A Phenomenological Study of Epstein's Parental Involvement Framework With Middle-School English Language Learner (ELL) Teachers and Language Specialists

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College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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A Phenomenological Study of Epstein’s Parental Involvement Framework With Middle-School English Language Learner (ELL) Teachers and Language Specialists

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Transformational Leadership

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of ELL teachers and language specialists who engage in parental involvement practices. A phenomenological research design was used to reveal and describe middle-school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement and its influence on student academic success at one middle school in the Pacific Northwest. Purposeful sampling was used to select the study’s participants. The teachers and language specialists used for this study had a minimum of 2 years of experience to ensure they had basic knowledge about the phenomenon of parental involvement. Data were gathered using semistructured interviews, document artifacts and a reflective journal from November 2018 through April 2019. After each interview was transcribed, significant statements were extracted, and the analyzed statements were paired with six a priori key themes from Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework. Through axial coding three subthemes emerged from the data. Data analysis and results revealed that when ELL teachers and language specialists used parental involvement strategies, they were able to assist parents to be involved with their children’s education, which in turn could influence the children’s academic outcomes. Consequently, the participants also revealed the inherent challenges associated with the communication attribute of the framework. This research study is insightful because it contributes to the body of knowledge around how middle-school staff can use parental involvement strategies to influence academic success with their ELL student populations.

**Keywords:** parental involvement, parental engagement, middle-school English language learners, student academic success, and communication barriers.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the first-generation educators, the school support staff, and the volunteers who fight daily to help all students to access their education regardless of their culture, race, class or country of origin. I see you!
Acknowledgements

As I reflect on this journey, I am grateful for God’s faithfulness. Thank you, Lord, for the ‘no limit’ spirit that served as a comforter to me when I was faced with trying ‘one more time’ when I felt that I could not persevere. This experience has altered the way I view the world as well as the many individuals that are doing the best they can daily. First, I want to thank my loving wife, friend, coach and cheerleader, Christina Harris; through it all she has been a source of encouragement and a constant reminder of why I fight so hard. I also want to express my gratitude to my five children, Naomi, Markiece, Shanel, Raylene and Quintel, for remaining patient and loving even when I was not, and allowing me to spend extra hours of my goal. To my mother, Verlene Love, Aunt Erma Palmer, and Kevin Culp, thank you for your examples of resilience that that has driven me to continue to get better at everything I do. To my professional mentors, Dr. Wendy Bleecker and Dr. Sue Wright, and Dr. Karen McKinney, thank you all for seeing something in me that I could not see in myself and encouraging me to pursue such a foreign path. I will always remember the pep talks and how you normalized the academic stress that I encountered. Additionally, to all my aunties, uncles, cousins and kinfolks, thank you for your encouraging words as well as the support you have showed me throughout the years. I am and will always be inspired by you and your journeys.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

According to the Migration Policy Institute (2016), the foreign-born population in the United States grew from 9.6 million to 43.7 million between the years of 1970 and 2016. During this period, in one state, in the Pacific Northwest the foreign-born population grew from 322,144 to 1,020,394, and in the year 2017, the total number of ELL children was 464,400, of which 122,600 were enrolled in K–12 public schools (MPI, 2019). These numbers reveal that public educational systems are becoming more diverse, prompting the need for teachers to reexamine their communication and parental involvement strategies in regard to how they engage ELL populations as they attempt to educate their increasingly diverse student bodies (Robinson & Volpe, 2015; Soutullo, Smith-Bonahue, Sanders-Smith, & Navia, 2016). Clearly, some teachers may experience difficulties with using parental-involvement strategies to involve ELL parents in student learning, because of their lack of awareness and understanding of the cultural and traditional practices of many ELLs within schools (Robinson & Volpe, 2015; Soutullo et al., 2016).

To uncover recent findings about this topic, literature published from 2013 to 2018 was reviewed using word searches in Concordia University’s library and Google Scholar databases, using the following key terms: parental involvement, parental engagement, family engagement, English language learners (ELL), English as a second language (ESL), and English-language development (ELD). Research uncovered factors that inhibit the delivery of parental-involvement strategies to traditional students and ELL populations, along with the perceptions of these populations and public-school educators about the implementation of these strategies.
Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

As ELL populations continue to grow in the Pacific Northwest (Migration Policy Institute, 2016), many of these foreign-born families are enrolling their children in public schools, tasking teachers with bridging cultural and communication gaps between the new ELL groups and themselves. Traditional communication methods used by teachers to engage non-ELL populations have included phone calls, letters sent home, and parent–teacher conferences. However, because of the communication challenges that have arisen as a result of using these types of media to engage ELL populations, teachers may need additional strategies to educate, inform, and connect with ELL students and their parents (Soutullo et al., 2016). Effective communication may be a requirement for ensuring that parents, school staff, and community members are able to work together to influence student academic achievement (Epstein, 2009).

Within the literature, Epstein’s (2009) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1997) parental involvement and engagement frameworks were reviewed. Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework was the foundation for this study, because it conceptualizes the following six involvement types: “parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community” (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 64). These types of involvements can act as a framework for categorizing behaviors, delineating roles and actions performed by school staff, families, and community members as they work together to increase student academic achievement (Epstein et al., 2002). Historically, all six of the parent-involvement types have presented unique engagement challenges for school staff (Lowenhaupt, 2014); however, when implementing them with ELL populations, the effects of these challenges may be exacerbated by additional cultural and communication factors associated with these populations (Soutullo et al., 2016). The following paragraphs offer a brief overview of Epstein’s
six types of parental involvement, along with their potential benefits for teachers and parents. One may notice some similarities in benefits to teachers and parents linked to various types of parental involvement.

**Parenting.** This type of involvement helps families with establishing home environments to support student learning. Results for parents may include their acquiring a greater understanding of and confidence about parenting, improved understanding of child and adolescent development, and an increased ability to modify the home environment to make it more conducive for learning. Results for the teacher may include an awareness of parents’ everyday challenges and a greater understanding of families’ background, cultures, concerns, goals, and needs. Strategies used with this involvement type may include offering suggestions and training on how to improve home conditions, using workshops, and multimedia presentations to help parents understand their children’s developmental stages (Epstein, 2009).

**Communication.** The communication involvement type centers on designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications, which may aid parents with understanding school programs and policies, how to monitor their children’s progress, and how to improve parent-to-teacher communication. Results for teachers may include increased awareness of cultural factors that may influence how families communicate with schools, increased understanding of parent networks of communication, and an improved ability to understand the family’s views of school programming. Strategies used with this involvement type may include conferencing with parents; using language translators to assist ELL families, and school staff with communicating with each other; and sending home notices in the forms of memos and a newsletter regularly to inform parents of student progress and school events (Epstein, 2009).
Volunteering. The volunteer type of involvement includes recruiting and organizing parents to help and support schools. This involvement type could aid parents with understanding teachers’ jobs, which may lead to increased levels of empathy for the work teachers perform. It also could help families to feel welcome and valued when they visit schools. Results for teachers may include seeing families involved in new ways in the school environment, which may allow school staff to focus more attention on students because of the support they receive from volunteers. Strategies used with this involvement type may include developing volunteer programs in schools that promote volunteerism in the areas of monitoring school safety and basic student behavior management, such as safety patrols to monitor students before and after school (Epstein, 2009).

Learning-at-Home. This involvement type assists families in helping students at home with homework and other classroom-related activities. Results for parents may include building more capacity to encourage and assist their children with learning at home, and their understanding of school instructional programming may grow. Implementing this type of parental involvement may assist teachers with designing tailored homework assignments that take into consideration familial factors such as family cultural practices and family designs and structures, such as single-parent, and families’ income and educational levels. Strategies used with this involvement type may include sharing information with families about skills required for students to be successful at each grade level, distributing information about homework policies, and offering pointers on how to monitor and discuss schoolwork in the home environment (Epstein, 2009).

Decision-Making. This involvement type focuses on including parents in school decision-making and on developing parent leaders and representatives who will offer input into
policies, procedures, and practices that affect student education within schools. Benefits to parents may include their feeling a sense of ownership of the school as they are informed about parents’ voices in school decision-making processes. Some results for teachers may include an awareness of parents’ perspectives in policy development and decision-making processes within the school environment. Strategies used with this involvement type may include the development of active parent organizations, advisory councils, and parent networks that target school reform and improvement (Epstein, 2009).

Collaborating with the community. This type of parental involvement centers on identifying resources and services from the community that could assist with strengthening school programs, family units, student learning, and development. Results for parents may include their acquiring knowledge about community resources, along with a greater awareness of how to access community services. It may support teachers by increasing their awareness of community resources for referral purposes, and it could provide a pool of volunteers to aid them in educating students. A strategy used with this involvement type could be disseminating information to students and families about community resources, such as health care, cultural events, community-based recreational options, and social support groups (Epstein, 2009).

All six of Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement types are important and may warrant more in-depth individual reviews; however, given the research design and targeted communication attribute of this study, ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement through the lens of Epstein’s parental-involvement framework were explored. Research has revealed that parents and educators have miscommunicated with each other, which often has resulted in many educators’ judging parents as not wanting to be involved in school programming and parents feeling as if schools did not
want them involved (Soutullo et al., 2016; Lowenhaupt, 2014). Therefore, this study will examine the communication that takes place between middle-school ELL teachers, ELL students, ELL parents, and language specialists. For this study, middle school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement related to how it influences student academic success were explored, within public middle-school environments.

Statement of the Problem

Ample research shows that parental involvement has a positive influence on student academic success with dominant English-speaking student populations; however, research on its influences on ELL populations is limited (Chase, Hilliard, Geldhof, Warren, & Lerner, 2014; Leatherwood & Voisin, 2017), especially for middle-school populations (Shim, 2013; Vázquez-Montilla, Just, & Triscari, 2014). The overall existing body of research about ELL student populations revealed that educators often possess a limited understanding of linguistic and cultural elements, which hinders them from engaging ELL students. As schools become more racially and ethnically diverse, the achievement gap between native speakers and ELL student continues to grow. More than half of middle-school ELL students were considered to be nonproficient on national math and reading examinations in comparison with other students (Tellez & Manthey, 2015). This figure highlights that middle-school ELL students are not excelling in the core classes, which hinders their academic success.

Several researchers took a more in-depth look at factors that may contribute to ELL students’ not excelling academically in the school environment. They discovered the three broad areas—language and culture, family resources, and families’ undocumented status as barriers—that hindered parental-involvement efforts with ELL populations in general, which may contribute to the poor academic outcomes of ELL students (Soutullo et al., 2016). They also
discovered that many teachers believed that schools’ communication strategies were ineffective and that teachers often misinterpreted families’ unresponsiveness to them as a product of their lack of attendance at school events (Soutullo et al., 2016). Despite the challenges associated with parental involvement, Zhou (2014) maintained that parental-involvement programs may aid in the development of effective partnerships between the school and home, with parents representing the home environment of the child and the teacher representing the school environment. Given the potential influence of parental involvement on student success, examining ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ perceptions and experiences concerning parental involvement may be worthwhile. The findings may contribute to the body of research in this area, which may assist school systems in developing additional strategies to engage ELL populations.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to reveal and describe middle-school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement and its influence on student academic success at the middle school level. As teachers plan and deliver instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students, their perceptions of students and their needs may influence the way they deliver instructions to students. According to McFarland-Piazza, Lord, Smith, and Downey (2012), the parent–teacher relationship may be a critical element in accomplishing this goal with ELL populations. They argued that successful parental-involvement programs focus on improving the parent–teacher relationship to help build a respectful and an effective learning environment. This type of environment is formed when both parties value the contributions of the other and collaborate for the success of the student.
McFarland-Piazza et al. asserted that teachers feel more valued when they have healthy and positive relationships with parents.

The building of healthy relationships may be linked to the development of effective communication among individuals. This suggestion calls attention to the language barriers that exist between teachers and ELL parents, because such barriers may prevent the two parties from communicating effectively to build respectful relationships. In light of this, within this study, the perceptions and experiences of language specialists, as cultural brokers (Jezewski, 1990), were explored to assess the feasibility of this goal with school staff and ELL families. The use of cultural brokers was validated as a beneficial practice to help educators connect with ELL populations by helping to rebuild trust between the groups (Geller et al., 2015; Ishimaru et al., 2016). I used Epstein’s (2009) six parental-involvement types to guide this study. Reviewing the research participants’ perceptions of parental involvement using Epstein’s framework provided data that may assist education systems with training teachers on how to engage their ELL students and those students’ parents to influence student academic success.

**Research Questions**

Creswell (2007) defined a phenomenological study as one that describes the essence of human experiences. Researchers use perception as the main source of knowledge, because the research participants’ perceptions cannot be disputed (Moustakas, 1994). This study was guided by research questions that are designed to provide data about the research participants’ experiences, perceptions, and use of each of the parental-involvement types. I sought to discover the essence of the research participants’ experiences with parental involvement related to its influence on student academic success. I used the following questions to explore how ELL
middle school teachers and language specialists perceive and experience parental involvement at the middle school level:

Q1: How are middle school ELL teachers’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support student academic success?

Q2: How are language specialists’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support parental involvement efforts at the middle school level?

**Rationale and Relevance**

In the qualitative research tradition, many different types of research designs may be used. The qualitative research designs of narrative research, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory study, and case study were used to provide existing research on parental involvement. For this study, a phenomenological research design was used to explore the lived experiences of ELL teachers and language specialists who have encountered the parental-involvement phenomenon (Walsh, 2012). Researchers using a phenomenological design place an emphasis on how the participants perceive meaning themselves as opposed to focusing on the researcher’s perceptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Research on parental involvement in public schools focused mainly on how such involvement affects parents, students, and teachers and on how it influences the academic and behavioral success of students (Axford et al., 2015; Chase et al., 2014; Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Epstein (2009) would argue that it is important for school staff, parents, and community members to understand the benefits of working together to encourage student learning. Understanding how teachers’ beliefs build their own confidence in the value of
parental-involvement programs could create awareness of the underlying influences teachers have on these programs (Broomhead, 2014; Ivankova et al., 2016). This awareness may provide additional support to teachers as they facilitate parental-involvement strategies. Moreover, it was assumed that the phenomenological research design would allow me to record and report the essence of how parental involvement may influence academic success (Moustakas, 1994).

**Significance of the Study**

The increasing number of ELL students in general-education classes has affected how teachers implement pedagogical practices within the middle-school content classroom. Middle-school general-education teachers are challenged to use best practices to meet the learning needs of their nonnative speakers (Vázquez-Montilla et al., 2014). Berg, Petró, and Greybeck (2012) argued that many general-education teachers do not feel prepared to support ELLs within their traditional-classroom setting. Hence, teachers could use additional training to support their ELL student populations, since the lack of preparation could hinder their ability to support ELL students in acquiring a second language (Bunch, 2013).

According to Olvera (2015), middle school is a transitioning stage for adolescents, and it can be especially challenging for ELLs as they adjust to the physical changes happening in their bodies associated with the developmental aspects of adolescence and as they grapple with learning new content. Cullington (2014) argued that ELL students struggle in school to meet proficiency levels on standardized tests because the tests are available only in English, meaning that language barriers may limit ELL students’ ability to demonstrate their knowledge. There is a dearth of studies on middle school teachers’ perceptions of how parental involvement influences academic success in schools with increasing ELL populations (Shim, 2013; Vázquez-Montilla et al., 2014). My review of literature on language specialists’ perceptions of the same
phenomenon showed that research on this topic was nonexistent. After reviewing the literature, I recognized the need for a qualitative study gauging middle-school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ perceptions of parental involvement and its influence on ELL students’ academic success. For this reason, a phenomenological approach design was deemed the most suitable for this study. Using Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework enabled this study to provide insight into how school systems may improve their communication and parental-involvement practices with ELL populations.

**Definition of Terms**

The terms *parental-involvement* and *parental-engagement* have been used synonymously and interchangeably in the literature. Both are often used to describe a complex series of actions that take place among schools’ staff, parents, and community members to help children to be successful in public schools. Similarly, throughout this study, the term *parental involvement* is used to describe both involvement and engagement strategies used to support student achievement, because the term involvement is in line with Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework. A list of the terms and definitions used within this study follows.

*Parental involvement:* Often used interchangeably with parental engagement in the literature, it is described as a complex series of actions that take place among schools, parents, and the community on the behalf of children accessing their education (Epstein, 2009; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

*Cultural broker:* A cultural broker is a person who bridges, links, or serves as a mediator between individuals of different cultural groups to help mitigate communication challenges (Jezewski, 1990).
**Communication:** This term refers to an exchange that is transactional in nature, involving the sharing of information between groups of individuals in a way that is reciprocal and contains a high level of empathy (Schneider & Arnot, 2018).

**Foreign born:** This term refers to “people residing in the United States at the time of the population survey who were not U.S. citizens at birth. The foreign-born population includes naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent immigrants (or green-card holders), refugees and asylees, [and] certain legal non-immigrants” (Migration Policy Institute, 2016, para.1).

**ELL:** According to the U.S. Department of Education, ELLs are “students who were not born in the United States” as cited in Migration Policy Institute, 2016, para 2).

**Middle school:** For the purpose of this study, middle school will include students in Grades 7–8.

**Assumptions**

According to Creswell (2012), researchers bring a set of certain beliefs or assumptions to their researcher studies. Assumptions in qualitative research are connected to a research study’s level of bias, the participant and researcher relationship, the time frame of the study, the number of participants, and the extent to which the findings are valid and reliable (Suzuki, 2012). In this phenomenological study, three assumptions needed to be addressed. First was the assumption that participants would be willing to provide information to me. Second was that the research participants would be willing to supply me with accurate accounts of their experiences with parental involvement; and third was that I would be aware of my role while engaging research participants.

These assumptions could have led to a level of bias within the themes and concepts developed during the data analysis phase. In efforts to address this potential challenge, the
semistructured questions were carefully crafted to include open-ended questions that allowed for in-depth responses from participants. I also field tested these questions. Themes from the individual interviews were analyzed using the Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method described by Moustakas (1994). Prior to engaging in the coding process, member checking was used to protect the validity of the transcribed audio-recorded interviews, by securely emailing a copy of each participant’s transcript to them to confirm it represented what he or she intended for me to record, and that my preliminary findings accurately captured their statements and comments.

**Delimitations**

Within this study five delimitations were present. The first was that teacher participants and language-specialist participants were selected through purposeful sampling, which enabled me to recruit research participants who had similar experiences with the phenomenon to be explored (Moustakas, 1994; Walsh, 2012). The second delimitation was that middle schools that possess the largest ELL populations were purposefully selected to be research sites. The third delimitation was time for gathering the necessary data for this study. The tasks connected with each of the data-gathering methods of this study produced valuable data, but given that it took place over the course of 6 months, with 3 of those months designated for gathering the data, time had to be managed to complete each of them.

The fourth delimitation was that there were no ELL children to be interviewed. The majority of data and findings were collected from interactions among the teacher-participants, language-specialist participants, and I, so all data were gathered from adult representatives and not from ELL students themselves. The fifth delimitation involved using the perceptions and experiences of language specialists concerning how middle-school staff communicate and
facilitate the six types of parental involvement instead of directly interviewing ELL parents. It would have been preferable to interview parents; however, as a product of the potential language barriers and of the time needed to do so, the data from the language specialists were not an equal comparison but nevertheless provided valuable insight into perspectives of ELL parents, given that parents and teachers typically communicate about school matters with them first.

**Limitations**

The phenomenological research approach provided a depth of understanding and the essence of parental-involvement phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants at the middle school level related to how that phenomenon influences student academic success. Although the methodology used in-depth analysis and a priori coding, three limitations existed within this study. The first limitation concerned the criteria used to purposefully select the research participants. Within the district there was a small number of participants who had experience with the phenomenon to be explored in this study (Merriam, 2009). Similarly, the second limitation was not only specific to this study but also had to do with the nature of phenomenological studies because of the subjectivity within them. According to van Manen (1997), phenomenological research can restrict the transferability of a study because sample sizes are often small. Having a sample size of three ELL teachers and three language specialists challenges the transferability of the study to other similar populations. The last limitation of the study was the use of a reflective journal as a data source to triangulate the data of this study. Although memoing (Tufford & Newman, 2010) was used to limit my level of bias, the journal entries were representative of my interpretation of the research participants’ behaviors and comments; hence the study may possess a level of subjectivity that constitutes a limitation in this study (Dowden, Gunby, Warren, & Boston, 2014).
Summary

With the increasing level of ELL families relocating to the United States, public education systems are changing; and if teachers are to continue to educate all children effectively, they may need to develop additional parental-involvement strategies to work with ELL populations (Robinson & Volpe, 2015; Soutullo et al., 2016). In this chapter, I outlined the background of ELLs and explained the need for a phenomenological research study to gauge the perceptions of middle-school ELL teachers and language specialists related to parental involvement and student academic success. The findings of this study may assist school administrative teams with understanding the perceptions and experiences of ELL teachers and language specialists related to parental involvement as they work to increase their staff’s proficiency levels with implementing parental-involvement strategies. To this end, this phenomenological study used Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework as a conceptual framework to explore the experiences and perceptions of ELL middle school teachers and language specialists related to parental involvement influencing ELL student academic success.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

As mentioned previously, increases in diversity within the United States’ public educational systems is creating additional challenges for educators (Robinson & Volpe, 2015). For example, because some teachers may lack awareness and understanding of the cultural and traditional practices of diverse families, they may have difficulty employing parental-involvement strategies to engage them (Robinson & Volpe, 2015; Soutullo, Smith-Bonahue, Sanders-Smith, & Navia, 2016). This chapter contains a review of the literature concerning parental involvement and engagement with ELL and non-ELL populations. The current literature contains a considerable amount of information, recommendations, and strategies for educators about how to engage non-English-language populations. Literature published from 2013 to 2018 was reviewed to uncover more recent findings concerning this topic. The search methods included word searches conducted in Concordia University’s library and on Google Scholar databases using the key terms parental involvement, parental engagement, family engagement, and English language learners (ELL), English as a second language (ESL), and English-language development (ELD).

