ABSTRACT

PATTERSON, KIMBERLY NICHOLE. Modifying the Relationship Building Role Defining (RBRD) Conference Protocol for use in Parent-Teacher Conferences. (Under the direction of Dr. Heather Davis, Dr. Erin Horne, and Dr. Michael Maher.)

The purpose of this study was to modify the Relationship Building Role Defining (RBRD) Coaching Protocol (Reiman & Peace, 2004) for use in parent-teacher conference and to explore its effectiveness. The original RBRD protocol aims to build a relationship between a mentor teacher and a novice teacher working in a helping relationship. The design allows them to share their backgrounds and discuss their roles (Reiman & Peace, 2004). Working in partnership with a middle grades teacher, the RBRD-PTC protocol aims to build a relationship between the parent(s) and teacher and provide both with the opportunity to express their view of their roles and expectations as they apply to educating the student. This case study included one parent and one teacher. The teacher was trained in the use of the RBRD protocol, conducted a parent-teacher conference using the protocol, and participated in two interviews (pre- and post-), The parent participated in one interview following the conference. The parent-teacher conference was recorded to analyze the teacher's fidelity to the modified RBRD protocol. Findings indicate the parent and teacher were successful in furthering their relationship and expressing their expectations during the conference. The parent and teacher built shared understandings and formed a partnership as a result of the conference.

Modifying the Relationship Building Role Defining (RBRD) Conference for use in Parent-Teacher Conferences.

by
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BIOGRAPHY

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Kimberly completed her Master's Degree through North Carolina State University in the summer of 2014. She received a Master's of Science degree in Curriculum and Instruction. She plans to work in the field of education in some capacity and hopes to earn her Ph.D. in the future.

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MODIFYING THE RELATIONSHIP BUILDING ROLE DEFINING (RBRD) PROTOCOL FOR USE IN PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement in a child's education has been widely regarded as an important factor in student success. Henderson and Berla (1994; see also Kalin & Steh, 2010). found parent expectations and the learning environment they create as better indicators of student success than the family's socio-economic status (SES). Parents best support their child at home when they are aware of what their child is doing in school, and they know specifically how they can help. This requires communication between the home and school and a willingness to work together in the best interest of the child.

Challenges exist when it comes to teachers involving parents in a child's education. Cultural expectations, time restraints, and varying motivations to be involved all influence a partnership between the parent and teacher (Patrikakou, 2008). At the same time, a partnership may be the answer. When parents and teachers partner, they should be seen as equal players, both possessing valuable skills and information that can be used for the common purpose of helping the child be successful (Jordan, Reyes-Blanes, Peel, Peel, & Lane, 1998).

Parents and teachers both bring unique expertise to the partnership. Nobody knows a child better than the parent, nor is anyone else going to be a better advocate for the child (Greenberg, 2002). Parents are going to bring concerns about the well being of the child as a whole. They want to know that their children are safe, happy, and learning (Ginsberg, 2012).. Teachers bring an educational expertise to the relationship. The teacher will also

know the child from a different perspective and will be able to offer the parent understanding about the child's learning and academic behavior (Greenberg, 2002).

Creating these partnerships requires a focused effort and willingness to face the challenges that come. There must be room to develop a relationship between the parent and teacher, one characterized by understanding and a common goal (Laskey, 2000). This may require the teacher to learn about the cultural expectations of the parent and develop and understanding and respect for the family's unique cultural perspective (Patrikakou, 2008). It may require teachers to dispel preconceived notions about parents and listen to them for insight (Kalin & Steh, 2010).

Finally, research shows students are more motivated to succeed with consistent and clear expectations from parents and teachers (Patrikakou, 2008). When parents and teachers see the value in creating a partnership, the student is the one who ultimately benefits.

Subjectivity Statement

My personal interest in researching parent-teacher relationships and conferencing began after my spring class, ECI 705, during which I was introduced to the original Relationship Building Role Defining Conference. When completing a homework assignment for the class, I wrote that I was curious how such a conference would play out between a parent and teacher if it were re-designed to fit those needs. That response prompted the creation of my protocol and this study.

My interest, or really my concern, for relationships and partnerships between parents and teachers took root before I took the graduate class. Throughout my years of teaching I have had a wide range of experience with parents. Most of them were very positive. In fact,

when I moved from teaching seventh grade to teaching eighth grade, I had most of the same students again based on parent request. It was one of my favorite years teaching to date. I generally did not have many issues relating to parents, but I was also taught well by two very experienced teachers who were on my team when I first started teaching. They taught me how to be proactive and how to conference successfully. Regardless of this fact, there were still parents who were challenging.

The year before I finished teaching to become a student, I had my most challenging parent experience. This parent started off the year with the idea that her son was not going to be successful on my teaching team because we were all too young and inexperienced. I was the most experienced teacher on the team with eight years experience. She requested that her son be moved to another team and was not granted her request. This irritated the parent. When she had been denied her request, she started to become rather belligerent with each one of his teachers. At one point, she called a conference and demanded that I explain my science test to her. She brought the test, which her son did well on, and demanded to know specifically how I taught the content on the test. She had a problem with the fact that I did not check to make sure that all of my students were copying their guided notes accurately, even though the students were in eighth grade. She demanded that we e-mail her every week with a progress report and a lengthy explanation of each task listed and a detailed assessment of how he did on each task. We complied with her demands and he stayed on our team. As the year progressed, she still wanted e-mails, but she stopped demanding the detail and she stopped calling conferences. He was a successful student and actually scored his only level 4 in middle school on the 8th grade science E.O.G.

Another parent experience that made an impression on me did not happen with me but with a colleague. She was in her first year teaching math and had a rather unique homework check policy. She would not check every problem everyday, but would have the students turn in all of their homework at the end of the week and spot check their assignments. The teacher received an e-mail from these parents because the student received a poor grade on a homework check, and received a notice that they wanted a conference. The teacher was very intimidated because the e-mails had not had a kind tone. The parents set up the meeting with the principal and this teacher. She asked me to come because she did not trust the administrator and I knew these parents. My presence was likely to calm the situation down, which it did. The parent came to the meeting with the full intentions of intimidating the teacher into changing her policy. The parent was not successful and made it clear that she was not happy about the situation. There was really no resolution to the meeting and the teacher really did not know how to handle the situation on her own. Thankfully as the year progressed, this relationship grew and was no longer characterized by conflict.

It is possible that a meeting to build a relationship and discuss roles would have changed these two situations. Had the first parent met the team, felt assured of our competence and understood our expectations, she may have extended a little more trust. Had the second parent understood the homework expectations from the start, and had the teacher explained her rationale to the parents, there may never have been a meeting meant to intimidate a new teacher. I do not think these two situations are unique in that many parent-

teacher conflicts could be stopped before they start with conferences simply meant to build a relationship and define roles and expectations.

Relationship Building and Role Defining in the Parent-Teacher Conference

In this thesis, a potential model for a parent-teacher conferencing protocol is introduced. I modified the original RBRD to fit the parent-teacher context. In order to determine if the protocol developed was effective, I designed a case study to explore one parent-teacher dyad's perspective on their experience and potential value. I trained the teacher on using the RBRD-PTC, and the teacher then conducted a conference. The results from this conference were analyzed.

The model is based on Alan Reiman's relationship Building Role Defining Conference (Reiman & Peace, 2004). The original conference encouraged discussion between a mentor and a teacher in which they introduced themselves, discussed experience, roles, and expectations, as well as set norms for the relationship (Reiman,& Peace, 2004).

The protocol used in this thesis diverges from the model slightly, but the intent is still the same. The goal in both formats is to build a relationship and communicate expectations and roles. In the Relationship Building Role Defining for Parent-Teacher Conference protocol (RBRD-PTC) the parents and teacher introduce themselves, the parents share their roles and expectations, the teacher shares his or her roles and expectations, and they work to create a partnership in the end.

This protocol is intended to help parents and teachers communicate with each other, build trust and shared understandings, which form a basis for a partnership. With this in place, the parent and teacher work together to help the student be ultimately successful.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of the proposed RBRD-PTC by enlisting a teacher and parent to conduct a conference using the protocol. I collected qualitative data in the forms of two teacher interviews, a conference recording, and one parent interview. The first teacher interview was conducted at the very beginning of the process to gain an understanding of her view on roles and working with parents. The second interview with the teacher was conducted after training and the conference to gain her perspective on the aspects of the conference and their effectiveness. The teacher interview was conducted immediately following the parent-teacher conference. The data collected from the interviews and the conference was analyzed and compared to the proposed protocol. In understanding effectiveness, I needed to determine if the design of the conference aided the parent and teacher in building a relationship and communicating their roles and expectations.

Context

In our schools today, there are many students who are unsuccessful. Teachers see these students and believe them to be unmotivated, lazy, or incapable, to cite a few of the reasons teachers provide for their failure. Many times teachers perceive the parents of these students in much the same way, viewing them as unsupportive (Lazar & Slostad, 1999)

Research has shown that involving parents in the child's education will make a difference in the child's success, yet teachers are not readily reaching out to these parents and working with them to create partnerships. Why is this?

Many times it is teacher perception. Less than half of teacher think they can change parent's views, and only one-third think it is up to them to involve parents in the first place (Patrikakou, 2008). Additionally, teachers form expectations in their minds and when parents fail to measure up, teachers think they are unsupportive. Teachers are also largely uneducated when it comes to learning how to deal with parents. Many of then received little or no training in parent relationships in their undergraduate program. This leads to anxiety when dealing with parents (Lazar & Slostad, 1999)

From the parent's perspective, the problem may not be lack of willingness to support but lack of ability. Many parents do not know how to support their children (Patrikakou, 2008). School today is very different from school when parents were students. The expectations are different, technology is prevalent, and testing is everywhere. The curriculum expectations are different and parents see the work their students bring home and sometimes feel very lost.

Parents also may be dealing with negative feelings about school based on their own schooling experience. This may cause anxiety on the part of the parent resulting in them not initiating contact or trusting the school (Patrikakou, 2008).

Finally, parents who are of low SES or parents who are from cultures other than the norm for the school may simply hold different expectations for their students. Teachers often perceived these parents as being less involved which may impact negatively the quality and quantity of teacher interaction with these parents (Hughes & Gwok, 2007). If these parents don't think teachers are willing to work with them, then why would they make the effort to be involved with teachers and the school?

This is obviously a complicated problem to which there is no one solution. However, there are steps in the right direction. One step toward a successful parent-teacher partnership is a successful "getting to know you" conference with parents.

Organization of Thesis

Five chapters comprise this thesis. The introductory chapter provides a look into what the study hoped to accomplish and why it took place. The second reviews the literature on parent-teacher relationships, conferences, and partnerships as well as a brief history of parent-teacher involvement throughout the years. Next, the methodology chapter outlines the methods and introduces the reader to the participants in the study. The fourth chapter, the findings, explains what was discovered when the data were analyzed. This chapter attempts to demonstrate the effectiveness of the conference protocol. Finally, the discussion concludes the thesis by explaining the findings and relating them back to the literature as well as outlining the delimitations of the study.

Limitations

Being a case study, the findings from this study cannot be widely generalized. This study only had a one parent and one teacher as the participants. The teacher in this study was an Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) teacher, so her student population was not general and possessed very specific characteristics. She was also the only volunteer. The teachers in this school at the time of the study were required to meet with all homeroom students' parents and distribute Chromebooks. The teacher who volunteered for this study was not a homeroom teacher and therefore not required to meet with all parents. The parent in this study was a single mom and was the primary care taker of the student. The student

had no other parent influences in his life, and therefore all involved were only dealing with one set of parental expectations. This is not always the case. Ethnic diversity, which can greatly impact parent-teacher communication, was not represented in this sample. Also, the student discussed in this case study was a successful student, and the parent and teacher expectations for him were very aligned. This would automatically set up a certain degree of success since there was no need to communicate differences or come to any degree of compromise. Many of the barriers effecting parent and teacher communication were not in effect for this study.

Keywords

Keywords: Parent, Parent(al) involvement, partnership, active listening, role, expectation,

Parent is defined as anyone who primarily cares for the student. In some instances this is not the biological mother or father. In this study the definition is extended to mean anyone in charge of the care of the student (Ginsberg, 2012).

Parent(al) Involvement is defined as when a parent /guardian is an active participant in the child's learning. For the purposes of this study, parent involvement goes beyond surface measures such as joining PTA or volunteering at a sporting event.

Partnership is when at least two people are working together as equals toward a common goal.

Active listening is defined as a listening technique that is meant to provide information to the listener and allows for a response to the speaker (McNaughton & Vostal, 2010).

Role is defined as a part played by someone. In this case, the parent or teacher.

Expectation is defined as a belief about someone else and their achievement or behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between the school and the family, specifically the parent and the teacher, is complex and yet proves vitally important for the student to achieve the greatest level of success in school. Because of its importance, it cannot be ignored, but because of its complexity, it often is avoided or minimized. Many factors contribute to the complexity of these relationships. Margery Ginsberg in her work *Invaluable Allies Partnering With Parents for Student Success* stated that "A range of scholarship on school-family partnerships suggests that time pressures, multiple responsibilities, and unspoken assumptions and expectations can interfere with parent participation" (Ginsberg, 2012 p18). Teachers also deal with time constraints and are often not trained in how to conference and partner with parents.

So how do parents and teachers come to terms with theses constraints and build a relationship that will ultimately impact the student? One part of the answer is the parent-teacher conference, ideally, a chance for the parent and teacher to meet and work together for the good of the student. However, these conferences do not often happen until there is miscommunication, or a problem that needs to be resolved. They are frequently fraught with conflict and dreaded by both parties. What could help this situation is a conference designed to discuss roles and expectations to build a common understanding before any issues arise.

The Reason for the Relationship- Student Success

Literature showed that the success or failure of a school went beyond simply the educational aspects, but extended into the social and political realm, which made the need for

community support imperative. Margery Ginsberg stated that "Data that points to persistent gaps in learning outcomes among diverse student groups suggest that school improvement needs to be a community enterprise that often exceeds the typical definitions of parent involvement" (Ginsberg, 2012 p21). As stated in the article *The Home School Connection*, the days are gone where parent involvement meant going into the school to talk to the teacher if there was a problem or joining the PTA. A shift in involvement occurred resulting in parents moving "from hands-off to hands-on" (Greenberg, 2002, p42). Schools and teachers today encourage parent involvement. The stronger the relationship with the community, the more successful the school and ultimately, the more successful the student.

Researchers studied and documented parent involvement as it relates to student academic success. During their early childhood years, students who participated in early education and had involved parents were more prepared for school, were less likely to be retained, and were more likely to graduate from high school. As students entered adolescence and high school, there was still a place for parent involvement. Parents who maintained an academic interest in their children and expected them to do well produced students who earned more academic credits, made better grades, and made plans for college (Patrikakou, 2008). Research conducted by Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005) suggested that students who have involved parents are more motivated, work harder, and are more intrinsically interested in learning. These students sought to be challenged and were more persistent with their schoolwork. (Kalin & Steh, 2010).

Parent involvement also positively influenced a child's social and emotional wellbeing,

which was often tied to academic success. Students with involved parents often were in trouble less, had increased attendance, were more motivated, and had better attitudes about school and learning. With increased opportunity for risky behavior, parent awareness and involvement was found increasingly important (Patrikakou, 2008).

The Home School Relationship- A Historical Perspective

The link between the school and the parents existed since the beginnings of the common school, though through time the role that parents and teachers played changed drastically. As early as 1839, educators such as Henry Barnard from Connecticut made efforts to reach out to parents, recognizing that there may be a lack of understanding about what goes on in schools. Barnard, for example, held lectures in the evenings, which were open to the parents and community, a practice that was also used elsewhere. One of his lectures, held in 1847, was titled "Reciprocal Duties of Parent and Teacher" (Meyer, 1962 p48) which invited discussion on the topic (Meyer, 1962).

This discussion continued elsewhere in the country as well. In 1845, a county in New York State sought to discuss how parents could be interested in school. The discussion turned to how to get children interested in education and the members were left asking: "Could this be aided by teachers visiting parents or parents visiting schools?" (Meyer, 1962 p48). Later, in 1854, a different county issued a resolution that stated: "cooperation of parents with teachers in the performance of their duties is essential to the prosperity of the schools" (Meyer, 1962 p48). In the early days of the common school, schools were interested in involving the parents and community. (Meyer, 1962).

In the mid to late nineteenth century, the role of parents in the schools differed from today. Depending on the community needs and often size of the school, parents could take on many roles. Some of these roles included teacher selection and determining pay, building and upkeep of schoolhouse, checking on attendance of students, choosing textbooks, or hosting the teacher in their home. Parents were also seen as being partially responsible for the student's education at home and were expected to supervise their home learning and social and moral development. Inevitably, sometimes the parents took their role too far and would evaluate the teachers, which caused some tension (Meyer, 1962).

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century brought societal changes with the Industrial Revolution and the beginnings of media influence from the radio, for example. Schools changed in response to society, and the role of parents in schools also changed in response. This theme of parent-teacher relationships changing as society changed would continue throughout the twentieth century (Powell & Diamond, 1995).

In the time period between 1900 and the early 1940's, teachers viewed parents as those who needed to be educated about their children by the experts (teachers), not viewed as competent or knowledgeable. Much of this view of the parent stemmed from the newly formed PTA (Parent-teacher Association). The PTA grew during this time and led meetings to educate parents on children. They also created strict policies that did not permit parents in the association from influencing administrative decisions (Powell & Diamond, 1995). This is somewhat removed from the role of parents just decades earlier when they were involved in most aspects of administrating the common school (Meyer, 1962). Parents did take on the

role of advocate for conditions for children; child labor laws came from this era, as did using schools for community and playgrounds (Powell & Diamond, 1995).

