Teacher. Trained Master Teachers will provide feedback to teachers and model effective classroom practices frequently by co-teaching with volunteer teachers. This will alleviate the pressure volunteer teachers reported they experienced when they were thrust into classrooms as the lead teacher.

The Triad model is one of many possible solutions that could support recent college graduates, who have no formal teacher preparation, become effective classroom teachers while learning about and adjusting to the school's culture. The researcher recommends the Master Teachers will assume responsibility of facilitating the learning of volunteer teachers. They will have the necessary training to enable them to do so. The data clearly indicated that volunteer teachers need a structure that will help them expand their knowledge of teaching and also learn more about their students and their learning over time. A well defined structure not only supports the volunteer teacher but also assures continuity in teaching and advancing the curriculum in a cohesive fashion.

In her research on Teach for America, Darling-Hammond (1990) criticizes the lack of cohesion in the curriculum of poorly-run university teaching programs. Restructuring the volunteer model will also enhance the collaboration among teachers to discuss, review, plan and strategize what is to be taught. As a result of this study, it is evident experience and training is necessary for volunteer teachers to become effective in the classroom. The findings suggested volunteer teachers can be an integral part of the Urban Hope community. However, in order for teachers to become more effective and confident in their teaching ability, they need to feel secure in their role as volunteer

teachers. By restructuring the volunteer teacher model, they will receive mentoring and supervision which are key factors in supporting new teachers. They will also team teach with an experienced educator. This will help make effective use of the volunteers and maintain the school's commitment to providing an excellent education to its students.

### *Hiring & Staffing*

Urban Hope recognizes the effects the transient model has on the curriculum and the relationships between teachers and students. The school hires new volunteer teachers every year. Although the volunteer teacher terms are staggered, it is difficult to achieve continuity in the curriculum and staff. By the time teachers have become acclimated to the school, their tenure is up. The researcher recommends for the administration to pay attention to such factors such as: stability or consistency of staff, reviewing the recruiting process, and making a concerted effort to hire a culturally sensitive and diverse staff. According to the findings in the study, volunteer teachers expressed the advantage of having a diverse staff. They expressed that their work with Families First would not have been as effective with a homogenous group. In addition, it is important for the students and their families to recognize the school's commitment to diversity.

The researcher recommends that administrators begin their recruiting process earlier in the season to provide enough time for teachers to receive sufficient teacher training and time to learn about the school's culture prior to the arrival of the students. The recruitment process should include an effort to hire teachers who are culturally sensitive and understand the challenges Urban Hope students face. The findings in the study suggested teacher attitudes and perceptions have a profound impact on their ability to establish authentic relationships with parents. Therefore, it is recommended that they

receive adequate teacher training that includes an emphasis on cultural sensitivity and culturally responsive teaching. The researcher recommends continuing the collaboration with Families First.

The study participants reported the two-week teacher induction program was helpful but volunteer teachers were overwhelmed and tired at the end of the teacher induction period. Currently, the school year begins immediately following the two-week training. If administrators offer the induction program earlier in the summer and extend the training for a longer period of time, teachers will begin the school year with sufficient information and skills to feel more confident in their teaching ability. It is recommended that the Principal and Master Teachers will clarify the roles and expectations of volunteer teachers. This will help volunteer teachers have a better understanding of their roles as volunteer teachers. The researcher also recommends extending volunteer teacher terms for an additional year to those who are interested and have been successful practitioners. Third year volunteers will be compensated with additional salary increase.

- The recommendations would promote greater collaboration and ensure:
- Stability
- Affinity for the tasks at hand
- Sense of commitment to the community
- Knowledge of curriculum
- Experience in facilitating learning at Urban Hope
- Connection with learners
- Camaraderie with colleagues

The researcher provides a summary of practice and policy implications for the volunteer teaching model listed below.