Most of the research used in this review was from the last 5 years, although older research was used to build the context of the topics under review. Research on the effects and impact of parental involvement on diverse English-speaking student populations and ELL student populations was explored. Key themes, such as the effects and impact of parental involvement on academic achievement, social factors, mental health, and discipline within schools, were reviewed. I explored teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of parental engagement strategies and placed findings under the dominant topic of barriers to effective parent involvement.
Conceptual Framework

The foundation for this study was Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework, because it was developed from many research studies’ findings related to the topic of parental involvement. Epstein’s framework encompasses three overlapping spheres: “the family, the school, and the community” (p. 2). These spheres influence a child’s growth and development. The overlapping of all three factors places the child in the center and reveals that the factors are interdependent upon each other. This interdependence also creates friction among parents, teachers, and students, as a result of societal issues that arise that are outside of their control.

Within the framework are the six parental involvement types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (see Appendix C). Historically, all six types of the parental-involvement areas have presented unique engagement challenges for school staff; however, these challenges may be exacerbated when adding ELL populations to the matrix (Lowenhaupt, 2014).

Partnership allows the school, the parents, and the community to work with each other to learn and share ideas to influence student learning (Epstein, 2009). Using Epstein’s parental involvement framework in this study allowed me to increase my level of understanding of parental involvement with middle-school ELL populations. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to answer the research questions while revealing and describing middle-school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement and its influence on student academic success.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

The topic of parental involvement is not new; it has been widely explored by governmental systems, school officials, educators, and parent organizations. This is significant
because it highlights that there is an awareness at multiple levels of the importance of parental involvement in education systems. Traditional parental involvement activities favored by schools normally have included Back-to-School Nights, participation in Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs), helping with homework, and chaperoning field trips (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015). This literature review will not explore these involvement types; however, it is worth noting how parental involvement has been traditionally viewed and managed, because doing so may assist readers with understanding barriers that ELL and non-ELL populations may encounter.

Within the selected body of literature used within this review, researchers used qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods to explore the topic of parental involvement within K–12 school systems. Throughout the literature, various researchers explored the effects of parental involvement models and practices on diverse student populations. The researchers discussed in the following paragraphs explored the impact of these models and strategies on engaging ELL populations, reducing student discipline, and improving students’ mental health. They also explored how parental involvement may help students connect socially in schools and improve their academic outcomes. Additionally, each of the following studies explored various factors that may influence educators’ abilities to support parental involvement in school systems.

**Parental involvement with ELL populations.** Research into parental involvement with ELLs dates back to more than 20 years ago (Baird, 2015). This shows that this is a challenging phenomenon for education systems; however, it also reveals a history of multiple attempts to improve parental involvement with this population. For example, Hornby and Lafaele (2011) used an adapted version of the Epstein (2009) model of parental involvement to develop the following four unique barriers to parental involvement: individual parent and family factors,
parent–teacher factors, child factors, and societal factors. Tarasawa and Waggoner (2015) and Lowenhaupt (2014) reviewed these factors and agreed that many of the efforts to improve parental involvement lacked adequate ELL parent input into the process. This points to the need for education systems to increase ELL parent input in school decision-making processes.

Ishimaru (2014), taking the previously mentioned factors into consideration, used an ethnographic case study to explore some collaborative efforts of parents, community organizers and educators to develop a model to address educational change. Using data from 48 interviews with 44 educators, parents, and community members, all of whom were part of a district coalition, and with more than 100 hours of direct and participant observations, Ishimaru discovered that the coalition helped to build positive relationships among district leaders. She also reported that the coalition helped the district leaders to improve their involvement practices with the growing population of ELL students within the school district of her study. This is significant because her research revealed that engaging all stakeholders in the parental-involvement improvement process may help schools to improve their engagement efforts.

Parental input in the improvement process was highlighted as a critical factor for improving parental involvement efforts with ELL populations. Methods to effectively accomplish this in light of the barriers highlighted by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) may require additional support from the community. For example, when Tarasawa and Waggoner (2015) used a case study to develop successful outreach efforts to 3,300 ELL students, they discovered a lack of adequate ELL parent representation on their parent advisory council. This was a critical element because the authors wanted to explore the experiences of ELL parents within school systems. To overcome this barrier, they collaborated with community agencies that worked with diverse populations in the community to recruit additional parents. Consequently, after gathering
data and feedback from participants of the study, their findings identified barriers that limited ELL parental involvement, such as the reality that despite ELL parents’ having placed a high value on their children’s education, many of them reported feeling less connected with their children’s school than did mainstream English-speaking families. The researchers suggested that if school wanted to improve ELL parents’ involvement, they needed to explore using more culturally and language-sensitive involvement approaches.

Parent–teacher factors were outlined in research as a barrier to parental involvement efforts (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Because this research was conducted with non-ELL populations, it may be concluded that parent-to-teacher interactions with ELL populations may be more challenging to navigate because of structural factors, power differentials, and the additional cultural and language elements. In exploring the parent-teacher factor at the middle school level, Shim (2013) used grounded theory to explore the dynamics of ELL parent and teacher interactions. In looking at the total of 385 middle-school students who attended the research school site, with ELL students making up 20% of the population, Shim sought to explore factors that hindered the collaborative efforts between teachers and ELL parents.

In Shim’s study, participants attended bi-annual ELL parent events and shared their experiences with her during 15-minute interviews. The study’s findings revealed that the ELL parent-involvement strategies used by teachers overlooked the structural factors and power differentials between them and the parents, which hindered their efforts to collaborate. Shim reported that “teachers’ judgments toward ELL students and their parents; ELL parents’ frustration about their inability to influence a teacher’s decision making; and ELL parents’ fear of repercussions for speaking up” affected both the teachers’ and the parents’ ability to communicate, leading teachers to misunderstand the perspective of families and vice versa (p.
This argument calls attention to factors that prevent teachers and parents from collaborating effectively with each other and thereby from potentially assisting education systems in improving their engagement efforts directed toward ELL populations.

Thus far, the research reviewed has highlighted multiple barriers that ELL populations experience in the area of parental involvement, along with areas of improvement for education systems. Soutullo et al. (2016) studied some of the challenges that schools face because of an increase in immigrant populations within school systems. Using focus groups’ interview data from 18 elementary teachers, Soutullo et al. discovered the three broad areas that constituted barriers to engagement: language and culture, family resources, and families’ undocumented status. They also discovered that teachers believed schools’ communication strategies were ineffective within schools and that teachers misinterpreted families as being unresponsive to them because of their lack of attendance at school events. The researchers suggested that the most effective involvement strategy would be to build true partnership between teachers and parents, with mutual respect and understanding at its core. This research signifies a shift from considering the education system entirely responsible for improving parental involvement to considering that responsibility to be held jointly by the education system and by parents, which is a notion that aligns with Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework.

It is well known that collaborative partnerships may improve participation efforts among groups (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015), but key elements of collaboration are mutual respect and understanding among the groups (Soutullo et al., 2016). To build mutual respect and understanding between them, ELL parents and teachers have to communicate effectively with each other. In taking a more in-depth look at how to build collaborative relationships, LaRocque (2013) assessed parental involvement strategies with diverse families using a meta-analysis.
approach to explore strategies that could facilitate successful and effective partnerships between the homes and schools of students. LaRoque found that parental involvement did impact the academic domains, but that its effect was greater on the social element of students’ and their families’ lives, meaning that it often led to fewer disciplinary problems in schools. LaRocque also discovered that ELL families felt excluded from participating in school systems, which hindered the building of collaborative partnerships. This information called attention to the reality that educators who work with ELL families need additional engagement strategies to be successful. It also suggested that the benefits of successful and effective partnerships between homes and schools can positively influence ELL students academically and socially, but emphasized that the building of a collaborative partnership between parents and educators is crucial.

One factor to consider when exploring the building of collaborative efforts between schools and ELL parents is whether parents can access and participate in opportunities, given the challenges they face. Tarasawa and Waggoner (2015) argued that schools have misinterpreted ELL families’ lack of participation in school activities as meaning these families do not care about their children’s education. In reality, many ELL families face “Language barriers, fears with regard to immigration status, time pressures, family obligations, lack of transportation, and a disconnect between home and school cultures” (p. 130). All of these factors hinder their ability to access and participate in school activities.

Lowenhaupt (2014) explored school access and participation for Latinos, using quantitative methods to analyze statewide survey data from school principals and teachers in 384 schools who worked with immigrant students. Using a descriptive approach to identify patterns in practice from survey data and thematic coding of responses from participants about family
involvement, Lowenhaupt discovered that schools shaped family engagement practices, but that more culturally appropriate definitions were needed for family engagement practices to be effective with Latino populations. Lowenhaupt argued that traditional definitions of family engagement in schools failed to include certain communities, perpetuating marginalization of individuals because of their race, ethnicity, language, and immigration status. These findings mean that education systems must explore other, nontraditional options to engage ELL families, because many of the currently used practices do not account for elements connected to ELL populations (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015).

Nontraditional engagement options may include communication between parents and schools to be scheduled at more regular intervals, communication offered in the parents’ first language, home visits to be conducted, and someone to facilitate home-to-school coordination (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015). In researching an intervention to help facilitate home-to-school coordination with ELL families, Ishimaru et al. (2016) explored the use of cultural brokers in conventional school-involvement practice in schools. Cultural brokering is defined as “helping families translate and rehearse the behaviors & [sic] communication styles of the dominant culture, providing access to institutionally based networks, & [sic] integrating the cultural values & [sic] resources of families & [sic] community members into the school environment” (Patak Pietrafesa, 2017, para. 2).

Research validated the use of cultural brokers as a critical element in addressing differences between schools and parents to improve parental involvement efforts to ELL populations (Geller et al., 2015; Ishimaru et al., 2016). By examining qualitative case studies of three parent and community engagement initiatives in the American west, these researchers discovered that the role of a cultural broker was complex but also critical for bridging the
differences between schools and parents. The authors also discussed how conventional engagement efforts failed to capture the cultural and social resources of nondominant families. However, using an equitable lens to implement parental-involvement strategies and cultural brokers could help parents to connect with schools. This idea is significant because it provides a well-researched option for improving engagement strategies to help remediate communication challenges and conflicts that may arise when education professionals attempt to engage ELL populations (Gazzotti & Liberali, 2014).

The use of a cultural broker can help improve communication between ELL parents and schools. Similarly, Geller et al. (2015) explored the use of cultural brokers to increase the successful deployment of parental involvement strategies to Latino families. Using focus groups, interviews, and observation with five cultural brokers, 81 parents, and 18 teachers, Geller et al. researched the impact of this strategy on building trust with parents. The researchers reported that although using cultural brokers was a promising practice for building trust and respect between parents and teachers, the harmful effects of the dominant educational systems that caused the mistrust remained present. This notion introduces larger systemic issues as potential barriers to improving parental involvement in education systems, which was also surfaced as an issue by Epstein (2009).

**Parental involvement and engagement.** The aforementioned researchers explored parental involvement with ELL populations. The researchers mentioned in the following paragraphs explored parental involvement with non-ELL populations, which is significant because many traditional involvement practices used by educators were developed for them. Consequently, exploring research on the impact of these efforts with non-ELL populations may help practitioners to alter current successful models and practices to support ELL populations.
Avvisati, Gurgand, Guyon, and Maurin (2013) explored the benefits of parent involvement using quantitative methods and a controlled experiment. Their focus was on parents’ attitudes about parental involvement, children’s behavior, and the effect of parental involvement on children’s academic results.

Using a large-scale randomized control trial with 1,000 parents connected to 34 middle schools and 183 classes in Paris, France, the researchers randomly assigned 96 of the 183 classes to the control group of parents who facilitated parental-involvement programs within the middle schools. They discovered that parental involvement was a low-cost intervention and that involving parents in school programming positively affected students’ academic and social behaviors. This finding is significant because the researchers’ sample population was middle schools, and they noted that during the middle-school years, disadvantaged parents were less often involved with their children academically, which led to their children’s poor academic achievement and increased social problems. According to Beddoes and Castelli (2017), students typically enter middle school with undeveloped physical stature and a high level of emotional instability, and Wang, Hill, and Hofkens (2014) observed that parental involvement participation decreased during the middle-school years. These factors may need to be considered when exploring parental involvement with ELL middle-school populations.

When considering the potential emotional and physical instability of traditional middle schoolers, it becomes apparent that they may require additional support. For example, there is potential for social problems to occur more frequently among this population (Avvisati et al., 2013). Axford et al. (2015) explored the social behavior of bullying and the impact that parent involvement may have on it. Using a meta-analysis, Axford et al. validated that including parents in school-based prevention programs could open positive communication pathways
between school and parents, which could benefit children at school and home. The authors did not report a significant impact of parent involvement on social behaviors; however, they validated findings of parental involvement having a positive impact on communication and academic achievement. This shows that parental involvement with middle-school parents can open positive communication pathways that may be helpful for students as they transition through a difficult phase of life.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (2016), 49.5% of middle school-age children may have a mental health disorder and require additional assistance. Piotrowska et al. (2017) explored previous research on this topic to develop a conceptual model of parental involvement with programs for students who have mental health challenges. By evaluating the outcomes of students in parental-involvement programs, Piotrowska et al. developed the connect, attend, participate, enact (CAPE) model. They argued that the model addressed the need for a comprehensive model of parental engagement that took both the child’s environment and the dynamics of the caregiver–child relationship into consideration. One critical discovery of the Piotrowska et al. study was that the success of the program was dependent upon the researchers’ ability to reach and engage parents. This suggests that parents must be involved in school programs to assist children who may have mental challenges. Two questions that arose were: (a) Do ELL middle-school students experience higher or lower rates of mental health challenges? and (b) What potential resource would they need to be successful?

In further exploring the domain of mental health and researching high school populations, Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) conducted a multiwave longitudinal study that explored the effects of parental involvement on mental health and academic achievement with students. Researching 1,056 adolescents, they explored the effects of different types of parental
involvement on 10th graders’ academic achievement and 11th graders’ levels of depression. They assessed three “latent constructs of parental involvement” using three scales: “home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and academic socialization” (p. 615). They also used two latent constructs to measure the student report measures “behavioral and emotional engagement” (p. 615) using the Behavioral Engagement Scale.

The Home-Based Involvement Scale assessed five items linked to how parents manage after-school education for their children. The School-Based Scale assessed the frequency with which parents attended school events, and the Academic Socialization Scale used five items to assess how parents communicated with their children about their future educational goals. The Behavioral Engagement Scale possessed five items to assess students’ behaviors and emotions. All the items of the scales were rated on a 5-point scale. With the data, the researchers established a positive correlation between parent involvement and good mental health and academic achievement with these students. Furthermore, they found that teachers and parents working together can positively support high school students’ mental health needs. This shows that parental involvement can support students with mental health challenges at the high school level as well.

All students who have mental health challenges may not need academic resource help; however, it is worth noting that a portion of the middle-school population may need special-education services. The researchers discussed in the following paragraphs explored the impact of parental involvement with special-education populations. Adams and Jones (2016) used a mixed-methods approach of sequential explanatory design to explore the impact of parental involvement on helping special-education students to become more integrated within general education settings. They first used a survey instrument with 95 teachers and 104 parents, from
10 government-funded primary and secondary schools located in Malaysia. Next, looking at the number of times that parents attended individualized education plan (IEP) meetings with teachers, the researchers selected 68 parents’ responses to examine in greater depth and to explore the nature of collaboration between the two populations. They discovered that parental involvement benefited special-education high school students socially and academically in school and highlighted parental involvement as a significant factor for supporting special-education populations.

In looking more critically at the topic of academic success with high school general-education students, Chase, Hilliard, Geldhof, Warren, and Lerner’s (2014) study was part of an ongoing longitudinal study of youth development, which began in United States in 2002 and involved 710 students in grades 10 through 12. Using a meta-analysis and results of their structural equation model, Chase et al. discovered that parental involvement was pivotal to students’ academic accomplishments and that the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive domains of the student affected academic success. They concluded that students’ academic success required an understanding of multiple factors that influence students, given that the factors do not exist in isolation. This conclusion emphasizes the importance of researchers’ becoming aware of multiple factors that affect a student’s ability to be academically successful.

Diverse student populations may have additional factors that need to be considered. In looking at African-American and Latino males, Leatherwood and Voisin (2017) explored parental involvement outcomes between them and their White counterparts. Using a sample population of 226 youth and their caregivers, they researched how a youth’s desire for an education affected that youth’s level of academic success. Leatherwood and Voisin’s study outlined a youth’s desired educational outcome, as a factor to be considered when looking at
parental involvement. Using survey result data, the researchers discovered that a caregiver’s educational level and the vision of the life that the caregiver had for his or her children had a greater effect on the level of educational attainment among the youth, illustrating the importance of engaging African American and Latino parents to specifically affect the educational outcomes of African American and Latino males. This finding also points to the need to have educators understand barriers that diverse communities may experience as they attempt to engage in their students’ education.

**Barriers to effective parental involvement and engagement.** Research outlined thus far has examined parental involvement and its effect on students socially, mentally, and academically. However, some researchers alluded to barriers, such as socioeconomic factors, affecting parents’ abilities to be involved in their children’s education (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). The researchers discussed in the following paragraphs explored teachers’ perspectives and biases, parents’ perspectives on school engagement efforts, and low socioeconomic statuses as barriers to parental involvement efforts. In light of the previous researchers’ findings, it may be plausible that all of these barriers affect ELL populations and non-ELL populations, but further research would be required to verify that thesis, because the research discussed below was conducted with non-ELL populations.

**Teacher perspectives and biases.** The ability of parents and teachers to work together is linked to multiple factors, such as parent availability and parents’ access to resources (Williams & Sánchez, 2013; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). If teachers are unaware of these factors, they can develop inaccurate perceptions and biases toward some parent groups. McKenna and Millen (2013) used a grounded theory model to explore some teachers’ perceptions. They conducted a pilot study merged with hypothetical ideas and an inductive theory on parent voice to explore the
impact of teachers’ perceptions of parents on parent engagement strategies. Specifically, they recruited a small population of eight mothers who had multiple children in public schools. Their findings included the two major themes of (a) parents having different views of parental involvement in school programming and process and (b) parents having defined the boundary between school life and home life differently from educators. Parents viewed the teachers’ role as serving educational purposes primarily, and when the students returned home it was then the parents’ responsibility to care for their physical, social, and emotional needs. The researchers argued that educators’ inability to serve students was often linked to negative perceptions educators had about parental involvement, given that teachers believed that the role of the parent was to assist students academically at home with homework and to attend school functions. This study, although conducted with very few subjects, suggests that the misperceptions held by parents and teachers may generally hinder parental involvement efforts with student populations.

Looking more specifically at where educators’ misperception may originate, Broomhead (2014) explored the cultural views of educators working with special-needs students. Using a qualitative interpretative phenomenological methodological approach, Broomhead conducted semistructured interviews with 15 education professionals from within behavioral, emotional, and social difficulty (BESD) and mainstream schools. His findings indicated that the norms and values held by educators regarding parenting practices and education were biased and affected the educational outcomes of students. This finding is significant because it revealed how educators’ cultural lens, if not addressed, may lead to their developing biases toward certain student populations (Ivankova et al., 2016). What this means is that parental-involvement efforts may also be affected by the perceptions that educators have of diverse families, which may negatively affect student academic achievement (McKenna & Millen, 2013).
Additionally, a teacher’s attitude may be a reflection of his or her perceptions, which are derived from his or her cultural views (Ivankova et al., 2016). Researchers have validated that a teacher’s negative perceptions can adversely affect how that teacher communicates with parents (Broomhead, 2014; McKenna & Millen, 2013). Ivankova et al. (2016) used a mixed-methods design to research teachers’ and parents’ attitudes toward underperforming general-education students and the impact of teachers’ biases on student academic outcomes. Administering questionnaires to 156 teachers and 186 parents, they discovered that when teachers used biased approaches to assess students, the outcomes of each student were negatively affected. This research revealed how teachers’ perceptions influenced their ability to engage parents, hindering their ability to communicate effectively with them.

Parents’ perceptions of school involvement and engagement. The previous paragraphs illustrated that teachers’ perceptions have been shown to affect parental involvement negatively (Broomhead, 2014; McKenna & Millen, 2013). To complete the picture, Yoder and Lopez (2013) explored parents’ perceptions of their having input into school programming. Using semistructured interviews with 12 parents who had school-age children between the ages of 4 and 17, they analyzed parents’ perceptions by transcribing audiotapes and written correspondences from focus groups. The data were used to explore factors that affected the groups’ ability to be involved in schools’ programming and to outline how parents were able to overcome barriers to involvement. Yoder and Lopez discovered that parents wanted to be more involved with schools but lacked the necessary resources of time and monies to do so. Yoder and Lopez also reported that feelings of marginalization prevented parents from being involved in school programming. This finding suggests that without adequate resources, parents cannot
take advantage of the opportunities to be involved that schools offer (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015).

Learning that parents feel marginalized because of their lack of resources has indicated that if parental involvement practices are to be equitable, time and financial resources may be a factor to consider when developing them. Robinson and Volpe (2015) conducted a qualitative study to explore parental-involvement models at two elementary public schools in an Appalachian school district. Using individual and focus group interviews with 16 parents with very low socioeconomic statuses, the researchers explored the themes of school culture and climate, educational policy, and parental involvement. Their findings included that parents wanted to be more involved in the education of their children, but limited time to be engaged and feelings of marginalization prevented them from doing so. This finding calls attention to the need for resources and for soliciting parents’ input into developing parental involvement activities to improve their accessibility for all parent groups (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015; Yoder and Lopez, 2013).

To further explore the perceptions of parent groups, Tucker and Schwartz (2013) explored the perspectives of 135 parents who had students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Using a mixed-methods survey study, they examined parents’ perceptions of how collaborative the individualized education plan (IEP) process was for them and their children. Findings revealed a lack of opportunities for parents to provide input into the process resulting from parents’ having difficulty communicating with school teams. In other words, some parent groups may face barriers when attempting to communicate with schools. Murray et al. (2014) also explored parental involvement with the individual education plan (IEP) process among African American parent groups. Using semistructured interviews with 44 African
American parents, they researched parents’ perceptions of their participation in these processes. Similar to what was reported by Tucker and Schwartz (2013), parents in this study reported encountering communication barriers to becoming what they perceived as fair partners in the IEP process. This may be critical information: If parents do not feel that they are meaningful partners in the IEP process, can they be expected to increase their involvement in it?