The parent-teacher relationships between the 1940's and mid 1960's began to see some change and an increased advocacy. For example, parents of children with cognitive impairments banded together to form NARC (National Association for Retarded Children). This was significant because prior to this, parents of these children tended to turn their children over to institutions and have no further contact with the child. These parents took a new view of their impaired children. Parents of young children were also taking a very active cooperative role in their children's education. Neighborhood based parent cooperatives for young children were formed with an early childhood teacher and parents who rotated on a voluntary basis as the help to the teacher. In this instance, the view of the teacher held significance in that parents viewed them as both experts and learners. In general though, teachers still viewed parents as those needing instruction about child development, although the focus shifted to teaching parents about their child socially and emotionally (Powell & Diamond, 1995).

The mid 1960's through the mid 1970's ushered in another time of social upheaval that affected the schools and the role of the parent and teacher. During this time, some of the social aspects of schooling changed. Equal access to education, no matter the race or disability became expected. The nation began to take notice of the issue of poverty and its effects, and from this came the Head Start program to try and combat the perceived educational deficits inherent with poverty. Head Start programs required parents to participate on the board, differing from the past in that it treated parents as valuable

contributors. Early intervention programs were established to help impoverished parents of small children. In the 1970's, criticisms began to emerge about this approach, because it assumed that mothers in poverty were inept (Powell & Diamond, 1995).

From 1975- 1990, a large shift in parent-teacher roles, as well as a major shift in society took place. During this period of time, the family dynamic changed, and many students came from homes of single parents or blended families. Both parents worked in many families, resulting in less time for parent involvement. An increased focus on serving minority populations became evident. However, this shift made parent-teacher relationships more difficult (Powell & Diamond, 1995).

Prior to this era, parents viewed teachers as experts meant to diagnose and solve problems. The view shifted, however, to collaborator. When dealing with parents and families, the focus became looking for strengths and respecting culture and community, instead of only focusing on the child and imposing white middle class values. Parents gained legal rights in order to be involved in their child's education. Despite the movement in the direction of parent involvement, a range of beliefs about parent involvement existed which influenced the ways parents participated in their child's education. Often times, the teacher would involve the parent only as much as was necessary, and of course there were always parents who did not want to be involved (Powell & Diamond, 1995).

While the role of the parent in schools changed drastically over time, some of the issues that parents and teachers experienced remained somewhat static, while others changed in response to changing roles. In the late 1940's, a study involving interviews with over 500 parents of elementary students provided insight into parent-teacher relationships. In this

study, three main factors existed that caused difficulties between parents and teachers. Those were disagreements or misunderstandings regarding school programs, teachers and parents protecting their own interests, and inadequacies of parents or teachers in their relationship (Kaplan, 1950).

The first cause of conflict listed, disagreements or misunderstandings regarding the school program, stemmed from parents evaluating school based on their own experiences. Often, parents found differences between how they learned when they attended school and how their children were learning now, which caused anxiety with some parents. Sometimes this caused parents to educate students differently after school hours causing confusion for the students. (Kaplan, 1950). Basically, parents possessed an inaccurate understanding of the school program, but nobody took the time to explain it to them. Without this understanding, anxiety and confusion resulted in both parents and students.

Teachers and parents protecting their own interests also caused conflict. At this time, many parents felt that the school could be too intrusive into their lives and they did not welcome too much involvement or interest. At the same time, teachers also protected their own interests. Since they were viewed as the experts during this time period (Powell & Diamond, 1995), many had the attitude that parents did not have much to contribute. This resulted in the parents feeling alienated and conflicted when these interests were intruded upon (Kaplan 1950).

Finally, a personal inadequacy on the part of the parent or teacher also was, and is, a source of conflict. The study found frustration from teachers when parents would not take care of their children. The article gave an example of a parent who would not purchase

glasses for her child even though he (or she) had means to do so, ultimately resulting in the teacher turning the case over to a child welfare agency. This kind of incident caused teachers to develop negative perceptions of these parents. Another contributing factor to conflict was the parent who was not responsive to communication no matter the effort of the teacher, as well as the other end of the spectrum with the parent who was overprotective. Overprotective parents tended to see no wrong in their child's actions and became defensive instead of working with the teacher to correct a behavior. On the other side, conflict also existed when teachers were inadequate or untrained and therefore not doing a good job in the classroom (Kaplan, 2005).

The Modern Parent-Teacher Relationship

From about the 1990's on through today, society recognized the positive impact a parent-teacher relationship can have on student success. This era focused on including the parents and families in the education of the child. This perspective took into account the unique culture and make up of families today (Powell & Diamond, 1995). Not only has this shift occurred in families socially, but it also influenced by modern legislation. The No Child Left Behind Act makes a statement regarding parents and education. It states:

> "parent involvement means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including ensuring that (a) parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; (b) parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; and (c) parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in

the education of their child" [title IX section 9101(32)].

Today parents are encouraged to be "full partners" in their child's education. A partnership requires effort from both parties. Both the school and the parent need to show respect, regard, listen, and make an effort to understand the cultural influences of the other. (Jannsen-Vos & Weijers, 2012). This kind of partnership benefited the student. Researchers Owen, Ware, & Barfoot, (2000) found in a study conducted with pre-school children, that "when parents and caregivers reported that they partnered, communicated, and were close, both parents and caregivers were observed to be more responsive and sensitive to children, and children were more likely to be rated by caregivers as more prosocial and less aggressive" (Iruka, Winn, Kingsley & Orthodoxou, 2011).

Parent partnerships and parent involvement carry different connotations. Parent involvement may mean parents participating in school activities, such as PTA or volunteering at sporting events. It is possible for a parent to be involved by this definition and not be viewed as a partner. Parent partnerships, in this study, are defined as a parent and teacher working together as partners toward the common goal of helping the student be optimally successful. Parents and teachers that are partners communicate and share responsibility for the student's success. Many times the relationship between the home and school is focused on parent involvement, and not focused on the relationships the parents have with teachers or other school personnel. However, research showed that this relationship has a greater impact than simple involvement with the school (Hughes & Kwok, 2007).

There is much literature directed to both parents and teachers with suggestions about how to build these partnerships between the two.

The suggestions for teachers were numerous. J.A. Brands in her article *Partner With Parents* and Patrikakou, in his article *The Power of Parent Involvement* provided several of the same suggestions for teachers about how to build a successful partnership. Both suggested that teachers should communicate often with parents about roles and expectations as well as ways parents can help. They also suggested communicating to the parents a positive story or examples about the student's successes (Brand, 2005; Patrikikou, 2008). Additionally, Brands offered suggestions such as being welcoming, inviting the parents to share about their child and their goals, listening, sitting along side the parents, and taking notes (Brands 2005).

Greenberg, in her article *The Home School Connection* (2002) encouraged parents to build partnerships with their child's teacher. Greenberg highlighted for parents that they possess value in the partnership by reminding parents that they were the experts on their child and that they have unique insight into the child's tendencies and personalities. She did not underestimate the role of the teacher and viewed the teacher as the expert on the school and curriculum, who also has insight into the child from a different perspective. She encouraged the parent to find out from the teacher how he or she viewed parent involvement and to not overstep boundaries (Greenberg, 2002).

Greenberg provided suggestions for parents about how to be a partner, as did Patrikakou, in his article *The Power of Parent Involvement.* Several of these ideas coincided.

Many of the suggestions centered on communication. Parents were encouraged to ask for communication, and to work out a communication plan that worked for the parent and teacher. Parents were also to share with teachers about their home and culture. Parents were encouraged to find out from the teacher how they could become involved (Greenberg 2002; Patrikakou, 2008). Greenberg (2002) suggested involving multiple family members as well as the parents and finding ways to share family culture with the class.

Interestingly, Greenberg (2002) also addressed parent's hesitation when participating. She said that some parents needed to get over a negative past experience with school and work to trust teachers and schools. She cautioned that not resolving past issues with school could negatively impact the student's view of school (Greenberg, 2002).

It was reported that teacher relationships with parents has more of an impact than simply parental involvement in schools (Hughes and Kwok, 2007). A study conducted by Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, (2009) found that parent and teacher relationships were the key to effective involvement and parent engagement in the child's education (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009). This was not to say that school involvement such as membership in PTA or volunteering for a sporting event was not important or vital to a school culture. Often school involvement can grow out of the parent-teacher relationship. Teachers can get to know the parents, make them feel welcome, and then find opportunities for the parents to become involved.

Roadblocks to Parent-teacher Partnerships

Parent and teacher relationships are beneficial, however, it is not always easy for parents and teachers to form these relationships and create partnerships. There were a variety of reasons for this. Sue Laskey (2000) described parent and teacher relationships as being highly emotional, and linked to relationships, culture, and power as well as requiring emotional understanding. She described emotional understanding as being able to feel what the other is feeling. Laskey stated that "a great deal of the history, culture and organization of teaching makes achieving such understanding difficult or impossible" (Laskey, 2000 p846). In today's educational system, these difficulties play out in a variety of ways. Cultural differences, differences in socio-economic status, teacher and parent perceptions and biases, and organizational and time restraints name a few.

Teacher and parent difficulties due to cultural and linguistic differences were among the most well documented reasons. The discontinuity between school and non-mainstream culture began in the 1800's. Many teachers encouraged children of immigrants to leave their culture at home (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Researchers concluded that "The strength of parent-teacher relationships is complicated by cultural, language, and socioeconomic-status dissimilarities between parents and teachers. Researchers have found that with such dissimilarities, it is easy for both parents and teachers to develop misperceptions that lead to poor communication and a lack of respect" (Cair- ney, 2000; O'Connor, 2001; Ogbu, 1993) (Iruka, Winn, Kingsley & Orthodoxou, 2011). Racial and linguistic diversity increased in the public school system, and will likely continue to increase. This resulted in parents and

teachers having different ideas about what involvement meant based on varying cultural expectations (Patrikakou, 2008). Research has shown that it is less common for minority parents to have positive relationships with the school and teachers and that minority parents are less likely to be involved in school activities aimed at parent engagement (Hughes & Gwok, 2007). A study by Clark & Lopez (1983) showed that teachers and administrators viewed this lessened involvement as uncooperativeness or lack of concern about or value for education. (Hughes & Gwok, 2007). This negative teacher perception may negatively impact a teacher's interaction with minority parents (Hughes & Gwok, 2007). Another study by Chavkin & Williams (1993) looked at how minority parents viewed their involvement in education. It was found that both minority and Caucasian parents exhibited similar attitudes about education and that minority parents exhibited the same, in some instances higher, levels of involvement in home related educational activities (Hughes & Gwok, 2007).

These studies indicate disconnect between minority parents and involvement in the pubic schools, as well as disconnect between teachers and minority parents. Researchers sought to find reasons for this. One possible reason reported is that teachers are simply uneducated about the cultures within the school community. Learning about the unique aspects of these cultures and how members of these cultures interact will lead to more positive relationships, more accurate perceptions by teachers, and a more multicultural atmosphere within the school (Patrikakou, 2008). An example is African American and Hispanic parents and teachers from another culture. The African American and Hispanic cultures utilize their own parenting and communication styles as well as beliefs about

education (Hughes & Gwok, 2007). Research conducted by Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, & Dornbusch, (1993) reported that African American parents tend to communicate often and are more likely to be critical than Hispanic parents who tended to be less assertive (Hughes & Gwok, 2007). The teacher may prefer one communication style, but should understand each approach in order to best understand how to communicate with parents.

Additionally, minority parents may not feel accepted or a sense of belonging due to the issue of racism in society. Many times schools mirror society in power structures and are filled with white middle class teacher and administrators. An unpublished dissertation by Dina Devose from N.C. State University, explains this in her research findings. She explains that there may be a level of discomfort that exists for minority and low-income parents when talking to white middle class school professionals. She explains that these school professionals hold a certain degree of power simply because they understand the politics of school and are usually more educated. However, in her study she gave an example of a parent who, when speaking to a teacher of the same race, was more comfortable even though the above mentioned power still existed with this teacher. There was a perceived leveling when the races were the same (Devose, 2013). Also, the school culture may negatively affect the way minority parents view the school (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009).

Another major factor affecting the parent-teacher partnership is socio-economic status (SES). This is closely tied to cultural and linguistic differences within the literature, so much so that many of the researchers mention them together when discussing their findings. Lott (2001) reported that SES affects parent-teacher relationships because of lack of time, life

difficulties, differing value of education. Boykin (1994) cited a lack of ability to successfully use the school system and follow middle class white norms as another barrier (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009). Laskey reported in her study that her findings were consistent with research in that working class and single parent families were relegated (Laskey, 2000). In general, trust is an issue between families of low SES and school systems. (Iruka, Winn, Kingsley & Orthodoxou, 2011). When schools do not work with these families to accommodate their work schedules or work to communicate with them, then there is often difficulty when forming a relationship.

A high SES can also affect parent-teacher relationships. A parent attitude of entitlement and over involvement creates a unique issue for teachers. A qualitative study conducted by Landeros (2010) examined the difficulties associated with the parent-teacher relationship in an affluent elementary school. The study points out that most often this relationship involves two women, the mother and the teacher. The role of primary caregivers was largely viewed as the mother's role, and therefore, looking out for the child's education was also primarily viewed a mother's role. Mothers exhibiting entitled behavior and those that are over involved have chosen to become involved because doing so made them appear socially as a "good mother" by doing everything they can for their child to ensure a good education and therefore, elevating their social status (Landeron, 2010).

It is no secret that many in society do not view teachers as professionals, and often this is the case in an affluent area where many of the involved mothers possessed education or jobs that are held at a higher status than teaching. Sometimes these mothers gave up

careers and felt that being involved in the school is their job. While they are not the teacher, they could have been, and this resulted in these parents feeling free to criticize teachers. Often these criticisms led parents to band together and use their connections and resources to take action that may not have been in the best interest of the school community. Administrations who gave in to these parents lost a degree of control of the school. This caused teachers to not be viewed as experts, which negatively affected the parent-teacher relationship (Landeros, 2010).

Often teachers' own fears, bias, and constraints can become barriers to effective parent partnerships. Some teachers espouse the attitude that communicating with parents is one more thing to add to an already burdensome workload (Patrikakou, 2008). Teachers in the middle school and high school often had 30 or more students in each class, and they taught multiple classes a day. That resulted in numerous parents to contact (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Some teachers did not view parent communication as a valuable use of their limited time. Additionally, teachers often experienced anxiety when interacting with parents. Some teachers feared that contacting parents would cause conflict and they would not know how to handle it. Therefore, teachers avoided parent communication, which actually resulted in miscommunication and conflict (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Only contacting parents when a problem occurs sets a negative tone for parents and does not encourage involvement (Patrikakou, 20008). Teachers sometimes feel that working with parents as partners would diminish their professional status and authority, when often the opposite was true (Lazar & Slostad, 1999).

Research by Laskey (2000) highlighted the bias and emotional issues that come with parent and teacher interactions. She found that when teachers believed they were treated as professionals and they were dealing with a parent that they felt was responsible, then they expressed positive emotions and were willing to work with that parent. Conversely, when teachers felt that parents' behavior was irresponsible or disrespectful, then they expressed negative emotions and did not want to work with the parent. She found that teachers often judged parents based on their own belief system. Teachers tended to respond negatively to parents when they were questioned, challenged, felt unsupported, or dealt with parents who raised their children in a way that differed from the norm (Laskey, 2000).

Parents also bring beliefs and sometimes fears into the parent-teacher interaction, which affect the relationship. Some parents have limited education, and therefore have anxiety about their involvement in school, particularly when the students are in middle school and high school. A study by Bandura (1989) found that parents who didn't believe they had the ability to help their student avoided helping either because they did not think they would be helpful or because they did not want to feel inadequate (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Also, many parents had negative experiences when in school, causing a degree of anxiety in the parent. This attitude could also negatively affect the child's view of school (Patrikakou, 2008). These anxieties could inhibit relationships with teachers.

Sometimes, the problem is simply that parents do not know how to get involved in their child's education. Research has shown that parents are willing to get involved in all kinds of ways, but are simply unaware of involvement possibilities (Kalin & Steh, 2010).

Parents want to learn from the teacher about the curriculum in the classroom and how they can help (Patrikakou, 2008).

The idea that parent relationships and partnerships were for the elementary school and not for high school appeared as a theme in literature. Parents and teachers can often times misinterpret a teenager's desire for independence to mean they no longer want their parents involved with the school. However, when parents were involved at this level, the students were more successful. (Lazar & Slostad, 1999; Patrikakou, 2008).

The Need For A Tool

The potential barriers hindering a positive and productive parent-teacher relationship may seem to be insurmountable, but it is possible to address these issues and build trusting, productive partnerships with parents.

The Need For A Tool- Untrained Teachers

A factor influencing relationship building is the fact that most teachers did not receive adequate or effective training in their teacher education programs on how to effectively work with parents. Few Universities offered courses on parent involvement, and those that did may not have required it. Many programs included parent involvement as an aspect of some required coursework (Patrikakou, 2008), thus little actual understanding of or training on parent involvement occurred in pre-service teacher education. This resulted in teachers hesitantly including parents in the classroom an fear involved when working closely with them. In a study done by Nobel (1991), high school teachers reported some of the reasons for their uneasiness. The teachers reported that they were unsure what to talk about in a conference, or how to end a conference. Teacher's concern about about how to handle a

situation involving parent conflict also caused uneasiness in teachers (Nobel, 1991). Teachers needed support and education about parent-teacher conferencing. The administration of the high school in the Nobel study recognized this, and provided literature as well as peer coaches in the form of counselors or special education teachers. Teachers surveyed after the training all reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that the information had been helpful (Nobel, 1991). Teachers need support and education when it came to building relationships with parents and this support and education should become a focus (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009). This applied not only to preservice teachers, but also teachers in the classroom. (Lazar& Slostad, 1999).

