PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE HEAD START POLICY COMMITTEE FROM AN INSIDER’S PERCEPTION: EMPOWERMENT OR RHETORIC?

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B.A., California State University, Sacramento, 1999

PROJECT

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

EDUCATION
(Multicultural Education)

at

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO

SPRING
2011
PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE HEAD START POLICY COMMITTEE FROM AN INSIDER’S PERCEPTION: EMPOWERMENT OR RHETORIC?

A Project

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Abstract

of

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE HEAD START POLICY COMMITTEE FROM
AN INSIDER’S PERCEPTION: EMPOWERMENT OR RHETORIC?

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Angela Ramirez

Parent Involvement is a vital component to the success of children academically but also
the success of schools and communities. Head Start has the prestige of being the first
program to value the importance of parent involvement. Parent involvement has many
sub-categories that must be analyzed in order to document the success of the involvement
of parents. In this study, the focus is how parent's participation in a shared-
decision/governance partnership is empowering for parents and does the participation of
parents produced outcomes that match the expectations of the Head Start philosophy. The
results of this study suggest that parents who participated in their Head Start program's
Policy Committee had not met the standards required from the Head Start program.

__________________________

, Committee Chair
Forrest Davis, Ph.D.

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Date

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DEDICATION

For my two sons, Tyler and Andrew Gray. Life, Love, and Success.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is important to acknowledge and thank several individuals whom assisted me in the process of completing my study. First, I would like to thank God for giving me the ability to forge forward, especially through the challenging moments. To my new friend, Lisa Daniels, whom without her support, I may of not been able to see the light at the end of the proverbial tunnel; Dr. Forrest Davis, for supporting me as a student and by standing by his philosophy that students come first. And lastly, with all of my love, to my husband Craig, who without his emotional and financial support, this could have not been possible.
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome.”- Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)

As parents, we are told by educators that we are our children’s first teacher. Therefore, when our children begin school, parent participation becomes an expected partnership. President George Walker Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation January 2008, which included a parent involvement component. The parent involvement component falls under Title I, which offers a supplemental funding program for economically disadvantaged students and includes preschool programs. Parent involvement is a double-edge sword. As a parent of two sons who attended public schools, I can attest to the mixed messages parents receive from schools regarding parent involvement.

Parent involvement in school settings vary from school to school, especially in schools where economically disadvantage students attend. Statistics show that many children of poverty have learning difficulties, resulting in a high dropout rate. These concerns for our future citizens have been an on-going issue. In order to give children who live in poverty an opportunity to become academically successful, a pilot program that focused on the cognitive, social-emotional, physical (small/large motor), and academic readiness was created by the federal government: Head Start.
The Head Start program believes that parental participation is important to a child’s well-being. “The influence of parents goes beyond the critical nature of their relationship and interaction with the child. In the early years of life, the parent determines the child’s daily environment and the majority of his or her experiences” (Zigler & Styfco, 2010, p. 140). With the recommendations of many professionals, a mandated policy for parent involvement became a component of the program. In addition, full funding of the Head Start program is tied to the parent involvement component, thereby incentivizing the program to collaborate with parents. Head Start performance standards regarding parental involvement state that parent involvement will empower, educate, and provide opportunities to improve on parenting skills, child development, job-building skills and self-esteem, just to name a few.

The focus of this project is to delve into the definition of parent involvement, and to see how parents and administrators functioned in a collaborative partnership on the Head Start Parent Policy Committee.

**Background**

Head Start is a federally funded program which was originally declared as a “War on Poverty” program concept during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson in 1965. This comprehensive program was designed to address low-income children and families throughout the United States, implemented by local communities. Head Start’s mission and goal is to promote school readiness by addressing the social-emotional and cognitive development of children. In addition, many comprehensive services are delivered to
children and families in the area of health, nutrition, educational and social services. One of the program components are family and community partnerships. The purpose of involving parents in the program is to provide opportunities for all family members to thrive, thus breaking the poverty cycle. Consequently, during the planning stages of implementing Head Start, a current theory regarding poverty was influencing how the program would address its children and families. This theory was based on the book “The Culturally Deprived Child,” which states that poor and disadvantaged individuals are so, due to the pathologies or deficits in their sociocultural backgrounds. “The notion of cultural deprivation carried the implicit assumption that the culture of the poor was inferior to that of the middle class—as if the latter were the only culture, and poor people didn’t have it” (Zigler & Styfco, p. 32).

The theory was a simplistic and negative perspective with which to explain poverty. The root of Head Start was grounded in alleviating poverty. Parental participation at many levels was intended to help break the cycle of poverty. Parent involvement became a key component in the original concept, and in 1967, a Head Start policy was written that described parent involvement. According to the Head Start Performance Standard 45 CFR 1304.40(d) Parent Involvement-general, “parent participation in the design of activities and experiences will assist in expanding parental strengths and interest is essential” (see http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov./hsclc/family, p. 1).

Head Start claims that parents are vital to the success of not only their child’s education, but their own, as a parent. Many services such as parenting education, male
involvement, nutrition and budgeting, and employment opportunities within Head Start and the community are available. In order to provide further experiences to parent involvement, there is the provision of shared program governance which offers “opportunities for parents to be involved in shared decision-making activities with the governing body and staff which include elected participation on the Policy Council or Policy Committee” (see http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/family, p. 1).

Parent Council/Committee members are voted in by their parent representatives from the individual preschool programs in their Head Start Program. As a council/committee member they hold positions such as Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Parliamentarian, Treasurer and Grantee Representatives for the Head Start Council Committee. It is also important to note that 51% of participants in a parent involvement council or committee must be parents (or a legal guardian) who have children currently enrolled in the program. Therefore, Head Start fully supports the importance of having parents involved in the program; the program could not function without the parent variable.

Having worked for several Head Start programs in the county, my role as a teacher and education specialist emphasized promoting parent involvement. It was not until I volunteered for a change in job assignment to the Parent Involvement Specialist responsible for parent involvement/governance including the Head Start Parent Policy Committee that I saw a clearer picture of parent involvement within the Child Development Department. This position had become currently available due to the
retirement of the past Parent Involvement Specialist. This extra job responsibility was offered to all lead teachers in the Child Development department; however rumors and complaints regarding questionable practices (such as favoritism with some parents and staff), protecting “pet projects” supported by the Director, and forms of intimidation tactics to control parents surfaced. Therefore, tenured staff refused to transition into the vacancy. I stepped up to the plate to take the position, overlooking alleged past history.

I had just celebrated my one-year anniversary with the District with no concerns regarding my ability to meet district standards. This school district had gone through many changes; for example, the school district now has its eighth superintendent, and the population served has shifted toward a more diverse population of students and families. This district, which serves over 40,000 students in the K-12th grade population, and another 1200 students in their Early Head Start/Head Start program reports that they serve over 80 languages. According to the 2008 enrollment statistics, approximately 50 % of the population is Hispanic in the preschool population. Yet, there is no documentation on how many of these young children are English Language Learners.

Parent involvement is imperative when promoting the success of children. Administrators and educators have been very vocal about the importance of parent involvement, yet the struggle of what is parent involvement and how much involvement of parents is welcome has become a debatable issue. The focus of this research is to discuss, reflect and analyze the experiences of parents who participated in the policy
committee of this district’s Head Start program, and investigate the experiences that may differ from the expectations of the process of shared program governance.

**Statement of the Problem**

While parent involvement is encouraged by the education system, what does it mean to be an involved parent? In Head Start, parents are mandated to participate in the program and required to take part in a Policy Council/Committee, giving them the responsibility to assist with policy and program decisions. Parents are specifically told that involvement at this level empowers their abilities to make decisions in their child’s education, and for themselves. According to Olivos (2006), “most parent involvement policies, for example, are embedded in the notion that the function of the parents is to blindly support the schools’ and the teachers’ efforts to educate the students without questions” (p. 83). For this reason, it is questionable as to whether or not teachers and administrators promote collaboration and the open door policy that would empower parents in a collaborative partnership.

**Purpose of the Study**

The objective of this study is to examine and document parent involvement in the Head Start Preschool program with the focus on parent policy committee participation. This study will focus on the following questions:

1. Pertaining to Head Start, what does empowerment for parents mean?

2. Do parents who participate in the Head Start program develop a partnership
that promotes authentic parent involvement, collaboration, and decision-making skills that assist with approving or disapproving policies and procedures?

**Theoretical Basis**

This study will incorporate a number of theories to help explain the many levels of parent/family involvement focusing on low-income, diverse (African-Americans, Latinos) and to include other marginalized groups of people.

Paulo Freire has theorized that people can only be free when one is truly empowered. For individuals, especially those who have been oppressed throughout many generations, knowledge is the key to freedom. However, obtaining knowledge is not always easy due to many circumstances such as poverty, discrimination, and culture. Therefore, education is the method to obtain knowledge which equates to numerous freedoms. This is an issue that persists in many countries including the United States. According to Freire (2000), “education as the practice of freedom- as opposed to education of domination- denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exist as a reality apart from people” (p. 81). So what is necessary in providing equal access to true empowerment that will give parents the power to practice their rights and freedom?

These reoccurring issues of obtaining equal educational access begin with how the political environment views the importance of equal educational access. “One cannot
expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people” (p. 95). In addition, Freire believes that the reason why the education system fails is because those who write the policies design them according to their own reality and personal views. In order for the parents to be heard, it is necessary to be involved and united as a group to make the changes needed to become empowered.

**Parent Involvement**

Epstein (1995) states, “the way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about children’s families” (p. 1). Epstein argues developing school, family, and community partnerships will provide the students with a positive and supportive environment that in fact helps students want to stay in school, want to learn, and graduate from school. She has written the framework that explains six types of parent involvement that constitutes participation, they are:

1. Parenting: support, nurturing, and rearing;
2. Communication: relating, reviewing, and overseeing;
3. Volunteering: supervising and fostering;
4. Learning at home: managing, recognizing, and rewarding;
5. Decision making: contributing, considering, and judging;
6. Collaborating with the community: sharing and giving (p. 13).

It is important to note that in order to get the most optimal outcomes and participation addressing parent involvement, all six types of parent involvement must be in place.
Even though there are schools that value and respect the power of parent involvement, often school districts in the county do not. Many schools whose staff and administrators do not understand the role of parent participation have documented this fact. These same schools claim this is due to the lack of training, policies, leadership, and financial budgeting that would promote how to partner with parents. Epstein stresses that school leadership should recognize the importance of parent involvement, which can only provide two possible outcomes. The first outcome would distance parents, thereby creating misunderstandings, dissatisfaction and disempowerment. The second outcome would promote a welcoming environment that supports collaboration and partnering with parents in order to cultivate students’ learning.

Olivos (2006), states that “quite possibly one of the most critical of the contradictions in our nation’s public school system is its inability to close the educational achievement disparity between specific social groups and middle and upper-class white students” (p. 86). He states that the public education system has many challenges because there are those who believe that the system is a failure. On the other hand, the public education system has produced many successful citizens who have made this country the powerful nation that it is.

Olivos speaks to the importance of parent involvement. He begins by giving the background of several theoretical perspectives regarding race and the perceptions of American society’s view of the disadvantage (poor, culturally diverse and people of color). One theory that has been in contention is the deficit theory which is broken into
three sub-categories; biological, structural or environmental, and cultural. The common thread of these theories are based on these four main tenets which states “(1) that there exists a disadvantaged group; (2) it is alleged that the cause of their disadvantage lies with the group itself; (3) the culture is the likely source of the cause; (4) let us see what we can find in their cultural attributes that would explain their disadvantage status” (p. 45). It is these assumptions toward parent involvement practices for bicultural and disadvantaged parents that emerge within the public school environment. Therefore, programs created to give poor, disadvantaged, and culturally diverse populations a head start, continue to promote the assumption that “only those experiences provided by Anglo middle-class culture can provide the basis of school preparedness and upward mobility” (p. 48).

**Family Diversity**

Hansen and Lynch (2004), authors of “*Understanding Families: Approaches to Diversity, Disabilities and Risk*”, wrote that many theoreticians and researchers have tried to characterize the concept of families. As parent involvement becomes a highlighted component in education, addressing family systems becomes pertinent. Therefore, how can schools (administrators, educators, and staff) address families (parents), support, and understand the multiple effects created by economic deprivation? In addition, how does the system address and provide an adequate education to children/families that are culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse?
Their recommendations are centered in research and practice. “Parents and family members know their child better than anyone else. They understand the needs of their family system, and the beliefs and behaviors that they value and by which they live” (p. 186). Therefore, it is important to have a working partnership with families when addressing the needs and concerns of the child. Researchers such as Bronfenbrenner and Nicolas Hobbs, in his book “Strengthening Families” (1984), emphasize that families are important to the success of a program/school. It is that exact point that will help educators and all who provide services to children on how to address effective partnerships with parents/families.

Hence, it is the practice of professionals that must be dealt with in order to provide services that will address the variables children, parents and families bring with them. There needs to be a realignment of priorities and the way professionals address families. As customer services to families are being scrutinized, the issue of power becomes a factor. Professionals are the individuals who have the power due to their knowledge. Parents want to be empowered with that knowledge that professionals hold, not have it held against them, leaving them helpless. “Proactive Empowerment through Partnerships” (1985) states empowerment enhances capabilities. “To be empowered is to have the information and sense of personal competence necessary to advocate for oneself or someone else.” (Dunst, p. 197).
Poverty

Ruby Payne is an expert whose theory has evoked mixed feelings regarding the mindset of poverty. She states that educators would see more successful outcomes if they studied and understood how poverty influences individuals. As a result, many administrators and schools have incorporated her theories into their approach in addressing children/families living in poverty. For this reason, her theories are important to use as a backdrop in this study. A few key points that Payne (2000) states about poverty are:

1. Poverty is relative.
2. Poverty occurs in all races and countries.
3. Economic class is a continuous line, not a clear-cut distinction.
4. Generational poverty and situational poverty are different.
5. This work is based on patterns. All patterns have exceptions.
6. An individual brings with him/her the hidden rules of the class in which he/she was raised
7. Schools and business operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules of middle class.
8. For our students to be successful, we must understand their hidden rules and teach them the rules that will make them successful at school and at work.
9. We can neither excuse students nor scold them for not knowing; as educators we must teach them and provide support, insistence, and expectations.
10. To move from poverty to middle class or middle class to wealth, an individual must give up relationships for achievement (at least for some period of time).

11. Two things that help one move out of poverty are education and relationships.

12. Four reasons one leaves poverty are: It’s too painful to stay, a vision or goal, a key relationship, or a special talent or skill. (pp. 2-3).