*Practice:*

- Restructure Volunteer Teacher Model
- Clearly define roles for Master and volunteer teachers
- Provide volunteer teachers' opportunities for collaborations and mentoring

*Policy:*

- Offer a third year option for qualified volunteer teachers
- Adopt hiring practices earlier to ensure candidate is the “right fit”
- Set schedule for hiring process

### ***Teacher Preparation***

Urban Hope’s volunteer teacher model has been an integral part of the school’s culture since its inception. The volunteer teachers are considered the second set of learners. In order to maximize volunteer teacher learning, the researcher makes several recommendations in regards to teacher preparation.

### *Teacher Preparation*

As previously stated, volunteer teachers at Urban Hope arrive at the school with little or no teacher training. In her research, Darling-Hammond (2002) contends that there is a relationship between teacher education and teacher effectiveness. According to Darling-Hammond, the more the teacher knows, the higher the students’ performance. Teacher preparation is critical to student success. Volunteer teachers at Urban Hope have tremendous pressure to academically prepare the students for entrance into challenging high schools. If they are not prepared themselves, they will not be able to meet the school’s expectations. Study participants expressed concern about their teacher preparation. It was one of the barriers that prevented them from connecting with parents.

Volunteer teachers arrive at the school in late August for a two-week intensive teacher induction program. The program offers a crash course “introduction to teaching 101” to volunteers for ten hours per day for ten school days. While the induction covers significant material, volunteer teachers are usually overwhelmed and exhausted at the end of the two weeks, which also is the beginning of the school year. The researcher

recommends collaborating with a local college or university education program that will offer classes to volunteer teachers at the beginning of the summer and perhaps into the first semesters of their teaching. The extended induction program will give volunteer teachers sufficient time to get better acquainted with each other, become more familiar with the schools' culture, work collaboratively with Master Teachers on pedagogy, and curriculum. Further, Urban Hope will make every attempt to hire volunteer teachers whose major was Education.

The induction will be viewed as a continuum as opposed to a “summertime learn to teach route”. Volunteer teachers expressed a desire to have more time to discuss teaching and learning. Darling Hammond suggested those who go through summertime “learn to teach” routes have a much higher rate for leaving the profession than those who have high quality training. In her research she contends people who are underprepared are more likely to become discouraged. The induction program would attempt to develop initial elements of a professional learning community. Volunteer teachers will begin to gain the skills and confidence they need to become effective teachers.

As a result of the study's findings and consistent with research of successful urban schools the researcher highly recommends integrating on-going cross-cultural and cross racial training for volunteer teachers as well as the administrators. The demographics at Urban Hope are an accurate reflection of the multicultural society in which we live. There are racial, ethnic, and socio-economic differences between volunteer teachers and the students and their families. While this is a benefit in any environment, it also can be a challenge. The conversations about race, class and culture must continue.

The researcher recommends continuing the work with Families First and maintaining the advisory program especially given the nature of the transient volunteer teaching population. Both initiatives will provide a structure for enhancing cross-cultural and cross-racial relationships between teachers, students and parents. The researcher provides a summary of practice and policy implications for teacher preparation listed below.

*Practice:*

- Expand teacher induction program
- Collaborate with local colleges and universities for professional development
- Establish Professional Learning Communities
- Continue working with Families First
- Integrate Culturally Responsive Teaching in teacher preparation

*Policy:*

- Require volunteer teachers to successfully complete training program in summer as a prerequisite to begin teaching in September
- Establish policies about effective communication with parents (eg. Collaborations, 24-hour return phone call or e-mail policies with parents)
- Multicultural Curriculum Assessments (periodic review of curriculum and materials)

***Parent Involvement***

Urban Hope is committed to improving parental involvement. Volunteer teachers and administrators recognize the significance of parental involvement and the role parents play in the educational journey of their children. Consequently, the school is committed to creating an environment where parents are valued, respected and feel welcomed at the school. Parents are the central contributors to a child's education. The key to successful parental involvement programs is acknowledging all parents have hopes and goals for their children and encouraging them to use their voice.

The researcher recommends volunteer teachers and administrators at Urban Hope continue to engage in conversations about the importance of parental involvement. The researcher recommends putting structures in place to support the initiatives such as scheduling time during the days and evenings for students and parents. Parent involvement should be intricately woven into the fabric of the school by involving parents in homework, school events and joining forces with teachers on the Parent Teacher Council. The researcher provides a summary of practice and policy implications for parent involvement listed below.