Meaningful parental involvement among African American families was further explored by Williams and Sánchez (2013). They studied African American families in inner cities to explore barriers that parents in such families faced while attempting to be involved in their children’s education. Their study was part of an ongoing investigation into parental involvement in an inner-city high school. Using in-depth interviews with 25 African American families, the researchers found that although parents wanted to collaborate more with schools, obstacles that were indigenous to inner cities, such as lack of access, time, and resources, prevented them from doing so. Findings also suggested that if educators take these factors into consideration when planning and implementing school-based programming, parental involvement in inner city schools may increase.

**Socioeconomic barriers to school choice.** Throughout the literature, there are suggestions that a family’s socioeconomic status could serve as a barrier to school involvement. A lack of financial resources could lead to parents not participating in school processes that influence student academic success (Williams & Sánchez, 2013; Yoder & Lopez, 2013). Finances may also affect a parent’s ability to offer his or her child educational opportunities. Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, and Wilson (2015) used an economic model to explore how families’ income levels affected their ability to choose educational settings for their children. Using a quantitative method, with a sample size of 9,369, households, they examined
characteristics of households and of schools, along with the distances between schools and homes. They discovered that most of the families in the study preferred schools with high academic performances but that their income levels prevented them from moving their children to a choice school within a school district that gave choice options. This finding highlights how a lack of financial resources can both hinder a parent’s ability to be meaningfully involved in schools (Williams & Sánchez, 2013; Yoder & Lopez, 2013) and prevent a parent from giving his or her children certain educational opportunities.

Attempts have been made to provide educational opportunities for disadvantaged youth; however, there may be barriers that prevent these youth from taking advantage of those opportunities. Chevalier, Harmon, O’Sullivan, and Walker (2013) explored the effects of policies designed to limit income constraints in efforts to provide families with additional schooling options. Using a series of British cross-sectional data sets, they discovered that despite the intended purpose of school choice policies to open up more opportunities for families that have low incomes, these policies were less effective than ensuring that families had permanent increases to their household incomes. This finding illustrates that offering more education options and developing income policies to assist low-income families does not guarantee that families will be able to overcome barriers to accessing educational opportunities.

**Review of Methodological Issues**

Within the body of literature reviewed in this study, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches were used. Creswell (2014) asserted that each of these methods can be used to explore human phenomena. Qualitative and quantitative methods are used to test theories empirically by exploring different variables’ relationships with each other (Creswell, 2014). Mixed-methods research combines elements of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide
well-supported and diverse findings for researchers (Creswell, 2014). Each method has strengths and weaknesses, and the selection of a method should be informed by the topic of exploration, the researcher’s worldview, and the group the research is being produced for (Creswell, 2014).

Stake (2010) deduced that the qualitative method is distinguished from other methods by the “integrity of its thinking” (p. 31), which moves social research away from the cause-and-effect explanations that are indigenous to quantitative methods. Researchers immerse themselves in studies but are not participants; rather, they are close observers, recording their observations to gain more personalized experiences of studies as they uncover findings and reasonable conclusions to topics and research problems (Creswell, 2012). Stake noted that weaknesses of the qualitative method include the level of potential subjectivity, that the method’s contributions to science can be slow, that frequently more questions than answers emerge, and that the ethical risks for the research participants are high.

Like qualitative methods, quantitative methods center on research questions; however, users of these methods have traditionally subscribed to post-positivist assumptions, viewing quantitative methods as traditional forms of research (Creswell, 2014). Researchers using these methods have a hypothesis in mind and use controlled groups or environments to answer research questions and to test a proposed hypothesis. Quantitative methods are less time consuming and more cost effective than qualitative methods because the researcher is able to collect data from a larger sample size using technology such as mobile surveys. Creswell (2014) posed that quantitative methods are empirical in nature, with variables being able to be monitored and isolated, which protects against research biases, and that these methods are good for producing generalizable results. A weakness of quantitative research is that researchers are
unable to get in-depth and specific information that covers the affective domains of the humanistic elements of studies.

Mixed-methods research is the blending of qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct research. Creswell (2014) noted that both paradigms use observations to address research questions, develop explanatory arguments from data, hypothesize about the outcomes of studies, and attempt to limit the level of biases within the studies. Weaknesses of this method include that it may be difficult for one researcher to carry out alone given the expense and time required; also, some strategies may yield unexpected, conflicting results (Creswell, 2014). When exploring research topics and problems, Creswell (2014) posited that researchers seeking to interpret the meaning of individual experiences by using an inductive style and focusing on understanding individual meaning should look to qualitative rather than quantitative methods. He also observed that mixed methods could be used to strengthen research projects; however, researchers need to explore the potential “methodological trade-offs” of using this method (American Psychological Association, 2016, para. 1), because it can be time-consuming and require more resources to conduct.

In exploring the topic of parental involvement with ELLs, the body of literature collected for this study was represented by qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs. Some of the studies used mixed-method designs, with researchers exploring preexisting data coupled with qualitative methods (Adams & Jones, 2016; Avvisati et al., 2013; Geller et al., 2015; Ivankova et al., 2016; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). For this study, given the limited amount of research and the unknown variables associated with this phenomenon, qualitative or mixed-methods designs were considered more appropriate for exploring this topic. When looking at the potential barriers of using a mixed-methods design, along with having an advocacy/participatory
worldview, it seemed that qualitative methods aligned with my perspective and targeted participants.

Within the current body of research studies on parent involvement and engagement, the qualitative strategies of narrative research, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory study, and case study have been used. This study used a phenomenological study design to explore this phenomenon, because this design affords researchers the opportunity to describe the essence of research participants’ experience with parental involvement (Creswell, 2014) and to reveal and describe the research participants’ experiences with parental involvement. The findings of this research method may contribute to the body of research in the area of parental involvement with middle-school ELL populations. The results may also be used to improve middle school ELL teachers’ efforts to involve these students and their parents.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Avvisati et al. (2013) and Axford et al. (2015) indicated that parental involvement positively affected children’s educational experiences in the area of students’ social behaviors, that is, peer-to-peer relations within the school environment. Both Piotrowska et al. (2017) and Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) concluded that students’ mental health levels improved because of parental involvement. Chase et al. (2014), Leatherwood and Voisin (2017) indicated that parental involvement positively affected students’ academic outcomes. Researchers also uncovered barriers to the successful implementation of parental engagement strategies with diverse populations. For example, educators who had negative perceptions about parental involvement were unsuccessful in engaging parents with school programming (McKenna & Millen, 2013). In cases when educators possessed biased norms and values about parenting practices and education, the educational outcomes of students were negatively affected.
(Broomhead, 2014; Ivankova et al., 2016). Educators’ beliefs about parents not wanting to be involved in schools were refuted, and researchers argued that parents lacked the necessary resources and that many of them reported feeling marginalized as they attempted to connect with schools (Robinson & Volpe, 2015; Yoder & Lopez, 2013).

Several studies explored the effects of parental involvement activities on general education students (Avvisati et al., 2013; Axford et al., 2015; Chase et al., 2014; Leatherwood & Voisin, 2017; Piotrowska et al., 2017; Sheikh-Khalil, 2014); however, research into parental involvement and engagement activities concerning ELLs is limited, with the findings highlighting the need for educators to use more culturally and language-sensitive engagement approaches (Waggoner, 2015). Shim (2013) argued that current parental-involvement models overlook the structural factors and power differentials that exist between parents and educators. LaRocque (2013) discovered that parental-involvement strategies used with diverse students mostly affected them socially, often leading to fewer disciplinary problems in schools. The use of cultural brokers was validated as a beneficial practice to help educators connect with ELL populations by helping to rebuild trust between the groups (Geller et al., 2015; Ishimaru et al., 2016).

Shim (2013), LaRocque (2013), Lowenhaupt (2014), and Yoder and Lopez (2013) concluded that the African American, Latino, and ELL parents in their studies reported feeling marginalized and lacking the necessary resources to participate in school programming. The similarities among the groups may warrant questions about the relationship between lower-socioeconomic-status backgrounds and cultural elements such as ethnicity, race, and place of national origin, given that many of the studies targeted population were representative of these groups. Broomhead (2014) argued that many traditional teachers from middle-class cultures do
not understand the social contexts, lifestyles, and cultures of other groups, which often results in their misjudging diverse parents as inadequately parenting and supporting their children.

Overall, research exploring the effects of parental involvement on academic outcomes for ELL student populations is limited but may be helpful for building the capacity of teachers to influence ELL students’ academic achievement.

**Critique of Previous Research**

Some of the research on parental involvement took place in countries outside of the United States, raising questions about whether its findings are applicable within a Western context (Adams & Jones, 2016; Avvisati et al., 2013; Chevalier et al., 2013). This question may be more relevant with a general-education student population as opposed to an ELL population, because communication issues and language barriers may exist within any school environment that caters to students speaking foreign languages. However, the relevance of the research taking place outside of the United States may need to be explored to ensure that the findings are generalizable to this research study. For this study, I believed that the research was relevant given that he was exploring the parental involvement phenomenon with ELL populations.

Several research studies on parental involvement strategies found that those strategies had positive effects on academic outcomes for English-speaking students (Axford et al., 2015; Chase et al., 2014; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Additionally, some of the studies explored the effects of these strategies on social behaviors (Avvisati et al., 2013; Axford et al., 2015) and on mental health (Adams & Jones, 2016; Piotrowska et al., 2017; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). The existing body of research about parental involvement with ELL student populations revealed that educators often possess a limited understanding of linguistic and cultural elements, which hinders their ability to engage parents from different cultures (Lowenhaupt, 2014; Soutullo et al.,
2016). By exploring the perspectives of teachers, researchers discovered three broad areas—language and culture, family resources, and families’ undocumented status—as barriers to involvement and engagement efforts. They also discovered that many teachers believed that schools’ communication strategies were ineffective and that teachers often misinterpreted families as being unresponsive to them because of their lack of attendance at school events (Soutullo et al., 2016). This study used focus group interview data from a sample of 18 elementary teachers to validate the findings. Researchers have validated that using cultural brokers could help to improve communication between ELL parents and educators; however, although this strategy improved relationships, it failed to address systemic elements, such as power differentials, that hindered families from being involved in school programming (Geller et al., 2015). Overall, most of the research about ELL student populations explored challenges related to communication, although fewer studies have been conducted on how parental involvement practices influence the academic outcomes of ELL students.

Chapter 2 Summary

Research revealed positive outcomes for how parental involvement influences academic achievement (Chase et al., 2014; Leatherwood & Voisin, 2017), students’ social behaviors (Avvisati et al., 2013; Axford et al., 2015) and students’ mental health (Adams & Jones, 2016; Piotrowska et al., 2017; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014), with a predominantly English-speaking population. However, research into how parent involvement influences the outcomes of ELL populations was limited (Shim, 2013), with most of it focusing on the difficulties that parents and teachers experience while attempting to work with each other. Similarities existed concerning diverse families and ELL families feeling marginalized as they attempted to engage schools. Misperceptions held by educators about parents not wanting to be involved in their
children’s educations surfaced, along with insights into how educators arrived at this conclusion. Parents and educators often held different perspectives on the boundaries between a child’s school life and home life and on the associated responsibilities of parents and the teachers within each setting. Overall, research findings revealed that because of increasing communication and cultural differences within the educational system, unique involvement challenges have emerged for educators. Teachers need additional resources and training to address the emerging issues, to enable them to effectively involve all parents in their children’s education.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the research design and procedures that were used during this phenomenological research study. In addition, the chapter will cover the methods used for selecting research participants, the collection of data, and the methods used to analysis the data. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions concerning parental involvement and its influence on student academic success. In the research studies drawn upon for this study, multiple researchers explored parental involvement with traditional middle-school student populations (Hill, 2015; Hill & Wang, 2014; Murray et al., 2014; Park & Holloway, 2013; Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014); however, research on parental involvement with middle-school ELL was limited (Shim, 2013). The purpose of this study was to reveal and describe middle-school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement and its influence on student academic success. Therefore, this study used a phenomenological research design to explore this phenomenon.

In addition to using the phenomenological research design, I used Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework as the conceptual framework to help guide this study. This framework assisted me with defining the phenomenon of parental involvement. Epstein’s (2009) framework encompasses three overlapping spheres: “the family, the school, and the community” (p. 2), all of which influence a child’s growth and development. The framework includes the six parental involvement types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community (see Appendix C). These types of involvements can be used as a framework for categorizing behaviors, delineating roles and actions performed
by school staff, families, and community members while they work together to increase student achievement (Epstein et al., 2002).

This framework creates a lens for viewing parental involvement that puts the child at the center of these three spheres. It is worth noting that each of the spheres is interdependent with the others. This interdependence may produce individual challenges for school staff, parents, and community members because of factors outside of their control. For example, neither of these stakeholders controls the times at which school is in session, leading to the time schedules’ not being conducive for building partnerships (Epstein, 2009). However, when successful partnerships are formed among them, the partnerships can influence student academic success (Epstein, 2009). Using the lens of Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework within this phenomenological study aided me in exploring the experiences and perceptions of ELL teachers and language specialists and the challenges they perceived concerning parental partnerships related to student academic success.

**Purpose and Design of the Study**

Reiners (2014) argued that a phenomenological research design may allow for the natural attitudes and lived experiences of people to be described and interpreted. Creswell (2009) further described a phenomenological study as one that describes the essence of human experiences. The purpose of this study was to reveal and describe middle-school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement and its influence on student academic success. A descriptive approach was used with this phenomenological research design because that approach assisted me in understanding the essence of experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The research questions listed below guided this phenomenological study,
allowing me to arrive at the essence of ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences with using parental involvement to increase academic success.

Q1: How are middle school ELL teachers’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support student academic success?

Q2: How are language specialists’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support parental involvement efforts at the middle school level?

In the qualitative research tradition, many different types of research designs may be used. This section explains why phenomenology was selected as the design for the study. In exploring existing research on parental involvement and engagement, the qualitative research designs of narrative research, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory study, and case study have been used. Fewer phenomenological studies were conducted to explore the phenomenon of parental involvement (Broomhead, 2014; Bunnell, Yocum, Koyzis, & Strohmyer, 2018; Hebel & Persitz, 2014; Xaba, 2015). Hence, a phenomenological study was used to examine the lived experiences of ELL teachers and language specialists who have encountered the phenomenon (Walsh, 2012). Researchers using a phenomenological design emphasize how the participants perceive meaning themselves as opposed to focusing on the researcher’s perceptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Given my intended purpose of revealing and describing the experiences and perceptions of ELL teachers and language specialists related to how parental involvement influences student academic success, this research design enabled me to record and report the essence of this phenomenon (Moustakas,
For this reason, a phenomenological approach design was deemed most suitable for this study.

**Central phenomenon of the study.** The central phenomenon of this phenomenological study related to middle-school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions concerning parental involvement and how such involvement may influence student academic success. Most of the research reported that parental involvement strategies have positive effects on academic outcomes for English-speaking students (Axford et al., 2015; Chase et al., 2014; Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Some of the studies also explored the effects of parental involvement on social behaviors (Avvisat et al., 2013; Axford et al., 2015) and on mental health (Adams & Jones, 2016; Piotrowska et al., 2017; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Ample research shows how parental involvement positively influences student academic success with dominant English-speaking student populations; however, research on parental involvement’s influence on ELL populations is limited (Chase et al., 2014; Leatherwood & Voisin, 2017), especially for middle school populations (Shim, 2013). An examination of the overall existing body of research on ELL student populations revealed that educators often possessed a limited understanding of linguistic and cultural elements, hindering their ability to engage these students (Lowenhaupt, 2014; Soutullo et al., 2016). By exploring the perspectives of teachers, researchers discovered the three broad areas of barriers to involvement and engagement efforts to ELL populations in general: language and culture, family resources, and families’ undocumented status (Soutullo et al., 2016). They also discovered that many teachers believed that schools’ communication strategies were ineffective and that teachers often misinterpreted families as being unresponsive to them because of their lack of attendance at
school events (Soutullo et al., 2016). Despite the challenges associated with parental involvement, Zhou (2014) maintained that parental-involvement programs may aid in the development of partnerships between the school and home, with parents representing the home environment of the child and the teacher representing the school environment. As a result of the potential impact of parental involvement on student achievement, examining ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ perceptions and experiences concerning parental involvement may be a worthy course of study.

According to Reiners (2014), phenomenological research focuses on the essence of a shared phenomenon in order to find understanding and the meaning of it, which may assist researchers with recording the natural attitude and lived experiences of the research participants to be described and interpreted. The phenomenon of interest in this study was ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ perceptions and experiences concerning parental involvement and its influence on student academic success. ELL teachers and language specialists in this study were asked to share their experiences with parental involvement and how they perceived parental involvement influencing student academic success. I used semistructured interviews and documentation to explore this phenomenon to gain insight that may help to improve parental involvement at the middle-school level. The objective of this phenomenological study was to understand the research participants’ perspectives on the phenomenon, while potentially creating additional questions for further research studies.

In phenomenological studies, the researchers use perception as the main source of knowledge, because the research participants’ perceptions cannot be disputed (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (1982) argued that an understanding of a phenomenon begins with the researcher setting aside his or her own beliefs and preconceptions. Moustakas (1994) asserted that the purpose of
the phenomenological approach is to describe and refine the lived experiences of individuals to surface the essence of the phenomenon. Using this methodology, I examined ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences related to parental involvement and how it influences student academic success.

**Research Population and Sampling Method**

This section will describe the research population, participant selection process, and data sources used for this phenomenological study. This study was conducted with research participants from a middle school in a Pacific Northwest school district and included a total of six participants: three middle-school ELL teachers and three language specialists who served as communication liaisons between school staff and families. The school site was chosen based upon the percentage of ELL students enrolled in it. The school selected for this study had four ELL teachers on staff. The school was located in a low-to-medium-income neighborhood. The student ethnic population was representative of the neighborhood, with 82% of students who were predominantly English-speaking and 18% of students who were ELLs. As a whole, the schools’ ELL student population spoke more than 10 different languages, including Russian, Spanish, Marshallese, and Vietnamese ([redacted], 2016).

Before conducting this phenomenological study, I submitted all the required documents to Concordia University’s Institutional Review Board, including signed consent forms from the ELD director and hosting middle school principals. The consent form briefly explained the study and gave consent for me to access the proposed sites (see Appendix J). Upon receiving approval to conduct this study, I contacted the ELD director and the middle school principal again by phone or e-mail to inform them that the study was beginning and to ensure that they understand the purpose of the study, along with the methods used to acquire data for it.
Purposeful sampling was used to recruit the research participants for this study, given that it is an appropriate method for selecting individuals with common experiences relevant to the topic of interest (Lin, 2013; Merriam, 2009). This sampling method was convenient because at the time when this study was conducted, I was able to visit the school district where the participants were employed. However, the identities of all the participants in the study were protected by assigning a number to identify each instead of using their names. All identifying information, such as the participants’ names or specific school of employment, was not included because the results of the study will be shared.

I recruited the ELL teachers and language specialists for this study by using personal contacts. Next, recruitment materials, including a research invitation, were sent via personal e-mails to potential participants connected to select middle schools throughout the school district of interest (see Appendices A and B). In these e-mails, I included the consent form, an explanation of the topic of the study, and a list of exclusion criteria, and invited the participants to contact him for more information. This was the initial method for recruiting the targeted number of researcher participants.

It was determined that, should these initial recruitment efforts produce too few research participants, I would have used a snowball sampling method to identify other candidates for potential recruitment. Snowball sampling is the process of taking suggestions from the study participants of other potential participants who may be candidates for participation in the study (Newman & Hitchcock, 2011). I would then contact these referred participants to explain the purpose of the study in an effort to gain their consent to participate in it. According to Moustakas (1994), it is paramount that participants in phenomenological studies have experience with the phenomenon, be interested in the phenomenon, and be willing to participate in the
study; therefore, I used the following selection criteria for inclusion in this study: Participants had to be currently employed by or assigned to the middle-school sites within the school district chosen for study; and teachers and language specialists had to have a minimum of 2 years of experience to ensure they had basic knowledge about the phenomenon of parental involvement.

When recruiting an appropriate sample to conduct qualitative research, Bowen (2008) noted, saturation is the primary consideration when determining the sample size of a study. The data saturation point is reached when the researcher concludes that he or she has enough representation to gather a substantial amount of data for the proposed study (Bowen, 2008). I ensured that themes surfaced during the study and the relationships identified among the themes were represented sufficiently by the data collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To accomplish this, Francis et al. (2010) recommended using a sample size of between 10 and 13 participants; however, Creswell (2012) advised researchers to use a sample size between five and 25. In accordance with these suggestions, a sample size of six participants was used in this study.

After conducting the selection process, I met with the middle-school ELL teachers and language specialists individually to give them information packets, which included a recruitment letter and an explanation of the study. During the meeting with each of the potential participants, the participant was given the option to sign a consent form if he or she chose to participate in the study. In the event two or more of the ELL teachers and/or language specialists would have declined to participate in the proposed study, I would have used a snowball sampling method to identify additional potential candidates to approach about participating in the research study. Upon acquiring the targeted number of research participants, the ELL teachers, language-specialists, and I worked together to select times, dates, and locations to conduct the interviews and to collect documentation used to communicate and implement elements of Epstein’s (2009)
parental involvement framework. At the conclusion of this study, principals and the ELD director were allowed access the research findings to aid them in developing future professional development session for teachers.

**Instrumentation**

According to Creswell (2009), the four basic methods for collecting data are observations, interviews, document analysis, and audio and visual analysis, and of these methods he cited interviews as the main one used in phenomenological research. Additionally, reflective journaling is a process that researcher use in qualitative research to collect data. According to Vicary, Young, and Hicks (2017) the use of a reflective journal could aid researcher in the “process of learning, interpretation and bracketing, thus evidencing transparency” (p. 556). For this study, interviews, document analysis and a reflective journal were used to gather data to explore the research questions and to describe the essence of the parental-involvement phenomenon linked to this phenomenological study. Data were acquired from semistructured interviews and from documentation of school announcements, homework, and other materials sent home to parents from multiple school sites over the course of 10 weeks.