Often when a person considers poverty, it usually is defined through financial lenses. However, poverty includes a high level of limited resources beyond finances. Hence, it is important to look at the emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, and relationships/role model resources in the lives of individuals living in poverty. Why does this matter in the field of education because Payne (2000) states, “Educators have tremendous opportunities to influence some of the non-financial resources that make such differences in a students’ lives. For example, it costs nothing to be an appropriate role model.” (p. 25).

Limitations of the Study

Results from this research should take into account several limitations which would influence the study. The conclusions of this research are based on the experiences of three parents from one school district in the same Head Start program, whose experiences within the program spans over six years. Therefore, expanding the interviews and focus groups to other parents and/or school districts would provide additional data that could support the claims of the parents in the Head Start program in this study. Another factor to take into account is the potential bias as a result of limited experiences of the
researcher in her role as a Parent Involvement Specialist in the Head Start program of the same school district. However, her interpretation and expertise on analyzing the data of this research is based on her 17 years as an education specialist, parent involvement specialist, and teacher for several Head Start programs, including her education in the field of Child Development.

**Definition of Terms**

The purpose is to provide significance to the following terms used in the research of this study:

*Parent Involvement:* Having parents become “captivated” by their own children, supportive of their education, and irrationally committed to the idea that their children matter. (Bronfenbrenner, 1992, p.101).

*Authentic parent involvement:* Is based on empowerment that leads to action and further reflection. (Olivos, 2006)

*Inauthentic parent involvement:* Is involvement that is defined by individuals and/or professionals in the field of education. (Olivos, 2006)

*Empowerment:* To give official authority or legal power to an individual or group. (Webster Dictionary, p. 370).
Collaboration (interpersonal): Is a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal. (Friend & Cook, 2010)


Head Start: Is a federally funded comprehensive entitlement program focusing on children, families and community. (Head Start Performance Standards)

Parent Policy Committee/Council: Is a shared decision-making group of parents, whose responsibilities is to work in partnership with management staff and the governing body to develop, review, and approve or disapprove policies and procedures. (Head Start Performance Standards)

Performance Standards: Are detailed regulations that guide Head Start programs to meet the goals and objectives of the program which are placed in a Code of Federal Regulations publication. (Head Start Performance Standards)

Organization of the Study

An introduction of the history of the Head Start program will be presented in Chapter One. Within this study, the mandated component of parent involvement will be examined and the Parent Policy Committee will be the focus of this research. A presentation of theoretical views will help analyze parent involvement and its function of empowering,
respecting and valuing the process of shared governance, which is the charge of parents in this Head Start program.

Chapter Two will be the Review of Related Literature that will describe the various concepts of parent involvement including two ethnographic research studies regarding parent experiences within the Head Start program at the site level, as well as on the Parent Policy Committee.

Chapter Three will describe the methodology and findings used in conducting this study. Chapter Four will present discussion and conclusions of those findings.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to investigate what parent involvement and empowerment looks like in the Head Start program at the level of program governance. As parents are told that they are their children’s first teacher, and scientific research supports parent involvement as a valuable factor for academic success, why do school administrators and the culture of schools still limit, deny access to, and/or patronize parents? Despite the scientific research, there is still a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of what is parent involvement? Epstein (1995) discussed the various themes of parent involvement. One of those themes focuses in on how decision-making collaboration is one key to the success of school, family and community partnership. Hence, an opportunity for decision-making is a contribution to the empowerment of parents who value the academic success. Olivos (2006) affirms that educational work that supports and acknowledges the importance of parents’ contribution to their children’s academic success is one step toward true empowerment.

As discussed in Chapter 1, parent involvement is a valued component of the Head Start program and within that component are various opportunities for parent participation. This study’s focal point will be on parent participation within program governance. A review of the literature will paint a picture of how important parent involvement is to the success of children and how school, families and community are
vital to diverse and low socioeconomic schools and early intervention programs, such as Head Start. Parent involvement within Head Start has been key since its inception in 1965. In contrast to other early childhood intervention programs in the early 1960s, Head Start broke ground by viewing parental participation as essential to both children’s and families’ growth and development (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004). As a result, how does Head Start make a difference in how parent involvement is promoted, valued and respected? Is parent involvement at the level of shared governance empowering to parents who participate?

Head Start Program

“The United States cannot afford to waste its young people and ignore their families” is the bold statement made by the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion (1993), in their final report Creating a 21st Century Head Start. The 47 committee members addressed the successes and challenges of the program that as of 1993 Head Start had served 13 million children and their families. Here are a few of the overall findings that will be addressed by this study:

1. Most Head Start programs offer quality services; however, the quality of programs is uneven across the country.

2. Head Start needs to be better equipped to serve the diverse needs of families.

3. In many communities and states Head Start, public schools, and other early childhood programs and providers responsible for addressing the needs of young children and families operated in isolation from one another with adequate resources, planning, and coordination (Part II, p. 4).
According to the parents who were interviewed for this study, and from my personal observations, the academic success of children in the program had measurable outcomes. However, Head Start families, specifically the parents who participated in the study spoke about how administrators and staff had a tendency to push their agenda, not always having the best interest of families. This concern expressed by parents is viable, and leads to the second finding of uneven quality which was documented in the advisory committee’s report. Once again, statements were made by parents who participated in this study that during their participation which covered a five year span, inconsistencies following policies and procedures were being dismissed by those who monitored the program. As a staff member, I could see how classrooms were not equally given the same high quality environment, that some staff had training in specifics such as implementation of curriculum while others were not, and more to the point of parent involvement, inconsistencies on how governance was being implemented.

“Since its inception, Head Start has been a leader in requiring that the home, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds of children and their families be an integral component of the program” (Epstein, 1995, p. 39). Hence, this program was designed to provide services and opportunities to children and families of low socio-economic backgrounds and of diverse populations (i.e. African-Americans, Latinos and Native Americans). It is ironic how this can be such a concern when it is an overall philosophy. From my personal experience as a parent involvement specialist and lead teacher, some staff had contempt for the families who had children in the program. It became visible when parents asked for services or reminded staff that particular services were being negated such as
translation of written materials into Spanish. According to Ramirez (2002), parents reported wanting to be part of the school environment but “unless parent’s attitudes regarding parent involvement are known, policy implementation may prove difficult” (p. 39).

Parents had concerns regarding how their school district implemented the Head Start program including how the governance committee of the parent involvement component was implemented. Another aspect of my experience was that the school board had only been involved with the program during its Federal Review year, which occurs every three years. At that time, Board members are invited to attend a program briefing. The members are walked through a series of potential questions that will be asked by reviewers. During my term as the parent involvement specialist at the time, I personally had very little contact with the school board as well as the policy committee parents of the program. This raised a valid concern of how was the program being valued and implemented. The article, The Challenges of Parent Involvement Research (1998), reports that “school districts nationwide are being encouraged to reexamine their parent involvement policies and programs and to demonstrate innovative approaches in order to obtain Federal education dollars” (p. 1). Confirming my experience, this report further fueled my interest in pursuing my study.

According to the authors, Head Start’s philosophy is based on “the assumption that poor children and families have inadequate and inappropriate values and habits, and this explains their inability to gain a foothold in the economy.” (p. 19). From the words of parents in this study this was a common complaint that was brought up throughout these interviews. Parents were talked down to, and were made to feel “stupid” in the words of parent 3. In one of my conversations with the past parent involvement specialist, she had said to me that I must not make complicated demands of parents because these parents are not “sophisticated” enough to take on certain tasks. In an email that I received from her, she wrote “Empowering parent strategies: suggested using the social hospitality committee to help meeting prep and purchase of door prizes” (email).

Parents are encouraged to participate in the classroom; however, through the structure of the Head Start program, it is important to have parents sit on a Parent Policy Council/Committee. Participation in the Head Start program, especially as a council/committee participant, has been promoted as an empowerment avenue. According to Ames and Ellsworth (1997), empowerment is a term loosely thrown around and that similar programs have been criticized for inherently demeaning the characterization of empowerment. What is evident is that parents are required to assist on policymaking decisions; however, planning and control of the program had been decided in advance and guarded by program administrators. In addition, several Head Start programs are not stand-alone programs, thus furthering limited empowerment of parents.

Undermining the Parent Policy Council has been documented in other Head Start programs; as in the case of the New York County Head Start programs, according to
Ames and Ellsworth (1997). Decision-making rights of parent members had been blocked, redefined and ignored by administrators. These actions left parents angry and frustrated, making it difficult for some members to remain on the policy council/committee. This is the case with parents who participated in the study. Parent 1 could not continue her third year due to the stress created by her interactions with administration/staff. Parent 2 also did not complete her second year with the program and resigned due to the stress, intimidation tactics and from personal attacks she endured due to administration/staff. Even when staff members are strong believers in the Head Start and the philosophy of the program, Ames and Ellsworth point out that staff either were removed and/or resigned due to the power play and disrespect of administrators. These were the options present to the researcher, as the parent involvement specialist for our program. How then, can Head Start’s original mission remain a true collaborative partnership between parents and administrators?

Sissel’s (2000) research entitled *Staff, Parents, and Politics in Head Start: A Case Study in Unequal Power, Knowledge and Material Resources* focused on several Head Start centers within the Head Start program that is overseen by a local community action group. She explains that Head Start is the only early child development program that provides comprehensive services to the children and families they serve. Included in these comprehensive services is parent involvement. Bessie Draper, who developed parent involvement in 1967, states she wove in roles for parent involvement at various levels of the Head Start hierarchy (Zigler & Styfco, 2010, p.145). Within the parameters of parent involvement was participation in the decision-making process. Parents have
high expectations regarding their role participating as partners to decision-making/shared governance. Parents from this study expressed that they felt compelled to participate because they would be making decisions that would be in the best interest of children and families of the program. One of the factors of parent involvement was to encourage leadership, collaboration and decision-making skills that parents could utilize in the workforce and within the community. Yet, amongst those researchers and individuals interested in Head Start’s success, mixed reviews and results have pointed out that Head Start effectiveness was being challenged. Longtime Head Start advocate, Dr. Edward Zigler, has publicly criticized the uneven quality of the program (Washington & Oyemade, 1995). What should also be considered is the fact that there has been very little research being conducted on the many levels of parent involvement, according to my research. Sissel (2000) points out, “In the same way that parent involvement has been neglected programmatically, research on parents and on the outcomes of parent involvement has also been lacking” (p. 3).

There were two camps of thought regarding the research of how parent involvement benefited parents and the children. Washington and Oyemade (1995) argued there was a significant omission of outcomes regarding the effectiveness of parent involvement. Additionally, the lack of appropriate funding seemed to be a common thread throughout many programs within the Head Start program. On the other hand, applied research “have had mixed results (Kinard, 1975; Shapiro, 1977) due to conceptual or methodological flaws in the research” (Levine, 1993; Philip & Cabrera, 1996) (p. 4). Documented research regarding parent involvement was based on how parents felt about themselves,
how staff treated and perceived parents, and how parent involvement was interpreted by staff, administration and parents. In the many components of services offered in Head Start parent involvement has been the centerpiece that has become a major focus in the field of education to date. In spite of this, Head Start a well-known and well-funded program, “despite periodic challenges to the program, has led a charmed life” (Sissel, 2000, p.1).

Sissel (2000) further discussed the politics and culture of Head Start which influences how and what is known to the public. She points out that Head Start has been the government’s “pet project” and the public has had a positive view of Head Start’s impact of helping low-income children and families. What is evident is limited ongoing research that supports the long-term outcomes of Head Start proponents are available.

“Thus, one objective of this book is to transform the “private” into the “public”; that is, to more fully explicate this link and to actively critique the potential, promises, pitfalls and paradoxes of parent and staff involvement in Head Start.” (p. 10).

From my point, of view based on my experiences working with Head Start, this is a critical statement. Parents, as well as myself, needed to have crucial input from principle advocates, researchers and/or concerned citizens documenting how parent involvement faired with the Head Start program. From the interviews of parents, many improprieties had been overlooked regarding implementing the policies and procedures of Head Start. For parents who sat on the policy committee and put time, energy and passion into their role as officers, it was vital that administrators/staff were forthright, respectful and implemented the program in a joint venture partnership.
Sissel spoke with administrators, staff, teachers, parents and community members regarding the many components of Head Start for one year. She focused on documenting and observing parent involvement, a mandated policy in which the staff is required to encourage the many levels of parent participation. Even though this is a key element to parent involvement, what was noted by parents of the study was that teacher/staff did not understand the process and/or did not know the importance the parent involvement component. Their experiences regarding recruitment for parent involvement at the governance level varied from teacher to teacher. “In Head Start, while parents were always an integral part of the program design, their actual role, while symbolically intact, has been somewhat ambiguous, contested, and subject to interpretation by practitioners in the programs.” (p. 59). Therefore, the issue is that staff and administration will have its own interpretation to what constitutes parent involvement, which can be the thread that unravels the program’s fidelity.

According to the Head Start Performance Standards, parents of the program and administration are to work in partnership concerning decision-making rights in policy, educational programming, and access to receiving social services. Policy and decision-making is documented and monitored when parents of the program participate in the Parent Policy Committee/Council, hence fulfilling the shared governance policy. The next level of partnership is at the classroom level where parents partner with teachers to address specific classroom issues. The last level of partnering is with the family service workers, who collaborate with parents to form a “family partnership agreement,” which assists with social services referrals, and goal/objectives of specific families. Even though
this was not a concern with the parents who participated in the study, it is important to
know that parent involvement consist of many levels of participation and services to be
rendered.

There are many factors and variables that contributed to the dysfunction of this Head
Start program as is the case with the Head Start preschool program in this study. Lack of
implementing program policies and monitoring of such policies created tension and
distrust further marginalizing the population they served. This starts at the top, with
administration. Executing the parent involvement component has become a revealing
aspect of how parents are valued within the program. Power and control are issues that
seemed to come up for parents when they discuss their experiences with governance.

“The parent involvement component of Head Start began from a vision grounded in
principle of justice” (p. 281). What was observed and recorded were ways staff and
administration made decisions regarding the amount of involvement they dictated to
parents. This is what discouraged full parent participation as written in the Head Start
Performance Standards. This further disenfranchised parents and families.

Parent Involvement

Hill’s (2004) article, Parental School Involvement and Children’s Academic
Achievement: Pragmatics and Issues proclaims that “the school’s context and policies
influence parent involvement” (p. 162). What is documented is that parents from lower
socioeconomic backgrounds have the most barriers and less involvement with their
children’s education, due to a lack of flexibility in their work schedules, transportation
issues, and often a lack of positive experiences navigating the educational system.
Therefore, the experiences parents have with the Head Start program could affect how involved they will be in future of their child’s education. For example, parent 2, who had many confrontations with administration which influenced her to resign from her position dissuaded her youngest child from participating in the Head Start preschool program. Due to the negative experiences she endured during her participation in the policy committee, her youngest child sat out her preschool years.

