

School Social Workers' Relationships with Parents: A Critical Incident Field Study

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OM SHANTI NAMASTE.

Dedication

This field study is dedicated to my parents, Jane and Randy Hansen. Truly, they have been my first and most important teacher.

Abstract

School social workers engage parents in helping relationships which benefit children's learning. The extant literature has been focused on school social worker-parent interventions, not on the relationship. This qualitative study uses the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) to focus on the school social worker-parent relationship, and thereby begin to address this void in the literature. The study examined the experiences of school social workers and identified specific school social worker behaviors determined to be effective in building and sustaining relationships with parents. Data collection involved 18 one-to-one audio taped interviews with school social workers which were transcribed into texts. During analysis, critical incidents were identified which contained (a) a situation, (b) a behavior, and (c) an outcome. From the critical incidents, 38 school social worker behaviors were identified to be effective in building and maintaining relationships with parents. From these behaviors, three behavioral themes were identified that were present in at least 50% of the interviews. The three behavioral themes are: (a) communication behaviors, (b) showing care and concern behaviors, and (c) working within the school system. Based on the identified behavioral themes, competency standards for school social workers that may enhance their interactions with parents are suggested.

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

School social workers interface with students, families, the school community, and the larger community in order to aid students in learning and development. Studies have shown that interventions involving the school social worker-parent relationship aid student learning and achievement (Bloch & Seitz, 1989; Devaney & Milstein, 1998), improve student study skills (Polster, Lynch, & Pinkston, 1981), increase children's self esteem (Banchy & Carter, 1979), develop better communications between the school and home (Bowen, 1999), and lead to increased parent involvement in schools (McDonald & Frey, 1999).

Kurtz and Barth (2001) found that school social workers spend about 37% of their time working with parents using a variety of interventions and methods to improve student learning and development. The relationship between the school social worker and the parent is the foundation for the work to be done on behalf of a child's learning, yet studies have focused on the function or purpose of the relationship, not the dynamics of the relationship that create connection and meaning in the relationship. Understanding those school social worker behaviors associated with developing and maintaining helping relationships with parents can aid school social workers in engaging parents in needed interventions and/or services that will benefit their children's growth and learning.

In recent years, there has been increasing attention within the school social work profession on evidence-based practice--the process of identifying competencies, practice guidelines, and best practices through the integration of research and practice (Franklin, 2001; Peebles-Wilkins & Amodeo, 2003). Research on the parent-school social worker

relationship has focused on interventions and methodologies, not the relationship between a parent and the school social worker. In order to engage parents in effective interventions and services on behalf of students, it is to the benefit of school social workers to understand not only intervention practices but also their behaviors and roles that can aid in engaging parents in the helping relationship.

Research Objective

The objective of this study is to understand the effective behaviors engaged in by school social workers to develop and sustain relationships with parents.

Research Question

The research question of this study was: what are the effective school social worker behaviors that are associated with developing and sustaining helping relationships with parents?

Description of Study

Due to the study's focus on behaviors of school social workers that work to engage parents in relationships, the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was selected as the appropriate methodology because of its focus on identifying specific effective behaviors. Eighteen school social workers volunteered to be interviewed and were asked to share their experiences working with parents in audio taped interviews. The audio tapes were transcribed, reviewed, and analyzed for critical incidents reflecting (a) a situation, (b) a behavior, and (c) an outcome when noted by the school social worker. From the critical incidents, I identified the effective behaviors of school social workers in engaging and maintaining relationships with parents. The effective behaviors described in the critical

incidents were then grouped into clusters that portrayed larger behavioral themes and subthemes. A student rater was used to validate the critical incidents, behaviors, and themes that I had identified.

Definition of Terms

Definitions of the significant terms used in this study are:

Microsystem: Complex relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514).

Mesosystem: The interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his/her life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

Exosystem: Formal and informal structures that have an impact upon the mesosystem, such as one's neighborhood or government (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

Macrosystem: Institutional patterns, which impact the micro-, meso-, and exo-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

Helping relationship: A supportive, compassionate working alliance, which helps a person to cope or learn to cope with their problems (Perlman, 1979, p. 54).

Evidence-based practice: The integration of research evidence with clinical expertise and client values (Sackett, Richardson, Rosenberg, & Haynes, 2000) in making practice decisions (McNeece & Thyer, 2004).

Critical Incident Technique (CIT): A procedure for gathering certain important facts concerning behavior in defined situations (Flanagan, 1954, p. 335).

Critical incident: A description of a behavior within a defined situation and the outcome or result of the behavior (Fountain, 1999).

Behavior: A specific action of a school social worker described in a critical incident.

Theme: An identified broad behavioral category developed from the analysis of behaviors.

Competencies: Core social work knowledge and skills that serve as prerequisites for practice and should be seen as a first step in the progression to practice guidelines or for best practices in social work (Peebles-Wilkins & Amodeo, 2003).

Study Assumptions

1. School social workers engage parents in helping relationships on behalf of children's learning and development.
2. School social workers use a variety of methods to connect with and build relationships with parents.
3. School social workers will be able to report significant incidents from their experience.
4. Incidents reported by school social workers can aid in identifying effective behaviors that are associated with helping relationships with parents.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The goal of the literature review is to identify extant research and theory concerning the practice of school social work with parents as a basis for the study reported here. The discussion of literature is focused on three areas: (a) an examination of theoretical and practice models that can and do influence practice; (b) an examination of the role of school social workers, history of the field of school social work, social work professional standards, and research on school-based social work with families, and (c) an examination of the idea of evidence-based practice in relation to school social work practice.

To begin the examination of school social workers relationships with parents, there is a need to start the discussion by developing a deeper understanding of theoretical models that influence school social workers' professional work. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model underlies school social workers' views of a student as interacting within the social environment of family, school, and community and will be discussed at some length in the following section.

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) model also serves as the foundation underlying the parent involvement models of Joyce Epstein (1995) and Susan Swap (1993). These family involvement models focus on the types of interactions between families and schools and the benefits to students, parents, and the school that accrue from those interactions. The services and interventions school social workers provide involve the kinds of relationships and interactions with parents that are reflected in the family

involvement models. These models will also be discussed in this chapter.

Moving the discussion forward, the literature review examines the role of school social workers and their interactions with parents. A review of the historical context focuses on the influence of the social sciences, legislative mandates, and societal forces on school social work services with parents and families. The examination of the role continues with a look at the current professional standards set by the National Association of Social Workers (2002) regarding school social work practice with families. Finally, the examination of school social workers' role with families looks at the research on family involvement and school social work intervention and services.

The literature review concludes with a discussion about evidence-based practice. Evidence-based practice is the development of effective school social work practices through research, analysis, practice, and sensitivity to a client's individuality (McNeece & Thyer, 2004). The steps towards developing evidence-based practice are outlined as prelude to understanding one of the outcomes of this study- the development of an initial set of competencies focused on the school social worker-parent relationship. School social workers spend approximately 37 percent of their time working with parents toward improving student learning and development (Kurtz & Barth, 2001). School social work evidence-based research has focused on the interventions and clinical methods of the school social worker-parent relationship, yet the research has not looked specifically at the interaction between school social workers and parents. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be part of a larger process of developing evidence-based practices focused on the school social worker-parent relationship.

Models

Theoretical and practice models are foundations underlying professionals' thinking and how they view situations. Models serve as guides to interaction and reflect insight regarding how people relate to and interact with the world around them.

Human Development Ecology

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Human Development Ecology theoretical model is a principal theory used by the field of social work to understand how individuals engage and interact in relationships with the world by navigating among different systems. Systems, in Human Development Ecology theory, have rules; roles; and boundaries that can be open, closed, or permeable, which affect the interactions between the individual and the environment (Fraser, 1997; Germain, 1999). Each system will be described along with an example of how school social workers interact with parents in those systems.

Microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (1977) starts with the microsystem, which he describes as "complex relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person" (p. 514). Bronfenbrenner (1979) stresses the critical aspect of the microsystem is the experiencing of it by the child. For a child, the focus of the microsystem is the relationship of the child to his/her immediate setting, the home or the classroom (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Events in the microsystem affect a child's worldview, self-esteem, and resiliency (Fraser, 1997). The development of the Individual Education Plan, which is an intervention plan developed between the family and the school addressing the special education needs of a child, is an example of a school social worker intervention with parents that is focused on the microsystem of the

classroom.

Mesosystem. Expanding from the microsystem, Bronfenbrenner moves to the mesosystem (1977). The mesosystem is defined as “the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his/her life” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). The focus is on the interaction among the various microsystems that a person experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Richman and Bowen (1997) point out that positive connections for children between microsystems can produce a supportive context for learning and development, whereas weak connections or conflict among microsystems can be a risk to children’s healthy development. The interaction between the school and home is a critical mesosystem in terms of its effect on children (Christenson & Sheridan, 2002). The nature and frequency of contacts, the kinds of experiences, and the compatibility of values of adults in the home and those reflected at school affect children’s learning and development (Bowen, 1999).

The school social worker focusing on a child’s mesosystem looks at how the interaction of the home and the classroom affects the child’s learning and development (Christenson & Sheridan, 2002). School social worker interventions which target the home-school mesosystem may include parent conferences, acting as a liaison between parent and teacher, school staff development, parent education services, providing parent support groups, or family therapy (Chavkin, 1989; Kurtz, 1988).

Exosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the exosystem as “formal and informal structures that have impact upon the mesosystem such as one’s neighborhood or government” (p. 25). The individual does not participate directly in those systems, yet those systems can interact with and impact one’s life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Christenson & Sheridan, 2002). Exosystem examples impacting children’s learning and development include a parent’s place of work or the activities of a local school board (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Christenson & Sherdian, 2002). At the exosystem level, school social workers’ family-focused interventions may include acting in interagency collaborations, advocating on behalf of families, or resource development (Chavkin, 1989; Kurtz, 1988).

Macrosystem. The macrosystem is described as “the institutional patterns of culture or subculture, which impact the micro-, meso-, and exo-systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). These institutional patterns include policies, social networks, and societal roles. The macrosystem is the subsystem most removed from the child (Richman & Bowen, 1997), yet can have a significant impact on the child’s life (Christenson & Sheridan, 2002). Two examples from the policy macrosystem arena are the No Child Left Behind Act (P.L. 107-110) and Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) of 2004, which are federal policies that direct federal funds and provide directional mandates for educational services that influence how children learn. Macro-level societal roles include the norms and mores that go along with titles such as student, parent, and school social worker. Macrosystem focused parent-oriented interventions that school social workers are involved with include advocating for changes in laws or policies (Chavkin, 1989; Kurtz, 1988).

Ecological model and school social work. For the school social worker, the Human Development Ecology provides a framework to understand the interactions and relationships between children, families, the school, and the community (Clancy, 1995; Smith, Connell, Wright, Sizer, & Norman, 1997) with a particular focus on the interactions between the student and their environment (Allen-Meares, Washington, & Welsh, 2000). Using the Human Development Ecology framework, Kurtz (1988, p. 451) posits five assumptions for the school social worker in understanding the relationship between the student, their family, and the school:

1. The family is the most influential system in a child's life.
2. Resolution of the pupil's problems is more effective when interventions occur within more than one system.
3. When pupils and their families are under stress, the school can be a stabilizing factor.
4. Social work services to parents must be directly relevant to some facet of pupil's school adjustment.
5. Services to families benefit children.

Relationships. The ecological work of school social workers is grounded in relationships: relationships of the school social worker with students, with families, with other school faculty/ personnel, and relationships within the community. Perlman (1979) defines relationship as an emotional bond with another person. For school social workers, the relationship with parents is a helping relationship, one which is a "supportive, compassionate working alliance. . . which helps a person to cope or learn to cope with

their problems” (Perlman, 1979, p. 54). Perlman states helping relationships are (a) purposeful, (b) client centered, (c) time bound, and (d) have authority.

For the school social worker, the client is typically the child with the purpose of school social work services being to improve the student’s development and learning. Parents are brought in at times because they are significant to the child’s micro and meso systems. At those times, the parents become a client as well. The purpose of the school social worker-parent relationship is focused on the welfare of the child, while interventions may be targeted towards the family or the child (Perlman, 1979).

The time boundary of the academic year, the grade level of the student, and the mobility of the student can affect the school social worker-parent relationship. Due to the nature of school social workers’ work calendar, which follows the academic calendar, interactions with parents typically occur while school is in session. Relationships between parents and the school social worker may be developed over time as the child continues through the grades at a particular school. In other cases, the grade level or school in which the school social worker works may influence the relationship boundaries. In those situations, when a child moves on to another grade level or moves into another school, the school social worker needs to terminate their relationship with the parent or transition the parent into another relationship with a different worker assigned to the next grade or school. Student mobility can also affect the school social worker- parent relationship, often causing termination of the relationship.

Compton and Galaway (1989) define authority in the school social work-parent relationship as “a power delegated to the practitioner [school social worker] by client [parent] and agency [school] in which the practitioner is seen as having the power to influence or persuade resulting from possession of certain knowledge and experience and from occupying a certain position” (pp. 295-296). Perlman (1979) focuses on the expertise of the social worker stressing that the school social worker has knowledge and skills to address a concern or problem with a client. For school social workers, the theoretical knowledge base includes child development, systems theory, and family dynamics theories. The experiential knowledge of school social workers includes knowledge of community resources, an understanding of a school and/or district's policies and procedures, and a skill set of intervention strategies with children, families, the school, and the community.

The helping relationship has been shown to have positive benefits for the client. Shofield and Brown's (1999) study showed the helping relationship creates the opportunity to repair self-esteem and help the client to work towards building self-efficacy. Perlman (1979) asserts that other benefits to the client of a helping relationship include connectedness and bonding, getting what one wants or a way towards it, security, feelings of hope, feelings of being nurtured, ability to try something new, and learning. These benefits are similar to the ones found by family involvement model creators Swap (1993) and Epstein (1995). The benefits in these family involvement models focus on feelings of support, respect, and understanding for the student, parents, and the school.

Ecological theory summary. Clancy (1995) states the ecological theory takes the school social worker out of viewing concerns or problems from the individual deficiency view to examining different interactions within the school context. Dupper (2003) appears to agree with Clancy, stressing school social workers view student concerns as “a lack of goodness of fit” (p. 5) with his/her environment. The role of the school social worker is then to work within the context of the person and their environment to bring about a better fit (Allen-Meares & Washington, 2000).

This study is grounded in the ecological model, which focuses on system interactions and relationships, with the idea that a school social worker interacting with parents creates systemic change influencing children's development and learning. For this study, the researcher has focused attention on the relationship between the school social worker and the parent, staying within the microsystem and mesosystem layers of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Human Development Ecology Theory.

The relationship between the parent and the school, including the school social worker, is critical to a child's learning and educational success. Researchers and theorists have adapted the ecological model to examine the dynamics of family involvement between families and schools. Two of those efforts are discussed in the next section.

Family Involvement Models

Human Development Ecology theory influenced two of the major parent involvement models, Epstein's (1986) Six Types of Family Involvement and Swap's (1993) Partnership Model of Family Involvement, with a focus on the interface between systems and the impact of that interface. In both family involvement models, the interface

of systems is between the home and school with the interface's impact being the effect on children's learning and development (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). The family involvement models developed by Swap and Epstein build on the ideas of Human Development Ecology theory and relationships. They reflect the idea that positive relationships and interactions between different subsystems in a child's life can be associated with positive outcomes for children, families, and the school. For the school social worker, the parent involvement models presented suggest methods of communication, decision-making, and collaborative roles that engage the parent in an active meaningful process with the school towards the goal of a child's education.

Six Types of Family Involvement. Epstein's (1995) model describes six types of family involvement in schools: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaboration. Each type of family involvement has associated positive benefits for the student, the parents, and the school. Due to the nature and function of the school social worker-parent relationship and the purposes of this study, this discussion will provide an overview of five of the six types of involvement (all but volunteering), provide examples of how school social workers work within the particular type of involvement, and highlight some of the benefits for students, parents, and the school.

The first type of involvement described by Epstein (1995) is parenting or home environment. With this type of family involvement, Epstein states the home environment sets the stage for, and continues to influence, a child's learning. Epstein asserts that parents provide support for learning by creating a healthy and safe home environment

where a child's basic needs and emotional needs are cared for. School social workers engage parents in this type of family involvement by creating services and programs that are focused on the family such as parent education services, home visiting, and family support services (Epstein, 1995).

For students, the benefits from the parenting type of involvement are building of good work habits (like attendance) and respect for school and family (Epstein, 1995). Epstein (1995) describes the parental benefits from family involvement as feelings of support from the school, respect for the school, and feeling understood by the school for their role in their child's life. Epstein describes the benefits from family involvement for the school as including respect for and understanding of the families within the school community (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein (1995) describes communication as a type of family involvement that involves "effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication" (p. 706). With this type of involvement, parents and the school use a variety of tools to keep communication open and informative. School social workers engage parents in this type of family involvement through phone calls to parents, email exchanges, conferences, letters home to the parents, home visiting, and providing information to parents about school policies and procedures (Epstein, 1995).

With this type of family involvement, the benefits for students, families, and the school center on understanding students' progress, the school's policies and procedures, and informed decision-making (Epstein, 1995).

Learning at home is described as “providing information to parents about how to help a student at home with curriculum activities” (Epstein, 1995, p. 706). This type of involvement involves communications between the school and home about activities children can do with their families at home or in the community that can enhance the child’s learning and development (Epstein, 1995). School social workers try to engage parents in home learning activities such as homework information, problem solving with parents about what they can do at home to build learning or developmental skills, and working with parents to develop educational plans (Epstein, 1995).

Student benefits from home learning include improved learning skills and a positive attitude about schoolwork and learning (Epstein, 1995). Epstein (1995) asserts the parental benefits from the home learning type of family involvement include valuing their child as a learner and an understanding of how to support their learning. For the school, Epstein further asserts the benefits from the home learning family involvement type include appreciation of the parents as teachers and the feeling of support from the home in efforts to improve a child’s learning and development.

Decision-making is described in Epstein’s (1995) model as having a practice that includes parents in the decision making process and develops parents as leaders. School social workers engage parents in this type of family involvement by encouraging involvement in PTOs/PTAs; encouraging parent initiatives to lobby and advocate for their children with the school, the district, and larger macro-systems; encouraging parent networking, and working with parents of children with special needs on Individual Educational Plans that address educational needs and services to be provided for children

(Epstein, 1995).

Parents having input on policies and procedures that impact student learning and the opportunity to develop their own advocacy skills are viewed as principal benefits from the decision making type of involvement (Epstein, 1995). Students benefit from the outcomes of the decisions, while schools benefit from having parent input (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein (1995) describes collaboration as the identification and integration of community resources and services for purposes of improving student learning, family dynamics, and the school environment. With this type of involvement, school social workers are involved with parents by linking them to needed services, advocating for parents, and helping parents to develop new support services/programs.

For students and families, collaboration benefits include being linked to appropriate services that can aid the student and/or family and relationships with the broader community (Epstein, 1995). For the school, Epstein (1995) asserts benefits at this level of involvement include appropriate referrals for students and families to meet their needs and relationships with the community.

Parental Involvement Home-School Models. Susan Swap's (1993) work on family involvement includes development of four models of home-school relationships: protective, school-to-home transmission, curriculum enrichment, and partnership. Each home-school relationship model has particular goals and methods of interaction. Swap describes the protective model as the dominant model of family-school relationships, in which parents delegate the education of their children to the schools and there is a distant

relationship between parents and the school. With this distant parent-school relationship, Swap reports parents hold the schools accountable for children's learning. Educators, in the protective model, accept the accountability and responsibility for children's learning and keep parents at a distance. Swap further notes parent involvement and parent participation in the decision making process are not valued or sought by educators. The only advantage to the protective model is if a school wants to keep parents away, because interacting with them from this model of involvement will insulate the school from more active parent involvement (Swap, 1993).

Swap (1993) indicates that the school-to-home transmission model is the one used most often in a family involvement program. The focus of this interaction model is to support the schools' objectives. Parents are seen as helping prepare a child for school and encouraging a child's school success. Swap stresses "parents may be involved at this level in the classroom on decision making or advisory bodies, yet their role is subordinate to the school" (p. 30). With the school-to-home transmission model, home learning activities are similar to Epstein's (1995) learning at home type with the focus on home learning activities such as homework packets, hotlines, and family learning activities (Swap, 1993). Communication transmissions between home and school are similar to Epstein's communications type with educators providing information to parents about the school program using newsletters and structured school visits-such as conferences (Swap, 1993). Swap states communication has a one-way direction from the school to the home; parents are not engaged in a two-way communication process with the school. Swap reports the school to home transmission model fosters positive interactions between the

school and home, mutually supportive efforts towards student's success, and the perpetuation of societal values.

In the curriculum enrichment model, Swap (1993) describes parents as engaged in helping the school to develop curriculum and instruction. Swap reports that in this involvement model, parents are not engaged in other areas of the school program. Swap notes benefits to this model include the valuing of parents' expertise in terms of how it could influence student instruction or the curriculum taught and a mutual respect between parents and the school faculty. With this model, communication between home and school begins to have a two-way communication but the communication is focused primarily on the curriculum.

Swap (1993) describes the partnership model to have four primary components: (a) two-way communication, (b) joint decision-making, (c) mutual support, and (d) enhanced learning at home and school. Two-way communication is focused on sharing information between the family and the school in a manner that keeps both parties informed (Swap, 1993). Stemming from two-way communication, joint decision-making involves both parents and the school personnel in working together to resolve issues of concern (Swap, 1993). Swap defines mutual support as activities designed by parents to support school personnel, such as volunteering and organizing events, and activities designed by school personnel that support parents, such as a parent education class. The activities designed and implemented help to foster relationships between the home and school (Swap, 1993). Swap notes that parents and the school work together in this model to help children learn. Swap states there are collaborative interactions and mutual

responsibility for student learning at this level of family involvement. As a result of the partnership model of home-school relationships, Swap goes on to say that, parents and school faculty feel listened to, share a joint vision, value each other's perspective, share information, plan and make decisions together, and problem solve together.

Family involvement models summary. The family involvement models presented here represent different ideas of family involvement. Epstein's (1995) describes specific actions schools can engage in to get parents involved with their children's education. Swap (1993) discusses a variety communication styles and relationships between schools and parents. Yet, each of the family involvement models, which are fundamental to this study, build on Bronfenbrenner's (1997) ecological systems model and the nature of relationships between systems. Both models express that when families and schools have a positive relationship there are positive benefits for students, parents, and the school. The discussion of the family involvement models that underlie this study highlights family involvement practices that are focused on creating relationships with parents and that aid in students' in learning and development.

School Social Work and Family Involvement

Historical Role of the School Social Worker

The role of school social worker is broad (Constable & Montgomery, 1985) with an important emphasis on making links between the student, school, home, and community (Berrick & Barth, 1991). The role school social workers play in creating links between home and school systems and the interventions they use to accomplish their work with families have evolved since the early roots of school social work (Radin,

1989). Legislative mandates, societal forces, and the social sciences have influenced the focus and direction of school social work services with parents and families.

During the early years of school social work (1900-1910), school attendance laws passed by the states, truancy, and poor school performance were the principal issues of concern (Allen-Meares, 1988; Dupper, 2003; Radin, 1989). Interactions between school social workers and families were focused primarily on the connection between home environment and the student's success in learning (Constable & Montgomery, 1985), and on being a liaison between the school and the home (Allen-Meares et al., 2000). During this early period, the school social worker helped families understand school and helped the school understand how the family affected a student's life (Radin, 1989).

In response to the mental hygiene movement of the 1920s, the focus of school social workers moved away from being a home-school liaison to being a school caseworker (Constable & Montgomery, 1985; Radin, 1989). The school social worker turned away from the interactions of the family and school and instead directed the focus of intervention on the diagnosis and treatment of individual children (Constable & Montgomery, 1985; Radin, 1989). During the Depression of the 1930s, school social workers focused on the direct social conditions and physical needs of children (Dupper, 2003).

