

DISSERTATION

CORRELATES OF, AND INTERVENTION EFFECTS ON,
PARENT-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

Submitted by
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Colorado State University
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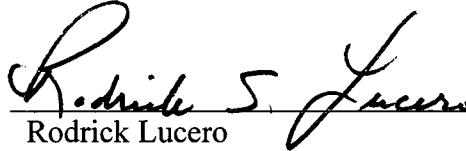
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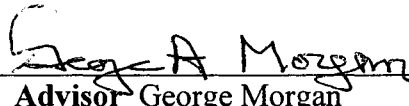
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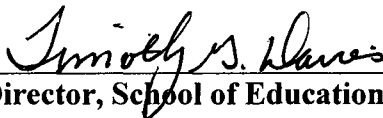
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION
CORRELATES OF, AND INTERVENTION EFFECTS ON,
PARENT-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

The purpose of this study was to examine parent-teacher relationships within the context of a community-based intervention program. This study used an experimental, repeated measures design to explore how similar parent and teacher role expectations were, how perceptions of school climate related to parent involvement, and whether participation in the program strengthened parent-teacher relationships and increased parent involvement in schools.

This study was part of a larger program evaluation of the effectiveness of the DARE to be You (DTBY) Bridge program. This innovative project provided community-based intervention to children along with their parents and their K-1 teachers through a series of workshops that focused on building relationships and improving the learning environment, with the goal of enhancing school readiness and adjustment.

Participants were recruited from kindergarten classes and first-grade classes in the Four Corners area of Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. The sample consisted of 347 parents, who were randomly assigned to a control or an experimental group, and 80 teachers.

At baseline, findings indicated that parents and teachers agreed that they should be supportive of one another's roles, that parents should have more responsibility than schools for teaching social skills, and that family and school should have equal responsibility for children's school success. Furthermore, teachers had significantly

higher expectations than parents for parent involvement, and parent involvement was significantly greater when parents perceived parent-teacher communication to be more frequent and the school climate to be welcoming. No significant intervention effects were found for parents on actual parent involvement, role expectations, or parent-teacher communication. However, parents from the intervention group, compared to controls, reported the school climate to be more welcoming a year after enrolling in the program.

Findings are discussed within the context of several frameworks of family school-relations. Teachers' tendency to want increased parental involvement in teaching social skills is discussed in terms of the Separate Spheres model and parents' perception of a welcoming school climate is discussed in terms of the importance of high-quality communication.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	1
<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Parent Involvement Promotes School Success.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Researcher's Perspective</i>	<i>4</i>
Chapter 2	7
<i>Literature Review.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Models of Parent-School Relationships</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Parent Involvement.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Teacher and Parent Expectations for Parent Involvement</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>School Climate and Parent Involvement.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>SES and ethnicity.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Qualities of a positive school climate.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Parent Involvement Interventions.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Hypotheses.....</i>	<i>25</i>
Chapter 3	28
<i>Method.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Participants</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>The Bridge Program.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Measures.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>School involvement</i>	<i>33</i>

<i>Expectations for involvement</i>	33
<i>School-family relations</i>	36
<i>Procedure</i>	37
<i>Quantitative data</i>	38
<i>Qualitative data</i>	38
Chapter 4	42
<i>Results</i>	42
<i>Plan of Analysis</i>	42
<i>Parent and Teacher Expectations of Parent Involvement</i>	43
<i>Qualitative findings</i>	45
<i>Correlates of Parent-School Involvement</i>	46
<i>Qualitative findings</i>	48
<i>Intervention Effects on Family-School Relations</i>	49
<i>Qualitative findings</i>	50
Chapter 5	52
<i>Discussion</i>	52
<i>Parent v. Teacher Expectations for Parent Involvement</i>	52
<i>Correlates of Parent Involvement</i>	54
<i>Intervention Effects on Home-School Relations</i>	57
<i>Study Limitations</i>	61

<i>Future Research</i>	63
<i>Conclusion</i>	64
References	66

Chapter 1

Introduction

Research shows that partnerships between parents and schools are integral to the educational success of children (Christenson, Rounds, & Franklin, 1992), and parent involvement has been identified as one of the most important correlates of children's success (Henderson & Berla, 1994). It is clear that parent involvement is linked to positive educational outcomes for children, so one might assume that families and schools are natural allies. After all, children's development takes place within the contexts of both the family and the school, and both parents and teachers are concerned with children's best interests (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Scott-Jones, 1995). In the best of worlds, the environments of home and school would act in complementary ways that reinforce one another's roles in the education of children. However, such alliances are not always the case (Lightfoot, 1978; Scott-Jones, 1995). More often, parents and teachers perceive themselves to be in adversarial roles (Connors & Epstein, 1995; Lawson, 2003; Lightfoot, 1978).

In an ideal situation, home and school environments would play mutually reinforcing roles in the education of a child, but the major differences that do, in fact, exist between the home and the school environment can make it challenging for parents and teachers to work effectively together. Increasing the opportunities for linkages between the home and school is one way to address this problem (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993).

The purpose of this experimental, repeated measures study was to explore parent-teacher relationships within the context of a community-based intervention program. My

purpose was to ascertain how similar parent and teacher role expectations were, how perceptions of school climate related to parent involvement, and whether participation in the program strengthened parent-teacher relationships and increased parent involvement in schools.

Parent Involvement Promotes School Success

One of the most important transitions in the life of a child occurs at the beginning of formal schooling. At this time, children are faced with a new set of expectations for which their families may not have prepared them adequately (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). The success with which children negotiate the challenges of the school transition is due in part to the type of experiences that children have prior to entering school, which prepare some more than others to meet the new goals and expectations of kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Yet children's transition from the family, as the primary context of socialization, to the norms and skills required in school is more successful when there is collaboration and communication between the two settings (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). One ingredient in such family-school partnerships is parental involvement; research consistently validates that parent involvement affects children's educational achievement and success in school (de Carvalho, 2001; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark, & Peay, 2001; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005).

Partnerships between parents and schools are integral to the educational success of children (Christenson et al., 1992): Parent involvement is one of the most consistent predictors of children's school success (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Regardless of parent income or education, students at all grade levels do better in their academic work – and

have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations, and other positive behaviors – if they have parents who are involved in their education (Connors & Epstein, 1995). As well, parent involvement is consistently correlated with academic success as measured by higher grades, higher test scores, and improved long-term academic achievement (Christenson et al.).

For example, in prekindergarten and Head Start programs, higher levels of parent involvement are associated with greater mastery of early basic school skills such as early math and verbal skills as measured by teachers' progress reports for children (Marcon, 1999). Maternal school involvement predicts cognitive competence for kindergartners as measured by compliance to teachers' instructions and memory for those instructions (Culp, Hubbs-Tait, Culp, & Starost, 2000). In addition, children with involved parents exhibit better attitudes toward school (Christenson et al., 1992), and kindergarten children with involved parents also exhibit greater general academic motivation (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). Success indicators linked to parent involvement include student grades and achievement test scores, lower rates of grade retention, and lower rates of dropping out (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005).

Family involvement is also associated with math achievement and predicts higher scores on standardized math tests (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). For example, when parents completed parent-child interactive math homework with their children, there was an increase in the number of children attaining math proficiency from one year to the next (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Furthermore, kindergartners with involved parents also have

higher academic functioning, with greater achievement in both math and reading, than kindergarteners with less involved parents (McWayne et al.).

In addition to achievement, parent involvement is directly related to better school attendance (Christenson et al., 1992). Effective communication patterns between school and family, as exhibited by two-way communication practices, has a beneficial effect on daily student attendance and decreases the rate of chronic absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004).

Higher levels of parent involvement in prekindergarten and Head Start programs also are associated with stronger teacher-reported social skills (Marcon, 1999). Children who exhibited high social skills (e.g., self-control, cooperation, prosocial engagement) had parents who provided them with enriched home environments that reinforced what the children were learning at school and placed emphasis on the value of school in general (McWayne et al., 2004). This supportive home environment was found to be the strongest predictor of high social skills (McWayne et al.). Given that parent involvement is essential to children's success in early elementary school, early childhood educators would benefit from a better understanding of what contributes to greater parent involvement. In the literature review that follows, I will focus on three factors that are believed to foster or hinder parent involvement: role expectations, attitudes, and school climate. These factors will be discussed in the context of several frameworks of family-school relations.

Researcher's Perspective

This study of parent-teacher relationships grew out of the desire to explore how opportunities for relationship-building between parents and teachers outside of the

traditional school setting might be beneficial for both parents and teachers. As both a parent and a former early childhood educator, I have had experiences on both sides of the aisle.

As an educator, I felt the pull of parents who wanted special attention paid to their child, even as I sought increased involvement from parents whose children would benefit from additional assistance. Why is it that they are the parents who don't come to parent-teacher conferences? As a teacher, I know how important it is to keep parents informed of their children's progress and of the opportunities to participate in the life of the classroom. I also know how challenging it is to inform parents when things are not going well for their child. I am well aware of both the benefits and the challenges of parent-teacher relationships from first-hand experience.

As a parent, I struggle with the demands of involvement that encroach upon my daily life. Although I enjoy the opportunities to take part in school activities, I find myself frustrated by the amount of assistance that is expected of me when it comes to my children's homework. I especially find this issue a challenge in light of my knowledge of the benefits of parental involvement in home-based activities. As I strive for the balance between holding my children accountable and helping them accomplish, I often wonder if I am doing too little or too much. When the phone rings and it is a teacher, my heart dips a little with anticipation. My first thought is always that something is wrong.

From 2003 to 2005, I served as the Associate Evaluator for the DARE to be You (DTBY) Bridge Project in Southern Colorado. This innovative project provided community-based intervention to families and K-2 teachers. The purpose of the DARE to be You (DTBY) Bridge program, which is described in more detail in chapter 3, was to

offer a series of community-based workshops that were completed by children, parents, and teachers that focused on building relationships and improving the learning environment, with the goal of enhancing positive child outcomes. As the Associate Evaluator, I assisted in the design and evaluation of program theory, provided research-based information to DTBY site staff, and assisted with the focus group interviews that assessed the program.

This study is an extension of the work I completed between 2003 and 2005, and affords me the opportunity to look at parent-teacher relationships and explore the benefits and challenges of these relationships in neutral territory: that is, within the context of a community-service program that is not in the home and not in the school, but has the potential to improve parent-teacher relationships in both the home and the school.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Models of Parent-School Relationships

It is now well accepted that partnerships between families and schools play an important role in ensuring successful child outcomes (Connors & Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Historically, this was not always the case. During the past 100 years, three broad theoretical perspectives have reflected an understanding about school and family connections (Connors & Epstein, 1995).