It is revealed in the article, “Research on Families, Schools, and Communities: A Multicultural Perspective” (Hidalgo, et. al., 1995), that past research had studied schools and parent involvement separately. It was not until 1980’s that a focus on how schools, families, and communities collaborate for the best interest of a child’s education. Research before the 1980’s on partnership encouraged schools, programs, school districts and the State to implement their plans to cultivate programs for school, families and community partnerships. This effort began at the preschool grade level and carried throughout to high school. As was stated earlier, Head Start had pioneered the importance of parent and community partnerships. Research supports the importance of partnering with families, thus children are more academically successful. What makes this a “win-win” outcome is that families who give, and involve themselves with their child’s education become empowered in the process of collaborative involvement, and for school districts, positive outcomes. In the case of Head Start, not only are children academically involved (setting a positive pattern) but their parents also have the opportunity to assist with academic input that will affect all children within the program.
For that reason, it is vital to monitor how parents and administration collaborate on their roles of shared governance.

As communities become more diverse; cultural differences, significant number of low-income families and second language learners has become the challenges of schools (education). Hence, the partnering with parents becomes a valuable factor that encourages the success of the child. Educators are recognizing to an increasing degree the importance of engaging low-income families and communities as partners in the educational process (Heleen, 1990). This recognition of full inclusiveness in engaging parents is noteworthy; however, “historically, public schools serving impoverished families and communities have not concerned themselves with the need for massive societal change” (Heleen, 1990, p. 507). Consequently, with the lack of understanding the challenges of struggling parents (families) schools continue to alienate minorities and low-income families from participating and collaborating with schools.

Why, in the case of Head Start, has this become an issue of concern? This program specifically is designed to assist children and families of low socio-economic status, and statistically has a large diverse multicultural clientele. One reason for this is teachers who are of different cultural or ethnic background from their students are less likely to have a relationship with parents of these students (Sharma, 2005). Research by Epstein and Dauber (1991) has stated that teacher’s bias has influenced parent involvement with minorities or low-income families. Teachers of Head Start are not alone with these incoming views. From my personal experience, I have witnessed and heard many conversations regarding “poor parents”, “lack of education parents”, and “seeking
services parents” by teachers, staff, and administration equally. The overall attitude has become in the words of the director, “we can not enable parents by providing them services that are all ready out in the community”.

I have not really been sure of the reason for such comments, but it can influence how parents receive services from the program. In order to promote collaboration and partnership regarding parent involvement, especially in disadvantage schools and communities, it is important to understand the unique barriers and resources, in order to establish an effective parent involvement partnership. The point cannot be clearer that educators, administrators and policy makers must address all families, and deliver the opportunities to all children to have an environment that promotes real learning. Yet, how does this look for programs that are based on providing services to children and families from low economic and diverse backgrounds?

Olivos (2006) makes known in his book, *The Power of Parents: A Critical Perspective of Bicultural Parent Involvement in Public Schools*, is that the perception of the public school system appears to be that parents who are low income and/or culturally diverse do not want to be involved in the education of their children. This mindset is attributed to the low turnouts during school activities, as well as meetings and functions that administrators, teacher and/or staff have presented as parent involvement activities. There is a pattern of unsuccessful authentic relationships with the families being served especially for parents who are the most “challenging” to engage; for example, low income parents and minority parents, in particular, Latinos and African-Americans, according to Olivos. Yet, there is the poignant question of why would they want to be
involved in an educational system that doesn’t value, respect, and are insincere of their parental involvement?

If parent involvement clearly is a factor for a child’s academic success, it is relevant for the education system to look at what effective methods are being practiced to promote parent involvement in disadvantaged communities. For the parents who took on the responsibilities to become involved with the policy committee, this was their moment to assist not only their child’s success, but the success of all children in the program. When asked about what they thought parent involvement looked like, Parent 2 expressed that it meant making decisions on curriculum, classroom policy, etc., and to make the decisions together for the benefit of children. What have been traditionally offered in many school districts to parents who wanted to actively participate in their children’s education had in fact been passive and incidental opportunities. Olivos writes about parent involvement paradigms that will empower parents in their role as decision makers for the purpose of individual student achievement and school test scores. Here lies the question of what is empowerment. According to Olivos, he claims, “parent empowerment should not only been seen as a process that allows marginalized parents to better support, without question, the agenda of the school. Instead, it should be the growth of political strength that allows them to take up their own struggle when they feel they are being overlooked or wronged” (Olivos, p. 10). In the core values of Head Start it declares empowerment as “believing that people can identify their own needs and interests and are capable of finding solutions of changing. Head Start offers people opportunities and support for growth and change” (anonymous, 2007).
Olivos maintains that far too often bicultural (diverse) parents are invited to participate in the process of engaging in their children’s education; however it is not an authentic collaboration. This is the case with parents who made claims regarding their experiences in the parent policy committee. There is a need to create an equitable and authentic relationship for parents in order to embrace the needs of diverse families and communities. This can only be established if educators, administrators, and political representatives are committed to fully represent their diverse communities and remember that there is not one model that will address all diverse schools and communities.

Summary

The “War on Poverty,” a concept that had grandiose tenets, was conceived during the Johnson presidential Administration in the 1960s. The idea of providing additional services and education to a population that had a history of being ignored, disenfranchised, with limited opportunities to reach for the “American Dream” now was being realized through the Head Start program. The original concept of this program, which is to provide comprehensive services to children and families, has been a challenge for agencies and school districts alike. As pointed out in this section, working with a diverse and ever changing population has created challenges to this program and in the field of education.

Creating policy and procedures regarding the provision of services for children and families is only the beginning of a series of steps that must be acknowledged and implemented to get the message across to educators and all individuals who work with children and families, especially those individuals living in poverty. According to
Muhammad (2009), “education for all” is not just a liberal rant; it is a matter of survival for everyone but especially those groups that have been pushed to the margin of society.” (p. 8).

Some common concerns regarding parents, families, and community involvement is that educators have not successfully addressed the understanding of methods needed to provide services to a multicultural, diverse, (and in the case of Head Start) low income children/families. There has been a lack of training, sensitivity, accountability, and research since the inception of this program. How can the Head Start program continue to receive billions of dollars to provide comprehensive services without a true check and balances system that is beyond self-assessment? The following chapters will describe the method used to obtain the perceptions of former and current Head Start parents.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research analyzed past and current parents who provided their experiences and perceptions of parent involvement in the Head Start Parent Policy Committee. Due to the changing views of the education system, parent involvement today has become an evolving partnership. Parent involvement is currently taking a center stage in how students succeed academically; however, the Head Start program has from the time of inception included parent involvement as a vital component within their program. Hence, Head Start, being a comprehensive program serving children and families including decision-making, share governance opportunities has limited research on the many levels of their parent involvement component.

Research Questions

The investigation of this topic is led by the research questions, which will address the perceptions and experiences of current and past parents regarding their parent involvement within their Head Start preschool program focusing on share-decision/governance.

1. Pertaining to Head Start, what does “empowerment for parents” mean?

2. Do parents who participated in the Head Start’s policy committee develop a partnership that promotes authentic parent involvement, collaboration, and decision-making skills that assist with approving and disapproving policies and procedures?
Subjects

The subjects for this study include both past and current parents who have participated as their classroom representatives and as officers in the Parent Policy Committee of their Head Start preschools programs. The past parent participants have five years of combined experience working on the Parent Policy Committee, and the current parent is in her third and last year of participation. The selection of participants was based on a past working relationship the researcher had as a parent involvement specialist. Parent will be assigned numbers in this study. All names of people, school district and agency throughout the study have been changed to provide anonymity to all subjects.

Past parent number one has custody of her grand-daughter who had attended the Head Start program for three years. This single grandparent is female, 55 years of age, Caucasian, and is currently receiving disability benefits. She completed college and has a Nursing degree. During her first year in the Head Start program, she held the position as the classroom representative for the committee. During her second year, she served as the chairperson of the Parent Policy Committee.

Past parent number two is a married female; she is 27 years old Caucasian and is a stay-at-home mom. She had two of her three children attend the same Head Start preschool program and choose not enroll her last child into the program. She has a high school education and recently graduated from a local trade school. In her first year in the program, she held the position of secretary for the Parent Policy Committee. During her
second year of participation she too served as the chairperson of the Parent Policy Committee.

Parent number three is a single grandparent in her sixties, who is Puerto Rican and Hawaiian, and raising her three grandchildren whom all have attended the same Head Start program. The youngest is currently enrolled in the Head Start preschool program. This parent served as the parliamentarian in her first year and the classroom representative in her second year. Currently, she serves as the Head Start Representative for her school district to the grantee Head Start Parent Policy Council, the distributor of federal funding to all Head Start programs within the county.

Design of the Study

Procedures

Before interviews were conducted, a request form to proceed with this research, and participant consent form was submitted to the University’s Human Subjects Approval committee. Upon approval, participants were individually contacted by the researcher in an effort to recruit those who had previous and/or current participation in the Head Start program of the “North School District”. Participants were given a brief description of the purpose of this study, and details of how the interviews would be conducted. After obtaining the signature consent of all participants, interviews began. The participants were individually interviewed at their home and/or at the community coffee shop. The purpose for choosing these areas for interviewing was to provide a relaxed and uninhibited environment that the participants would feel free to talk about their experiences. All participants were given the same four questions, allowing at least 45
minutes to complete the interview. The purpose of the one-on-one interviews was to get detailed accounts of how these Head Start councils and committees functioned within the partnership of shared governance, and if this partnership embraced or failed to embrace decision-making opportunities for parents. At a later time the three participants met together for a focus group meeting, leaving to address one additional question, and any other details they could add to this study regarding their experiences with the Parent Policy Committee.

**Instruments**

Five questions were comprised to ask the participants in order to gather information and experiences that clearly explained how parents and the participants were valued as involved parents. The participants had their questions recorded and transcribed. The data was be synthesized in order to formulate the findings of these interviews. There were five questions asked of the participants.

1. What did you know about Head Start when you signed your child up for the program?
2. Parent involvement is an essential component of Head Start; what role did you have as a parent?
3. Knowing that you sat on the Parent Policy Committee at your Head Start program, could you please talk about those experiences? Please include why you participated in the Parent Policy Committee, about the trainings you received, collaborating with the administration, and the likes/dislikes of your time as an officer.
4. Now that you have had time to reflect upon your experiences as a past or current parent of Head Start, what would you share with new families/parents coming into the program and their parent involvement to the program?

5. If you could share your thoughts to the school district administrators regarding your experiences in the Head Start program, what would you tell them?

Analysis of Data

Data collected for this research was first obtained through individual interviews of each participant, which were later transcribed. The second part of this research was obtained from a focus group meeting where the parents were given the opportunity to answer the last research question. In addition, the participants had the option to discuss and share, as a group, any additional perceptions and experiences during their involvement in their preschool program. Each interview was transcribed, including the focus group interview, and coded for themes and patterns that would provide information that would address the research questions and any other themes that emerged from analysis.

Role of Researcher

The researcher is a former employee of the Head Start program with the school district of this particular study. The role of researcher is two-prong. In addition, to conducting this study, she is a former staff person of the Head Start program. Her position was that of lead teacher/parent involvement specialist; responsibilities included training staff and coaching teachers but more importantly to work as a liaison for parents.
who participated on the Parent Policy Committee. Therefore, in this study her experiences within the Head Start program will be part of the research.

Summary

This chapter has restated the purpose of this study and has depicted the methods utilized in obtaining data expressing the perceptions and experiences of parents who had been involved in the Head Start program with the emphasis on the Parent Policy Committee. A description of each parent and their history of parent participation were provided. In addition, the interview questions posed to each participant was made available in order to understand the direction of this study. Chapter 4 will present the analysis of the data, discussion and conclusion of this research.
Chapter 4  
DATA ANALYSIS/RESULTS

Research outcomes were based on the research questions posed in the beginning of this study: (1) Pertaining to Head Start, what does empowerment for parents mean? and (2) Do parents who participate in the Head Start program develop a partnership that promotes authentic parent involvement, collaboration, and decision-making skills that assist with approving or disapproving policies and procedures? After reviewing the responses of the interviews and focus group meeting, the following seven significant themes emerged:

1. Tension between administration and parents
2. Intimidation and lack of respect
3. Rubberstamping
4. Lack of training on the role of parents/officers in shared governance
5. Policy, procedures and monitoring of governance are being compromised at two levels.
6. Returning to the Parent Policy Committee
7. Empowerment and parent involvement

Therefore, what does “empowerment” and “parent involvement” look like to these parents who experienced Head Start?
Tension between administrators/staff and parents

Three of the interviewed parents experienced tension working with staff and administration during their time serving on the parent policy committee. This tension was brought on because these parents had decided that they were going to challenge and ask questions regarding the responsibilities of their role as an officer on the Parent Policy Committee.

Parent 1 stated that she had sat on the committee for two years and that her first tense experience with administration was when she began educating herself on parliamentary rules and policy and procedures regarding governance. She states:

“I took this job [chairperson] very seriously. When I got my hands on the Performance Standards book [Head Start], J.H. (Parent Involvement Specialist) found out and she was not happy with me because I was questioning things. She did not like me questioning things about how things ran or how things are.”

Parent 3 had similar experiences with staff and administration that not only caused tension it caused her to resign. She recalls:

“They [administrators] weren’t so fantastic. They were difficult to work with. I didn’t always feel like there was a good working relationship with coordinators with parents. I don’t think that they collaborated very well even though I think that administration would like to think that they did.”

Parent 2 who is currently an active member of the policy committee shares these accounts during the focus group meeting:
“They don’t like these things, like asking questions because I have been threatened with termination several times this year, and I have gotten to the point that I have said if you don’t want me here, terminate me then.”

*Intimidation and lack of respect*

All three parents felt intimidated in many ways throughout their time serving on the parent policy committee. This intimidation and lack of respect was dealt to parents by staff and administrators in an attempt to persuade them to not make waves, since they had little understanding of the program’s complexities. As one of the parents put it, “This is about power.”

Parent 1 had the most to share about how she and parents were embraced within the committee.

“They treated us like low class citizens who had very little education. They take us and herd us like leading cattle to the feeding trough. You know, I worked all my life and I was a nurse; well educated. If we did not play the way they wanted us to and approve the budget or the hiring of someone they wanted, they [administrators] would hover over the top of you and insinuate that you are not smart enough to make the decision. I remember when I was the Chair of the Policy Committee. The Parent Involvement Specialist, she was like the guiding ruler and when she frowned, people would back off from asking any questions. A smile meant that you were on the right track with her, and she could influence parents with subtle ways of intimidation, even on me. But they pushed me to the edge where I could not go on, and the stress was ruining my health. It was so stressful that I eventually quit.”
Parent 2 stated, “The parents made me feel welcome but a lot of staff talked down to you and I did not think they had the right to talk down to me because they were no better than me.”