The focus of school social workers on students' mental health returned during the 1940s and 1950s (Radin, 1989) due to a change of perception within the school social work profession in favor of the school social worker as clinical practitioner over being a 'truant officer' (Dupper, 2003, p. 13). The school-home interface orientation of the early

pre-1920 days of school social work and the societal conditions focus of the 1930s were no longer the focus of practice. Instead a deficiency model in which the focus of intervention was on what was wrong with an individual child became the focal point of practice (Allen-Meares et al., 2000).

In the 1960s, school social workers took on a more activist role. The activist role moved the profession away from mental health and treatment to looking at societal situations and problems affecting students in efforts to try and prevent problems (Constable & Montgomery, 1985; Radin, 1989).

Today's school social work practice. Many of the roles and tasks of today's school social workers involve significant interactions with and services to parents including providing family and parent education (Radin, 1989), prevention and intervention (Radin, 1989), case management (Radin, 1989), assessment of students for special needs attention (Staudt, 1991), liaison services (Constable & Montgomery, 1985; Staudt, 1991), individual student consultation (Staudt, 1991), and teacher consultation (Berrick & Barth, 1991).

These parent-focused interventions and services are a response to governmental policies, changes in theoretical perspectives, accountability pressures, and continuing changes within the public school system (Allen-Meares, 1988; Radin 1989).

Governmental policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (P.L. 107-110), laws involving education of children with special needs, and litigation rulings have provided school social workers with mandates for serving children and their families (Allen-Meares, 1988; Radin, 1989). School social workers continue to learn new theories and

approaches, such as evidence-based practice, that influence their practice and their relationships with parents. School social workers are being held accountable. They are evaluating their interventions with and services to students and their families and communicating their outcomes to principals, school districts, and other funding sources.

School Social Work Standards and Family Involvement

In an effort to inform and influence social work practice towards effective and ethical practice, The National Association of Social Workers has developed practice guidelines for school social work, clinical social work, medical social work, child protection, and other practice areas (Howard & Jenson, 1999). The school social work standards developed by the National Association of School Social Workers [NASW] (2002) address professional preparation and development, ethical principles, practice values and standards, and the macro-level support structures in which school social workers operate.

The ethical values of dignity, personal worth, and the importance of human relationships are present in the NASW standards for school social workers (National Association of Social Workers, 2002) and resonate with the principal ideas behind the family involvement models of Epstein (1995) and Swap (1993). The standards reflect a view of parents as essential collaborators in children's learning. Parents' input and feedback about the child's development and the home environment help school social workers provide services to children. Other values such as service, social justice, and integrity are not directly or intentionally connected to the idea of family involvement or

worker-parent relationships, yet they are present in the relationships that school social workers have with parents (National Association of Social Workers, 2002).

There are six standards that stand out with regards to family involvement and the relationships between school social workers and parents. Each of these standards is discussed below in an effort to understand the professional expectations of school social workers in their work with families and to understand how the standards relate to this study.

Standard 4: School social workers shall ensure that students and their families are provided services within the context of multicultural understanding and competence that enhance families' support of students' learning experiences (National Association of Social Workers, 2002, p. 12).

Standard Four encourages sensitivity for the student and the family. In social work professional preparation, school social workers begin their development of multicultural understanding and competence through coursework and practical experiences (National Association of Social Workers, 2002). Standard Four can be interpreted as encouraging school social workers to continue their multicultural education and develop further experiences in order to deepen their understanding and practice competence (National Association of Social Workers, 2002, p. 12). School social workers are then encouraged in Standard Four to provide services to parents and students that are sensitive to the unique backgrounds of the students and families (National Association of Social Workers, 2002).

Standard 6: School social workers shall help empower students and their families to gain access to and effectively use formal and informal community resources (National Association of Social Workers, 2002, p. 12).

Standard Six encourages the school social worker to link families and students to needed resources with a particular focus on empowering families and students (National Association of Social Workers, 2002, p. 12). Instead of a dependent relationship in which parents and students don't feel much power in what services are offered and how they are offered, the school social worker is to encourage parents and students to have personal responsibility and authority in the decisions to access services and how those services will be provided (National Association of Social Workers, 2002).

Standard 8: School social workers shall advocate for students and their families in a variety of situations (National Association of Social Workers, 2002, p. 13).

Students and families face situations in which they need an ally to help them acquire or negotiate services or to be a voice with community or governmental agencies for the student or family. Standard Eight is a call of action for school social workers to be able to be that ally or voice for students and families with institutions that may be intimidating, confusing, or challenging for the student or family to address on their own (National Association of Social Workers, 2002).

Standard 9: As leaders and members of interdisciplinary teams and coalitions, school social workers shall work collaboratively to mobilize resources of local educational agencies and communities to meet the needs of students and their families (National Association of Social Workers, 2002, p. 14).

Standard Nine reflects Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological idea that students and families have interactions with a variety of systems and to meet their needs. School social workers need to not simply work with the family but realize that the family interacts with and is part of a community that impacts the family's functioning. In order to meet families' needs, the standard encourages the school social worker to work with other professionals, within the school setting and in the community setting, in a spirit of collaboration, utilizing the skills and talents of collaboration in order to provide effective services to students and their families (National Association of Social Workers, 2002).

Standard 12: School social workers shall conduct assessments of student needs that are individualized and provide information that is directly useful for designing interventions that address behaviors of concern (National Association of Social Workers, 2002, p. 15).

Standard 13: School social workers shall incorporate assessments in developing and implementing intervention and evaluation plans that enhance students' abilities to benefit from educational experiences (National Association of Social Workers, 2002, p. 16).

Standards Twelve and Thirteen might appear to only be focused on the student, yet there is significant parent involvement in order for assessments and intervention plans to be individualized to the child's needs.

These standards focus on the ecological relationships of the school social worker and interventions that lead to children's school success. The standards require school social workers to be grounded in theories of human behavior within the social environment and call school social workers to act in an empathic manner towards students and their families.

Studies of School Social Work-Parent Services

Several studies have pointed to the positive impact of school social work services with parents on student achievement and/or student behavior. Bowen (1999) designed an intervention to address student academic and behavior issues through parent contacts, parent education, performance feedback, and home learning activities. Bowen found parents and teachers perceived a marked improvement in student academic performance and classroom behavior and in parent-teacher communication as a result of the interventions. Another study indicated that the Families and Schools Together program, a family support program that focused on family meetings and family meals and routines led to improved student academic performance, improvements in child behavior, and increased parental involvement in schools (McDonald & Sayger, 1998).

Polster, Lynch, and Pinkston (1981) initiated a home learning environment project in which they enlisted parent support to provide students with an appropriate study setting and parental rewards for student performance. They found that a home-based

reward system that developed study skills, and which was established by school social workers and parents, improved the students' study skills.

Banchy and Canter (1979) were involved in a home visiting project that taught parents home learning tasks that they could implement with their children. In their study, Banchy and Canter found that 92 % of the home learning tasks presented to parents in home visits were implemented by parents with the children. Banchy and Canter also found that the home visit intervention of introducing home learning opportunities for parents to implement with their children increased the child's readiness skills.

Schofield (1979), a school social worker, implemented the Parent Effectiveness Training program, a parent education group focused on communication and conflict resolution skills (Gordon Training International, 2005). As a result of the parent education program, Schofield found that the children, whose parents participated in the program, had increased self-esteem. It should be noted that concerns have been raised by Doherty and Ryder (1980) about the Parent Effectiveness Training program including (a) the mechanical feel to parent-child communication and problem solving, (b) the idea that parents are flawed in their own parenting skills and need training to be better parents, (c) the use of the skills developed in a Parent Effectiveness Training as a universal answer to parenting issues, and finally (d) the narrow viewpoint of family communication of parent to child rather than addressing the multitude of relationships and interactions in a family.

Other studies of school social work service show that school social work interventions with the family result in better communications and improved relationships between home and school. Dillard, Donenberg, and Glickman (1986) reported that school

social workers brought parents of children with learning disabilities together for a parent support group. This intervention strategy led parents to move from a feeling of helplessness in relation to the school to being able to communicate in relation to the school and advocate for the well being of their child.

Devaney and Milstein (1998) designed a parent workshop series that addressed student learning. The parent workshops addressed effective communication, school readiness activities, discipline, discussions about first-grade preparation, and parenting styles. As a result of the parenting series, these researchers found home-school communication improved, parents felt more welcomed, and parents were less intimidated by their child's schoolwork.

Kurtz and Barth's study (1989) examined the role of school social workers and their interactions with parents in order to get a picture of the types of services and situational conditions of school social workers' relationships with parents. Kurtz and Barth found 37% of a school social worker's week was focused on parent involvement. School social workers in the study reported that their work with parents was a significant expectation of their school systems (54 % of the 253 school social workers surveyed). The remainder of the school social workers surveyed stated that their school systems had some expectation that school social workers are involved with families.

To get an idea of the concerns that school social workers address, Kurtz and Bartz (1989) asked them to rank the family-based concerns that bring parents and school social workers together. Forty-eight percent ranked child rearing and management as the major family concern, followed by parent-child communication (23%), family transitions

(19%), family alienation (7%), and child abuse and neglect (5%). The researchers also asked school social workers to identify and rank the top school-based concerns that bring parents and school social workers together. They found that 47% of the social workers ranked the handicapping conditions of the student as the highest school-based concern, followed by discipline ranked highest by 21% of the school social workers, academic concerns (12%), truancy (11%), and mental health issues (5%).

When asked about the interventions used by school social workers to engage parents, Kurtz and Barth (1989) found that a parent conference was the most typical interaction cited. Other intervention methods reported included referrals, crisis work, screening by staff, family assessment, parent groups, program development, parent counseling, and parent associations. Kurtz and Barth continue stating, "Most interactions were face-to-face (conferences, crisis work, assessments), and some were indirect (advocacy and referral)" (p. 411).

The studies reviewed here have focused on the effectiveness of school social worker- parent interventions on behalf of the child and the amount of time allocated by school social workers towards family involvement to address a variety of concerns. Yet, what the studies lack to address are the dynamics of the school social worker-parent relationship. It is this void in the literature this study is focused on.

School Social Work Summary

School social workers have an historical foundation in working with parents towards children's success in school. Social sciences, legislative mandates, and societal forces have shaped this foundation. The profession has built on its historical foundation

to develop professional standards that guide school social work practice. Along with professional standards, school social work practice has examined intervention strategies and how they impact children's learning, parent functioning, and home-school relationships. Although one-third of a school social worker's work week is spent involved with parents, there is little research on the dynamics of the school social worker-parent relationship. To this point, evidence-based practices related to school social worker-parent relationships have focused on the interventions and clinical methods engaged, not the dynamics of the relationship. Evidence-based practices in school social work need to address the dynamics of the helping relationship between school social workers and parents, looking at how parents get engaged in the helping relationship and what school social workers do to keep parents engaged in the intervention work supporting children's educational success. Research that does exist on evidence-based practice for social workers is reviewed in the next section.

Evidence-Based Practice

In recent years, increasing attention has focused on the concept of identifying and defining the evidence-based practices in social work (Franklin, 2001). This examination is taking place within professional organizations in the field, through professional journals, at conferences, and in presentations, which address how knowledge is created and how knowledge is used in the field (Franklin, 2001; Gambrill, 1999; Howard & Jenson, 1999; McNeece & Thyer, 2004). The focus on evidence-based practice is an effort to provide quality services (Pollio, 2002; Franklin, 2001; Kirk, 1999). School social work has responded to the growing attention towards evidence-based practice with its

own movement to identify best practice standards (Franklin, 2001; Raines, 2004) and to implement best practices within school social work (Dupper, 2004).

Evidence-based practice is defined as the integration of the best research evidence, clinical expertise, and the client values in making practice decisions (Sackett et al., 2000). Within the social work field, scientific investigation is used to evaluate assessments, interventions, and service outcomes to determine processes that work within the field (McNeece & Thyer, 2004). Social workers are encouraged to share the results of scientific investigation with other practitioners, who then integrate best practices with their own clinical expertise and the values of the client (McNeece & Thyer, 2004; Pollio, 2002). Clinical expertise is the integration and application of one's education, interpersonal skills and past experience to assess and address client functioning (McNeece & Thyer, 2004). McNeece and Thyer (2004) describe client values as "the unique preferences, concerns, and expectations of clients that are brought to a clinical encounter with a social worker" (p. 9). Social workers are to be sensitive to client values and consider them when making practice decisions if they are to serve the client effectively (McNeece & Thyer, 2004).

Pollio (2002) asserts that social work is in "an age of accountability" (p. 59) in which the profession has to examine itself, including the interventions used by social workers. Within school social work practice, the focus on accountability is a result of federal mandates and program funding (Raines, 2004). The federal mandate of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (P.L. 107-110) requires educational service providers to use intervention methods with a scientific evidence base (Raines, 2004). Due to

diminishing resources and government mandates, funding agencies are requiring social workers to show effectiveness of social work interventions (Pollio, 2002; Raines, 2004).

Competencies, practice guidelines, and best practices are three conceptual practice ideas within evidence-based practice (Peebles-Wilkins & Amodeo, 2003; Sackett et al., 2000). In their article delineating terms, Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo (2003) separate competencies, practice guidelines, and best practices by how research is used to develop each practice and how social workers implement those practices. Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo describe competencies as “knowledge, attitude, and skills statements that serve as prerequisites for practice and should be seen as a first step in the progression to practice guidelines or best practices” (p. 213). Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo describe practice guidelines as methods for “assessing and treating clients based on research, professional consensus, or a combination of the two” (p. 213). The intervention studies mentioned in the earlier section would be examples of practice guidelines as they focus on interventions to treat clients. Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo go on describing best practices as “procedures or protocols developed from research” (p. 213).

Evidence-Based Practice Process

Developing the question. Sackett, Straus, Richardson, Rosenberg, and Haynes (2000) outline five steps in the development of evidence-based practice. The first step is to convert the information needed into a question (Sackett et al, 2000). Gambrill (2003) points out that the question(s) can examine different aspects of a program or intervention, including the effectiveness of a program, cost of a program, measurement of self-improvement, potential harm, opportunity for prevention, assessment, and the practice

guidelines of an intervention.

Answering the question. The second step to developing evidence-based practices is to track down the best evidence to answer the question (Sackett et al., 2000). In this stage, the researcher/practitioner can analyze existing research through journals, textbooks, and web-based research reviews (McNeece & Thyer, 2004). Jackson (1999) states the researcher/practitioner can also consult with experts in working towards consensus building on developing and drafting guidelines.

Evaluate the evidence. The third step is to critically evaluate the evidence for validity, impact, and applicability (Sackett et al., 2000). McNeece and Thyer (2004) state the researcher/practitioner needs to evaluate the scientific credibility and application of interventions in practicing from an evidence-based practice perspective.

Integrating new knowledge into practice. The fourth step in evidence-based practice is the integration of knowledge with clinical experience, clients' values, and the situation (Sackett et al., 2000). Knowledge, at this stage, is disseminated internally within the profession and externally within the macro level systems in which social workers operate (Jackson, 1999). At this step, researchers/practitioners can access conferences and workshops that present intervention evidence or seek continuing education that is focused on evidence-based practices (McNeece & Thyer, 2004). With this dissemination of knowledge, researchers/practitioners are encouraged to test the guidelines by using them in the field and reflecting on their use (Jackson, 1999). After the dissemination, field-testing, and implementation, the final step in the development of evidence-based practice is to evaluate the effectiveness of a practice through review and revision by

practitioners (Sackett et al., 2000). Reviews and revisions are used to refine competencies, practice guidelines, best practices, and protocols (Jackson, 1999; McNeece & Thyer, 2004).

Evidence-Based Practices Summary

Evidence-based practices in school social work involve the integration of scientific investigation, professional expertise, and client values. The scientific investigation involves identifying questions and processes for finding the answers to them, the evaluation of findings, dissemination of new knowledge to the field, field-testing of new knowledge, and finally the refining of the new knowledge. Due to changes in mandates and funding requirements, and increasing emphasis on accountability within the profession, school social work has responded with its own quest to develop evidence-based practices.

Literature Review Summary

The focus of this study is the relationship between school social workers and parents. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model concerns the concept of the individual within their social environment and the interactions among social systems that influence the individual and his or her microsystem. The family involvement models of Epstein (1995) and Swap (1993) focus Bronfenbrenner's concepts on the parent-school relationship. Both family involvement models assert that having a positive relationship improves student learning and behavior. One of the foundational assumptions underlying this study is that the relationship between school social workers and parents has an impact on student achievement, along with other positive outcomes for the student, the

family, and the school.

School social workers have been working with families in a variety of ways from the early days of the profession. Government mandates, societal forces, and changes within the profession have influenced social workers' interactions with parents across time. Within the profession, The National Association of Social Workers (2002) has developed a set of standards that address professional preparation and development, ethical principles, practice values, and practice standards. The standards serve as guides to practice, but do not identify behaviors that engage parents in helping relationships. School social work studies have shown that there are significant benefits for students, parents, and schools from school social work services and interventions that involve parents. Yet, the school social work research does not address the ways that school social workers engage parents' participation in their child's education at school or develop relationships with parents.

Evidence-based practice is the integration of research evidence, expertise, and client values in making practice decisions (Sackett et al., 2000). The process involves identifying a practice-focused question, obtaining evidence relevant to answering the question, evaluating the evidence, and then integrating the finding(s) into one's own practice (McNeece & Thyer, 2004). This study attempts to develop school social work practice competencies through a process of evidence-based research. Competencies are the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that serve as prerequisites for practice and should be seen as a first step in the progression to practice guidelines or for best practices (Peebles-Wilkins & Amodeo, 2003). The research presented in the next three chapters attempts to

identify effective behaviors of school social workers that help to develop and sustain relationships with parents. Based on school social workers' descriptions of effective behaviors in the data collected, the researcher recommends competencies for school social work practice and encourages school social workers to test the competencies out in their own practice.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

The chapter's first discussion will set the study's method in the larger context of qualitative research. To examine qualitative research the discussion will address: (a) what is qualitative research, (b) history of qualitative research, and (c) principal philosophies of qualitative research. The discussion will then focus on a particular branch of qualitative research, interpretive research, by addressing: (a) what is interpretive research, (b) history of interpretive research, and (c) interpretive research perspectives and methodologies. Finally, the discussion will focus on the critical incident technique (CIT) as a qualitative, interpretive research method.

Following the discussion about qualitative research, the chapter will address the specific critical incident technique used in this study by providing a brief history of the method, examining how CIT has been used in education and social work, addressing the specific strengths of CIT as a research method, and outlining the CIT implementation steps as they were carried out.

*Qualitative Research**What is Qualitative Research?*

Qualitative research attempts to “develop a deep and detailed understanding about a given phenomenon” (Redmann, Lambrecht, & Stitt-Godhes, 2000, p. 136). Qualitative research is described as focusing on qualities, processes, and meanings which are not measured (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) by “statistical procedures or other means of qualification” (McLeod, 1994, p. 77). Instead, qualitative research uses “micro- and macroanalyses drawing on historical, comparative, structural, observational, and

interactional ways of knowing” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004) to examine and describe human activities and meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) specifically describe qualitative research as follows:

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individual lives. (p. 5).

Though qualitative research encompasses a variety of paradigms, theories, and methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), there are four primary themes that can be drawn from the definitions above. First, qualitative research attempts to develop a deep understanding or description of phenomena (Redmann et al., 2000; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Second, qualitative research deals with concerns, problems, and issues “not measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Third, qualitative research focuses on exploring social and human problems (Creswell, 1998). Finally, the exploration of the social and human problems occurs within the natural setting (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Padgett, 2008).

Elements of Qualitative Research

Bogdan and Biklan (1998) and Taylor and Bogdan (1998) describe fundamental elements of qualitative research as being naturalistic, descriptive, concerned with the process, meaningful, inductive, and holistic. These elements will be examined below.

Naturalistic. Bogdan and Biklan (1998) state that qualitative research uses actual settings as the “direct source of the data and the researcher is the key element” (p. 4). Qualitative researchers see individuals interacting in their environment, which is complex, and seek to gain understanding by engaging the participant in the context of their lives. Bogdan and Biklan (1998) state that researchers feel that action can best be understood when observed in the setting in which it occurs and seeking to understand the historical context of the systems in which one lives.

Descriptive. Qualitative research describes phenomenon; it “paints a picture” of the participants’ reality and experiences. “The qualitative research approach demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998, p. 6).

Concerned with process. Qualitative research focuses on the process of interaction with the world (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998). The focus on process emphasizes both the interaction of the participant with their world and stresses the importance of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. The researcher develops a relationship connection with the participant; which is valued and relevant. The use of interviews in this Critical Incident Technique (CIT) study created opportunities to develop relationships between the participants and myself in order to study the effectiveness of the participants’ behavior and role within the social context of the school social worker-parent relationship.

Meaning. One of the fundamental tenets of qualitative research is that humans seek meaning of their world and that meaning creates one's reality. Qualitative researchers are curious about the experiences of the human condition and the meaning humans develop and associate with those experiences (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). "Qualitative researchers set up strategies and procedures to enable them to consider experiences from the informants' perspective" (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998, p. 7) in order to understand participants' reality and the meaning associated with their reality.

Inductive. Qualitative researchers develop their understanding inductive methods (Cieuzo & Keitel, 1999). Inductive methods are creative and intuitive (Loftland, 1995) utilizing both the researcher-participant relationship and the examination of the data for patterns, themes, and interconnectness to develop understanding (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998; Taylor & Biklan, 1998).

Holistic. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) state qualitative researchers do not look at people, settings, and groups as parts or "variables" (p. 8). Instead, qualitative researchers are interested in exploring people, settings, and groups as whole entities (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Qualitative researchers attempt to develop holistic understanding by exploring the subject matters'/participants' pasts, realities, experiences, and situations (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Through the attempts to develop a holistic understanding, a familiarity develops as the researcher "get[s] to know them [the participants] personally and experience what they experience in their daily struggles in society" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 8).

History of Qualitative Research

The history of qualitative research has its roots in hermeneutic practices “dating back to antiquity” (Palmer, 1969, p. 35), in particular biblical exegesis (the interpretation of the Old Testament/Torah) and fieldwork. Starting in the 1600s, hermeneutics focused on the Protestant ministers need for “interpretive manuals” to interpret the Bible (Palmer, 1969). From the biblical exegesis beginnings of hermeneutic interpretation, hermeneutics began to look at other texts for interpretation and meaning (Palmer, 1969).

Also, qualitative research has its’ beginnings in the “origins of fieldwork [which] can be traced back to historians, travelers, and writers ranging from the Greek Herodotus to Marco Polo” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 4). Modern pioneers of fieldwork include Fredrick LePlay and his study of European families and communities in the 1850s (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) and Malinowski’s anthropological studies of non-western cultures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Malinowski is also noted for tying observation and experience to theory and “describing how he obtained his data and what the fieldwork experience was like” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 8).

Historically, qualitative research has been influenced by positions or stances addressing issues about knowledge development, meaning, and being in the world. A brief discussion about the Chicago School will highlight the Schools’ contributions to the qualitative approach followed by a discussion of the moments within North American qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Philosophical stances about meaning (hermeneutics) and being in the world (phenomenology) have also influenced qualitative research and in particular, interpretive qualitative research. These philosophical stances

will be specifically explored below in the section about interpretive qualitative research.

Chicago School. The Chicago School defined a group of researchers within the University of Chicago sociology department who taught and did observational research from 1910 to 1940 (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Padgett, 2008; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The Chicago School is credited for influencing qualitative research in the areas of theory and methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Padgett, 2008; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The Chicago School was interested in how “symbols and personalities emerged from social interaction” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 8). With regards to methods, the Chicago School used a variety of data – especially first hand data, had a concern about everyday life, and provided a voice for marginalized people (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

Moments within North American qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) outline seven moments of qualitative research within North America: (a) traditional, (b) modernist, (c) blurred genres, (d) crisis of representation, (e) post-modern, (f) postexperimental and (g) the future. These moments will be briefly described below. Denzin and Lincoln state the traditional period “begins in the early 1900s and continues until World War II” (p.19). Denzin and Lincoln describe the focus of this time as field experiences that provided “colonializing accounts which were reflective of the positivist scientist paradigm” (p. 19) of different people and cultures. Denzin and Lincoln state the modernist moment as occurring post World War II to the 1970s. Denzin and Lincoln describe this moment as focused on “formalizing qualitative methods” (p. 22) and providing “a voice to society’s underclass” (p. 22). The third moment Denzin and Lincoln mention was between 1970 and 1986, a moment of “blurred genres” (p. 24).