The Need For A Tool- Unsuccessful Conferences

Lack of training and personal insecurities may cause novice and veteran teachers to make mistakes during a conference. Fredricks and Rasinski (1990) identified some of these common conferencing mistakes that teachers made based on the work of Losen and Diament (1978) and provided suggestions for how teachers could avoid these common problems. A problem addressed was that teachers often presented themselves as the absolute authority and as the one who had all of the answers. Teachers felt that admitting wrong behavior or shortcomings was a sign of incompetence resulting in denial of any wrongs. Teachers tended to over assess and diagnose situations, label children, communicate with too much jargon, talk excessively, and form opinions about children and parents before even meeting them. These behaviors work against a parent and teacher partnership. The authors suggested that teachers approach parents welcoming the idea of compromise and be willing to listen while accepting that parents can be problem solvers. They suggested that teachers communicate

only about the child, use words that are easy to understand, talk less, and listen more (Fredricks & Rasinski, 1990).

The literature is clear and consistent with what constitutes a successful parent-teacher conference. The conference should not be the first contact the teacher had with the parent, but be preceded by phone calls, newsletters, or some other form of communication. Researchers cited that a successful parent-teacher conference was one in which the parent was made to feel welcome. Greeting parents and setting up a comfortable physical environment were important, as well as allotting a sufficient amount of time. Teachers were encouraged to share positive comments about the child to the parents, and convey a sense of caring to the parent. Preparedness was always important to the success of a conference and teachers should come prepared with an agenda, student work, and any necessary reports. Teachers were also encouraged to avoid jargon when speaking, and listen to parents, valuing what they had to say (Brands, 2005; Jordan, Reyes-Blanes, Peel, Peel, & Lane, 1998; Miller, 1998; Million, 2005; Wise, 2000).

When teachers participate in conferences that they know will be characterized by conflict, Elmore (2008) created a seven-step process to aid teachers in conducting a successful conference. He proposed an introduction, a presentation of the purpose of the conference followed by discussion of the issue, all stated factually and in a calm manner. He then allowed for a defense in which the other party listened, followed by a chance for the other to understand and reiterate his or her understanding. Next, both parties came to an agreement about the best solution. The meeting then concludes swiftly (Elmore, 2008).

A Conferencing Protocol

A conferencing protocol could guide the untrained or anxious teacher successfully through a parent-teacher conference. A tool that results in a successful conference should allow for the parent and teacher to build trust, learn about each other's roles and expectations, create a shared understanding, and encourage the teacher to be an active listener.

Building Trust

Research has shown trust as a vital component to any cooperative relationship (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998; Tschannen-moran & Hoy, 2000) and specifically important in the parent-teacher relationship (Adams & Christenson, 2000). A study conducted by Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette, & Hamby, (1992) revealed parents and school professionals both identified trust as vital to a relationship (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Additionally, open communication required trust and those who trust will disclose more accurate and helpful information (Tschennen-Moran, & Hoy, 2000).

Trust was found to be inherent to a certain degree in the schooling process. Parents trusted the school to a certain extent and believed that the school would work to keep their child safe and educate their child. There also existed a degree of distrust for many parents, possibly stemming from experiences or conflicting values. Difficulty existed in breaking the mindset of distrust. Distrust caused feelings of anxiety and monitoring behaviors could develop (Tschennen-Moran, & Hoy, 2000). Therefore, teachers need to work to build trust with parents.

The identification of trust as an important component to the relationship was easy, but defining trust was more difficult. Literature suggested various definitions for the construct of

trust, varying by discipline. Social scientists, economists, and psychologists each developed unique definitions for trust. (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998; Tschannen-moran & Hoy, 2000). Adams and Christenson described trust in a parent and teacher relationship based on the research of Holmes and Rempel (1989). "Trust in the family–school relationship (is defined) as confidence that another person will act in a way to benefit or sustain the relationship, or the implicit or explicit goals of the relationship, to achieve positive outcomes for students" (Adams & Christenson, 2000 p480). This definition implied that trust between the parent and teacher was ongoing and sought the best interest of the student, a common element between the parent and teacher. Tshennen-Moran and Hoy (2000) defined trust by components. They defined trust as a relationship in which there is vulnerability and belief that the other is "competent, reliable, open, and concerned," (Tshennen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p556) as well as honest. Vulnerability exists in parent-teacher relationships, and offers an opportunity for both the parent and teacher to display these characteristics.

Adams and Christenson (2000) studied trust between parents and teachers. They found that parents trusted teachers more than teachers trusted parents. They also found that parent trust for teachers decreases as the grade level increases. This shift could stem from the higher teacher to student ratio and the increased onus put on the student in the higher grades. The researchers found that trust increased when communication between the home and school improved. They also discovered that the nature of the interaction better indicated trust than the frequency of the interaction did. (Adams and Christenson, 2000). This would indicate that building trust with parents can be more difficult in the upper grades but could improve with quality, frequent, positive interaction.

Research revealed challenges for parents and teachers when creating trust, such as cultural differences and socio-economic status. Teachers report higher levels of trust with higher SES parents. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, (1997) found that low SES families generally distrusted schools due to not understanding school practices or negative prior experience with the school or from their own education (Iruka, Winn, Kingsley & Orthodoxou, 2011). Distrust sometimes occurred when cultural values and expectations deviated from the norm. Kipnis (1996) found that people's uncertainty about cultural norms made trust in a diverse relationship difficult. Finally, people tended to trust others like themselves, a phenomenon called characteristic-based trust (Tschennen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Teachers wishing to build trust with parents culturally different from them should make an effort to learn about the cultures of these parents (Jordan, Reyes-Blanes, Peel, Peel, & Lane, 1998).

Developing trust in a parent and teacher relationship was not found to be an easy process, but one that took time, structure, and commitment (Patrikakou, 2008). Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna (1985) suggested that trust progressed through the stages of "predictability, dependability, and faith" (Adams & Christenson, 2000 p480). Trust based on reliable behavior defined the predictability phase. Trust ascribed to the person based on experiences of reliable behavior defined the faith phase. In short, trust became a characteristic of a person with consistent reliable behavior (Adams & Christenson, 2000). In a parent- teacher context, building trust may have required multiple opportunities for interaction. Too often, a parent's first interaction was when a problem arose, and no positive interactions occurred. Problem solving between parents and teachers required trust and with

no previous interaction, this proved difficult (Adams & Christenson, 2000). In addition to frequent contact, quality parent-teacher interactions built trust through creating predictability for both parties (Tschennen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). A tool designed to build trust needs to encourage positive interactions with parents.

A Tool to Clearly Define Roles and Expectations

Parent and teacher concepts of involvement and roles and expectations in education often differed. Factors such as diversity, SES, and personal bias affected these concepts (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). These differences necessitated the need for communication between parent and teacher about roles and expectations. Literature about parent and teacher roles and expectations provided insight.

Teachers acknowledged that parent involvement positively impacted student success. However, teachers believed that they had little impact on parent involvement or influence over parents. Only one-third of teachers reported that it was their job to involve parents. Half of the teachers believed they had the ability to change parent behavior (Patrikakou, 2008). This indicated a lack of teacher-initiated involvement with parents. Parents often did not initiate relationships with teachers unless there was a problem. Some teachers also saw their role as the expert, and the parent as the learner. Research indicated that parents and teachers both saw the teacher as the problem solver. Additionally, teachers were more likely than parents to see parent involvement in the problem solving process as important (Kalin & Steh, 2010).

Teacher's perceptions of parental involvement also seemed related to demographics. Teachers tended to perceive educated parents as more involved. Teachers of younger children also perceived parents as more involved. Parents' belief that their involvement was only necessary when the students were younger could explain this. Additionally, teachers rated single parents as less involved even though research indicated otherwise (Patrikakou, 2008). Teachers also viewed working class parents as being unsupportive. However, working class parents viewed themselves as supportive, and were supportive in the home context, not visible at the school (Crozier, 1999).

Teachers also hold expectations for students and parents. When considering students, teachers tended to be optimistic, but did not believe all students would reach a successful future. Working with students and assessing student work formed expectations in teachers. Teachers also reported noticing parental values on education reflected in the child. Parents wanted their children to finish school and become confident adults (Rubie-Davies, Peterson, Irving, Widdowson, & Dixon, 2010). This created differing expectations of students. A student's academic performance and behavior may reflect home expectations and values. Cultural differences should be taken into account and parents' values should not necessarily be judged on cultural norms (Jordan, Reyes-Blanes, Peel, Peel, & Lane, 1998). When teacher expectations were unmet, teachers viewed parents as unsupportive, when that may not actually have been the case (Crozier, 1999).

Literature revealed that parents may view their role in education in qualitatively different ways than teachers. Many times, SES affected how parents view their roles in their child's education. For example, Landeros (2011) described the roles that upper middle class

parents, mothers in particular, played in their child's education. These parents involved themselves with schools and teachers, willingly took leadership roles, and had a narrow view of teacher professionalism (Landeros, 2011). A study regarding how working class parents viewed their roles generated different results. A study by Crozier (1999) revealed that the working class viewed the teacher as the expert and felt that the school and home possessed distinct roles. Even though these parents had concerns, they trusted the teachers and did not go to the school and inquire.

Research has shown that parents wanted to know four things from schools and teachers, regardless of their ethnicity or SES. Parents wanted to know that their children were safe, well educated, and were being taught to be responsible and caring. Parents also wanted assured of the teacher's competence (Ginsberg, 2012). This research indicated that parents expected a capable teacher to responsibly educate their child and keep their child safe. Additionally, parents expected teachers to attend to the affective aspects of education (learning to be responsible and caring). Parents held expectations of students academically and behaviorally. Culture and SES influenced these expectations (Laskey, 2000).

A Tool to Build Shared Understandings and Partnerships

Parents and teachers need to communicate about roles and expectations in order to build shared understandings and ultimately a partnership. Students were more motivated to succeed when parents and teachers communicated the same message and shared mutually understood expectations (Patrikakou, 2008). Yet, barriers in teaching such as structural organization, precedent, and differing cultures make this shared understanding difficult.

It was found that building this shared understanding required purposeful interaction and communication over time as well as conditions that were conducive to relationship development. If teachers only interacted occasionally and randomly, teachers did not have a chance to develop these shared understandings (Laskey, 2000). Therefore, when teachers and parents do communicate they needed the opportunity for authentic, planned communication that would build trust. Additionally, when teachers and parents communicate, teachers need to create an atmosphere conducive to two-way communication. Often when teachers spoke to parents, they dominated the conversation by choosing the topic, doing the majority of the talking, and only acknowledging their perspective (Laskey, 2000). Lulavien (2000) conducted a study in which she found that there needed to be allowance for teachers and parents to come to a shared understanding. She also found that teachers tended to define "what matters" (Lulavien, 2000)..

Building shared understandings aids in building a partnership. True parent and teacher partnerships required parents and teachers working as equals. This encouraged a cooperative effort in the education of the child. Teachers needed to recognize that parents advocate for their children and possess valuable information about their academic and social needs. Parent's views needed to be included in decision making. In a study by Pruitt, Wandry, and Hollums (1998) involving parent interviews, they found that parents wanted to feel that their suggestions were valued by their child's teacher (McNaughton & Vostal, 2010). This however, did not always happen. In a study by Bernhard et. al (1998), parents reported feeling ignored when they shared their views on goals and decisions (McNaughton, Hamlin, McCarthy, Head-Reeves, & Schreiner 2007).

Sue Laskey (2000) explored the role of emotions and moral purposes in teacher parent relationships. She found that, at times, the moral purposes, goals, and expectations of parents and teachers aligned. This resulted in positive emotions. She also found that at other times, the parent and teacher did not share common goals and purposes. During these occasions, teachers felt negative emotions and would separate themselves from the parents. She found that teachers said they supported the idea of teacher and parent collaboration. However, they wanted the collaboration to line up with what they believed (Laskey, 2000). Parent and teacher congruency would be ideal, but in our increasingly diverse society, it is not always the case.

In order for partnerships to form, parents and teachers needed to work together. Together they needed to decide what is important for a child, create goals, and arrive at solutions. In order for this to happen, there needed to be a mutual respect for each other's roles and expectations (Rasinski & Fredricks, 1990).

A Tool to Encourage Listeing

Finally, listening was found to be an important component of the parent and teacher relationship. In a study conducted by Hornby (2000), parents reported wanting teachers to listen as a change they would make to teacher behavior (Kalin & Steh, 2010). Listening required more than hearing content. It required hearing feelings as well and conveying a message of understanding. When people felt understood, they were more open. When a teacher took the time to listen, he or she gained understanding about the student and the family (Wise, 2000).

Active listening was found to be a strategy useful when communicating with parents. Active listening encourages response to what is heard and allows the one listening to gather information (McNaughton & Vostal, 2010). Active listening included verbal and non-verbal components. A study conducted by Cheatham and Ostrosky found that wait time and silence had a positive impact on communication with parents (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2009). Sometimes silence and non-verbal cues such as looking at the speaker and nodding encouraged the other to speak more and convey that one was listening. Sometimes, a simple acknowledgement such as "okay" or "uhuh" conveys listening to the other. Strategies such as paraphrasing what the other says effectively establishes understanding. Paraphrasing both feelings and content is helpful during a conversation (Reiman & Peace, 2004).

A study by McNaughton, Hamlin, McCarthy, Head-Reeves, and Schreiner (2007) provided evidence that training teachers in active listening may improve active listening skills. Both parents and pre-service teachers involved in the study found the active listening strategies valuable (McNaughton, Hamlin, McCarthy, Head-Reeves, & Schreiner 2007).

The RBRD-PTC- A Conferencing Tool

The RBRD-PTC, a tool to facilitate teacher and parent communication, allows for authentic purposeful communication in which parents and teacher could share their view of roles and expectations. Teachers would need to actively listen to parents and be willing to build shared understandings and work toward a partnership. This effort with parents will help build trust and facilitate a positive relationship. This relationship could help the student become more successful. It could also encourage the parent to become a more active

member of the school community. Such a tool would be beneficial to all.

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the effectiveness of using a modified Relationship Building Role Defining (RBRD; Reiman & Peace, 2004) conference (Appendix C) in a parent-teacher context. The RBRD conference when re-designed and used with a parent and teacher, aimed to build a relationship between the parent and teacher and provided and opportunity for all involved to communicate their roles and expectations involving the student and his or her education. A copy of the redesigned protocol can be found in Appendix B. In determining the effectiveness of the protocol in allowing roles and expectations to be communicated, this study also examined the perception of teacher's roles from the parent and the teacher perspectives.

The guiding questions in this study are as follows:

- Will using the RBRD conference modified for parent-teacher conferences help the parent and teacher build a relationship?
- Will using the RBRD conference help the parent and teacher effectively communicate their goals and expectations?
- How does the teacher view his/her role?
- How does the parent view the teacher's role?

Participants

All teachers at Central Middle School[1] had an equal opportunity to participate in this

[1] Central Middle School is a pseudonym for the 6-8 middle school used in this Study.

study, though only one teacher was needed. The teachers were first notified of this opportunity through an e-mail that read as follows:

> Hello!
>
> My name is Kim Patterson and I am a student at North Carolina State University. I am conducting a research project for my thesis about parent-teacher conferences. I am looking for a teacher to partner with me in my research. The research will require you to answer interview questions, learn active listening strategies, and conduct a parent-teacher conference using a certain protocol that will be recorded. I am looking for a teacher who has a new student or knows of a parent they would like to know better, not a parent relationship that is characterized by conflict. Would you be interested in participating in this research project? If so, please respond to this e-mail and let me know that you would like to be considered.

After sending out this e-mail, one teacher, Ms. Jones, responded with interest in participating. After allowing three days to elicit any further responses, she was selected to participate in the study. She was then provided with the informed consent form.

Next Ms. Jones selected a parent that she felt she would like to get to know better. The parent selected by the teacher needed in this study needed to be someone that she did not know well and a relationship not characterized by conflict.

Table 3.1: Table of Participants

Participant	Background	Attitude about parent-teacher relationships	Exemplary quotes
Ms. Jones	- A teacher of 23 years, mostly in middle school and social studies. - Believes in holding students to high expectations, challenging students, and quality work - Describes herself as an extroverted person who seeks and values relationships	- She has always sought to learn from parents. - She believes in making positive contact with parents. - Sometimes questions parents' true motives. - Believes it is important to build relationships with parents	" I am not their parent. However, having children of my own makes me a different teacher. I am forever asking, would I want my children to have me for a teacher?" " I am a connections person. I like to know a little about the parent so I can make a connection with them for the future..."
Karen	- Single mother with one son - At the time of the study she was a graduate student. - Interested in her son's education and she frequently talks to him about it. - She wants her son to be an active person	- She wants to be an involved parent, and even though she cannot be at every event she wants to help when she can. - She believes in teaching responsibility and supporting a teacher - Her support is tied to her belief in teacher competence.	"I'm just trying to get to know the teacher and know what I'm dealing with. I'm a very prepared individual…I get my ducks in a row and I appreciate the teacher to do the same." "I teach those things at home that a teacher shouldn't have to teach. The basic responsibility type things."
Researcher	- Eight years in the middle school classroom before becoming a full time graduate student. - Nationally board certified teacher with ample leadership experience within the school.	- Believes that building a relationship with parents is helpful to students - Has a range of positive and negative parent experiences.	"I believe in being a lifelong learner and I am always looking for a challenge." "Getting to know the parent and building a trusting relationship can make a difference with students."