**Data Collection Methods**

Data collection took place from November 2018 through April 2019. During this period, data were collected and analyzed in two phases. In phase 1, I conducted one semistructured 60-minutes interview with each of the three middle school ELL teachers and three language-specialist participants and collected document artifacts representing their attempts to engage. During phase 2, I analyzed and coded the collected documentation used to inform parents of classroom activities, assignments, student progress, and school events. During this phase, document artifacts were also collected from the language specialists to explore how frequently
middle school staff requested assistance while attempting to engage ELL parents with the six parental involvement types. The reflective journal data were gathered throughout the data collection phases. I combined the interview and documentation pieces of data to explore the perceptions and experiences of the ELL teachers and language specialists with communicating and implementing the six parental involvement types to engage ELL families. The following sections contain a more in-depth discussion of the data-collection methods and processes.

**Teacher and language specialist semistructured interviews.** Interviews were conducted using a list of guiding, open-ended questions designed for the ELL teachers and a second set designed for the language specialists (see Appendices A and B). These questions were used to explore research participants’ experiences with parental involvement in an effort to examine their facilitation of parental involvement within the context of Epstein’s (2009) framework and to reveal and describe participants’ perceptions and experiences concerning how these factors influence student academic success. All interview questions were field tested by two middle-school teachers who did not participate in the study, to ensure readability and relevancy to this study.

According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), interviews can be used to collaboratively build meaning with interviewees. Using the interview method, a researcher may discover the meaning given to a phenomenon by exploring participant perceptions of it (Roulston, 2010). Additionally, Oltmann (2016) asserted that face-to-face interviews may allow the researcher to witness nonverbal cues given by interviewees, which may further reveal additional feelings and perceptions of the phenomenon under review. However, Oltmann also cautioned researchers that face-to-face interviews, if not carefully managed, could lead to researcher bias if the researcher directs participants to answering leading questions. This
possibility necessitated the use of field-tested interview questions, which limited the probability of bias creeping in (Oltmann, 2016). Given the benefits of conducting semistructured interviewing, this approach appeared to be an appropriate data-collection tool for this study.

Once I had identified the research participants who met the inclusion criteria of this study, I called them to set up a meeting to inform them of the details of this study and to solicit their consent to participate (see Appendix A). Next, the interview locations, dates, and times were scheduled with each participant. One week before the interviews took place, I asked the ELL teachers and language specialists to bring to the interview artifacts that represented their parental involvement efforts. Three semistructured interviews, one for each of the teacher-participants was conducted in January 2019. Three separate semistructured interviews, one with each of the language specialists was conducted in February 2019. Interviews lasted approximately 60-minutes, because according to Jacob and Furgerson (2012), interviews should not exceed 60–90 minutes because otherwise individuals may find them too long and become tired and less cooperative.

During the interviews, ELL teachers answered open-ended questions about their previous usage of the six parental involvement types, along with questions about how they perceived the involvement types influencing student academic success (see Appendix D). The language specialists were asked a different list of open-ended questions that targeted their perceptions and experiences concerning how the six involvement types had been used at the middle-school level (see Appendix E). After the interviews, transcribed copies of the interviews and my notes were given to ELL teachers and language specialists for them to verify the accuracy of what I recorded as their answers and comments to the interview questions, because this is a viable way of validating information (Stake, 2010). Participants reviewed transcripts of their comments and
statements and then confirmed that I indeed captured the correct meaning of their statements and comments as the researcher, adding credibility to the data acquired.

**Documentation.** One week before the interviews were conducted with research participants, I requested that each participant bring to the interview artifacts that revealed their parental involvement efforts. This documentation included homework assignments, school announcements, progress reports, language specialists’ phone and e-mail logs from the schools’ participating middle-school ELL teachers and language specialists. I used the documentation to gain insight into ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences with the six parental involvement types in the context of encouraging student academic success. Using a documentation review log, I reviewed the documentation and paired it with Epstein’s (2009) six parental involvement types, using a documentation review guide (see Appendix F).

**Reflective journaling.** At the beginning and throughout the data-collection phases, I recorded entries into a reflective journal to capture research participants’ initial reactions to the interview questions. This approach assisted me with exploring the unspoken meaning behind some of the participants’ answers and actions. According to Thorpe (2010), researchers can use reflective journaling to facilitate active learning, as they actively reflect about that new learning taking place. To triangulate the data of this study and make the findings more accurate and credible, I paired, compared the reflective journal data with interview and documentation data (Creswell, 2014). Through recording the frequency with which research participants reported engaging in each of the parental involvement types during the interviews and documentation review, I was able to reveal the involvement types participants engaged in the least and the most. Next, I paired this data with observation data from my reflective journal that validated the use of each involvement type (see Appendix P). The data acquired from this study revealed the
perceptions and experiences of the middle school ELL teachers and language specialists regarding facilitating communicating parental involvement using Epstein’s (2009) framework lens.

**Identification of Attributes**

Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework was the conceptual framework used to guide this study. Her six involvement types—“parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community” (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 64)—were the attributes of this study. Because of the amount of time needed to explore each of the six parental involvement types, a more in-depth study may be needed, since this study addressed how the involvement types are perceived to be communicated and implemented by middle-school ELL teachers and language specialists. All six of Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement types were the attributes and perhaps warranted more in-depth individual reviews. However, given the targeted communication attributes of this study, ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ perceptions of how Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework may influence ELL student academic success were explored.

Researchers have revealed that parents and educators have generally miscommunicated with each other, which often resulted in many educators judging parents as not wanting to be involved in school programming and parents feeling as if schools did not want them involved (Lowenhaupt, 2014; Soutullo et al., 2016). Therefore, the attributes of this study included how communication takes place among middle-school ELL teachers, ELL parents, and language specialists, as they attempt to work together. Semistructured interviews were used to explore how ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement influence student academic success. I gathered documentation of the various types
of correspondence from the middle schools, teacher-participants, and language specialists to uncover how ELL teacher-participants communicate and implement the parental involvement framework with elements that are both within and beyond the classroom, such as homework, school events, and community resources and events.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

In exploring the research participants’ perceptions of and experiences with using the six types of parental involvement (see Appendix C), I analyzed data gathered from semistructured interviews and from documentation to identify significant statements, recurring patterns, phrases, and themes (Creswell, 2012). The 60-minute audio-recorded interview data were analyzed using the Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method described by Moustakas (1994). According to Creswell (1998), this method is popular among researchers because it offers a clear description of the steps to follow. The process employs phenomenological reduction, which includes bracketing, horizontalizing, and surfacing of themes in the data that can lead to the construction of a collective description of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

In this method, data analysis starts as soon as the first set of data is available. Data are obtained from assigning equal value to each of the research participants’ recorded statements (horizontalization), and textural data, which represents a description of the written or printed words that are purposefully transcribed from audio recordings of the interviews, during the data analysis process (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Next, the researcher uses imaginative variation to surface and synthesizes the structural description (the how) of the participants’ experiences, resulting in the textural-structural description. According to Creswell (1998), this procedure requires researchers to use their imagination and intuition to reflect upon the relationship between themes and the participants’ experiences.
After the interview data were transcribed and assigned equal values, I reviewed the transcribed interviews to uncover dominant messages shared in the interviews and to outline similarities among participants’ responses. I organized the data using a priori codes derived from Epstein’s (2009) framework and axial coding to surface subthemes from the data. According to Stemler (2001), a priori codes are developed based upon preexisting theory or concepts. According to Creswell (2009), axial coding is the process of interpreting the relationships between and among categories. These codes enabled me to identify, analyzing, organize, describe, and report themes found within the data sets. The findings of this study may be used to deepen the understanding of ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ efforts concerning parental involvement, and they may inform professional development efforts to improve student outcomes.

The second data set was derived by analyzing the collected documentation. I asked ELL teachers and language specialists for documentation of correspondence that had been or would be sent to parents, including homework, progress reports, and school announcements, to analyze. The collected documentation was coded using a priori coding (Stemler, 2001) to organize themes and concepts linked to the six parental involvement types. Next, I developed specific categories to organize themes that surfaced from the data (see Appendix G). The data-collection process and the analysis process needed to be well managed (Creswell, 2012); hence, Atlas.ti software (Scientific Software Development, 1997), a data organization system, was used to manage these processes.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

A review of the research design of this phenomenological study revealed three distinct limitations and five delimitations. The first limitation concerned the criteria used to purposefully
select the research participants. Within the district there were just a few participants who had experience with the phenomenon explored in this study (Merriam, 2009). Similarly, the second limitation was not only specific to this study but had to do with the subjective nature of phenomenological studies. According to van Manen (1997), phenomenological research can restrict the transferability of a study because sample sizes are often small. Having a sample size of three ELL teachers and three language specialists challenges the transferability of the study to other populations. The last limitation of the study was the use of a reflective journal as a data source to triangulate the data of this study. Although memoing (Tufford & Newman, 2010) was used to limit my bias, the journal entries were representative of my interpretation of the research participants’ behaviors and comments; hence the study may possess a level of subjectivity that constitutes a limitation in this study (Dowden et al., 2014).

The first delimitation of this study was that teacher participants and language-specialist participants were selected through purposeful sampling, which enabled me to recruit research participants who had similar experiences with the phenomenon that was explored (Moustakas, 1994; Walsh, 2012). The second delimitation was that middle schools that possess the largest ELL populations were purposefully selected to be research sites. The third delimitation was time for gathering the necessary data for this study. The tasks connected with each of the data-gathering methods of this study produced valuable data, but given that the study took place over the course of 6 months, with 3 of those months designated for gathering the data, time had to be managed to complete each of them.

The fourth delimitation was that there were no ELL children to be interviewed. The majority of data and findings were collected from interactions among the teacher-participants, language-specialist participants, and me, so all data were gathered from adult representatives and
not from ELL students themselves. Further research could be conducted to incorporate ELL parents’ and students’ perceptions concerning the effectiveness of their teachers’ parental involvement strategies and efforts. The fifth delimitation involved using the perceptions and experiences of language specialists concerning how middle-school staff communicate and facilitate the six types of parental involvement instead of directly interviewing ELL parents. It would have been preferable to interview parents; however, as a product of the potential language barriers and time needed to do so, the data from the language specialists do not offer an equal comparison but may provide valuable insight into potential perspectives of ELL parents, given that parents and teachers typically communicate about school matters with them first.

Validation

In qualitative research, Creswell (2014) defined validation as the attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings based upon the researcher’s and participants’ conclusions. This phenomenological study used four elements—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—to establish its validity and trustworthiness. Multiple methods, including rich descriptions of the research participants’ experiences and perceptions, were used to validate the data. Data were triangulated using multiple data sources. Finally, I used member checking to have each participant confirm that his or her statements and comments were accurately represented in their own transcribed interview. Using all of these methods increased the credibility and dependability of the research.

Credibility and transferability. Credibility refers to the degree to which the research findings reflect the experiences of the participants involved, ensuring rigor in the research process (Patton, 2015). Studies are considered to be credible when the findings are recognizable by others who have experienced the same phenomenon (Husserl, 1982; Tobin & Begley, 2004).
I improved the credibility of this study by using member checking (Stake, 2010), saturation (Patton, 2015), and epoché, or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994; Tufford & Newman, 2010).

*Transferability* refers to the ability of readers to judge how applicable the findings of the study are to other contexts (Patton, 2015). According to Seidman (2013), the objective of qualitative research designs is to describe a phenomenon and not to make a broad generalization about it, the latter approach being more relevant to quantitative research. I analyzed interview documentation, and reflective journal data to surface themes and patterns within the data to develop thick and detailed description of the parental-involvement phenomenon. The descriptions may enable readers to make personal judgments about the study findings’ transferability and applicability to other settings (Patton, 2015).

**Dependability and confirmability.** According to Patton (2015), dependability is the extent to which the research findings are relatable using other data-collection methods. Patton argued that researchers can use triangulation to enhance the dependability of research findings. In this study, my reflective notes, interviews data, and collected documentation data were coded and compared with each other to triangulate the data, increasing the study’s reliability and the accuracy of the interpretation of the experiences and perceptions of the research participants (Stake, 2010). Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings reflect research participants’ overall intent and meaning as opposed to those of the researcher (Patton, 2015). Epoché (bracketing) was used to ensure personal biases were set aside to examine the data from a nonbiased perspective (Husserl, 1982; Moustakas, 1994; Tufford & Newman, 2010).

**Expected Findings**

Based upon the literature, I anticipated that middle-school ELL teachers and language specialists would share their personal experiences concerning parental involvement, information
from conversations they have had with colleagues, the outcomes of their attempts to communicate with each other, and the outcomes of their attempts to engage ELL families. Previous research revealed positive outcomes after examining how parental involvement affected both dominant English-speaking parent-to-teacher relationships and student academic success (Chase et al., 2014; Leatherwood & Voisin, 2017). After reviewing the data from this study, I described the essence of the parental involvement phenomenon experienced by the research participants at the middle-school level.

**Ethical Issues**

**Conflict of interest assessment.** The conflict of interest for this study was minimal. During the time frame of this study, I lived in close proximity to the school district in which this phenomenological study was conducted, and had access to the host district’s teachers and language-specialist staff, so there was no conflict of interest with the study. I ensured that each participant understood that I did not serve in the capacity of an evaluator and did not work directly with his or her supervisors, and I reiterated that all information would remain confidential. I guaranteed participants that no identifying information would be included in the disseminated results of this study. Participants were also informed that their participation would be voluntary. They did not receive any incentives for choosing to participate in this study, and they were assured that they would not be adversely impacted by choosing not to participate in this study.

**Researcher’s position.** I recruited and interviewed participants, collected and analyzed the data taken from the semistructured interviews and my reflective journal, and examined documentation collected during this phenomenological study. As the primary research tool (Dahl & Boss, 2005) I could be considered an insider in this study, possessing a level of
researcher bias that has to be considered (Chenail, 2011). Husserl’s (1982) concept of epoché or bracketing was used to assist me with maintaining an open mind and to limit the impact of personal biases in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the database for this study.

*Bracketing* is the act of setting aside one’s personal experiences and views while examining the researched phenomenon from an objective perspective (Moustakas, 1994). I used memoing (Tufford & Newman, 2010) to bracket during this study. According to Rhodes, Dawson, Kelly, and Renshall (2013), *memoing* occurs throughout the data-collection process and it refers to the researcher’s taking notes and including his or her own personal observations in the narrative of the notes. Memoing allows a researcher to review and examine his or her personal feelings about the research, which may lead to a more critical look at the data acquired (Tufford & Newman, 2010). I also was reflexive while recording notes in my reflective journal (Thorpe, 2010). A reflexive method is used in qualitative research to assist the researcher with separating his or her personal views assumptions and personal preferences from the acquired data, which may increase the researcher’s self-awareness about personal biases, limiting the level of subjectivity applied to the data (Dowden et al., 2014).

**Ethical issues in the study.** This section outlines the ethical issues that could have arisen during this study. When conducting studies that involve the use of human subjects, the researcher is responsible for ensuring that participants are protected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). For that reason, a signed agreement was obtained from the school’s district office to be given to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Concordia University for approval. Participants were given a detailed outline and description of this proposed research study before it took place. Individuals consented to participate in this study by signing a consent form (see Appendix H and I) that included a description of the study, sample interview questions, and measures taken to
ensure that participants’ information remains confidential. All participants’ identifiable personal data were coded with a numeric code, and data were accessible only to the study participants in the interview data segments for member-checking purposes. To ensure confidentiality, all data, including electronic data and written material have been stored off the school sites, and will remain in a locked storage cabinet for 3 years, after which it will be shredded and discarded.

**Chapter 3 Summary**

Chapter 3 identified a phenomenological study as a methodological approach for conducting research on middle school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences with parental involvement. Using their perceptions and Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework lens, I explored how teachers and language specialists perceived parental involvement’s influence on student academic success. The data collected from interviews and documentation were used to answer the research questions of this study. The results were used to describe the essence of the parental involvement phenomenon with ELL populations at the middle-school level. The results also provide school districts with information that may be helpful in developing additional professional development sessions for educators who work with ELL populations.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

This chapter presents a description of the sample, the research methodology and analysis, and the data and results, followed by a summary of the findings of this study. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to reveal and describe middle-school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement and its influence on student academic success. A data analysis of this study revealed the experiences and perceptions of ELL teachers and language specialists in conjunction with the barriers that they perceived when encouraging parental involvement to influence student academic success. The research questions listed below guided this phenomenological study and assisted me in surfacing the essence of ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences with using parental involvement to influence middle school ELL students’ academic achievement.

Q1: How are middle school ELL teachers’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support student academic success?

In regard to research question Q1, understanding how teachers’ beliefs, derived from their experiences and perceptions, build their own confidence in the value of parental-involvement programs and could create awareness of the underlying influences teachers have on these programs (Broomhead, 2014; Ivankova et al., 2016). Further, this awareness may provide additional support to teachers as they facilitate parental-involvement strategies. Researchers using a phenomenological design place an emphasis on how the participants perceive meaning themselves as opposed to focusing on the researcher’s perceptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Research on parental involvement in public schools focused mainly on how it affected parents, students, and teachers and on how it influenced the academic and behavioral
success of students (Axford et al., 2015; Chase et al., 2014; Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Epstein (2009) argued that it is important for school staff, parents, and community members to understand the benefits of working together to encourage student learning.

Q2: How are language specialists’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support parental involvement efforts at the middle school level?

In regard to research question Q2, there is a dearth of studies on middle school teachers’ perceptions of how parental involvement influences academic success in schools with increasing ELL populations (Shim, 2013; Vázquez-Montilla et al., 2014). After reviewing the literature, I recognized the need for a qualitative study gauging middle-school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ perceptions of parental involvement and its influence on ELL students’ academic success. For this reason, a phenomenological approach design was used for this study. Using Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework provided insight into how school systems may improve their communication and parental-involvement practices with ELL populations.

As the researcher, my role was to investigate the experiences of three ELL teachers and of three language specialists who implemented parental involvement strategies at the middle-school level. I have had experience with facilitating trainings for school staff members and have helped to develop parental involvement strategies for building administrators. My interest in this study arose as I explored how parental involvement frameworks could assist school staff with engaging families that were less represented within schools. I conducted this study with the hope of helping school staff to effectively engage all student and parent populations. Given my intended purpose of revealing and describing the experiences and perceptions of ELL teachers
and language specialists related to how parental involvement influences student academic success, I deemed a phenomenological approach design to be most suitable for this study.

To explore the research participants’ perceptions of and experiences with using Epstein’s (2009) six types of parental involvement, I analyzed data gathered from semistructured interviews, a reflective journal, and documentation to identify significant statements, recurring patterns, phrases, and themes (Creswell, 2012). I conducted the semistructured interviews with the three ELL teachers and the three language specialists between late January and the middle of March 2019. The initially projected timeline was between early January through the end of February 2019; however, because of the school’s holiday schedule, interviews were scheduled later than expected. I scheduled a single interview separately with each ELL teacher participant, and these interviews were conducted during one of the participant’s preparation periods. Each of the interviews took place at the middle school site on different days and lasted less than one hour. The semistructured interviews with the language specialists were conducted offsite at a mutually agreed-upon location. These interviews lasted for less than one hour and were conducted on different days.

The audio-recorded interview data were analyzed using the Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method described by Moustakas (1994). According to Creswell (1998), this method is popular among researchers because it offers a clear description of the steps to follow. The process called for the use of phenomenological reduction, which included bracketing, horizontalizing, organizing themes, and constructing a textural-structural description of participants’ experiences (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Using this method, data analysis started as soon as the first set of data was available. Data were obtained from having assigned equal value to each of the research participants’ recorded statements (horizontalization), and
from textural data, which represented a description of the written or printed words that were purposefully transcribed from audio recordings of the interviews during the data analysis process (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

During the data collection process, all participants were assigned an individual numerical code to protect their identities before data were collected. I conducted six audio-transcribed interviews, collected document artifacts from participants, and maintained a reflective journal throughout the data collection phase. The reflective journal was used to document additional information from the participants during data collection, such as their initial reactions to the interview questions and their efforts to supply document artifacts, because this approach assisted me with exploring the unspoken meaning behind some of their answers and actions. I reviewed the transcribed interviews to uncover dominant messages shared by participants, to outline similarities among their responses. Next, I organized the data using the a priori codes—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community—derived from Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework. I used this process to create an interpretation of the data at a greater depth. Initially, I sent research participants a copy of their own transcripts to verify if preliminary findings were an accurate representation of their statements and comments. Next, I used the software ATLAS.ti (Scientific Software Development, 1997) to extrapolate from the transcripts key themes linked to the a priori codes, and subthemes that addressed the research questions.

Reviewing transcripts, document artifacts, and my reflective journal notes with the software resulted in data to pair with the six a priori themes, along with surfacing four subthemes through axial coding, that were relevant to Epstein’s parental involvement framework. The data analysis and results of these themes and subthemes provided a textural description of the data.
Next, I used the process of imaginative variation, which involved the use of my imagination to seek meaning from the themes and subthemes (Moustakas, 1994), to surface the structural description (the “how to”) of each participant’s experiences. The shared experiences of the participants (textural-structural description) revealed the essence of their perceptions of and experiences with the six types of parental involvement described in Epstein’s parental involvement framework. The findings of this study may be used to deepen the understanding of ELL teachers and language specialists concerning parental involvement, and it may inform professional development efforts to improve schools’ parental engagement efforts.

**Description of the Sample**

This research study was conducted in one middle school in the Pacific Northwest. The school possessed one of the largest ELL populations in the school district. During the participant recruitment phase of this study, eight individuals consented verbally to participate in it; but at the conclusion of this phase, six participants were enrolled. One individual dropped out of the study, stating that the time to participate was no longer available because of an increased workload. Another teacher-participant did not meet the inclusion criteria. Since I had enough representation to gather a substantial amount of data for the study, I concluded that data saturation could be reached (Bowen, 2008). Creswell (2012) advised researchers to use a sample size of between five and 25 participants. In accordance with this suggestion, a sample size of six participants was deemed sufficient to achieve data saturation.

The three ELL teachers were assigned students based on the students’ English proficiency levels. These teachers were selected based on their level of experience, the number of years they had taught, and the grade level/current grade taught. The three language specialists interviewed varied in their race/ethnicity, level of experience, and number of years serving as a
language specialist within the host district. The language specialists’ first languages were Marshallese, Arabic, and Spanish, respectively, so they worked more extensively with these ELL student groups at the middle school.