Denzin and Lincoln describe this moment as being marked by a variety of paradigms, methods, and strategies within qualitative research that influenced the knowledge being developed and a blurring of “boundaries between the social sciences and the humanities” (p. 25). This moment saw new technologies, specifically the computer, aid the researcher in studies and an increase in qualitative research focused journals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln also describe a shift within this moment from positivistic approaches to interpretive approaches. The fourth moment, from the mid 1980s until 1990, Denzin and Lincoln call the crisis of representation. During this moment, qualitative researchers struggled with issues of gender, race, and class and how they impacted research methods and the knowledge developed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Different models and approaches to qualitative research resulted from these struggles. Denzin and Lincoln state the fifth moment, the postmodern moment, which started in 1990 and went until 1995, was concerned with developing more narratives and storytelling. Denzin and Lincoln state the sixth moment, postexperimental, started in 1995. Denzin and Lincoln describe both the postexperimental moment and the future moment of qualitative research as happening now. These moments have been characterized by a “concern with moral discourse [engaging in] critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 3).

Epistemologies Underlying Qualitative Research

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) outline three epistemological stances in qualitative research: (a) social construction, (b) philosophical hermeneutics, and (c) interpretive philosophies. Social construction and philosophical hermeneutics will be briefly examined below. A more comprehensive examination of interpretive philosophies and research will follow.

Social construction. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that as human beings we want to make sense of our experiences; we want to develop ideas, concepts, and meaning to make sense of our world. The idea that human beings construct their knowledge, meaning, and realities through experience and social interaction is fundamental to the idea of social construction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Turnbull, 2002). To make sense of our world from a social constructionist stance, Denzin and Lincoln state human beings are involved in an active process of “testing and modifying” (p. 305) their ideas, concepts, and meanings within a social context involving “shared understandings, practices, and language” (p. 305). Turnbull (2002) appears to agree with Denzin and Lincoln stating that the realities developed through social construction may change and are “influenced by context and time” (p. 318). The social context has historical and sociocultural elements which impact the constructions of ideas, concepts, and meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Social constructionist researchers are interested in understanding “how social experience is created and given meaning” (Turnbull, 2002, p. 320). Turnbull (2002) states social constructionists developed theories of interaction through an inductive

process which involved a relationship with the “real world” (p. 319). Turnbull states this real world interaction is a relationship between the researcher, the participants, and the study’s audience which contributes and generates new meanings, knowledge, and theories.

Philosophical hermeneutics. Philosophical hermeneutics has its roots in the works of Heidegger (Christopher, 2001), Gadamer, and Taylor (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The focus of philosophical hermeneutics is on the questions of being (Christopher, 2001). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) point out from the philosophical hermeneutics stance, understanding “is the very condition of being human” (p. 301) as human beings seek to interpret the world. Christopher (2001) expands on Denzin and Lincoln’s description by noting that philosophical hermeneutics is both a “model of culture and how it impacts the self and a means of thinking interpretively about cultural meanings and discerning their specific manifestations” (p. 115).

Denzin and Lincoln state the philosophy underlying philosophical hermeneutics “requires the engagement of one’s biases” (p. 301) in the development of understanding. These biases are “sociohistorically inherited” (p. 301) and are tested through an engagement “a dialogical encounter with what is not understood, with what is alien” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 302) to develop understanding.

Interpretive Research

Interpretive stance. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) and Jax (1984) describe the interpretive philosophical stance as one that is interested in understanding the meaning of actions. Denzin and Lincoln outline three notions of the interpretive stance to

understanding: (a) intentionality, (b) how we interpret the meaning of our own and others actions, and (c) analysis of meaning systems. Denzin and Lincoln describe intentionality as an intimate process of “getting inside the head of an actor to understand what he or she is up to in terms of motives, beliefs, desires, thoughts, and so on” (p. 296). Denzin and Lincoln’s notion of how we interpret the meaning of our own and others actions is addressed in Jax’s (1984) assumptions of the interpretive stance. Jax states human beings are capable of interpreting the meaning of their actions and do so within a social context. Denzin and Lincoln state, “Human action is meaningful by virtue of the system of meanings which it belongs. Understanding those systems of meanings (institutional and cultural norms, action-constituting rules, and so on) is the goal of *Verstehen* [understanding]” (p. 298).

Assumptions underlying interpretive research. Jax (1984) outlines eight

assumptions of the interpretive stance to qualitative research:

1. Human beings are self-interpreting beings capable of interpreting other people’s actions or language as well as their own actions and language.
2. The person acting or speaking brings to any situation a framework of personal meaning.
3. As an actor or speaker in a social cultural scene, experience is not a private but an intersubjective occurrence.
4. The meaning of an act or the symbolic use of language cannot be separated from the context of the situation.
5. Human beings cannot be reduced to parts; their completeness is more than the sum of their parts.
6. Actions and language are rule governed. Rules have been defined by social practices and institutions, and they have value attached to them.

7. Human beings reason affectively as well as cognitively.
8. The self as a thinker is linked to the self as an actor and speaker.

Within Jax's (1984) assumptions are several themes that can be noted. First, Jax's assumptions reflect the notions described by Denzin and Lincoln (2003). There is also a contextual nature to Jax's assumptions in which there is an emphasis on the exchange or interaction between the actor and his/her environment that is critical to interpretive understanding. As part of this context, there are rules which are socially constructed and value laden which impact actions, language, and interpretation (Jax, 1994). There is also a fundamental holistic theme within Jax's assumptions; Jax notes that one cannot separate oneself from other parts of the self (i.e.: thinker from actor, emotion from thought).

Philosophies of the interpretive stance. There are two foundational philosophies of the interpretive stance to qualitative research: hermeneutics and phenomenology. These two philosophies will be examined below.

Rennie (1999) describes hermeneutics as "the practice of interpreting the meaning of text" (p. 5). Odman & Kerdeman (1999) define hermeneutics as "the theory and practice of interpretation and understanding (German, *Verstehen*) in different kinds of human contexts (religious as well as secular, scientific, and quotidian)" (p. 184). Hultgren (1999) describes hermeneutics as a process of "exposing hidden meanings, making the strange or alien familiar and comprehensible" (p. 42).

Hermeneutics has its roots in ancient times and the interpretation of religious and judicial texts (Palmer, 1969; Rennie, 1999). Palmer (1969) cites both Aristotle and Plato as referring to hermeneutics in their writings. The origin of the word hermeneutic is found in two Greek words *hermeneuien* (verb) and *hermeneia* (noun) which are tied to the Greek god Hermes who is associated with “transmuting what is beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence can grasp” (Palmer, 1969, p. 13).

Both Palmer (1969) and Rennie (1999) write that during the Reformation the practice of hermeneutics provided interpretive manuals for Protestant ministers to aid in their interpretation of the Bible. In the 19th century, Friedrich Schleiermacher began to think of hermeneutics as a “science of understanding” (Palmer, 1969, p. 40). Schleiermacher’s hermeneutic understanding involved both a grammatical interpretation and a psychological interpretation (Odman & Kerdeman, 1999). Odman & Kerdeman (1999) state this was a change in hermeneutics from the “practical rules” (p. 188) of understanding from the biblical exegesis (grammatical interpretation) to an inclusion of the psychological interpretation which they describe as “the examination of the conditions that make understanding possible” (p. 188).

In the late 19th century, the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey thought hermeneutics was a means of studying “the whole field of human studies” (Odman & Kerdeman, 1999, p. 188; Palmer, 1969). Dilthey contributed specific ideas to hermeneutics including (a) people understand specific experiences through a cultural context of meaning (Odman & Kerdeman, 1999) and (b) “an empathic approach to understanding another’s experience that involves the application of induction, analysis,

construction, and comparison” (Rennie, 1999, p. 5).

In the 20th century, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer contributed to the ideas of hermeneutics by addressing “how human beings define themselves as beings in the world” (Odman & Kerdeman, 199, p. 190) and the questions of being (Christopher, 2001). Annells (1995) outlines Heidegger’s contributions to hermeneutics including: (a) the concept of *Dasein* – “situated meaning of a human in the world” (p. 706), (b) connectedness instead of linear time, and (c) being in the world – a view of “person and the world being co-constituted” (p. 706).

Phenomenology as a research practice looks at the meaning of lived experience. The focus of the research is the examination of the experience to find the essence of that experience – what makes the experience/phenomena what it is. Heidegger (1962) describes phenomenon as “that which shows itself in itself” (p. 51) and that phenomenology is the process of bringing that experience to be seen. Heidegger states “to have a science ‘of’ phenomena means to grasp its objects in such a way that everything about them which is up for discussion must be treated by exhibiting it directly and demonstrating it directly” (p. 59). The aim is to describe the experience as it actually happened with universal meaning (J. McClelland, personal communication, October 11, 2000).

The historical roots of the phenomenological approach have been noted in three phases: (a) Preparatory, (b) German, and (c) French (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Speziale and Carpenter (2007) note Franz Brentano and Carl Stumpf were predominant thinkers of phenomenology during the Preparatory period. The hallmark of this period

was the concept of intentionality – the idea to have “consciousness one must be conscious of something” (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007, p. 78).

The German Phase is centered on the works of Edmund Husserl (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998) and Martin Heidegger (1927/1962). Husserl was interested in using phenomenology to address issues of human concerns, philosophy, and science (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Speziale and Carpenter (2007) state the phenomenological ideas of essences – “the basic units of common understanding of any phenomenon” (p. 79), intuiting – “an accurate interpretation of what is meant in the description of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 79), and phenomenological reduction – “a return to the original awareness regarding the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 79) were principle contributions to phenomenology during this period.

The French Phase leaders included Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sarte, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). The focus of this phase was on the relationship between lived experience and consciousness or being in the world (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007).

Interpretive methodologies. There are a variety of research methods that are qualitative interpretive methods. Hermeneutics and phenomenology have already been addressed as interpretive philosophies, yet there are also interpretive studies that are hermeneutic or phenomenological in their approach. Hermeneutic studies examine texts attempting to answer the question “What is the meaning of this text about X?” Phenomenological studies examine experience and attempt to answer the question “What is it like to be X?” Hermeneutic phenomenological studies examine the meaning of an

experience and attempt to answer the question “What does it mean to be X?” Sherman and Reid (1994) describe ethnographic methods as methods in which the researcher immerses themselves in and participates in the natural setting of a culture or society in order to develop understanding. The question of ethnographic research is “What is the culture or subculture of X?” The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) has been noted as a qualitative interpretive research method which seeks to answer the question “What are the effective or ineffective behaviors of X?” The strengths of the CIT as a qualitative interpretive research method are examined below.

The Critical Incident Technique as a Qualitative Method

Critical incident technique as a hermeneutic phenomenological method. CIT is a qualitative method that is situated within the interpretive stance of qualitative research (Chell, 1998). It draws from both phenomenology (Chell, 1998) and hermeneutics (von Post & Erikson, 1999) as it seeks to develop understanding of a particular phenomena (effective or ineffective behavior within a situational context) through the interpretation of texts (transcribed interviews of those with experience of the phenomena being studied). This idea of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach is described by Speziale and Carpenter (2007) as “essentially a philosophy of the nature of understanding a particular phenomenon and the scientific interpretation of phenomena appearing in text or written word” (p. 88).

Speziale and Carpenter (2007) outline three principle steps to a hermeneutic phenomenological process: (a) a naïve reading, (b) structured analysis, and (c) interpretation of the whole. With the naïve reading, “the researcher reads the text as a

whole to become familiar with the text and begins to formulate thoughts about its meaning for further analysis” (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007, p. 89). Following the naïve reading, the researcher engages in the structured analysis, which Speziale and Carpenter (2007) describe as “the identification of meaningful connections and patterns” (p. 89). Finally, the researcher engages in the interpretation of the whole, which Speziale and Carpenter (2007) describe as “a reflection of the initial reading along with the interpretive reading to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the findings. It is at this point that themes and subthemes are described (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). CIT is implemented using these principle steps (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005). These steps are specifically described as they relate to this study and the implementation of CIT later in this chapter.

Strengths of the critical incident technique as a qualitative method. As a qualitative research method, the CIT has certain strengths: it (a) attempts to develop an “understanding about a given phenomenon experienced by a specific group” (Redmann, et al., 2000, p. 136), (b) is naturalistic (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998), (c) is descriptive (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998), (d) is an inductive method examining the links between the data of the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998), and (f) focuses on meaning (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998).

In a CIT study, the research study’s purpose is to understand the effective and/or ineffective behaviors of a particular group within a defined situation. This purpose of a CIT study drives the development of the research question, the data collection decisions, and the data analysis decisions. To understand the effective behaviors of school social

workers in developing and sustaining relationships with parents, I developed a research question focused on identifying those behaviors. In a CIT study, data collection decisions are made with the following research purpose and question in mind: (a) who would have experienced the phenomenon and be able to report about those experiences? and (b) how would the researcher obtain those reports? For this study, I decided school social workers would have the direct experiences with the phenomenon of interest and that direct interviews would be the preferred method of reporting those experiences because they offered the school social worker an opportunity to directly report those experiences. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the effective behaviors of school social workers, the data analysis was focused on identifying critical incidents happening within specific situations then taking those critical incidents and looking for behaviors and behavioral themes that occurred throughout the data. The behavioral themes identified in the next chapter are the outcome of working to develop an understanding of the behaviors that are associated with developing and sustaining relationships with parents.

The naturalistic element in a CIT study brings the researcher into interaction with individuals who have experiences with the phenomenon being studied, providing a direct source to the data (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998). The interaction between the researcher and the study participants is also seen as helping the researcher develop and understand the behavior because the researcher directs study participants to recall and report their experiences with the phenomenon being studied.

Qualitative research provides a description of the phenomenon being studied in order to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998). The phenomenon's description comes from the interpretation of a study's data i.e., words and pictures, which are collected (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998). In a CIT study, the description one hopes to come away with is a description of effective or ineffective behaviors of a particular phenomenon in a particular setting (Flanagan, 1954). For this study, I focused my efforts on examining the experiences of school social workers in order to describe the effective behaviors that led to and helped to sustain relationships with parents.

A CIT study develops its results through an inductive process (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998). In an inductive process, the researcher examines the data to discover interconnections (links) within the data that lead to a description of the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998). In a CIT study, the researcher looks for critical incidents that are reflected across the data that provide a thematic description of effective or ineffective behaviors.

Central to qualitative research is the focus on meaning. Sherman and Reid (1998) define meaning as "what an experience means to a person" (p. 495). They further stress that meaning is interactional, occurring between "a person, an object, and an action taken toward the object" (p. 495). The assumption here is that humans seek meaning in their lives to understand the world and their interaction with the world (Bogdan & Biklan, 1998). In this particular study, the identified meaning focus was on school social workers' experiences developing and sustaining relationships with parents.

*The Critical Incident Technique**Introduction*

The CIT is “a procedure for gathering certain important facts concerning behavior in defined situations” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 335). The procedure described by Flanagan (1954) of “gathering certain facts” (p. 335) includes: (a) the collection of stories, reports, observations, or anecdotes about certain behaviors reported by the population being studied; (b) the identification of critical incidents from those reports; (c) the identification of specific effective or ineffective behaviors developed from the analysis of critical incidents; and (d) the identification of behavioral themes to describe effective or ineffective behaviors within a defined situation (American Institutes for Research, 1988; Chell, 1998; Zemke & Kramlinger, 1982).

History and Uses of Critical Incident Technique

John Flanagan (1954) developed CIT from his research during World War II with the Aviation Psychology Program. Flanagan’s initial research was to create protocols for the selection and classification of aircrews serving in the war. Flanagan states the initial CIT studies examined reasons pilots failed bombing runs. Flanagan collected and analyzed data reported in the group mission reports of failed bombing runs and then used the findings to make recommendations regarding the selection and training of aircrews within the Air Force.

Following the war, Flanagan (1954) and others developed the American Institute for Research, using the research process and techniques developed during the war to study behavior. Initial studies of the American Institute for Research included using Air

Force officer interviews to identify critical requirements for their job, the use of a variety of data to identify the critical requirements for commercial airline pilots, and the use of interview data to assess the performance of physical science researchers (Flanagan, 1954).

Critical incident technique in education. Due to the success in identifying and describing effective and/or ineffective behaviors, CIT has been used in education to study a variety of phenomena. In an effort to develop a model of school-community communication, Abbott, Campbell, Schuck, and Woolley (1968) obtained data from parents, youth, school staff, and the community of a school district in California to understand the behavioral concerns of the community as a critical step in developing a communication model. In another study, Zalman and Bryant (2001) interviewed school principals about conflicts with parents, students, and staff to identify the principals' behaviors in conflict situations. They identified 273 effective and ineffective behaviors principals used to deal with conflicts they experience and three categories of conflict which the principals experienced: (a) conflict with parents, (b) conflict with students, and (c) conflict with staff. Le Mare and Sohbat (2002) identified teacher behaviors and characteristics that supported or inhibited a student's help seeking behavior. They interviewed 115 elementary school students to understand student perceptions of teacher characteristics and behaviors that supported or inhibited help seeking. They found 10 teacher behaviors and characteristics that supported or inhibited student help seeking behavior: (a) teacher willingness to help the student, (b) perceived teacher competence, (c) teacher reactions to student help seeking, (d) teacher expectations, (e)

personality traits of the teacher, (f) teacher relationships with students, (g) the teacher's predictability, (h) the gender of the teacher, (i) the teacher's mood, (j) and the student's perception of familiarity with the teacher.

Critical incident technique in social work. CIT has also been used within social work to investigate a variety of phenomena. Takagi (1958) collected 219 critical incidents from six University of Minnesota School of Social Work field instructors in order to identify characteristics of effective casework performance. Mc Gowen (1978), using the reports of 39 practitioners and their child advocacy interventions, explored the dynamics of interventions and used the findings to develop a model for case advocacy practice. In a study involving the observational reports of 72 social work students and practitioners, Swenson (1983) identified key variables in natural helping processes and developed a natural helping classification. Ellison (1991) using a survey distributed to Master of Social Work students and field instructors identified 15 effective and 13 ineffective behaviors of field instructors' teaching.

Strengths of the Critical Incident Technique

Gremier (2004) describes CIT as having three significant methodological strengths: (a) the method uses participants as experts, (b) the method provides the opportunity to examine phenomena that have a limited research base, and (c) the method can add to a multimethod study or be used to generate new research.

Participant as expert. In CIT research, the individual study participant is viewed as the expert because of their direct experiences with the phenomenon being examined (Gremier, 2004; Sibley, 2004; Stauss & Weinlich, 1997). CIT study participants provide

accounts of their experiences that contain rich data of first hand experiences (Gremier, 2004), which may provide evidence of integrating theory and practice (Schon, 1987). For this study, school social workers with a minimum of three years of school social work practice were viewed as the experts in being able to integrate social work knowledge, values, and skills into effective direct practice with parents. Consequently, they were viewed as an appropriate source, for providing critical incidents reflecting experiences with parents.

Examining phenomena. CIT is a research method that can be used to develop new knowledge about a phenomenon for which there is little documented literature (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990). The knowledge developed in a CIT study provides a description of a phenomenon (effective or ineffective behaviors in a certain situation), which contributes to developing an understanding of that phenomenon.

As noted in the literature review, there is a history in school social work of working with parents, there are professional standards for school social work practice focused on the school social worker-parent relationship, and there is a body of literature that discusses outcomes from school social worker interventions with and services to parents. However, little has been written about the dynamics of the school social worker-parent relationship. To address this void in the research, the purpose of this study is to develop understanding of behaviors school social workers engage in to develop and sustain relationships with parents.

Aiding other research. Griemer (2004) asserts CIT aids other research by being incorporated in multi-method studies. Griemer stresses the generation of new knowledge developed by a CIT study can be used as foundational knowledge when investigating a phenomenon.

Study Procedure

The CIT method used in this study was implemented in three stages: (a) planning and preparation, (b) data collection, and (c) data analysis. The following sections describe each research stage and how it was conducted.

Planning and Preparation

The planning and preparation process for conducting a CIT study involves: (a) identifying the problem, (b) developing a formal and functional statement of the objective of the research study (Flanagan, 1954), and (c) identifying the research question (Stitt-Gohdes, Lambrecht, & Redmann, 2000).

The problem. School social workers have a history of working with parents on behalf of students' learning and development. Kurtz and Barth (2001) write that social workers spend over one-third of their time with parents in efforts to improve student learning and development. Developed from the study's theoretical literature foundation, a principal assumption underlying this study is that students, parents, and school social workers function in a systems interaction, centered around the child, in which the relationship between school social workers and parents and the interventions and services stemming from that relationship have an impact on the system parts (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Expanding on the principal assumption, positive relationships between the home

and school have positive outcomes for students, parents, the school, and the community (Epstein, 1996; Swap, 1993). Research (e. g., Bowen, 1999; Devaney & Milstein, 1998; Dillard et al., 1986; McDonald & Sayger, 1998) shows that there are positive outcomes for students, parents, and the school from the interventions and services engaged in by school social workers with parents, but there is little documented about the school social worker-parent relationship.

As I reviewed the available literature on school social worker-parent relationships, I found a gap in the research. The literature describes positive outcomes from school social worker-parent relationships and the types of school social worker-parent interventions, yet the literature lacked an emphasis on the development and maintenance of school social worker-parent relationships.

Study objective and research question. The objective of this study is to understand effective behaviors school social workers engage in to develop and sustain relationships with parents. This study is in direct response to address the void in documentation about the school social worker-parent relationship by developing an initial examination of the effective behaviors of school social worker in developing and sustaining their relationships with parents. CIT appeared to fit my goal of developing an understanding of school social work behaviors that are associated with developing and sustaining relationships with parents because (a) the method provides the opportunity to explore phenomena about which there is little documented research and to create an understanding of such phenomena (Gremier, 2004) and (b) the method uses reports of direct experiences within defined situations to identify effective or ineffective behaviors

(Chell, 1998).

CIT research describes a critical incident study's objective as a specific statement of the phenomenon to be studied in the research project (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986). A researcher can develop the study's objective by conducting a literature review on the phenomenon to be studied, by seeking a description of the activity from those in the field, or both (Woolsey, 1986). The study's objective is then used by the researcher to identify the research questions and then used by research study participants to "select incidents to report" (Woolsey, 1986, p.244).

From the study's objective, I developed the following research question for this study: What are effective school social worker behaviors associated with developing and sustaining helping relationships with parents?

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher. As the researcher for this study, I am a doctoral candidate with a family education focus. I have a Bachelor and a Master degree in social work and worked as a social worker for five years prior to pursuing a career in family education. I have completed coursework to be licensed as a teacher in Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) and have been teaching in ECFE for 12 years.

As a result of my educational and professional background, I became interested in family involvement and schools. I was curious as to what strategies work to engage families in children's learning and development. This study is an integration of my professional and educational background and my curiosity about effective strategies to engage families in children's learning and development.

In conducting this study, one of my strengths is that I share a similar educational background to the study's participants of foundational social work coursework, which is required by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) for a Masters degree in social work. Another strength of my background is that I have had professional experiences working in school systems with parents, school social workers, teachers, and administrators. Both my foundation knowledge and my professional experiences in school systems were helpful in understanding the participants' experiences. With regards to this study, my limitations will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Identification of study participants. For this study, I identified two criteria to guide participant selection: (a) school social workers had to have been practicing school social work for at least three years and (b) school social workers had to live in the metro area where I lived. The first criterion of professional practice was based on the concept of tenure (usually three years of teaching or professional practice within a school district). In some school districts, school social workers as well as teachers are tenured. Involving tenured social workers insured participants had a sufficient amount of experience in the field and with the phenomenon of interest. The experience criteria is in response to both Woolsey (1986) and Redmann et al. (2000) who encourage the researcher to identify participants who are familiar with the activity to be studied and who can make first-hand observations. The second criterion was identified because of my limited funds for travel.