Ms. Jones chose a parent, Karen, she met earlier in the year on open house night. She remembered her as being very interesting and likeable. Because she taught sixth, seventh and eighth grade, and the student was in sixth grade, she would work with this Karen and Bill, her son, for the next three years. Ms. Jones contacted Karen, who agreed to participate and signed the consent form. She and Ms. Jones agreed on a conference date. In this situation, there was only one parent for the student so only Karen was invited, and agreed to participate.

Ms. Jones: A veteran teacher in her first year at Central Middle School, volunteered for this study. She and her family recently relocated to the Central Middle School district. This move was the first time she lived outside of her hometown, but she stated that the change benefitted her family and they were happy there. She took a teaching position at Central Middle School as an AIG (Academically and Intellectually Gifted) teacher. Her class was offered during the student's elective blocks. Ms. Jones was not considered a homeroom teacher and therefore was not required to meet with, or partner with, a specific group of parents. She taught two 45-minute blocks for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade each day. She believed that her job was to challenge the students and to hold them to high expectations, and that she was hired "to increase their test scores." She said that this might be one of her favorite years teaching, but that it was not without challenges. In her initial interview she stated: "In this position, I took the place of someone who had been here for a long time. My belief systems about class are very different from the belief systems of the former teacher, which caused some issues at the beginning." She believed strongly in the importance of relationships, with parents and other people in her life, and said, "everything in my whole life

is relationships." At the beginning of each school year she sends home a form that allows the parents to tell her about their child. She uses this as a first step in initiating a parent-teacher relationship.

Karen: The parent in the study, Karen, was a single mom. She had only one son, the sixth grade student about whom the conference was conducted. They were also new to the area, having moved to North Carolina from Georgia only one year prior. She was pursuing her master's degree in forensics and graduated in May, 2014. She was not yet sure what she wanted to do for her career, but planned on staying in the area. She wanted to be involved in her son's education and was generally supportive of teachers, unless her experience with the teacher gave her reason to not be supportive. She believed in teaching her son to be responsible. She was concerned about her son academically as well as emotionally. She expressed concern with how he was dealing with, or would deal with, the loss of his father.

Subjectivity Statement: I believe that a teacher is more than a person who stands up in front of a class and imparts information. A teacher is someone who teaches, but also builds a relationship with the student. Teachers learn who their students are so they can best meet their needs, never neglecting the affective side of teaching. When teaching content, it is important to teach in such a way that the students are able to experience what they are learning. Allowing opportunities to interact with each other and with the content is important for student learning. It is also important that the teacher is always learning.

I also believe that building a positive relationship with parents is beneficial for the parent, student and the teacher. When parents and teachers communicate their expectations and define their roles in the beginning, there can be more consistency and partnership, which

helps the student be more successful in school. Parents can enrich the classroom in a variety of ways, and building a positive relationship can provide opportunities for involvement.

Measures: Relationship Building Role Defining Conference

The original Relationship Building Role Defining conference protocol, developed by Alan Rieman ,(Reiman & Peace, 2004) facilitates a conversation between mentors and mentees when beginning a mentoring relationship. The conference allows those involved to get to know one another as well as share and define the roles they intend to take. The conference opens with a greeting and a stating of purpose. This is followed by an invitation for both parties to share their feelings about the roles they were taking on. Next, the mentor and mentee define their roles and set the expectations for their relationship establishing mutually agreed upon norms. The relationship continues to build as the mentee shares prior experience. The remaining part of the conference is logistical when the mentor and mentee discuss the coaching process and set up a schedule and a process for communication in the future. Finally, the conference ends in a summary of the meeting. Throughout this entire conference, active listening was used (Reiman & Peace, 2004).

The RBRD-PTC protocol developed using ideas from this protocol, combined with research about parent-teacher conferences. The RBRD-PTC begins with an introduction where the teacher shared about him or herself and the parent(s) were invited to introduce themselves. This is similar to and different from the original conference. In the original conference, there is time for introductions, stating a purpose, and sharing of feelings about the new role (Reiman & Peace, 2004). In the parent-teacher context, it seems necessary to introduce one another but not to discuss feelings about a new role since the point of this

meeting was a conference to discuss roles and expectations for the student, teacher, and classroom. For this purpose, the introduction of the RBRD-PTC focuses on allowing the parent and teacher to get to know one another. The first part of the introduction allows the teacher to introduce him or herself. This is an important aspect of the conference. Teacher competence, research showed, proved one of the four assurances that parents wanted from a teacher (Ginsberg, 2012) and this protocol provides the teacher with an opportunity to demonstrate competence to the parent.. The second point in the protocol allows the parent(s) to tell the teacher a little bit about who they are and opens it up for the third point, which is when the parent tells the teacher about the student.

The second section of the protocol aligns well with the original RBRD conference. The next section of the RBRD conference is when the mentor and mentee discuss roles and expectations. In this section, both parties take the chance to share how they view their respective roles. After this, both parties work together to set norms for the relationship (Reiman & Peace, 2004). In designing the RBRD-PTC, this was the central focus of the conference . Following the RBRD-PTC protocol, the teacher encourages the parents to share their roles and expectations. The parents share how they view education in the home, how they view their role in their child's education, and how they feel the teacher can help. When the parent finishes communicating, the third section affords the teacher the opportunity to share his or her expectations and roles in the relationship. In this section the teacher assures the parent and discusses the role he or she will play in the child's education as well as his or her expectations for the student.

The fourth section in the protocol parallels the RBRD in the planning section. In a

parent-teacher context, this means creating a partnership between the parent and the teacher for the benefit of the student. In this section, the teacher reiterates the roles and expectations stated by the parents and by the teacher, and then they together begin to make a plan. The final section of the RBRD-PTC and the original RBRD is essentially the same in that they both conclude the conference with a summary and end on a positive note (Reiman & Peace, 2004).

The original RBRD provides time for sharing prior experience that is not included in the modified version (Reiman & Peace, 2004) This section is not necessary in a parent-teacher interaction, but could be added to allow parents to share their past experiences and allow teachers to share their educational background, further aiding the teacher in making a case for his or her competence as a teacher. This could be added, but was not included in the protocol used for this conference.

Active listening is an important component of the RBRD conference. Active listening is a communication strategy that can keep a conversation going as well as allow the speaker to think about and discuss issues to hopefully arrive at a conclusion or solve a problem. In *Succeed at Mentoring*, four examples of effective listening are outlined, silence, simple acknowledgments, door openers, and active listening. Active listening is when the listener reiterates the speaker's thoughts or feelings expressed during the conversation (Reiman & Peace, 2004). This is also included in the RBRD-PTC. Using these effective forms of communication may allow the parent to feel more affirmed and comfortable with the teacher. It may also allow for more communication than a conversation not utilitzing active listening.

In addition to the conference protocol, the RBRD-PTC provides some recommendations for the teacher regarding how to conduct a conference posted at the top of the sheet. These suggestions are based on research from *Conferencing With Parents: Successful Approaches* (Fredericks, A. D., & Rasinski, T. V. ,1990). The article outlined common mistakes teachers make when conferencing with parents and then provided suggestions for how to avoid those mistakes. The list of suggestions on the parent-teacher RBRD was based on these suggestions.

Procedures

Following participant selection, the research process began by explaining the process to Ms. Jones. This was communicated through e-mail correspondence. In this correspondence, I reiterated the purpose of the study, the steps involved for her and Karen,, and sent an electronic copy of the protocol to Ms. Jones for her review. She and I set up a time for an initial meeting to review the protocol and begin discussing active listening.

At the initial meeting, Ms. Jones and I discussed active listening. She said that she was familiar with the process and explained to me what was involved in active listening. Her explanation focused mainly on the process of listening. For example, she explained that active listening was focusing on what the other person said, repeating back to the person what you understood them to say, looking at the other person, and trying not to interrupt. This alerted me to the fact that the teacher had a moderate understanding of active listening and effective listening strategies, but would likely need further instruction, particularly in the roadblocks to good communication. I agreed to send her some additional information on active listening and the roadblocks to effective listening for her to study and discuss at the

next meeting. At this initial meeting she was also asked to respond the following questions:

- How do you see your role as the teacher in alignment with parents?
- How do you see your role as the teacher as distinct from parents?
- What are some of the challenges you have experienced while developing relationships with parents?
- What are some of the goals you have for an initial parent-teacher conference?
- What do you think parents want to know at an initial parent-teacher conference?
- What are some of the challenges you have experienced while interacting during parent-teacher conferences?
- How have you observed parents rely on you as a source of instructional / emotional support in the past?
- How would you like parents to rely on you?

In determining if the RBRD-PTC was effective in building a relationship and defining roles, it was important to know how Ms. Jones viewed parent-teacher relationships, as well as how she viewed her role as a teacher.

I met with Ms. Jones a second time prior to the conference to review active listening and practice the RBRD-PTC protocol. During this meeting, I asked her to once again describe active listening. This time the teacher's explanation was more detailed. She and I then discussed roadblocks to effective communication. Ms. Jones understood and agreed with roadblocks such as starting a new conversation when inappropriate, but expressed some disagreement about the roadblock of questioning and about the roadblock that involved telling a personal story. I explained that I could understand the reasons why these are

difficult roadblocks to overcome, and then explained why these roadblocks were detrimental to communication. She did not seem convinced at the end of the conversation. Ms. Jones and I then practiced the RBRD-PTC protocol from both roles and practiced active listening. Initially, she expressed that she was a little nervous, but as the practice conferences continued, she became more open and comfortable with the process. Upon completion of the practice, I confirmed with her the date and time for the parent-teacher conference.

Ms. Jones conducted a recorded conference using the RBRD parent-teacher protocol format. Immediately following the conference, I conducted an interview with Karen and asked the following questions:

- In what ways was this conference similar to or different from previous parent-teacher conferences?
- Do you feel that the teacher listened to you?
- In an initial parent-teacher conference, what are your goals?
- What goals did you have for this conference and were they met?
- What do you want to know from a teacher?
- How do you see your role as a parent in alignment with the teacher?

These questions were designed to allow me to see if the conference met the needs of the parent, and how the parent saw her role, as well as the teacher's role. Karen willingly cooperated during this process. Immediately following her exit interview, I interviewed Ms. Jones. The teacher agreed to the interview, but was operating under a time constraint. The questions I asked the teacher were as follows:

- In what ways was this conference similar to or different from previous parent-

teacher conferences?

- Do you feel that you were able to effectively communicate your role as a teacher during the conference?
- How did this form help you to meet your goals during a parent-teacher conference? Did it hinder you?
- Do you feel that this protocol helped you to build a positive relationship with the parent?
- Did using this protocol make the conference more or less challenging? Why?
- Did you feel that active listening was effective?

These interview questions were designed to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the conference from the Ms. Jone's perspective.

The qualitative method of using interviews allowed those involved more freedom in expressing their feelings and thoughts about the conference and protocol than would a quantitative method such as a survey. Recording an actual conference allowed me to analyze the conference proceedings and compare them to the conference protocol. It also allowed for a comparison of the stated roles in interviews to the roles that were communicated in the conference.

All recordings of interviews and of the conference were stored electronically and password protected. All names of people and places that could identify the subjects were changed. Any information protected by FERPA was removed from transcription. All participants signed forms of informed consent and were assured of confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the conference and interviews, I then transcribed all recordings and field notes. Once transcriptions were complete, I open coded the transcriptions looking for themes. I created a data table based on these themes. In this initial data table, each theme was noted, defined, and then exemplified by quotes and extensive notes taken from the data. In the process of creating this data table, additional themes emerged and were added. This initial data table also included a participants' section in which data about each participant was included in the charts. The data collected about the participants was regarding their experiences and their view of parent-teacher relationships. Upon completion of the initial data table, a second data table was created. In this data table, the participants' section included the participant's title, a brief description of their background, a brief description of their view of parent-teacher relationships, and an exemplary quote. Additionally, this table included the major themes from the data formatted in a more organized fashion. Each theme was divided into sub-themes when pertinent. Each sub-theme was described by an operational definition, and one to two exemplary quotes.

This data was then analyzed to determine if the conference was indeed effective in building a relationship and defining roles. I looked for evidence that a relationship and trust were being built as a result of this conference. I looked for how Ms. Jones viewed her role, how Karen viewed her role, as well as the teacher's role, and evidence of these views being communicated in the conference. The conference was also analyzed to determine if it met the goals of the participants for an initial conference. Finally, the data was analyzed to find evidence of active listening and its effectiveness in this conference situation.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This study sought to discover if a modified version of the Relationship Building Role Defining Conference (RBRD) developed by Alan Rieman (Reiman & Peace, 2004) could successfully facilitate parent-teacher conferences. Specifically, my aim was to develop a tool, the RBRD-PTC, which would effectively help parents and teachers build a relationship and communicate their roles and expectations.

To accomplish this task, I first identified a middle school teacher-parent dyad willing to participate. I then introduced the teacher, Ms. Jones, to the RBRD-PTC and trained her on how to use the tool. I then conducted three interviews. I transcribed the interviews, my field notes and a recording of a conference in order to discover the teacher's and parent's attitudes and perceptions of the RBRD-PTC and their roles.

I organized the data into tables for analysis to determine the effectiveness of the RBRD-PTC. The first table focused on Ms. Jones and the parent, Karen's, perceptions of the effectiveness of the RBRD-PTC. This table focused on understanding how effective the different parts of the RBRD-PTC were in building a relationship and defining roles. For example: How effective was directing the teacher to share about herself? The themes in this first table were the teacher's view of the conference, the parent's view of the conference, and the shared view of the conference. A second table focused on perceived roles of the teacher and parent. Analysis of this table led to an understanding of role communication during this conference. The teacher's role to initiate conference, teacher's role to inform and care, and parent and teacher in partnership emerged as major themes.

Table 4.1: Outline of Findings- Conference Analysis

Outline of Findings Table 4.1 Conference analysis	4.2	4.3	4.4
Major Theme	**Teacher's View of the Conference**	**Parent's View of the Conference**	**Shared View of the Conference**
Sub-Theme:	Sharing information about self	Getting to know the parent	Importance of trust
Sub Theme:	Teacher sharing expectations/roles	Parent sharing expectations/ roles	Active listening
Sub-Theme	Format of conference	Conference met goals	

4.2 Teacher's views of the RBRD-PTC Protocol

The first major theme explored in this section was Ms. Jones' view of the conference. The analysis included examining her view on sharing information about the self; the introductory section of the RBRD-PTC. The analysis continued by examining her views of sharing goals and expectations, a key element to the RBRD-PTC. Finally, I conducted an analysis of her overall perception of the RBRD-PTC based primarily on her final interview.

Teacher's View of the Conference: Sharing Information About Self

At the start of the conference, Ms. Jones began by sharing information about herself with the parent. Using this protocol, the information she shared could be anything about her personally or information about background and experience. In this particular conference, she began by sharing that she has "20 some years in education." As is consistent with literature, parents want to know that the teacher is competent (Ginsberg, 2012) this teacher began to assure

Table 4.2: Teacher's View of the Conference

Table 4.2 **Teacher's View of the Conference** **Sub Theme**	**Operational Definition**	**Exemplary Quotes**
Sharing Information About Self	In the RBRD-PTC, the person conducting the conference tells the other person about him or her self.	Ms. Jones: I'm Mrs. Jones and I'm Bill's AIG teacher. Umm, let me tell you a little bit about me. I um, have 20 some years in education, this is my first year here at central middle school just like this is Bill's first year here at Central. Umm, I am looking forward to a super year with Bill and I will have him for the next two years. . . "
Teacher Sharing Expectations/Roles	In the RBRD-PTC, the teacher shares his or her expectations and roles concerning the classroom and student learning.	Ms. Jones: I really am pushing quality over quantity. Particularly with those guys. And they're new to um, AIG everyday, so I didn't break them in as difficultly, that's not the right word, as I wanted to. I feel like they are not held to the standard that I believe they should be so next year he may struggle a little. And I will tell them up from just because you think you deserve an A you probably don't.
Format of Protocol	The teacher's view of the effectiveness of the RBRD-PTC protocol when being used to conduct a conference.	Ms. Jones: It does hinder me a little, but it does help in that it gives you a guideline as opposed to going somewhere else. I could have talked about her job forever and still missed the point about it being about Bill. So it's a help and a hindrance in some ways.

the parent of her competence and experience in sharing this. In continuing her introduction, Ms. Jones then made a connection to the student by stating that this was her "first year here at Central Middle School just like this is Bill's first year here at Central." In this comment, she connected with the student and began to shift the conversation to him. She finished her introduction by stating that she would be Bill's teacher for the next two years of middle school. At this point, Ms. Jones focused the conversation on the student and not herself. After this comment, she shared the purpose of the conference with the parent and asked the parent to share about herself.

While this was the only part of the RBRD-PTC designed specifically for Ms. Jones to share about herself, she both directly and indirectly shared about herself throughout the conference. For example, in the conference she told the parent that she ran a robotics club and that she helped with the fitness club. Indirectly, she alluded to the fact that she has sons. When encouraging the parent to push her son to try out for football, she said: "like I want my sons to play for men like these guys."

Karen expressed in her exit interview that this conference was similar to others because "the teacher told something about themselves." During this conference, Ms. Jones successfully provided information about herself; however, it went beyond the introduction at the beginning of the conference.