**Research Methodology and Analysis**

This phenomenological study was conducted to reveal and describe middle school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement and its influence on student academic success at the middle school level. All participants’ identifiable personal data were coded with a numeric code, and data were accessible only to the study participants during the interview data segments for member-checking purposes. To ensure confidentiality, all electronic data and written material was stored off the school sites and will remain so for 3 years in a locked storage cabinet, after which they will be shredded and discarded. Data were obtained from my reflective journal, each of the research participants’ recorded statements from a semistructured interview, and document artifacts, all of which were used to triangulate the data (see Appendix P). For validation purposes, at the conclusion of the member-checking process with participants, the six transcribed interviews were analyzed and coded. The initial coded categories were derived from the six involvement types: *parenting*, *communicating*, *volunteering*, *learning-at-home*, *decision-making*, and *collaborating with the community* of Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework. The resulting six a priori codes provided information about ways in which participants reflected upon their experience with the six parental involvement types.

In addition to the six a priori themes, four subthemes arose from axial coding the similarities in words and phrases among participants’ responses from the transcripts. Recurring statements that represented more than one of the participants’ views were identified and coded
under each of the key themes and subthemes. The statements in this study were significant in facilitating understanding of the phenomenon of ELL parental involvement at the middle school level. The findings of this study provided a textural-structural description of the research participants’ experiences with engaging ELL families through the theoretical lens of Epstein’s parental involvement framework. In summary, the essence of ELL parental involvement at the middle school level was surfaced.

**Summary of the Findings**

In this phenomenological study, to establish validity and trustworthiness, the four elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used. To validate the data, I used multiple methods to acquire rich descriptions of the research participants’ experiences and perceptions of the parental involvement phenomenon. The interview, document artifacts, and journal data were used to triangulate the data (see Appendix P). Finally, after the audio-recorded interviews were over, the interview data were transcribed and submitted to the research participants for transcript review first and then member checking to confirm the accuracy of their responses to interview questions.

**Textural and structural description.** By answering semistructured questions that addressed the six parental involvement types of Epstein’s (2009) framework, ELL teachers and language specialists in this study described their experiences. As is reflected in the literature, a benefit of using this framework was that it could assist researchers with categorizing behaviors and with delineating roles and actions performed by school staff, families, and community members (Epstein et al., 2002). The six involvement types also served as a priori codes for me and assisted in revealing that ELL teachers and language specialists experienced persistent
challenges with the communication attribute of this framework, which limited their ability to engage families with the six parental involvement types.

ELL teachers and language specialists revealed and described parental involvement as influencing student academic success; however, the degree to which parents could be involved in the process would depend on their level of education, their ability to communicate in English, and their work schedules. The teachers expressed the belief that there is a connection between parental involvement and student achievement. However, teachers noted that involvement did not have to be centralized to the school and could take place through traditional parental engagement practices, such as Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs), helping with homework, and/or chaperoning field trips (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015). Highlighting the learning at home type of involvement, they discussed how parents working with their children could help the students to become proficient in their first language, which could assist the students with learning English more effectively and assist the parents in staying connected to their children.

Language specialists reported that some teachers worked hard to support families by being flexible and conducting home visits. Language specialists also noted that because of the lack of time available and the insufficient number of language specialists, challenges arose in fulfilling the needs of schools and families. One pivotal point highlighted by the language specialists was that their allegiance was split between the school system and their community. The specialists noted that, despite being school district employees and working with families during the work day, they also made themselves available for families outside of these times, because they felt responsible for helping their community members to settle into their new life in the United States. The language specialists discussed their roles as resources, cultural brokers, and community members.
In summary, of the six types of parental involvement, *parenting, communication,* and *learning at home* were the ones whose use was described by the research participants; it appeared that their schools’ usage of the *decision-making, volunteering,* and the *collaborating with the community* types of involvement were very low or nonexistent; but there appeared to be ongoing discussion about how to increase their usage. However, by using the process of imaginative variation to reflect upon the relationships between the a priori codes, axial codes, and each of the participant’s experiences, I was able to surface the structural descriptions (the how) of the participants’ experiences. By combining and synthesizing the textural and structural descriptions of their experiences, I surfaced the essence of the parental involvement phenomenon with the group.

**The essence of parental involvement.** In this study, parental involvement was seen as a beneficial practice for supporting teachers, students, and parents. Teachers and language specialists reported that by using parental involvement strategies, they were able to assist parents in being involved with their children’s education, which in turn could encourage children’s academic success. ELL teachers and language specialists were able to examine their current parental involvement strategies through the theoretical lens of Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework. Consequently, they surfaced the inherent challenges associated with the communication attribute of the framework. The three overlapping spheres of this framework—“the family, the school, and the community” (Epstein, 2009, p. 2)—were acknowledged as areas that needed to be addressed when exploring parental involvement;
however, additional time and resources would be required to build relationships in efforts to implement the involvement types.

**Data Analysis and Results**

During the data collection phase, research participants were on vacation; therefore, I had to schedule all the semistructured interviews later than initially planned. Additionally, because the host school district anticipated a budget shortfall, school directors had begun having conversations with staff about potentially laying off certain school staff (none of whom were research participants). Outside of these two circumstances, I was unaware of any other changes taking place in the host school district that would have affected the interpretation of this study’s results. Data collection and analysis procedures were conducted using a phenomenological design. Interview and document artifact data were gathered from research participants and were coded using the six a priori codes—*parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making,* and *collaborating with the community*—derived from Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework. After this process, subthemes were surfaced through axial coding the interview data. Results revealed participants’ perspectives on how they defined and conceptualized the parental involvement phenomenon through the theoretical lens of Epstein’s framework.

**ELL teacher participant narratives.** The following narratives were derived from answers (see Appendix L) to the set of Epstein’s (2009) framework questions designed for ELL teacher participants. Additionally, 10 supplemental questions were used to guide interviews with teacher participants (see Appendix K). During the interviews, ELL teachers were asked to describe parental involvement by reflecting upon their personal experiences with the phenomenon. To categorize, organize, and code their responses to the interview questions, I
used the software ATLAS.ti (Scientific Software Development, 1997), which assisted with data management. Within the software, Epstein’s (2009) six involvement types were used as a priori codes to outline key themes, and axial coding was used to surface three subthemes from the data.

**Parenting.** This type of involvement focused on helping families establish home environments to support student learning (Epstein, 2009). Research participants were asked to respond to questions to reveal how capable they perceived parents to be at establishing learning home environments for their children. The key question related to this theme was: Within your school, how does the staff help all families establish home environments to support children as students? All participants shared similar responses to this question; however, two out of three participants discussed the need for school staff to do home visits to address barriers, such as parents’ educational level and their ability to speak English, that prevented parents from establishing the home environment needed for learning. For example, Participant 1 mentioned, “I think all parents are capable; there is [sic] always some interesting exceptions, but I think all want to—they just don’t know how.” During the interviews, I noticed that the question “Are parents capable of helping their children learn?” caused participants to pause, and in my reflective journal, I wondered whether the pause signified teachers’ being uncomfortable because they did not want to criticize the parents’ abilities to parent.

**Communication.** The communication involvement type was centered on designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school types of communications, which could aid parents with understanding school programs and policies, knowing how to monitor their children’s progress, and understanding how to improve parent-to-teacher communication (Epstein, 2009). All participants expressed a desire to increase and improve communication between themselves and their students’ parents. The key question related to this theme was: In
what ways does your school design and implement effective forms or school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children’s progress? In my reflective journal, I noted that this involvement type received the most input from participants. The three participants primarily talked about the challenges with communication. Participant 3 elaborated on how ELL teachers had to focus on helping families to acclimate once they were living in a new country:

I am not sure (about whole school programming); I know in ELD, a lot of what we do, especially with the newer the families are to the country, is help them to understand expectations for the way things operate here—you know, whether that is making appointments, or how to call in and say that your child is sick. How often you need to do that, so they don’t get marked unexcused absent, or [receive] discipline in the home.

As a strategy to help parents to monitor and communicate about their children’s academic progress, Participant 1 reported, “I always try to get my parents set up with PowerTeacher or PowerSchool on their phone, so they can follow their kids.” Participant 1 also discussed the challenge of communicating with parents when they were not able to understand the language, stating, “Not all families are literate in their primary languages, as a lot of the languages are oral,” adding, “they [teachers] opt out of sending information via the mail” if they believe parents will not be able to understand it. To facilitate the two-way communication that is needed to support students, Participant 2 noted,

the biggest resource is the interpreters, and that support—I think that is huge, because if there are events, like at school, we can immediately go to the interpreters and they can get that information out to parents. They also help us a ton with any translation of flyers.
Highlighting the importance of having interpreters present. In summing up the overall experiences of ELL teacher participants with attempting to build two-way communication between themselves and families, Participant 3 noted:

I think school-to-home communication has been difficult ever since I’ve been here. . . . We are trying to get things translated into language that our families actually need. We are trying to get information sent home in ways their families can actually receive . . . whether it is through Facebook, if their phones get shut off . . . or if they don’t have e-mail, send it out through some other means; it’s difficult for a number of reasons; those communication barriers of the phones being shut off . . . so frequently our families move.

In addition to revealing the communication barriers, a review of the teacher participants’ interview data about communication revealed a subtheme concerning other ways to communicate.

Alternative methods to communicate with parents. All the ELL teachers expressed their difficulties with communicating with parents via the telephone that arose from the parents’ phones being shut off, which resulted in the teachers’ using alternative methods to communicate with the parents. Participant 1 observed, “We’ll get a hold of parents through Facebook . . . and if it is like a serious issue, always through the interpreter, never through e-mail or text,” highlighting an informal protocol they used to determine when to use alternative methods to reach parents. Participant 3 agreed: “I have contacted parents through Facebook and other social media, ’cause even if that phone gets turned off, they can still find some place with Wi-Fi that they can use.” In addition to using the social media platform Facebook, Participant 1 said, “I use Remind [software program] . . . it is a texting app [with a translation feature], and some parents—even if they speak English—I will just text them, ’cause that seems to be a lot easier.”
Volunteering. The volunteer-type of involvement included recruiting and organizing parents to help and support schools (Epstein, 2009). The key question related to this theme was: How does your school recruit and organize parent help and support? In my reflective journal, I noted that each participant seemed unsure about this involvement type; all of them shared information about attempts made to engage this involvement type, but only 1 of 3 participants had personal examples to share from experience. Participant 1 mentioned, “I think they probably use Facebook—weekly publication goes out. I don’t really know, because I don’t think ELD is usually—I just don’t think that is just necessarily a school effort.” Revealing their limited knowledge about this involvement type. Participant 3 stated, “We have been trying to recruit parent support, definitely; we have a parent—I believe it is called a parent advisory committee; we keep on trying to get more parents from different groups and different cultures to join.” Supporting the conclusion that the use of involvement type in the school was limited.

Learning at home. This involvement type assisted families in helping students at home with homework and other classroom-related activities (Epstein, 2009). The key question related to this theme was: How do you and your school provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning? All participants perceived it to be important for parents to reinforce learning at home; however, two of three participants acknowledged that language barriers and having a limited number of interpreters were hindrances. They also shared some strategies they used to engage families. For example, Participant 1 explained:

I do what’s called homeschool connections, so I might say: “Today we learned cells are the building blocks of all things. Go outside with a parent or guardian and write down
five things that are living . . . explain to your parents how you know”; but there is [sic] not consequences for not bringing it [to class].

I noted in my journal that teacher participants were adamant about ensuring that parents engaged with their children in their first language at home, because this helped the children to become proficient in English faster and it also assisted parents with maintaining connections with their children—which was another subtheme.

*Learning at home in the first language to accelerate English proficiency and build family bonds.* Participant 2 noted, “During the student-led conferences, I like to tell parents how valuable it is at home for them to keep speaking in their first languages’ cause that is going to support their student in the classroom.” In support of this strategy, Participant 2 mentioned:

So, their [parents’] involvement would not necessarily be in the classroom, but my hope is to send home assignments where it brings parents and children together in their first language to discuss classwork and get the students to be talking to their parents.

The same participant added:

My hope is to bring parental involvement into the actual classroom through homework, so then the students would come back to report, “This is how my auntie or my mother solved the equation”—almost get the students to bring their parent’s voice into the classroom and to validate the parents voice at home . . . with children growing up being immersed in English . . . their parents are kind of trying to catch up.

This statement verified the participants’ attempts to use homework as a strategy to support the whole family.

*Decision-making.* This involvement type focused on including parents in school decision-making and on developing parent leaders and representatives who will offer input into
policies, procedures, and practices that affect student education within schools (Epstein, 2009). The key question related to this theme was: How do you include ELL parents in school decisions and develop parent leaders and representatives? All participants discussed their future plans with using this involvement type, and two of three participants discussed engagement efforts by another staff member (non-ELL) with the Marshallese community, but none had examples from their own experiences. Participant 3 answered: “No, not really; we are on a committee that is trying to work with that . . . they have been kind of like surface-level ideals that we’ve thrown about so far,” verifying they were in the beginning stages of addressing this involvement type.

_Collaborating with the community._ This type of parental involvement was centered on identifying resources and services from the community that could assist with strengthening school programs, family units, and student learning and development. The key question related to this theme was: How do you and your school identify and integrate resources and services from the community, outside of the school, to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development? All participants were able to share some information about what was happening at their school around this involvement type; two of three participants discussed the school having a back-to-school night, but I noted that they alluded to it being an area that could be improved. For example, Participant 3 reported, “We’ve been talking about . . . I don’t know if hiring is the right word, maybe hiring, maybe having some volunteer opportunities where community members come in, just to check in with students.” As an example of one effort happening at the school, Participant 3 noted, “I think the Marshallese community has it; they have their panel and their listening group, actually and—I don’t know.” Participants also discussed the school having community fairs and giving resources to families. As a more concrete example, Participant 2 stated:
This year I saw an incredible effort to get parents information about the Southeast Community Center and like pulling them in, saying, “We need doctors for physicals,” and doctors came to our gym, they translated those flyers, I was able to give them out in Russian and Spanish.

Overall, the information shared in this involvement area was limited; but a subtheme concerning the connection of staff to their buildings was surfaced.

**ELD staff connection to the school buildings.** ELL teacher participants discussed challenges concerning connecting with parents and a sense of isolation within their school building. Participant 1 commented, “We are kind of in a bubble—well I can say just from my ELD review team meetings, ’cause I have to bring in all the teachers of the kids that are failing and we have to have an intervention meeting.” This participant also admitted, “I am in the dark a lot of the time; I think to myself, why weren’t we notified of this?” Participant 2 stated, “I am trying to think outside of ELD; I am so stuck in this world. I think, I know [that] in the ELD department we do home visits.” All teacher participants alluded to the ELD staff of the school being less involved and informed about what was going on at school.

**Language specialist participant narratives.** The following narratives were derived from answers (see Appendix N) to the second set of Epstein’s (2009) framework questions designed for language specialist participants. Additionally, 11 supplemental questions were used to guide the interviews with language specialists (see Appendix M). The following paragraphs are organized around the six a priori codes and outline the themes. Axial coding was used to surface one subtheme from the interview data collected from the language specialists.

**Parenting.** This type of involvement helped families with establishing home environments to support student learning (Epstein, 2009). The key question related to this theme
was: Within the schools that you serve, how do teachers help all families establish home environments to support children as students? In answering this question, two of three language specialists noted that they were unaware of staff’s engagement with this involvement type. Participant 6 answered, “I don’t know if they do. I mean I think we all, if we have a chance to, talk about it . . . very few do home visits just to meet families.” Participant 6 also revealed that as teachers attempt to assist families with establishing the home environment, they meet with difficulty, given the communication barriers that create the need for interpreters to be present to assist teachers. Participant 5 also made the statement that follows, adding that a teacher’s ability to assist parents may be linked to the parents’ educational level as well:

Some [parents] who are more highly educated, they are more involved on a daily basis, they help their students. Others who may not even read or write, they don’t know how to support their child, and they are struggling in their own life, like to figure out the new life in the U.S.

This statement highlighted the difficulties that families faced while attempting to establish home environments conducive to student learning.

Communication. The communication involvement type was centered on designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school types of communications, which may aid parents with understanding school programs and policies, how to monitor their children’s progress, and how to improve parent-to-teacher communication (Epstein, 2009). The key question related to this theme was: How do your schools design and implement effective forms or school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children’s progress? Of the participants, two of three reported that other staff had contacted them to assist with this involvement type.
Based on participants’ feedback, I noted in my reflective journal that because of the language barriers that existed between ELL teachers and families, language specialists were required to engage this involvement type. In addition, the language specialists had to be flexible and accessible to teachers. Participant 4 reported, “Sometimes I let the teacher call me while the student is there. . . . I am available always, I am available 24/7, and I use Messenger on Facebook.” Even when language specialists were flexible, limited time and staff meant limitations were present. Participant 6 noted, “We sometimes use flyers; it is usually about time constraints because the language specialists are usually only able to translate things within the seven languages in the ELD office,” which highlighted that there was a limited number of specialists to assist schools. The participants also expressed that parents have a critical role in assisting their children and creating learning environments at home; however, communication challenges hindered the ELL teacher in helping them to do so.

**Volunteering.** According to Epstein (2009), this involvement included recruiting and organizing parents to help and support schools. The key question related to this theme was: How do your schools recruit and organize parent help and support? Of the participants, two of three did not know of any steps the school had taken to engage in this involvement type. As I listened to participants’ responses, I noted in my reflective journal that language specialists’ specific role in supporting school staff and parents with this type of involvement appeared to be unclear—hence research participants’ comments. For example, when asked the aforementioned question, Participant 6 replied, “I don’t know. I feel like that would be interesting, for you to go and choose a cohort of a few south hill schools and north schools and see and ask them that question, because I don’t really know.” Participant 5 gave a similar answer, stating, “I don’t want to be unfair or to generalize, but I don’t feel there is any ELL involvement; and even when there is, it’s
just like when we tried to create an advisory, and none of my families showed.” In support of the previous two perceptions and experiences, Participant 4 acknowledged, “To be honest with you, I don’t have any idea. And that’s the thing: I don’t want to say there isn’t any because I don’t have much information about that,” highlighting this participant’s lack of awareness of what was happening in schools around this involvement type.

**Learning at home.** This involvement type was about assisting families in helping students at home with homework and other classroom-related activities (Epstein, 2009). The key question related to this theme was: How do teachers and school staff provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities? According to two of three participants, this involvement type could be challenging to implement, depending on a parent’s educational level and ability to understand English. Participant 6 answered the question by saying, “Yes, parents are capable. . . . I think if we take a parent that does not speak English at all, it so sad and disheartening, but they want to help so badly, but they can’t, because they can’t read it.” Participant 5 also echoed other participants by discussing parents’ education level and their ability to communicate in English as factors that precluded their engaging in this involvement type. As Participant 5 put it:

> Some [parents] who are more highly educated, they are more involved on a daily basis, they help their students. Others who may not even read or write, they don’t know how to support their child, and they are struggling in their own life, like to figure out the new life in the U.S.

The participants’ responses supported the connection between a parents’ ability to communicate in English with the successful implementation of this involvement type.
**Decision-making.** Epstein (2009) posited that this involvement type focuses on including parents in school decision-making and on developing parent leaders and representatives who will offer input into policies, procedures, and practices that affect student education within schools. The key question related to this theme was: How do your schools include ELL parents in school decisions-making as well as develop parent leaders and representative from ELL populations? Of the participants, two of three gave responses that reflected an overarching theme: that they were unaware of any efforts being made by school staff in general to support this type of parental involvement. Participant 5 replied, “I don’t have any idea” when asked about this involvement type.

**Collaborating with the community.** This type of parental involvement was centered on identifying resources and services in the community that could assist with strengthening school programs, family units, and student learning and development (Epstein, 2009). The key question related to this theme was: Within the school you serve, how do teachers identify and integrate resources and services from the community, outside of the school, to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development? One participant did not know whether this involvement type happened in the school, while two of the three discussed college staff’s volunteering to help families. In my reflective journal, I noted that because of language specialists’ roles, they spent significantly more time engaging parents from the community sphere and had less information about what was take place within the school—an observation that was supported by participants’ responses. For instance, Participant 5 noted:

> Because I don’t work at the school, I don’t know if they are doing something. Maybe; we have a middle school where the ELD teacher from elementary who was his ELD teacher, she’s still supporting him and the family in getting him enrolled in sports.
This statement indicates that some ELD teachers may stay support families across different grade levels. Participant 4 mentioned that “they reach out through the universities, like student teachers. They reach out to them to come out for after-school homework club and regular activities,” supporting the notion that language specialists connected with other community organizations to implement this involvement type.

As participants shared their experiences with and perceptions of this involvement type, the subtheme language specialist fulfilling the roles of liaison and cultural broker emerged from the interview data. Language specialists talked about experiences with being interpreters for families, working for the school systems, and acting as liaisons and cultural brokers for their communities. As Participant 4 stated:

I help them by communicating in our language, first of all. English is our second language, and if I know that a parent is lost, which is really obvious, especially in my community, I will ask some question: “Hey, what can I do? What can the school help you with? Do you need to understand material, do you need to understand a phone call from school?”

Revealing the connection the language specialists have with the community, Participant 6 also discussed challenges with brokering resources for families, saying:

It has been really hard for me. I have tried to look for resources to. . . . If I can get help with communicating with the families, churches, pastors, and community leaders, but that like—helping us to bridge the gap to talk to people.

In my journal, I referenced language specialists’ verbalizing their commitment and allegiance to being seen as part of their communities, despite being an employee of the school district. Participant 6 acknowledged the difficulty, saying:
But I am also an advocate; so this parent is asking us, “I want to help, I don’t know, you told me my son is low on his reading level, you told me my son doesn’t understand the math, you told me that my son is lost in science, you told me all these things,” then we are done.

This conversation took place during attempts to help teachers to spend more time with parents during teacher conferences. This advocacy connection was also nuanced in Participant 5’s response, as she described how she engages families around disciplinary incidents:

I am very sincere with them and I show them that I care; when their child is at fault, I call them and explain the picture as the whole thing, and tell them [about] that educational system, to explain why that certain behavior or that this is not acceptable here.

This response surfaced the challenging situations that language specialists may be put in as they advocate for school and families. Participant 5 discussed feeling allegiance to the community while feeling challenged by working in the school system. This participant’s comment was: “It’s challenging because they consider me a community member, and that can be really good and very risky, and in terms of there are times they expect more from me, while I don’t have any authority, really.” All participants expressed their belief that parental involvement was very important, but indicated that the communication challenges and lack of resources prevented school staff from engaging all of the involvement types of Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework.