Recruitment of study participants. My initial steps to recruit participants involved acquiring the support and access to the mailing list of the state school social worker association. I contacted and met with the president of the state school social work association to explain the study and establish a means to recruit voluntary participants among the members. I provided the president a briefing paper on the study and offered to make myself available to board members if they had questions about the study. I paid the state school social worker association an access fee to the member database and obtained a letter of support from the association president for the University of Minnesota's Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

After receiving the University of Minnesota's Human Subjects Institutional Review Board's Approval for the study (see Appendix A- University of Minnesota's Human Subjects Institutional Review Board's Approval Notification), I mailed 100 introductory letters to school social workers in the metro area I lived in (see Appendix B- Introductory Letter to School Social Workers). As already mentioned, I chose the particular metropolitan area based on my available financial resources for the completion of this study. The introductory letter explained the purpose of the study, the criteria for participating in the study, how the study would be conducted, and my contact information. Interested school social workers were encouraged to contact me by phone or email. I responded to those who contacted me with a telephone call to further explain the study, discuss their potential interest, and establish interview times for those who were willing to participate.

The participants. Twenty-two social workers indicated interest in the study and were contacted by phone. I was able to conduct 18 interviews. Attempts to involve the other four school social workers who showed interest in participating were made, but due to the school year ending and summer schedules I was unable to secure those interviews. Seventeen participants were female; one participant was male. Seventeen interview participants were involved with special education services in their district. One participant had a sole focus on general education students and their families. Participants were involved with all ages of students: pre-school, elementary, junior high/middle school, and high school. Participants received a \$20 gift card for completing an interview.

Interviews. When volunteers responded to the study's introductory letter and chose to participate in the study, the participants and I discussed and agreed to times and locations that were convenient for the participant. All interviews were conducted in the participant's office or an alternative space that provided privacy for the school social worker.

I made a decision to use face-to-face interviews rather than telephone interviews, due to my interest in being able to be able to interpret and respond to nonverbal communication (Redmann et al., 2000). Another reason I chose face-to-face interviews was the opportunity to probe with further questions in order to develop a deeper understanding of school social workers' experiences with parents and my interest in (Redmann et al., 2000).

All interviews were recorded using an audio tape recorder. Redmann et al. (2000) suggest that interviews be audio taped, so that the researcher can monitor the tone, phrasing, and content of the interview questions, in order to enhance the reliability of the way interviews are conducted across participants. Audio taping also frees the researcher from note taking and to direct all of his or her attention to what the interviewee is saying (Redmann et al., 2000).

At the time of interview, school social worker participants and I reviewed a consent form that addressed issues of the voluntary nature of the interviews, privacy, and confidentiality. Participants were notified of the methods and purpose of the study and how the information they provided would be used. Participants were also notified of the potential benefits and risks to being interviewed for this study. Participants were informed that they would receive a \$20 bookstore gift card for their participation at the end of the interview. The volunteer participants agreed to the conditions of the interview as stated in the consent form, (see Appendix C- Consent Form) and signed the consent forms of this study. School social workers participating in this study were involved in one interview that explored their experiences with parent relationships.

The interviews lasted about an hour. At the conclusion of the interviews, I thanked the participants and provided them with a \$20 bookstore gift card for their participation.

Interview questions. The research question for this study was: what are the effective school social worker behaviors that are associated with developing and sustaining helping relationships with parents? In developing the interview questions, I

was influenced by the work of Flanagan (1954) and Stitt-Gohdes et al. (2000). As a result, the interview questions, I developed asked school social workers to discuss their role as a school social worker and to identify significant experiences with parents.

The primary interview questions were: (a) Describe your role as a school social worker. (b) Describe a critical or important experience that is an example of your role interacting with parents and families in your school (this could be either something that went well or something that did not).

Probing questions that followed the initial questions asked for clarification of the meaning of responses, attempted to go into further depth regarding a particular response, or brought the subject back to the focus of the interview. Examples of those follow up questions included:

1. How did that relationship start?
2. What happened as a result with that parent you were just talking about?
Where did the relationship go?
3. How did you feel about the outcome with that relationship?
4. So what happened in that relationship after that conversation?

After the participant described a significant experience, I repeated the primary interview question and asked the school social worker to identify and describe another significant experience interacting with parents.

The inexperience of the researcher led to primary questions not being focused directly on developing and sustaining relationships with parents. Also, school social workers were not given specific parameters about what was considered a critical

experience interacting with parents other than to report a situation that went well or a situation that did not go well. As a result, the school social workers self selected their reports of what they considered a critical experience interacting with parents. The consequences of these limitations will be examined in Chapter 5.

Transcription. The audio taped interviews were transcribed into text by a hired transcriptionist recommended by the author's first advisor. Following the transcription, I reviewed the transcribed texts and interview audio tapes to verify the transcriptions, clean up any transcription errors, and minimize inaudible segments of the transcripts. I conducted a second reading of the interview text data to orient myself to the data gathered. Following the transcription text clean up and the orientation reading, I began to examine the data for critical incidents identified by the school social workers of their role interacting with parents.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data had three components: (a) the identification of the critical incidents, (b) the identification of specific behaviors from the critical incidents, and (c) the development of behavioral themes from the specific behaviors identified within the critical incidents.

The analysis of the transcribed interview texts for critical incidents originate from the study's objective and the questions used in the interview (Flanagan, 1954; Redmann et al., 2000). "The purpose of analyzing critical incident interviews is to understand the commonalities among the responses" (Stitt-Gohdes et al., 2000, p. 11). Flanagan (1982) describes the analyzing process as one of insight, experience, and judgment, in which the

researcher spends time with the raw data, reviewing it for critical incidents that are identified by the participants (Fountain, 1999). I approached the data from my own educational and professional background, making subjective judgments to identify critical incidents from the data (Flanagan, 1954).

Identifying critical incidents. After my initial review to verify and clean up transcription errors and the second review to orient myself to the texts, I reviewed the transcribed texts again using a different color highlight marker to indicate each component of the critical incident in accordance with Fountain (1999). Fountain identified three components of a critical incident: (a) a description of the situation, (b) an account of the actions or behavior of the key player in the incident, and (c) an outcome or result. For this study, I adapted Fountain's criteria. Critical incidents had to have: (a) a defined situation, (b) a specific behavior of the school social worker interacting with parents, and (c) an outcome or result when indicated by the school social worker. Each interview contained several critical incidents described by an individual school social worker.

Identifying behaviors from critical incidents. After I had marked the transcription texts for the three components of critical incidents, I made notes in the margins of the texts identifying the specific behaviors of each critical incident (Stitt-Gohdes et al, 2000). The notes in the transcriptions' margins resulted in a behavioral description of what the school social workers did in their interaction with parents. I also noted potential themes of behavior across the interviews.

I recorded the behavioral descriptions from the critical incidents in a table and indicated the number of critical incidents across all the interviews in which the behavior was mentioned. This data is presented in Table 1 in Chapter 4 and in Appendix D-Behavioral Themes and Behaviors. However, the number of critical incidents across all interviews in which a behavior was mentioned yielded little useful information.

Reliability. To establish reliability while identifying the critical incidents, behaviors, and possible themes I contacted local area universities to recruit a graduate-level social work student as another coder of the behaviors. The recruited student rater was a PhD social work student from the University of Minnesota and a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker with her own private practice. The student was given \$200 as a stipend for her time.

I had instructed the student rater that the interviews had been coded for critical incidents, which included (a) a defined situation, (b) a specific behavior of the school social worker interacting with parents, and (c) an outcome or result when indicated by the school social worker. I provided the student rater with the first five transcribed texts and asked her to review the texts to verify the identified critical incidents. She was also asked to code behaviors from the critical incidents and identify possible behavioral themes of the first five transcripts. Following her review and coding of the first five transcripts, I met with the student rater to discuss the identification of the critical incidents, behavioral coding, and the identification of potential behavioral themes (Stitt-Gohdes et al., 2000). Her review agreed with my analysis of the identification of critical incidents, the coding of the behaviors, and the identification of the initial four

behavioral themes of the study's first five transcripts.

Behavior coding of the remaining transcripts. I used the agreed upon coding of behaviors from the first five texts to review my behavior coding of the remaining interviews' critical incidents. Then, I provided the student coder with all the raw data to review the other behaviors I had identified based on our agreed coding. The student rater made a judgment about whether or not the behaviors I coded met the behavioral codes that we had agreed upon from the analysis of the first five transcript texts. The student rater agreed with my behavioral coding of the remaining texts' critical incidents. As a result of the analysis, 38 behaviors were identified across the interviews and are listed in Table 1 in Chapter 4 and in Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors.

Units of analysis shift. Initially, I had identified the number of critical incidents across all interview texts in which a particular behavior was mentioned; yet this yielded little useful information. To identify the effective school social worker behaviors and behavioral themes across the interviews, I shifted from the number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned as units of analysis to the number of interviews in which a behavior occurred at least once — i.e. a method recommended by Stitt-Gohdes et al (2000) in which each interview is considered a unit of analysis. If a behavior was present in an interview I now counted the behavior once per interview. This is demonstrated in Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors.

Theme development. I identified four initial behavioral themes from the data of this study. The student rater reviewed and agreed with my analysis of the initial behavioral themes. These themes are broad groupings that categorize the behaviors

identified in this study. Though some behaviors could be identified as belonging to more than one thematic group (e.g., expressing nonverbal communication), I made the decisions to designate those behaviors in a particular thematic group based on my insight, experience, and judgment, to which the student rater agreed (Flanagan, 1982).

To determine the frequency of a particular theme across the interviews, I followed a procedure outlined by Stitt-Gohdes et al. (2000). A table of this procedure is outlined in Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors. To begin, I indicated on a spreadsheet each theme's specific behaviors and the number of interviews in which that behavior was described. Next, I rank ordered each theme's behaviors on the spreadsheet by the total number of interviews in which a behavior was described (Stitt-Gohdes, 2000). Then, I counted the number of interviews in which a behavioral theme was reflected. If an interview contained any of a particular theme's behaviors, the interview was counted as a single unit of analysis towards the theme's frequency of occurrence (Stitt-Gohdes et al., 2000). To be considered a significant behavioral theme, the theme had to have been identified in at least 50% of the 18 interviews. At this point one of the initial behavioral themes was dropped because it did not meet the criteria of being identified in at least 50% of the 18 interviews. Three behavioral themes were identified: (a) communication behaviors, (b) showing care and concern behaviors, and (c) working within the school system behaviors.

While grouping behaviors into broad behavioral themes, patterns of behavioral subthemes were determined. These subtheme categories are shown in relation to each broad behavioral theme in Tables 2, 3, and 4 in Chapter 4. I designated which behaviors

belonged to particular subthemes based on thematic similarities through my insight, experience, and judgment. As a result, each behavioral theme has subthemes and specific behaviors.

Methodology and Methods Summary

The first discussion of the chapter discussed the major aspects of qualitative research. This discussion was an attempt to understand the CIT within the larger context of qualitative research. The discussion addressed: (a) what qualitative research is, (b) the elements of qualitative research, (c) the history of qualitative research, (d) and the philosophies of qualitative research. The next discussion focused specifically on the interpretive stance within qualitative research examining: (a) what is interpretive research, (b) the assumptions of qualitative research, (c) the philosophies of qualitative research, and (d) the interpretive methodologies. The third discussion focused on CIT as a qualitative interpretive research method and the strengths of CIT as a qualitative research method.

The CIT is a research process developed by Flanagan (1954) that attempts to identify effective and/or ineffective behaviors within a defined situation, through the examination of reports or observations from the persons with the most experience with the defined situation or phenomena of interest. Both the education and social work fields have used the Critical Incident Technique to identify effective behaviors within those fields.

CIT's principal strength of using participants as experts to gain an understanding of a phenomenon was central to the objective of this study (Gremier, 2004). Along with

the use of participants as experts, the method's other significant strength of being able to shed light on phenomena that have a limited research base was a key factor in the choice of using this research method because there is limited research on the school social worker-parent relationship (Gremier, 2004).

I carried out the CIT used in this study in three primary stages: (a) planning and preparation, (b) data collection, and (c) data analysis. The planning and preparation involved identifying the problem the study addresses and identifying the research objective and the research question to address that problem. I identified a gap in the knowledge about school social worker-parent relationships — specifically what are the effective school social worker behaviors in establishing and maintaining relationships with parents. As a result, I developed the study's objective and research question to address the gap knowledge. The study's objective was to understand the effective behaviors school social workers engage in to develop and sustain relationships with parents. The research question asked: what are the effective behaviors of school social workers associated with developing and sustaining helping relationships with parents?

In the data collection stage, I contacted the local school social work association to discuss the study and get permission to use their member database for recruitment. I sent out 100 introductory letters to school social workers in the local metropolitan area explaining the study and the requirements to participate in the study. Eighteen school social workers who had three years or more experience and who lived within the local metropolitan area were identified as study participants and agreed to participate in the study. The data collection involved face-to-face audio taped interviews with the 18

school social workers about their experiences working with parents. A hired transcriptionist transcribed the audio taped interviews, and then I reviewed the transcripts to verify the transcriptions and clean up transcription errors.

I read the transcribed texts for a second time to orientate myself to the data. After completing the second reading, I began to analyze the texts for critical incidents. I used highlighter marker to indicate the three components of a critical incident: (a) a situation in which the behavior occurred, (b) a behavior the school social worker described taking that the social worker associated with a critical experience in their relationships with parents, and (c) an outcome, when it was stated by the school social worker.

After identifying the critical incidents, I made notes in the margins of the texts to identify the specific behaviors of each critical incident. These notes were behavioral descriptions of school social workers interactions with parents. I also noted potential behavioral themes across the interviews. I recorded the number of critical incidents across all interviews in which a specific behavior was mentioned in a table. This data yielded little useful information. As a result, I later switched from the number of critical incidents across all interviews in which a specific behavior was mentioned to identifying the number of interviews in which a behavior occurred at least once (Stitte-Gohdes et al., 2000).

A recruited student rater reviewed the first five transcripts' to verify the critical incidents. She also coded behaviors from the critical incidents and identified potential themes of the first five transcripts. Later, the student rater and I met to discuss and agree on the critical incidents, behaviors, and themes of the first five transcripts. Using the

agreed upon behavioral codes, I reviewed my coding of the remaining texts' critical incidents for effective behaviors. Then, the student rater reviewed my behavioral coding of the remaining texts to determine whether or not the behaviors fit the coding criteria we had agreed on. Thirty-eight behaviors were identified from the data.

From the groupings of the identified and agreed upon behaviors of all the texts, I developed the behavioral themes of this study (Stitt-Gohdes et al., 2000). The student rater reviewed and agreed with my initial behavioral themes. Next, I identified the frequency of a behavioral theme across all the interviews. For a behavioral theme to be included in the data reported in this study, the theme had to be identified in at least 50% of the interviews (in at least 9 of the 18 interviews). Three behavioral themes were identified in the analysis and will be reported in Chapter 4.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

The objective of this study was to understand the effective behaviors school social workers engage in to develop and sustain relationships with parents. The CIT method was used to obtain and analyze data relevant to this objective. This chapter reports the behaviors, the three behavioral themes that were identified from the behaviors, each theme's subthemes, and samples of the data on which the themes were based.

Behaviors

As mentioned earlier, critical incidents identified in this study had three components in accordance with Fountain (1999): (a) a defined situation in which the incident occurred, (b) a behavior the school social worker described that reflected building or maintaining a relationship with parents, and (c) an outcome, when it was stated by the school social worker. I identified 38 behaviors, from the critical incidents, which are displayed in Table 1. A student rater reviewed the data and agreed with my assessment and coding of the 38 behaviors.

Table 1

Critical Incident Behaviors Identified in Interviews

Interaction behaviors	Number of total critical incidents across all interviews in which the behavior was mentioned	Number of interviews identifying the behavior
Communicating behavior or progress to parent	30	14
Making continuous attempts to contact the parent	13	11
Listening to the parent	16	10
Expressing care and concern to the parent	12	10
Using a school interdisciplinary team approach with parent	15	9
Being intentional about contact with the parent	13	9
Acknowledging parents' feelings and concerns	13	8
Having informal contacts/interactions with the parent	15	7
Inviting the parent to meeting or school	9	7
Being an intermediary between home and school	7	6

Interaction behaviors	Number of total critical incidents across all interviews in which the behavior was mentioned	Number of interviews identifying the behavior
Answering parents' questions or concerns	5	5
Being sensitive in sharing information with the parent	5	4
Working with parents regarding child's school transitions	5	4
Displaying empathy towards parent	6	3
Getting information from the parent	3	3
Getting information for and sharing information with the parent	3	3
Identifying parent strengths	3	3
Apologizing to the parent	3	3
Developing a school service plan with the parent	4	2
Using humor with a parent	3	2
Introducing oneself to the parent	3	2
Using extended family to continue contact with family	2	2
Inviting the parent to contact if needed	2	2

Interaction behaviors	Number of total critical incidents across all interviews in which the behavior was mentioned	Number of interviews identifying the behavior
Using an interpreter to contact the parent	2	2
Expressing nonverbal communication	2	2
Encouraging parent to take action within school system	2	2
Problem solving with parent within the school system	2	2
Helping parents understand child's behavior	2	2
Being there for the parent	1	1
Staying "real" with parent	1	1
Using social worker's own experience to empathize with parent	1	1
Acknowledging the parent	1	1
Discussing family dynamics with the parent	1	1
Giving the parent space	1	1
Having a non-judgmental attitude	1	1
Using similar backgrounds with connect to parent	1	1

Interaction behaviors	Number of total critical incidents across all interviews in which the behavior was mentioned	Number of interviews identifying the behavior
Treating the parent with respect	1	1
Getting to know the parent personally	1	1

Themes

Following the identification of school social worker behaviors from the critical incidents, I grouped similar behaviors together that shared a broader behavioral theme. A student rater reviewed and agreed with the behavioral themes identified. After grouping the behaviors by theme, I determined the frequency of a theme and its behaviors across the interviews. To be considered a significant behavioral theme, a theme had to have been identified in 50% of the interviews or in at least 9 of the 18 interviews. Three behavioral themes were identified: (a) communication behaviors, (b) showing care and concern behaviors, and (c) working within the school system behaviors.

In reporting the behavioral themes in this chapter, critical incidents will be used to demonstrate the behavioral themes, subthemes, and behaviors identified in this study. A summary chart outlining each theme is provided with its subthemes, behaviors, and the interview frequency of each behavior.

Communication Behaviors Theme (N=18)

All of the 18 school social workers described critical incidents in which they engaged in 16 different behaviors that reflected a communication theme. With the establishment of a larger theme of communication behaviors, the 16 identified behaviors were grouped into two subthemes: (a) communication access strategies and (b) information sharing. Behaviors identified in the first subtheme, communication access strategies, focused on communication strategies meant to engage parents and keep parents engaged. In the second subtheme, information sharing, the behaviors identified focused on the exchange of information between the school social worker and the parent. The communication behaviors theme and the related subthemes and behaviors are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Communication Behaviors Theme, Subthemes, and Behaviors (N=18)

Subthemes	Behaviors	Number of interviews identifying the behavior
Communication access strategies	Making continuous attempts to contact the parent	11
	Being intentional about contact with the parent	9
	Having informal contacts/interactions with the parent	7
	Inviting the parent to school or meeting	7
	Introducing oneself to the parent	2
	Using interpreter to contact the parent	2
	Using extended family to continue contact with family	2
	Inviting the parent to contact if needed	2
	Using humor with a parent	2
	Staying "real"	1
Information sharing	Communicating behavior or progress to parents	14
	Answering parents' questions or concerns	5
	Being sensitive in sharing information with the parent	4

Subthemes	Behaviors	Number of interviews identifying the behavior
Information sharing	Getting information from parents	3
	Getting information for and sharing information with parents	3
	Helping the parent understand child's behavior	2

Communication access strategies

All of the 18 school social workers described communication behaviors focused on engaging parents and keeping parents engaged in communication. These strategies included making continuous attempts to contact the parent, being intentional about contact with the parent, informal interactions, inviting the parent to the school or to a meeting, introducing oneself to the parent, using interpreters, using extended family to continue contact with family, inviting the parent to contact if needed, using humor with a parent, and staying “real”. These behaviors will be examined below with critical incidents examples provided.

Communication access strategies: Making continuous attempts to contact the parent. Eleven of the 18 school social workers described their persistence in making contact and keeping communication going with parents. In the incident described below, the school social worker discusses trying a variety of methods to engage the parent and keep the parent engaged. The worker describes being thoughtful of how the message was delivered and how messages were stated. The worker reports that the mother “would

connect for a while” then back off. And though the worker reports that he/she did not push things with the parent, the worker would continue to outreach to the parent to “stay in contact”.

[According to the parent] their child was the identified problem in the family and a bad one and all the family issues revolved around that child, no matter how much you build that child up at school [inaudible]. Situations were very, very complex. . . . So when initially I thought I need to get this parent, they struggled with school, they don't see school as [inaudible], so I need to offer some school supplies. If you didn't get the permission slip in, can we do this verbally over the phone. Things to make life easier. But interspersed with that, behavioral things were showing up with the child. So I thought I need to . . . I can't do the five goods to the one negative . . . but I gotta try to not just let every phone call be negative. So that she's going to take my calls. So what I did end up doing was I would say I need to talk with you about a field trip; I'd leave a message like that because she didn't answer if she knew it was the school calling. I'd try to leave a message about what it was we needed to talk about. If there was a behavioral concern I tried not putting that message on the phone. And partly because I knew the child would be punished even before I had any information. . . . So it was hard. I would try sealed letters. I would try to talk to her at work where I was more likely to get her there than leaving a message at home. But if I left it too vague I'd never hear back from her. She did respond very quickly if she knew it was a behavioral issue. . . . Eventually the child moved on to another school. I just would have to try to connect, and mom would connect for a while, then I'd have to back off or I would feel mom backing off so I would not push it. And then another thing would come around, what can I give or if it was a behavioral thing, I really tried to keep the giving to them enough because it was inevitable that the behavioral issues were going to come up[inaudible]. And for my comfort level, too. I knew I needed to stay in contact. I didn't want to dread calling this parent. I needed to have some humor with this parent. I needed to talk about her job, her new job, and talk about them moving, and how exciting, just chat with her. Interview 16P.

Communication access strategies: Being intentional about contact with the parent. In discussing their communications with parents, 9 of the 18 school social workers described being intentional in their contact with parents. What is meant by “being intentional” is that the school social worker appears to value having contact with the parent and makes critical decisions about their contact with parents.

In the following incident, it is the student's first year at a new school. The student has been getting in trouble and not taking ownership for their behavior. The parent was initially unhappy with the school and how it was handling the situation with their child. The school social worker makes a decision to increase contact with the parent and links the increased contact with the parent with an improved relationship with the worker.

Interviewee At the beginning of the year, it's his first year here – and at the beginning of the year the parent was pretty upset because the student would continually get into trouble with other students. He would play the victim role, but he would be doing stuff to the other students and wouldn't take ownership for his behavior. So the parent got upset with our administration here and just didn't like the student coming here. The student wasn't happy here. So then what I started to do was to have more contact with the parent. And this is one of the kids that I've collected homework for [as part of the worker's case management responsibilities] from the beginning of the year. I also call the parent and let the parent know like in our group sessions if the student was cooperative, respectful, polite, friendly, so that I'm also giving some positive feedback to the parent. So then I'm in a sense helping the student get homework and letting the parent know that I'm trying to advocate for the student at school and help with the homework piece. Then I'm also calling the parent to report positive stuff back. I'm also calling the parent to report if there's a situation at school. The parent feels so much more comfortable with me, she even calls me if there's things that she wants me to know about or if she has a question, which in a counseling or social work role, it's very hard to get parents to feel comfortable enough to call the school as many times as this parent does. . . .