*Practice:*

- Maintain advisory program
- Clearly articulate parental involvement as a value at Urban Hope
- Clearly define roles and expectations of teachers and parents
- Establish opportunities for parents and teachers to connect informally
- Provide training for teachers and parents to maximize parental involvement
- Offer flexibility when scheduling parent meetings and gatherings

*Policy:*

- Include parent involvement as part of teacher evaluation
- Monitor parent involvement credit and hold parents accountable for completion
- Implement communication policies with parents

In review of the four themes, the researcher's recommendations for practice and policies directly support the goal of the project. It can be assumed these recommendations will lead to the development of even more effective relationships between volunteer teachers and urban parents.

*Further Research*

Since the study focused solely on the volunteer teachers experience at Urban Hope, it was difficult to assess whether the program was successful without having the parents' perspective. Although volunteer teachers stated their participation in the study



improved their relationships with parents, it would be interesting to note whether parents shared the same sentiment.

The overarching goal of the project was to maximize student learning by establishing a successful partnership between home and school. Therefore, it would be helpful to school administrators to study the impact the partnership had on student learning over a longer period of time. The study did not allow enough time to explore student and parent attitudes and perceptions with regards to student learning. Future research on the academic success of students at Urban Hope and beyond would help measure the effects of the partnership. Future research would also focus on the impact of student and parental attitudes and perceptions. It is challenging to measure perceptions and attitudes however; future research could include collecting quantitative data such as student report cards, admission into challenging high schools and colleges, and increased parental participation at Urban Hope and secondary schools to help measure the long term success of the program.

Another implication for future research would be a study of the school's culture. Although the researcher provided a description of the school's culture, it would be interesting to compare Urban Hope to other schools with similar demographics. Urban Hope is a part of a consortium of schools that serve a similar student population and share similar missions. Further research on school culture at these schools would be helpful in making decisions that directly impact student learning. This would expand the sample selection and provide the researcher with the ability to provide more accurate generalizations. Future research could provide Urban Hope and other schools useful information to establish effective partnerships programs between parents and teachers.

### *Leadership Lessons*

The two program initiatives were initiated with the explicit goal of getting volunteer teachers and urban parents to work together. As the leader of this project and study, the researcher discovered significant lessons about her leadership journey. The leader learned that she too had preconceived attitudes and perceptions about the volunteer teachers that could have interfered with the overarching goal of the project; to establish authentic relationships between volunteer teachers and urban parents.

Initially the leader questioned whether the volunteer teachers were fully committed to the success of the students. When the leader assumed responsibility of initiating this project, the leader expected the volunteer teachers to suffer from the “missionary complex”. The leader expected the volunteer teachers to act in a manner that would suggest that they were at Urban Hope to “save the poor little children of color”. Although the leader was certain the participants had great intentions, she questioned the validity of their motives. The leader quickly discovered the volunteer teachers were extremely committed to the students and their families and recognized the potential impact her bias could have had on establishing authentic relationships with volunteer teachers. The leader became more reflective of her prejudices and listened more attentively to the participants during discussions.

The researcher learned to exercise patience with a group of young but enthusiastic volunteers. While they were fully committed to the school’s mission, they had not received significant diversity training prior to their arrival at Urban Hope. The researcher recognized that their learning curve was steep while the administrators who also participated in the study had received diversity training throughout their life experiences.

At first the researcher viewed this generational gap as a challenge but soon learned their differences enriched their conversations. The researcher was uncertain if the administrators' participation in the project was effective because they had a different role at the school. Their participation proved to be quite valuable in the study. They not only provided a different perspective but also an opportunity to strengthen the relationship between volunteer teachers and administrators.

The researcher learned that diversity training was a group effort and not solely based on her experiences alone. It was revealing to the researcher that the youth and inexperience of the volunteer teachers was also a great tool for diversity training. The researcher found that was a humbling but necessary lesson that she learned. She recognized the very criticism that she had of the volunteer teachers "to fix the problem at Urban Hope" was similar to her idea to "fix the teachers through the two initiatives." Instead the initiatives proved to be mutually beneficial to both the study participants and the leader.