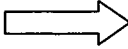
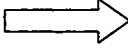
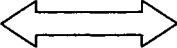
The first perspective can be labeled *Separate Influences*. The psychological and sociological literatures of the early twentieth century argued for keeping parents' roles and teachers' roles separate, with the family focusing on their child's social development and the teachers focusing on the child's education. The second perspective can be labeled *Embedded Influences* and is reflected in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework that recognizes the multiple and interdependent influences of the multiple contexts in which children develop. For example, Bronfenbrenner's model views children's development as being embedded within both the *microsystem* and the *macrosystem*. As the twentieth century came to a close, a social-organizational perspective of *Overlapping Spheres of Influence* became more predominant. This perspective expands upon Bronfenbrenner's model, and serves as a means by which school and family relations can be more fully understood and studied. In this perspective, the child is viewed as the reason for home and school partnerships, and it is acknowledged that external forces affect the shared responsibilities of families and schools (Connors & Epstein, 1995).

It is evident that schools' emphasis on family involvement has changed over the years from one that gave all responsibility for education to the teacher to one that recognizes that both parents and teachers have responsibilities to provide educational opportunities that benefit children. With this recognition comes the realization that families and schools need to work together to promote children's learning. In spite of this, parents are often excluded from actively participating in schools, with parent participation affected by not only the teacher's views of parents, but also ethnic, racial, and class issues (Lightfoot, 1978; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). It is clear that all families could use help to better support their children's learning (Connors & Epstein, 1995) and that teachers need help to better understand how to work with families (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Fully acknowledging that school-community cultures often leave families feeling like outsiders, Swap (1993) argued that understanding the various ways families are allowed to be involved is the first step towards making collaborations a reality. In order to better understand how family involvement fits into the concept of home-school partnerships, Swap delineated four models of home-school relationships that show how schools resist or encourage effective school-family partnerships. These approaches reflect the theoretical distinctions between separate and overlapping spheres of influence, and in many ways reflect the historical views of parent and teacher roles (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Four models of Home-School Relationships

<u>Swap (1993)</u>		<u>Historical Context</u>
<i>Protective</i>		<i>Separate Spheres</i>
<i>School-to-Home</i>		<i>Embedded Influences</i>
<i>Curriculum Enrichment</i>		<i>Embedded Influences</i>
<i>Partnership</i>		<i>Overlapping Spheres of Influence</i>

In the *Protective Model*, parents and teachers are kept separate from one another with the primary goal being to reduce conflict between the two. The assumption in this model is that parents willingly delegate their child's education to the school system, holding teachers accountable for their child's educational outcomes. In turn, teachers accept that responsibility and prefer that parents do not interfere in the education process. In this model, opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and bidirectional communication are discouraged.

In the *School-to-Home Transmission Model*, parents are enlisted to support the objectives of the school. It is understood that children's outcomes improve when school and home share common goals and perspectives, but it is the school that defines what these goals and perspectives should be. The role of the family is to make certain that the home environment emulates what the school deems desirable. Unfortunately, when schools endorse and enact traditional definitions of parent involvement, they inadvertently rely on stereotypes and prejudices that serve to marginalize families and their children (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Teachers may find it challenging to involve parents who's racial, cultural, and language backgrounds differ from their own,

because these parent's expectations for schooling may differ from the teachers' (Souto-Manning & Swick).

In the *Curriculum Enrichment Model*, the school's curriculum is enriched through contributions from the family. It is understood that continuity between the child's home life and school life is beneficial, so the curriculum is enhanced by the expertise of parents who strive to share the cultural background of the home environment. In this model, parents and teachers work together to provide opportunities to the children that reflect diverse cultures. Although this model encourages parent participation, the bulk of the power is retained by the school system.

In the *Partnership Model*, the primary objective is to help all children achieve success, so parents and teachers work together in collaboration through bidirectional communication to identify children's needs, parents' strengths, and school resources. In this model, joint problem-solving is desirable and welcomed, and participation is actively encouraged on the part of the school, the parents, and the larger community.

Challenges and barriers in the implementation of school-family partnerships can be seen in the heavy reliance on the school-to-home transmission model, and the distance, both social and physical, that still seems to exist between educators and families. For example, although schools espouse a goal of encouraging parent involvement, the actual policies and practices of the schools often are in direct opposition to this stated goal (Christenson, 2004). A case in point: A local school district has a policy that requires families to bring only store-bought, prepackaged foods to school functions. Although the stated purpose of this policy is to reduce the chances of food-borne illnesses, an unintended consequence is that families with ethnically diverse food

backgrounds are discouraged from preparing dishes that reflect who they are individually. In essence, the homogenized potluck does not reflect the diversity of the student population.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement can take many forms. Volunteering in the school, helping their children with homework, and reading to their children at home are all examples of ways in which parents can be involved, but it is important to note that parents can be involved with their children's education without collaborating with their children's school or teachers (Christenson, Rounds, & Franklin, 1992). Although it is clear that involvement in general is beneficial for children's outcomes, some argue that collaborations or partnerships between home and school lead to even greater benefits for all parties involved.

Epstein's (1997) model of family involvement presents a framework for viewing the differing ways parents can be involved in their children's education. *Volunteering*, where family members help with school-based events, and *decision making*, where family members are involved in collaborative planning with the school, pertain to involvement that is school-based. *Parenting*, which reflects the home environment in which the child lives, and *learning at home*, which reflects how the parents support homework and home-based learning, pertain to involvement that is home-based. *Communicating*, which reflects the practices that promote bidirectional communication about school programs and children's progress, pertains to both the home and the school. Finally, *collaborating with community*, which reflects the interface between school and

community, is where the identification and integration of community resources serves to strengthen school offerings and home environments.

The term *home-school collaboration* is related to parent involvement but is broader in scope and more inclusive in nature. Home-school collaboration is much more than a series of activities; it is an attitude that reflects the sharing of common goals and responsibilities between parents and teachers who view each other as equals (Christenson, Rounds, & Franklin, 1992). In home-school collaboration, both parents and teachers are invested in the collaborative process. This concept is closely related to Epstein's concept of *family-school partnership* (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Although Epstein prefers the term *partnership* to *involvement*, this choice of terminology was not supported by Lawson (2003) because the parents and teachers in his study had unequal power, and parental input into decision-making processes was limited. For this reason, Lawson posits that it may be "inappropriate and exploitative" to use the term *partnership* in situations where the parties involved come from differing cultural, ethnic, and/or economic backgrounds (p.126).

The various models discussed in this and the last section reflect the differing goals and operational definitions of family involvement. For example, if parental involvement is simply parental engagement in school-based and home-based activities, providing the child with a stimulating environment, and being aware of the child's progress (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowksi, & Apostleris, 1997), then teachers can support parent involvement by providing parents with written tips on how to support learning in the home, a practice that is widely used and emblematic of the school-to-home transmission model. If the purpose of parental involvement is to more broadly encourage linkages between home and school,

then it is beneficial for both parents and teachers to engage in family-school collaborations that address mutual concerns and challenges, which goes beyond sending information home with the child. This view can be more concisely labeled a *family-school partnership*, because families and schools come together to address issues and find solutions to problems.

Although school family, and community partnerships is a preferred concept over parent involvement because it acknowledges the shared responsibilities for student outcomes and the breadth and depth of efforts of all involved (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006), for the purposes of this study, the term *parent involvement* is used. Parent involvement can be assessed in terms of the amount of time parents spend in school-based activities, such as volunteering in the school building and attending parent-teacher conferences, and in terms of the amount of time parents spend in home-based activities such as helping their children with homework or reading to their children (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999). With this view comes the understanding that parents do not have to be physically present in the school to be actively involved in their child's education. For example, teachers in a school that effectively supported the academic success of at-risk minority students identified parent involvement as a key component of their program, and specifically stated that the types of parent activities that teachers perceived to be beneficial were home-based and included showing that they cared about their child's education, assisting with homework, facilitating access to books for reading, and providing their children with self-confidence (Brown & Medway, 2007).

It is clear that both parents and teachers expect parents to be involved in their children's education and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) described the motivating

factors that guide *why* parents do so. These factors include the ways in which parents define their role and responsibilities in their child's life, and their perceptions of invitations by the school, including the demands and opportunities that are extended to them. It is to these factors that I turn next.

Teacher and Parent Expectations for Parent Involvement

Although there is an implicit assumption in much of the literature that teachers and parents hold similar views about what constitutes parent involvement (Barge & Loges, 2003) in fact teachers and parents often have divergent beliefs about what it means to be involved (Lawson, 2003). A review by Epstein and Sanders (2000) confirmed that parents and teachers have little practical knowledge of each other's roles and perspectives related to children and schools. Few teachers have a clear working knowledge of the hopes that parents hold for their children and how those hopes can be translated into effective parent involvement activities. Few parents can clearly articulate what is going on in their children's schools and what the teachers expect of parents.

Even if parents and teachers agree in theory, they may differ in practice. They agree because ultimately both parent and teachers are concerned for the children's best interests, and they differ because teachers' school-based focus and parents' home-based focus can serve to put them in direct opposition (Lawson, 2003). For example, Graue (2005) studied preservice teachers and found that although they acknowledged that parents are experts on their own children, they also pointed out that, when compared to teachers, parents have only limited understanding of the dynamics of working with groups of children or being in the classroom. These preservice teachers also viewed parents as exhibiting inherent biases that preclude taking into account all of the differing

needs and issues that arise within the classroom setting. Parents are viewed as being only concerned with and advocating for the well-being of their own child, and are therefore viewed by preservice teachers as being more subjective in their approaches, perhaps demanding inequities in the classroom. Preservice teachers see themselves, on the other hand, as being more objective and theory driven.

Although teachers report that parent involvement is a key component of the success of their programs (Brown & Medway, 2007), teachers' responses in a series of ethnographic interviews revealed that they had expectations that parents would be involved in ways the school and the teacher deemed appropriate and desirable (Lawson, 2003). The same could be said of the parent participants, who responded in ways that specifically conformed to the demands and expectations of the school (e.g., participating in field trips, talking with teachers). A difference between the two groups arose in the source of their answers: Teachers responded in ways that put the school at the center, yet parents responded in ways that were based in the community (e.g., safety issues after school is out, the challenges of providing for their families).