Interviewer What do you think, in your relationship with mom, made it comfortable that the mom takes initiative with you now and will call you up?

Interviewee I think just 'cause the mom knows that I'm working hard to collect homework and to let her know how her son is doing in school. Normally, when the mom calls me, like if she called me today, I would get back to her the same day. So I put her at a priority. Also, I'm not only calling home to report the negative stuff but also the positive stuff. So there's more of like a rapport and a relationship between myself and the mom. So I think all that helps. Interview 4D.

In the following incident, the school social worker reports that a student was going to be expelled due to property damage. The worker reports that she/he knew that the school administration would need to contact the parent. But because the worker had an established relationship with the parents, the worker makes a decision to try and contact the parent first before the school's administration contacts the parents in order to empathize with the parents and address what the next steps could be taken.

There was a time when a child was gonna be expelled. He had done some very serious damage to property. This is a parent I had a relationship with, quite a good relationship with. What the child had done was pretty clear. There was nothing I was gonna be able to do or should have done to try to keep him within the school. It was one of those extremes with students that are non-negotiable. So, quite frankly, I was upset about it, too. I'd known this kid for a couple years. . . . I knew the administrator would call the parent. But then I thought, "Well, they're [the parents are] gonna call me. I'm gonna go ahead and call them first." I thought, "I don't want to call them, but they are gonna be really upset." And I thought, "I am somebody they trusted before and talked to before. I need to call them and at least empathize that I could see that as a parent this is gonna be painful, that they haven't wanted this for their child, and that this isn't their fault." I felt in this way I needed to try to talk to them, express my sadness or concern or empathy, but then also try to help them so they didn't get stuck in that role of . . . I was afraid they were gonna try to defend their kid and get their kid talked out of . . . try to blame the school instead of help move the kid on to the next level. . . . And when I first called, that's where they were going. The dad was saying, "Oh, I know it wasn't him. It was this person and he's being framed. We need you to . . . I've talked to a lawyer and I'm telling him you're gonna stand up in court and defend [him-the student]." So I had to say to them, "Well, I'm not able to do that. I can't do that. If he goes to court about this, which he very well may, I can speak on his behalf about things that are good or his strengths, but I can't recommend that he not be expelled. I do work for the district, I do support their plan." And then I had to remind him. "And so do you. When he started here, you followed a discipline policy, you supported that you could follow this. Some things just can't happen. But what we could have some say in or what you could help him say is where he would go. One piece of that would be the school that he would go to, and you may be able to have some say about which program he goes to. But really, let's look at this as an opportunity." The picture I use a lot is . . . in the Chinese language, there is a character for crisis is really two words together – one means danger and one means opportunity. So a lot of times I use that with parents or kids or adults or anybody in that kind of situation saying there are different ways to

look at a crisis. Saying oh, my gosh, we're immobilized. . . . Well, we can say, well yes, there's that fear, danger, but this is also an opportunity to go forward in a different way. So we were able to talk about it, how could we do something different that maybe here we weren't able to manage. We talked about different types of things that we had talked about before that they weren't really interested in [earlier]. Interview 9I.

Communication access strategies: Having informal contacts/interactions with the parent. Seven of the 18 school social workers described informal contacts with parents as providing an opportunity to connect with parents. In this first critical incident, there was a need to access for special needs services, the school social worker describes how informal contacts at school provided an introduction to who he or she was when it came time to contact the foster parent about the special needs assessment. Then, during a home visit, the school social worker "chit-chats" with the foster parent, which provides the school social worker insights to the family. After the meeting with the foster parent, the school social worker completed his/her evaluation, contacted the foster parent, but the children had returned to the biological parent.

So I've had actually several contacts with her [the foster parent] prior to actually doing any kind of interview here. I had attended this conference even though this kid wasn't a client of mine. He wasn't technically getting any services. . . .So I talked to them on the phone. I'd met them at conferences. A couple school activities like an evening fun night or third grade concert or something like that. So they knew who I was. So by the time I got to the house, we had a pretty good relationship. . . . [I] went to the house and had a very nice time sitting around the dining room and talking. The baby was there, she's two. I'm playing with her, talking to mom. In the course of conversation we talked about her [the baby's] other siblings and home improvements that are going on at the house. Who some of their neighbors are. The Dairy Queen down around the corner. The conversation kinda ebbs and flows. Because you know how it is sometimes, you just need to take a little mental break. But then, I think that there's helpful information in that, too. I find out who's the neighbors and who are his [the student's] friends? What does he do with them? Where does he go in his neighborhood? Interview 2B.

In the next example, the worker takes the opportunity of a field trip to create a bond with the parent. The incident may be of concern to the reader. Yet the researcher was not alarmed by the incident as he had experienced similar field trips as a youth in which his class was encouraged to pair up with friends, go explore the park without the chaperone, and meet up with the chaperones and the class at a certain location and time.

I have another parent that I connected with, and we just feel real good about talking with each other. I met her because her older daughter went to Valley Fair. She [the mother] was a chaperone and I was a chaperone. The kids ditched us. So I got to go on all the rides with this parent. Which was really nice because when you spend a few hours on a roller coaster with somebody. . . .I mean, not every social worker gets to do that with a parent, but that's one instance of how I got to know that parent. Interview 17Q.

Communication access strategies: Inviting the parent to school or meeting.

Seven of the 18 school social workers reported incidents of inviting the parent to come to the school or to a meeting, which appears to be a means for developing relationships between the worker or school and the parent.

In the following incident, the school social worker needs to establish a new relationship with a biological parent (the children had been in foster care). The worker reports he/she worked with the county social worker to get a meeting between the school and the parent. The worker states, "The idea being let's bring her [the parent] into this environment, make her part of the community.

Interviewer So you're having to establish a new relationship?

Interviewee Having to establish a new relationship with his biological mom, overnight. Like I said, literally overnight. So in that case it was working pretty closely with the county social worker who's been working with his family to kind of act as an intermediary in bringing this mom into this environment. We had it set up actually so they would be there on Friday afternoon or whatever it was, the day after he [the student] returned home.

Bring them in here so that mom can meet both their teachers, could meet me, the principal. The idea being let's bring her into this environment, make her part of this community. The social worker unfortunately got tied up with something. They didn't get her until 3:00, just in time to pick up the boys, for me to sort of quickly review the IEP, and mom to sign off on it. So it was . . . a fairly quick meeting. So just kinda meeting her and telling her the good things that have happened with the boys. On the one hand kinda saying your boys are doing really well. The foster family where they were did a really nice job with that. Whatever you think about them, they've done a really nice job with these guys and their teachers are great. It would be nice at some point to meet. It's been difficult meeting with the family because the boys were actually- they're living technically in another school jurisdiction. It's still in X [name of district], but if they were going to the school connected to where they live, they'd be going somewhere else. And mom doesn't have transportation, so . . . it's been difficult. . . . And then the new family, working a lot with the social worker who knows all the parties involved. And letting her, taking the lead is the wrong way to say it but letting her be the intermediary, the conduit for the relationship. Interview 2B.

In the following incident, the school social worker was conducting a home visit to go over paperwork for a special education evaluation. During the home visit, the mother shares with the school social worker her frustration with the school's assistant principal and how the school was handling concerns about her son. The school social worker reports listening to the parent's concerns, while addressing the school's concerns and inviting the parent to come to the school to observe the behavior. After repeated attempts to address the school's concerns and invite the parent to come to the school, the parent agrees to come to the school.

While she was signing it [the paperwork], I said, "It sounds like you're angry with my school right now". She told me in very strong terms that she was really angry with the assistant principal. And I just listened to her talk about her frustration. But I really was not willing to back down on that her son has some major issues. So I kept telling her both sides at the same time. Each time, it's like . . . "I want you to come to school and see how your son is acting at school and maybe that'll resolve his issues, while you're there at least. It could resolve it permanently. Maybe he'd do better with you there, but maybe you'd see it [the behavior]." And

by the end of the conversation because I kept saying he's got major issues and maybe some people aren't handling things as well as they could but he's got some major issues, she was saying, "Well, I'm gonna catch him. I'm gonna come to school repeatedly through the end of the school year and see if I can catch him." Because she cannot believe . . . she kept saying, "I cannot believe, he's a good boy, he doesn't act like this." "Well, he does." [laughter] And it's not sweet stuff. It's nasty and totally disruptive of the entire class. I went home patting myself on the back last night. Interview 6F.

Communication access strategies: Introducing oneself to the parent. Two of the 18 school social workers would take a variety of opportunities to introduce themselves to parents. In the following incident, the school social worker describes introducing him/herself to the parent, then proceeds to talk with the parent about the parent's experiences with having a child with special needs and with the school. The worker reports, "The parent was real receptive to that [calling to introduce the worker and get information about the parent's child]".

Interviewee I'm thinking of a kid who was in a special program in a school that I worked at. And because of the student's special needs, I can remember when I first met the parent, it was just introducing myself because I knew her child had a special need and we needed to talk about the special need. What [having a child with special needs] that meant for her and what her experiences had been at the school because it had not been positive. And I wanted to make sure that okay, there's a new social worker on the job [laughter]. And we ended up having a wonderful relationship because I was always calling her. I initially called her just to introduce myself and to just ask for some feedback about her child. I guess it was in the fall and I wanted to know how the summer went so that we could have a smooth transition into the fall. It was just wonderful. The parent was real receptive of that. She was very frustrated in past schools for the treatment that she and her child had received. She always said it was refreshing to come. And we had a good relationship to the point where I ended up having her be on a PDP [Professional Development Plan] team for me. So it just kinda grew into a nice working relationship.

Interviewer So you said one of the things that you did was you phoned the mom.

Interviewee Uh-huh.

Interviewer Can you remember other things that you did to build that relationship with mom? Or things that you did to keep the relationship active and going.

Interviewee Initially I called her to introduce myself. I also sent out a letter to all the students in the special program introducing myself and a little bit about myself and how long I've been in the district and that I was new to the school. . . . So I tried to have a working relationship. And it just so happened the parent that I'm thinking of was receptive to that. Interview 5E.

Communication access strategies: Using interpreter to contact the parent. Two of the 18 school social workers described incidents in which they needed to work with an interpreter in order to make contact with the parents. In the incident below, the worker describes working with a parent, through an interpreter, to address a student's absenteeism.

Interviewer Can you think about one of those opportunities that you had where you tried to get the parent involved and you just ... it never happened, and what things you tried in that situation?

Interviewee I know there's been times I have been in meetings. Some of those meetings I don't work with the kid, so the counselors do it. And sometimes, too, the parents don't even know, like there's language barriers. There was a student recently who's Hispanic and she's missed so much school. And recently I just called home with an interpreter, and the mom had no idea. Nobody's contacted her. She's not a special ed student, she's a regular ed student. That's another issue because there's so many kids here at schools, and we just don't have enough support at the schools to meet with every single student. But now I'm working with the student and she's doing a lot better, and the parents are more informed. So that's working better. Interview 4D.

Communication access strategies: Using extended family to continue contact with parents. Two of the 18 school social workers described working with extended family members in order to maintain a contact with the parent. In the incident described below, the worker discusses working with the grandmother because the parent had cut off

contact. Through listening to the grandmother's concerns, the worker was able to have a relationship with the grandmother that resulted in the biological father of the student to get in contact with the school and work with the worker.

I was working with a girl one time who I absolutely know like I know my name was prostituting. She was wearing seductive clothing and she was skipping out of class and she's been picked up by limos with guys in it that were twice her age. It was just absolutely clear as could be. I could not get that mom. There was no way. The girl had so much power and I could not get that mom to even look at the clothing issue as problematic. . . . She [the mother] was really resistant. She quit responding to phone calls. The kid dropped out of school for a while and ran away from home. [The child] came back home and came back into our school setting. It was just a mess. But what I had lost in that eagerness of mine to save this kid was, actually not even save her just to keep her from physical harm, but what I had lost was that relationship with the parent. So she [the mother] saw me more as an adversary than an advocate. And it took a long time to get that back. Actually I had to avoid the mom and went to the grandma. Because grandma would call me up and I'd say, "I don't have a release to talk to you. You're not listed anywhere. I'm happy to listen, but I can't [provide any information]." So I listened. I just literally listened while this grandma went on and on and on and on and on. So then ultimately the grandma, she would call me about once a week with some new horrible story. And then ultimately the estranged father, who the grandma still had a relationship with, came into the picture and he was listed as a parent. He was estranged from the mother but not from our school records. So I could meet with him, talk a little bit about where it felt like we were. And ultimately we got the mother back in and the grandma came one day. I just heard this kid is a junior in college. She has ultimately admitted that she was prostituting in her sophomore year of high school. Interview 1A.

Communication access strategies: Inviting the parent to contact if needed. Two of the 18 school social workers described opportunities they set up in which the parent could contact them if needed. With the following incident, the school social worker described a mother who had concerns about her child's academic performance. The school social worker describes talking to the parent about her concerns, getting feedback from the teachers about the student's performance, getting school personnel to complete assessment paperwork for the parent, and presenting options to the parent about how to

proceed to meet the parents needs. The school social worker goes on to talk about encouraging the parent to contact him/her if needed.

Interviewer So where's your relationship with mom now?

Interviewee They were here for conferences and they stopped over and we chatted for a little bit and kinda just checked in about who he was doing. I kinda left it at, "My door is open. You can always give me a call if you need anything or have any questions. Just give me a call and we can talk about it."

Interviewer How did you feel about the outcome with that relationship?

Interviewee The relationship I think was fine. I think she'd call me if she needed something. The problem isn't solved, which sometimes is the frustrating part about my job and about trying to help kids do better in school is that ... he's still struggling and they still get frustrated about it and we don't have any clear explanations for why he's having a hard time. So sometimes that can be frustrating. But I think my relationship with the parent is fine. I totally think she'd call if she had any concerns about him. Interview 7G.

Communication access strategies: Using humor with a parent. Two of the 18 school social workers described incidents in which they engaged the parent using humor. In the incident below, the worker describes having a relationship with a parent in which there was some "ribbing" by the worker towards the parent. The school social worker in this incident specifically states, "You can't necessarily do that [rib the parent] until you have a real rapport with the family". It appears that the ribbing from the worker helped the parent to have some insight to the concerns of the school.

The dad I was just talking about, after the kid had been dismissed or suspended many times. The father had always been saying they had no difficulty with him at home, so they couldn't understand all the problems we were having. I'm out on a home visit about halfway through the school year and the kid had just been dismissed again. So I said, "Why are you guys home today? I don't really understand this. He does so well, most fifth graders that I know can stay home alone if they're sick or out of school for a day." And the father [laughter] went,

“Oh! We’d never leave him alone!” “Well, why?” [laughter] Dad said, this, this, this, and this. I said, “That’s exactly what I’m talking with you about. We use different language at school, but it’s exactly the same thing. That’s why your kid’s having trouble at school also.” And it opened an entirely different door that dad was just . . . a light went on, he said, “Oh, yeah.” I said, “You can stay home and supervise him one on one. In the classroom he’s maybe one with 25. And all those little things you’re talking about he’s doing in that classroom. It’s hard for that teacher to watch every one of those and teach all the other kids at the very same time.” It all made sense to the father. After a year and a half of him not seeing why his kid ever had trouble here. It was just that moment. But, that took again having a relationship with the dad, I could rib him a little bit about that and kind of be playful about it. And you can’t necessarily do that until you have a real rapport with the family. So it takes quite a bit of engagement time in my estimation. It’s not a real quick thing. Sometimes it is. Interview 18R.

Communication access strategies: Staying “real”. The school social worker in this incident had been describing interactions with a particular parent in which many of the interactions were informal conversations about the student’s family and occasional conversations about the student’s tardiness. The school social worker then makes a point to stress that being real helps him/her make connections with parents and provides the example of the parent with a tardy child.

Interviewee I’m thinking of one parent. . . . Her oldest came to our school in kindergarten when I first started. I kinda knew him for [being a] kindergarten kid that was tardy a lot. So I had to write a “your kid was tardy letter” to her. So that’s the first way that she ever heard my name was she got this little letter. But she didn’t respond to the letter at all. Maybe the kid came to school one time more or two times after the letter. . . . She [the mother] came in I think to bring him in late. And I ambushed her at the door. I think that’s what happened. I’m going back seven years now [laughter]. . . . I think I just introduced myself as the person that had written her the tardy letter. . . . I just told her you know, he’s late a lot. And she acknowledged it was true and kinda mumbled something about they’d have to work on that. Which actually never happened ’cause I’ve known this guy through first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and he’s still a chronically tardy kid. . . . But through the years I would just probably briefly visit with her when she’d come in. . . . She was a quite soft-spoken, quiet person. So I wasn’t trying to be real pushy with her. I didn’t want to say, “Oh, what you doing?” Get all nosy about her

business. Like, "Why are you tardy all the time? You staying up late?!" Nothing like that. If people want to tell me stuff and they feel comfortable with me, they'll tell me stuff. I'm not the type to really ask a lot of questions unless I feel that our relationship is strong enough to withstand a probing, nosy question. But generally I just don't do that. Give me a break. I might just say, "Oh, your baby is so cute. How old is he?" Pick up the baby. "How you guys all doing? You guys all doing alright?"

Interviewer So just checking in? Casual.

Interviewee Right. I keep it casual. I feel like I have to do that 'cause I can't stand people that are in your face, nosy people. Like, "Oh, you look so nice today." . . . I try to be sincere. I try to give people their space. I don't want people to go, "Oh God, here comes X again. Here she comes. She's gonna ask me how I am." I keep myself real, like how I'm talking right now. This is me. This is how I always am. This is how I am when I'm at home. What you see is what you get. And I think the parents know that, too. I try to just stay me and real. With this parent that's how I am. Even with my neighbors, with my friends. I'm not all like, "Let's get together for lunch tomorrow, talk personally." I'm like, if I see you again I'll just say, "Oh, hey, X, how you doing? How's your research project going?" I'm not all, "Let's get together next week and have lunch." Build [the relationship] slowly, I think. And I think this is what happened with this particular parent who I'm telling the story about. . . . Now I know her. Now she knows me. Now she knows to call me when there's a problem. Interview 17Q.

Information sharing

Sixteen of 18 school social workers described incidents in which the school social worker engaged in information sharing behaviors that appear to have helped to develop or sustain their relationships with parents. These behaviors included: communicating behavior or progress to parents, answering parents' questions or concerns, getting information from the parent, getting information for and sharing information with parents, and helping the parent understand child's behavior. These behaviors are discussed below with critical incident examples.

Information sharing: Communicating behavior or progress to parents. One of the principal communication behaviors shared by the school social workers interviewed was reporting behavior to the parents. Fourteen of the 18 school social workers described incidents in which they reported to parents both positive and challenging behaviors.

In the following critical incident, the school social worker (as part of an interdisciplinary team) continues to provide a resistant parent with behavioral reports that led to a change in a child's ADHD medication. The worker reports that the parent began to trust the school team because of the contacts the team and school social worker had with the parent.

One student came here in about let's say January. A 4th grader. Taking medication at home. I believe it's ADHD. Sometimes he would come to school and he'd just be like this and saying I didn't take my medication. So the teacher was wanting me to call, and I started to refuse. I'm not gonna call. I'm not taking [responsibility for] these medications. I won't do that. But we started having to make more phone calls home about the kid wasn't doing it. So we kept trying to get the parent. I think I asked the parent once, "Would you consider allowing us to give it here at school, because that would solve the problem?" If he [the student] said that he didn't have it, we would check with the parent and [we were thinking] he could take it at school. She would not agree. . . . And over a period of time we did ask when we were reporting about certain things that the kid was doing. So finally after several months of her learning to trust that when we called about the student's behavior, something that was going on, she knew that we weren't lying. She just started to trust us. So about three or four weeks ago, she agreed that he could take medication here at school. This was huge. This is a woman who comes out of Gary, Indiana, a terrible family history. You could just tell she wanted nothing to do with us. [She] was even pretty hostile to her child, too- really not very nice to him. But slowly but surely over several months she agreed to that. Now, in that case, he started having ticks. So we reported that to the mother. She started going back to the doctor. And now he's off medication and driving everybody crazy because he's not taking anything while they're seeing if he has ticks. . . . That was a case of hostility before she ever met us and you can see why. And then slowly over several months now, she's just on our side. Interview 150.

Information sharing: Answering parents' questions or concerns. Five of the 18 school social workers reported that answering parents' questions or concerns was a critical example of their work with parents that reflected relationship building. In the example below, the worker allows the parent to vent her feelings to the worker. After listening to the parent vent, the worker is able to hear the parent's questions and follows through in getting the answers for the parent.

[After letting a parent vent] Had a couple for real questions and I didn't know the answers to them, but I wrote down her questions after we kinda had this meeting, I wrote it down. I said, "What do you really need to know? And I'll help you find out." So I wrote down her couple questions she had and she felt better after we talked. I shook her hand. She went away. I got her number. I said I'll call you when I find out the answer. I went to the teachers, I asked them the questions. And I for real called her back and told her what she wanted to know. And by then I think she had thought of a couple more questions. I said I don't know, I will find out, and I will call you back. And I think finally someone had treated her like a real person with a real concern and not just sluffed her over because she's loud. Interview 17Q.

Information sharing: Being sensitive in sharing information with the parent. Four of the 18 school social workers interviewed described having to convey information to parents in which they were intentionally sensitive in presenting the information- making specific decisions on how information was shared with the parents. In the following incident, there were concerns about the student's behavior in school. The student had hiding under her coat, pulling her hair over her face, and appearing to not listen to the classroom teacher. The school social worker had contacted the parent and who agreed to have the student evaluated. After the evaluation, the school social worker and the parent met to discuss the outcome. The school social worker discusses presenting the evaluation

information to the parent and his/her concerns about presenting the information in a sensitive manner.

I had not really had a chance to meet with the mom or the family or anything at this point. So this was really, truly starting cold. And it was a matter then of calling the mom and introducing myself and letting her know that we're gonna proceed with this evaluation – which she knew about because the teacher had talked with her and said we want to assess her. And the mom said that's fine. They'd actually already taken her to a counselor, to a therapist, and had already begun some therapy with her. Mom was very cooperative in this whole process. Cooperative is the wrong word – involved. She was very involved. As a matter of fact, I frequently commented on how she was always ahead of my curve. So they'll call and say we're gonna assess her for special ed; well, she's already been going to therapy for a month. And at some point as the girl's behavior began to deteriorate. . . . We meet. We talk about what the evaluation plan is gonna be. She signs off on it. Parent interview. Check list. The whole process. Sit down. Do the meeting, the evaluation review meeting, and say she meets the criteria for EBD. That's the information that's sometimes hard to tell people. You know what? Your kid has an emotional and behavioral disorder. I think it's easier to hear your child has a learning disability. Oh, okay, my kid is relatively smart and she has a learning disability. No, my kid is smart but they're mentally ill. Trying to present that information in kind of a nice way. Obviously I present it in a nice way. But how do you hear it in a nice way? But in this case mom already knew this. But even at that it's still kind of hard to hear. It takes a little while to digest it. So it's how you present it in a meeting in a way that is sensitive, but still presents the information. And personally the way that I prefer to do these meetings . . . I've sat in enough meetings where they sit down with an evaluation and they go section by section, line by line. . . . Please. So I don't want to sit in a meeting for an hour waiting to hear the conclusion. I don't care what your protocol for the psychological testing was. I don't care what the WHISK is. I want to know if my kid qualifies. And then give me the details. So that's how I start my meetings. She qualified. I might say we assessed her intellectual, academic functioning. We did all the parent interview and things, and based on all that she qualifies for services under the heading of emotional behavioral disorder. And that's how I went with this meeting. I said, "Based on what you were telling us at home and what we're seeing at school, she's having these behaviors. She's clearly a very smart girl." We went through the intellectual results. Her IQ is really high. She clearly does not have a learning disability. So you're able to give a lot of the good along with the more troublesome news. So in this case it was a matter of developing the IEP, meeting with the kid, and we had kind of like a crisis plan in place with her. . . . Putting a plan in place at school. Educating mom about this. And then as the girl's behavior continued to ebb and flow, being in

touch right away with mom. . . . And mom was really good about keeping us up on what was going on, too. . . . It was like a model mom. Interview 2B.