Teacher's view of the conference: Sharing expectations and roles.

This conference provided Ms. Jones and Karen with an opportunity to share their roles and expectations. Ms. Jones shared her roles and expectations both directly and indirectly through stories.

The first point where Ms. Jones shared her role was in response to Karen sharing her expectations of Ms. Jones. She stated directly "I'm hired to do this job to increase their test scores." This conversation continued and Ms. Jones indirectly shared that she expected to challenge the student. This was in response to the parent sharing that she wanted her son to be challenged. She gave the parent an example that they were doing challenging math problems that had caused him to ask questions. She then talked about reading and said that it was good for him to read those "hard critical books." Later on in the conference, Ms. Jones opened herself up to the parent and offered to help her by caring for Bill and watching out for him. This communicated her belief that teachers are care-takers.

Ms. Jones communicated her expectation of quality both directly and indirectly throughout the conference. She communicated this indirectly through two stories. The first story she told referred to a time when she returned an assignment to the student to redo because it was sloppy. She said "And I have handed it back to him and said 'Bill I need you to do this again.'" Shortly after this, she told a story about Bill not wanting to completely finish an assignment before turning it in and how this was not acceptable. After these two examples, she directly stated " I want quality over quantity (yes) that's my new catchphrase quality over quantity." The teacher both directly and indirectly stated her expectation to the parent.

Teacher's View of the Conference: Format of the Conference

The teacher's view of the RBRD-PTC was examined. During the post conference interview, Ms. Jones answered three questions pertaining to the format and effectiveness of the modified RBRD. Those questions were as follows:

1. How did this form help you to meet your goals during at parent-teacher conference? Did it hinder you?
2. Do you feel that this protocol helped you to build a positive relationship with the parent?
3. Did using this protocol make the conference more or less challenging and why?

In response to the first question, (was the form helpful or a hindrance), Ms. Jones felt that it was both a help and a hindrance. She felt that it kept her focused and this she viewed as helpful. She said, "It gives you a guideline as opposed to going somewhere else." Interestingly, she also found the guideline to be a hindrance. She stated, "I find that if you can just get people talking and interested they'll tell you everything you need to know without having to follow a format." Essentially, the teacher found the format to be both helpful and a hindrance for the same reason.

In response to the second question about if the protocol was successful in building a positive relationship, Ms. Jones felt that it was. She said, "It was guided in that direction and I knew that was the point." The protocol allowed Karen to talk about her child in a positive light. This aspect of the RBRD-PTC, in Ms. Jones' opinion, was the reason it helped to build a relationship.

Finally, in response to the third question about the conference being more or less challenging with the protocol, she responded with "less and more." However, Ms. Jones only elaborated on how the protocol made it more challenging. Her response to this was more

about the format. She felt that it was too wordy and needed to be in more of a key word format instead of lengthy sentences.

4.3 Parent's View of the Conference

The second major theme explored in this study was Karen's view of the conference. The analysis examined her views on the sharing about self, sharing goals and expectations, and exploring whether or not her goals for a conference were met. The RBRD-PTC protocol design allowed Karen to share about herself and then tell about her son, Bill, in the introduction. This design was meant to build the relationship between the parent and teacher. Using the RBRD-PTC protocol, Karen was to be afforded time to share her roles and expectations with the teacher.

Getting to Know the Parent

Ms. Jones invited Karen to share about herself and about Bill at the beginning of the conference. When invited to share about herself, Karen shared the following: “I am a military widow, a single mom since Bill was a baby. Uhh which keeps me on my toes. Umm, I’m finishing grad school right now so uh that’s uh, Bill doesn’t get as excited about my A’s as I do.” She began by sharing about the structure of her family, then about how she was a graduate student. She then continued to share about herself after Ms. Jones asked the question “What are you in school for?” She explained that she was graduating with a master’s degree in forensics and that she and her son were new to the area.

Karen then continued to talk about Bill, and for the majority of the conference, Ms. Jones and Karen focused on him. However, at the end of the conference Ms. Jones invited Karen to come in and speak at career day, which encouraged her to tell a little bit more about

herself and her future career. Questioning from the teacher directed most of this conversation. In this Ms. Jones learned about her career goals for after she graduated. Ms. Jones' invitation to Karen to participate in career day opened up the conversation for her to share more about herself and for the relationship to be furthered. From the opportunities provided to Karen, she shared about her family, her school, her past career, and her future career aspirations.

Table 4.3: Parent's View of the Conference

Table 4.3 **Parent's view of the RBRD-PTC conference Sub-Themes**	**Operational Definition**	**Exemplary Quote**
Getting To Know the Parent	In using the RPRD-PTC, the teacher invites the parent(s) to tell about themselves.	Parent: Most teachers, they tell about themselves but not really concerned about me or where I come from. So that I thought was kind of nice because I felt like there was a little more interest there from the teacher, wanted to know who she was dealing with.
Parent Sharing Expectations/ Roles	Using the RBRD_PTC protocol, the parent is invited to communicate their roles and expectations for the student's education and school experience.	Parent: I want him to be continually challenged so he doesn't get bored. I worry about him, um, because he's kind of coasted through you know, school, which is good, I mean he's bright, I think, but I worry that, you know, if he's not challenged and kept interested (umhum) like, like leaning towards things that he likes, like competition, making things interesting and making him want to be involved I'm afraid I'm going to lose him come high school time. Um, so I appreciate that he comes to see you everyday.
Conference Goals	Did using the RBRD-PTC aid the parent in meeting conference goals?	Parent: When I was told that she wanted to discuss possibilities for Bill's future and what we could look ahead to do, it was just another opportunity for me to come and learn a little bit more about her and what goes on here on a daily basis.

Karen viewed this chance to talk about herself positively, and indicated that this conference differed from other conferences in the past because of the invitation to share about herself. In her interview, she stated: "Most teachers, they tell about themselves but not really concerned about me or where I come from so that I thought was kind of nice because I felt like there was a little more interest there from the teacher, wanted to know who she was dealing with." She perceived this opportunity to talk about herself as personal interest from Ms. Jones, which could further their relationship

Parent's View of the Conference- Sharing Expectations and Roles

Ms. Jones sought to understand Karen's roles and expectations for the child's education. Using the protocol, Ms. Jones was encouraged to invite the parent to share how she viewed education in the home, how she viewed her role in the child's education, and how she could help.

During the conference, Karen shared that she valued education in the home. However, the teacher introduced this idea to her by stating " I can tell that you guys value education at home." Because this statement was leading, the initial response from the parent was "we do." Ms. Jones did not invite Karen to describe the ways in which education was valued in the home, which limited her understanding of how the family valued education.

Next, the protocol called for Ms. Jones to invite Karen to share her roles and expectations regarding the child's education. Ms. Jones did not directly ask her to share this before asking about how she could help. However, Karen's roles and expectations did come out in the conference. During the interview, Karen was asked to describe how she saw her role as a parent in alignment with the teacher. She began by stating, "I support a teacher."

She elaborated on this point by sharing that she believed it was her job to teach her son to be responsible for his schoolwork and manage himself. She stated: "it's my job to teach a lot of that stuff so he can come here and be the responsible student." She believed it was her job to support the teacher and curriculum, as well as teach her child responsibility.

During the conference, Karen brought up responsibility twice. During a conversation, Ms. Jones commented that she saw Bill grow up a lot. Karen agreed and explained how she had seen him become more responsible. She states, "he's learning the responsibilities that I want." Additionally, when Ms. Jones shared about how she intended on holding the AIG students to a high standard, Karen said "Responsibility, what they're capable of because they are capable." However, during the conference, her belief that it was important to support the teacher did not come up. Due to the teacher's failure to precisely follow the protocol, she had a limited understanding of how the parent saw her role and her expectations for the student.

Ms. Jones did ask Karen how she could help meet her goals. The teacher directly asked "Um, what do you expect from me? What do you expect from me here for Bill?" In this statement, she sought the parent's expectations of her as a teacher. This question elicited a response of how the parent felt the teacher could help her student. The parent responded by stating: "I want him to be continually challenged so he doesn't get bored." This remark began a conversation in which the teacher explained how she challenged the student.

Parent's View of the Conference- Meeting Conference Goals

In examining the effectiveness of the RBRD-PTC, determining if Karen reached her goals was important. When asked directly in the interview about her goals for the conference, she stated: "When I was told that she wanted to discuss possibilities for Bills future and what we could look ahead to do, it was just another opportunity for me to come and learn a little bit more about her and what goes on here on a daily basis." Essentially, her goal as a parent during this conference was to get to know the teacher. She felt that the conference helped her feel assured that they were working in the same direction. In response to the following restatement of feelings by me: "Good, so this helped you feel connected and assured that you guys are working in the same direction." Karen responded by saying "Absolutely, because I know her more now, and that's a big thing." Based on her response to this question, the parent felt that this conference enabled her to learn more about Ms. Jones. She stated directly: "I think we have a good relationship." The parent also felt positive about the conference for several other reasons stated in the interview. She liked the fact that the teacher had suggested extracurricular activities for him. She also liked that the she and the teacher saw the same behaviors because it assured her that she knew her child.

4.4 **Shared View of the Conference**

There were aspects of the RBRD-PTC that both parties experienced. One of the goals of the conference protocol was for the teacher and parent to create a partnership that would result in student success. Additionally, both parties experienced building trust. In order for an effective relationship to grow, Ms. Jones and Karen needed to trust one another.

Table 4.4: Shared View of the Conference

Table 4.4 Shared View of the Conference Sub Theme	Operational Definition	Exemplary Quotes
The Importance of Trust	An aspect of the RBRD-PTC is building trust between the parent and the teacher. Trust is an important part of any relationship	Ms. Jones: "Some parents who were unsuccessful in school themselves, often have a great deal of anxiety when it relates to their own children in school. It makes it more difficult to convince those parents that as a teacher, I really do have their best interest at heart. That means little baby steps in the early relationship phase."
Active Listening	When using the RBRD-PTC, the teacher is to use active listening techniques when talking with the parent.	Researcher: "Did you feel that active listening was effective?" Ms. Jones: "Sure, but you really have to concentrate on it and it takes a lot of focus, which is not my forte. To know to continue to make eye contact, to shake your head, to reiterate back with they say, to stop interrupting, Those are just skills I could do better on."

Finally, both Karen and Ms. Jones would experience active listening. Ms. Jones was to use active listening techniques, and Karen was asked whether or not she felt that Ms. Jones listened to her during the conference.

Shared View of the Conference: Building a Common Goal.

This conference protocol aimed to build a partnership between the parent and the teacher. During this conference, Karen initiated a conversation about two problems she felt Ms. Jones could collaborate with her in helping Bill. Initially, Karen addressed the issue of Bill rushing through his work. She said in the conference "that is something that, if I could fix, I would be so happy." She continued by speculating as to the reasons why he did this.

Ms. Jones then responded by adding her guesses as to why he rushed through his work, tying it back to his competitive nature. As the conversation progressed, she then explained what she did when Bill turned in a sloppy assignment. She said "I have handed it back to him and said Bill I need you to do this again . . . because that's not acceptable." In response, Karen said "okay good. it's not. It's not acceptable in my house and I hope it's not acceptable at school." At this point in the conversation, Karen and Ms. Jones both identified a problem and shared a common understanding that the behavior was not acceptable. Ms. Jones shared her strategy of dealing with the problem (handing the assignment back) and Karen agreed with it. At this point, they both shared a common understanding and goal to help Bill take his time and not submit sloppy or incomplete work. Ms. Jones and Karen further discussed the problem, and Ms. Jones followed up with a specific example of the problem.

This common goal developed early in the conference. In the second section of the RBRD-PTC, Ms. Jones asked Karen how she could help. Ms. Jones framed this conference as a conference to get to know one another and look to the future, therefore she initiated this by asking the parent the following questions: "alright is there anything you'd like to tell me about for next year, is there anything I need to know ahead of time? Is there anything I can help with for his schedule?"

Ms. Jones and Karen reached a second common understanding toward the end of the conference. Karen began the conversation by addressing her concern that her son had not grieved the loss of his father. She expressed this concern by saying: "But if it becomes related to any kind of bullying or girls, or any other all that emotional middle school stuff, you know, I don't know." Karen was concerned about how dealing with his father's loss

would affect her son socially in school. As the conversation progressed, Ms. Jones made herself available to Karen when she said "please let us know." This was followed by a direct request from Karen for help. She said

> "And that's one of those things you can help me with as well. I will certainly keep and eye out on, you know if I notice one of the boys is giving him a hard time or if he's having some kind of typical peer issues, but you know, there may be things that you see here too"

This quote shows that Karen wanted the teacher(s) to look for any issues Bill may be having with peers. Ms. Jones responded to Karen and said:

> "Right but he won't tell you that at home. Because sometimes they're really different here at school than they are at home. So please let us know if you see anything that I need to help with. . . and because I'm in touch will all of his teachers all the time I can do a lot from my end and I will know Bill better than all the seventh grade teachers (exactly) because he's already been with me for a year (exactly) so please be in touch."

In this response, Ms. Jones acknowledged that she could help and explained to Karen that she could also communicate any needs because she was in contact with his teachers and already knew the student. Twice in the above quote, Ms. Jones encouraged Karen to contact her. They both created a goal to communicate about the student socially and emotionally.

Shared View of the Conference: Building Trust

Trust is important in a relationship in which two people work together cooperatively. Without trust, the relationship could be in danger of "social distance and competition" (Rieman and Peace, 2004 p79). One of the main goals for this conference was to build a relationship between Karen and Ms. Jones, which would require trust. According to Tshennen- Moran and Hoy (2000), trust occurs when there is vulnerability with the other, based on the belief that the one being trusted is "(a) benevolent, (b) reliable, (c) competent, (d) honest, and (e) open." (Reiman and Peace, 2004 p79).

The RBRD-PTC design aimed to create a partnership between the parent and teacher. Working relationships exhibit vulnerability to varying degrees because both involved are dependent on one another. Therefore, in order for the partnership to work, those involved need to trust one another.

Trust requires benevolence according to the above definition of trust. In this context, one being benevolent would imply "that one's well being will be protected" (Reiman & Peace, 2004). Those involved in the relationship need to believe that the other is not entering the relationship for the others' determent and that there will be protection with any vulnerabilities. Parent and teacher relationships do not automatically exhibit benevolence. For example, negative past experience diminish trust in the relationship before the parent and teacher ever meet.

Reliability is a component of trust according to the definition provided by Tshennen-Moran and Hoy (2000). Reliability, in the context of the RBRD-PTC,

involved whether or not needs were met. Reasons such as SES, culture, or past experience may affect the teacher's and parent's needs in the relationship. Therefore, parents and teachers also need to be open and honest with each other when communicating in order to build trust and set the stage for reliability. Teachers demonstrating reliability aid in proving the teacher's competence, which research shows is important to parents (Ginsberg, 2012).

Ms. Jones spoke of the importance of trust in her initial interview. She first mentioned trust when referring to the fact that she had to gain the trust of her students' parents because her classroom functioned differently than the way the previous teacher's classroom functioned. She said " It has taken most of the school year to gain their trust and understanding that I have very high expectations for them and that my class is not about 'fluff,' but about pushing them to grow. It did not come easy but I am looking forward to next year when I have a year under my belt with this school." She referred to trust a second time when she said:

> " Some parents who were unsuccessful in school themselves, often have a great deal of anxiety when it relates to their own children in school. It makes it difficult to convince those parents that as a teacher, I really do have their best interest at heart. That means little baby steps in the early relationship phase. Once they trust you, it is easy to get the students and the teachers and the parents on the same page."

These two quotes exemplified Ms. Jones' understanding of the importance of trust in a parent- teacher relationship. She understood the developing nature of trust and exhibited a willingness to work toward a trusting relationship.

The interviews and conference showed evidence of developing trust in this relationship. Karen opened up to the teacher about the loss of the father in the family. At one point, she exhibited vulnerability when she admitted that she did not know how to handle it when her son grieved the loss of his father. She stated during the conference: "that's another thing that's starting to rear its head I think. And I don't know, I don't know how to handle it. I don't know how I'm going to, you know I'm just going to kind of keep and eye on it." Ms. Jones responded by assuring her that she and Bill were in a good place for support (military community) and that she was available to the parent for help. Karen displayed vulnerability and this showed that she trusted Ms. Jones with this information.

Shared View of the Conference: Active Listening

The RBRD-PTC protocol prompted Ms. Jones to use active listening techniques throughout the conference. She learned about listening techniques such as silence, acknowledgments, door openers, and active listening by restating content and feelings offered by the parent. She also learned about roadblocks to active listening such as starting conversations randomly, interrupting, adding personal stories, and questioning. Ms. Jones resisted the fact that questioning and adding personal stories could be roadblocks to listening.

During the conference, Ms. Jones demonstrated some active listening techniques.

Restating Content:

1. "He is a very normal 12 year old boy and he does love sports"

2. “He's a big competition kid.”
3. “Alright, so you feel like our role here at school is to just keep pushing Bill as much as we can (yeah) to encourage him to be the best young man that he can be.”

Door Openers

- “you can say that again” (acted as a door opener in this context)

Simple Acknowledgments

– yes (x3) uh-huh, right okay good! Yeah

Analysis of an audio recording did not allow for observation of other aspects of effective listening such as eye contact, nodding of the head, etc. This data showed that Ms. Jones’ active listening strengths were simple acknowledgments and restating content. Her weakness was in restating feelings and silence. She failed to restate feelings of the parent despite the opportunity to do so. Additionally, both Ms. Jones and Karen talked over each other at times and silence was rare.