In one study, teachers reported a lack of awareness about family practices at home for about one third of the parents (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasrow, & Fendrich, 1999). Although this may simply be indicative of poor parent-teacher communication, the authors argued that this lack of knowledge on the teachers' part points to the need for research that looks into both parent and teacher perspectives and the roles each should have in the context of parent-teacher collaboration. It is clear that teachers have high expectations for parent involvement, in part reflected in their concern that some parents lack the skills necessary to support their children's learning or simply do not participate

enough (O'Connor, 2001). The current study addresses this topic, exploring parent and teacher perspectives and roles in the context of parent involvement.

In spite of the many benefits of parent involvement, parents and teachers sometimes view one another in ways that contribute to tension and misunderstandings. For example, teachers who feel defensive about their roles, skills, and abilities might view parents with suspicion, because if the parent interferes in the teacher's realm, it is threatening to the teacher's insecure self-confidence (Lightfoot, 1978). Some teachers may themselves have grown up with parents who had very low levels of participation and teachers who were the sole decision makers; therefore, they may be unaware that a different model may be more beneficial in the context of parent involvement and child outcomes (Comer, 2001). This may explain why parents perceive that they are routinely excluded from actively participating in schools, with parent participation dictated by not only the teachers' views of parents, but also issues related to ethnicity and social class. Parents themselves have many diverse perspectives about how to best approach parent involvement. For example, some parents believe it is their responsibility to be very active in the school, but others believe that their presence in the school indicates disrespect or distrust for the teacher (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Furthermore, not only are teachers concerned when parents are not involved, they also resent when parents are overinvolved (Miretzky, 2002). Intrusive parents are so invested in their own child's education that it can siphon resources away from other children in the class or school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In contrast, absent parents often are the ones that the teacher may need to see, because their children are more likely to struggle academically or socially in school (Christenson, 2004).

Often, though, teachers do not ask the right questions about why parents aren't more involved. After all, most parents place a high value on being involved in their children's learning (Drummond & Stipek, 2004), and both teachers and parents acknowledge that partnerships between them are beneficial for children's outcomes (Lawson, 2003). Although there may be a need to address issues of the intrusive parent on an individual basis, there is a more pressing need for schools and teachers to look at their practices related to why parents are *not* involved. These practices can be labeled a part of the *school climate*, which I address in the next section.

School Climate and Parent Involvement

Although teachers and schools might not realistically be able to address all of the barriers to parent involvement, such as structural factors (e.g., work schedules) and attitudes, it is clear that school climate influences parent perceptions of involvement (Griffith, 1998; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). How parents feel about the school their children are in, whether positive or negative, affects how they become involved (Perkins-Gough, 2008). School environments that are warm and caring, invite parents to participate, and are receptive to their input are more likely to have high levels of parent participation. For example, parents who reported their child's school to be welcoming also reported higher levels of involvement (Griffith, 1998).

The factors that influence parent perceptions of the school climate include safety, trust, respect, fairness, high expectations, and an overall welcoming environment (Perkins-Gough, 2008). In order to assess how parents perceive their children's school, the Council of Urban Boards of Education surveyed 10,270 parents in 112 urban schools. The findings reveal that most parents (84%) said that they trusted the teachers at their

child's school (Perkins-Gough). Eighty-seven percent of parents also thought that teachers respected them, but only 77% believed that teachers respected their children. In general, parents responded that they felt comfortable and welcomed at their children's school with only 17% of parents responding that they do not feel welcome. Responses did vary by ethnicity, with 26% of Hispanic parents reporting they were much more likely to feel *unwelcome* compared to 8% of Whites and 8% of Asians. In addition, 16% of Blacks and 17% of Native Americans felt unwelcomed.

Although the culture of the school can promote beneficial outcomes, by the same token the culture of the school can also exacerbate any problems that exist (Comer, 2001). For example, if the culture of the school is perceived by parents as being one where their involvement is not embraced, and teachers find it difficult to reach out to parents and invite them to participate, then the school culture may contribute to separate spheres of home and school. Even when schools endorse a partnership model, some parents may remain disengaged. For example, teachers may find it challenging to involve parents whose racial, cultural, and language backgrounds differ from their own (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). They may have ambivalent feelings about working with these parents, or they may hold onto prejudicial attitudes that negatively affect their ability to reach out to such parents (Lightfoot, 1978; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

Barriers to family involvement often reflect a school's climate and culture. For example, structural barriers in the school setting may include lack of funding for outreach programs or severe time constraints on the part of overworked teachers (Christenson, 2004). Teachers may restrict the viable options parents have for engaging in beneficial activities, simply by defining parental involvement too narrowly (Miretzky, 2002).

Furthermore, teachers who are controlling and expect parents to defer to their requests may alienate rather than engage parents (Lareau, 1987). For teachers, assumptions about what responsible parenting entails may limit how they perceive parent involvement (Miretkzy).

SES and ethnicity. Unfortunately, teachers are not the only ones who may erect barriers to parent involvement. Parents themselves may be guilty of preventing other parents from becoming involved. For example, parents from the ethnic majority may exclude other parents who differ in socioeconomic status (SES) or ethnic background (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002). Social networks at school also contribute to parent involvement, with parents having fewer social network contacts and opportunities reporting less involvement in their children's school (Sheldon, 2002).

In some studies, parent involvement has been found to differ by SES (Griffith, 1998; Lareau, 1987; Sheldon, 2002). Parents with greater financial resources tend to be more involved: Financially stable families seem to have more time for their children's academics and also exhibit more interest and concern for their children's education (Sheldon, 2002).

Others have found no differences based upon SES (Grolnick et al., 1997). Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) argued that this is because differences in involvement patterns are more clearly explored in the context of available resources, which can vary between families regardless of SES. Clearly, family and parent variables may themselves be impediments to involvement. These barriers can include lack of time, lack of energy, and a low sense of skills and knowledge (Hoover-Dempsey et al.). Parents may have a low sense of self-efficacy that hampers their willingness to engage in a challenging or

ambiguous task such as collaborating with the school (Christenson, 2004). For the parents, their own negative memories of schooling may serve as a barrier (Miretkzy, 2002). Structural barriers may include life-context variables such as lack of role models; economic, emotional, and time constraints; and child care or transportation issues (Christenson). The school's responsiveness to these issues can strongly affect parents' levels of involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al.), and teachers who seek true collaboration provide parents with support that facilitates involvement (Dauber & Epstein, 1993).

But school-based practices to increase collaboration between parents, teachers, and communities may still be fraught with challenges such as unequal distribution of power and selective practices that serve to prevent individuals or families from active participation (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Lawson, 2003). Exclusion practices can be overt, as when there is verbalized resentment toward services that are provided to increase participation (such as translation services for nonEnglish speaking parents) or covert, as when parents or teachers outwardly act as if the other person's feedback is valuable, even as they fully intend to disregard the information shared (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002).

Qualities of a positive school climate. A welcoming school climate encourages parent involvement. Parents perceive and respond to general invitations to be involved when the atmosphere at the school is welcoming and responsive, when the school has practices that keep parents well-informed of school events and policies, and when parental inquiries and suggestions are responded to in a respectful manner (Christenson, 2004).

Teachers who place value on parental involvement strive to create ways to facilitate home-school communication and view themselves as being responsible for

building the parent-teacher relationship (Brown & Medway, 2007). The ways in which individual teachers reach out to individual parents can affect parent involvement and both teacher invitations to parents and teacher attitudes about parents are related to parent's willingness to become involved (Epstein, 1986).

One of the strongest predictors of home- and school-based participation is teacher invitation (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Specific invitations from the teacher are beneficial to parent involvement because parents respond to the message that the teacher values their contributions. For example, parents are more likely to become actively involved when they believe that the teacher and the school implement practices that facilitate parental help with homework and parental involvement in reading both in the home and at the school (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). General invitations to involvement and specific teacher invitations were significantly correlated with home-based involvement for parents of ethnically diverse elementary students (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). In contrast, specific teacher invitations, but not general invitations by the school, predicted school-based involvement for the same parents (Green et al.).

When constructive communication exists between parents and teachers, combined with active participation in school activities, parents gain an increased understanding of school expectations and how to more effectively work with their children at home (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Unfortunately, expectations for communication between parent and teacher can be viewed very differently between the two groups. For example, teachers confirm that calling on the telephone when there is a problem is an important aspect of communication, but they also emphasize the importance of positive follow-up calls when the child does something positive (Brown & Medway, 2007). In contrast,

many families of color report hearing from the school only when their child is in trouble (Miretzky, 2002; Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2000). Often, parents may not be contacted directly by the school: Perkins-Gough (2008) found that 62% of parents reported that their primary source of information about the school was their children. When parents perceive that poor communication exists, they often view the source of the problem as stemming from the school (Lawson, 2003).

Teachers often allude to the value of effective communication practices. Pre-service teachers saw communication as being central to their future teaching style, reporting their belief that communication from school to home was critical to student outcomes (Graue, 2005). Ironically, although these teachers saw home to school communication, specifically in the form of newsletters, as being beneficial to parents, they also pointed out that the actuality of preparing a newsletter is burdensome to them as already-busy teachers.

Parent Involvement Interventions

Various studies have documented that promoting parent involvement leads to beneficial outcomes for students, but I could identify no experimental or quasi-experimental studies that attempted to improve parent-teacher relationships by using a community-based intervention program. Most interventions attempted in order to promote parent involvement are small in scope with a home-based focus or reflect a school-to-home model. For example, one study looked at the effects of a home-based intervention program for 4- and 5-year-old children. Participant mothers were provided with a curriculum and resources that they taught to their children in the home setting. Results were mixed: The first cohort of participants scored significantly higher than the

control group on cognitive measures, but the second cohort showed no significant difference from the control group (Baker, Piotrkowski, & Brooks-Gunn, 1998). Yet another study looked at an intervention that was designed to increase family involvement in mathematics homework for middle school students (Balli, Demo, & Wedman, 1998). This intervention consisted of prompting students to involve a family member in their homework by providing specific directions on how to involve their parents versus another group that was also prompted with specific requests for parent comments and signatures. The control group received no prompts. Although parent involvement did significantly increase for students who were prompted to request parental involvement, there was no significant difference in student achievement between the three groups. Both of these are examples of studies that share a focus on home-based parent involvement, but not specifically parent-teacher relationships.