Information sharing: Getting information from parents. Three of the 18 school social workers described incidents in which getting information from the parent helped the school social worker understand the situation. In the critical incident below, the school social worker contacted a parent of a special needs child in the beginning of the year in order to have a smooth transition. It appears from the worker's comments that by showing interest and wanting to get information from the parent, the school social worker created a positive reception from the parent.

I initially called her just to introduce myself and to just ask for some feedback about her child. I guess it was in the fall and I wanted to know how the summer went so that we could have a smooth transition into the fall. It was just wonderful. The parent was real receptive of that. Interview 5E.

Information sharing: Getting information for and sharing information with parents. With getting information for and sharing information with parents, 3 of the 18 school social workers described incidents in which the parent had requested information from the school social worker or the school. The school social worker would then gather the information and report back to the parent. In the incident below, the parent had been in jail and asked the school social worker to get information about how her child was doing. The school social worker would ask teachers how the student was doing and the worker would report back to the parent.

Interviewee One of the relationships I have with a parent that's easy is a parent who called me at the beginning of the year. She was in jail. Mom was in jail. Kid was staying with dad. And mom was concerned about that. And mom was concerned that dad didn't believe in the medication the kid was taking, so the kid wasn't gonna be medicated. That he was gonna pull her out of this school to send her to a school that's closer to where he lives

instead of where she lives. She was just really concerned about the decisions that he was gonna make. And she was probably gonna be in jail through like November. So I talked with her about what her concerns were. It's really bizarre talking with a parent who's in jail because they get cut off and they have to call back. The phone call gets cut off and then they call back again. You can't ever call her back.

Interviewer Frustrating.

Interviewee Well, I take the phone call and then she'll say we're gonna get cut off and then she'll cut off again. It's just a little bizarre. She probably would call on a weekly basis to kinda just check in and see how her kid was doing here. So we would just spend time talking about what I knew about the kid, and I'd get some feedback from teachers. And then she did get out of jail and the kid went back after some court stuff. The kid ended up going back to stay with her. That's an example of a relationship that if I show concern for the kid and that we're doing what we can to support your kid and she's doing okay. Oh, she had a bad day yesterday and this is what happened, but this is what we did. Just those kinds of things. Parents, I think, just really need to kind of trust us. And when the trust is there ... they don't need to trust us, but when there is a trusting relationship, it's really easy to keep them hooked in. That's just an example of the parent that I've spent a lot of time talking with on the phone about her kid.

Interviewer Where's the relationship now?

Interviewee It's fine. I haven't talked with her. I probably haven't talked with her for a month. Interview 7G.

Information sharing: Helping the parent understand child's behavior. In helping parents to understand the child's behavior, 2 of the 18 school social workers would explain to the parent the mental health reasons for a behavior or in the case below the intentional reasons behind a behavior. In the incident below, the school social worker describes talking to a parent about why her child had become pregnant- that it was a choice the student had made and that the student had made efforts to get an education to prepare for having a baby.

Interviewee One young woman whose mom . . . (and I have kept in contact with the young woman over the years) really wanted her to [put the baby up for adoption]. This young woman had not gotten around to saying to her mom that she was no more interested in adoption than the man on the moon. But the mom thought she had control over the situation. So I had to break the news to mom that I looked at this girl's transcript. She was a good student, but she had taken all these child development classes. I told the mom, she was intentionally pregnant 'cause she wanted a baby. I said, "I don't think that she's going to go for adoption." And sure enough, that was what [happened]. But as it turned out, apparently the mother had never gotten around to telling her daughter that she had also become pregnant at like 16 or 17 and had given that baby up for adoption. So that was a whole hidden agenda. . . . And she [the student] is now a marshal. So she's done really well and she works for the federal government. And her son is my daughter's age, so he's maybe 18. That was sort of a positive thing. And the young woman does see her mom and they have their fights back and forth, but she's gone through counseling and so forth. Interview 14N.

Showing Care and Concern Behaviors Theme (N=16)

Sixteen of the 18 school social workers interviewed described critical incidents in which they engaged in 16 different behaviors, which showed care and concern toward the parent regarding parental, familial, or child concerns. With the establishment of a larger theme of behaviors showing care and concern, the 16 different behaviors were further identified into two subthemes: (a) displaying empathic behaviors and (b) treating the parent respectfully. The behaviors showing care and concern theme and its related subthemes and behaviors are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Showing Care and Concern Behaviors Theme, Subthemes, and Behaviors (N=16)

Subthemes	Behaviors	Number of interviews identifying the behavior
Displaying empathic behaviors	Listening to the parent	10
	Expressing care and concern to the parent	10
	Acknowledging parents' feelings and concerns	8
	Displaying empathy towards parent	3
	Expressing nonverbal communication	2
	Being there for the parent	1
	Using social worker's own experience to empathize with parent	1
	Discussing family dynamics with parent	1
	Using similar backgrounds to connect with parent	1
Displaying respectful behaviors	Identifying parent strengths	3
	Apologizing to the parent	3
	Treating the parent with respect	1
	Acknowledging the parent	1
	Giving the parent space	1

Subthemes	Behaviors	Number of interviews identifying the behavior
Displaying respectful behavior	Having a non-judgmental attitude	1
	Getting to know the parent personally	1

Displaying empathic behaviors

In this study, the subtheme of empathic behaviors is a subcategory of behaviors 15 out of 18 the school social worker described engaging in to understand the parent—their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. These empathic displaying behaviors are discussed below with critical incident examples.

Displaying empathic behaviors: Listening to the parent. Ten of the 18 school social workers described incidents of intentional listening. Intentional listening as described by the school social workers allowed the parent to share and express strong feelings. In the first incident, the school social worker describes working with a parent who needed assistance connecting to other mental health services. The school social worker had described accompanying the parent to meetings with the other service providers and conducting an in-school parenting workshop series as attempts to connect with the parent. The school social worker goes on to describe the opportunities to listen to the parent that would occasionally arise at the parenting workshop.

Interviewee And then she [the mother] had come to our parenting series, which I was very impressed by. The fact that any parent who comes out to the school to learn how to be a better parent is very impressive to me. And so I think that I relayed back to her that I was very grateful that she would come. There were a couple of times when she was the only parent who showed up. And instead of being sort of like, “Oh well. Only one [parent] showed

up, let's not meet". We would just sit down and talk together about how's it going with your child. He just started puberty. "How's that going?" [laughter] And just kind of taking the time to meet with her. And I think time is one of the most important things and it's our smallest resource that we have is time. We just don't have enough of it. But being able to just take the time to sit and listen without rushing the family through whatever it was they have to say was very important. . . .

Interviewer So where's your relationship with this particular mom now?

Interviewee Well, I saw her today. Very good. I think that she feels that we – she and I and the school program together – have worked really hard for her child for three years and that he has come a long way. Interview 8H.

In the following incident, the school social worker describes meeting with a parent to discuss a transition from the school the student was attending to a school that would meet the child's needs. The school had attempted a number of interventions. The school social worker stated, "Things were not working". The parent was resistant to a change in placement and was not attending meetings to discuss the issue. The school social worker makes arrangements to meet the parent, outside of school, to talk about the situation. As the school social worker reflects on the incident, the worker states that the parent "needed someone to listen" to them- really hear them.

Oh, I can speak to a situation that just occurred recently whereby we have a student who is participating in our special ed. program with a primary disability of EBD [Emotional Behavioral Disorder]. Our school is not appropriate placement. We have tried all the interventions we have. This young man needs a self-contained EBD program, which we do not have at this building. We have it at one of our other junior highs. It was a very difficult situation with the parent. The parent did not want him leaving. Kinda went outside the box a little bit in terms of how we do our meetings. It's very intimidating for parents coming into meetings, bottom line. Even if it's only a couple of people, it's very intimidating especially if you are a parent of a person of color coming in to basically an all white staff, sitting around a large table in a conference room. Things were not working. We [the school staff] were meeting. Manifestation of determination meetings needed to be held on this student, a number of them, and we had to go ahead with the meeting without the parent. I called the parent and I think . . . That's part of my role eventually, but typically that's the case manager role first. So then I came in

and I think the parent just needed someone to listen, let her vent a little bit, and be able to talk with her on her turf or turf outside the building. So we agreed to meet at a restaurant and just talk. Through listening and talking, both of us, kind of give-take-give-take, agreed that the parent would go look at the program at the other junior high. And bottom line, that happened. The parent and student were very pleased. The student is now in a program that is meeting his needs. So, in that sense doing it a little bit differently in terms of process here in the building, not being as formal, I think is helpful sometimes – not always, but sometimes. It was successful this last time. Interview 10J.

Displaying empathic behaviors: Expressing care and concern to the parent. In this subtheme, 10 of the 18 school social workers described behaviors in which they communicated their care and concern for either the child or the parent themselves to the parent. In the incident below, a teacher has approached the school social worker about a student she/he has concerns about. The student and teacher meet with the school social worker about the concerns. The school social worker proceeds to describe asking a parent to come to school to discuss the child's thoughts of hurting him or herself. The worker did not express an outcome, yet the idea of expressing care and concern for the child to the parent is clear in the incident.

And the student basically said that she was feeling sad and that there were things happening at home between her parents and with her. She felt a little like hurting herself but she wouldn't ever do it. Basically she doesn't know what to do. So then I contacted her mom. I said that the teacher was concerned about her and that the teacher wanted her to stay after school to talk to me. And the mom was very concerned. I asked the mom to come and maybe we could all talk about what's going on together. So the mom came. This is a student that I'd never met before, a student that I've never talked to the parent before. In fact, the counselor had talked to this student and this parent before, and she had to leave so then I was sort of brought into the situation. But the parent was really nice. "We [worker and teacher] just are concerned and supportive." We just kinda went over how the student was feeling. And I asked about counseling, outside counseling, and the parent said the student had been in outside counseling but then had stopped. And I suggested it would be a good idea to get her back into counseling. And just kinda went over some of my concerns from the conversation. Interview 4D.

In the following incident, the worker has been working with a family for a number of years. The family has a variety of issues including single parenthood, mental health issues and learning disabilities of the child, and chemical use in the family [the chemical user is not stated in the interview]. There is presently a concern about child neglect. The school social worker contacts the parent, with whom the worker has an established relationship, to discuss the concerns.

I've had an ongoing relationship with her [the mother] for several years. Recently there's been concerns that the child is being neglected. In fact, we called child protection on this mom because of the neglect. Not abuse, but just that she's not around and the kid is saying there's not food and that his brother's beating up on him. Those kinds of things. I have a good enough relationship with her [the mother]. I mean, child protection did nothing, because it's not big enough and there's no bruises. But I have a good enough relationship that I followed up with this mother and I just talked to her about it. "We're [school personnel] concerned." I mean I didn't tell her that we had called child protection, but I did tell her that we were concerned and that her son said this and that and what are they doing. She happens to be savvy enough that I think that she knows that child protection could be an issue anyways. . . . I suggested that maybe to have some therapy might be good. She said, "What about family therapy?" . . . Anyway, low and behold she called me back later that day and she had tried to access two agencies for help and then asked me to follow up with more because she got naturally some road blocks. Interview 11K.

Displaying empathic behaviors: Acknowledging parents' feelings and concerns.

Eight of the 18 school social workers described incidents in which they acknowledged the parent's feelings, their concerns, or both. In the first two incident examples, the school social worker listens to the parent and provides validation to the feelings. In the first incident, the student was having behavioral issues and low academic achievement at school. The assistant principal had asked the school social worker to talk to the parent and see if the parent would agree to a special education evaluation. The school social worker proceeds to describe making a home visit to complete paperwork. During the

visit, the parent shares that they are angry with the school and how the administration is working with the parent's child. While listening to the parent, the school social worker uses the opportunity to let the parent share their feelings and create an opportunity to invite the parent to the school.

She lets me in the door and I explain that I'm gonna go through the evaluation request verbally with her and ask her if she's ready to sign off on it. I do that, and all the time I'm doing it she's got this major attitude. I know something's up because of her attitude, plus the principal had told me that she's really angry with the school. . . . We get to the part where I'm explaining to her all the reasons we're going to do the evaluations that are written on there, and the last statement is that she requested it. She says, "I didn't request it." I said, "Really? . . . So that's not what I've been told by the assistant principal." She said, "No, I never requested this." I was like, "Well, do you want me to cross it out?" She said, "No." I hadn't even said that but she could tell I was thinking what am I gonna do about this. I think she feared that I was gonna go back to the office and have to come back again or send her out different paperwork. At which point she said, "No, just leave it, I don't mind" Like she was ready to be done with this whole deal and she didn't care about that piece. So, she signed it [paperwork] and I brought along an extra copy for her to keep. While she was signing it, I said, "It sounds like you're angry with my school right now." She told me in very strong terms that she was really angry with the assistant principal. And I just listened to her talk about her frustration. But I really was not willing to back down on that her son has some major issues. So I kept telling her both sides at the same time. Each time, it's like . . . "I want you to come to school and see how your son is acting at school and maybe that'll resolve his issues, while you're there at least. It could resolve it permanently . . . but maybe he'd do better with you there, but maybe you'd see it." And by the end of the conversation she was . . . I kept saying, "He's got major issues and maybe some people aren't handling things as well as they could but he's got some major issues." She was saying, "Well, I'm gonna catch him. I'm gonna come to school repeatedly through the end of the school year and see if I can catch him." Interview 6F.

In the next incident, the parent has a bad reputation with the school personnel to the point staff would try to avoid the parent. In this incident, the parent comes to school to talk about concerns he has about kids picking on his son. The school social worker is asked to intervene. By listening to the parent and validating the parent's feelings, the school social worker states, "Somebody's taken him [the parent] seriously."

Interviewee Actually like today, before you got here today there was a dad who has a reputation as a hard ass. When he comes in, people scatter. [laughter] So I become like the designated deal with this dad sort of guy. He comes in; they get on the phone to me. It's like, okay. The first time I met the guy we were out front doing buses in the morning and he was leaving. He didn't have a very good word to say about anybody or anything. The guy had no idea who I was. And he's talking crap to me. So my impression, of course, was not especially favorable. I said, "Who is that guy?" And then somebody told me who he was. It's like oh, that's who it is. I've heard of him. So he comes in two weeks later with this fairly serious concern. I get designated the guy who gets to talk to him. We come down here and the guy is incredibly restrained in his presentation. You can tell that underneath it he's just festering. And he acknowledged [his feelings], he said, "I'm really mad, I'm really trying not to . . . I'm mad and I'm worried." So I'm able, of course, then to sort of acknowledge that and say, "Oh, yeah, I understand your concerns." And sometimes the relationship . . . part of it obviously is just listening. I think some of it is giving something and getting support. "Yeah, I'd be concerned, too, if that happened at my house. How long has that been going on? I'd be mad, too. Yeah, if you want to do that, I think that's a good idea; let me know what you find out. I'd be glad to listen." So actually today he was in here and said, "The last two weeks I've been watching . . . [it has to do with corners and fights]. In this school they don't do nothing. Somebody lied to me." And of course he's again with me being very restrained. Part of what I have to give him is acknowledging that. Yeah, oh, yeah, everybody is shouting him names. I agreed to meet him down at the corner here a little bit before 3:00. He said, "Well, they're not gonna do anything while you're down there." "No, maybe not, but you can point out who some of them are." So then he goes away feeling like hopefully what he's done is beginning to correct the problem for his son.

Interviewer He feels like he's been heard.

Interviewee He's been heard. Somebody's taken him seriously. That I'll then take the information someplace and try to do something with it. Even if it's nothing more than standing down on that corner. But something. So he feels heard and validated and his kid is safer. So again, this is one of these kind of crisis things and using the social work skill to overcome personal feelings about this guy. And frankly, I've heard some icky things about him, but he's not that bad of a guy. He's intense. . . . But he's clearly doing this because he's worried about his boy. And just recognizing that piece. And people just see him as an asshole. But he's a worried parent who happens to have kind of an intense and confrontive personal communication style. So how do you work with that. A lot of people aren't so good at that. Interview 2B.

In the following incident, the worker had a three-year relationship with a parent, who had come to the worker with concerns. The worker states that listening to the parent and acknowledging the parent's concerns has helped the parent to trust the worker and feel positively about the school.

The other thing that I think has really helped with this parent is being listened to and that we have in this program the use of an intervention space, and she has felt at times that the way her child has been treated in the intervention space has not been appropriate. And whenever a parent says that to me, I never disregard that because it's always possible. It's always possible if you have adults who are constantly all day long dealing with escalated children, that sometimes things happen or are said that shouldn't be said. It can happen in any setting. And we use supervision and training very much in this program [inaudible]. But there are times it happens. None of us is perfect at all times. And when she's brought those concerns with me – and she's told me this is what she has appreciated – is that I've taken it seriously, I've reported it to the lead of the program, and it's been taken care of. . . . I think that has helped with the trust issue with this parent. She knows if she comes to me and tells me something happened, it will be taken care of. Interview 8H.

In the next incident, an angry parent had come to the school with a concern. The school social worker met with the parent to listen to the parent's concern and gather more information about the situation. According to the school social worker, the worker did not know the parent or student previously. The worker does not discuss the outcome, yet the

worker did note that they were actively trying to listen to the concern and validate the parent's concern.

Interviewee I've had to walk into situations where all of a sudden you hear screaming in the main office and you go in to see what it is and this parent I've never met before who's screaming their head off at the office people- swearing, "This F-ing school!" And [inaudible] this child you've never met before who's cringing embarrassment at this parent who's totally off the wall. So then I usually just kind of go up and introduce myself and try to get them out of the office view into another room and vent.

Interviewer So think about a time that you just describe and that happened. What did you do after you got them out?

Interviewee I listened to them. I let them talk for a while. And then I tried to orient them to the moment. "Tell me where you live. Tell me about your child. I haven't met your child. Okay. I see this is really upsetting. What's going on?" And then start talking about that. "Well, you're damn right." [laughter] I just try- the louder they get, the calmer I try to get myself. . . . "Let's get to the bottom of this. Let me get this information." So then I might get a piece of paper or something to write down so that she knows I'm taking seriously what she's saying. This one woman who's like, okay, I really need to talk to somebody higher up in the district. "Yeah, you're right, they shouldn't be saying that to you. Who was saying that? We're gonna have to investigate it." So I wouldn't be offering anything that I couldn't follow through on because it was a situation that . . . this wasn't a child I knew, it wasn't a parent I knew, but at the school. And the principal wasn't here and the principal really needed to be directly involved in it. So I just more, with that, trying to validate her complaint, what we're gonna look at, validate that she had a real [pause] I couldn't validate the answer she wanted, but I validated that she had a right to be angry, or she had a right to raise a concern. At the same time, I kept trying to just get her calm so we could talk about it without saying shut the fuck up. [laughter] Which is what other people [school personnel] were saying. . . . So it's all about listening- listening and trying to get them to understand and try to see who we could get to be on their side. And the district always has some kind of other advocate that are higher up in the interim positions. There's always somebody that they can see beyond. Letting them know they could talk to me again. Or letting them know I'm not the one, but I'll find out who is, who handles that situation. Interview 9I.

Displaying empathic behaviors: Displaying empathy towards parent.

Acknowledgment of the parent's thoughts and feelings and empathy appear to be very similar as they both acknowledge the parent's thoughts and feelings. Yet, in the analysis, empathy was separated from acknowledging the parent's thoughts and feelings because 3 of the 18 school social workers described engaging in a behavior that there appeared to be a sense of deep understanding for what the parent is thinking or feeling which is missing from the behaviors of acknowledging feelings and concerns.

In the following incident, the student had been truant. The school social worker was aware the mother had health problems and was concerned that the child's truancy was connected to the mother's health concerns. The school social worker describes making a home visit to discuss the child's truancy. During the home visit, the school social worker describes being "able to identify with the parent's pain".

So the first time I went to the house, (she [the mother] was always saying she was gonna meet me outside) I just kinda made it so that I needed to go in. When I went in the house, the house was – they had moved two months previously – and basically nothing had been unpacked. It was a disaster. It wound up being a real breakthrough for me with that mother, because instead of me attacking her, which is what she was afraid if she ever let anyone in the door . . . she had other social service people involved in her life and she had never let them in the door. She was always outside and had a reason not to come in. And I basically said, "We need to go in and talk inside the house." It was pretty obvious. And I was able to make an alliance with her because instead of just talking about the kid, I was able to identify with her pain. She was heavily into pain. She was very depressed and not able to unload a box and was overwhelmed. So we started talking about how to get help with that. If we can get help for you, that's gonna help your kid. She said, "Aren't you gonna take him away?" I said, "That's not my job at the school. But we do need to get child protection involved as a way to get help for you." But it was all about helping her to be a better parent, to be a healthier human being. That was a big turning point. She trusted me. Interview 9I.

Displaying empathic behaviors: Expressing nonverbal communication. This particular set of behaviors could also be identified as part of the communication theme. I chose to associate supportive nonverbal communications with the expressing care and concern subtheme because 2 of the 18 school social workers described nonverbal communication with a parent that appears to provide the parent with comfort and communicates care. In this critical incident example, the parents have finally accepted that their child was using drugs. The school social worker describes how the nonverbal communication of placing an arm around the parent appeared to provide support and conveyed understanding to the parent.

So consequently on the day that they deflated, I remember putting my arm around her 'cause I knew her by then. You can imagine, and saying, "Welcome to the boat 'cause we're really worried about your son. We really want you in here with us 'cause we've got hard work to do to get him well." And so it was really like, "I'm so glad you're with us." This feels so good. So I think she felt comforted. Interview 1A.

Displaying empathic behaviors: Being there for the parent. One of the 18 school social workers described an incident in which they were present for the parent. The school social worker and parent started their relationship when the student entered the school in seventh grade. The summer before the student started, the school social worker had organized a chaperoned trip to the Boundary Waters. The student's parent was "really harsh at first" about the student going on the trip and had several questions and concerns. The school social worker described how the relationship developed by processing the parent's questions and concerns. The school social worker stated, "She [the mother] finally agreed to let her kid go".

In the following incident, the school social worker later describes working with the parent to come up with a plan about how to tell the child that he/she (the child) has been recently diagnosed of Neurofibromatosis. The school social worker reports the parent asked him/her to stay while the parent tells the child about the diagnosis. The worker decided to stay and be present with the family through the discussion. The worker reports, "There was a fundamental trust between this mom and me and that she felt comfortable enough to include me in such a tough moment."

At one point, the school social worker describes reaching out to the parent and hugging the parent. I also identified the hug at the end of the incident as a specific empathic behavior of nonverbal communication of care and concern. Nonverbal communication of care and concern was previously identified and described in this study.

This one mom that kind of is a harsh tough woman, a biker type woman who is very harsh when you first meet her. She said, "What is up with this trip? I don't know what you plan to do with my child. Where are you gonna take her?" She comes across as really harsh at first. I got to know her pretty well throughout the trip just because she had a lot of questions and a lot of concerns and she needed to process that with me for a little bit. Well, she finally agreed to let her kid go. . . . [Earlier] in this school year her [the student's] mom came in. No, she called the school and she said, "I need to talk to X [the school social worker]. She said I need to talk to her right away. And she said [to the school's office staff], "Give me her phone number. Give me her name." And I was in class or something like that. So all the secretaries were freaking out, "I don't know what's wrong with this mom but she wants to talk to you. Do you want me to say you'll call her later?" And I knew who this mom was. So I called her right back and she said she found out that [her] child has this diagnoses of NF, which is Neurofibromatosis, and it's a real degenerative . . . it's a genetic disorder that causes children to lose use of their limbs. They could lose actual limbs. They develop learning disabilities as a result of it and it's a real life-changing, degenerative disease. And her spine, she has all these fibroid tumors on it. So her mom is freaking out. And she says, "X [school social worker], I don't know what to do." So she comes in that afternoon and she says, "I gotta tell her. I don't know how to tell her. I just got this diagnosis. What do I do?" And I said, "We're gonna call her down and I think you should do it right here at the school before you leave." And then she

said, "I want you to be in here with me. I want you to be in here with her, too." I was there for the diagnosis. I hugged the mom. It wasn't like . . . when you think about relationships with parents you have to be really careful about boundaries. I felt like it was appropriate because we knew each other on the Boundary Waters trip, but we also knew each other in a professional way. And there's been times all year that I've had to be quite harsh with her, too. [laughter] So I felt at liberty to hug this woman. And she's crying in my arms. . . . I think the whole process couldn't have been unless I had that trip just because it was kind of . . . there was a fundamental trust between this mom and me and that she felt comfortable enough to include me in such a tough moment. And I don't think just from being a social worker that I could have even established that. It was really the extension of the trip. Interview 19S.