Some of the roadblocks used by the teacher were as follows:

Asks questions

- “What are you in school for?”
- “then what are you hoping to do?”

Diagnosing

- “he thinks first is better. . . it’s a competition”

Directing:

- “and we play scrabble some on Fridays,”
- “maybe we can encourage him to try out for some sports?”

- “Just have him come next Tuesday”
- “you should really encourage him to do football, it’s good for camaraderie”

This data showed that Ms. Jones frequently directed the conversation, though there were times when she followed the parent’s lead. She told several stories in the conference, which can sometimes be a roadblock. However, the stories were student centered and not about her. They all exemplified Karen's point or her point in the conversation.

Ms. Jones reflected on the effectiveness of active listening during the second teacher interview. She said the following: “Sure, but you really have to concentrate on it and it takes a lot of focus, which is not my forte. To know to continue to make eye contact, to shake your head, to reiterate back what they say, to stop interrupting. Those are just skills I could do better on (laughing) honestly. It is effective.” She acknowledged the difficulty involved in the active listening process and her lack of proficiency. ,She demonstrated a lack of confidence in her ability to effectively listen. She believed in the effectiveness of the technique despite the difficult nature of the task.

Karen felt that Ms. Jones listened to her. Interestingly, when she elaborated on this, she said the following: “She listens because I see her following through with Bill, and I have every confidence that she will take what I’ve said and she’ll work on him.” The parent interpreted the question to mean listen as in doing what was expected or told not as acknowledging what was being said and heard. In that regard, she felt that the teacher listened, or was responsive to her.

Roles and Expectations

An analysis of Karen's and Ms. Jones' views of their roles, as well as the communication of these roles, provided an understanding of the RBRD-PTC as an effective tool for communicating roles and expectations. A coding of the data collected from the interviews and the conference resulted in the major themes and sub-themes. The data table below presents these themes.

Table 4.5 Outline of Findings- Roles and Expectations

Table 4.5 Out line of Findings Roles and expectations	**4.6**	**4.7**	**4.8**
Major Theme:	**Teacher's role to initiate the relationship**	**Teacher's role to inform and care**	**Parent and Teacher in Partnership**
Sub-Theme:	Includes personal stories	Informs the parent academically	Need to develop a shared understanding about the student
Sub-Theme:	Demonstrates competence	Informs the parent socially	Need to develop a shared understanding about the parent/teacher relationship.
Sub-Theme:		Informs the parent about the classroom	

4. 6 Teacher's role to initiate the relationship

Both Karen and Ms. Jones implied that the teacher initiated the relationship. During Ms. Jones' initial interview, she stated "I want to establish positive relationships with parents." The teacher implied that she began the parent-teacher relationship, and that she wanted to do so in a positive manner before any issues arose. Every time Karen spoke about conferencing, it was a teacher-initiated conference. She referred to the required yearly

conferences as well as when a teacher called a conference. Not once does the parent mention asking for or calling the conference.

Teacher's Role to Initiate Relationship: Include Personal Stories

Ms. Jones told personal stories as a way to build the relationship with Karen. In her initial interview, she stated "I always want to be able to say something positive about the student and hopefully tell a bit of a personal story about the student. She told the stories as a way to help the parent better understand the child's school day.

Table 4.6: Teacher's Role to Initiate Relationship

Table 4.6 **Teacher's role to initiate relationship.** **Sub-Theme**	**Operational Definition**	**Exemplary Quotes**
Includes Personal Stories	Including personal stories in a conference is a way for the teacher to communicate to the parent that he or she really knows the child.	Ms. Jones: "I always want to be able to say something positive about the student and hopefully tell a bit of a personal story about the student."
Demonstrates Competence	In a parent-teacher relationship, it is important for the teacher to assure the parent that he or she is qualified and capable of effectively teaching the student.	Karen: "I do want to know about the teacher, their background, their, I guess not their history, but their experience is the word. So I know that they have, what capabilities they have to teach my son. I think that's probably the big thing, I'm just trying to get to know the teacher. And know what I'm dealing with."

During the parent-teacher conference conducted for this case study, Ms. Jones told three stories about Bill. The first story involved him working on an NCAA bracket project and interacting with her based on the content of the project. The second story provided an

example of how Bill tended to rush through work and not complete assignments. This story exemplified a problem that they were discussing. Finally, a story about Bill enjoying a class activity, scrabble, exemplified for Karen Bill's enthusiasm and competitive nature.

Karen also told three stories about Bill during this conference. The first story she used to give an example of how responsible he was. This story involved him calling her and asking to stay longer at a friend's house. The second story involved him posting a message on a website that had to do with his father. She used this story when explaining her concern that the student had not yet grieved the loss of his father. Finally, she told a story about how he did not want to read books she had purchased for him, but in the end, he read them and loved them. This was just an example of typical teenage behavior.

The story telling strategy employed by both parties in the dyad aided in building a relationship. During the interview, Karen said: "It was just another opportunity for me to learn more about him, and she pointed out some things 'Okay, that's Bill' (laughing), which is reassuring to me. I think, I'm always in for learning more about what's going on in the classroom." All of the stories the teacher told helped the parent learn more about what happened in the classroom.

Teacher's Role to Initiate the Relationship- Demonstrating Competence.

In a parent-teacher relationship, it is important that the teacher demonstrate for the parent that he or she is capable of effectively teaching the student (Ginsberg, 2012). During Karen's interview, she explained her goals for a conference when she said: " I do want to know about the teacher, their background, their, I guess not their history, but their experience is the word. So I know that they have, what capabilities they have to teach my son."

Essentially, Karen sought to determine the teacher's competence. She reiterated this point later on during the interview when asked what she wanted to know from a teacher. She stated: "I like to know their background and their experience because that tells me a little about what they do." She continued saying she liked to know how long a teacher had been at his or her job (implying that she wanted to know job satisfaction), how well he or she managed the learners needs, and viewed productivity in their classroom. All of these factors mentioned by Karen relate to competence. She took interest in teacher competence.

The RBRD-PTC directed Ms. Jones to assure Karen of her competence. During this conference, Ms. Jones stated that she has "20 some years" in the classroom. This communicated her veteran status to Karen. Frequently throughout the conference, Ms. Jones provided information about the classroom and gave specific examples of classroom work. She also spoke about how she managed learner's needs by explaining her expectation to challenge each student and allowing eighth grade students to do online coursework. Ms. Jones addressed the aspects of competence mentioned by Karen during the conference.

Karen stated in her interview: "I like the idea that we could talk about, alright these are some things that I would like to focus on, and the fact that she sees them too was like "okay, I know I'm working with somebody who is (capable)." Karen based her assessment of the teacher's competence on her observations and ability to see the needs of the student. In turn, the teacher successfully convinced the parent of her competence

4.7 **Teacher's Role to Inform and Care**

Ms. Jones viewed taking care of the student as one of her major roles as a teacher. She discussed her role as caretaker during her initial interview when asked about how she

saw her role in alignment with parents. Initially in her response, she stated that she wanted "to be an advocate for students" As she continued to elaborate in her response, she also addressed caring for student's basic needs, She stated:

> "This year, unlike most of my years teaching, the students do not 'need' me as much as in the past. Most of my students currently have great parents and they serve their role well as parents and providing for their children. In the past, I had to keep a more watchful eye to ensure students were safe and sheltered and fed. That role takes on more of a counselor that these students do not need."

Ms. Jones identified her role to inform the parent about the student as important. In her initial interview, she stated: "most students do not share what goes on in school. So parents always like to hear what's going on in school." This information took many forms. The teacher informed the parent about the student academically, socially, and in the classroom context. A caring teacher knows the student well enough to inform the parent about each of these areas.

Teacher's Role to Inform and Care: Informing the Parent Academically

Ms. Jones and Karen both believed that during a conference the teacher needed to inform the parent about the student's academic progress. Ms. Jones believed that parents want to know about the academic aspect of a child and stated in her interview: "they want to know how their child is doing . . . how they can help to help them in school." Karen acknowledged that informing academically goes on in a conference, but she did not see that as the most important part of the conference. She believed her

son to be academically capable. When discussing conferences, she acknowledged that teachers typically inform the parent academically. She said "they tell you what's been going on, and that's most of the reason I'm called in for a conference."

Table 4.7: Teacher's Role to Inform and Care

Table 4.7 Teacher's Role to Inform and Care Sub-Theme	Operational Definition	Exemplary Quotes
Inform the Parent Academically	The teacher and parent work together to build a shared understanding of the academic expectations for the student.	Ms. Jones: "ummm, it doesn't necessarily, and so he will turn in some very sloppy stuff." Karen: "yes"! Ms. Jones: "and I have handed it back to him and said Bill I need you to do this again." Karen: "Okay good" Ms. Jones: "because that's not acceptable." Karen: "okay good. It's not. It's not acceptable at my house and I hope it's not acceptable at school. Um it's something that if I could, you know, I could work on with him and try to, you know reiterate it doesn't matter if you finish first if it's not worth a hoot." Ms. Jones: "exactly…"
Inform the Parent Socially	A parent will often rely on a teacher to be mindful of a student's social interactions. Parents and teachers seek to build a shared understanding of the child's social expectations	Karen: "I also like to know the social things that they see, because I don't see that and he's not going to share that with me. So what she mentioned about the group of boys that he runs with. I know them, but I don't know them like she does and to hear that they already started in this little bit of being hard on each other, whatever it is that they're doing, I would have no clue about that if the teacher didn't tell me. I appreciate that insight because I know to look for signs of those actions fro him."
Inform the Parent About the Classroom	Parents want to know how the classroom works and the expectations of students within the classroom.	Ms. Jones: "I needed a year to kind of get under my belt as well, so that parent's understood what I was here for so I didn't crush their poor little hearts at first. Um but next year there will be a better expectation, I feel like, for them, um, in terms of increase for them for what I think they're capable of."

Teacher's Role to Inform and Care: Informing the Parent Academically

Research supports Karen's view that academics are not the most important topic to parents when it comes to reasons for parent-teacher cooperation. A study by Kalin and Steh (2010) surveyed parents and teachers to discover the motivation behind parent teacher cooperation. They listed three possibilities and asked parents and teacher to rank order them. The possibilities were student academic achievement, the child's social needs, and the relationship between the parent and child. Interestingly, in both the parent and teacher group, student academics ranked lowest. Parents ranked the teacher-child relationship highest, and teachers ranked social needs as highest (Kalin & Steh, 2010). It is likely that parents are less concerned about academics than teachers think.

Ms. Jones informed Karen about Bill's academic progress. Interestingly, Ms. Jones' sharing about Bill academically was in response her comments. For example, after she mentioned that she wanted the student to be challenged, Ms. Jones told Karen about an academic activity in class during which Bill was challenged and asked questions. She said, " like the NCAA stuff, its got math problems this week. . . Which has been good for him, he's asked a couple of questions about that which has been good for him." Even though Karen believed her son to be academically capable and may not have been concerned about grades, she wanted to know about his academic performance.

Teacher's Role to Inform and Care: Inform the Parent Socially

Ms. Jones and Karen both placed importance on learning about the Bill socially. Ms. Jones stated in her initial interview that "They (parents) want to know how their child is doing, how they relate to others" She continued the thought by saying "They want to know if they are hanging out with the right people." Further, when discussing how parents had relied on her in the past, she said "I have had parents ask that I help to discourage or encourage certain relationships for their children." The teacher viewed caring for the child socially as important to parents.

Karen showed concern about the social well being of her son. During the interview, she mentioned "he gets out of the car in the morning, he'll see somebody he knows, I know he's made friends and socially he is fine in middle school." This indicated that she paid attention to the social aspects of the child's life. Ms. Jones also spoke to the importance of learning about the student socially when she responded to a question about what she wanted to know from a teacher. She stated: "I also like to know the social things that they see, because I don't see that and he's not going to share that with me." In this statement, Karen expressed her appreciation for learning about the social aspects of Bill's life at school. She relied on the teacher to notice her son's interactions with his peers and to let her know.

During the parent-teacher conference, Ms. Jones informed the Karen about the student socially. At one point during the conversation Ms. Jones discussed bullying. She said "I see some of that in Bill's circle of boys (okay) sometimes they're really hard on each other (okay) and not in a good way (okay) so let me know if you think

that may become an issue there are probably four or five of them." Following the conference, she commented on this insight from the teacher. She stated:

> "So what she mentioned about the group of boys that he runs with. I know them, but I don't know them like she does and to hear that they already started in this little bit of being hard on each other, whatever it is that they're doing, I would have no clue about that if the teacher didn't tell me. I appreciate that insight because I know to look for signs of those actions from him"

Karen greatly appreciated this insight from the teacher. Ms. Jones' caring for the student showed through her knowledge of his social interactions and her ability to share with the parent.

Teacher's Role to Inform and Care: Inform the Parent About the Classroom.

Both parties involved acknowledged the importance of learning about the classroom. Ms. Jones shared her belief in an interview when she stated: " (parents) want specific directions on how to improve their child's performance in class" The teacher viewed her role to share classroom expectations as important. As she stated in her first interview: "I have very high expectations for them and that my class is not about 'fluff' but about pushing them to grow"

Parent expectations of the AIG program in this middle school exist from previous experience. Regardless, teacher expectations for a classroom change for each teacher. Parents and teachers benefit from parents whom clearly understanding classroom expectations.

Karen also saw the value in learning about the classroom. In her interview she shared: "I'm always in for learning more about what's going on in the classroom. I may not be volunteering at every social event at the school, but my big thing is helping out in the classroom" Communicating about the functions and expectations of the classroom provided her an idea of how to help and become involved in the classroom, furthering the relationship and involvement with the school.

During the conference, Ms. Jones clearly communicated to Karen the expectations for her classroom. One example of this is when the teacher stated the following:

> "I'm really am pushing quality over quantity. Particularly with those guys. And they're new to um, AIG everyday, so I didn't break them in as difficultly, that's not the right word, as I wanted to, I feel like they are not pushed and their grades are not held to the standard that I believe they should be so next year he may struggle a little. And I will tell them up front just because you think you deserve and A you probably really don't"

During this conversation about classroom expectations, Ms. Jones communicated that she held high expectations. As this conversation continued, they discussed past AIG classroom experiences, and the teacher informed the parent about an online opportunity for the Bill when he enters the eighth grade. Communicating classroom expectations and procedures provided the parent with the information necessary to help the student succeed in that classroom context.

4.8 Parent and Teacher in Partnership

The RBRD-PTC design allows for the parent and teacher to form a partnership. A partnership involves the parent and teacher working together with a shared understanding toward a common goal. During this conference, there was a need to develop a shared understanding regarding the student and the parent- teacher relationship.

Table 4.8: Parent and Teacher in Partnership

Table 4.8 Parent and Teacher in Partnership Sub-Themes	**Operational Definition**	**Exemplary Quote**
Developing a Shared Understanding About the Student	During a conference, the parent and teacher create a partnership and develop a shared understanding for how to benefit the student	Ms. Jones: "I think she has the same (approach), she appreciates my approach to Bill, and I think she can just reinforce what I want in long term for my kid."
Developing a Shared Understanding About the Parent and Teacher Relationship	During a conference, the parent and teacher can create a partnership that is distinct from the relationship with the student.	Ms. Jones "On a side note, do you want to come and talk about, come to career fair and talk about forensics with sixth graders?" Karen: "ooh, when?"

Parent-teacher Partnership: Developing a Shared Understanding About the Student

The parent and teacher involved in this conference valued creating a shared understanding. In this context, both Karen and Ms. Jones referred to this as being "on the same page." In Ms. Jones' initial interview, she mentioned being "on the same page" twice. To begin with, she discussed how she viewed her role in alignment with parents. She stated: "It is important that my students know that the parents and I are on the 'same page' and that we all want what is best for the students." In this context, she referred to a common

understanding between the parent and teacher meant for the benefit of the student. Ms. Jones also mentioned this idea in the initial interview when she stated "once they (parents) trust you, it is easy to get the student and the teachers and the parents on the same page." She referred to the importance of trust when developing a shared understanding. Ms. Jones viewed being "on the same page" as a relationship with the parent characterized by trust and a mutual understanding of expectations for the student in his or her best interest.

Karen also referred to being "on the same page." She said in her interview: "but we're on the same page and that's just reassurance to me, that yeah, something is right and that we're both working toward the same goal." She agreed that she felt in a partnership with the teacher. She elaborated on this idea when she stated that she felt the teacher understood her approach with Bill and that Ms. Jones would reinforce her goals for her son. Karen's view of being "on the same page" involved feeling supported by Ms. Jones and believing that the she and the teacher had the same goals.

This conference protocol aimed to build a partnership between the parent and the teacher. During this conference, Karen initiated a conversation about two problems she felt Ms. Jones could collaborate with her in helping Bill. Initially, Karen addressed the issue of Bill rushing through his work. She said in the conference "that is something that, if I could fix, I would be so happy." She continued by speculating as to the reasons why he did this. Ms. Jones then responded by adding her guesses as to why he rushed through his work, tying it back to his competitive nature. As the conversation progressed, she then explained what she did when Bill turned in a sloppy assignment. She said "I have handed it back to him and said Bill I need you to do this again . . . because that's not acceptable." In response,

Karen said “okay good. it’s not. It’s not acceptable in my house and I hope it’s not acceptable at school.” At this point in the conversation, Karen and Ms. Jones both identified a problem and shared a common understanding that the behavior was not acceptable. Ms. Jones shared her strategy of dealing with the problem (handing the assignment back) and Karen agreed with it. At this point, they both shared a common understanding and goal to help Bill take his time and not submit sloppy or incomplete work. Ms. Jones and Karen further discussed the problem, and Ms. Jones followed up with a specific example of the problem.