**Document Artifacts**

To assist with triangulating the data, in addition to using the interview and reflective journal data, I used my documentation review guide (see Appendix F) and made an outline of the document artifact data acquired for this study (see Appendix O). When scheduling interviews
with the ELL teachers and the language specialist participants, I asked them to bring document artifacts with them to our semistructured interviews. None of the ELL teachers supplied physical artifacts; instead, they verbally shared a list of various documents that they used, most of which were connected to the *learning at home* type of parental involvement. They discussed sending home notifications about school conferences and events. The majority of the document artifacts shared by the three language specialists were supplied by one of them; however, they reported that these documents were typically given to most ELL families when they visited the ELD office. I was looking for artifacts that supported research participants’ use of the six involvement types; however, I discovered that the artifacts that were supplied supported only the *parenting, communication, and collaborating with the community* types of parental involvement. For a report on the physical artifacts supplied by language specialists, see Appendix O.

Combining the ELL teacher reports with the physical artifacts offered by the language specialists revealed that school staff engaged families primarily with the *parenting, communication, and collaborating with the community* types of involvement. The *learning at home, volunteering, and decision-making* parental involvement types were not represented within the document artifacts collected from the language specialists or verbally shared by ELL teacher participants. All research participants reported that communication barriers, lack of time, and lack of translation services prevented families from receiving many of the announcements in their native languages. I pondered whether this awareness caused the participants to wonder whether they should use documents to engage families with these involvement types.

**Summary**

Chapter 4 reviewed the research findings of this study with three middle school ELL teachers from one middle school and three language specialists connected to six middle schools.
Six major themes and four subthemes emerged from the data. ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ transcribed interviews were used to create a thick, rich description of their experiences with using parental involvement, viewed through the theoretical lens of Epstein’s 2009 framework. A textural-structural description of ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions revealed the essence of this phenomenon, which concluded that parental involvement could influence academic success, with middle school ELL populations. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the results, a discussion of the results in relation to the literature, and the implications of the results. Finally, it provides recommendations for future research on ELL parental involvement at the middle-school level.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

As ELL populations continue to grow in the Pacific Northwest (Migration Policy Institute, 2016), public schools’ staffs are tasked with bridging cultural and communication gaps between the new ELL groups and themselves. Traditional communication methods used by school staff to engage non-ELL populations have included phone calls, letters sent home, and parent–teacher conferences. However, communication challenges have prevented the development of communication between school staff and ELL populations, and school staff are in need of additional strategies to educate, inform, and connect with ELL students and their parents (Soutullo et al., 2016). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of three middle school ELL teachers and three language specialists who engaged in parental involvement practices. Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework was used to code participants’ responses to interview questions, document artifacts and my reflective journal. The framework was also used to explore how parental involvement influenced the academic success of middle school ELL students, from the participants’ perspectives and experiences. This chapter presents a discussion of the study’s results in relation to the literature, the limitations of the study, theory implications, and recommendations for further research.

Participants in this study reported using parent-teacher conferences, home visits, and school events as some of their involvement strategies to engage middle-school ELL parents. This study gave participants the opportunity to describe their previous and current parental involvement efforts through the theoretical lens of Epstein’s (2009) framework. Furthermore, the results of this study may help local school administrators develop involvement and engagement strategies to improve their outreach to ELL parents as school staff attempt to influence the academic outcomes of ELL middle school students.
Summary of the Results

This study revealed that participants engaged parents using different types of parental-involvement strategies. The ELL teachers and language specialists who participated in the study were not previously familiar with Epstein’s (2009) framework; however, as they shared their parental engagement experiences, I was able to categorize their engagement efforts and pair their experiences with the six involvement types. This measure enabled the research participants to assess their current involvement strategies, along with the strategies their schools used to engage families. For example, the involvement types of volunteering, decision-making, and collaborating with the community were used the least. However, it was apparent that the communication involvement type, in addition to being the one most used by participants, was the most difficult to engage ELL families with because of the language barriers they encountered. ELL teachers and language specialists expressed the belief that an increased level of parental involvement could influence students’ academic outcomes; however, the degree to which parents could be involved was dependent upon their level of education, their ability to communicate in English, and their work schedules.

The teachers expressed the belief that there is a connection between parental involvement and student achievement. However, teachers noted that involvement did not have to be centralized to the school and could take place outside of the traditional parental engagement practices. This included activities such as Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs), helping with homework, and/or chaperoning field trips (Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015). Highlighting the learning at home type of involvement, teachers discussed how parents’ working with their children at home could help the children to become proficient in their first language, which could
assist the students with learning English more effectively and could also assist the parents with staying socially connected to their children.

Language specialists reported that some teachers worked diligently to support families by being flexible with scheduling conference times and by conducting home visits to connect more with ELL families. However, they reported that the school district hired too few of them to provide the interpreter services needed for all the schools within the school district, which created time constraints related to supporting all the school districts’ buildings with challenges that required interpreter services. One pivotal point highlighted by the language specialists was that their allegiance to the school system and their community was divided because of the nature of their job. The specialists noted that, despite being school district employees and working with families during the work day, they also made themselves available to families outside of these times because they felt responsible for helping some of their community members settle into their new life in the United States. The language specialists discussed their roles as resources, cultural brokers—people to help ELL families to communicate more effectively with school staff families (Geller et al., 2015; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Patak-Pietrafesa, 2017) and community members.

**Expected findings.** Based upon literature reviewed for this study (Shim, 2013; Vázquez-Montilla et al., 2014), I anticipated that middle-school ELL teachers and language specialists would share their personal experiences with parental involvement, information from conversations they have had with colleagues, the outcomes of their attempts to communicate with each other, and the outcomes of their attempts to engage ELL families. During semistructured interviews, research participants shared their personal experiences concerning parental involvement and information from conversations they had with their colleagues, which
confirmed my expected finding. For example, despite the ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ usage of the decision-making, volunteering, and the collaborating with the community types of involvement being very low or nonexistent, there appeared to be ongoing discussion about how other building staff engaged these involvement types and how ELL teachers planned to increase their usage of them. Additionally, research participants said they experienced communication barriers, such as families’ low English proficiency and phones that had been disconnected for lack of payment, which prevented school staff and ELL families from working together.

**Unexpected findings.** The expected findings of the study were validated by the outcomes of the study. Additionally, axial coding revealed three unexpected findings—research participants using alternative methods to communicate with parents, using homework as a method to foster learning at home in the first language to accelerate English proficiency and build family bonds, and ELL staff feeling disconnected from non-ELL staff and school programming in the school buildings. As ELL teachers and language specialists discussed the need to use the Facebook Messenger application to connect with parents because their phones had been shut off for lack of payment, the first unexpected finding surfaced. The second finding was ELL teachers using homework to encourage families to continue to communicate in their first languages at home. The teachers argued that this practice could assist students with acquiring English more quickly and could help to promote family bonding by giving parents and students an activity to engage in together. I noted in my reflective journal that ELL teachers discussed how students rarely completed homework and returned it to them; however, instead of penalizing students, ELL teachers realized that the traditional use of homework was not as beneficial for the ELL population. The ELL teachers said they believed that homework could be
used to help students build English proficiency and to help ELL parents connect socially with their children. ELL teachers asserted that students who were proficient in their first language gained proficiency in English more quickly. The teachers also noted that sometimes as students became more proficient with English, ELL parents and students would become more socially disconnected, which teachers attributed to families not speaking in their native languages in the home.

Finally, ELL teacher and language-specialist participants alluded to ELL staff in school buildings being less involved and informed about actions of non-ELL staff in the school. The ELL teachers reported that this disconnect prevented them from being informed about how non-ELL staff engaged ELL families with the six involvement types. Consequently, to the language specialists, the disconnect seemed normal, because they were assigned to assist the whole school district rather than just one middle school; therefore, they did not have time to observe non-ELL staff’s individual engagement practices. The following section discusses the results of this study in relation to the research questions, which guided this investigation into how ELL teachers and language specialists engaged in parental involvement to influence the academic outcomes of middle school ELL students, using the theoretical lens of Epstein’s (2009) framework.

Discussion of the Results

The intent behind this study was to explore the applicability of Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework with ELL teachers and language specialists as they sought to influence student academic success. Each of the participants in the study shared ways in which he or she used the parental-involvement types to engage ELL families. While participating in semistructured interviews and sharing document artifacts, they offered their perceptions of and experiences with the six involvement types: parenting, communication, learning at home,
decision-making, volunteering, and collaborating with the community. To triangulate the data acquired from these two data-collection methods, I used observation data from a reflective journal in which I recorded notes about the research participants’ reactions to specific questions during the data-collection process (see Appendix P). From these data-collection processes, I conducted an in-depth analysis of the results of the interviews and the document artifacts in relation to the research questions. These data, coupled with observation data from my reflective journal, provide readers with additional information captured through the process of imaginative variation, which surfaced “the how” of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 1998). The following sections contain a review of the two research questions in relation to the results of this study.

The first question in this study was about middle school ELL teachers’ perceptions related to Epstein’s (2009) framework. Q1: How are middle school ELL teachers’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support student academic success? In regard to research question Q1, understanding how teachers’ beliefs, derived from their experiences and perceptions, build their own confidence in the value of parental-involvement programs could create awareness of the underlying influences teachers have on these programs (Broomhead, 2014; Ivankova et al., 2016). Further, this awareness may provide additional support to teachers as they facilitate parental-involvement strategies. The teachers in this study defined and described parental involvement as referring to parents being involved in their child’s education by attending school events, helping their children with homework, and prepping them to learn at school.

Epstein (2009) and Goodall and Montgomery (2014) noted that the term parental involvement is used interchangeably with parental engagement in the literature; both were
described as a complex series of actions that took place among schools, parents, and the community on the behalf of children accessing their education. Participants’ definition of the term embodied the parenting and learning at home involvement types of Epstein’s (2009) framework and focused primarily on the realms of the family and the school, negating the community sphere of the framework. In answering semistructured interview questions, ELL teacher participants reported that they viewed their job as helping their students to acquire English proficiency. Teacher participants expressed a desire to help families but noted that families frequently came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and experienced barriers to becoming involved in their child’s education, including employment, language barriers, and the lack of finances. Uniquely, ELL teachers highlighted the importance of families becoming more involved with their children in the home environment and helping them to become proficient in their first language, because this measure could assist students with acquiring proficiency in English more quickly and it could also assist families with remaining connected to their children. Overall, the teacher participants discussed the communication type of Epstein’s (2009) framework as the most challenging of all the involvement types in which to engage families.

According to McFarland-Piazza et al. (2012), working on the parent–teacher relationship was considered to be the most critical element for improving communication with ELL populations. These researchers argued that successful parental-involvement programs focused on improving the parent–teacher relationship to help build a respectful and effective learning environment. This type of environment could be formed when both parties valued the contributions of the other and collaborated to help the student succeed.

During the scheduled interviews, the teacher-research participants shared comments that supported the previously mentioned authors’ argument about the need for parental-involvement
programs to focus of improving parent-teacher relationships. In reference to Q1, the ELL teachers discussed how they engaged primarily in the *parenting, communication, and learning at home* parental-involvement types; consequently, they discussed having difficulties with the *decision-making, volunteering, and the collaborating with the community* types of Epstein’s (2009) framework because of the barriers that parents and school staff experienced. For example, ELL teachers discussed parents having to work hours that prevented them from being able to attend school functions. The ELL teachers also discussed there being a limited number of interpreters to assist them with engaging families, which, as I noted in my journal, appeared to cause school staff to prioritize the use of interpreter services for more critical cases, such as disciplinary issues and health concerns. Like the first research question, the second research question targeted the language specialists’ experiences with and perceptions of the parental-involvement phenomenon from the theoretical lens of Epstein’s (2009) framework.

The second research question also explored participants’ perceptions of Epstein’s (2009) framework. Q2: How are language specialists’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support parental involvement efforts at the middle school level? In regard to research question Q2, I explored previous research on parental involvement at the middle-school level with ELL populations. I discovered that there were few studies on middle-school teachers’ perceptions of how parental involvement influences academic success in schools with increasing ELL populations (Shim, 2013; Vázquez-Montillaet al., 2014). After reviewing the literature, I recognized the need for a qualitative study that would examine language specialists’ perceptions of parental involvement and its influence on ELL students’ academic success.
For the purpose of this study, language specialists defined *parental involvement* similarly to teacher participants, to mean parents attending school events and working at home with their children. Consequently, when asked about their own parents’ involvement in their education, the language specialists reported that their parents were around and available if they needed them, but they were not involved. ELL teachers collectively shared a similar answer; however, one of the teachers revealed that her father was a school administrator, so there was a culture of valuing the traditional educational experience within their household. However, this finding was significant because it revealed the level of language specialist participants’ experiential knowledge with the phenomenon from their upbringing, which may or may not have influenced their perception of the phenomenon.

Overall, during the semistructured interviews, language specialists often discussed occupying multiple roles while attempting to assist parents. They described their roles as interpreters, resources, and cultural brokers. Jezewski (1990) defined a *cultural broker* as a person who bridged, linked, or served as a mediator between individuals of different cultural groups to help mitigate communication challenges. The use of cultural brokers was validated as a beneficial practice to help educators connect with ELL populations by helping to rebuild trust between the groups (Geller et al., 2015; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Two of the three language specialists expressed that they viewed themselves as part of the community, which often raised concerns for them as they attempted to resolve conflicts that took place between the schools and community members. One specialist reported that her community often perceived her as having more power than she did when it came to resolving issues, which she argued could lead to the community’s ostracizing her if she failed to resolve the conflict in a way deemed appropriate by the community. Consequently, all the language specialists, as school district employees, also
reported that they had limited capacity to support all the schools within the district, given how few of them there were.

Finally, in relation to language specialists’ experiences with and perceptions of Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework, the specialists noted that they engaged primarily in the communication, learning at home, and collaborating with the community types of involvement. In relation to the three overlapping spheres of the framework, the language specialists’ interview data, and the document artifacts revealed that language specialists worked with families, the school, and the community. Epstein (2009) argued that it was important for school staff, parents, and community members to understand the benefits of working together to encourage student learning. In my reflective journal, I noted that language specialists voiced the importance of the six involvement types of Epstein’s framework several times; however, they directly discussed some families not being proficient enough in English, resulting in language specialists’ needing to focus mainly on the communication, learning at home, and collaborating with the community types of involvement. The following sections contain a discussion of the conceptual framework in relation to the results of this study.

**Discussion of the study results in relation to the conceptual framework.** Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework was the foundation for this study; it conceptualized the following six involvement types: “parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community” (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 64). Epstein (2009) suggested that these types of involvements could act as a framework for categorizing behaviors, delineating roles and actions performed by school staff, families, and community members as they work together to increase student academic achievement. Hence, I used Epstein’s (2009) types of involvement as a priori codes to organize and analyze the data of this
study. Historically, all six parent-involvement types have presented unique engagement challenges for school staff (Lowenhaupt, 2014). However, I confirmed that when these engagement types were implemented with ELL populations, the effects of these challenges were exacerbated by the additional cultural and communication factors associated with engaging these populations (Soutullo et al., 2016). The following paragraphs offer a brief overview of Epstein’s six types of parental involvement, which I used as a priori coded themes and subthemes, along with the research participants’ perceptions of and experiences with these types of parental involvement.

**Parenting.** This type of involvement was noted for helping families with establishing home environments to support student learning. Results for parents could include their acquiring a greater understanding of and confidence about parenting, improvement in their understanding of child and adolescent development, and an increase in their ability to modify the home environment to make it more conducive to learning. Results for the teacher could include an awareness of parents’ everyday challenges and a greater understanding of families’ background, cultures, concerns, goals, and needs (Epstein, 2009). Looking at the interview data for this study, it became apparent that all participants shared similar responses to questions that addressed this involvement type (see Appendices K, L, M, and N). Two of three ELL teacher participants discussed the need for school staff to conduct more home visits to address barriers, such as parents’ educational level and their inability to speak English, which they argued prevented parents from establishing the home environment needed for learning. For example, Participant 1 mentioned, “I think all parents are capable; there is [sic] always some interesting exceptions, but I think all want to—they just don’t know how.” Two of three language specialists noted that they were unaware of staff’s engagement with this involvement type and
revealed that as teachers attempted to assist families with establishing the home environment, they ran into difficulties arising from communication barriers, which created the need for interpreters in some cases. From my reflective journal I was able to validate this finding, for the communication barrier prevented ELL teachers from being able to observe and give parents specific feedback about how to establish a home environment necessary to foster student academic learning.

**Communication.** The communication involvement type was centered on designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school types of communications, which could aid parents with understanding school programs and policies, how to monitor their children’s progress, and how to improve parent-to-teacher communication. Results for teachers could include increased awareness of cultural factors that may influence how families communicate with schools, understanding of parent networks of communication, and improvement in the teacher’s ability to understand the family’s views of school programming. In regard to this study, all participants expressed a desire to increase and improve two-way communication between themselves and their students’ parents to better support students’ learning. Of the language specialist participants, two of three reported that school staff typically contacted them to assist with this involvement type, which consequently necessitated that the language specialists be flexible with their work schedules. However, ELL teachers and language specialists alike verbalized that there were time constraints and a limited number of language specialists to assist with this involvement type. All research participants reported that parents had a critical role in assisting their children and creating learning at home; however, I noted in my reflective journal that the facilitation of two-way communication was challenging and often inadequate. All research participants noted how difficult it was to assist ELL parents with
understanding school programs and policies. They described challenges with helping ELL parents to monitor their children’s progress. Finally, they discussed barriers to instructing ELL parents on how to improve parent-to-teacher communication. I attributed the research participants’ challenges to the lack of adequate time and resources to resolve the communication challenges that arose because of some parents’ limitations with communicating and understanding the English language.

*Alternative methods for communicating with parents.* All the ELL teachers and language specialists expressed having difficulty communicating with parents via the telephone because of phones being disconnected for nonpayment of bills, or difficulties with using the mail system arising from families moving frequently. They reported that because of these challenges, they had to use alternative communication methods, such as social media and texting, to reach parents. One of the three language specialists reported often using Facebook Messenger to contact parents. In my reflective journal, I noted that research participants’ use of social media apps was perceived as the new norm for communicating with some ELL families; consequently, one of the participants expressed concerns about confidentiality and the legality of using the app, but said that it was an effective communication tool.

*Volunteering.* According to Epstein (2009), the volunteering type of involvement included recruiting and organizing parents to help and support schools. This involvement type could aid parents with understanding teachers’ job responsibilities, which may lead to increased levels of empathy for the work they perform. It also could help families to feel welcomed and valued when they visit schools. Results for teachers could include seeing families involved in new ways in the school environment, which could allow school staff to focus more attention on students because of the support that they receive from volunteers. In my reflective journal, I
noted that each ELL teacher participant seemed unsure about this involvement type, as evidenced by their shrugging and apologizing for not having an answer. However, all of them shared information about making attempts to engage this involvement type; but only one of three ELL teacher participants had personal examples to report from their own experience of how they engaged in this involvement type. Participant 1 mentioned, “I think they probably use Facebook—weekly publication goes out. I don’t really know, because I don’t think ELD is usually—I just don’t think that is just necessarily a school effort.” Of the language specialist participants, two of three did not know of any steps the school had taken to engage in this involvement type. As I listened to participants’ responses, I also noted in my reflective journal that language specialists’ specific role in supporting school staff and parents with this type of involvement appeared to be unclear, which may explain their lack of awareness of school efforts regarding it. However, given that language specialists are often the primary contacts between schools and families, their assessment of this involvement type may have revealed the frequency with which it was discussed in schools. This conclusion was verified by the ELL teacher participants’ lack of personal examples to offer about the implementation of this involvement type.

*Learning at home.* Participants defined this involvement type as meaning assisting families with helping students at home with homework and other classroom-related activities. Results for parents could include building more capacity to encourage and assist their children with learning at home and increasing parents’ understanding of school instructional programming. Implementing this type of parental involvement may assist teachers with designing tailored homework assignments that take into consideration familial factors such as family cultural practices and family designs and structures—for example a single-parent
structure—and families’ income and educational levels (Epstein, 2009). All participants in this study perceived it to be important for parents to reinforce learning at home; however, two of three ELL teacher participants noted that language barriers and having a limited number of interpreters were hindrances to being able to effectively implement this involvement type. According to two of three language specialist participants, this involvement type could be challenging to implement, depending on a parent’s educational level and his or her ability to understand the English language.

Collectively, ELL teachers and language specialist reported that language barriers, parents’ educational level, and the unavailability of interpreters hindered the implementation of this involvement type. Uniquely, this involvement type also caused school staff to modify and redefine the traditional purpose of homework, which led to the surfacing of the subtheme *learning at home in the first language to accelerate English proficiency and build family bonds*. ELL teachers used homework to encourage families to continue to use their first languages at home, which they argued could assist the students with acquiring English more quickly and could help to promote family bonding by giving parents and students an activity to engage in together. Participant 2 mentioned:

> So, their [parents’] involvement would not necessarily be in the classroom, but my hope is to send home assignments where it brings parents and children together in their first language to discuss classwork and get the students to be talking to their parents.

In my reflective journal, I noted that ELL teachers told how they assigned ELL students homework, but included in the instruction that students should ask their families questions about the homework or ask them to join in on some exploratory exercises of the homework. For example, one ELL teacher offered an example of a homework assignment designed to help
students to identify different types of tree leaves in the community. The ELL students were encouraged to ask their families to go outside with them to help the student identify different types of trees in their community and to share the names of the trees in their native languages and in English with their parents. The research participants argued that this type of exercise could assist ELL families with staying socially bonded and could help students to acquire English proficiency.