In the parent involvement literature, the emphasis appears to be in one of two general categories: outcome-oriented studies with a focus on the benefits of parent involvement for child outcomes, or process-oriented studies that examine the processes that constitute parent involvement. For example, one correlational, longitudinal study measured the number and quality of parent-teacher contacts per year and whether or not parents participated in activities at home and school (Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999). There was an initial decline in both parent participation in school-based activities and parent contact with teachers between years one and two, but there was no further decline between years two and three. Over the course of the 3-year study, there was no decline in the number of home-based educational activities. When teachers

reported good interactions with parents, and reported that parents participated in both home-based and school-based activities, students tended to perform better overall.

Often studies such as these rely solely on teacher reports *or* parent reports. Less often these studies take into account the perspectives of both groups at the same time. Lawson (2003, p. 82) specifically stated that the parent involvement literature would benefit from an analysis of the “unarticulated assumptions” that exist for parents and teachers. Furthermore, he argued that this issue is especially important in the context of elementary schools that serve low-income families, in light of the heavy emphasis on school-based activities in which parents may find it challenging to participate.

It is clear that the influence and quality of the links between the multiple contexts in children’s lives – families, communities, and schools – are influential in preparing children for success in school (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Therefore, educators and researchers need to understand how each of these three contexts influences the academic experiences of children. Although the importance of parent involvement is widely acknowledged in the literature, there are few rigorous, systematic interventions to promote parent-school partnerships and family involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Furthermore, the majority of studies that address the issue of parent involvement and parent-teacher relationships focus on what happens inside schools or what happens in the home, but I could identify no known studies that have looked at community programs that exist outside of schools and homes and how they can promote parent-teacher communication as well as positive relationships and increased involvement within the schools.

An innovative approach was adopted in the current study in that a community-based intervention was provided to families and K-2 teachers. The purpose of the DARE to be You (DTBY) Bridge program, which is described in more detail in the next chapter, was to offer a series of community-based workshops that were completed by children, parents, and teachers that focused on building relationships and improving the learning environment, with the goal of enhancing positive child outcomes.

The purpose of this study was to assess parent-teacher relationships within the context of this community-based intervention program in order to ascertain whether parent and teacher role expectations were similar or dissimilar, as well as to determine whether participation in the program facilitated parent-teacher relationships and increased parent involvement in schools.

In order to do this, I analyzed quantitative data related to parent involvement collected from parents and teachers. In addition, qualitative data collected from a small subset of parent and teacher participants in the context of focus groups addressing their perceptions of the program and its impact was also included to add clarity to the quantitative findings.

Hypotheses

My first hypothesis is concerned with parent/teacher differences in role expectations. Based on the literature indicating that teachers generally endorse parent involvement (e.g., Brown & Medway, 2007; O'Connor, 2001) but that parents often encounter multiple barriers to such involvement (e.g., Lawson, 2003; Lightfoot, 1978; Miretzky, 2002; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), I hypothesize that teachers have higher expectations for parent involvement than do parents, in part reflected in their concern that

some parents lack the skills necessary to support their children's learning or simply do not participate enough (O'Connor, 2001).

The second hypothesis posits that more favorable attitudes toward school involvement, on the part of *both* teachers and parents, correlate with higher levels of parent involvement. Teacher attitudes about parents are related to parents' willingness to become involved (Epstein, 1986) and teachers who place value on parental involvement view themselves as being responsible for building the parent-teacher relationship (Brown & Medway, 2007), which leads to a more welcoming environment.

It is clear from the literature that a welcoming school climate encourages parent involvement (Christenson, 2004; Griffith, 1996, 1998; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). For example, parents perceive and respond to general invitations to be involved when the atmosphere at the school is welcoming and responsive, when the school has practices that keep parents well-informed of school events and policies, and when parental inquiries and suggestions are responded to in a respectful manner (Christenson, 2004). Therefore, my third hypothesis is that parent involvement is greater when the school climate is welcoming and when teachers communicate supportively with parents. School environments that are warm and caring, invite parents to participate, and are receptive to their input are more likely to have high levels of parent participation (Griffith, 1998; Perkins-Gough, 2008).

Finally, the importance of parent involvement is widely acknowledged in the literature, but few studies look specifically at systematic interventions to promote parent-school partnerships and family involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). My fourth hypothesis posits that as a result of participation in an intervention program to promote

positive family-school relationships, parents and teachers will have more favorable role expectations related to parent involvement, more actual parent involvement, and more open parent-teacher communication.

Chapter 3

Method

Participants

Families and their children's teachers were recruited from the general population at two sites. At Site I, eligible families were recruited from the three kindergarten classes and all first-grade classes in Montezuma County, Colorado. At Site II, eligible families were recruited through the Northern Navajo Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Department of Education in the three-state Shiprock catchment area that includes parts of Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. For each cohort, recruitment was geared toward meeting a risk profile of 10% of families with no more than one risk factor (e.g., low income, single parent, teen mother), 80% with 2-7 risk factors, and no more than 10% of families with over 7 risk factors. Due to the importance of parent involvement and family-school partnerships to children's success in school, families with children ages 5 years to 7 years were included because this age is a key transitional time into school. When asked to report their child's grade in school, 32.6% had a child in kindergarten, 31.1% had a child in first grade, and 26.8% had a child in second grade.

The sample consisted of 347 parent participants. Of these participants, 64% were mothers and 22% were fathers, with the remainder being an uncle, aunt, grandparent, or other relative. In terms of ethnic background, 50.7% identified themselves as Native American or Alaskan Native, 37.8% identified themselves as White, and 7.5% identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino/a. Most (57.9%) of the parent participants identified themselves as married, 11% identified themselves as single, and 15% identified

themselves as cohabiting. Parents were randomly assigned to either the control group or the experimental group.

Related to eligibility for TANF (welfare), 67.4% indicated that they did not receive TANF. The parents had completed an average of 12.60 years of education, and their average age was 35.46 (range =19-73).

The sample included 80 teacher participants (96.3% female; 58.8% White and 40% Native American). Fifty-two percent of the teacher participants had a bachelor's degree, 37.5% had a master's degree, and 2.5% had an associate's degree. As with the parent participants, teachers were assigned to either the control group or the experimental group.

The Bridge Program

DARE to be You (DTBY) is a community-based program for families that originally focused on youth between the ages of 5-18 years, their parents, and community professionals who worked with them (Miller-Heyl, MacPhee, & Fritz, 1998; 2000). Later, the program was adapted for families of preschoolers so that children between the ages of 2-5 years would be reached directly through involvement in a children's program, and indirectly through a parent's program, training of daycare providers, and community training of multi-agency teams that work with families. It is important to note that the Bridge program took place in a community agency (e.g., the *DARE to be You* offices in Cortez, Colorado; the BIA offices in Shiprock, New Mexico) rather than in a school setting. The DTBY Bridge program brought together children, parents, and teachers to focus on building relationships, increasing communication, and improving the learning environment to achieve the goal of enhancing positive child outcomes.

Participants (consisting of children, their parents, and their teachers) came together at a community agency building and took part in 2½ hour weekly sessions over a 10-12 week period. Each session included a meal and social time, a parent/child/ teacher warm-up activity and informational workshops for separate age groups (see Table 1).

Table 1

DTBY Bridge Program

10-12 weekly sessions scheduled over 3-4 months Each session lasted approximately 2.5-3 hours				
Activity	Time allotted	Participants		
Meal/social time	30 minutes	Parents, teachers, 5-7 year olds, and siblings		
Warm-up Activity	15 minutes	Parents, teachers, 5-7 year olds, and siblings		
Informational Workshops	1.75-2 hours	Parents and Teachers	5-7 year olds	Siblings

During each informational workshop, three separate groups were formed consisting of (a) teachers and parents, (b) 5- to 7-year-old children, and (c) siblings. Each group simultaneously covered the DTBY curriculum modules in a developmentally appropriate format.

Curriculum modules consisted of objectives that focused on:

- Improved self-efficacy
- Increased internal locus of control or mastery
- Enhanced decision making skills through effective reasoning
- Mastery of effective child-rearing strategies (particularly communication skills that foster children’s self-esteem and self-efficacy, decision making, and problem solving skills).
- Effective stress management

- Familiarity with developmental norms
- Strengthened peer support

The DTBY curriculum modules were provided in the same order across sites and cohorts, although the examples and some activities varied to more effectively meet the needs of each site and cohort. For example, to improve their self-efficacy around the parenting role, parents and teachers shared with one another successes they had experienced with their child. To increase their locus of control, participants engaged in activities that helped them to discern choices they make and who “pulls their strings.” To enhance decision-making skills, activities were offered that helped participants with conflict resolution. To learn effective child-rearing strategies, activities demonstrated different parenting styles and role plays demonstrated effective communication skills. To manage stress effectively, participants were taught to recognize the sources of stress and how to cope with them. To diminish unrealistic expectations for children, participants learned developmental norms to increase empathy and reduce frustration with children.

DTBY is a culturally-sensitive program that uses an ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to address the many systemic influences on families as they raise their children. The program considers the needs of the individuals and families involved, as well as the communities in which the program takes place. The social context of the parents is acknowledged in a culturally-specific manner. For example, family-oriented programming is offered to Hispanic families because they have a cultural preference to be with extended family. In contrast, White families tend to rely more on friends, so friend-oriented programming is offered to White participants (Miller-Heyl, MacPhee, & Fritz, 1998; 2000).

An important aspect of DTBY is the belief that early family intervention is critical to the prevention of later problems and that prevention programs are most effective when they incorporate multiple contexts beyond the parent-child relationship. This means that the contexts of community and school are clearly recognized as instrumental to positive outcomes for children. The Dare to be You Bridge program was specifically developed to offer informative workshops to parents and teachers in the context of a community agency (i.e. not in a school environment) with the intent of building family-school relationships. Therefore, teachers participated in 20 hours of the Bridge workshops at the community agency alongside parent participants. In these workshops, teachers *and* parents explored ways to emphasize family strengths, appreciate cultural differences, increase their own personal teaching efficacy/parenting efficacy, and foster children's social competence. The Bridge program curriculum expanded upon the original *Dare to be You* curriculum because the Bridge curriculum included discussion and activities to increase participants' understanding of the ways in which to encourage family-school relationships. For example, in the context of the Bridge program, more emphasis was placed on the value of family-school communication, in contrast to the original *Dare to be You* program's emphasis on the importance of communication in general.

In conjunction with the adult curriculum, the children's curriculum had a track for the 5-7 year olds that incorporated concepts learned by the adults in ways that were developmentally appropriate for the children. Additionally, a curriculum for older children was included for older siblings who attended and child care was available for the youngest siblings.