Parent 3 recalled how the Parent Involvement Specialist had her way of “manipulating” parents on the committee by befriending them. This created a “fake” relationship so she could be in control or make her job easier.

*Rubberstamping*

Another claim that all three parents expressed was the fact of not being given enough time and/or information to make a good decision, therefore just agreeing with administration’s recommendations.

According to Parent 1, “We were puppets. We were approving the budgets and all the committee work and we weren’t properly trained. They keep the parents uninformed, untrained and malleable so they can control their actions and get the resources they need without following the rules.”

Parent 2 and 3 both stated that they voted for projects, budgets and hiring of new staff for example was based on the expectations of leadership and/or staff and administration. The fear of being singled out, looked upon as inferior, intimidated, and not having the knowledge to be able to make a prudent decision were some of the contributing reasons for rubberstamping the voting process.
Lack of training on the role of parents/officers in shared governance

All three of the parents experienced a lack of training during the period of time they served as a representative and officers of the policy committee. Training is important to anyone who skills and knowledge is limited. However, for these parents, it was essential.

Parent 1 recalls how her first few meeting played out.

“I got a cheat sheet on how to run a committee meeting and that is the only way I knew how to run it. When we would look at the budget and committee work we did not know what we were doing. We were just not trained.”

Parent 2 recalled:

“The first year I don’t remember getting any kind of training as far as my role as the secretary. They gave me a laptop computer that had the last month’s minutes and I would just type in the new minutes. Also, that year the chair was given a script that the parent involvement specialist gave her and would use that as her guide. The parent specialist would sit in the back and interject and explain as we went through the meeting. In the hiring process, parents would volunteer to attend the process. The director, coordinators and teachers would be in this process. Everyone received a rating sheet and we go around, taking turns asking a question to the candidate. Everyone in the room would discuss who they felt was best suited for the position. I did not know how to score the interview and when it came up to discussing the candidates I did not speak up because the district employees had the upper hand.”

Parent 3 states:
“I did not understand, especially things like the budget. This year’s training was done while we were voting for officer position. The new Parent Involvement person would use the wipe board to explain the different roles and then as representatives we would nominate someone and vote. That is all the training we got.”

*Policy, procedures and monitoring of governance are being comprised*

All three parents experienced how policies, procedures and monitoring of the program did not always follow the Head Start Performance Standards. These concerns from the parents explain the lack of discontent they had with the program as a whole.

Parent 3 who is a current member of the policy committee explained in the focus group:

“You know there is an agenda that the committee is supposed to follow. We don’t follow it. We will have people come in who are on the agenda as action items come first before consent items. We don’t vote, for example I parent D would like to make a motion and someone then seconds it. No, the chair just says, “Do you approve x, y and z then we all say yes. It’s approved. Another thing that just happened is we had ethical conduct training during our committee meeting. I am glad we had training, but this should have been done in October when Policy Committee started, not in March when we have only two months of school left. The federal reviewers just came out this year and one question he asked was about trainings. I said we have not received any training so far. Before I could finish my
sentence, the Chair told me to be quiet. And she took over answering the reviewer’s question.”

Parent 2 talks about how the past parent involvement specialist influences parents on how or what to vote on.

“She seems to have things down pat, she would just come and deliver her message and then you know how they want you to vote. And I say vote in quotations because I mean nobody basically . . . always vote yes on everything. I mean why would you vote no, I mean it did not seem that it would make a difference. It’s the school district; they are going to hire who they want or fire whey want. . . . so, I really did not think that any of that [voting] was quite sincere.”

Parent 1 strongly says:

“So Head Start is abusing funds [her program] and it is not being supervised or used appropriately [funds]. It is a selected few that run everything including a particular secretary that are in charge, and doing things that the state people [staff] who are paid to do but are getting fired because she is causing that. They know how to hide. . these people know how to hide themselves and not let anyone get to speak to the people [federal reviewers] who come back to check on the Head Start program.

*Returning to the Policy Committee*

Even after many disappointments and the high anxiety level of these parents with their participation in the Policy Committee, all three parents came back to serve a second and third year. Here are the responses they gave to why they decided to continue with their involvement within the program and committee.
Parent 1 said that she came back the second year because she had just started to understand how she could make a difference within the program. She had started reading on her own the policies and procedures of governance, including reading through the Head Start Performance Standards. This gave her confidence to give it another try. She states, “It was not until December when I attended my one and only training in New York that I found out that we were doing everything wrong.” This gave her the foundation to take on the administration; in addition, she was able to get the support of her fellow officers. However, it was a bumpy road to haul; Parent 1 did not complete a third year.

Parent 2 also decided to come back even after a trying first year. She began her second year with holding the position of Chair. She states, “It can be an uphill battle trying to work with administration. I came back because I had the passion. After her battles with administration and staff, this parent did not come back to complete her third year.

Parent 3 came back for a second year, as her first year experience provided information that helped her feel she could serve an additional year. During her second year, an inexperienced Parent Involvement Specialist had taken over. This is her third and last year with the program. Parent 3 stated:

“I stayed, and stayed and stayed and I am still here. I wanted to tell the new parents I am trying to voice myself and ask questions. New parents now know that this is what they must do when they are in the Policy Committee.”
Empowerment and parent involvement

All three parents had expressed that they had pre-conceived thoughts about their participation in the program. They were told in the program by staff/administration and written in the Head Start Performance Standards that they would be empowered and how essential it was to participate in the program.

Parent 1 was very vocal about what the program promises and what they actually do for children and families. She shared with the group what ideas she had coming into the program.

“You know I came in already empowered due to my background and education. I had a successful life. I came into this program as a grandmother who was legally responsible for my granddaughter. I had some health issues that prevented me to continue in my profession, so I was on disability. So, I am not the typical parent coming into the program. But while in the program, I became empowered, truly empowered. After I attended the Head Start National Parent Conference that gave me the knowledge I need to challenge how the Parent Policy Committee was being ran. I was not given the proper training to really understand how important my role was, even though I knew it was. I thought that parent involvement would be a three-prong partnership with teachers, staff and parents, working together. I thought we would have formal meetings that would help with overseeing the program to having a check and balance within the program. We met with staff and administration, but it was more like you were told how they wanted it to look like or about persuading us to push their agenda.”
Parent 2 had also been very vocal and showed signs of anger in her voice when she shared with the group what she thought about parent involvement and empowerment within the program:

“Parent involvement I pictured to be parents helping to make decision on curriculum, classroom policy, budgets and sitting down with staff talking back and forth. I thought that I would be making decision together for the benefit of children. It may have started with those ideas but it was more than that. For me, especially in my second year it was a battle and being gang up on by administration. How can a parent be involved when this is how they are being treated? I thought empowerment would be to speak up, to have the courage to speak on behalf of the program. About getting the resources to become more educated and also to help other parents with services that would help promote their education. I thought it was how to be more business like within the program. Little did I know that if I spoke up that I would be belittled or stripped from whatever power I had as a parent?”

Parent 3 is a woman of little words, but does get her point across:

“I had no idea what empowerment was or looked like because this was a new word for me that I kept hearing in the program [by staff/administration]. My thought on parent involvement was that I would be active in the program and to help my children academically. It [parent involvement] was going to help me get ready for putting my grandkids in elementary school. It was more than that on the policy committee, it was negative and getting the run around.”
Transcription of Parent 1

Researcher: What did you know about Head Start when you signed your child up for the program?

Parent 1: I found out about Head Start (05-06) through a poster that was placed in my neighborhood. It was a program for low income families and I am raising my granddaughter and on a fixed income. I really did not know anything about Head Start. I have my young daughter who needed to be placed in a preschool environment and I thought this was a good opportunity.

Researcher: Parent involvement is an essential component of Head Start, what role did you have as a parent?

Parent 1: I was asked by the teacher of my school site to represent the classroom and I had told her that I did not want to do this because I had health issues but if nobody else wants to represent the classroom ah maybe I would do it. She came to me and said nobody wanted to do it so I represented our class as the representative who would go to the parent policy committee. I was not voted in until after I attend the first parent/teacher meeting. I really got a lot of information for my classroom but nothing was really explained to me. It was very hard to concentrate on what was going on. I just would vote on issues because they show you how to vote but I don’t remember who showed me. Or maybe it was a piece of paper that was handed out that explained how to vote. But there was really no training. You walk in cold
turkey not knowing anything or anyone and not knowing who belong to what site, nothing. You sit there thinking I don’t know what to do. I don’t know what to vote for. It was very intimidating. They have a panel of people sitting in front of you and I didn’t know what a chair was or a co-chair did. The chair at that time always would run in late dressed in her pajamas and slippers. It was not run officially. Nothing seemed like we were doing anything, like we were useless. That was my first year. I read up on some of the things I did not know about Head Start. I just want to tell you, they, Head Start treat parents as low class citizens with very little education. [From your experience]. From my experience, they take us and herd us together give us very little training and expect us to do these jobs. When in fact anyone with an education and with it, I... in my case I saw through what they were doing and basically it was like leading cattle to the trough. If we did not play the way they wanted us to and balance the budget the way they wanted or do a hiring that they wanted or if we have questions about hiring that did not fit into their plans they tend to hover over the top of you; insinuating that you are not smart enough. We got to let the other people that have the education do this. They have done all the hard work and all you have to do is pass this. When I did not feel confident with something I would question it and that got me elected to chair, in my second year. And then I literally studied the books. I read all the books necessary. I read
the policy committee books cover to cover, no one expected me to do that. I took this job very seriously and it all started over my daughter’s preschool which is one of the oldest and they had a water fountain that was so grungy, so dirty and so full of gunk. I mean it was solid water; the kids could not get a drink of water when they were outside. It was full of dirt, leaves and plugged up. I wanted that fixed. In the two years I tried to get that fixed one thing and it never did get fixed, no matter how hard I tried. They did all kinds of things so that is one of my experiences. You know Jane ran the show; she gave us a cheat sheet on how to run a committee meeting. That was the only way I knew how to run the meeting. I got my hands on the performance standard book and other head start books and read about what policies or how parent committees were supposed to be ran. When Jane found out she was not happy with me because I was questioning things. She did not like me questioning things and how thing ran or how thing are. We were given the challenge of hiring and we were not given training on how to hiring or sit in a hiring committee and we did not know that firing was in our thing [job description]). We would sit in on these meetings with a check list and we would check if we felt they were qualified. You know I was a nurse, I was one of the most educated persons there and I didn’t know the qualifications for someone else [interviewees]. So sitting there on interviews was exciting and deciding who you like or thought was qualified
was a head rush and getting it back to the committee to vote if they are qualified or not ……

Researcher: Clarification, are you telling me that you never received training, like, from the grantee or training from Jane since she was the parent involvement specialist.

Parent 1: Right, I did not even know about the grantee until half way through my second year in the committee. We had a representative that went to the grantee and she would report out but I did not make the connection. And Mary came out and would say a little this and that but it was a separate feeling, no connection. It was like Jane was the boss and the coordinators, not the grantee. Of course, Terry was the boss of our program but we never saw her, I mean she would run in and out of our meeting all the time. We could make appointments with her but she would only tell us calm down don’t get stress but she basically did nothing.

Researcher: Knowing that you sat on the Parent Policy Committee at your Head Start program, could you please tell about those experiences? Please include why you participated in the Policy Committee, about the trainings you’ve received, and your collaboration with administration.

Parent 1: I have had so many experiences with the policy committee and fighting the Director. I guess you call her the director, the head honcho….. Of Child Development. Of Child Development. They would not allow us to do our job and they wanted us to be the cattle. They did not want us to have a brain and
see that. They were funding things that didn’t seem right to us. They were buying language courses that didn’t have all of the properties needed to make up a complete curriculum, and spending thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars on something that the policy committee did not agree on. And yet they overrode us.

When they say parents are vital they are not speaking truthfully because they run the show; they get the people with low education in they so they can direct them to do exactly what they want. They treat them to these wonderful little learning excursions and people think that maybe some of these people have never been away on vacation so they are gifted and they are blessed. Ya know I have worked for a living my whole life, I worked hard, I was a nurse, I’m well educated. I was not going to be herded like that. But yet they pushed me to the edge where I could not go on and just had to quit because I could not fight anymore. It ruined my health, it just was so stressful that I eventually had to quit. But, in December they sent me to New York, my one and only training and that was exceptional. I found out there that we were doing it all wrong.

We were not meeting the standards. We were not doing our meetings like the way we were supposed to and we were not even told what we were supposed to be doing. We were more; we had the right to be people and stand up and say the buck stops here. You can’t keep forcing this down our throats and not giving us options. We need all the information. I mean they bring us the hiring list well we picked that one and we would have to believe that was the one
they want. And like sheep we would just do that for the first part of my second year. But after that I wanted to know more. We had an incident with comments that I overheard from pretty girls. I noticed it in meetings that Perry was very well known for his blonde bimbos even though he was married he was well known for choosing these pretty young girls in the policy committee. He talked to them and spent time with them. He never, never spoke to me. When you walked in that first day, I remembered I was chair of the policy committee at that time. Jane had been our counsel. I don’t know what they our mentor whatever she answered all our questions. Whenever she was like the guiding ruler and frown from her would make people back off from asking questions. A smile meant that you were on the right track with her and her influence on the parents who were there by this subtle intimidation, even on me.

I was the feisty one, I wasn’t going to take this shit by the time I been through the first year of pc and sat as a parent in the audience and saw what they were doing and saw ways that I could make it better. I didn’t realize until Ann came in, around the third time when I had to get my papers out for the meeting I thought she was not influencing me. She was not giving me what needed to be done. She was willing to let me lead the way it was supposed to be. That was the first time I honestly realized that we had been guided, pushed I mean prodded like cattle and herded into the trailer. Jane herded us the way she wanted us to go.
There was no empowerment, there was nothing. You got praised for little things. It was so superficial. You know the think that most of the families came to eat the snacks. They listen but it was run so poorly. I saw a grantee meeting and I was surprised on how they did it. I became president, ah Chair. I read and learn as much as I can and nobody could believe I could quote out of the Robert’s Rule guide. But it was until the new parent involvement specialist came did I learned that there was power. But make them strong and secure and without being herded and the need of politics. I did not want to trust her [Ann] because I had been under Jane’s care for a year a year and a half. My terms were coming to an end soon. And she, Ann opened my eyes with unbelievable clarity. I saw distinctly with her subtle changes like appropriate wear. Which is wonderful because one of the reasons is the president/chair before me came in with slippers and pajamas. No no to me is that quality apparel, clothes. I don’t know, it was subtle differences that we could implement ourselves. We could implement and we could see where all the cracks were. And when I started to explore the cracks, people were . . I denied hiring a person I rejected her when everyone on the interviewing committee was a good thing. Her references did not check out right and there was a question I had. The question it started a whole bunch of trouble. I did turn that client/ person down, my board supported me but they brought her back again the next meeting again trying to put her in a different place so it was a battle of wills to get the parent to work like puppets. We were puppets we were doing the budgets, the committee work
that we were just not trained at all, we were not trained. I mean I needed a book to do my opening speech and had my little hammer but with that hammer came a lot of power. But to find out that you really did not have any that you were overturned, tricked, betrayed all of that stuff is just disenchancing, disheartening and ultimately I wanted to fight and I fought until I could not fight anymore.