In Robert Starratt's book, *Ethical Leadership* (2004), he defines effective leaders as present, authentic and responsive. Ethical leadership requires leaders to be morally committed to high quality learning for all students. Responsibility, authenticity, and presence are virtues critical to the success of educational leaders. These virtues allow the leader to embody a moral fiber that is intricately woven into all aspects of the school community. The ethical leader realizes his or her role as human, educator, administrator and citizen. When the leader has a moral compass he or she is able to accept responsibility, build authentic relationships with all stakeholders and understand the importance to people and situations. The virtues help educational leaders develop

personal and professional breath, depth and knowledge in their role and roles of others in providing a high quality school community for all students. It is their moral responsibility.

The leader realized her moral responsibility guided all of the decisions she made during the project and study. It was important for the leader to have core values that were shared openly and honestly with the participants. Even during difficult times during the study, such as emotional meltdowns with study participants, the leader learned to keep in mind their emotional state but also honor the primary purpose of their participation in the project and study. As such, this created an authentic relationship between the leader and the participants and it also encouraged them to take risks in engaging in challenging dialogues. These dialogues would eventually help volunteer teachers to establish relationships with each other, parents and students. Thus providing an atmosphere where all constituents would have a greater understanding of their roles and responsibilities at the school.

The leader was always taught, “to thine ownself be true” which was a motto she learned to model for the participants. Instead of becoming disappointed in the young teachers when they gave into “peer pressure” during several conversations, the leader realized the importance of exposing her vulnerabilities. Authenticity is a virtue that connects oneself to a wider whole (Starratt, 2004). This gave the participants permission to openly express their insecurities. Previously, the leader may have become secretly frustrated that the participants refrained from exposing themselves completely based on her cultural norms and values. However, the leader learned to meet the volunteer teachers where they were in terms of their cultural, racial and socio-economical

backgrounds. Thus, she was able to completely expose herself while giving others permission to do the same.

The leader also believed her presence throughout the study provided credibility with the participants but also demonstrated her commitment to them and the entire school community. Throughout the study, participants took advantage of engaging in conversations with the leader in her office and during other random times during the year. The leader recognized the importance of being able to clearly articulate to the participants the value of their role in the project and study as well as the positive effects that the program would have on the school community. The leader learned the value in being immersed in the program alongside the participants. Presence as a virtue proved to be a valuable lesson for the leader. The researcher learned the success of this project depended upon being completely present. Next year, the leader will play a significant role as a participant from start to finish. The participants expressed that they were grateful to the leader for working collaboratively with them.

The leader recognized the importance of home school relationships. According to Starratt, educational leaders must exercise empathy and compassion for all of the constituents. In doing so, the leader learned that in order to promote the school's mission, the leader had to be responsible for the entire school. The leader learned to be responsible for getting the participants involved on behalf of the greater good. The leader learned to take responsibility to view the volunteer teachers' participation in the project as a collective, not individualized, effort. The leader learned the importance of being explicit with the stakeholders about the benefits of embarking on a challenging project. At times leaders can be consumed when they are faced with obstacles. At the conclusion

of the study, the leader had time to reflect on the lessons learned. The most valuable lesson learned in this journey was the importance of identifying the leaders' core values. The leader learned that in order to affect change, it is imperative to embody the three virtues of ethical leadership.

### Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine volunteer teacher attitudes and perceptions and the impact the parent involvement project had on establishing a partnership with urban parents. The findings of the study are supported by previous research. Schools can effectively partner with parents so long as the commitment is clearly expressed and the efforts include training for both teachers and parents.

In conclusion, the study provides hope to educators working in schools similar to Urban Hope. In spite of potential barriers that can prevent teachers and parents from collaborating, schools can effectively engage teachers to take ownership in initiating a relationship that would benefit teachers, parents and students. According to Jim Cummins (2001), current attempts at reform fail to boost any achievement in any significant way for the same reasons that previous generations of reform were ineffective; that empirical data that challenges the current mindset are ignored and that there is a deep antipathy to acknowledging that schools tend to reflect the structure of the society and that these power relations are directly relevant to educational outcomes (Cummins, 2001).