Measures

School involvement. Parents completed seven items related to their involvement in activities supportive of the child's education. For two of these items, parents reported how many days per week they (a) talked to the child about what he/she was doing in school, and (b) read to the child. On the remaining five items, parents rated from 0 (*never*) to 2 (*3+ times per school year*) how often they (a) volunteered in the child's classroom, (b) asked the teacher about how to help the child with school work, (c) attended parent-teacher conferences, (d) attended extra-curricular activities, and (e) visited the child's classroom. These items, which formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .75$), were drawn from various studies of parent involvement (e.g., Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Patrikokou & Weissberg, 2000). In terms of validity, parents in this study who were more involved in their children's education worked fewer hours ($r = -.14, p = .01$), had a more positive attitude toward the parental role ($r = .22, p < .001$), and were more invested in the parental role ($r = .19, p < .001$).

Expectations for involvement. Parents and teachers completed multiple items related to expectations for parent-school involvement which were expected to form a single scale. However, two independent multi-item scales emerged, *Role Expectations* and *Separate Spheres*, and neither was strongly and consistently related with the two global ratings for parents and teachers. Therefore, expectations for involvement were assessed through two scales (*Role Expectations: Partnerships* and *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres*) and two global items (*Global Expectations: Manners* and *Global Expectations: Academics*).

For *Role Expectations: Partnerships*, parents and teachers completed 10 items, rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), related to the division between home and school of responsibility for promoting academic success and respectful behavior. All items were phrased in terms of who *should* be responsible; e.g., “parents need to help teach their children to read, write, and do math;” “the school should work on children’s self-respect, peer skills, and coping;” and “teachers should advise parents on effective ways to work with their child.” Higher scores represent expectations that families need to be engaged in supporting school success *and* that teachers need to be supportive of family engagement. These items, which were developed for this study, were based in part upon the theoretical model developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997). When it comes to their children’s education, parents’ beliefs about what they are supposed to do and how they are supposed to act lead them to engage in the involvement activities they deem important. This role construction is directly influenced by the groups in which parents belong or identify and reflects the group’s belief systems, as well as parental beliefs about parenting practices and how the home is supposed to support the school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler). Parents and teachers have joint responsibilities as children transition into school, and both cognitive skills and social competencies play an important role in successful transitions (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000), so these items assess teacher and parent beliefs about *who* is responsible for supporting academic success and respectful behavior.

In the current study, these 10 items formed a reliable scale for the parents ($\alpha = .84$) but not for the teachers ($\alpha = .50$). Exploratory factor analysis with the teacher ratings did not yield a satisfactory two- or three-factor solution. Given that one of the hypotheses

concerns parent-teacher differences in role expectations for partnership, the decision was made to maintain the same item content for this scale in both samples despite the low alpha reliability for the teachers.

Two global items (*Global Expectations: Manners* and *Global Expectations: Academics*) asked respondents to rate who should be more responsible for teaching children to be respectful and polite, and to succeed in school. These two semantic differential items were rated from 1 (*family only*) to 7 (*school only*), with midpoint ratings for a mix of responsibility. For the parents in this study, ratings on these two items were modestly correlated with each other ($r = .23, p < .001$) but were uncorrelated with the 10-item *Role Expectations: Partnership* scale ($r < .05$). The latter correlations were not improved by recoding scores such that the midpoint rating received the highest score. For the teachers in this study, the two global ratings were uncorrelated with each other ($r = .06$) but they were significantly correlated with the *Role Expectations: Partnership* scale, especially the global item related to teaching children to be respectful and polite, $r = .44, p < .0001$.

Parents and teachers also completed a 3-item scale that tapped into beliefs that the spheres of family and school are separate. These three items formed a scale, *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres*, that assessed beliefs that (a) parents usually don't know much about what it takes to succeed in school, (b) family issues and problems should not be the teacher's business, and (c) teachers should make all of the decisions about how to best educate children. The items on the *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres* scale reflect the *Protective Model* (Swap, 1993) in which it is desirable to keep parents and teachers separate from one another in order to reduce conflict between the two. Therefore, the

means on these three items can be used to gauge the strength with which teachers and parents endorse this model. For this study, the scale had marginal reliabilities for teachers ($\alpha = .66$) and parents ($\alpha = .55$). *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres* scores were neither correlated with *Role Expectations: Partnership* scores nor (unexpectedly) with *Global Expectations: Manners* and *Global Expectations: Academics*. Given that none of the four scales/items correlated across parents and teachers, they will be treated as separate variables in the analyses.

In this study, parents who had higher scores on *Role Expectations: Partnership* – for greater family/school collaboration – were more educated ($r = .19, p < .001$), had a more positive attitude toward the parental role ($r = .31, p < .001$), and were more invested in the parental role ($r = .16, p = .003$). Similarly, teachers who had higher scores on this measure were higher in general self-efficacy ($r = .23, p = .05$) and were more invested in the teaching role ($r = .22$). Conversely, parents who endorsed the idea that school and family were separate spheres were less educated ($r = -.34$), were less satisfied with the parental role ($r = -.21$), and were lower in general self-efficacy ($r = -.30$), all $p < .001$. Teachers who more strongly believed in separate spheres also were less educated, $r = -.24$. These findings are consistent with the findings of Epstein and Dauber (1993) that more educated parents exhibit more involvement in both home and school.

School-family relations. For the present study, parents completed two scales that measured various aspects of the school climate and promotion of family-school partnerships. All items were adapted by Griffith (1996a; 1996b; 2000) from national and regional surveys of school environment and satisfaction. On the 5-item *Teacher Communication* scale ($\alpha = .74$ in Griffith, 2000; $\alpha = .76$ in the current study), parents

rated, from 0 (*never*) to 2 (*3+ times* per school year), how often the teacher asked the parent for help, invited the parent to school, communicated to the parent how the child was doing, and suggested ways to help the child to succeed in school. The 12-item *School Climate* scale ($\alpha = .82$ in Griffith, 2000; $\alpha = .93$ in the current study) focuses on how welcomed and comfortable the parents and their child feel at school, and whether they are treated in a fair and caring manner. Items on this scale are rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). These two scales are correlated with attitudes toward the school, particularly parent satisfaction, as well as parent involvement, and predict student achievement (Griffith, 1996a; 1996b; 2000).

Background information was collected as part of the survey and included the following variables: ethnic background, relationship to child participant, education, age, marital status, number of children, number of hours worked per week, and monetary assistance eligibility (TANF).

Procedure

This study used an experimental, repeated measures design. Families were assigned at random to the control and intervention groups. Although the control group had access to all services available in the community, people in the control group did not have access to the DARE to be You Bridge workshops. Intervention families had access to all services available in the community and received the additional DARE to be You Bridge workshops. The families who were randomly selected into the experimental group and the corresponding teachers attended 10-12 sessions, each 2 ½ -3 hours in duration.

Teachers' participation was dependent upon which families were assigned to the intervention group, so random assignment of teachers was not possible. Therefore, some

teachers had control children in their classrooms. Therefore, the design included four groups of parents that represented all combinations of whether or not their child's teacher participated in the DTBY workshops, and whether or not they and their child participated in the DTBY workshops.

Quantitative data. Data were collected by site research coordinators who were trained in both survey administration and confidentiality procedures. Participants completed the baseline measures before assignment to groups or had surveys individually administered after assignment. In general, group testing was the norm, with exceptions for individual assessments when it was difficult to arrange group testing. Trained site research coordinators orally administered the paper-and-pencil measures to participants.

Code numbers but no other identifiers were written on surveys. Surveys were sealed in manila envelopes upon completion by participants. To further ensure confidentiality, the files that linked code numbers to names were kept in locked filing cabinets at the project site. The evaluation team was given access to data with only code numbers. The individuals who can associate names with numbers never see the data and the individuals who see the data never have access to the participants' names.

Qualitative data. In addition to survey results, this study used focus groups to explore more fully participants' perceptions of parent-teacher relationships. These focus groups took place during the summers of 2003 and 2004 in Cortez at the DTBY office and consisted of a small subset of parents ($n = 8$) and teachers ($n = 5$) who met immediately after completing their follow-up surveys. Due to time constraints, these focus groups did not include Native American participants from the Northern Navajo BIA Department of Education in the three-state Shiprock catchment area (Site II).

The additional data from the focus groups add more depth to the study, and allow for further exploration of any unexpected results found in the quantitative data analysis (Cresswell, 2003). Although they provide less control over the data collected when compared to surveys, focus groups are well suited for collecting participant's attitudes and allow the investigator to expand upon quantitative findings through the perspective of the participants (Fern, 2000; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1988). Furthermore, interaction between participants has the potential to lead to greater self-disclosure, which can add depth to the investigator's understanding of the topic. For example, Baker and Soden (1997) pointed out the following:

Closed-ended self-report surveys cannot fully capture the dynamic transactional nature of parents' involvement in their children's education. Many of these processes could better be explored through open-ended and observational techniques which would produce rich data, shed light on complex processes, and generate new hypotheses. (p. 15)

For the purpose of this study, a moderately structured focus group protocol was used when conducting the focus groups with a small subset of DTBY Bridge participants. Both parents and teachers were invited to participate. All focus group interactions were tape recorded. In addition to the audiotape, one of the investigators in the room took handwritten notes of the verbal exchanges.

At the beginning of each focus group, the facilitator explained the purpose and intent of the focus group, set the ground rules, and had the participants introduce themselves. Participants were told by the moderator that the purpose of the focus group was to explore *differing* viewpoints about family-school relationships and that all viewpoints, ideas, and experiences were equally valid and important: There were no right or wrong answers. The typical ground rules governing focus groups (Krueger & Casey,

2000) were explained to the participants.

The focus group protocol consisted of questions that introduced general topics but did not consist of specific questions to answer. General questions were developed to capture the perceptions of both parent and teacher participants and promote open-ended responses. Examples of questions included:

1. Describe what a strong family-school partnership looks like to you.
2. How would you define a welcoming school?
3. What barriers to involvement do you experience?
4. What are your preferred ways of communicating between school and home?
5. How does the DARE to be You Bridge program promote partnerships and support a welcoming school environment?

Follow-up questions allowed participants to expand and clarify their views. This was particularly important because of the emergent nature of qualitative research: The process of asking questions is dynamic and responsive to the responses of the participants (Cresswell, 2003). Once the focus group was completed, participants were thanked for their time. All participants were invited to share in a meal as a way to show appreciation for their time.