Researcher: Now that you have had time to reflect upon your experiences as a past or current parent of Head Start, what would you share with new families/parent coming into the program and their parent involvement to the program?

Parent 1: Just talking about Head Start makes my blood boil. I would not be the best person to recommend the program to parent ummm but for the preschool part I would say yes. The teachers are good and my daughter got a lot out of the program. I mean she still does great in school because of Head Start. I would tell them to beware of what you get yourself into because the way the committee was ran for many years is to keep parents involved but not knowledgeable. That want to keep things good for them [administration] not about what is good for families. I mean I have all kinds of stories to tell ya that would take hours to explain or describe so I don’t think I would be the best person to boast about good experiences with the parent committees.

Parent 2

Researcher: What did you know about Head Start when you signed your
child up for the program?

Parent 2: I found out about Head Start through a local paper. I was hesitate to go
down there but I knew it was free preschool for parents who were, families who
were low income for people to put their child in preschool. That what I knew
before coming in, that is all I knew.

Researcher: Parent involvement is an essential component of Head Start; what
role did you have as a parent?

Parent 2: After I got my children signed up with Head Start I went to the Sunrise
Head start and went to their parent meeting and they were talking about parent
involvement. They were talking about a room parent to represent their class. That
they would go to a bigger meeting that the main Head Start office ummm, and
nobody raised their hand so I though ok well I’ll go it could hurt. I thought that I
would just go and get some flyers and bring them back to the classroom. So I
became the representative for our Sunrise Head Start classroom. And the first
couple of meetings go to the policy meeting the bigger meetings they wanted
officers and I believe that first year I signed up and elected to be secretary for the
Head Start Policy Committee. I was involved there and I was still very shy going
in and then the following year as I got more involved with sitting on hiring
meetings with head starts teachers and directors. I started to get to know other
parents and staff members that the next year I would take on becoming the Chair
of the committee. So I had several roles.

Researcher: Why don’t you describe/explain what that first year was like since
you served two years?

Parent 2: The first year going into the meeting I thought that they were going to
give me flyers to take back to my classroom and activities those things that were
going on in within the school district or within our community. Ummmm. . It felt
a little weird, like. . It felt like . . when they were telling us about our role would
also include sitting in on meetings on hiring new employees for head start and
having a saying in the budget and the activities that go on with head start and the
food that was served and just about everything. But I thought that was kinda a
joke there is no way that they are going to let Ha-ha, parents really have a part in
that. And I didn’t feel that that was sincere and I was always hesitant about that.
Ummm at the time Jane was our head start liaison for the policy committee and
she was a staff and she was one of the coordinators for head start. She, I think she
had done it (position) for about 15 plus years or so, I think, she was there for a
long time. She seem to have things down pat, where she would just come and
deliver a message and then you know we would vote and I say vote in quotations
because I mean everybody basically always voted yes on everything because why
would we vote no I mean. It did not seem that it would make much of a
differences anyway like if we were voting on something and everyone said no I
mean we really would not . . . I really that it was going to matter anyways. It’s
the school district they are going to hire who they want or fire who they want to
or you know and apply who ever they want to. So I really did not think that any of
that was quite sincere. And that was just my own feelings ahhh on that first year.
It wasn’t, I was just there to get more involved and wanted to maybe better in my kid’s education and school district and maybe even want to venture into maybe teaching myself that I just wanted to get a grasp on how school district and how the schools work and see how I liked that.

Researcher: Knowing that you sat on the Parent Policy Committee at your Head Start program, could you please talk about those experiences? Please include why you participated in the Parent Policy Committee, about the trainings you received, collaborating with the administration, and the likes/dislikes of your time as an officer.

Parent 2: I became secretary that first year, mostly because they were going thru the, all of the officer positions in the board such as chair, co-chair, secretary ummm, grantee representative and parliamentarian. And when it came to secretary, no body really raised their hand for that position. Ummm, I thought I venture out and I thought if I raised my hand then some else would raise there hand and then we would have to vote on it. There was no way that I’m going to do it. But no one else raised their hand so I it was, it was just me for secretary that was taking notes of every policy committee. They are called minutes. That first year I did not know what I was getting myself into. Two for one. I can not really say if I really enjoyed it or not. It didn’t I was really befriend a mother who was in her second year. She did not sit on the board but she was a part of head start and a room representative, and she was Cory Manny. I was happy to meet other parents. The experience as a whole was enjoyable, I did not really . . .
Researcher: What about the trainings you received. Like for the first year?

Parent 2: The first year, I don’t really remember there being umm any kind of training, really not for anything as far as training for my role as secretary for the policy committee. They basically just brought in a laptop ummm told me to just where they had already had it set up and I would just erase the last month’s minutes and just type in the newww minutes. I asked how much detail they wanted they said just little sentences here or there, just basically the topics that were discussed. Ahhh for as far as other trainings, I know that they do like a national I forget what they call it. It was the National head start training, work whatever city.

Researcher: Was that the parent conferences?

Parent 2: Yes, that was the parent conferences. Usually it is up to the chair, the chair to go and they would vote on somebody else. And I think that the training that they receive when they would go to parent head start conferences, these national ummm I don’t really remember too much of training they receive because I wasn’t there. But I know that there were many classes umm that the parents could choose to go to or not choose to go to Ummm. Some of them dealt with food issues, education field, different ways to help children who are struggling, ummm different ways that you could give your child positive feedback and ummm confidence. Umm some people took classes on how to spend family time together. Just those were some of the things but I didn’t, I did not go and the truth the information that was brought back to me. People would
just run off the pamphlets what they received and I did not thing that that was truly beneficial. I didn’t, I was not there, and I don’t know everybody’s out take comes back with a different take on things. But there was really not training across the board.

Researcher: So what about your trainings as an officer?

Parent 2: Not that I truly remember ahhhh it is possible that that first year they had training but I couldn’t make it to it but they basically ahhhh. I know the chair that first year; she would have a script see were they at that front table (officers table) that Jane (parent involvement specialist for 12 yrs.) made up and they would basically read off of the agenda and what wasn’t known that first year by the chair, Jane would interject and she would be standing in the back of the room and she would just say, this is why we are doing this or now we are going to go on to this or is there any yeas or nays. Like for voting or whatever it was. She kinda sat in the back ahhh because she did it for so many years, she would just interject, and that was her way of coaching or something. We would have the officers meeting once a month to go over what was going to be on the agenda for the main Policy Committee meeting, again it would be like Jane would come in and she would already have the agenda set and did we agree. Umm ok like free snack time basically and there were times when different officers would ask questions umm about how they handled there roles as chair or co chair or secretary but I don’t really remember getting any training, training for my role at least [secretary].
Researcher: What about trainings in hiring/interviewing process, did you get training in those areas?

Parent 2: I think there was suppose to be training in those areas umm but I don’t remember receiving training in that process. Umm, I think they said that when you go into the room they will explain it to you. Like if you were sitting on ah hiring interview.

Researcher: Well how did that process go?

Parent 2: They would appoint a time where the parent would volunteer to go in with coordinators and directors of Head Start and other Head Start teachers to sit in on an interview for whatever position whether it is a teacher assistant or teacher position or whatever the different roles there were. You go in on there [interview room] and they give you a sheet, if there were 5 candidates being interviewed then you were given 5 sheets for each candidate and its like a scoring sheet. And it gave like, we would go around the table they have a sheet of questions and we take turn asking the candidate question. We would then score that person um on the sheet we had in front of us and then at the end of the interviews when we were done with the candidates the director, coordinators, teachers, and the parent who were involved um would discuss who they felt was best suited for the position, why and why not. Umm, one I first was starting doing it I would I did not know how to necessarily score it; it wasn’t explained to me how to score it. It was just what you feel you know just put it you know if there were 5 candidates just put 1,2,3,4,5 and rank them and put down who you like the best,
who was best suited. And when the discussion part would come up umm the first few times that I had done interviews I really did not say too much because I felt that it was not really going to matter. I couldn’t as a parent, I could tell the district employees that how who to hire umm, so I would say I like this person but majority rules so they would like someone else and that is just how that process went. And when they found someone they would umm, it would go to the policy committee council, committee meeting and they would say umm Dee sat on this interview for this person and this position and she gives her recommendation to the committee and this is the best qualified and then they would take a vote on it, ya or nay or they could abstain even. Umm, I don’t think that when we came back to the policy committee we couldn’t give the rest of the committee any of the information why we thought this person was qualified or maybe why we felt that this person was not qualified but this was the majority vote among the other coordinators, director and teachers. So I never sat on a firing, umm anything like that only on the hiring process.

Researcher: Did anyone every sit on a firing or resignation

Parent 2: No

Researcher: Did anyone every approve a resignation

Parent 1: Yeah, think we have, yeah. I think a resignation was brought yeah, yeah, brought in the second year. But we were not allow to hear why?

Researcher: What about the collaboration with the administration?

Parent 2: It was all right. As far as you know some of the teachers were very nice
and some of the administrators such as the coordinators (she gives the names of director and coordinators] they weren’t so fantastic. Ha Ha! They were difficult to work with they had I already had a feeling that they had in mind how they were going to do things, who they were going to hire, what steps they were going to take umm just across the boards. That was their job and that what was they were actually hired to do and as a parent it was just my job to go along with them, and when questions were asked and we went with them it would kind of you know they would just pat us on the back and say “oh yea, you know we will look into that but your gut you know that this is not going to happen that it, it is what it is. You know that they . . . . . . are blowing smoke up your ass, I guess. Haha, I mean that’s ahh that’s not the classist way to put it but that’s how I felt. I didn’t always feel that there was a good working relationship with coordinators and parents. I don’t think that they collaborated very well even though I think that administration would like to think that they were. But coming from the parent’s angle I don’t think a lot of parents felt that way.

Researcher: You had a liaison who was assigned to the parents and how did that go? [relationship]

Parent 2: First, year our liaison was Jane, she as I had said before she had been there for many years. She just knew how to run the ship umm she kept it to as little of questions as possible. Just about everything. Umm I really did not get to know her that well the first year. I was kind of quiet and reserved and I left that to parents who had been there you know a few years more than I had been there, to
ask questions or get more involved with her. Umm, in a way, I guess you could say that working with her was a bit of a manipulation because she had a way of with a smile on her face acting all friendly she really cares and she wants to be your friend she wants to know you. She took that and she build kinda like a faux or fake relationship with parents so that way it made her job easier to direct us so that we . . . . the administrators probably told her they would like us to go if that makes sense. She had a way to make it seem “Okie dookie”, hey and very passive and that she says that this is your guy’s idea; this is your guys vote. This is true to form you know, it’s your committee and you have an absolutely say so and then she would, you can tell she would kinda of direct us towards what administration would want and that would seem like it what we really wanted and that it was really our decision too. I had debated coming back or not coming back next that next year. The reasons I came back was that our site was umm for awhile did not have a parent representative and at the very least I would like to come back so that we could get information transferred from the policy committee meetings to our smaller sites at the Sunrise Head Start and to try to get parents more parents involved at a site level and as a whole Head Start level. By the end of that first year we were told that Jean would be retiring and she would not be coming back. And that they would be looking for aaa new parent liaison for the policy committee. There were some questions that came to arise umm actually about budgets. You know every month we would get budget reports tell us what was going on across the board at Head Start. We got one for our individual
classrooms and then we would get one for all of Head Start where monies were, allocate for this or whatever umm. The Chair actually realized something was being said and presented in the budget that didn’t really make a lot of sense to parents and I think towards the end we were ahh questioning Jane and asking her questions and she would put off like ohh its fine, ohh its . . . I forgot her wording because it was a while ago. But she just made it seemed like its ok and she come up with some sort of you know grand excuse to try to get us off her back, I guess. But I didn’t, what really brought me back was that I was realizing more or what The Chair was saying and what she brought up because I wasn’t you know that involved in the budget reports. I would look at it and it would go fast [the presentation from the account clerk] Craig, you really don’t have time to really look at those types of things. As the Chair would go home and look, we would talk and start to discuss and see things it just made us want to get more involved to try to change things. But it also made me not want to be involved.

Researcher: As an officer, you would go back to your representatives and explain the budget reports is that correct or not correct?

Parent 2: Yes, are you talking about . . . .I forget we did have someone on our policy committee board who was involved to go to budget meetings with administrators and Craig, the accountant for Head Start. They would be able to see and hear more in depth to where the budget was going. Why certain money was put in places. Why certain monies were cut umm just everything. Then they would just come back to the main policy committee meeting. They would give us
the papers. [Craig] But they would not go into depth. This is how much Head
Start started off this year this is what we spent so far this is what has been
allocated for next year. You know just the basic reports and then we would all just
vote on it right there and then. We [committee] would approve or not approve the
budget. We were always asked, when it came to the budget to approve it without
being able to, we are taking the word of the parent who sat in on those meetings.
We were just taking her word that it was fine. Then we would take a vote and
pass. . . to tell you the truth to this day even in the monthly policy committee
meetings I don’t understand the whole voting on it to approve it or not approve it
anyways because we it was from the month before and we could not necessarily
change it to the previous . . .

Researcher: Do you know what training that parent received for the budget?

Parent 2: No I don’t know

Researcher: Was it one parent?

Parent 2: Yes, one parent. Wait, wait let me take that back there was one parent

 who went to the budget meetings but there was a subcommittee like a budget
committee. And other parents could sign up for this thing if they wanted to, I
don’t necessarily know if that many more parents would attend those meetings.

Researcher: So those parents who were on the budget subcommittee did they
every have the accountant give an introductory training on how to read a budget
report?

Parent 2: No
Researcher: Or what areas can you vote on or do you vote on the whole budget?

You have to know what you’re voting on.

Parent 2: Right, that is where my confusion was on because I did not know.

There was a meeting that I did go to where we went over the budget and they went over it line for line. But it was not training, like this is how you read a budget. Because a lot of times they would be on a line and I would ask them to tell me where on the budget they were. We did have some training at grantee but it was only if we wanted to go there.

Researcher: Ok let move on to the next question. Now that you have had time to reflect upon your experiences as a past or current parent of Head Start, what would you share with new families/parents coming into the program and their parent involvement to the program?