Displaying empathic behaviors: Using social worker's own experience to empathize with parent. In this incident, the school social worker described using his/her own experience with having a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD] in an attempt to understand and connect with a parent who also has a child with ADHD.

Interviewee This is a family that I've never had any contact with. So it's one of these situations where I get to call somebody stone cold. Sort of the sense in the building is that I'm better at this than other people. "Could you call the family and present this?" "Well okay. I don't know this lady, but sure." I'll give the teacher the opportunity. It's like, "Do you want to call? I mean, they know you." I say, "I'll do it with you if you want to talk to them. And they'll say, "Ahhh. . . It's like, "Well. . ." So I call this mom and introduce myself, let her know who I am and what my role is in relation to her son. And let her know some of the concerns that the teachers and other staff in the building have noted that he has a really hard time staying still. And our worry is that it's really affecting his learning, that he's not learning nearly at the rate that we would hope for his age. And present it that way. . . . "We'd actually kinda like to have [him] assessed. We have this program through the schools where we could have him assessed for attention deficit disorder." Someplace in there I probably said something along the line he has a lot of characteristics of this. And then the parent starts to see, "Yeah, he's like that at home." And you ask some follow-up questions. It's like, "Well, okay, we have this free evaluation that we can do. All it's gonna cost you is a little bit of time over at X. Some time doing the paperwork." And of course their first thing is, "But I don't want him on medicine." It's like, this isn't even about medicine. We're not even at that. All we want to do now is just figure out

what's going on. That's the tendency of the staff as well. Let's get him assessed and get him on medication. Or they'll even skip the assessment part and tell the family he needs to be on medication. Who wants to hear that? Eventually you come to that conclusion on your own, but you don't want the teacher telling you your kid should be on drugs. I'm able to approach that somewhat more delicately. So in this case it was a matter of presenting the information to the parent about her son's behavior and how it was affecting his learning. Presenting what can we do about it. I said, "I'll get the information; once I get it we'll sit down, we'll go over it together. So sign consents and everything. If you have any questions you can ask me." So that then is my first opportunity to actually kinda meet this mom is when I get this [inaudible] the paperwork. "Let's meet and go over it." So we do that. I've got a personal relationship established with the lady. X calls me with a date. I get in touch with her. Okay, here's the evaluation date. I get the report back, which says the family at this point is not wanting to treat with medication; they just want to see if this will get better with time. X Social Service Agency being good says okay, client self-determination, we'll go with that. So, I touch base with the family saying, "I got this. I got the report, just want to see if there's some things that you can do on your own might work." Knowing that they're not gonna really actually do anything significant 'cause they don't have him lined up with any kind of counseling. They don't have the resources or the wherewithal on their own to deal with this. They don't have a library at home with things on attention deficit disorder.

Interviewer Very few people do.

Interviewee I do. My oldest daughter has attention deficit disorder. So not only professional, but personal. Which I think is another reason that people here want me to do these things. Not only with my professional role, but my personal experiences with my own daughter.

Interviewer There's empathy.

Interviewee There's empathy. And I think that people who work here have a sense that because I've been through it, I've got the empathy and more of an ability to talk to them as a peer rather than as a professional. And I use information from my family freely in the course of my interviews and talking with people. "Yeah, I really understand you have a concern about using medication, a lot of people do. As a matter of fact, my own daughter, we struggled with this, too." So I'm able to use information so they know that yes, somebody actually understands.

Interviewer It's real.

Interviewee It's real. It's not an academic exercise. It's not somebody saying what do you know about it. It's like well, you know what, I do. There's a lot of things in my family experience that I don't share. But some things I am able to do. And in this case, able to say, "Okay, that's cool. You guys want to do that I mean there are some things we can try at school." Actually what I did is, "What's your plan? How do you want to do this? How long do we want to give this?" Kinda work out a timeline with her. And they're really technically, there really wasn't a plan. It's like alright, we'll see how it goes for a while. You guys work on it at home. We'll do what we can here at school. We'll just kinda see how it goes. . . . So that relationship with that family I would guess is ongoing. Interview 2B.

Displaying empathic behaviors: Discussing family dynamics with parent. In the following incident, the school social worker displays empathic behavior by recognizing the parent's perception of how he was raised and ties the statement to the current experiences of the child. The school social worker then reports using the parent's reflection to do some family problem solving.

I'm thinking of another kid who was so chemically dependent, from a long line of chemical dependency. The kid came in and said, "I gotta cut back on my weed." I said, "Perfect, we can work on that. Why?" And he said, "Because I'm lazy and I can't remember shit." I said, "Yep, that'd be it. Memory and motivation that would be it. Okay. So how do you want to do that?" He said, "I want to tell my parents." This was miraculous. So we bring both mom and dad in, which I'd never even seen the dad before. We got mom and dad and the kid, and he's sort telling them I'm at the end of my rope here. I'm [social worker] thinking next step treatment. That's where I'm going. [laughter] But nope, that was me and not them. The dad just went ballistic, just ballistic, screaming at him. Screaming, screaming, screaming at him. So then the kid took off furious. . . . Now it's me and the dad and the mom. I say to the dad, "Tell me about your dad." "Oh, my dad was just a son of a gun." So he's telling me about his dad and I said, "Now, think back to what you just did with your son . . . where'd you learn it?" So then he's crying, dad's crying. This poor mom. She'd never seen this man ever melt like this at all. So I said, "Okay, so you hear how hurt he is about what just happened here. How are we gonna make it right? How are we gonna get him in a better place?" The dad says, "I could work on the car with him 'cause he and I like to work on the car." Great. Perfect. Let's work on the car. . . . But what happened that day. the kid actually came back. You know how they do that. They do that. If you're meeting with the parents, they are not staying away even after they walk out. [laughter] It just can't happen. So we pulled him in and then there

was this sort of connection, very immature, between dad and kid. There was no apology. There was no I love you so much. None of that. There was I think [dad saying], "I want to buy you that thing for your mustang". Okay, so we got a little bit of a connection that the dad's not disowning you. And the mom is saying and I think this will all just be fine. I don't think you'll have to use anymore. And that was sort of how we ended it. . . . But what I think happened there is that there was just the slightest inkling of a moment of improved relationship between the father and the son. That goes down as a very positive feeling in my mind, that very incident. Interview 1A.

Displaying empathic behaviors: Using similar backgrounds to connect with

parent. In the following incident, the school social worker displays empathic behavior by using his/her own background to understand how the parent presents herself and connect with the parent.

I came in contact with this mom, just one of those lasting relationships, too. The kid had had this horrible harassment issue – he's kind of a very effeminate type kid and he wasn't open about being a homosexual by all means. He was only in seventh grade when I met him, but he definitely had some qualities. He had a very feminine name, too, so he'd get made fun of by other kids. He had this incident where he walked into the school building and all these kids were yelling out "faggot, faggot", all these big huge ninth graders. He was a very gifted kid, so we accelerated him up to another level. I don't work with gifted kids very often, so that was kinda fun working with this mom. Really savvy mom, too. She's from the east coast, I'm also from the east coast, just a real in-your-face type parent that a lot of other Minnesotan-type educators are really scared of. I think her and I could join on that [being raised on the east coast]. I respect that everything is basically on the table and they say what's on their mind. I still get notes from her and updates about how he's doing. Again, I think it was just that I was able to be real with this mom and not this kind of fake urged relationship. It actually ended up being a real relationship around again what's the best interest for her child. Interview 19S.

Displaying respectful behaviors

In treating parents respectfully, 9 of the 18 school social workers described situations in which they demonstrated respect for the parent by believing in the parent, acknowledging the parent, offering help and assistance to the parent, giving the parent space, working with the parent to build the parent's own advocacy, being there for the

parent, being non-judgmental towards the parent, treating the parent respectfully, and getting to know the parent personally. The incidents highlighted here are representative of treating parents respectfully and are discussed below with critical incident examples.

Displaying respectful behaviors: Identifying parent strengths. Three of the 18 school social workers described incidents in which they acknowledging a parent's strengths. In the following incident, the school social worker describes a parent who was initially hostile and nervous about starting school herself. In the incident, the school social worker recognizes the challenges the parent is facing yet emphasizes the positives happening in the parent's life. The worker reports, "I felt like we moved toward a positive relationship because I was able to see her strengths, to talk with her about the positives in this phase of her life. . . . Somehow I feel that sort of turned a corner from the school who's down her throat about getting him to doctor."

I think she has some self-esteem issues, which are pretty tough because child protection's been active for years. She's had issues with chemical dependency. She was hostile at first. But you know, I think a lot came together for her. For one thing MFIP has the time limit. So she knew she had to get to school. She went to treatment. And at first she was hostile. . . . I think it's important to help this mom feel hopeful about herself, for one thing. She's an intelligent woman. She does have something to contribute. She called me to say she's gonna start school. She's real anxious. What if he [her child] couldn't make it to school every day, da-da-da-da-da. I think you reflect with them that this is a huge change in her life, but that also in this case I'm really excited for her. This is an opportunity for her. I know she's gonna do the best she can to get him here every day, to call me when things are tough if I can help work things out. It's not losing sight of her main goal which is getting that child to school every day, but it's taking the mom where she is. This is a big change for you. I accept that. I recognize that and I'm glad you at least called me to say you're worried. What if the daycare doesn't get him on the bus every day, or what if I don't get him to the daycare. She had all these anxieties because she felt child protection hanging over her. But I felt like we moved toward a positive relationship because I was able to see her strengths, to talk with her about the positives in this phase of her life . . . recognize, I should say, that this is hard but it's also exciting. This is a big

change, I think really good for you, it may turn out to be something you really like, you've got a lot to contribute. Just trying to build up her confidence, 'cause I feel in her helping her see that I feel that. Somehow I feel that sort of turned a corner from the school who's down her throat about getting him to doctor.
Interview 12L.

In the second incident, the student had a number of issues- a health-impaired disability, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, compulsive behavior, and displaying oppositional behavior. The parent wanted to revise the Individual Education Plan because of the transition of her child into a new school. The school social worker describes being involved with the parent through the transition to a new school and the revision of the Individual Education Plan. During the process, the worker begins to see the parent's concern and actions regarding it as a strength of the parent. By identifying the parent's strengths, the school social worker appears to have transformed his/her impression of the parent and reporting that the parent, "left him here with lots of complimentary comments to the teacher and to the leading management, to the LD teacher, to myself, after kind of weighing us and evaluating us".

And I learned as I got to know her . . . and again it took hours and hours of phone conversations and re-writing IEPs, I'd send it home, it was due for a re-write. Actually, she wanted a re-write at the beginning of the year because it was a different building. We have different services. She wanted to know exactly what we would all do and spell it out incredibly minutely. But you know, I got to realize that everything she was asking came out of complete caring for her son and out of sometimes not quite understanding things. She would sort of overreact a little bit to grab hold and make absolutely certain he got what he needed. And I just grew to realize this is incredible time on her part, an incredible love, even though for us it was very, very time-consuming, many phone calls to me, to the lead, to an aide, to the teacher, to the LD teacher. It took, no exaggeration, I'm sure, every week, two-three-four hours. . . . She has toyed with transferring and she's decided to leave him here. And she's left him here with lots of complimentary comments to the teacher and to the leading management, to the LD teacher, to myself, after kind of weighing us and evaluating us- really

evaluating us all year. So it's been a very interesting situation and just a neat mom and a neat kid and a lot of work. Interview 18 R.

Displaying respectful behaviors: Apologizing to parent. Three of the 18 school social workers described incidents in which they treated the parent with respect by apologizing to the parent. In the following incident, the school social worker had been describing a relationship with a parent of a child with behavioral issues and the attempts to create a relationship with the parent. The worker then continued to describe having to address an immediate health concern that the student presented with the parent. The decisions and action that the school social worker took created a rift in the worker-parent relationship. The school social worker then describes trying to make amends by apologizing and explaining the decision-making situation to the parent. The worker concludes that if the student is back next year, the worker will continue to try and build trust and a relationship with the student's parent.

Then her son came to school two days with a lot of pain in his abdomen. So I called her and I said, "Is there any chance this is appendix? I'm really worried about your kid". She said no. She didn't know. She was gonna call the doctor and talk it over. She had by that point decided to try him on medication [for the behavioral issues], she thought it was just due to the meds, that he was having some cramping. Well, it turned out it was appendix. So a day later he's in the hospital with an appendicitis attack. In the interim, she had not wanted anybody in the building to know he was on medication. I was about maybe the third person to know – she first told an LD teacher and the principal and then me. When the kid was in that much pain, I told the nurse before reaching her on the phone and asking her permission to do that. She [the parent] felt very betrayed by me. And I understand that. I also felt in a building with a kid in a lot of pain, the nurse needed to know the additional factor having to do with meds. So, I have called her back and apologized and said, "I'm really sorry, I understand your point. I know that I broke a confidence here. I had to make a professional judgment at that moment when I saw your kid in as much pain as he was". So I would say she is really struggling with trusting us and struggling with knowing if we really can serve her child well. And we are struggling with knowing if we can serve him well or not. We have tons of variables on that one, including her final decision to

try meds, and I think she felt we were strongly encouraging medication knowing his nature and thinking that there might be something that would help him. There's lots of pieces to this. But my betrayal on the medication issue, the situation with us not acting on this maybe a little more promptly or quickly, and then the question of the medication and that that was something we thought was worth a try if she was willing to try it. I think she has not at any point had a real trusting, comfortable feeling. And he's had many dismissals. And it has ultimately affected her job. The corker was the appendicitis attack and she missed a few days. So it's been a challenging growth of a relationship. And one that if he's back next year, I'll certainly work very hard to build that trust and to build that relationship. And we'll have to see if we really ultimately can meet his needs. Interview 18R.

Displaying respectful behaviors: Treating the parent with respect. In the following incident, the school social worker describes a parent that has a challenging reputation with the school personnel. By exhibiting respect for the parent and not reacting negatively towards the parent's communication style, the worker began to develop a relationship with the parent, which led the parent to be comfortable in approaching the worker about her concerns.

She [the mother] was like a parent that nobody wanted to deal with. She was just one of those people that was loud. She might have been suffering from some mental illness. She blamed teachers. Teachers were afraid of her. Even the administration was kind of backed off of her a little bit. I formed a relationship with her because . . . this is what I think I did, I'm not 100% sure. I didn't talk down to her like she's a crazy person. I didn't act afraid of her. I think what I did was treated her with some respect. I said, "Can you come back to my office? And let's talk about it." I sat her down and I actually sincerely listened to what she had to say. And I think a lot of people to hear her ranting and raving, they'd turn their ears off or they're not really listening to her words. . . . I don't understand. . . . She's just had a lot of problems with other people in the building. But it got to the point where when she would walk in the building, they [school staff] would say that I was the only one that could talk to her because people were afraid of her. She would come right straight to my office and talk to me because I would help her sort out what did she want. Interview 17Q.

Displaying respectful behaviors: Acknowledging the parent. School social workers in the interviews described occasions in which the parent did not get a warm, welcoming reception from school staff. As this incident illustrates, the school social worker displayed a respect for the parent by acknowledging the parent, which led to the school social worker and parent having a relationship in which the worker states, "I know her, now she knows me".

There's probably several, but just one popped in my mind. Her oldest came to our school in kindergarten when I first started, and I kinda knew him for kindergarten kid that was tardy a lot. . . . Build [the relationship] slowly. And I think this is what happened with this particular parent who I'm telling the story about. I think every time I saw her, I just always would acknowledge that she was there, always inquired how she was doing, always reminded her that her kid was tardy. [laughter] It never helped any, so I don't know if I had the wrong approach [about addressing the tardiness concern]. You know, now with him graduating, she's got three more kids coming through the school. But now I know her, now she knows me. Now she knows to call me when there's a problem. Interview 17Q.

Displaying respectful behaviors: Giving the parent space. In this following incident, the school social worker describes treating the parent in a respectful manner following conflict with a parent by providing space, backing off the situation between the worker and the parent. After time had passed and the parent acknowledged the worker, the worker began to have interactions again with the parent. By providing the parent with some space, it appears to have mended the relationship as the worker reports, "So, there was a stretch there of a few months where we didn't connect, but we're back."

This particular time I had to give this woman some bad news, and she did not like hearing that her son ever does anything wrong. . . . So it really created a bad situation because she wouldn't believe anybody, including me, even though I had gotten to know her, that her son is capable of doing things naughty. And I don't know if it's 'cause she feels it's a reflection on her or if she really honestly never thinks he does anything bad. I don't know that part. But at one point she was not

happy with me 'cause I had told her some things that he had did, and she was kinda pretty much yelling at me on the phone about how I'm picking on him and I don't think about what the other kids are doing to him, and other people start things with him and he's the victim. So in that case, that didn't go well. . . . So I gave us both some space because I'm not the type that says you know what, I'm the school and I get to say bad news. I didn't cop an attitude, which could have been real easy, or yell back at her and say you know what, you don't know your son. I didn't do that. I backed off the situation. . . . After a long time, and I mean a long time, I think I saw her somewhere at the school here, and I just waited for her to acknowledge me, and she did, and I said hi, and then the next time maybe I said hi. I eased my way back into that one, to the point where she called me up on the telephone and kinda acted like nothing had ever happened. I'm talking about months, maybe even possibly a year had passed. Now I see her quite often . . . her son's not in this school any more, and she's very friendly to me, and she tells me how her son's doing. So, there was a stretch there of a few months where we didn't connect, but we're back. Interview 17Q.

Displaying respectful behaviors: Having a non-judgmental attitude. The school social worker had been reflecting on his/her relationship with a parent who had challenges accessing services for her child with mental health needs. After discussing a few different engaging behaviors the school social worker states:

There's been times I've had to call her and say you know, your child said this happened over the weekend and I need to make a report. And again, I think not being judgmental and just saying, "Hey, things happen. There's a lot of stress. But I've gotta make this report; that's my job. What can I do to help you manage this stress so this doesn't happen again?" . . . I think that she feels that we – she and I and the school program together – have worked really hard for her child for three years and that he has come a long way. . . . I think that she feels very positively. Interview 8H.

Displaying respectful behaviors: Getting to know the parent personally. This worker described treating the parent respectfully by getting to know little things about the parent, the specific example is a love of chocolate, and using this knowledge in interactions with the parent to build a relationship with the parent.

This parent has a child who is in a self-contained program. And has been in the self-contained program for three years now. The parent has not really been happy with the program and the teacher. . . . This parent has been an extremely challenging parent. Extremely. We lost some staff members because staff members have had it. That kinda puts the framework on this. And a challenging parent for me. Exhausting. . . . [The social worker proceeds to talk about behaviors he/she engaged in to develop a relationship with the parent: listening the parent, phoning to follow up with the parent, getting the parent's perspective on a situation, emails between the worker and the parent] Build that trust. . . . Getting to know the parent a little bit more personally, or sharing some personal things. Like, for example, the two of us love chocolate. So when we meet, we each bring chocolate. Those kinds of little things that just help make parents understand that we're working hard on this, and you may not be satisfied, but we're doing the best we can. . . . We have, over the last – it's been a challenge – but this past year has been much better in terms of dealing with the parent and the parent is feeling better about the program, not truly excited about it, but better. And now we're working on transition to the senior high. Kinda being side by side with the parent as we work with the senior high, knowing that I'm there . . . hopefully she knows I'm there to advocate for her child. Interview 10J.

Working Within the School System Behaviors Theme (N=14)

Fourteen out of 18 school social workers described critical incidents in which they engaged in 6 different behaviors working with parents within school systems. With a larger theme of working within the school system, the 6 behaviors were further identified into two subthemes of working within the school system: (a) working within the school setting and (b) assisting parent advocacy with school system. The behavioral theme, the related subthemes, and specific behaviors are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Working Within the School System Behaviors Theme, Subthemes, and Behaviors (N=14)

Subthemes	Behaviors	Number of interviews identifying the behavior
Working within the school setting	Using an interdisciplinary team approach with parent	9
	Being an intermediary between home and school	6
	Working with parents regarding child's school transitions	4
Assisting parent advocacy with school system	Developing a school service plan with the parent	2
	Encouraging parent to take action within school system	2
	Problem solving with the parent within the school system	2

Working within the school setting

Nine out of the eighteen school social workers described specific behaviors working within school settings to build connections between the school and the family. The first behavior to be addressed in this subtheme describes working within an interdisciplinary team to connect and communicate with families. The second behavior identified addresses school social workers behavior as an intermediary in communication and understanding between the school and the parent. The final behavior in this subtheme is working with parents to make connections between the parent and the next school during a transition. Each behavior is discussed below with critical incident examples.

Working within the school setting: Using an interdisciplinary team approach with parent. Nine of the 18 school social workers described working with other professionals (i.e. teachers, administrative staff, and others) in an interdisciplinary team as an approach to working with parents. By working with an interdisciplinary team, school social workers reported being able to communicate with and keep connected to parents, get paperwork completed, and provide services to parents. In the first incident, the worker describes working with his/her team to provide a unified message of concern to the parent about a child's issues. The school social worker reports that the parent was responsive and positively reactive to the team's message of the issues.

There's one family that came to mind, but I don't know if this one will be adequate for what you're looking for. This is a family that was in today. I've had numerous contacts with them [the parents] over the school year. . . . She [the mother] was in for an IEP [Individual Education Plan] on one of her well-behaved kids. So then the other team came and they really had some issues with the daughter and wanted the parents help to address them. So as a team, we really did a great job of telling this mom what the issues were that we had seen. And with her [the daughter] it's stuff like nasty behavior toward other kids, rude to borderline rude stuff to her teachers, [and] some significant lack of effort in classes. But that, at this point, has gotten [inaudible]. The one piece has gotten better because the mom intervened with her. The student came to a meeting and heard her teachers say all this to the mom. [The student] heard the mom say this is gonna stop, this way of treating other people. She's [the student's] not gonna continue like this. Period. The mom made a lot of decisions to get in closer with her daughter and followed through on some of it. So she [the student] got better. . . . Again, the mom and dad were really responsive. The mom agreed to spend some more time here at school. Again [the mother] made a commitment to get in closer with her daughter. Interview 6F.

In the second incident, the school social worker reports a situation in which there was a resistant parent. The worker reports that he/she was not able to create a relationship with the parent, but did use an interdisciplinary team approach to try and build a relationship with the parent. The school social worker reports one method was to use a

“good cop/bad cop” approach with the parent. In collaboration with the school psychologist, they reported positive behavior of the student and possible next steps to the parent. Later, the worker reports using a positive relationship the student has with an Educational Assistant (EA) to intervene with the parent and complete necessary paperwork.

Interviewee We had one parent this year who refused to have us do even an evaluation on their child. It was an EBD situation, never was able to get that parent to come around. Thankfully their child was able to manage their behavior a notch better so we could get through the end of the school year. There’s been talk that they’ll go to another school. So never was able to kinda make that leap [towards a relationship].

Interviewer Do you remember what kinds of things you did to try and get them engaged and make that leap?