This common goal developed early in the conference. In the second section of the RBRD-PTC, Ms. Jones asked Karen how she could help. Ms. Jones framed this conference as a conference to get to know one another and look to the future, therefore she initiated this by asking the parent the following questions: “alright is there anything you’d like to tell me about for next year, is there anything I need to know ahead of time? Is there anything I can help with for his schedule?”

Ms. Jones and Karen reached a second common understanding toward the end of the conference. Karen began the conversation by addressing her concern that her son had not grieved the loss of his father. She expressed this concern by saying: “But if it becomes related to any kind of bullying or girls, or any other all that emotional middle school stuff, you know, I don’t know.” Karen was concerned about how dealing with his father's loss would affect her son socially in school. As the conversation progressed, Ms. Jones made herself available to Karen when she said “please let us know.” This was followed by a direct request from Karen for help. She said

> "And that's one of those things you can help me with as well. I will certainly keep and eye out on, you know if I notice one of the boys is giving him a hard time or if he's having some kind of typical peer issues, but you know, there may be things that you see here too"

This quote shows that Karen wanted the teacher(s) to look for any issues Bill may be having with peers. Ms. Jones responded to Karen and said:

> "Right but he won't tell you that at home. Because sometimes they're really different here at school than they are at home. So please let us know if you see anything that I need to help with. . . and because I'm in touch will all of his teachers all the time I can do a lot from my end and I will know Bill better than all the seventh grade teachers (exactly) because he's already been with me for a year (exactly) so please be in touch."

In this response, Ms. Jones acknowledged that she could help and explained to Karen that she could also communicate any needs because she was in contact with his teachers and already knew the student. Twice in the above quote, Ms. Jones encouraged Karen to contact her. They both created a goal to communicate about the student socially and emotionally.

Parent-teacher Partnership- Developing a Shared Understanding About the Parent-teacher Relationship

Ms. Jones and Karen sought to build a shared understanding about the role the other would play beyond helping Bill. Karen stated the following during her interview: "For me, the big thing is I want to know about the teacher. I want to know how she feels about me. Is

she going to accept me as an involved parent?" Karen desired involvement and wanted to know Ms. Jones' view on parent involvement. At another point during the interview, she shared "my big thing is helping out in the classroom." Karen showed interest in a partnership with Ms. Jones for classroom type activities.

Ms. Jones also desired to build a partnership with Karen that included more than working with the student. She really wanted to connect with parents. When discussing goals she had for an initial parent-teacher conference, she stated "I like to know a little about the parent so I can make a connection with them for the future or our current relationship." She valued knowing the parent as a person distinct from the student. Later in the same interview she stated "I want to establish positive relationships with parents so that if I need them for assistance with discipline or a guest speaker, then they are willing to do that." This quote exemplified Ms. Jones' belief that relationships with parents could go beyond simply helping with the child and involve parents in the classroom, for example, as a guest speaker.

Ms. Jones and Karen both had the same goal. Both wanted to know the other and both wanted the parent to be involved in the school or the classroom in some capacity. Ms. Jones made an effort to know Karen better by asking her questions about her master's program and her future career. She also sought to provide Karen with an opportunity to come in and be involved in the classroom when she invited her to speak at career day. In response to this invitation, Karen said "The fact that she thought of me for career day, that's a big thing too, because that's the kind of stuff that I want to participate in and definitely in the future will work on that" The effort of Ms. Jones to build a partnership with Karen distinct from Bill was greatly appreciated by her.

Summary

To summarize, the RBRD-PTC format was effective in building a relationship and allowing the parent and teacher to communicate and build a shared understanding. Sharing about the self, expectations and roles, both directly and indirectly aided in building the relationship. The information shared facilitated a partnership between the parent and the teacher for the benefit of the student. It also encouraged a relationship between the parent and teacher distinct from the relationship with the student, which encouraged future involvement in the school.

DISCUSSION

Purpose

Building a Relationship

Overall, both Ms. Jones and Karen perceived the RBRD-PTC successfully aided them in building a relationship. In this conference, for example, Karen shared that she was pursuing a master's degree in forensics. Had this conference never occurred, Ms. Jones might not have learned this about her. Sharing this allowed them to have a conversation that resulted in Ms. Jones learning about Karen as a person, which is vital when building a relationship. This revelation led to Ms. Jones inviting her to participate in career day as a speaker. She greatly appreciated the invitation, though she had to decline and offered to participate next year. This opened the door for future communication between Ms. Jones and Karen and provided an opportunity to involve the parent in the school community.

This conference helped the parent and teacher build trust. Trust in a parent-teacher relationship is not automatic, but can be built. A study by Adams and Christenson (2000)

found that improved communication between home and school built trust. Therefore, trust likely grew simply from conducting this conference (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

The interviews in this study revealed that Karen built trust based on her belief of the teacher's competence. Teacher competence was cited as one of the four assurances that parents want from teachers (Ginsberg, 2012). Throughout the conference, Ms. Jones convinced Karen that she was competent. She shared about her experience, stories of her interactions with the student, and about her high expectations. In this study, Karen's trust became apparent when she exhibited vulnerability and trusted Ms. Jones with personal information about her concern about the student's grief and how she felt ill equipped to handle it. She asked Ms. Jones to help her watch for any social or emotional issues with Bill that could be related to the loss of his father. This request showed that she trusted Ms. Jones to watch out for her son and to care for him while in school. This conference may have helped Karen develop trust for Ms. Jones.

Communicating roles and expectations

This conference led to a discussion that allowed for both the parent and teacher to clearly explain their expectations and roles, despite issues with complete compliance with the protocol. Communicating roles and expectations allows for the parent and teacher to minimize misunderstandings and adds consistency for the student. When both parties understand each other and learn how to work together, then the student will benefit.

Ms. Jones communicated through stories and direct statements that she expected to challenge the student, and that she wanted quality work over a quantity of work. Karen communicated that sloppy or incomplete work was not acceptable; neither was rushing and

not taking the time necessary to do the work well. They both valued quality work. She also communicated that she expected her son to view school as his job and that anything else comes second. Late in the conference, she spoke about how Bill was becoming more responsible and explained her expectation of responsibility. In this case, the expectations were aligned. Also, the parent and the teacher respected each other's roles, as they were expressed, and no compromise was necessary.

Conference as a means of meeting goals

This conference did meet the teacher's goals for an initial parent-teacher conference. In her initial interview, she stated several goals she had for a conference:

- Say something positive about the student
- Tell a story about the student
- Make the parent smile or laugh
- Learn about the parent
- Create a connection with them for future

In this parent-teacher conference, the teacher met every one of those goals. She told three stories involving the student, complimented the student by saying he is knowledgeable, made the parent laugh, learned about the parent, specifically her job, and then made a connection with her by inviting her to participate in career day at the school.

During the interviews, the parent addressed her goals for an initial parent-teacher conference. In her response, she expressed two main goals: to learn more about the teacher and to learn more about the classroom. This conference allowed her to learn more about the teacher. She learned about her experience and learned how she dealt with the student

through the stories she told. She also learned about the classroom through the teacher's explanation of her expectations and her many examples of work that was going on in her class. She shared with the parent that they read difficult books, worked through difficult math problems, and participated in activities like scrabble and brackets for March madness. The parent was able to come away from this conference knowing more about the teacher and the classroom.

This particular conference met the goals of Ms. Jones and Karen. Both parties wanted to know each other better, which was one of the main goals of this conference protocol. Also, the teacher felt it was important to share what was going on at school and the parent wanted to know specifically about what went on in the classroom.

Protocol Format

The format of the protocol aided Ms. Jones and Karen in building a relationship and communicating about roles and expectations. Communicating about the self and communicating about roles and expectations both contributed to building a relationship. Communicating about the self helped them learn about each other and communicating about roles and expectations helped them build a relationship centered on helping the student.

The design of the RBRD-PTC protocol led to discussion about roles and expectations from both parties. However, when it came time in the conference to invite Karen to share her views, Ms. Jones did not directly ask her to share. When Ms. Jones was supposed to ask how the parent viewed education in the home, she led the conversation by stating "I can tell that you guys value education at home." Karen confirmed that they do value education, but this did not afford her the opportunity to define her view of education on her own. While this

opportunity was missed directly, the parent did communicate her roles and expectations for the student throughout the conversation.

Had the parent been afforded the opportunity to directly share her roles and expectations the conversation may have proceeded differently. When asked in her interview how she saw her role as a parent, she explained that she wanted to support the teacher. She believed her job was to teach her son responsibility. She did not think a teacher should be required to teach students how to be responsible. Her view of responsibility was apparent in the conference, but her belief that she was to support the teacher was not.

The post interview provided a possible reason for why this oversight occurred. Not being able to quickly use the form during the conference was one possibility. When discussing the conference in her post interview, Ms. Jones noted that the form was difficult to follow because she felt it was too wordy. She felt that the sentences were too long and it made it hard to reference during the conference. The exclusion of this invitation to the parent may have been unintentional. The possibility remains that she forgot to ask or did not want to ask.

Possible Changes to the Protocol

Upon review of the conference and data, I would implement a few minor changes to the protocol format. First, changing section II part C where the teacher asks the parent(s) how they feel the teacher can help. Eliminating this would eliminate redundancy during the conference since the final section focuses on forming a partnership with the parent. Instead, a section that allows the parent to specifically talk about goals for the student needs included.

This would allow the parent to talk about his or her goals beyond their expectations, which may prove informative to the teacher.

The remaining parts of the protocol should remain the same, as they were effective in the conference. I would continue to include active listening even though the teacher was not a proficient active listener. Active listening allows for the focus to remain on the parent. It also provides an opportunity for the teacher to restate the parent's roles and expectations to allow for clarity of understanding between the two.

The teacher's second interview indicated the need for a second possible change. The teacher felt the protocol was too wordy and therefore, difficult to follow during a conference. Designing two versions of the protocol would resolve this issue. The first version would remain the same; with the second form using a bullet format that would serve as more of a sheet of talking points for a teacher. The teacher in this case study felt that the sentences on the paper were too much when talking to a parent. Two different protocol formats allows the teacher to still use the protocol, but would allow for personal choice based on what would work best for his or her style.

Importance

Understanding the student

This conference protocol allowed for Karen and Ms. Jones to better understand Bill, and view him from different perspectives. The parent is the expert on the child's personality and tendencies, whereas the teacher is the expert on the curriculum and the child's academic behavior (Greenberg, 2002). Ms. Jones made the point that middle school students often act differently at home than they do at school. During the conference and in her interview, Karen

mentioned that Bill did not share a lot about his day or details about what happened at school. Ms. Jones shared about Bill at school, giving Karen the opportunity to understand how he acted and interacted outside of the home environment. Ms. Jones also learned about Bill as his mom saw him, which provided additional insight about Bill. The more a teacher knows about a student, the more equipped the teacher is to meet the student's needs.

Karen and Ms. Jones gained a deeper understanding about Bill as a result of this conference. Karen shared about Bill's signs of grief that were just beginning to arise. Ms. Jones may not have been aware of this before the conference. This insight allowed her to demonstrate sensitivity to Bill, knowing of his loss, and look for ways that this grief might affect him. Ms. Jones shared with Karen about the social issues affecting Bill. She shared that his friends started being hard on each other. It interested Karen to know this, so that she could keep an eye on him and watch for any signs of bullying.

Through this conference, both parties gained insight about Bill, which may prove useful information when making decisions about him. For example the teacher may need to be careful about how she addressed holidays such as Memorial Day, which may possibly remind the student of his loss.

Understanding the parent

It is helpful to the teacher to understand the parent(s) and their goals and expectations for the student. Every parent brings different expectations into the interaction and communicating about this is helpful to the teacher. In this situation, Ms. Jones and Karen shared similar expectations for the classroom and for the student. In general, and in this conference, this results in positive emotions between the parent and teacher (Laskey, 2000).

This created no need for compromise, but that is not always the case. When the teacher understands what the parent expects, then he or she can know how to better help the student. In the case where the expectations match up, there is likely to be success. Other times when the expectations do not match up, problems may arise.

Understanding the parent can help the teacher know how to best communicate with the family. Some parents expect constant communication about their student from the teacher. This is often the case with upper middle class mothers (Landeros, 2011). Other parents prefer a hands off approach to their child's education and allow the students to take the responsibility, therefore requiring little communication (Crozier, 1999). During this conference, Karen shared her expectations for Bill and her approach to parenting him. She believed Bill capable and wanted him to be responsible for his own education. She wanted Ms. Jones to support her in expecting quality work and in communicating any social issues. This insight helped Ms. Jones understand how and when to communicate with the parent.

A conference of this kind may also bring to light any access issues with the student's family that may affect communication. Most teachers are encouraged to keep an updated website, use Edmodo, or regularly e-mail parents. Schools also use technology that allow for mass phone call communications. These tools are useful forms of communication when the parent has regular Internet and phone access. At the end of the conference, the teacher has the opportunity to talk to the parent about future communication. It is at this point that the teacher and parent can determine the best way to communicate with one another. Ms. Jones already knew how to best contact the parent and therefore did not need to discuss this at this

particular conference. Had this conference been earlier in the year, that conversation would likely have taken place.

Building a relationship with the parent ultimately benefits the student. When there is open communication between the teacher and the parent, when expectations are clear and roles are defined, the student can experience support and consistency between school and home. This will ultimately set the student up for success. (Patrikakou, 2008).

DELIMITATIONS

Being a case study, there are many limitations. This case study exemplified a conference between a unique dyad. Ms Jones, a veteran teacher, enjoyed conferencing. No conflict existed between her and the parent and the student was successful. Ms. Jones was a single parent, and the only caregiver in Bill's life. She was very supportive of education and wanted to be involved in her son's education and school community. This situation was rather ideal. Were the dyad different, this conference may have rendered different results.

Timing of Conference

This study was conducted toward the end of the academic school year. This allowed for the teacher to learn much about the student in the seven months that this student was in the teacher's care. Ms. Jones had many stories she could tell about Bill and obviously knew him. This was a factor for Karen in determining the teacher's competence. Were this conference conducted toward the beginning of the year, this could have been different. Mrs. Jones would have had fewer experiences with Bill from which to draw her observations and stories. Without these experiences to prove her competence to Karen, she may have needed other sources. Mrs. Jones could have conducted a student interest survey and learned about

the student prior to the conference, or documented at least one interaction. During the conference, Mrs. Jones could have shared this with the parent, took notes, or shown some initial work or assessment to prove to Karen that she was a competent teacher who knew Bill.

Family Dynamic

In this study, Karen was the only primary caregiver for Bill. The father passed away several years prior and she never remarried. Therefore, Bill only dealt with one set of academic and behavioral expectations, which provided consistency for him. The loss of the father provided a unique aspect to this dyad. Karen explained that because of Bill's age when he experienced the loss, he had not yet grieved. However, the parent believed the grieving process had newly begun with the student and expressed concern about how this would affect him socially.

The unique family dynamic influenced the outcome of the conference. In a co-parenting or blended family situation, a student would likely be dealing with more than one set of behavioral and academic standards. This conference may occur with only one parent in the co-parenting situation, providing the teacher insight into only one set of expectations and roles. While this is helpful, it would provide an incomplete picture of the student's life. Often in a co-parenting or blended family situation, the expectations differ in each household. Ideally, both parents in the co-parenting situation attend the conference, and all involved could clearly communicate roles and expectations, and create a plan that involved all caretakers in the child's life. However, not all co-parenting situations allow for this since the parents are not always amicable. In this case, the teacher needs to communicate with both parents in order to build relationships and help the student become successful.

The teacher understanding the co-parenting situation can help the student. In some situations, the student goes back and forth between homes during the school week. This sometimes results in confusion on the student's part and being prepared can be difficult. The teacher can help the student manage better if he or she is more aware of the situation and the expectations from each parent.

Using this conference protocol to understand the student's situation in each household will also help the teacher know how to best communicate with the parents. If the teacher needs to handle a situation or communicate about an assignment, but can only communicate with one parent, days could pass before the situation is addressed. Open communication with both parents allows the teacher to handle any situation in a timely manner. Sometimes in these situations, parent support differs. Knowing this, the teacher knows whom to contact should an issue arise. Open communication is also important for communication about field trips or report cards. Often there is only one signature required and one parent can be left out from this communication entirely. Students also learn how to take advantage of what could be a lapse in communication. Conducting an RBRD-PTC conference could help to work out these communication issues that can arise between parents in a co-parenting or blended family situation.

Parent of a different culture

This dynamic would also differ if the parent and teacher were of different cultures. People bring their culture into every interaction. Many researchers studied the effect of culture on student-teacher interaction. Take for example a study conducted about the differences between teacher interaction with white and African American students. More

praise, eye contact, attention, and less criticism characterized interactions for white students compared to African American students. Interestingly, there was most criticism for gifted African American students. Because the African American culture is misunderstood, or not recognized as important in many schools, these students often experience cultural dissonance, and have to live in a sort of limbo between cultures when in school (Reiman, Peace, & Theis-Sprinthall, 2002). A conference between an African American parent and a white teacher, may have provided a very different conversation. This conference would have allowed the teacher to open up the conversation to the parents of a different culture, allowing them to explicitly communicate their expectations for school and how they saw their role in the student's education. Awareness and appropriate response to differing views of roles and expectations can reduce the disconnect between the cultures of home and school, and work to change negative attitudes and perceptions based on lack of understanding (Patriakakou, 2008). These roles and expectations communicated may be very different than what the teacher was familiar with or understood. This can help the teacher begin to understand the cultural expectations that the student has at his or her home. The parent can also communicate to the teacher what he or she expects of the teacher, which may also differ from what the teacher believes her role to be in educating the student. In a conference where the teacher and parent are of a different culture, there may not be as much alignment of roles and expectations as there was in this conference. This understanding of culture can begin to build bridges between the student's home culture and the culture of the school. This conference protocol can also help teachers begin to understand how cultures other than their own view

education, which will hopefully translate to improved instruction of students from different cultures (Hughes & Gwok, 2007).