Parent 2: I don’t know how I feel mixed about this. If they want to get involved, that of course they could. If they do they would need to have a passion and they would to research out what was being told to them. Because you are not always told the truth but how would you know unless you ask questions to staff. And then you would need to research out what they are telling you. Otherwise, if you don’t mind wasting your time because I feel like I wasted a lot of my time. Make sure you do your research because sometimes it is not what it supposed to be. It can be an up hill battle with administration. It just can go both ways, but I would lean toward telling parents not to waste their time. Because you need support from the parents on the committee and from staff and it is a big responsibility. I think
that is all I would tell them unless that asked for more reasons.

Parent 3

Researcher: What did you know about Head Start when you signed your child up for the program?

Parent 3: I did not know anything about it. I just new that there was a preschool and that I could drop him off for a few hours, I just heard it from hear say, word of mouth, I did not have any formal information on it.

Researcher: Parent involvement is an essential component of Head Start; what role did you have as a parent?

Parent 3: My grandson was in class [preschool] and the teacher needed somebody so I was voted to be the classroom representative and that took me to the policy committee. As a parent with head start I was the class room rep. and that is how it started for my first year. I did another year and I skipped a year. Now I am here again with the program. As a class a classroom rep I would go to the Policy Committee meetings and getting information from there and bringing it back to the classroom things that I thought that they [parents] would be interested in.

Researcher: Knowing that you sat on the Parent Policy Committee at your Head Start program, could you please talk about those experiences? Please include why you participated in the Parent Policy Committee, about the trainings you received, collaborating with the administration, and the likes/dislikes of your time as an officer.

Parent 3: Being a part of the program at first . . . I did not really know anything
about it. But I was curious so I went to a couple of meetings and umm I felt that I wanted to quit but I felt like it, I felt umm people were looking at and talking to me like I did not know what I was talking about, I was lower than them [the staff of head start]. Not actually the parents. The parents made me feel welcome, lot of them felt the say way that I did and but they, lot of the staff they talked down to you. Some of the staff…. I didn’t think that some of the staff they talked down to you and I did not think they had the right to talk down to me because they were no better than me. But I had people tell me to stick with it stick with and I stuck it out. I found it interesting and I found out a lot of things that parents did not know that staff knew but the parents didn’t know. But when I tried to say some things about it my first year I was told that I was basically [by you] that things should be this way or that way explaining to me better. My second year, I came back because like so I can fight the system. I started to learn thing about how they [policy committee] should be ran and it still was not being ran. So I could bring up of these questions so to get a better answer but lot some of the parents were gone so I like I was more on my own that second year. This year I came back and I don’t like it at all. It basically is new parents and the staff is scared and they tell you just what they want you to know and when I ask questions I am given an answer but not the right answer I am looking for. When I ask them to explain it I get the run around and they are still putting me off.

[Training] The first year, not knowing anything about it was interesting because we went over the by-laws, Robert Rule book and any questions we it was
explained better to me. In the trainings of the officers, meeting about how to make a motions and things, it was explained good. The second year, I kind of started fading off what was give was the basic like this is what your basic duty is as an officer. Now this is my third year of training ah we did not have training. It was put on the board (wipe board) who wants to be the chairperson and they would just go over it the paper right here. The duties of the chairperson is . . . and that is it (pointing) and that is basically the training. And this year, the training, there really was no training. They are trying to tell me that we had training and I said where was I? Because I haven’t missed any meetings. Basically we did not have trainings. When the federal review came the chairperson, when he asked that question [tell me the trainings you PPC have received] she said oh yea we had training on this and this and that, and while the federal reviewers, and she said how we went through trainings and how we do this. I asked do you know what day that is because I don’t remember missing any meetings and I uh I don’t remember any trainings. And she just looked at me and just waved me off to be quiet. I don’t know I must of missed that training [hahaha]. The federal; review guy heard me ah he had to of heard me he was seating right next to me. So this year, ahhh, I would not recommend it to anyone to go, I would not recommend anyone to go to the policy committee because I don’t agree with it this year. My first year it was fine, I liked it. The first year Ann was working there and I liked working with her [you] because you explained things to me if I did not understand them, you answered me without putting me down or looking at me dumb or ignorant or
something in that category. The first year, ah I can’t remember that lady’s name. 
let's the big white lady who did not have all her credential and stuff and she was a 
friend of a friend and got in there anyway. Not Vicky but she was rude to me too. 
[ I helped named a staff that she could possibly be talking about and she said that 
was the person] Dory she was one person who looked down on you and she 
would talk to me like that and like I was a child you know and she was not any 
better than me. And umm the director she tries to word things to make you feel 
better about your question but she really does not answer your question. She’ll 
make it seem like she just puts a lot of words out there and your supposed to I 
guess try to find the answer and I guess that sounds right. When I went to her and 
asked questions I wanted her to be more precise and she would not do that she 
would go around the bush about it. The second year was kinda hard because staff 
was changing and June [new pi specialist] came on and I tried to help June as 
much as I could about how we did things, like maybe if she did things this way it 
would be easier than doing it this way, without really telling her what to do. But 
she no training. It was her job and I did not want to tell her how to do her job but 
I could suggest things. The staff was getting a little attitude towards me because I 
was there and I came back again [second year]. This year I really have not worked 
with the staff you know, I talked with Janet on limited things but I don’t go out of 
my way anymore. Because the whole thing is not what I was looking for.
Researcher: Now that you have had time to reflect upon your experiences as a past or current parent of Head Start, what would you share with new families/parents coming into the program and their parent involvement to the program?

Parent 3: Umm, I don’t know if I would suggest anything to people who want to come in because I don’t like the way it’s ran now. Ah, I have have still some good thoughts about Head Start and the Policy Committee. I would umm tell new parents to be involved as much as they can in their child’s life and it’s important to them. And, I found out a lot of things and it is interesting and don’t be afraid to speak up. That was my problem, I didn’t say anything and I was coached to speak, say it, come out with it. New parents you need to ask these questions to find out and if you don’t like the answer keep looking. I thing a lot of parents are going to ask questions because they don’t know and they are relying on other people to give you the answer and they may look upon you like your are ignorant and uneducated, like that. And I felt that way when I first started and I did not want to ask because if it is a easy question they are going to say that your nutty and I was a new parent and I did not know for a long time and the parent next to me she did not say anything for a long time.

Focus Group Meeting

Researcher: If you could share your thoughts with the district administrators regarding your experiences in the Head Start program what would you tell them?

Parent 1: States her name and says I don’t care if you use my name. I would
dearly like to go after them or expose them for the rats they are. Umm, it is . . . .

I am sitting here at a table four years after I was in the program and just saying things is just raising my heat. That is what started it in the first place, I was the first parent to jump in and jump out and scream and yell and get things done and they did not like me. So Head Start is an abuse of funds [her program] and it is not being supervised or used appropriately It is used as a family, not family exactly, yes it’s a family of people who is in charge, not necessarily the people who supposed to be in charged. It is a selected few that run everything including secretaries (V) that are in charge and doing things that the state people that are paid for are getting fired for she is causing that. She is . . . its run by imbeciles.

Researcher: [I reiterate the question to keep parent 1 on track].

I would tell them in the sweetest words how f up this program is. That they know how to hide . . . school….these people know how to hide themselves and not let anyone get to speak to the people (federal reviewers) who come to check on the head start program. They keep the parents uninformed, untrained, and malleable so they can control their actions and get the resources they need without following the rules.

Parent 2: I think that they should put a hold on the Head Start program and somebody needs to get someone [outside consultant] to review the entire program and how they funds and what the program is really about and get back to the roots of what this program was supposed to be based on helping children with their education and their readiness for their elementary years the
empowerment of parents. They are not doing that completely their funds are
being misused [interjection from parent 1-misappropriated] and they are not
being allocated in the appropriate ways and every rule and by-law are not being
followed. I think that when they have that [problems] that they than need to
really come in and review that and get back to the basic core. They really
need to review the people who are running the program, like the director
the coordinators and upper management and even the school district that
oversees Head Start. Because I feel that they are flushing . . . flushing the
money given to run Head Start really because things are not being run the
way they are supposed to be done and they need to get back to those things.
Because I believe if they go back and put it on hold and review the hold
program as a whole and then go back and start a new. That that program
will can be successful in every way.

Parent 3: Who would who would come because grantee they try and if you
are talking about the federal reviewers they [admin] kinda school us on
what to say when the federal reviewers come. Because they [admin] had to
leave the room and us [committee officers] were in there and when I tried
to tell my interviewer, A.B. from the federal review ahh well I said we did
not get training as an officer and I was stopped by the chairperson. She said
yes we was yes we was and we did this, this and that. Yes that was during
the election [for all representatives at the 1st committee meeting explaining
positions up for vote a general job responsibilities] that’s not a training, so
I told A.B. that she is crazy we did not have it that way and I told him that they basically they [admin] gave us a piece of paper with questions they may asked. But since they could not stay in the interview with the chairperson we have known she handles it [policy committee] like a PTA. So if you are asking them to be look on, who would that be?

Parent 2: Say that you follow, ah you just go over the federal reviewer’s head, start writing letters to people in your state like the governor you know you can even write to the President of the United States and tell him this is how the bylaws and standards are written and this is on things are being ran and they don’t coincide, they don’t exist together[(meet the standards/bylaws] one goes off in one direction and the other out in Mars [that decisions/policy is inconsistent and not true to the main tenets of the program] and that is how far a part they are. I know that when the federal reviewers come they are only going to ask certain questions, Head Start management like directors and coordinators they prep you on what they want you to say.

Parent 3: That is why Kay [coordinator] . . . .

Parent 2: And if they know that you are going to say something out of line they will not allow you to attend. That is what they did to me and as the chair I was supposed to be talking to those federal reviewers, and I did not have a chance to say those sorts of things. So if you send a letter with the information going to the head of the federal review when they are not
there. They [federal reviewer] should have like a secret shopper, a mystery shopper who comes in and look at those programs. Those things need to be done and that should be part of the process.

Parent 1: We need ahh a mystery parent in each district. One mystery parent who would put their child into the Head Start and go thru what we have gone thru and see how this is run will prove beyond a shadow of a doubt what we’re saying.

Parent 3: Ok when I started I did not want to stay because I did not like the way it was ran and I did not like how they were talking down to me and that was Dee [coordinator] and Vicky [staff] from Parent Ambassadors. And then I did not want to stay because I felt stupid because a lot of things I did not understand especially the budget because I not good with money. A lot of things I did not understand and I did not really want to ask because the staff would just talk to me like I was dumb. They would just tell me things and I was supposed to just go with it. That was about 3 years ago but now it is not run anything like it suppose to. The meetings are not run right. The question you ask they still run around in circles but being this is my last year here I learned that I can come up and say this and that and they still don’t give you the correct answer. But I still put the question out there. A lot of parents won’t do that because they don’t want to look stupid.

Parent 2: Even when you ask those questions and they don’t give you the
direct answers you got their wheels spinning that you are a smart enough
parent to figure those things out by asking those questions.

Parent 3: These things they do not like [asking questions] because I have
been threatened with termination several times this year and I got to the
point that I said if you don’t want me here terminate me then.

Parent 2: Threaten, really threaten.

Parent 3: Threaten, like telling me that I have too many unexcused
absences this and that.

Parent 2: That is considered an unexcused absence?

Parent 3: So that was 2 unexcused absences and I usually don’t miss any
meetings but this year it is ran so bad I really don’t care.

Parents 1 and 2: Those are not unexcused absences!

Parent 3: Because nothing is ran or taught like it was when Ann was the
lead it has all fallen apart. When I tried to tell them why doesn’t the
executive board go over to grantees [policy council] maybe for they don’t
have to stay for the whole thing and maybe they can take back what they
saw back to the committee and do . . . run the committee a little like
grantee because it is not run like it supposed to be. Like you are not suppose
to use your cell phones and texting at the meeting but they are sitting next
to me texting away. The chair and the person sitting next to her are just
talking away, side barring. There is no meeting there everybody just get
together there because they need us there for our vote.
Parents 1 and 2: At the pc meeting. Yea that’s about right.

Parent 3: You know that there is an agenda, we don’t follow the agenda, we have people way down here in action items come in way up in here in consent items they don’t say we will be going out of order on the agenda. They just say ok and they just start talking. We don’t vote like I Parent 3 would like to make a motion on this . . . . . We don’t do that. The chair just says ok if you all approve ok we approved it. So we just raise our hands like puppets you know and then we started the pc in October then why are we now having ethical conduct training in March? It is very frustrating when we are doing thing a certain way like the way Ann trained us and I stayed a little longer and stayed and stayed and I am still there. But I want to try to tell the new parents I am trying to voice myself and asking why this or why that you know so that the new parents know that this is what they have to do when they are in pc.

Follow up question from researcher: “What did you think empowerment and parent involvement looked like before you participated in the program?

Parent 2: Parent involvement I pictured to be parents helping to make decision on curriculum, classroom policy, budgets and sitting down with staff talking back and forth. I thought that I would be making decision together for the benefit of children. I thought that empowerment would be to speak up, to have the courage to speak on behalf of the program. About
getting the resources to become more educated and also to help other parents with services that would help promote their education. I thought it was how to be more business like within the program. I don’t think that it is empowering when the administration talk crap about your personal life and try to make you look like your incompetent. That is why I resigned.

Parent 1: You know I came in already empowered due to my background and education. I had a successful life. I came into this program as a grandmother who was legally responsible for my granddaughter. I had some health issues that prevented me to continue in my profession, so I was on disability. So, I am not the typical parent coming into the program. But while in the program I became empowered, truly empowered after I attended the Head Start National Parent conference that gave me the knowledge I need to challenge how the Parent Policy Committee was being ran. I was not given the proper training to really understand how important my role was, even though I knew it was. I thought that parent involvement would be a three prong partnership with teachers, staff and parents, working together. I thought we would have formal meetings that would help with overseeing the program to having a check and balance within the program. We meet with staff and administration but it was more like you were told how they wanted it to look like or about persuading us to push their agenda.

Parent 3: I had no idea what empowerment was or looked like because this
was a new word for me that I kept hearing in the program. My thought on parent involvement was that I would be active in the program and to help my children academically. It was going to help me get ready for putting my grandkids in elementary school. It was more than that on the policy committee, it was negative and getting the run around.

Discussion

In this chapter, the interviews and focus group meeting results have been analyzed to find significant themes that would explain how the parents in this Head Start Parent Policy Committee experienced parent involvement. Not just parent involvement, but did parents develop a partnership that promoted authentic parent involvement, collaboration, and decision-making skills that would assist with approving or disapproving policies and procedures. In addition, did these parents obtain a sense of empowerment throughout this partnership? This is a noteworthy question because the Head Start philosophy states that parents will be empowered due to their participation in the program. As a researcher of this study, I will discuss the results of the parents’ answers, in addition to insight from my perspective as a staff member that had access to the Parent Policy Committee within this program.