It is clear that in spite of education reform, the schools that are the most effective understand that establishing human relationships are critical to student success.

APPENDIX A

Pre- and Post-Intervention Teacher Survey

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Volunteer Teacher (please circle) Year 1 Year 2

The goal of the Urban Hope School is to provide teachers with the tools necessary to forge authentic relationships with parents. We believe students, parents and teachers benefit greatly from positive parent-teacher relationships. We recognize the importance of providing professional development to teachers in order to help us reach our goal. Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey below. Your responses will be strictly confidential. The information will also help us better serve you.

Volunteer Teacher Survey – Please circle the answer that best indicates your response.

1. My attitudes and perceptions about parents affect the relationship I have with them.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. Parents want to be involved in their child’s education.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. I am comfortable working with parents.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. I communicate with parents regularly.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. The curriculum encourages parent-teacher collaboration.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. I work collaboratively with other teachers at my school.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. I am receptive to feedback.

- |                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
- 8. I have worked with students of diverse linguistic, cultural, and economic backgrounds.**
- |                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
- 9. I am confident in my subject matter.**
- |                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
- 10. I am aware of the support my school has to offer new teachers.**
- |                |       |          |                   |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|



## **APPENDIX B**

### **Volunteer Teacher Interview Questions**

1. We have been discussing the diverse tapestry at the Urban Hope School. We agree everyone adds cultural value to the school. Please describe how you identify yourself racially, ethnically and socially?
2. How do you interact with people from diverse cultures?
3. Volunteerism is an integral part of the school. Please share your interest in volunteerism.
4. Many organizations have volunteer opportunities. Please share how you made your decision to volunteer at the Urban Hope School?
5. Urban Hope is located in the heart of the inner city where crime is rampant. Although we have been in the building for almost ten years without any incidents, did you have any reservations before coming on board? If so, please describe.
6. Teaching can be both rewarding and challenging. Please describe three rewarding classroom experiences and three challenging classroom experiences. Why were they rewarding? Why were they challenging?
7. We discussed the importance in creating more opportunities for teachers and parents to work more collaboratively. Please describe how this could help or harm your teaching.
8. What kind of support do you need to be successful in your role as a volunteer teacher?
9. Do you believe parent involvement is important?
10. In what ways do you involve parents in your classroom?

## APPENDIX C

### Acceptable Use Policy for Teachers

The Urban Hope School Informed Consent  
All participants will be given this consent form.

Dear Faculty and Parents,

You are invited to participate in a research study that is part of my dissertation at Boston College. The goal of the project is to encourage teachers and parents to work collaboratively through three initiatives the school is implementing. Those initiatives include forming a parent-teacher council, developing an advisory program and providing teacher training with Families First, a non-profit organization that helps organizations improve relationships with parents and teachers. The purpose of the study is to assess whether these initiatives have positively impacted teacher attitudes and perceptions of parents thereby enhancing the relationship between the two groups.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete a confidential survey. You will also be involved in focus groups, be willing to be observed in the classroom and in meetings. As the primary researcher, you will work closely with me in addition to the Parent Coordinator and Families First. The information you share over the course of one school year will be collected for research purposes and will be held confidentially and anonymously.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Should you choose to participate, the information and feedback you provide will help us better serve our volunteer teachers by improving the teacher training program, preparing teachers to become more culturally sensitive and helping teachers communicate more effectively with parents.

As you know, improving relationships between the school and families is part of our Strategic Plan. By participating in this voluntary study, you will help us better serve our students and their families. Your participation will allow teachers and parents an opportunity to forge authentic relationships which will benefit the school, parents and students. In addition, your participation will help us make necessary changes to our teacher training program. Since the study is voluntary, you may withdraw from the study at any time without further inquiry.

If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at [itucker@mcaec.org](mailto:itucker@mcaec.org) or feel free to call me at (617) 427-1177 x101.

By reading the information above, I understand the conditions of this study. I understand I will be audio taped and that I have the right to review transcriptions for accuracy. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.

Study Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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