Analysis of the qualitative data was completed in six steps (Cresswell, 2003). Step one was to organize and prepare the data for analysis. All audiotapes and hand written notes were transcribed into separate Word documents. Step two was to read through all data, in order to gain a general sense of themes. Step three was to begin the detailed analysis process, which consisted of reading the data in detail in order to identify broad

categories or themes. Step four consisted of using the coding process from step three to generate more specific categories or themes. Step five consisted of reflecting upon and acting upon how the categories and themes would be best represented in the results section. The results of the focus group responses were then reported within the context of themes and subthemes that arose from the analysis. Step six consisted of the process of interpreting the results from the first five steps.

In order to enhance the accuracy of the findings, the following strategies were employed (Cresswell, 2003): *Triangulation* of different data sources, including the audiotapes and the notes that were taken by the investigators during the focus groups; *rich, thick descriptions* that lent an element of shared experiences; clarification of *biases* that created a narrative that resonated with the reader; and sharing of *discrepant information* that increased credibility.

Chapter 4

Results

Plan of Analysis

In the analyses that follow, the hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics, and involved quantitative data analyses of the baseline data and program impact of the DTBY Bridge program. See Table 2 for a brief review of the independent and dependent variables for each hypothesis.

Table 2

List of Variables

Hypotheses	Independent Variable(s)	Dependent Variable(s)
1	Parent v. teacher	Expectations for parent-school involvement
2	Expectations for parent-school involvement	Actual parental school involvement
3	Welcoming school climate; Communication	Actual parental school involvement
4	DTBY program group: intervention v. control	Favorable role expectations related to parent-school involvement; more actual parental school involvement; and more open parent-teacher communication

In addition to the quantitative data analysis, which for this study is the *priority approach* (Cresswell, 2003), focus group responses from a small subset of parents ($n = 8$) and teachers ($n = 5$) from Site I in Cortez were analyzed in order to better understand the participants' perspectives and add depth to the results of the quantitative data analysis. As mentioned previously, due to time constraints, these focus groups did not include Native American participants from the Northern Navajo BIA Department of Education in the three-state Shiprock catchment area (Site II).

The sequential explanatory strategy is helpful in interpreting quantitative results and is useful when unexpected results are found in quantitative data analysis (Cresswell). Insights from the focus group were particularly illuminating with regard to the ways in which teachers and parents perceive their respective roles, and the ways in which program effects were not captured well in the self-report quantitative surveys. The qualitative findings from these focus groups were at times consistent with the quantitative data and at other times in stark contrast.

Parent and Teacher Expectations of Parent Involvement

The first hypothesis was that teachers have higher expectations than parents for parent involvement. Recall that all of the items related to expectations for parent involvement were expected to form a single scale. However, two independent multi-item scales emerged, *Role Expectations: Partnership* and *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres*, and neither was strongly and consistently related with the two global ratings (*Global Expectations: Manners* and *Global Expectations: Academics*) for parents and teachers. Therefore, the global ratings were dropped from all analyses except a comparison of teachers and parents (hypothesis 1). In order to test the first hypothesis that teachers have higher expectations for parent involvement than do parents, independent samples *t*-tests were computed for the *Role Expectations: Partnership* and *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres* scales at baseline, given that the two groups (parents v. teachers) were compared on normally distributed dependent variables.

For the first scale, *Role Expectations: Partnership* (scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6), higher scores represented expectations that families need to be engaged in supporting school success *and* that teachers need to be supportive of family

engagement. For the second scale, *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres* (scored on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6), higher scores indicated a belief that it is desirable to keep the spheres of home and school separate from one another. As shown in Table 3, both parents and teachers generally agreed that parents and teachers should be supportive of one another's roles. An independent sample *t*-test on *Role Expectations: Partnership* revealed that teachers have significantly higher expectations than parents for parent involvement, $t(424) = 2.39, p = .02$, but the difference was small, Cohen's $d = .32$. The *t*-test on *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres* was not significant.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Measures of Role Expectations, Teachers v. Parents

	Teachers ($n = 85$)		Parents ($n = 341$)	
	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>	<u><i>M</i></u>	<u><i>SD</i></u>
Role Expectations: Partnership	5.53	.31	5.39	.53
Role Expectations: Separate Spheres	3.25	1.13	3.50	1.18
Global Expectations: Manners	2.75	1.37	2.80	1.37
Global Expectations: Academics	4.30	1.34	4.06	1.38

Global Expectations: Manners asked respondents who should be more responsible for teaching children to be respectful and polite, and *Global Expectations: Academics* asked respondents who should be more responsible for teaching children to succeed in school. Both were ordinal variables on a seven-point rating scale with "equal responsibility" at the midpoint. They had a skewness and kurtosis that approximated a normal distribution, so independent samples *t*-tests were the appropriate statistic in lieu of the Mann-Whitney *U* test. No significant difference between teachers and parents was

found for either of these global expectations. Note that on *Global Expectations: Manners*, both parents and teachers viewed the family as having more responsibility than schools for teaching social skills whereas on *Global Expectations: Academics*, both parents and teachers viewed the family and the school as having equal responsibility for school success. A paired *t*-test showed that the difference between the two Global Expectations items was significant ($p < .001$) for parents, $t(340) = 10.93$, as well as for teachers, $t(84) = 7.77$, and these differences were large, Cohen's $d > 1.14$.

Qualitative findings. All parents and teachers who participated in the focus groups endorsed the importance of parent involvement. It was clear that parents embraced the importance of their role in teaching *both* academic and social skills. This was most clearly reported in the context of home-based activities. For example, one mother had the following to say about the parental role in a child's education: "You need to teach discipline, respect; you need to play a big role in their education ... read them books at home, help them with math." Another mother also reported on the importance of home-based activities with specific examples: "I think what we need to do is lay the groundwork at home. For instance, your child, read to them as much as you can ... and then when they get to school and they are at an age they can read because they have the groundwork."

Teachers also endorsed the importance of parent involvement. When asked directly about their expectations for parents, teachers' responses reflected the quantitative findings that when it came to teaching manners, the family was viewed as having more responsibility than schools for teaching social skills. As one teacher said, "I didn't learn my manners at school, but lots of kids don't learn the basics about being respectful at

home. Teachers believe it is a family responsibility.” This statement reveals that even as they endorsed parent involvement, teachers also were more likely to endorse role differentiation when it came to supporting the academic and social development of children.

Teachers were consistent in their concern that parents were not teaching children the social skills that are the necessary prerequisites for academic learning.

Teacher 1: We’re their [the students’] foundation and we’re teaching them the manners that they need and we don’t have that much parent involvement in our school. So, I do say we as the school do the most. We teach them manners and the life skills that they need and we then teach the reading and the writing.

Teacher 2: Have to get the social stuff in order to learn, in order to get their academics. They need to wait their turn, be courteous. It all goes hand in hand.

Teacher 3: Half of the job revolves around social skills. Teachers do the most; we don’t have much parent involvement.

Although the quantitative findings revealed that teachers have significantly higher expectations for parent involvement, and that the family was expected to have more responsibility than schools for teaching social skills, recall that family and school were seen as having equal responsibility for school success. One teacher highlighted her perception of her ever-expanding role as a teacher by expressing her thoughts in this way:

Every day it seems like they expect if the kids don’t know how to do something they think it should be taught at school. Well, hello! They have to learn some things at home!

Correlates of Parent-School Involvement

The second hypothesis was that the higher the expectations were for school involvement, on the part of both teachers and parents, the more involved parents actually were in their children’s education. Pearson correlations were computed between the measure of parent involvement and the two scales measuring expectations for parental

involvement (*Role Expectations: Partnership* and *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres*) from both parents and teachers. Neither the *Partnership* scale nor the *Separate Spheres* scale reported by the teachers was significantly correlated with parent involvement ($r < .03$), but *Partnerships* reported by the parents was significantly correlated with school involvement, $r(288) = .29, p = .0001$. Parent-reported *Separate Spheres* was not ($r = .07$), however.

To analyze the third hypothesis that parent involvement is greater when parents perceive (a) the school climate to be more welcoming and (b) teachers to communicate supportively with parents, Pearson correlations were computed. When parents rated parent-teacher communication as more frequent and open, parent involvement was much greater, $r(343) = .48, p < .0001$. Similarly, a welcoming school climate was correlated with more parent involvement, $r(341) = .28, p = .0001$.

To assess the combined contribution of parent attitudes and perceptions to actual school involvement, a stepwise multiple regression was used. Stepwise regression is recommended over hierarchical regression when there is no theoretical rationale to test a particular order of entry of predictor variables. The predictor variables included parent-reported role expectations, parent-teacher communication, and school climate, given that all three bivariate correlations were significant. Teacher-reported predictors were omitted from the regression analysis because the bivariate correlations were nonsignificant. As shown in Table 4, parent-teacher communication and role expectations explained unique variance in school involvement, but school climate did not. The three predictor variables

combined to account for a moderate amount of variance in school involvement, $R^2 = .27$, $F(3,284) = 35.66$, $p < .001$. Tolerances were within permissible limits, indicating that multicollinearity was not an issue.

Table 4

Regression Analysis for Prediction of Parent School Involvement

Predictor	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>β</u>
Role Expectations: Partnership	.18	.05	.19**
Parent-Teacher Communication	.42	.05	.43**
School Climate	.02	.04	.04

** $p < .001$

Qualitative findings. All eight of the focus group parent participants explicitly identified communication as an important aspect of the parent-teacher relationship.

Parents repeatedly noted that partnerships between parents and teachers were valuable, and an important part of that partnership is communication, particularly if it was open and bidirectional. One mother described such communication in this way: “Partnership is teamwork: The teachers communicate with the parents and the parents communicate with the teachers.” Another mother’s comment was similar: “You have to have communication and you have to get yourself involved in the school. The communication is very important.”

Both teachers and parents were asked directly about welcoming school climates. In general, parents reported that the school environments were very welcoming, but one parent reported that she believed that just as there is only a small group of parents who actually become involved, there is also only a small group of teachers who actually want parent involvement:

I think there is this minority group that does want to volunteer and a minority of teachers that wants parents involved. But when you run up against a teacher that doesn't want involvement from the parent, it is really discouraging.