Overall, the parents had many emotions tied into their responses regarding their involvement with the Head Start program, and their time participating on the Parent Policy Committee. Seven significant themes emerged by all three parents in this study. Looking at these themes, it is evident that all three of the parents did not have a positive working partnership with administrators and staff of this Head Start program. After
analyzing each theme, the parents spoke and shared examples of intimations and lack of respect they encountered due to their questioning of program procedures, policies, and/or from a lack of respect from staff and administrators. I had observed parents being intimidated first hand. Staff, but mostly administrators, really saw parents as a figure head for the program. In addition, it was said to me that the parents were not sophisticated enough to made policy decisions. My role was to represent the point of view from administrator’s agenda, thereby enforcing the rubberstamp perspective.

Parents spoke about a lack of training. Parents received training that was insufficient for them to do their job properly. I received very little training myself regarding how to assist parents, and the Parent Policy Committee. Some of the training was given in the contexts of need to train as we go or when necessary. This usually meant at the last minute, for documentation sake or when a parent(s) demanded it. This was evident when parent 1 shared that while attending a national conference, she signed up for a workshop explaining how the policy committee is an official working committee. With this knowledge in her hand, she was able to shake up what one call the “status quo”. I can attest to this empowerment because I too attended a similar conference, and it opened my eyes to what was or was not being addressed within the program.

Hence, this is a good segue to the themes of empowerment and parent involvement in the Head Start program; according to the parents who sat on the Parent Policy Committee. Two of the parents came into Head Start with their understanding of what empowerment is, speaking about having knowledge and information that assist carrying out decisions regarding assisting with policies and procedures regarding children and
families of the program. All three parents had a view of what parent involvement and their contribution as an involved parent in the program was going to look like. The telling thread to this theme was that parents’ expectations and view of the program was hopeful until they experienced the politics of Head Start.

Summary

This study was designed to establish whether or not parents who participate in the Head Start program as representatives and/or officers of the Parent Policy Committee are empowered, by participating in authentic parent involvement activities that support skills, provide knowledge, collaboration, and share decision-making opportunities that embrace the philosophy of the Head Start program. In order to provide data that will determine the scope of parent involvement within this program, the follow questions were raised:

- What did you know about Head Start when you signed your child up for the program?
- Parent involvement is an essential component of Head Start; what role did you have as a parent?
- Knowing that you sat on the Parent Policy Committee at your Head Start program, could you please tell about those experiences? Please include why you participated in the Parent Policy Committee, about the trainings you received, collaborating with the administration, and the likes/dislikes of your time as an officer.
• Now that you have had time to reflect about your experiences as a past or current parent of Head Start, what would you share with new families/parents coming into the program and their parent involvement to the program?

• If you could share your thoughts to the school district administrators regarding your experiences in the Head Start program, what would you tell them?

Chapter two provided the literature and research supporting this study. Chapter three outlined the methodology of this study, which included the subjects, the design of the study, and the analysis of the data. Chapter 4 produced the results of this study providing data documenting parent involvement in the Head Start program from parents who participated on the Parent Policy Committee.

The rationale behind this study was to take a look at the levels of parent involvement within the Head Start program, but focusing on shared-decision/governance. The analysis of the interviews, including input from the focus group meeting produced results that indicated concern and perplexity on the delivery and implementation of policy and procedures within the component of parent involvement collaboration and/or activities. Furthering the need to investigate and document the various layers of parent involvement beginning at the preschool level and more to the point the Head Start Program. As was stated in the article *The Challenge of Parent Involvement Research* (Baker and Soden, 1998), a major source of confusion is the lack of scientific rigor in the research informing practice and policy. Because of this, less is known about parent involvement than commonly is assumed.
Conclusion

After reviewing the results of the interviews, focus group meeting, and direct observations of the researcher, adequate data is available to effectively address the research questions in this study. The perceptions of the parents and the researcher regarding parent involvement focusing in on governance with the Head Start program will provide the evidence that will address empowerment, authentic parent involvement and decision-making in policy and procedure. The data visibly indicates that the parents who served on the Parent Policy Committee had many concerns and questions and provided many examples of inconsistencies about how the Head Start program needed improvement in the program’s implementation.

Parents had expressed many concerns regarding how monitoring of the program was not being properly documented. This concern was seen at the delegate and grantee level. As the researcher and staff of this Head Start program, I had first-hand knowledge regarding the tension, power struggle and lack of respect parents experienced. Parents who were officers in Parent Policy Committee were those parents who had to endure the many power play tactics of administrators and staff. Parents were talked down to, were given the runaround, or chastised for asking for proof, documentation or further explanation on issues of concern. In the final report, Creating A 21st Century Head Start (1993) from the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion, the findings state that many management practices at the local level need to be strengthened (Pt. 1, p. 11).
Some staff and teachers had disdain for parents who were in this program. Comments regarding the parent’s alleged lack of education, how they dressed, their low economic status, or how they did not speak English were some of the insults or side comments whispered within the office and classrooms of this program. Sharma (2005) states, “due to the lack of understanding of ethnic, racial, social, and linguistic diversity students, teacher can engage themselves consciously or unconsciously in “mis-education practices” (p. 53). “Parent involvement is a key component of school success. In order to facilitate such parent involvement, particularly in low-income families, early childhood practitioners must understand the challenges that parents face and be equipped with strategies to overcome these challenges” (Hallam, Buell & Ridgley, 2003, p. 116).

I would like give some background on how this program had a lack of sensitivity regarding how they addressed diversity and poverty. I was one of less than ten Hispanics employed by the school district and there were fewer African-American staff. On a daily basis comments from staff, teachers, coordinators and the director could be heard. For example; we don’t want this parent to sit in on the interview process because she has dental problems or what do this parents what again are they just here to bitch. Bartolome (2009), in her article Beyond the Methods Fetish, quotes Paulo Freire (1987): “Schools reflect both the positive and negative aspects of society. Thus, the unequal power relations among various social and cultural groups at the societal level are usually reproduced at school and classroom level, unless concerted efforts are made to prevent their reproduction” (pp. 341-342).
I transitioned into the Parent Involvement Specialist position after the former retired from the school district. Parents asked for additional training in order to have officers fulfill their responsibilities in shared governance. Parents did not receive formal training on how to participate on an interview panel and had never been involved with assisting on screening employment applications. There was no formal training on how to read a budget report, no information regarding how parent participation at the classroom level produced income for the program, nor was there any training on how to effectively run a public committee meeting. What parents did receive as “training” would be on a need to know basis, i.e.: informational sessions. For example, at the beginning of the year officer election, the usual introduction of officer responsibilities occurred prior to voting. In the case of a federal review year, elaborate, ongoing trainings were provided in order to prepare parents for potential questions that would be posed to them during the monitored year. One of the parent’s suggestions was to have an outside consultant evaluate the program and freeze funds if the program did not run according to the premise or program roots. In addition, parents asked to have a consultant to spend time observing how staff and administrators work and/or collaborate with parents who are in governance.

Another issue that was brought up was that parents are not given written documentation on the outcome of the federal review. Since parents are interviewed by federal reviewers, it is only reasonable to be provided with written documentation of the review findings. Instead, parents are given a verbal overview of a sentence or two by management and/or director regarding the finds of the program. However, parents feel that they should see how every area was rated since this is part of the shared governance
process. For example, the case of “Parent 2,” who was not allowed to speak with federal reviewers because management and director knew that she had been vocal and insistent on following protocol and/or holding management accountable for sidestepping complaints, inquiries, and concerns that came up throughout the year she held the position of Chair. These complaints and concerns regarding how this program was implemented were not investigated within the program by the grantee. This type of power play had not been cited as a management problem. “Head Start cannot be improved without an honest appreciation of its weaknesses (and strengths), followed by a no-holds-barred inquiry into how it can be improved” (Besharov, 2005, p. 2).

It is evident that parents who participated in the interview and focus group meeting had many experiences and concerns regarding the Head Start program within their school district. There were other complaints and concerns that were not included in the analysis of this study; however, it is noteworthy to document that this particular Head Start program needs an independent review of how all services are provided. It is equally important to document and review the process of how this school district collaborates with the program which has specific policies and procedures that must be adhered to in order to receive funding.

One parent offered a suggestion regarding the obtaining of honest documentation of the Head Start experience would be if the federal government or another outside agency to send in a “Secret Shopper” to review the program in action. Families’ lives are dependent on empowerment, academic success for their children, and resources to guide them to transitions toward a more self-sufficient role in society.
In conclusion, it is important to look at the statement of the problem that leads the way for this study.

1. Pertaining to Head Start, what does empowerment for parents mean?

2. Do parents who participate in the Head Start program develop a partnership that promotes authentic parent involvement, collaboration, and decision-making skills that assist with approving or disapproving policies and procedures?

Parents who participated in this California Head Start program were not empowered, by their own admission, and by the parameters of the definition of empowerment. Collaboration, authentic parent involvement and shared governance were not fully rendered. What was clearly documented was the power struggle between administrators and parents within the Parent Policy Committee. “Indeed, low-income (bicultural) parents quickly become attuned to their low power status when they are caught in a process of actively advocating for their children’s educational rights only to be neutralized and dismissed by school personnel” (Olivos, p.70). This power struggle has a history, but to what extend is unknown.

Administrators, and to a degree, the “school district,” has not accepted their Head Start program to be defined by the policies and procedures of Head Start Performance Standards. NCLB Parent Involvement guidance states that “title I Local Education Agencies (LEA) must, to the extent feasible and appropriate, coordinate and integrate Title I parent involvement strategies and activities with parent involvement strategies under other programs such as Head Start and State preschool programs” [Section
1118(a)(2) (D) and 1118(e)(4), ESEA.] (No Child Left Behind, 2004, Parent Involvement Title 1, Part A). Child Trends Research Brief addresses how to help communities get children ready for schools and how schools can get ready for children. In identifying school readiness the National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP) speaks to having strong leadership involving individuals who have a clear agenda and the authority to make decisions, in addition to family [parent involvement] and community support.

This social service program was designed to promote academic preparedness and provide comprehensive services in a two generational delivery system. The perceptions of the parents clearly indicate that the original premise of the program to provide a head start to children and families who live in poverty has fallen of the mark within this school district. For that reason,” Head Start is far from perfect, and the reality has often not measured up to the possibility” (Zigler & Muenchow, p. 1).
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Head Start Training Module

Preface

The individual members of governing bodies for Head Start agencies may be volunteers or may be elected. They may have oversight responsibilities for a number of projects, programs, and priorities. Head Start may be one of many competing programs that beckons the attention of the governing body. Governing bodies must understand what each program under their jurisdiction expects of them. To clarify these responsibilities, the Head Start Program Performance Standards specify key tasks that members of Head Start governing bodies must perform. Managing these tasks for Head Start as well as additional programs requires creative leadership and a clear division of responsibilities between staff and the governing body.

In Head Start agencies, the governing body shares key decision-making activities with the Policy Council or Policy Committee. This concept of shared decision-making is unique to Head Start and is based on the assumption that the governing body is making key decisions about the agency and program and can, therefore, share some of these responsibilities. Small agencies that have Head Start as the central or major program may find it easier to share decision-making with the policy group. However, large entities that operate numerous programs—with Head Start as a relatively small part may find it more challenging to integrate decision-making into various levels of the organization.

To fulfill the Head Start governance mandates, including shared approval by both the governing body and the policy group, it is important to develop relationships and build bridges among all the decision-makers. This includes the policy group, the administrators, and the members of the governing body. Communication lines must be open and actively support partnerships among administrators, the policy group, and the governing body.

Fostering Program Governance is a training tool to help members of Head Start governing bodies, policy groups, Agency directors, and Head Start and Early Head Start directors understand their responsibilities in a Head Start environment that emphasizes shared decision-making.
Introduction

All of the discussion about governance focuses on the general responsibilities of agencies engaged in the delivery of Head Start services at the community level.

Outcomes After completing this training, participants will be able to achieve the following outcomes:

* Describe the functions of governance.
* Define the relationship between the Head Start policy group and the governing body and the relationships among the governing body, policy group, and management staff.
* Assess the status of governance in their own organization.
* Examine how shared decision-making with the policy group is conducted in their organization.

The Guide is written for governing bodies of Head Start grantees and delegate agencies. It is also appropriate for policy groups (Policy Councils or Policy Committees), Executive directors, and Head Start and Early Head Start directors who provide support to and are participating in the governance process.

Performance Standards The Head Start Program Performance Standards emphasize the need for governing bodies to:

* Develop, review, and approve or disapprove policies and procedures in partnership with the policy group.
* Design written policies that define the roles and responsibilities of governing body members and inform them of the management procedures and functions necessary to implement a high-quality program.
* Ensure that appropriate internal controls are in place to safeguard federal funds in accordance with Head Start regulations.
* Work with policy groups to establish written procedures for shared decision-making and for jointly resolving internal disputes including impasse procedures between the governing body and the policy group.
Module 1

Understanding the Role of the Governing Body

After completing this module, participants will be able to:

* Identify the basic responsibilities of the governing body.

* Use the documents and instruments that create and maintain effective governing bodies.

* Relate the responsibilities of governance to the requirements in the Head Start Program Performance Standards.

* Governing bodies must be clear about their obligation to represent the communities they serve as well as their responsibility as Head Start grantees to guide a quality program that effectively serves children and families.

* A governing body must understand the organizational mandates, legal documents, and other instruments that created the organization, and the processes and practices required to conform to them.

* In the world of nonprofit and public agencies, service to the public is not a strategy but an end in itself. This underscores the need to have internal systems that ensure accountability, measure the effectiveness of programs, and determine whether the activities of the organization and its programs are geared toward the people who are eligible for its services.

* The Head Start Program Performance Standards clearly state the roles, functions, and responsibilities of governing bodies and policy groups in relation to the Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Effective governing bodies understand their own responsibilities as well as the responsibilities of the policy group, the Head Start and Early Head Start program directors, and the Agency director.

Background Information

The Constituency

Major Responsibilities

Governance is the tool that empowered groups use to create and shape their future. Governing bodies provide the support and direction that chart the course to that envisioned future. The governing body of a Head Start organization is responsible for the stewardship—the legal and fiduciary oversight—of the organization. The empowered governing body exists on behalf of persons who are not seated at the governance table. The governing body represents the children and families that Head Start serves, the community and other stakeholders. (The mission of a particular Head Start organization may include serving constituencies other than Head Start-eligible families.)

Often, governing body members are appointed because they provide specific experience or the perspective of a particular group or segment of the organization's constituency. The entire governing body must be attuned to the issues and concerns of Head Start-eligible families in order to plan and oversee the delivery of quality services. Public agencies that choose to serve as Head Start grantees often represent Head Start-eligible children and their families as well as larger constituencies that may include the entire population of a political jurisdiction (such as a city, county, or Indian tribe).