Initial Relationship With Parent

In this dyad, the parent and the teacher shared an amicable relationship.. Ms. Jones chose to conference with Karen because she really enjoyed meeting the parent on back to school night. They shared postive experiences with each other before the conference. If the conference involved a parent that the teacher felt indifferent about, or a parent with whom the teacher did not have a good relationship, then the conference would likely have proceeded differently. An initial relationship that is negative or indifferent could impede the parent's openness and willingness to trust. The teacher may carry the burden of convincing the parent of his or her caring and attentiveness, making active listening particularly important. The parent may hold back when talking to the teacher, stifling communication.

A conference with a parent whose relationship is characterized by conflict adds difficulty. If the conflict between the parent and teacher came to resolution, then there is likely some degree of trust from the parent that the teacher will work to resolve any future issues, but the parent may still show reluctance. However, if the conflict did not find resolution easily or conflict still exists, this conference may not have carried out its purpose. In order for this to work, the parent and teacher need to trust each other and believe in working toward the same end. The teacher in this case may need to continue to get to know the parent and take small steps toward a partnership. This conference may not reveal all of the parent's beliefs about roles and expectations initially because lack of trust may be a

factor. However, whatever the parent shares the teacher can use and begin to build a renewed partnership and trust with the parent.

Conflict arising when parents and teachers meet is always a possibility. If that were to happen, then this conference protocol, if followed, should allow for conflict resolution. Michael Elmore (2008) proposed seven steps to resolving conflict in a parent-teacher relationship. The RBRD-PTC addresses all elements of the process except for the introduction. The introduction in the seven step process assumes the teacher and parent enter into the conference with an already known problem. The introductions in the RBRD- PTC are designed for the parent and teacher to learn about each other. Following the protocol, both parties should be able to state their case, the teacher should actively listen and clarify the problem, and in the end when they form a partnership, both parties should work to a common solution and build a shared understanding.

Parent expectations

The parent's expectations and the teacher's expectations in this conference demonstrated congruence. Both parties expected the student to be challenged and wanted him to take his time and produce quality work. However, parent and teacher expectations don't always match up. This protocol's design draws out the expectations of parents and teachers so that both parties can understand each other and build a partnership for the student. When this happens, it may reveal that the parent and teacher do not possess the same goals and expectations. In this case, the parent and teacher need to understand the other's views, and work together to compromise and build a partnership that respects the views of both parties. This could cause some degree of conflict between the parent and teacher. In this

situation, the teacher needs to be aware of his or her personal limitations for how he or she wishes to be used by the parent. Some parents have unrealistic expectations of teachers. Sometimes the parent and teacher need to agree to disagree, but understand the other's point of view.

Another problem can arise if the parents reveal a lack of support for education in the home or for the teacher. This would make building a partnership particularly difficult and characterized by negative emotions (Laskey, 2000). In this case, the teacher can try to find some small common ground and create a joint effort to benefit the student. With this small step, the teacher may begin to gain the parent's trust and hopefully this will result in finding more ways to involve the parent in the student's education. In this case, the teacher may have to take on more responsibility for the student's education initially.

Different Classroom

Every teacher's classroom operates under a set of unique expectations. The AIG classroom in this study represented unique expectations and population of students. The school identified the students in Ms. Jones class as academically or intellectually gifted. The administration expected the teacher to raise student test scores and challenge the students.

The students in this classroom demonstrated academic or intellectual capability, and generally demonstrated success in school, and the student in this study was no exception. A conference involving a successful, capable student is likely to contrast a conference about a less capable or successful student. Communication about roles and expectations still holds importance for unsuccessful students regardless of the increased difficulty. The parent may attend the conference initially frustrated because of the student's lack of success. This

frustration may become a roadblock to communication. The parent may not know how to help, may blame the teacher, or may give up. In this case, the parent and teacher should seek some small area common ground and seek to build student success. The strategy chosen should be measureable and likely to succeed. Often parents of unsuccessful students feel defeated and as if they have tried everything to no avail. During a conference, the teacher has the opportunity to learn about past successes and failures, what the parent expects, and how the parent envisions helping the student and teacher. It is important for the teacher to remember that the parent is the expert on the child. What the parent thinks should be valued.

Teacher Experience

The teacher in this dyad enjoyed getting to know parents. Throughout her 23 years in education, she experienced many successful parent-teacher conferences and understood the value of getting to know parents and students. She conducted "getting to know you" conferences in the past and desired partnering with parents. In conversation she tended to divert from the topic at hand, but transitioned a conference seamlessly.

Teachers newer to the profession lack experience with conferencing and may view the conference and its format differently. This experienced teacher felt the format was too wordy and restricting. The strict format and explanation may aid a new teacher in successfully conducting a conference. Parent-teacher conferencing often intimidates new teachers and a protocol like the one used in this study may ease the anxiety many teachers feel. It may also help shy or less confident teachers, new or veteran, when having conversations with a parent.

Experience is also a factor when communicating roles and expectations. Often new teachers are still forming their own ideas about their roles and expectations. This conference protocol aids teachers in thinking about these ideas, and provides a way to develop and communicate them. New teachers will likely change their concept of their roles and expectations. However, it is still helpful for them to think about and evaluate their ideas.

Teacher and Parent Buy-In

In order for this process to work, the teacher and parent require a certain degree of buy-in to the process. In this situation, Ms. Jones exhibited a large degree of buy-in, but was not completely sold on the process. She believed in the importance of the parent-teacher relationship, and understood the necessity in communicating roles and expectations. She believed in the importance of each part of the protocol, but found it difficult to follow because of her natural style of conversation. She also believed in the effectiveness of active listening, but found it difficult. She struggled with believing that questioning or telling stories could act as roadblocks to communication.

Teacher buy-in affected the conference. She demonstrated a weakness with active listening, although she made an obvious effort. She also held the belief that veering away from the point of the conversation or conference was acceptable. This belief may have influenced the way in which she used the protocol. The main goals of the conference were accomplished and were in line with her beliefs, but had she total buy-in with the process the conference may have been different. Experience presents a challenge when working with a veteran teacher. Because she previously conducted so many conferences successfully in the past, it was hard to convince her that a different way may also be successful.

Parent buy-in to the process also proved crucial. If a parent comes into the situation not willing to communicate, open up, or partner with the parent, then the goals of the conference will be difficult to reach. Parents who don't believe in building relationships with teachers present a unique challenge. A teacher in this situation may need to consistently take an interest in the student and family while respecting beliefs and boundaries. The conference, in this scenario, may only be successful in communicating about the teacher. Hopefully with some respectful persistence, the teacher can open communication and build trust, resulting in learning more about the family and student.

Future Use

The RBRD-PTC protocol presents a variety of uses in the future. It could be used to build relationships and communicate with parents who do not usually come to the school or take an interest in the child's education.

At the school where this study was conducted, the administration requires parents to pick up the first report card from the child's homeroom teacher. Even with the incentive of the report card, many parents, about ten percent, will still not come into the school. Many schools struggle to get parents in the door. Parents choose not to attend for a variety of reasons. Some do not have transportation, some cannot get the time off from work, some speak a different language and therefore cannot communicate with the teacher, and still others simply do not want to come into the school.

Teachers may use the RBRD-PTC to build a relationship with these parents who are not interested in coming to school, or are not able. A phone conference can address situations where there are access issues. In some situations the teacher can go to the parent's

home if both parties are comfortable with that option. This extra effort from the teacher may help the parent to understand that the teacher is genuinely interested in the family and wants to help the student succeed. This is especially true for parents who choose not to attend. Many times, a parent not wanting to come in to the school stems from negative past experiences, and this interest in the parent and student could help to build new, positive experiences. In situations where there is a language barrier, a translator can be asked to help so that the language barrier can be addressed.

One of the major issues with this conference protocol and future use is time. Conducting this conference with every single parent would take a great deal of time, a resource precious to teachers, particularly new teachers.

In an elementary school classroom with a relatively small number of students, the possibility exists for the teacher to conduct this kind of conference with each parent over a period of time near the beginning of the school year. However, in an upper elementary, middle school, and certainly high school teaching position, a teacher would find difficulty in finding the time to conference with the parents of every student.

In these situations, I would recommend conferencing with only a select few parents that the teacher feels he or she needs to get to know better. The teacher could send home a survey at the beginning of the year giving him or her an idea about the family and the student. The survey could contain aspects of the RBRD-PTC. For example, the survey could contain the following questions:

- What would you like me to know about you?
- What would you like me to know about your student?

- What do you expect from your student at home?
- What do you expect from me here?
- How can I help you?

The teacher can distribute these surveys and evaluate them to determine which parents to invite to a conference. If the responses to these questions seem to clash with the teacher's beliefs and expectations, then it may be worthwhile to call that parent in and communicate before potential conflict arises. Invitations to parents who do not fill out the survey or who did not elaborate may also prove valuable. The survey would provide the teacher with an idea about what the parent will say before the conference starts, allowing the teacher to prepare for the conference.

Teachers should consider inviting parents of at-risk students to a conference. The results of the conference can aid the teacher in understanding the situation and provide insight about the student and how to help the student. Hopefully, the conference will build a partnership with the parents at home and together the parent and teacher can provide the student with a positive start to the school year. This kind of interaction sometimes does not happen until the student is already unsuccessful, so conducting this conference soon in the year before failure occurs could curb failure.

Conducting a conference with parents who are highly involved in their child's education and are involved in the school may prove valuable. Discussing expectations and setting boundaries with these parents may allow for more successful communication and partnership throughout the school year. Often parents have reputations for initiating conflict

with teachers. If teachers meet with these parents early on and discuss mutual expectations and roles, then there is an opportunity to resolve potential conflict.

This conference protocol does not provide the total solution to building relationships and communicating with parents, however, it provides a tool for teachers to use to help build those positive relationships. Ultimately, any way that teachers build positive relationships and communicate with parents will benefit the student, and that is the ultimate goal.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

North Carolina State University is a land-grant university and a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina

Office of Research and Innovation
Division of Research Administration

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

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919.515.8754 (phone)
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From: Jennifer Ofstein, IRB Coordinator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: February 20, 2014

Title: Developing a Relationship Building Role Defining (RBPD) Parent-Teacher Protocol

IRB#: 3814

Dear Kimberly Patterson,

The research proposal named above has received administrative review and has been approved as exempt from the policy as outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (Exemption: 46.101. b.2). Provided that the only participation of the subjects is as described in the proposal narrative, this project is exempt from further review. This approval does not expire, but any changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

NOTE:

1. This committee complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU projects, the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.

2. Any changes to the research must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

3. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days.

Please forward a copy of this letter to your faculty sponsor, if applicable.
Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Ofstein
NCState IRB

APPENDIX B

Relationship Building – Role Defining conference parent-teacher protocol

Key Points to remember:
- Make sure the environment is comfortable and inviting
- Remember that the parent is your partner- avoid defensiveness, labels, making excuses, and providing all the answers or solutions. Leave room for the parent.
- Allow enough time to conference effectively
- Be prepared
- Actively listen

I. Introduction
- A. Teacher greets parent and introduces self (brief background)
- B. Teacher invites parent(s) introduction(s)
  1. Actively listen
- C. Teacher invites parent(s) to tell the teacher about the student
  1. Actively listen

II. Defining Roles and expectations-Parent
- A. Ask parent(s) how education is viewed in the home
  1. Actively listen
- B. Ask parent(s) to explain how they see their role in the student's education
  1. Actively listen
- C. Ask Parents how they feel you as the teacher can help
  1. Actively listen

III. Defining Roles and expectations- Teacher
- A. Assure parents (will keep child safe, and work to help them become responsible, andwell educated)
- B. Share your view of your role and expectations with regards to educating the student.

IV. Creating a partnership
- A. Briefly reiterate roles and expectations
- B. Discuss how you and the family can work together to benefit the student
  1. Actively listen

V. Closing
- A. Summarize conference
- B. Share information for future communication
- C. End on a positive note

References:

Fredericks, A. D., & Rasinski, T. V. (1990). Conferencing with parents: Successful approaches. Reading Teacher, 44(2), 174-176.

Reiman, A. J. & Peace, S. D. (2004). *SUCCEED at Mentoring Manual.* Unpublished Manual for the Curriculum and Developmental Supervision Program. North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695.

APPENDIX C

Component	*Example of Response*
1. INTRODUCTION	
___ Open with a positive greeting. ___ State purpose of conference	
2. FEELINGS	
___ Ask person to share feelings about new role ___ Actively listen! ___ State your feelings about your role	
3. ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS	
___ Describe your role as helper ___ Ask person to describe how they see their role ___ Discuss norms of relationship to include: __how to share feedback __how to handle uncomfortable situations __how confidentiality will be kept ___ Actively listen! ___ Sign letter of consent (if appropriate)	–
4. PRIOR EXPERIENCE	
___ Ask what prior experiences person brings to new role ___ Ask for any other background info they wish to share ___ Ask how they learn best /unique learning needs ___ Ask about strengths ___ Areas to target for improvement ___Actively listen!	

5. PLANNING	
a. Discussion of ongoing activities	
___ Describe coaching process (*give a copy of teaching competency profile*) ___ Describe communication process (*weekly reflections for novice teacher*) ___ Ask if person has questions ___Actively listen	
b. Discussion of future meetings	
___ Schedule next meeting ___ Plan weekly time for meetings (?)	

6. SUMMARY AND CLOSURE	
___ Ask person to summarize main thoughts and feelings about the conference. ___ Actively listen ___ Close with encouraging statement.	

Reiman, A. J. & Peace, S. D. (2004). *SUCCEED at Mentoring Manual.* Unpublished Manual for the Curriculum and Developmental Supervision Program. North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695.

APPENDIX D

Initial Teacher Interview Questions:

- How do you see your role as teacher in alignment with parents?
- How do you see your role as teacher as distinct from parents?
- What are some of the challenges you have experienced developing relationships with parents?
- What are some of the goals you have for an initial parent-teacher conference?
- What do you think the parents want to know at an initial parent-teacher conference?
- What are some of the challenges you have experienced interacting during a parent-teacher conference?
- How have you observed parents rely on you as a source of instructional/emotional support in the past?
- How would you like parents to rely on you?

Post- Conference Teacher Interview Questions:

- In what ways was this conference similar to or different from previous parent-teacher conferences?
- Do you feel that you were able to effectively communicate your role as a teacher during the conference?
- How did this form help you to meet your goals during a parent-teacher conference? Did it hinder you?
- Do you feel that this protocol helped you to build a positive relationship with the

parent?

- Did using this protocol make the conference more or less challenging? Why?
- Did you feel that active listening was effective?

Post- Conference Parent Interview Questions:

- In what ways was this conference similar to or different from previous parent-teacher conferences?
- Do you feel that the teacher listened to you?
- In an initial parent-teacher conference, what are your goals?
- What goals did you have for this conference and were they met?
- What do you want to know from a teacher?
- How do you see your role as a parent in alignment with the teacher?

APPENDIX E

Benefits:
If you participate in this study, you have the benefit of helping educators better understand the dynamic that exists between parents and teachers. Parents and teachers have the same goal- they want to see students succeed. In order to help students become successful, excellent communication, a good relationship, and a mutual understanding of roles and expectations is critical. The relationship building role defining conference protocol being developed is designed to create the kind of communication and relationship that is necessary. What is learned from this study will develop this protocol and provide teachers with insight that will lead to more effective parent-teacher conferences and better relationships with parents.

Confidentiality (Privacy):
All audio assignments, recordings and interview transcripts will be kept confidential on a password protected computer and destroyed by August 1, 2020. No identifying information (i.e. real names) will appear on the recordings and transcripts, nor will they be used in reports or in research papers. Direct quotes from the interviews may be used in reports about the research, with identities protected by a fake name.

Compensation:
You will not receive any compensation for participating in the project.

What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researchers:
Dr. Heather A. Davis
NC State University College of Education, 602J Poe Hall-P
Heather_Davis@ncsu.edu;

Kimberly N. Patterson
knpatter@ncsu.edu

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Administrator of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/ 515-4514) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148).

Consent to Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time. I agree for my interview and conference to be audio recorded."

Name (please print) Kathryn Fernandez

Signature _____ **Date** 3-17-14

(Researcher Retains This Copy)

(Please Retain Top Copy for Your Records)

Benefits:
If you participate in this study, you have the benefit of helping educators better understand the dynamic that exists between parents and teachers. Parents and teachers have the same goal- they want to see students succeed. In order to help students become successful, excellent communication, a good relationship, and a mutual understanding of roles and expectations is critical. The relationship building role defining conference protocol being developed is designed to create the kind of communication and relationship that is necessary. What is learned from this study will develop this protocol and provide teachers with insight that will lead to more effective parent-teacher conferences and better relationships with parents.

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Consent to Participate

"I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time. I agree for my interview and conference to be audio recorded."

Name (please print) Kimberly W. Oakley

Signature Kimberly W. Oakley **Date** 3-20-14

(Researcher Retains This Copy)

(Please Retain Top Copy for Your Records)