**Decision-making.** Epstein (2009) posited that this involvement type focused on including parents in school decision-making and on developing parent leaders and representatives who could offer input into policies, procedures, and practices that affect student education within schools. Benefits to parents could include their feeling a sense of ownership of the school as they were informed about parents’ voices in school decision-making processes. Some results for teachers could include an awareness of parents’ perspectives in policy development and decision-making processes within the school environment. All the ELL teacher participants discussed their plans to use this involvement type, and two of three discussed engagement efforts of another staff member (non-ELL) with one of the ELL communities; however, none had examples from their own experiences. For example, Participant 3 replied: “No, not really; we are on a committee that is trying to work with that . . . they have been kind of like surface-level ideals that we’ve thrown about so far.” Among the language participants, two of three responses expressed an overarching theme: that they were unaware of any efforts taken by school staff, in general, to support this type of parental involvement. Similar to the participants’ perceptions of and experiences with the volunteering type of involvement, it appeared that communication barriers may have prevented school staff from engaging in the decision-making type of involvement. After reviewing the frequency with which the research
participants reported lacking the necessary resources to engage in this type, I noted in my reflective journal that this involvement type was difficult for ELL staff to engage ELL families in, given the challenges of lack of ELL parent participation in schools in addition to language barriers.

**Collaborating with the community.** This type of parental involvement was centered on identifying resources and services in the community that could assist with strengthening school programs, family units, and student learning and development (Epstein, 2009). Results for parents could have included their acquiring knowledge about community resources, along with a greater awareness of how to access community services. This type of parental involvement may support teachers by increasing their awareness of community resources for referral purposes, and it could provide a pool of volunteers to aid teachers in educating students. All participants offered some information about what was taking place at their school around this involvement type. Two of three teacher participants discussed their school having a back-to-school night; nonetheless, all the teachers alluded to this being an area that needed improvement. One of the language-specialist participants did not know whether this involvement type was taking place in the school, and two of the three specialists discussed it only in terms of schools using college staff to help families, which was not a topic addressed in this study. Interestingly, in my reflective journal I noted that language-specialist participants cited schools having people to tutor and help ELL families connect with community organizations as a dominant resource that was needed. This finding validated the research positing that cultural brokers were critical because they could make the process of searching for and acquiring resources less daunting for ELL families (Geller et al., 2015; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Patak-Pietrafesa, 2017).
Another subtheme emerged from ELL teachers and language specialists discussing challenges arising from their sense of being disconnected from the general education staff, which they saw as contributing to their being less aware of how non-ELL staff work with families. All teacher participants alluded to ELL staff of the school as less involved and informed about what was going on at school. The teachers reported that this disconnect prevented them from being able to give input about how the non-ELL staff engaged ELL families with the six involvement types. Consequently, to the language specialists, the disconnect seemed normal, because they were assigned to assist the whole school district rather than just one middle school; thus, they did not have time to observe non-ELL staff’s individual engagement practices. At the same time, the ELL teachers’ feeling of isolation prevented them from offering much information to the language specialist about what strategies school staff used to engage families, leading to the specialist’s lack of awareness of use of the volunteering, decision-making and to a degree collaborating with the community types of involvement. In other words, the process was circular, with language specialists acquiring some of information about the parental involvement efforts occurring in school from ELL teachers.

For this study, middle school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement related to how it influences student academic success was explored within a public middle school environment. The research participants considered all six of Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement types to be important. Given the research design and the targeted communication attribute of this study, ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement seen through the theoretical lens of Epstein’s parental-involvement framework was explored. The following section outlines the findings of the study in relation to the literature.
Discussion of the results in relation to the literature. Previous research on parental involvement in public schools focused mainly on how it affected parents, students and teachers and on how it influenced the academic and behavioral success of students (Axford et al., 2015; Chase et al., 2014; Kraft & Rogers, 2015; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Consequently, the aforementioned research failed to embody the community sphere of parental involvement, which Epstein (2009) argued was important for ensuring that children could access resources that resided outside of the family and school spheres. Ample research had been conducted on how parental involvement could have a positive influence on student academic success with dominant English-speaking student populations; however, research on its influences with ELL populations was limited (Chase et al., 2014; Leatherwood & Voisin, 2017), especially for middle school populations (Shim, 2013; Vázquez-Montilla et al., 2014).

As schools become more racially and ethnically diverse, the achievement gap between native speakers and ELL students has continued to grow. In 2019, the middle-school ELL students represented in this study scored below other students on the Smarter Balanced Assessment in the areas of Math, English Language Arts and Science ([redacted], 2019). This figure highlights that middle-school ELL students have not been excelling in the core classes, which has hindered their academic success. To address this challenge, Epstein (2009) argued, it is important for school staff, parents, and community members to understand the benefits of working together to encourage student learning. Additionally, understanding how teachers’ beliefs build their own confidence in the value of parental-involvement programs could create awareness of the underlying influences teachers have on these programs (Broomhead, 2014; Ivankova et al., 2016). In regard to my study, by using a phenomenological research design I
was able to record and report the essence of how parental involvement may influence academic success (Moustakas, 1994).

In the literature there was a lack of consensus about the definition of parental involvement (Epstein, 2009; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014); participants in this study expressed the belief that parental involvement meant parents were involved in their children’s education despite facing the barriers of employment and difficult communication. There was a dearth of studies on middle school teachers’ perceptions of how parental involvement influences academic success in schools with increasing ELL populations (Shim, 2013; Vázquez-Montilla et al., 2014). My review of literature on language specialists’ perceptions of the same phenomenon indicated that no studies had been conducted on the topic. Therefore, this study may contribute to research because the results of this study reveal that using Epstein’s parental-involvement framework with ELL populations might provide insight into the challenges that school systems face with engaging families, which may improve their communication and parental-involvement practices with ELL populations. Using this framework enabled ELL teachers and language specialists to assess their current practices and to determine specific areas on which to focus their improvement efforts.

The literature revealed that all six of the parent-involvement types presented unique engagement challenges for school staff (Lowenhaupt, 2014). This study validated the research and revealed that when implementing the involvement types with ELL populations, the effects of these challenges appeared to be exacerbated by the additional cultural and communication factors associated with these populations (Soutullo et al., 2016). In addition to research participants reviewing their current parental-involvement practices, they were able to surface communication barriers that hindered school staff from engaging ELL families. Research also
validated the use of cultural brokers as a critical element in addressing engagement challenges between schools and parents to increase parental involvement with ELL populations (Geller et al., 2015; Ishimaru et al., 2016). The participants in this study also validated these findings, and data revealed that the role of a cultural broker was complex but critical for bridging the cultural differences between schools and parents. These same researchers also discussed how conventional engagement efforts failed to capture the cultural and social resources of nondominant families and argued that using an equitable lens and cultural brokers to implement parental-involvement strategies could help parents to connect with schools. The use of cultural brokers was validated in this study; however, the use of an equitable lens as an option to help remediate communication challenges and conflicts that may arise when education professionals attempt to engage ELL populations was not explored in my study (Gazzotti & Liberali, 2014).

The focus of this study was on parental involvement as viewed through the theoretical lens of Epstein’s (2009) framework and on how middle school ELL teachers and language specialists engaged in parental involvement to influence students’ academic outcomes. After analyzing interview and documentation data, I paired my findings with the six a priori codes adopted from Epstein’s framework. Using this process and axial coding, I developed a thick and detailed textural-structural description of the research participants’ experiences with and perceptions of the parental-involvement phenomenon in relation to the literature. This description may enable readers to make personal judgments about the study findings’ transferability and applicability to other settings (Patton, 2015).

In this study, parental involvement was seen as a beneficial practice for supporting teachers, students, and parents. Teachers and language specialists reported that by using parental-involvement strategies, they were able to assist parents in being involved with their
children’s education, which in turn could influence the children’s academic outcomes. Teachers of ELL students and language specialists examined their current parental-involvement strategies through the theoretical lens of Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework. Consequently, the participants revealed the inherent challenges associated with the communication attribute of the framework. The three overlapping spheres of this framework—“the family, the school, and the community” (Epstein, 2009, p. 2)—were acknowledged as areas that needed to be addressed when exploring parental involvement; however, additional time and resources would be required to build relationships in efforts to implement the involvement types. The following section explores the limitations of this study.

**Limitations**

This phenomenological research approach provided a depth of understanding and the essence of the phenomenon under study. Again, that phenomenon was parental involvement as perceived by the research participants at the middle school level related to how that involvement may influence student academic success. Although I used an in-depth analysis, a priori coding, and axial coding, three limitations remained within my study. The first limitation concerned the criteria used to select the research participants.

This study was conducted with research participants from a middle school in a Pacific Northwest school district and included six participants: three middle-school ELL teachers and three language specialists who served as communication liaisons between school staff and families. The school site was chosen based upon the percentage of ELL students enrolled at the school. The school selected for this study had four ELL teachers on staff and a total of 41 classroom teachers. The school was located in a low-to-medium-income neighborhood. The student ethnic population was representative of the neighborhoods, with 79% of students being
predominantly English speakers and 21% of students being ELL students. As a whole, the school’s ELL student population spoke more than 10 different languages, including Russian, Spanish, Marshallese, and Vietnamese ([redacted], 2019).

Within the district, only a small number of participants had experience with the phenomenon explored in this study (Merriam, 2009). When recruiting an appropriate sample to conduct qualitative research, Bowen (2008) noted that saturation is the primary consideration when determining the sample size of a study. The data saturation point was reached when I concluded that I had enough representation to gather a substantial amount of data for the study (Bowen, 2008). I ensured that themes surfaced during the study and the identified relationships among the themes were represented sufficiently by the data collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The second limitation was subjectivity, which is common given the nature of phenomenological studies. According to van Manen (1997), the transferability of phenomenological research can be restricted because sample sizes are often small. Transferability refers to the ability of readers to judge how applicable the findings of the study are to other contexts (Patton, 2015). Having a sample size of three ELL teachers and three language specialists challenged the transferability of the results of this study to other similar populations. According to Seidman (2013), the objective of qualitative research designs is to describe a phenomenon and not make a broad generalization about it, the latter being more relevant to quantitative research. I analyzed interview and documentation data to surface themes and patterns within the data to develop thick and detailed descriptions of the parental-involvement phenomenon. The descriptions may enable readers to make personal judgments about the study findings’ transferability and applicability to other settings (Patton, 2015). The last limitation of the study is the use of a reflective journal as a data source to triangulate the data
of this study. The notations in my journal were my reflections of the research participants’ behaviors during the study, which may have possessed a level of subjectivity. Although I used memoing (Tufford & Newman, 2010) to limit my level of bias, the journal entries were representative of my interpretation of the research participants’ behaviors and comments; hence the study may have possessed a level of subjectivity that was a limitation in this study (Dowden et al., 2014). The next section contains a discussion of implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory.

**Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

**Implications for practice.** In this study, the research participants acknowledged time constraints resulting from parent work schedules, communication barriers in the form of parents not being proficient in English, parents’ phones being disconnected, and ELL staff not being as connected within the school environment as barriers to implementing parental-involvement strategies. Participating ELL teachers mentioned that parents often had jobs that prevented them from being involved at school. The ELL teachers and language specialists mentioned that often parents did not speak any English, so they could not support their students academically even though they wanted to do so. The teachers and language specialists also discussed the lack of a connection between ELD staff and the other staff in the school building, which limited their ability to be informed about the programming of the school along with the parental involvement strategies of general education staff in the school building.

Research (Lowenhaupt, 2014; Soutullo et al., 2016) revealed that parents and educators have traditionally miscommunicated with each other, which often has resulted in many educators judging parents as not wanting to be involved in school programming and in parents feeling as if schools did not want them to be involved. ELL teachers in this study surfaced a similar dynamic
within the school between themselves and non-ELL staff. A strategy that could improve relationships between parents and school staff, as well as between ELL and non-ELL staff, could be to use effective collaborations, which was a strategy embedded within Epstein’s (2009) framework that stressed the importance of all stakeholders—families, school staff, and community members—working together to support families. A school building administrator could be a key school contact person to facilitate opportunities for parents, all building staff, and community members to meet together. During these meetings, it may be helpful to have parents, school staff members, and community members share their perspectives about parental involvement and to have them offer suggestions on how to improve relationships among the groups. These meetings could help all stakeholders to become more educated about the needs of families, schools, and the community, which could assist with developing clear communication protocols and procedures to help all stakeholders to feel connected and invested in supporting the success of children in schools.

The findings of this study supported that language, culture, and lack of family resources were barriers that hindered parental-involvement efforts among ELL populations in general (Soutullo et al., 2016). Soutullo et al. (2016) also noted that many teachers believed that schools’ communication strategies were ineffective and that teachers often misinterpreted families’ unresponsiveness to them as a product of their lack of attendance at school events. The ineffective-communication findings were confirmed and validated by participants in this study. However, despite the challenges associated with parental involvement, similar to Zhou’s (2014) findings, research participants expressed the belief that parental-involvement programs may aid in the development of effective partnerships between the school and the home, with parents representing the home environment of the child and the teacher representing the school
environment. In addition, the language specialists’ interview data validated the need to establish connections to the community, which paralleled Epstein’s (2009) recommendation to have representatives from each of the stakeholder spheres: “the family, the school, and the community” (p. 2).

In conjunction with these findings, after sharing this study’s results with the host school district’s associate superintendent, he shared with me having plans to submit a proposal request to the school board for funding to form a family-engagement department. Per the proposal request, a new director would be hired to oversee this department. The director would use this study’s findings to address some of the parental-engagement challenges surfaced and validated by the study, as they relate to the host school district. For example, the volunteering, decision making and collaboration with the community involvement types of Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework were used the least and were deemed the most difficult to engage in.

This study supports that through improving the implementation of these involvement types, school staff, families, and community members may be able to work together to access resources to address the challenges of lack of time and the need for more interpreters to assist families. The director of this new department would oversee the implementation Epstein’s (2009) framework and manage the implementation of district-wide parental-engagement strategies to help increase staff usage of the involvement types. Him or her would also be responsible for developing professional development series around the six involvement types to train staff working with stakeholders, as they worked together to implement the involvement types to support student academic success. This study’s findings along with Epstein’s (2009) recommendation could also assist public schools with fulfilling a requirement of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015).
Implications for policy. The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) requires states to consider their accountability systems related to students’ academic achievement. School districts must consult with families to offer programs and activities that involve parents and family members. Schools are also expected to work with parents to develop parent and family engagement policies, to increase their capacity to engage families, and to evaluate their family engagement policies and practices using input from families. Interestingly, according to ESSA, school districts must use at least one of the following strategies to engage families: offer professional development for school staff; offer optional home-based school programming; or provide shared, viable school information and collaborate with community organizations.

These required strategies of ESSA also parallel the types of involvement offered in Epstein’s (2009) framework: communication, learning at home, and collaboration with the community. Hence, the results of this study may be used to develop a policy, requiring professional development series for staff who are working with middle school ELL populations, which could fulfill ESSA requirements. For example, school districts’ board of directors could use Epstein’s parental-involvement framework to develop and adopt a family engagement policy to address the ESSA requirements. The policy could outline how school district would engage all families, with an emphasis on providing the necessary training for school staff to engage ELL families. School districts’ administrators could develop distinct trainings to meet the requirements of the family engagement policy for school staff. For example, a series targeting communication challenges may help school staff to develop strategies to connect more effectively with ELL families.

Implications for theory. This study revealed that parental involvement with middle school ELL student populations was beneficial and may influence students’ academic
achievement. However, in light of the communication challenges that surfaced, the study posed questions about how applicable Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework was for working with middle school ELL populations. The participating language specialists spoke of stakeholders representing each sphere—“the family, the school, and the community” (p. 2)—working together as being important; however, ELL teachers focused less on this element.

Using the six parental-involvement types—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community—to categorize behaviors and to delineate roles and actions performed by school staff, families, and community members while they work together to increase student achievement (Epstein et al., 2002) was seen as a noteworthy strategy. However, this study revealed that this method was fraught with challenges. Because of challenges related to communication surfaced during the study, the ELL teacher participants appeared to focus more on improving teacher–parent relationships as they attempted to engage in the parenting and learning at home types of involvement rather than the other involvement types. They also discussed the need to have parent volunteers present at school so that they could be more involved in decision-making and could collaborate more with the community to influence student academic achievement. However, ELL teachers reported encountering challenges in encouraging parents to be more involved, with communication difficulties being the primary one.

The language specialists described their jobs working as cultural brokers and interpreters for schools and families, which revealed how critical their roles may be in assisting school staff, families, and the community in working together. Language specialists, as cultural brokers may possess insight into how stakeholders could effectively work together to support the academic success of ELL students using each of the parental involvement types, due to the nature of their
work with each of the stakeholder groups. The use of cultural brokers was validated as a beneficial practice to help educators to connect with ELL populations (Geller et al., 2015; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Patak-Pietrafesa, 2017). Given the communication challenges associated with some parents not being proficient in English and their phones being inactive, some strategies are needed to address the communication challenges associated with using this theoretical framework with ELL families.

To address these challenges, school districts could adopt Epstein’s (2009) framework and use school personnel to develop strategies to make it more applicable to ELL populations. For example, to address the communication involvement type and communication barriers, I would recommend that school districts’ staff explore using phone-based or app-based interpreter services to help increase the availability of interpreter services for school staff and parents. Additionally, by developing strategies to engage ELL families with the volunteering and collaborating with the community parental-involvement types, school staff may be able to recruit community volunteers to provide interpreter services, since there may be individuals within the community who speak the different languages spoken within schools. The implementation of these strategies may also assist school staff with building support networks to increase their access to community resources, such as health care and financial assistance to hire additional support staff, which may aid school staff in remediating some of the challenges discussed in this study, leading to additional support to implement Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Several research studies on parental-involvement strategies found that those strategies had positive effects on academic, social, or mental health outcomes for English-speaking
students (Adams & Jones, 2016; Avvisati et al., 2013; Axford et al., 2015; Chase et al., 2014; Piotrowska et al., 2017; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). The existing body of research on parental involvement with ELL student populations shows that educators often possess a limited understanding of linguistic and cultural elements, which hinders their ability to engage parents from different cultures (Lowenhaupt, 2014; Soutullo et al., 2016).

By exploring the perspectives of teachers, researchers discovered three broad areas—language and culture, family resources, and families’ undocumented status—that acted as barriers to involvement and engagement efforts. They also discovered that many teachers believed that schools’ communication strategies were ineffective and that teachers often misinterpreted families as being unresponsive to them because of their lack of attendance at school events (Soutullo et al., 2016). Research validated that cultural brokers could help to improve communication between ELL parents and educators; however, although this strategy improved relationships, it failed to address systemic elements, such as power differentials, that hindered families from being involved in school programming (Geller et al., 2015). Overall, most of the research about ELL student populations explored challenges related to communication, although fewer studies had been conducted on how parental-involvement practices influence the academic outcomes of ELL students.

For this study, I conducted semistructured interviews, collected document artifacts, and used a reflective journal to explore and capture the perspectives and experiences of ELL teachers and language specialists. Because of challenges that participants experienced, there are multiple recommendation for further research. First, ELL parents could be interviewed to gain insight into their experience with this phenomenon, since doing so could provide firsthand information to the researcher. Increasing the sample size might provide additional insight into how other
school staff perceive middle schools to be engaging middle school ELL populations. Increasing the number of host middle schools could uncover additional subtle nuances that might not be germane to a specific school site.

Researching how to address the time constraints and the limited number of language specialist staff available to assist with communication challenges that arise for schools could make this framework more applicable to ELL populations. Language specialists discussed having challenges with maintaining positive relationships with members of their community, as they attempted to fulfill their jobs duties as school employees. Further research in this area may assist schools’ hiring managers with developing job roles that address potential boundary issues, which may hinder staff from preserving healthy ties with their communities. Finally, Epstein’s (2009) framework is inclusive of the family, school and the community sphere, as it relates to parental involvement. This study’s findings were interpreted through the lens of school staff and provide strategies on how school staff may engage families and the community. Research conducted in the community sphere and interpreted from the community lens may provide more insight into how community member may better engage schools and families.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of conducting this phenomenological study was to reveal and describe middle-school ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement and the influence of that involvement on student academic success at the middle school level. Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework was used to explore how ELL teachers and language specialists implemented elements of the various parental-involvement types. Epstein’s framework encompasses three overlapping spheres: “the family, the school, and the community” (p. 2), all of which influence a child’s growth and development. The framework
includes the six parental-involvement types: *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community* (see Appendix C). These types of involvements were used as a priori codes to assist me with categorizing the research participants’ behaviors and delineating their roles. These types also assisted me with organizing and evaluating the actions performed by school staff, families, and community members while they worked together to increase student achievement (Epstein et al., 2002). This framework created a lens for viewing parental involvement that placed the child at the center of these three spheres.

It was worth noting that each of the spheres is interdependent with the others. This interdependence produced individual challenges for school staff, parents, and community members because of factors outside their control. For example, none of these stakeholders controlled the times at which school was in session, leading to the time schedules’ not being conducive for building partnerships (Epstein, 2009). However, when successful partnerships were formed among them, the partnerships could influence student academic success (Epstein, 2009).

Interview and document artifact data were gathered from research participants and were coded using the six a priori codes—*parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning-at-home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community*—derived from Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework. After this process, the three subthemes—*alternative methods to communicate with parents, learning at home in the first language to accelerate English proficiency and build family bonds, and ELD staff connection to the school buildings*—were surfaced through axial coding of the interview data. Results revealed participants’ perspectives
on how they defined and conceptualized the parental-involvement phenomenon through the theoretical lens of Epstein’s framework.

In summary, of the six types of parental involvement, *parenting, communication, and learning at home* were described by the research participants as being used in their schools; however, it appeared that their schools’ usage of the *decision-making, volunteering, and collaborating with the community* types of involvement were very low or nonexistent; but there appeared to be ongoing discussion about how to increase their usage. However, by using the process of imaginative variation to reflect upon the relationships between the a priori codes, the axial codes, and each of the participant’s experiences, I surfaced the structural descriptions (“the how”) of the participants’ experiences. By combining and synthesizing the textural and structural descriptions of their experiences, I surfaced the essence of the parental-involvement phenomenon with the group. Despite the reported challenges with the communication aspect of each involvement type, participants perceived that parental involvement could influence student academic success.
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Appendix A: Invitation Flyer

Would you like to tell your story about your experience working with parents?

You May Be Eligible for This Study If:

- You are currently employed as a teacher in a public school
- You have at least 2 years of experience as a teacher
- You have basic knowledge about parental involvement

The purpose of the study is to describe teacher experience with parental involvement.

The study will focus primarily on your personal experiences: the challenges you faced and the strategies you used to work with students and their families.

What You Will Be Asked to Do:

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in one recorded interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. You will also be asked to review the interview transcript, to ensure that you feel comfortable with answering the questions. The interview will be an interactive discussion about your experience as a teacher working with parents. The interview will be conducted at a time and location convenient for you.