When teachers articulated aspects of welcoming environments that could facilitate communication and collaboration between parents and teachers, they offered very specific activity lists, much like the following: "Having a file of things the parents can do. ... Here's a list of things I need done. Make them feel they are needed and useful. ... Give them choices: Help with the group of kids or go cut these papers or laminate or make these copies and then they can choose what they want." This type of response was in contrast to parent responses that equated welcoming climates with places where children were valued and hugged.

Intervention Effects on Family-School Relations

The final hypothesis related to intervention effects for parents and teachers. Participation in the DTBY Bridge program was expected to promote more favorable role expectations related to parent involvement, more actual parent involvement, and more parent-teacher communication. Recall that for the latter two DVs, data were not provided by the teachers. Repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted separately for teachers and parents, with one between groups factor (intervention group: control v. experimental), and one within groups factor (time: pretest and 12-month follow-up).

The data (see Table 5) showed no significant intervention effects for the parents on actual parent involvement, partnership, or separate spheres. A significant time effect was found on the communication scale, $F(1,167) = 12.73, p < .001$, with both groups perceiving communication to increase a year after enrolling in the program. A significant intervention effect was found for parents on the school climate scale, $F(1,165) = 4.48, p =$

.036, with the intervention group perceiving the school to be more welcoming a year after enrolling in the program, and the control group declining on this measure. No significant intervention effects were found for the teachers. (The difference between the intervention and control teachers on Separate Spheres was significant, $F(1,46) = 6.36, p = .015$.)

Table 5

Program Impact, Baseline to 12-Month Follow-Up

	baseline		12 months	
	C	E	C	E
Parent	(<i>n</i> = 78)	(<i>n</i> = 106)	(<i>n</i> = 78)	(<i>n</i> = 106)
Partnership	5.35 (.59)	5.34 (.52)	5.29 (.66)	5.30 (.55)
Communication	1.15 (.55)	1.06 (.52)	1.25 (.51)	1.27 (.48)
School Climate	5.21 (.73)	5.16 (.78)	5.11 (.90)	5.30 (.64)
Separate Spheres	3.50 (1.16)	3.70 (1.24)	3.23 (1.21)	3.61 (1.29)
School Involvement	1.41 (.51)	1.40 (.52)	1.46 (.48)	1.53 (.54)
Teacher	(<i>n</i> = 7)	(<i>n</i> = 41)	(<i>n</i> = 7)	(<i>n</i> = 41)
Partnership	5.50 (.31)	5.55 (.29)	5.52 (.26)	5.56 (.33)
Separate Spheres	2.52 (1.03)	3.22 (1.16)	2.00 (.61)	3.25 (1.08)

Note: C = Control group; E = Experimental (DTBY) group.

Qualitative findings. Self-reported parent involvement did not increase as a result of participation in DTBY, but information from the focus groups revealed more program impact than did the quantitative results, particularly in the areas of role expectations and communication. For example, when asked if ideas about responsibilities or expectations of parents versus teachers changed as a result of being in DTBY, one teacher responded that “now the parents expect a lot more of us teaching [academic skills]; before they expected a lot more of us teaching respect.” Another teacher reported an increased awareness and understanding on the part of participants towards one another:

Teacher 3: We had to write down three expectations. It was kind of a shock to everybody. Parents expected the teacher to be kind and loving to my child, to

keep my child safe and treat them lovingly. One parent even wrote: Give them hugs. I really figured they would say “teach them.”

Although participants reported many benefits of the DTBY Bridge program in the context of the focus groups, the most-frequently mentioned benefit of DTBY, from both parents and teachers, was an increased understanding of the value of communication and ways to develop communication skills. For example, one teacher observed: “I saw the other teachers’ stuff that they were working on with their students in here and it just really helped one teacher to relate better to her student and then the parents communicated better.” A father described how improved parent-teacher communication helped to resolve a child’s feelings of alienation from school:

Before DTBY, I was kind of on the sidelines watching and we finally sat down and started talking with the teacher ... My son would come home and say my teacher hates me, she’s mean to me. So, I found out why ... because she made him do homework. So we got to talking and we started working out ways that we could help out my son in school and it worked out pretty good.

Finally, participants were enthusiastic in their endorsement of DTBY workshop activities that increased their knowledge of and skills for communication and understanding. Specifically, participants expressed appreciation for (a) the workshop on personality differences that increased understanding of how to interact and communicate more effectively with others, (b) the workshop that explored growing words/shrinking words and they ways in which people can support one another through communication, and (c) the workshop on I-messages, where participants learned communication skills to express how they feel, what happened to make them feel that way, and what they need.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study examined parent-teacher relationships within the context of the DARE to be You (DTBY) Bridge program, a community-based intervention program. An experimental, repeated measures design was used to explore similarities between parent and teacher role expectations, perceptions of school climate related to parent involvement, and whether participation in DTBY strengthened parent-teacher relationships and increased parent involvement in schools. As hypothesized, teachers had significantly higher expectations than parents for parent involvement. Both teachers and parents endorsed the idea that families should have more responsibility than schools for teaching social skills and that families and schools should have equal responsibility for children's school success. Furthermore, at baseline, parent involvement was significantly greater when parents perceived parent-teacher communication to be more frequent and the school climate to be welcoming. Finally, parents from the intervention group, compared to controls, reported the school climate to be more welcoming a year after enrolling in the program, but actual involvement did not increase.

Parent v. Teacher Expectations for Parent Involvement

Recall that both parents and teachers place much emphasis on home-school partnerships, as evidenced by the high scale means. The small standard deviations on these self-report scales indicate that such perceptions were uniformly endorsed by the respondents. Qualitative analyses confirmed these quantitative findings that parents and teachers endorsed the importance of parent involvement, with teachers having higher expectations than parents for this involvement. Additionally, focus groups revealed some

of the nuances and tensions around role expectations that were not evident in the survey findings. For example, in the focus groups, it became clear that teachers were more likely to endorse role differentiation/separate spheres when it comes to supporting social development of children, expressing in the interviews a desire for more home-based attention to social skills and having less explicit concerns about school-based academic support from parents. As one teacher stated, “[The children] have to get the social stuff in order to learn, in order to get their academics. They need to wait their turn, be courteous. It all goes hand in hand.” Given teachers’ desire for some role differentiation between parents and teachers with regards to social skills, it is initially surprising that no differences were found between parents and teachers on the *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres* scale. This discrepancy between the qualitative findings and *Separate Spheres* scale is likely because the *Separate Spheres* scale does not include items related to social skills, which teachers believe more strongly than parents should be primarily the parents’ responsibility.

Teachers also emphasized the importance of parent involvement in school-based activities, but acknowledged that not all parents are able to participate because of barriers to involvement. As one teacher stated, “Parent involvement is welcomed. Anytime a parent wants to volunteer, they are encouraged to come in, but it is not expected. We acknowledge that some parents can’t make it.” Thus, teachers readily acknowledged and accepted that barriers to involvement exist, but they were more forceful in their concern that parents were not teaching social skills at home. Teachers expressed frustration over parents’ lack of attention to their children’s social skills and clearly wanted parents to take a more active role in teaching their children these skills.

Previous research has found that teachers and parents have divergent views or expectations about what it means to be involved (e.g., Lawson, 2003). Teachers' frustrations may be a result of these divergent expectations. It also might be that teachers' frustrations stem in part from the differences between their idealized hopes for parent involvement and the actualities of parent involvement. Teachers' frustrations may arise from their *belief* that parents and teachers need to partner with one another in order to teach the children the social norms and academic skills required in school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) and the reality that parent involvement is elusive.

Correlates of Parent Involvement

One hypothesis tested was that the higher the expectations are for school involvement, on the part of both teachers and parents, the more involved parents actually are in their children's education. Yet neither the partnership scale nor the separate spheres scale reported by the teachers was significantly correlated with parent involvement. Although *Role Expectations: Partnership* as reported by the parents was significantly correlated with parent involvement, parent-reported *Role Expectations: Separate Spheres* was not.

Recall that the measure developed to assess expectations for involvement was not in fact a coherent, unitary scale. The expectation was that the items assessing partnership, separate spheres, responsibility for manners, and responsibility for academics would be indicators of a single latent construct that would be the same for both parents and teachers. Not only did the items not comprise a unitary scale, but the construct also was structured differently for parents and teachers. This raises an important question about how the construct of expectations for parent involvement is interpreted. It seems that

parents and teachers have a qualitatively different view of parent involvement, which could in part explain the lack of association between teacher expectations and parent involvement. There were difficulties in translating expectations into concrete actions and it seemed that teachers believed parents need guidance in the enactment of their roles.

Parent involvement also was hypothesized to be greater when parents perceived the school to be welcoming and the teachers to communicate supportively with parents. Previous research on this topic, although limited, consistently shows that a welcoming school climate encourages parent involvement (Christenson, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). For example, parents perceive and respond to general invitations to be involved when the atmosphere at the school is welcoming and responsive, when the school has practices that keep parents well-informed of school events and policies, and when parental inquiries and suggestions are responded to in a respectful manner (Christenson, 2004). This was found to be the case in the current study: When parents rated parent-teacher communication as more frequent and open, parent involvement was much greater; when parents reported the school to be more welcoming, parent involvement was also greater. Teacher role expectations for partnership were not related to parent involvement but parent role expectations (for school climate and parent teacher communication) were related to parent involvement. This could be reflective of differing meanings and interpretations of parent involvement for parents and teachers. On the other hand, it could be that parent involvement is more a product of internal (parental) constraints such as attitudes, opportunities, and perceived and real barriers, than it is due to external (teacher) forces. In the focus groups, teachers expressed their understanding of the reasons parents have varying amounts of involvement and their frustration with the

ways in which parents' involvement in teaching their children social skills at home is not sufficient.

Teachers and parents had similar but also divergent perspectives on processes that promoted parental involvement. Their perspectives were similar in terms of the importance of communication, with both parents and teachers endorsing the importance of communication being bidirectional. This finding is clearly reflected in Epstein's (1997) model of family involvement where the construct of "communicating" is best reflected in the practices that promote bidirectional communication between the home and the school about school programs and children's progress. Furthermore, effective bidirectional communication patterns are reflected in Swap's (1993) partnership model, where parents and teachers work together in collaboration through bidirectional communication to identify children's needs, parents' strengths, and school resources. Joint problem-solving is desirable and welcomed in the partnership model, and participation is actively encouraged on the part of the school, the parents, and the larger community.