In these situations, the public entity may need to take steps to assure that Head Start governance activities can be performed expeditiously. This may require designating a commission or some other entity within the public organizational structure to carry out these functions for the Head Start program. Such structures can provide the focus and specific attention that program planning and other governance activities require.

Governing bodies represent the people receiving the services, rather than the staff managing the program. The people receiving services and the larger community need access to the governing body as a means of holding the program and the agency accountable. Procedures for hearing and resolving community complaints must be established and implemented.
The governing body is responsible for ensuring that the Head Start program operates effectively and responds to issues and concerns in the community. This means the organization must have internal systems to ensure accountability, measure the effectiveness of programs, and determine whether the organization's activities are focused on the Head Start-eligible population. It is important not to confuse the stewardship role of governance with the administrative role of management and staff. Governance refers to general and legal oversight and not to implementing day-to-day operations, which is the responsibility of management and staff.
In *Basic Principles of Policy Governance*, John Carver and Miriam Mayhew Carver describes four functions of governance. These functions, relevant to both public and private agencies that are funded to operate a Head Start or Early Head Start program, are described below from a Head Start perspective:

* Create a process that leads to defining goals.

* Establish boundaries and limits that describe management's authority and responsibilities for implementing the Head Start program.

* Link with staff and assess staff and/or organizational performance to ensure that management and staff are moving toward program goals.

* Design governance processes to ensure that Head Start-eligible families are receiving quality services and that policies are being followed. The governing body must address broad values in these areas to fulfill its mandate.

**Specific Responsibilities** Richard Ingram, in the National Center for Nonprofit Boards publication, *Ten Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards*, and Edgar Stoesz and Chester Raber in *Doing Good better! How to be an Effective Board Member of a Nonprofit Organization* (see Resources) identify responsibilities of board members that are summarized below from a Head Start perspective:

* Determine the purpose of the organization. Organizations represent their constituents and exist for a purpose. Effective mission statements summarize the purpose of the organization. Each board member needs to understand and support the mission statement. In Head Start agencies, it is the responsibility of the governing body to work with the policy group and program staff to create the mission statement, understand and support it, and review it periodically for accuracy.

**Handout 3: Responsibilities of Governing Bodies**

* **Assess the performance of the governing body.**
The first step a governing body must take to assess the performance of the organization is to evaluate its own performance in fulfilling its responsibilities. It must analyze its achievements and reach consensus on the areas that need improvement.

* **Determine new services and monitor ongoing programs and services.**
The governing body is responsible for overseeing a process to assess the performance of the organization. It determines which programs and services are the most consistent with the organization's mission and monitors their effectiveness.

* **Act as liaison between the organization and the community.**
The governing body is the organization's main link to the community. To be a successful liaison between the organization and the community, the governing body must clearly articulate the organization's mission, goals, and accomplishments to the community. In addition, it must get support from other key players in the community. If complaints from the community arise, the governing body's responsibility is to assure that those issues are resolved expeditiously. The community includes Head Start-eligible children and families, public and private community partners, the general public, and the media.

* **Safeguard the organization's assets.**
As elected or appointed representatives of the community to watch over a federally funded program, governing body members must ensure that appropriate internal controls are established and implemented to safeguard the organization's assets.

* **Provide accountability to members.**
Members of the governing body must strive to understand the expectations of the organization they oversee and communicate with its members. They should provide periodic reports about the agency's progress in an appropriate format.
Handout 4: Documents and Instruments of Governing Bodies

* **Annual Report:** A document often used as an informational and public relations tool by an organization. It contains the year's program and financial highlights and may be distributed at the annual meeting. Many public agencies are required to produce annual reports.

* **Audit Report:** A document produced from a review of an organization's finances. Head Start agencies are required to have an annual independent audit. Although it primarily focuses on financial procedures, managerial and program areas are also examined.

* **Strategic or Long-Range Plan:** A long-range plan or blueprint to set direction for an organization, including its goals, objectives, strategies, and staff action plans. The process of developing this plan is an important function of governance.

* **Periodic Reports of Financial and Programmatic Status:** Written reports that inform governing bodies about what is happening with programs and services within the organization. These include periodic financial reports (usually monthly or at every meeting of the governing body). Staff must establish ongoing monitoring processes in order to provide adequate fiscal and program reports.

* **Articles of Incorporation:** A legal form registered with the state that defines the purpose and scope of the organization.

* **Charter/Ordinance:** A state statute or other legal process that establishes public entities.

* **Proof of Nonprofit Status:** A legal document from the Internal Revenue Service that certifies if an organization is incorporated as a tribal or local government, an educational institution, or another charitable or religious organization. Agencies with Head Start programs typically have nonprofit status.

* **Bylaws:** A document that determines the structure, function, and rules of the governing body. By-laws are written and approved by the governing body.

* **Provisions Developed by a City, County or Other Public Jurisdiction:** A document that determines the structure, function, and rules of the governing entity. In public agencies the rules require formal legal action by voters or by the public entity itself in order to make changes.
Module 2

The following discussion explains how the process of shared decision making between the governing body and the policy group relates to the major responsibilities of a governing body.

Examples of Shared Decision-Making

Planning
Monitoring and Assessing
Performance
Addressing Human Resources

Shared decision-making in planning is required in the Head Start Program Performance Standards. While it is common for the board and staff to share the responsibilities for planning in most organizations, in Head Start organizations this process is also shared with the Head Start Policy Council or Policy Committee. The Planning section of the Governance and Management Responsibilities Chart (Appendix A) in the Head Start Program Performance Standards specifies that the governing body and the policy group must jointly approve the majority of products that result from agency planning.

Planning process in Head Start includes developing such products as a procedure for planning a philosophy for the program (if one does not already exist), goals, objectives and strategies, operational plans and procedures for monitoring ongoing operations and assessing and program impact. (See the Technical Guide in the Management Series Planning and Reviewing for Success for a description of this process.)

The governing body and policy group must understand and agree on the planning activities that they need to perform and the timeframes for conducting these activities. Therefore, the first critical planning step is to establish how and when planning activities will occur-a procedure for planning. Because staff cannot commit either body to carry out these functions, the two groups must agree on the procedure before it is implemented. The governing body and the policy group must be consulted about any item that requires their approval during the developmental process and before approval is sought. It is imperative that the planning process describes not only when approval will occur but also when prior consultation and involvement in each planning activity will occur.

The governing body is responsible for ensuring that the program is meeting its goals and objectives. The results of ongoing monitoring of both program and fiscal activities provide information for the governing body and policy group to keep them appraised of program progress. The annual self-assessment results describe accomplishment of
program goals and objectives and outcomes for children as well as proposals to correct any identified problems.

The *Human Resources Management Section of the Head Start Program Performance Standards* states that the governing body and the policy group must approve personnel policies and decisions to hire or terminate the Head Start or Early Head Start director.
**Background Information** The *Head Start Performance Standards* related to governance reflect the responsibilities of the governing body. As described in *Module 1*, the major responsibilities of governing bodies are:

* Create a process that leads to defining goals.

* Establish boundaries and limits that describe management's authority and responsibilities for implementing the Head Start program.

* Link with staff and assess staff and/or organizational performance to ensure that management and staff are moving toward the goals that have been adopted.

* Design governance processes that ensure that Head Start eligible families are receiving quality services and that policies are being followed. The governing body must address broad values in these areas to fulfill its mandate.

When performing these responsibilities, governing bodies are expected to seek opportunities for creative partnerships with the policy group and staff. The *Head Start Program Performance Standard* that establishes a foundation for how these groups will relate requires the development of written procedures that describe how the governing body and the policy group will implement shared decision-making. Both bodies participate in developing and approving these procedures.

Agencies that have effective operating systems are able to identify how different parts of the organization-board, policy group, leaders/managers, and other staff-affect and play a role in each system. In this Guide, we focus primarily on the roles of the governing body and policy group in agency systems. We also address the importance of staff support and the need for clear descriptions of roles, particularly for shared decision-making.

The *Head Start Program Performance Standards* have identified management systems that each agency operating a Head Start or Early Head Start program must develop and maintain. Among these systems are governance, planning, communication, record-keeping and reporting, ongoing monitoring, self-assessment, human resources, and fiscal management. The governance system relates directly to the roles and responsibilities of the governing body and policy group. The governance system is dependent on and is an integral part of each of the other systems.
The following discussion explains how the process of shared decision-making between the governing body and the policy group relates to the major responsibilities of a governing body.

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*Monitoring and Assessing*

*Performance*

*Addressing Human Resources*

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The governing body is responsible for ensuring that the program is meeting its goals and objectives. The *results* of ongoing monitoring of both program and fiscal activities provide information for the governing body and policy group to keep them appraised of program progress. The annual self-assessment *results* describe accomplishment of program goals and objectives and outcomes for children as well as proposals to correct any identified problems. The *Human Resources Management Section* of the *Head Start Program Performance Standards* states that the governing body and the policy group

...
must approve personnel policies and decisions to hire or terminate the Head Start or Early Head Start director. The policy group does not carry the legal and fiscal responsibility for the agency as the governing body does; consequently, the governing body may be far more involved in determining personnel policies to assure that risk to the agency is minimized. These policies form the basis of an agency's human resources system.

Setting Staff Boundaries and Limits For all of the items that require shared approval by the policy group and the board, it is imperative that the role of staff in each item be clearly described and agreed to. In addition to the limits personnel policies place on staff, other limits or boundaries are needed to help staff understand expectations. For example, if the procedure for planning is to be initiated by staff as a draft working paper for the board and the policy group, the timeframe for receiving and acting on the draft as well as completing approvals ought to be detailed in the procedure for planning.

Boundaries for staff are needed in numerous areas. An example is the amount of flexibility staff have in making changes to the budget (which may also require changes in work plans to be detailed in agency procedures). This and other policies and directives should be part of the procedures that are adopted for governance. If a staff boundary or limit affects an area that is covered by shared decision-making, then the boundary must be approved by both groups. For example, the director has discretion to move the established percent of a budget category without the prior approval of the governing body and the policy group. The established percentage becomes the boundary that staff must follow.

Designing Governance Processes There are three very important aspects of designing governance processes and procedures that are shared between the policy group and the governing body.

The first is to ensure that there are clearly written procedures for each item that requires shared decision-making. Because many of the individual items are part of the ongoing systems of the agency, it is imperative that policymakers (policy group and governing body) understand how action on one item must be taken before action on others can occur. For example, the funding application is not developed before goals and objectives have been adopted. Procedures must be established using the "givens" that the agency must respond to, including the cycle of funding for the Head Start program.

The roles of agency leaders and staff are an integral part of the written procedures. For example, if the governing body and policy group expect staff to present their analysis of community issues and concerns from the Community Assessment (CA) as the preliminary information for establishing goals, this needs to be described in the procedures and timetable for planning. The activities staff performs as support to the
The second consideration when designing a governance system is the need for a procedure to resolve disputes between the governing body and the policy group. The dispute resolution process must be developed and approved by both the governing body and the policy group. The process must describe when an impasse exists and how the process is activated. The procedure is required in the event that there is a dispute between the two bodies. Many agencies are able to avoid such conflicts if their procedures for shared decision-making are supported by a good communication system that provides thorough and timely information to both groups. In addition to quality information, both groups must respect and support the shared decision-making process.

The third consideration when designing governance procedures is to assure that a procedure for hearing and resolving community complaints about the program exists. Both the governing body and the policy group are given operating responsibility for developing and implementing the community complaint procedure. This procedure allows both bodies to hear about issues that arise from within the community and to ensure that steps are taken to respond in a timely and thorough manner.

*Integrating Governing Body and Policy Group Membership Open* communication and access to information are important ingredients of shared decision-making. Many programs enhance communication between the groups by having at least one representative from the governing body serve on the policy group and at least one representative from the policy group serve on the governing body. In public agencies for which governing body membership is limited to elected members, other solutions, such as board and policy group liaisons, may help to accomplish similar results.

Exchanging members has many advantages. Each group stays abreast of what the other is doing. Relationships develop that help to personalize and demystify the groups and their members. Cooperation is fostered as relationships develop, making it easier to face challenging decisions. Most important, the two groups are better able to link their procedures when there is a linkage between the membership of the two groups. To accomplish this purpose, it is necessary to define how the two groups relate to each other.

In summary, the governing body and the policy group are always operating with a common purpose: to improve the lives of children and families. Both groups are important contributors to the Head Start program in their community. They are both interested in making the best decisions they can for the benefit of the program and the families served. They are both parts of the systems that integrate many facets to deliver high-quality services to eligible children and families.
APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research which will be implemented by Angela Ramirez, a graduate student in the Bilingual/Multicultural Education Department at California State University, Sacramento. The study will investigate experiences and factors that will portray how parent involvement on the policy committee was perceived by parents who were members of the committee. The Head Start program is a program that mandates parent involvement. The purpose of this research is due to increasing focus regarding parent involvement, and its influences in the field of education.

You will be asked five questions and asked to answer them to the best of your ability. This should take no longer than 45 minutes. You will be contacted by me to schedule an informal focus group to take place in March. I will be facilitating this gathering to further obtain your input and experiences during your time as a parent involved in the Head Start Parent Policy Committee. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. At any time you may decline to answer any question or series of questions. In addition, during this period of questioning, your answers will be recorded in order to document your words.

The procedures in this research contain no risk.

The benefit of your participation in this research is solely to provide vital information that will further document the topic of parent involvement.

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential. Your real name will not be used as well as any other identifiable information. However, the results of your participation will be analyzed in aggregate form and will become a matter of public record, and housed in the MA Thesis section of the CSUS Library. In addition, all recordings of your participation will be destroyed with the completion of this thesis.

You will receive no compensation for your participation in this research study.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Angela Ramirez at (916) 838-2413 or by email at education2power@hotmail.com or by contacting my thesis advisor Professor Mejorado at mejoradom@gmail.com
You may opt out without risk of consequence of reprisal. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in this research.

_______________________________    ________________
Signature of Participant                                                                       Date

Your signature below indicates that you agree to be audio-recorded in your participation of this research.

_______________________________    _________________
Signature of Participant      Date
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. What did you know about Head Start when you signed your child up for the program?

2. Parent involvement is an essential component of Head Start, what role did you have as a parent?

3. Knowing that you were on the Parent Policy Committee at your Head Start program, could you please talk about those experiences? Please include why you participated in the Parent Policy Committee, about the trainings you received, and collaboration with the administration.

4. Now that you have had time to reflect upon your experiences as a past or current parent of Head Start, what would you share with new families/parents coming into the program and their parent involvement to the program?

5. If you could share your thoughts to the school district administrators regarding your experiences in the Head Start program, what would you tell them?
REFERENCES