All information will be confidential and used solely for the purpose of understanding the experiences of teachers. This research project is part of a dissertation study conducted by University doctoral candidate.

If you are interested, please contact Oscar Harris at [redacted].
Appendix B: Language Specialist Invitation Flyer

Would you like to tell your story about your experience working with parents?

You May Be Eligible for This Study If:

- You are currently employed as a Language specialist in a public school
- You have at least 2 years of experience as a Language Specialist
- You have basic knowledge about parental involvement

The purpose of the study is to describe teacher experience with parental involvement. The study will focus primarily on your personal experiences: the challenges you faced and the strategies you used to work with students and their families.

What You Will Be Asked to Do:

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in one recorded interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. You will also be asked to review the interview transcript, to ensure that you feel comfortable with answering the questions. The interview will be an interactive discussion about your experience as a teacher working with parents. The interview will be conducted at a time and location convenient for you.

All information will be confidential and used solely for the purpose of understanding the experiences of teachers. This research project is part of a dissertation study conducted by a University doctoral candidate.

If you are interested, please contact Oscar Harris at [redacted].
Appendix C: Epstein’s Six Types of Parental Involvement

Dr. Joyce Epstein of Johns Hopkins University has developed a framework for defining six different types of parent involvement. This framework assists educators in developing school and family partnership programs.

Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement

1. Parenting: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.

2. Communicating: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children’s progress.

3. Volunteering: Recruit and organize parent help and support.

4. Learning at home: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

5. Decision-making: Include families as participants in school decisions and develop parent leaders and representatives.

6. Collaborating with community: Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and provide services to the community. (Epstein, 2009)
Appendix D: Teacher’s Interview Script

Interview Protocol: Teachers

Time of Interview: Interviewer:

Date: Interviewee:

Place: Grade Level:

(This phenomenological study research project is an examination of teacher perceptions and experiences with implementing parental involvement strategies with ELL populations.)

Thank you for allowing me to interview you. This interview will take around 60 minutes. I will be tape recording this interview: It will be transcribed verbatim and returned to you to check for accuracy and additional comments. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or to have data extracted from the study.

The purpose of this interview is to gain insight into your perspective and experience with parental involvement practices with ELL populations. For background knowledge, the questions that I will be asking were developed from Joyce Epstein’s six types of involvement. I also would like for you to know again that all of your answers will be confidential and will not be shared.

Distribute consent form and collect signed form.

Here is a copy of the questions I will be asking. I have provided it as a reference for you. As I mentioned, I may ask follow-up questions for clarification if needed.

Are there any questions that you have for me before we begin? (Begin recording.)
Background Question:

1. Please state your full name.

Introductory Interview Questions

1. How would you describe parental involvement?

2. When you were a child, were your parents involved in your education?

3. Do you believe your parents contributed to your educational achievement? Can you give me some examples?

4. Are parents capable of helping their children learn? Can you give me some examples of how they can get involved?

5. Tell me about your experiences with parental involvement.

6. How do you guide parents so they can help their children learn? Please explain. Do you believe it supports student learning?

7. Describe the strategies you use when you communicate with parents.

8. What major challenges or barriers did you face when communicating with parents? How did you overcome them?

9. What factors do you believe motivate you to encourage parental involvement?

10. Were there resources or support to assist you with parental involvement? Please explain. If so, can you give me some examples? Please describe resources or support available to you to assist with parental involvement.

11. Do you believe parental involvement increases student achievement? Please explain.
Epstein’s (2009) Framework Questions

Question 1: (Parenting) Within your school, how does the staff help all families establish home environments to support children as students?

Question 2: (Communication) In what ways does your school design and implement effective forms or school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children’s progress?

Question 3: (Volunteering) How does your school recruit and organize parent help and support?

Question 4: (Learning at home) How do you and your school provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning?

Question 5: (Decision-making) How do you include ELL parents in school decisions, develop parent leaders and representatives?

Question 6: (Collaboration with community) How do you and your school identify and integrate resources and services from the community, outside of the school, to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development?

Question 7: Please share with me any additional information about your experience with parental involvement.

(Adapted from Epstein et al.’s 2009 parental involvement framework)

Thank you for your time and attention today! I really appreciate your being willing to participate in this interview for my dissertation research.
Appendix E: Language Specialist’s Interview Script

Hello __________.

Thank you for taking time to meet with me to discuss parental involvement with schools. For background knowledge, the questions that I will be asking was developed from Joyce Epstein’s six types of involvement framework (Here is a copy of the framework) and please answer them based upon your experience with working with middle school teachers. I also would like you to know again that all of your answers will remain confidential and will not be shared.

1. How would you describe parental involvement?

2. When you were a child, were your parents involved in your education?

3. Do you believe your parents contributed to your educational achievement? Can you give me some examples?

4. Are parents capable of helping their children learn? Can you give me some examples of how they can get involved?

5. Tell me about your experiences with parental involvement.

6. How do you guide parents so they can help their children learn? Please explain. Do you believe it supports student learning?

7. Describe the strategies you use when you communicate with parents.

8. What major challenges or barriers did you face when communicating with parents? How did you overcome them?

9. What factors do you believe motivate you to encourage parental involvement?
10. Were there resources or support to assist you with parental involvement? Please explain. If so, can you give me some examples? Please describe resources or support available to you to assist with parental involvement.

11. Do you believe parental involvement increases student achievement? Please explain.

**Epstein’s (2009) Framework: Specific Questions**

Question 1: (Parenting) Within the schools that you serve, how do teachers help all families establish home environments to support children as students?

Question 2: (Communication) How do your schools design and implement effective forms or school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children’s progress?

Question 3: (Volunteering) How do your schools recruit and organize parent help and support?

Question 4: (Learning at home) How do teachers and school staff provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities?

Question 5: (Decision-making) How do your schools include ELL parents in school decision-making as well as develop parent leaders and representative from ELL populations?

Question 6: (Collaboration with community) Within the school you serve, how do teachers identify and integrate resources and services from the community, outside of the school, to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development?

(Adapted from Epstein et al.’s 2009 parental involvement framework)
Appendix F: Documentation Review

Teacher pseudonym:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Evidence</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Was this area addressed?  How?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Homework assignment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parent handbook</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Workshop or training announcement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Source of Evidence</td>
<td>TYPE 4 – LEARNING AT HOME:</td>
<td>Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Source of Evidence</td>
<td>TYPE 5 – DECISION-MAKING:</td>
<td>“Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.” (Epstein, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Source of Evidence</td>
<td>TYPE 6 – COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY:</td>
<td>“Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.” (Epstein, 2009).</td>
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</table>

Add notes:
**Appendix G: Coded Format Sheet**

Teacher pseudonym:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TYPE 1 – PARENTING:</strong></th>
<th><strong>TYPE 4 – LEARNING AT HOME:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ Workshop</td>
<td>√ Information on required content and performance standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Training</td>
<td>√ Regular homework assignments for student to discuss with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Family support program</td>
<td>√ Family input in helping set academic goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Home visit</td>
<td>√ School–parent compacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>√ Home–school homework completion contracts or logs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TYPE 2 – COMMUNICATING:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Language translator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Student work sent home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Scheduled written notices, memos, phone calls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Home newsletters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Parent handbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Informal conversation with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Parents can see the principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TYPE 3 – VOLUNTEERING:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ Annual survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Parent room or family center for volunteer work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Telephone tree or parent-to-parent system of contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Volunteer training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Documentation Given/Collected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TYPE 5 – DECISION MAKING:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ Parent participation in school committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Training to develop parent leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Parent–community advocacy groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Parent liaisons/parent advocates on staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TYPE 6 – COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>√ Information on community-based activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Partnerships with school, counseling, health organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Service to the community by students, families, and schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ School–business partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Safety and drug/alcohol-free programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ School-community sponsorship of multicultural events and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>√ Partnerships to provide adult mentors for students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive Notes

Reflective Notes

(Adapted from Epstein et al.’s 2009 parental involvement framework)
Appendix H: Teacher Consent Form

**Research Study Title:** ELL Parental Involvement: A phenomenological study of Epstein et al.’s (2009) parental involvement framework with secondary ELL teachers and language specialists in grades 7 through 8.

**Principle Investigator:** Oscar Harris

**Research Institution:** Concordia University–Portland

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Barbara Weschke

**Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this study is to determine how parental involvement paired with secondary ELL teachers’ communication impacts teachers-to-ELL parents’ and ELL parents’-to-teachers’ relationships in an effort to influence student academic success, specifically focusing on the methods and modes of communication used by the secondary ELL teachers. I anticipate approximately seven volunteers, of which none will be paid to participate in the study. We will begin enrollment in early December 2018 and end enrollment in early January 2019. To be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute audio-recorded interview focusing on your perceptions and experience with parental involvement. One week prior to being interviewed, you will be asked to bring document artifacts that you have or will use to facilitate parental involvement, to the interview. The study will conclude with an optional debriefing session and a reporting of the study’s cumulative findings. The study will last for about ten weeks; however, your participation should take less than 60 minutes of your time, with the exception of classroom implementation.

**Risks:**

There are minimal risks to participating in this study, which include stress no more than that involved in taking a basic exam. However, I will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a file cabinet. None of the data will have your name or identifying information. I will use only a numerical code to analyze the data. I will not identify you in any publication or report. Audio recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription and member checking. All other study-related materials will be kept securely for 3 years, and afterwards will be destroyed.

**Benefits:**

Information you provide will help educators to understand parental involvement challenges and opportunities as they attempt to engage ELL populations. The goal is for all participants to understand parental involvement and how to conceptualize its usage with ELL populations. You could benefit from this study by gaining additional knowledge and/or skills that may help to better involve and engage ELL parents.
Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you inform me of abuse or neglect that makes me seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation will be greatly appreciated, but I acknowledge that the questions I will ask may be personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with the study or to stop participating. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a bad emotion from answering the questions, I will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions, you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Oscar Harris, at [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (e-mail obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and the questions were answered. I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

__________________________________________
Participant Name

__________________________________________  ___________
Participant Signature                             Date

__________________________________________
Investigator Name

__________________________________________  ___________
Investigator Signature                            Date
Appendix I: Language Specialist Consent Form

**Research Study Title:** ELL Parental Involvement: A phenomenological study of Epstein’s (2009) parental involvement framework with secondary ELL teachers and language specialists in grades 7 through 8.

**Principle Investigator:** Oscar Harris

**Research Institution:** Concordia University–Portland

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Barbara Weschke

**Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this study is to determine how parental involvement paired with secondary ELL teachers’ communication affects teachers-to-ELL parents’ and ELL parents’-to-teachers’ relationships in an effort to support student academic success, specifically focusing on the methods and modes of communication used by the secondary ELL teachers. I anticipate recruiting approximately seven volunteers, of which none will be paid to participate in the study. We will begin enrollment in late December 2018 and end enrollment in January 2019. To be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute audio-recorded interview focusing on your perceptions of how middle schools use parental involvement to engage ELL families. One week prior to being interviewed, you will be asked to bring to the interview artifacts that you have or will use to facilitate parental involvement. You may share phone and e-mail correspondence that you have had with select middle schools regarding parental involvement. The study will conclude with an optional group debriefing session to report out the study’s cumulative findings. The entire study will last for about ten weeks; however, your participation should take less than sixty minutes of your time.

**Risks:**

There are minimal risks to participating in this study, which include stress no more than that involved in taking a basic exam. However, I will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside a file cabinet. None of the data will have your name or identifying information. I will use only numerical codes to analyze the data. I will not identify you in any publication or report. Audio recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription and member-checking. All other study-related materials will be kept securely for 3 years, and afterwards will be destroyed.

**Benefits:**

Information you provide may help educators to understand parental involvement challenges and opportunities that they may have with ELL populations. The goal is for all participants to understand parental involvement and how to conceptualize its usage with ELL populations. You could benefit from this study by gaining additional knowledge and/or skills that may help to better involve and engage ELL parents, as well.
Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you inform me of abuse or neglect that makes me seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation will be greatly appreciated, but I acknowledge that the questions I will ask may be personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with the study to stop participating in it. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a bad emotion from answering the questions, I will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions, you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Oscar Harris, at [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (e-mail obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and the questions were answered. I voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

_______________________________
Participant Name

_______________________________             ______________
Participant Signature                  Date

_______________________________
Investigator Name

_______________________________             ______________
Investigator Signature                  Date
Appendix J: School Authorization to Conduct Research

Date: 10/12/2018

Dear Institutional Review Board:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I give Oscar Harris permission to conduct the research titled *ELL Parental Involvement: A Phenomenological study of Epstein’s (2009) Parental involvement framework with secondary ELL teachers and language specialists in grades 7 through 8* at [redacted] school. We have agreed to the following study procedures to allow for semistructured interviews to take place with staff, and agree to share documentation in the forms of homework assignments, school announcement, progress reports, and language specialists’ phone and e-mail logs.

This also serves as assurance that this school complies with requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and will ensure that these requirements are followed in the conduct of this research.

Sincerely,

[redacted names]
Date: 10/12/2018

Dear [redacted],

The purpose of the research titled ELL Parental Involvement: A Phenomenological study of Epstein’s (2009) Parental involvement framework with secondary ELL teachers and language specialists in grades 7 through 8, at the Family Registration and Orientation Center. We have agreed to the following study procedures to allow for semistructured interviews to take place with staff, and agree to share documentation in the forms of homework assignments, school announcement, progress reports, language specialists' phone and email logs.

This also serves as assurance that this school complies with requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and will ensure that these requirements are followed in the conduct of this research.

Sincerely,

[redacted names]
## Appendix K: ELL Teacher Questions

### Interview Transcript Questions’ Alignment to Research Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Q1: How are middle school ELL teachers’ experiences with and perceptions of Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support student academic success? | 1. How would you describe parental involvement?  
2. When you were a child, were your parents involved in your education?  
3. Do you believe your parents contributed to your educational achievement? Can you give me some examples?  
4. Are parents capable of helping their children learn? Can you give me some examples of how they can get involved?  
5. Tell me about your experiences with parental involvement.  
6. How do you guide parents so they can help their children learn? Please explain. Do you believe your method supports student learning?  
7. Describe the strategies you use when you communicate with parents.  
8. What major challenges or barriers did you face when communicating with parents? How did you overcome them?  
9. What factors do you believe motivate you to encourage parental involvement?  
10. Were there resources or support to assist you with parental involvement? Please explain. If so, can you give me some examples? Please describe resources or support available to you to assist with parental involvement.  
11. Do you believe parental involvement increases student achievement? Please explain. |

### Epstein’s (2009) Framework Questions

1. (Parenting) Within your school, how does the staff help all families establish home environments to support children as students?  
2. (Communication) In what ways does your school design and implement effective forms or school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children’s progress?  
3. (Volunteering) How does your school recruit and organize parent help and support?  
4. (Learning at home) How do you and your school provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning?  
5. (Decision-making) How do you include ELL parents in school decisions and develop parent leaders and representatives?  
6. (Collaboration with community) How do you and your school identify and integrate resources and services from the community, outside of the school, to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development?  
7. Please share with me any additional information about your experience with parental involvement.
Appendix L: Synopsis of Responses to Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How are middle school ELL teachers’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support student academic success?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Participant Responses From Teachers</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td></td>
<td>Home visits</td>
<td>Call homes</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vaccination clinic info</td>
<td>Request meetings</td>
<td>Share expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Schedule interpreters</td>
<td>Making appointments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Calling child in sick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discipline in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acclimate in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Talk about home visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Translators</td>
<td>Some groups more</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flyers all in English</td>
<td>advantaged</td>
<td>Trying to reach out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(stressors)</td>
<td>Do not send home school</td>
<td>Translation services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mail (language barrier)</td>
<td>needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Families not literate</td>
<td>Phone shut-off</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do not have phones, use</td>
<td>High mobility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>WhatsApp or Facebook</td>
<td>Many barriers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Limited number of interpreters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at Home</td>
<td>ELD department helps</td>
<td>Parents are apprehensive,</td>
<td>Home visits (more idea)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use translators</td>
<td>because they do not speak English</td>
<td>Easier for parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage parents to continue to speak in first language</td>
<td>Language is a barrier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of translation services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Another school staff assist</td>
<td>Facebook (I think)</td>
<td>Have been trying</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly Viking (publication)(maybe)</td>
<td>Parent advisory (I believe)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t see it (staff)</td>
<td>Hard to convince them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Been trying for two years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>Marshallese leaders</td>
<td>Really don’t see it with ELL population</td>
<td>We are trying to pull different families into the parent advisory group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not common with ELL</td>
<td>Have heard about something with Marshallese community</td>
<td>Talking about pulling different student to be involved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating With Community</td>
<td>Southeast Community Center (I saw)</td>
<td>One staff works with community piece</td>
<td>At community night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hygiene school Community and Schools (program)</td>
<td>Back-to-school night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not specific to ELL pop.</td>
<td>Handing out flyers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community fair</td>
<td>Talking about it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Back-to-school night</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feels forgotten</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix M: Language Specialist Questions

#### Interview Transcript Questions’ Alignment to Research Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Q2: How are language specialists’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support the parental involvement efforts at the middle school level? | 1. How would you describe parental involvement?  
2. When you were a child, were your parents involved in your education?  
3. Do you believe your parents contributed to your educational achievement? Can you give me some examples?  
4. Are parents capable of helping their children learn? Can you give me some examples of how they can get involved?  
5. Tell me about your experiences with parental involvement.  
6. How do you guide parents so they can help their children learn? Please explain. Do you believe this method supports student learning?  
7. Describe the strategies you use when you communicate with parents.  
8. What major challenges or barriers did you face when communicating with parents? How did you overcome them?  
9. What factors do you believe motivate you to encourage parental involvement?  
10. Were there resources or supports to assist you with parental involvement? Please explain. If so, can you give me some examples? Please describe resources or support available to you to assist with parental involvement.  
11. Do you believe parental involvement increases student achievement? Please explain. |

**Epstein’s (2009) framework-specific questions**

1. **(Parenting)** Within the schools that you serve, how do teachers help all families establish home environments to support children as students?  
2. **(Communication)** How do your schools design and implement effective forms or school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children’s progress?  
3. **(Volunteering)** How do your schools recruit and organize parent help and support?  
4. **(Learning at home)** How do teachers and school staff provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities?  
5. **(Decision-making)** How do your schools include ELL parents in school decisions-making as well as develop parent leaders and representative from ELL populations?  
6. **(Collaboration with community)** Within the school you serve, how do teachers identify and integrate resources and services from the community, outside of the school, to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development?  

(Adapted from Epstein’s 2009 parental involvement framework)
Appendix N: Synopsis of Responses to Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How are language specialists’ experiences and perceptions concerning Epstein’s (2009) parental-involvement framework related to their use of its principles to support parental involvement efforts at the middle school level?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Participant Responses From Language Specialists</th>
<th>Participant 4</th>
<th>Participant 5</th>
<th>Participant 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>They make school welcoming (nothing addressed about the home environment)</td>
<td>Some teachers, not all interpret for the teachers</td>
<td>“Don’t know if they do” “We talk about it”</td>
<td>“Don’t know”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Through the language specialist Translate material</td>
<td>Through the language specialist (when there are concerns) Some parents contact language specialist directly</td>
<td>Some families do not speak English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at Home</td>
<td>After-school homework club used as an alternative</td>
<td>They call the language specialist Shared during conferences</td>
<td>Quiet place to study I am not a teacher I respect what they do Contact language specialists Flyers to be translated Talked about at conferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Homework club Call families Setup meetings</td>
<td>“I don’t feel there is any” Our office is creating parent advisory groups</td>
<td>“Don’t know” Parents asked to attend field trips Sit in the classroom (for behavior challenges)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-Making</td>
<td>Student-led conferences</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>“I don’t think this happens” “There may be some I don’t know about”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating With Community</td>
<td>Reach out to universities</td>
<td>Because I do not work at the school, I do not know</td>
<td>Some ELD teachers do to support children Finding shelter and clothing Work with World Relief (resettlement agency) Some college professors Limited by job role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix O: Language Specialists Artifacts Report

The list of artifacts that follows is categorized under the involvement type represented.

Parenting

- Annual notification given to parents about school rules and their students’ rights
- Instruction informing parents about how to sign their child up for school lunch
- Elementary supply list, about school materials that students need to bring to school
- Information for parents about how to sign their children up for kindergarten testing
- Information for parents about how to get children vaccinations to make them eligible to attend school
- School yearly calendar to help inform parents about school conferences and holidays
- Information about school policy concerning school attendance and the BECCA (truancy) program
- Information for parents about how to prepare their students for state testing

Communication

- A copy of instructions on how to use the social media and translation app to communicate with parents
- Information for parents about how to sign their children up for the highly capable program
- School yearly calendar to help inform parents about school conferences and holidays
- Information for parents about school policy concerning school attendance and the BECCA program

Collaborating With the Community

- Notification of resources for families to help sign their children up for college
### Appendix P: Data Triangulation Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semistructured Interviews Data</th>
<th>Document Artifacts Data</th>
<th>Reflective Journal Notes Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ELL Teacher</strong></td>
<td><strong>ELL Teacher</strong></td>
<td><strong>ELL Teacher</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>Learning at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at home</td>
<td><strong>Language Specialists</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>Artifacts</td>
<td>Parenting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with community</td>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td><strong>Least amount of engagement</strong></td>
<td>Collaborating with community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Least amount of engagement</strong></td>
<td><strong>Decision-making</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td><strong>Volunteering</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with community</td>
<td><strong>Least amount of engagement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Language Specialists</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interpretations of Results**

Comparing and contrasting the ELL teachers’ and language specialists’ interview data with the document artifacts, offered by the language specialists, and my reflective journal notes revealed that school staff engaged families primarily with the *parenting, communication, and collaborating with the community* types of involvement. The *learning at home, volunteering, and decision-making* parental involvement types were not represented within the document artifacts collected from the language specialists, but ELL teacher participants verbally shared using the *learning at home*. All research participants reported that communication barriers, lack of time, and lack of translation services prevented families, school staff and community from effectively working together.
Appendix Q: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.
Statement of Original Work (continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Digital Signature

Oscar Harris

Name (Typed)

11/5/2019

Date