Parents and teachers differed in their views of a welcoming school climate. When asked specifically in focus groups what would make a school climate welcoming, teachers responded with a list of projects the parents could do as volunteers. One wonders how widespread this view might be. In the school-to-home transmission model (Swap, 1993), parents are enlisted to support the objectives of the school and it is the school that defines how this should happen. Teachers' views in the current study – that a welcoming school climate is equated with tasks to be completed by parents – endorse this transmission model. In contrast, the parents described a welcoming climate as being one

that reflected the nurturing qualities of a teacher's relationship with their children, which is a very child-centered response. In the focus groups, this difference between approaches was reported by teachers as being surprising. Therefore, it may be that in trying to create a welcoming climate for parents, teachers adopt a more instrumental task orientation whereas parents expect or desire a more expressive orientation, particularly towards their children. Teachers should be made aware of parent expectations so they can assure parents that they will be expressive towards their children even as they engage parents in instrumental tasks.

Intervention Effects on Home-School Relations

This study also was concerned with the effects of participation in the DTBY Bridge program on role expectations related to parent involvement, more actual parent involvement, and more parent-teacher communication. Intervention effects occurred in the area of welcoming school climate. Control parents reported a slight decline in perceptions of the school climate being welcoming after one year, but parents from the experimental group reported the school climate to be more welcoming a year after enrolling in the program. Recall also that there was a significant time effect on the Communication scale with both the control and the experimental groups showing improvement. One possible explanation for change in the control group's communication is that they may have been exposed to intervention group parents as role models, given that intervention and control children could potentially be in the same classroom.

It is interesting to see the differing intervention effects for school climate and communication. After all, school environments that are warm and caring, invite parents to participate, and are receptive to their input are more likely to have high levels of parent

participation (Griffith, 1998). Communication is an important part of a welcoming school climate and parents are more likely to be involved when the school has practices that keep parents well-informed of school events and policies, and when parental inquiries and suggestions are responded to in a respectful manner (Christenson, 2004).

One explanation for the failure to find differences in intervention effects on the measure of communication between the control and experimental groups, even though this benefit was mentioned by every participant in the focus groups, is because the parent-school communication scale only asked for information about the *amount* of communication and did not ask about the *quality* of the communication. The results indicate that the amount of communication stayed the same from pretest to posttest, but the quality of the communication (e.g., communication that is more open, more bidirectional in nature) improved. This was confirmed in focus groups responses. As examples, one of the teachers stated, “Good communication skills are essential” and one of the mother participants stated, “DARE to be You was very educational because it taught us how to communicate with each other. It helped communication between parents, teachers, and kids.”

If communication is an important component of school climate then why does the latter change, but not the former? Upon review, it appears that the school climate scale better captured the construct of collaboration than did the communication scale. For example, the teacher communication scale asked parents to rate how often the teacher asked for help, invited the parent to school, or suggested ways to help the child at school. None of the five items in the scale asked parents to rate ways in which parents and teachers communicate and collaborate with one another. Instead, the items asked parents

to rate how often the teachers communicated with them in traditional ways. In contrast, the items addressing school climate specifically asked parents to rate how they felt about the ways the teachers interacted with the parents and the children. Home-school collaboration is much more than simply effective communication; it is an attitude that reflects the sharing of common goals and responsibilities between parents and teachers who view each other as equals (Christenson, Rounds, & Franklin, 1992). Although not specifically asking about collaboration, the items addressing school climate asked parents to rate such items as their comfort level with the teacher and the school, which may in turn be more important to collaborative relationships than the number of times communication has occurred.

Given that school climate and parent involvement were significantly correlated at baseline, it is notable that although the intervention program led to more positive perceptions of welcoming school climate one year after participation in DTBY, parent involvement was not affected. If parents in the intervention group reported that they felt more welcome after one year, why did they not become more involved? After all, Griffith (1998) found that a welcoming school climate was correlated with higher levels of involvement, and Perkins-Gough (2008) also found that parents' feelings about their children's school affect how they become involved. Furthermore, recall that teacher invitation, a form of communication that is evident in welcoming school environments, is one of the strongest predictors of home- and school-based parent participation (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). In a previous study, both general invitations and specific teacher invitations were significantly correlated with home-based involvement for parents of ethnically diverse elementary students, and specific teacher invitations, but not general

invitations by the school, predicted school-based involvement for the same parents (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007).

Ultimately, structural barriers may limit involvement for many parents regardless of a welcoming school environment. Unfortunately, data were not collected on the structural barriers (e.g., work conflicts, child care availability, distance between place of employment and school) that may have prevented parents from becoming more involved. Could it be that that parent participants in this study had already reached the maximum levels of involvement and a ceiling effect was operative? This possibility was investigated and found to not be the case. Although the perception of a more welcoming climate did not lead to increased parent involvement, perhaps the benefit of feeling more acknowledged in their involvement made parents perceive the environment to be more welcoming. Alternatively, perhaps the perception of a more welcoming environment actually reflected better communication and the school climate scale captured the *quality* of communication as a construct separate from the *quantity* of communication.

It is possible that intervention parents perceived the school climate to be more welcoming one year after the experimental program began because both parents and teachers were forming social networks based upon enrollment in DTBY that influenced their views on climate. After all, it is documented that social networks at school also contribute to parent involvement, with parents who have fewer social network contacts and opportunities reporting less involvement in their children's school (Sheldon, 2002). Given that parents in the intervention group developed a support group of other parents whose children were transitioning into school, an opportunity that was not available to the control group, it is possible that an increase in social support mediated the

intervention effects on perceptions that the school climate was welcoming.

Further research has been needed on both parent and teacher perspectives and the roles each should have in the context of parent-teacher collaboration (Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, & Fendrich, 1999), and findings from the current study have the potential to extend the parent involvement literature in several ways. The results of this study reveal that clarifying differences in teacher and parent expectations could facilitate more effective parental involvement. These results are promising on a practical level, given that it is easier to intervene with the processes of parent-teacher communication, school climate, and role expectations, and more difficult to modify structural barriers. For instance, the results revealed that teachers should focus primarily on demonstrating positive teacher-student interactions to parents to encourage their involvement in the classroom, and less on providing parents with practical ways to assist. Such a shift would likely be relatively easy for teachers to make. Second, the results of this study indicated that teachers are less concerned about parents being involved in the classroom, and more concerned about parents teaching social skills at home. This may come as a welcome relief to parents, allowing them to focus on and improve their parenting skills around the promotion of positive social skills.

Study Limitations

Given that this study employed random assignment to intervention and control groups, causal inferences are permitted about effects on parent outcomes. However, random assignment for teachers was problematic given that some experimental teachers had control children in their classrooms and some control teachers had experimental children in their classrooms. In fact, all participating teachers, whether control or

experimental, had both control and experimental children/families in their classrooms. Therefore, all classrooms had the potential to be influenced by DTBY in some way, whether it be by the teacher's increased knowledge of DTBY or the students' and parents'.

Furthermore, due to an oversight during the development of the assessment tool, no teacher data were collected for the following variables: teacher-reported parental involvement, teacher communication, and school climate. This study would be improved by the comparison of the teachers to the parents on all variables. Therefore, care should be made in future research to ensure that all participants are measured on the same constructs. Specifically, information about the variables from the teachers' perspective would expand upon our understanding of the parent-teacher relationship and allow us to more clearly explore similarities and differences.

Although the quantitative data were collected from a large number of participants who completed self-report surveys, the small number of participants in the focus groups means that the qualitative results cannot be generalized to the larger population. On the other hand, even within the small focus groups, a clear point of saturation was achieved, and it was evident that the perspectives of the participants were consistent and that no new information was forthcoming (Cresswell, 2003). The focus groups were completed at the same time as the administration of the posttest, which means that the focus groups did not serve to explore after-the-fact specific findings that were revealed from the quantitative data analysis. However, the data collected from the focus groups were informative and did expand upon our understanding of the nuances of parent and teacher perspectives.

Future Research

Future research looking at how role expectations and structural barriers affect involvement could help us in better understanding parent involvement. Clearly, communication is an important aspect of parent-teacher relationships and further investigation into the importance of the quality of the communication between parents and teachers and ways to promote high-quality communication is warranted.

The current study did not look at child outcomes, which would add depth of understanding. For example, data on the social skills of the child participants, as reported by parents or teachers, would be informative for a more thorough understanding of why the teachers perceive that the parents are not teaching social skills at home. After all, parents endorsed the importance of teaching home-based social skills, even as teachers reported that parents were not teaching them. This might indicate, on the one hand, that the *types* of social skills valued by teachers were not being emphasized by parents. On the other hand, it might indicate that the children's *mastery* of social skills did not meet the expectation of the teachers' standards.

Finally, although the sample included a large number of Native American families, this study did not focus on differences between ethnicities or cultures. Although there is little empirical literature specific to Native American family-school relationships, the broader family-school literature leads me to believe that differences may exist between the Native American participants and the non-Native American participants. For example, parents' own negative memories of schooling affect how they perceive their children's school environment and may serve as a barrier to parental involvement (Miretky, 2002) and Native American students have been found to have more negative

attitudes toward school when compared to White students and also to perceive their teachers as having less respect and understanding in general (Bolls, Tan, & Austin, 1997). Future research would benefit from closer examination of whether ethnic or cultural differences do exist in family-school relationships.

Conclusion

Parent involvement in their children's education has been clearly linked to positive educational outcomes (Christenson, Rounds, & Franklin, 1992; Henderson & Berla, 1994), so one might expect that the environments of home and school would act in complementary ways that reinforce one another's roles in the education of children. However, such alliances and collaborations are not always the case (Lightfoot, 1978; Scott-Jones, 1995) and some have argued that parents and teachers perceive themselves to be in adversarial roles (Connors & Epstein, 1995; Lawson, 2003; Lightfoot, 1978).

Within the context of the DARE to be You (DTBY) Bridge program, it was confirmed that teachers and parents do, in fact, understand that both family and school influence children's school success. This study provided evidence that even though parent involvement is considered desirable and is expected by all parties involved, teachers are less concerned about parents being involved in the classroom and more concerned about parents teaching social skills at home. When it comes to school climates that encourage involvement, parents placed a strong emphasis on an environment where children are emotionally nurtured, but teachers describe a welcoming environment as one that provides parents with specific tasks to be completed. Finally, participation in DTBY did increase parent's perception that the school climate was welcoming, but had no effect on parent involvement. Although this study has many strengths, the limitations of this

study point to the need to conduct further research on this topic, specifically pointing to the need to look more closely at both teacher and parent perceptions of high quality communication, school climate, and levels of parental involvement.

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