Interviewee I think meetings that accommodated her [the parent’s] schedule was one and didn’t necessarily accommodate mine. Again, it just sorta ended up this way that the psychologist and I were playing kinda good cop/bad cop. She was the good cop and I was the bad cop. So I think she [the mother] got a lot of positives as well as what we felt really needed to happen next with her child. Also, this was the one [the family] this year that we invited the district family advocate on board. Also she [the parent] refused to come to any more of our meetings, but we really needed a signature. So her son, on Wednesday afternoons, would meet for a tutoring session with an EA that he [the student] had a good relationship with in the building. And I gave the EA the paperwork and asked her to have the parent at least give us a signature. So she [the mother] picked that she didn’t want to go ahead with [the evaluation]. At least it was documentation that was important for our files. So just using other staff in the building that have relationships with parents or children. So I felt like we pulled out a lot of stops with having the family advocate ’cause she [the mother] didn’t necessarily have that great of a relationship with me, so I’d work with other staff that did. So that was helpful. Interview 13M.

Working within the school setting: Being an intermediary between home and school. Six of the 18 school social workers described times in which they are an intermediary between the school and home. Sometimes the worker reported helping the parent to understand things at school. At other times, the worker helped the school understand what is happening with the family. These behaviors could be perceived as communication behaviors and placed within that particular theme. They were specifically identified as a subtheme within this theme category because of a perceived misunderstanding between the school system and the parents, which resulted in an intervention of the school social worker to create understanding between the home and the school environments.

In the following incident, the school social worker describes defending the parent to other school staff who had a negative perception of the parent and the child. The student had a lot of aggressive behavior and the parent had a challenging reputation with the school because of her defense of her child. The school social worker and parent had worked on a plan to address the child's behaviors. The school social worker then proceeds to describe having to stick up for the parent with the school. By defending the parent to the school, trust between the worker and parent developed.

I would defend her a lot with the school. Because I believed in her and she knew it. And I would have to defend her at school. There were people that just wanted to say get that kid out of here. And I'd have to try to bring them along to see this kid in a different light 'cause the kid has a lot of problems. He was changing. This woman was incredible. She called me from her hospital bed to make sure . . . could I come and get him for school, he was staying with somebody else, she was in the hospital. I think that's a good example that she really did trust that I would try to be there for her kid. Interview 9I.

In the following incident, the worker describes miscommunication between the school and parent. The parents contact the social worker to look into it. After getting more details the worker contacts the family about the situation, helping to resolve the concern.

The one that comes to mind just happened about a week ago. It's not any huge issue, but . . . I received a phone call from a parent. She was crying because her daughter participates in one of our self-contained programs, and has . . . a challenging disability. [The daughter] came home and reported that she didn't have lunch that day. Well, the mom happened to be in the hospital so she couldn't be dealing with this. She [the mother] was crying and saying this has happened before. I worked it out with the case manager. That's not supposed to be happening. [The mother] was pretty upset. I said, "Let me check this out; I'll take care of it from here." Then [I] ended up getting an email from the father who was very angry, too, that this happened. The bottom line is it wasn't the case manager. It was a sub in the lunchroom taking the money who didn't know the student. [The sub] didn't know if the student doesn't have money in her account that that's okay, she should still get a lunch. The case manager gave her some food in the resource room, so she did have lunch. It just wasn't the school lunch. Because people didn't have the information, there were assumptions made. . . . And everything was worked out quickly. That's a minor issue. But because people didn't have all the information they needed, that's where the breakdown was. Again, communication. I find that to be a huge issue. Just the breakdown in communication. Once people have all the information, things are usually okay. Interview 10J.

Working within the school setting: Working with parents regarding child's school transitions. Four of the 18 school social workers described working directly with parents to help the parents with a child's transition to another school or program. In the following incident, the school social worker worked with a resistant parent to make a successful transition- talking to the parent about other programs and accompanying the parent on school visits to investigate other schools. The worker reports that the parent made a decision about where to send her child and that the parent left a message of gratitude for the worker for their efforts.

Interviewer Describe a critical incident or an important experience that is an example of your role interacting with parents.

Interviewee Okay. I can think of a handful of sort of critical ones. But one I can think of is working with a parent of a child who was in regular classroom but receiving pull-out special ed resource help for academics. That child was not making much progress, so we had to talk to the parent about a more specialized program for her child's needs due to the lack of progress in the area of academics. That program would be in a different building because the child wasn't making progress. First of all, that was hard for the parent to hear that information about her child. It was very difficult. The parent lives in the neighborhood and the thought of going to another school with a more specialized program was difficult. The parent is very resistant and angry about all these issues and would come to meetings that way. But [the parent] did come to meetings and was an advocate for her child; which I thought was huge. And I was also amazed at the fact that when we scheduled visits, I think we went to two or three schools to visit different programs, she always met me there, despite the fact that this parent would work nights and she'd be just coming off a shift. So often I find that to get parents, a lot of times, to cooperate, you have to go pick them up. Not very often do they just meet you there and that they show up on time. So anyway, this parent makes it to every appointment, resistantly, but I have a feeling that she somehow, in the back of her mind, must have known or else she wouldn't have been as cooperative in those types of ways. So again, all along through this process was very resistant but did make a decision about one of the schools and felt a connection with one of the schools that she had chosen. It was a school that had kind of an arts focus. And this child really had an interest in art and dance and this kind of thing. So the parent really felt a connection with that. Subsequently, it turned out to be a really good place for her and her child. But at the end, it was kinda like today, the last day of school and we were down to the wire visiting these places. I wrote her a letter kinda outlining how difficult this was, but how though she had been resistant . . . I don't know how I worded it, but that she was so cooperative and that I really had not worked with a parent that was so cooperative in terms of meeting me at places and that kind of thing. And on the last day of school, I think I had phoned her from my house to remind her of one of the meetings, so she called me back. So it was done for the year, I walked into my home, and she had left a message on my answering machine or call waiting or whatever. And it was a message that was really warm and thankful and grateful toward me. Where all along it had been a really resistant kind of angry road. But I think we both had kinda come or she had kinda come full circle with this and had really turned her attitude around. It was one of the best sort of closures to the end of a school year that I had had, and a most meaningful

one. I still get sorta revved up when I talk about it. So that's one.
Interview 13M.

Assisting parent advocacy within the school system

Five of the 18 school social workers described behaviors assisting the parent in advocacy efforts within the school setting. These efforts involved working with parents to develop a school service plan, encouraging the parents to take advocacy action within the school, and working with the parent to resolve problems. The specific behaviors are discussed below with critical incident examples.

Assisting parent advocacy within the school system: Developing a school service plan with parent. In assisting the parent with advocacy, 2 of the 18 school social workers described working with parents and other school personnel to develop a plan to meet a student's needs within the school setting. It appears from the incidents that there is a relationship present in order to work together to develop a plan so that all parties have ownership and "buy-in".

In the first incident, the school social worker communicates to the parent about a plan of action at school to address the parents' concerns. When the parents resist, the school social worker communicated a service plan to the parents and concern for the student, which the school social worker states the parents appreciated and then "were much more open to listening."

I felt that this child really had some significant needs and that he was shutting down and would not communicate. [The student] was withdrawing. I saw him as a significant risk. I just decided . . . it would be pretty easy for me to say oh, well, he is still arriving at school, he is still making grades okay, but I just didn't [inaudible]. And staying in touch with the parents saying, "I'm not gonna give up on your son." They would say, "Well, you know, he's been to three therapists and doesn't talk to them, I don't think he'll talk to you." And I said, "You know what? I'm gonna still check in with him each week, play a game, we'll do something. I want him to know there's someone here at school. . . . I think the parents really appreciated that, that someone cared enough. . . . I think when I told them that, they were much more open to listening. Interview 16P.

In the following incident, the school social worker works with both an angry parent whose child had been "suspended or dismissed frequently" and the school personnel to develop a plan to address concerns about the student's behavior.

I'm thinking of where the father in this particular case was quite defensive with the school. . . . By the end of the school year last year he [the student] did have an IEP [Individualized Education Program], it wasn't an ED IEP. But services were really quite limited, about a half hour a week. So working with the father to sort of change those services to a daily check-in, working with dad to understand that these really are quite severe behaviors. . . . And in that particular case, talking to dad at times I could reach dad, which would not necessarily be typical school hours. And throughout the first semester, we really had a very good working relationship. Now we've been able to work to the point where next year his son will be in a building that has the potential resource room if he needs it. . . . So, it's also the work of the principal and the teachers and the family to try to figure out without necessarily putting anybody down, but trying to help them all to figure out what might work well for a kid like that. . . . So, it's been a process really all year. Interview 18R.

Assisting parent advocacy: Encouraging parent to take action within school

system. In helping the parent to take action within the school system, 2 of the 18 school social workers reported encouraging the parent to address particular issues within the school by addressing school administrators. In the incident below, the school social worker had been reflecting back on his/ her three-year relationship with the parent. As the worker is reflecting on the relationship, the worker describes a brief incident in which the

worker validates a concern that the parent has, then encourages the parents to take action by writing to the school's administration. It appears that the worker is trying to stress by the parent taking action on the concern that there is the opportunity to work together- the school and the family.

Interviewer So where's your relationship with this particular mom now?

Interviewee Well, I saw her today. Very good. I think that she feels that we – she and I and the school program together – have worked really hard for her child for three years and that he has come a long way. . . . I think that has helped with the trust issue with this parent. She knows if she comes to me and tells me something happened, it will be taken care of. And I've at times encouraged her. There was one incident that she was really concerned. I said, "Can you write it up as a complaint to the principal? You can do that. If it happened like the way your child said it did, you need to do something about that. That's not okay. It's not okay with me for your child to be treated that way." And so that it's not us against them. They see it's all of us working together. Interview 8H.

Assisting parent advocacy: Problem solving with the parent within the school system. Two of the 18 school social workers described incidents in which they engaged the parent in problem solving regarding a concern at the school. The following incident describes problem solving with a parent- the parent wanted specific services for their child, which the school social worker describes as not being appropriate for the student. The school social worker attempts to work with the parent to create a solution that both the school and the parent can agree to. The solution did not work out for the student, but the incident provides an example of problem solving with the parent to reach a compromise of services. The worker reports that the relationship is "touch and go".

Interviewee This particular parent used to work in this building as a paraprofessional in the EBD room, and did not want her kid in the EBD room here because she knows what goes on there because she used to work here.

But really that was the appropriate place for this kid. That's where this kid was gonna get his needs met. That was the place where people would be able to work with him regularly on behavioral interventions and redirections, instead of just bouncing him out when he gets in trouble and sending him home, to be able to keep him here. Keep him hooked into school and start working with him on his behavioral issues. So the compromise we came to is . . . we have two EBD classrooms. One is for kids who are more conduct, really pretty aggressive kids. And one is for more the mentally ill kids. . . . So what we decided to do is start him in the other room [the room for the mentally ill students]. It's more quiet there. It's more nurturing. . . . They spend a lot of time on academics, which is really key for this parent. This kid is pretty smart. She didn't want the academic stuff to go to pot even though it was already gone to pot because he was acting out. The compromise we came up with even though we didn't necessarily feel like it was appropriate, that was the other option that we had for him in this building was to have him go into some of these other special ed programs or classes to help address the behaviors. That ended up not being successful. And he ended up in the other EBD room [the room for more conduct disordered and aggressive students].

Interviewer So what happened with your relationship with mom?

Interviewee This is a really pushy parent. . . . So it's really kinda touch and go with her. It kinda depends on what's going on with her, what's going on with all the kids. Interview 7G.

Results Summary

Thirty-eight behaviors were identified from the critical incidents of 18 transcribed interviews with school social workers. These behaviors appeared to help school social workers develop and sustain relationships with parents. From the 38 behaviors, three major behavioral themes were identified across the interviews: (a) communication behaviors, (b) showing care and concern behaviors, and (c) working within the school system behaviors. Within each behavioral theme, subthemes with specific behaviors were identified. Examples of critical incidents were provided to document the behavioral themes, the subthemes, and behaviors identified.

In the next chapter, the behavioral themes will be further discussed as potential competencies for school social work practice with parents. The next chapter will also examine the challenges of the study and implications for students, parents, the school social work profession, and further research.

Chapter Five: Summary, Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

Study Summary

In developing evidence based social work practice, one develops a practice question, seeks the answer to the question, evaluates the evidence, then integrates the gained knowledge with experience, client values, and the particular situation (Sackett et al., 1997).

In this study, I asked the question of what behaviors do school social workers engage in that help to develop and sustain relationships with parents. In order to study the behaviors of school social workers, I conducted a Critical Incident Technique study of their experiences with parents. I mailed out an introductory letter about the study to school social workers in the local metropolitan area. School social workers who had three years of professional practice experience and lived within the metropolitan area were invited to participate. Interested potential participants contacted me, and then I described the study and invited individuals to be interviewed. Eighteen school social workers agreed to participate and completed audio taped interviews. I developed the research and interview questions from the study's objective and asked the participants to identify critical experiences in their work with parents. A hired transcriptionist transcribed the interviews into text, so that I could review and analyze the data. I verified the transcripts by listening to the interview tapes and comparing them to the transcribed texts.

I analyzed the interview texts for critical incidents involving school social workers developing or sustaining relationships with parents. Critical incidents for this study had to have three components: (a) a defined situation in which the incident

occurred, (b) a behavior the school social worker engaged in, and (c) an outcome when noted by the participants. After identifying the critical incidents, I reviewed them to identify and describe the specific behaviors of the school social workers. I also noted potential behavioral themes across the interviews.

I hired a PhD social work student to verify the critical incidents, code the critical incidents for behaviors, and identify possible themes in the first five transcripts. The student rater and I met to discuss and agree on the critical incidents, behavioral codes, and initial themes of those transcripts. I reviewed the coding of the remaining texts using the agreed upon behavioral codes. Following my review, the student rater reviewed the remaining texts to determine whether or not my coding fit the behavioral codes we had identified and agreed on. The student rater agreed with the coding of the remaining critical incidents' behaviors. Thirty-eight behaviors were identified from the data.

The student rater and I agreed on my grouping of behaviors into four initial behavioral themes. After grouping the behaviors into the initial themes, I determined the frequency of a particular theme and its' behaviors across all interviews. For a behavioral theme to be included in the data reported in this study, the theme had to be identified in at least 50% of the interviews that is in at least 9 interviews. Three behavioral themes met this criterion: (a) communication behaviors, (b) showing care and concern behaviors, and (c) working within the school system behaviors. Following the identification of the three themes, I furthered grouped the behaviors into subthemes. As a result, each theme had subthemes and specific behaviors associated with it (as demonstrated in Tables 2, 3, and 4).

In the following section, I will: (a) discuss the meaning and significance of the study's findings, (b) address the limitations of this study, and (c) note conclusions that can be made from the study. Following the discussion of the study and its findings, implications and recommendations for school social work practice will be addressed. The implications and recommendations will: (a) introduce the concept of translating the study's results into a set of competencies for school social work practice, (b) examine the suggested competencies and the available literature supporting them, and (c) discuss recommendations for use of the suggested competencies in school social work practice, supervision, professional development, and research.

Discussion and Conclusions of Study Results

The objective of this study was to understand the effective behaviors engaged in to develop and sustain relationships with parents. It has been established that a significant portion of the school social worker's day involves engaging parents on behalf of student learning and development (Kurtz and Barth, 2001). Yet prior to the study reported here, school social work literature focused on the purposes of and outcomes from the work of a school social worker-parent relationship rather than on the relationship itself. The Critical Incident Technique was the research method used in this study because the method provides the opportunity to explore a phenomenon about which there is little documented research and to create an understanding of such phenomena (Gremier, 2004). The results of this study are an initial examination of the dynamics of the school social worker-parent relationship.

The school social worker-parent relationship is a helping relationship, which Perlman (1979) describes as “a supportive, compassionate working alliance, which helps a person to cope or learn to cope with their problems” (p. 54). Due to the limited literature addressing the dynamics of the school social worker-parent relationship, this study sought to understand the effective behaviors school social workers engage in to develop and maintain the relationship Perlman describes.

It must be noted that the school social workers were asked to identify critical experiences in their work with parents. They were not asked to recount experiences in which they thought they were effective in developing and sustaining relationships with parents. With my own insight, experience, and judgment, I determined the effectiveness of the school social workers from the outcomes portion of the critical incidents (Flanagan, 1982). As a result, I identified 38 school social worker behaviors I determined to be effective in building and maintaining relationships with parents. From the 38 school social worker behaviors, three behavioral themes were determined. These behavioral themes are: (a) communication behaviors, (b) showing care and concern behaviors, and (c) working within the school system behaviors. The themes and the identified behaviors provide the school social work profession with new knowledge about developing and maintaining relationships with parents. These themes of effective communication, care and concern, and the collaborative nature of working with parents and school personnel to meet the parents' or a student's needs are foundations of school social work practice.

Communication Behaviors

The communication behaviors theme had two subthemes: (a) communication access strategies and (b) information sharing. From the themes developed there are three lessons about communicating with parents to note. First, the behaviors identified from the critical incidents reflect the importance of good two-way communication, a theme that is present in Epstein's (1995) and Swap's (1993) writings on family involvement. Both authors stress the importance of two-way communication-- a communication process of sharing information between the family and the school that keeps both parties informed (Swap, 1993). The communication access strategy behaviors identified by the critical incidents of the school social workers provide the second lesson about communication. These strategies are attempts to increase opportunities for communication and build the relationship between the school social worker and the parents. The behaviors within this subtheme could be broken down into two categories of access behaviors: (a) methods to maintain communication with parents and (b) inviting communication behaviors. School social workers described a variety of behaviors to maintain communication with parents including making continuous attempts to contact the parent, being intentional about contacting parents, using an interpreter to contact the parent, and using extended family to continue contact with the family. Inviting communication behaviors included informal contacts and communications with parents, inviting the parent to the school or meeting, introducing themselves to the parents, and inviting the parent to contact the worker if needed. School social workers also described sustaining their relationships and communications with parents through humor and being "real" with parents.

The information sharing behaviors identified in this study are attempts by the school social workers to engage parents in a two-way information exchange. These behaviors can be further categorized within the subtheme as: (a) communication regarding the child and (b) engaging parents in information sharing. Communication behaviors regarding the child included reporting about a student's behavior or progress, being sensitive in sharing information with parents, and helping parents to understand a child's behavior. School social workers engaged parents in two way communication by being answering parents' questions or concerns, getting for and sharing information with parents, and getting information from the parent that would be helpful to understanding the child.

Showing Care and Concern Behaviors

In both Epstein's (1995) and Swap's (1993) family involvement models, there is a theme of care and concern present. In Swap's family involvement model, one of the outcomes of Swap's partnership model is a feeling that parents and school faculty feel listened to and value each other's perspective. In Epstein's writing about family involvement, she discusses the six types of family involvement as "types of caring" (p. 710). She goes on to state that when these types are "operating well" (p. 710) they create an environment of trust and respect between parents and the school along with helping children succeed in school. Yet, the models are missing the overt pieces that are present in the data in this study. The findings of this study stress specific compassionate behaviors as significant in developing and sustaining relationships with parents through empathic and respectful behaviors.

The empathic behaviors can be viewed in three smaller categories: (a) supporting the parent in expressing themselves, (b) expressing care and concern through nonverbal and verbal communications, and (c) empathy through rapport building behaviors. Three of the behaviors within this subtheme were about supporting the parents to express themselves: listening to the parent, acknowledging the parents' feelings and concerns, and displaying empathy towards the parent. School social workers also specifically described incidents in which they demonstrated care and concern through verbal and nonverbal communications and actions. Rapport building empathic behaviors involved the school social worker in using their own personal experiences to understand the parent or behaviors in which the school social worker connected the parent's family of origin experience to the current situation.

The respectful behaviors reported by the school social workers demonstrate both acknowledging the parent as a person of value and respectful interactions with the parent. Acknowledging the parent as a person of value included identifying the parents' strengths, acknowledging the parent, and getting to know the parent personally. The respectful interactions included apologizing to the parent, treating the parent with respect, and giving the parent space after a disagreement to "cool off".

Working Within the School System Behaviors

The working within the school system theme had two subthemes: (a) working within the school setting and (b) assisting parent advocacy. The behaviors identified in this theme have a collaborative character. Collaborative themes are expressed in Epstein's (1995) collaboration type of family involvement and in the National

Association of Social Workers' (2002) standards for school social work practice. The behaviors of working within the school setting were behaviors in which the school social worker worked with other staff and parents to build connections between the school and the home. Being part of an interdisciplinary team, school social workers reported having a unified message amongst the team in their communications with parents or letting staff who had better relationships with the parents take the lead in the communications between the school and home. School social workers also described being an intermediary between the home and the school by explaining what was happening at home so that the school staff could understand a student's behaviors or their academic performance and helping parents to resolve conflicts between the school and home. Another collaborative behavior the school social workers described was helping the parent with a student's transitions from one school to another by going on visits to the new school with parents and being an intermediary between the family and new school environment.

Assisting parent advocacy behaviors included developing a plan with parents for student services, encouraging the parent to take action with school administrators, or engaging the parent in problem solving. Each of these behaviors shared common characteristics of helping the parent to be an advocate for their child.

Limitations of the Study

Four areas of limitations of the study are discussed in this section: (a) my inexperience of collecting and analyzing data, (b) school social worker responses, (c) data from the parents, and (d) the contextual nature of the method.

Inexperience of the researcher. I faced two challenges in being an inexperienced researcher: (a) limited experience with research interviews and (b) learning to be alert to differentiate hypothetical or generalized reports from actual critical incidents. Though I had a set of interview questions that I developed from the Stitt-Gohdes et al. (2000) study and implemented the interview questions with each participant, had I had more experience in conducting interviews, I may have been able to re-direct social workers' generalizations and hypothetical reports back to specific incidents.

Also, the interview questions asked school social workers to describe a critical experience in their work with parents. The main interview question was vague and did not specifically guide the school social worker to identify what they perceived to be effective behaviors in developing and sustaining relationships with parents. Interview questions that specifically asked the school social workers to recount their effective experiences with parents may have produced different data to analyze and possibly led to different behaviors and themes being identified.

Flanagan (1954) stresses the challenges in the Critical Incident Technique methodology is not in the data gathering, but in the interpretation of the data by the researchers. Gremier (2004) also expresses concern about data interpretation with data being misunderstood or misinterpreted by the researcher. During the data interpretation process, I learned to be alert to social workers' reports of hypothetical situations or generalized reports in the data and to be careful to differentiate them from reports of actual specific experiences that reflected critical incidents. In working with the data, I noticed true critical incidents included a description of a specific situation, a behavior,

and an outcome, which was described by the school social workers for most critical incidents. Being aware of these elements was useful in identifying the critical incidents. After identifying the critical incidents, I was able to analyze them in order to identify the behaviors and behavioral themes reported here.

School social worker responses. To address the limitations of the school social workers' responses and their impact on this study, the discussion has to address: (a) concerns about memory lapses or recall bias and (b) the hypothetical responses and generalizations presented by the school social workers.

Both Gremier (2004) and Keatinge (2001) have concerns about the Critical Incident Technique's methods of using participant recall to relay incidents, stressing the issues of memory lapses and recall bias. Gremier states, with memory lapses, participants may not recall experiences or the sequence of events. With recall bias, participants may miss positive experiences intentionally and instead emphasize "rare or negative events" (Carpenter, 2000). Given these concerns, there is the possibility the school social workers may have left out details about a particular incident due to memory lapse or intentional or unintentional selective disclosure about incidents. Certainly, those possible issues are a limitation of this study.

School social workers did report critical experiences in their work with parents. However, they also reported how they would respond hypothetically or in general terms of what they would do when certain situations arose based on their experience. To identify critical incidents, the researcher used criteria that included (a) a situation context with a particular parent, (b) the action of the worker, and (c) an outcome when reported in

order to differentiate specific critical incidents from the hypothetical responses and more generalized reports.

Data from parents. As previously noted, there is little documentation about the dynamics of the school social worker-parent relationship. This study is an initial exploration of the dynamics of that relationship, yet it is one-sided. The study addressed the relationship from the school social workers' perspective, not the parents'. The school social workers reported critical incidents that they associated with being critical in their relationships with parents. The researcher identified behaviors and behavioral themes in the school social workers' critical incidents that are associated with developing and sustaining relationships with parents.

Contextual nature of the method. Another limitation of this study is the contextual nature of the method. The study reported here provides a snapshot of eighteen school social workers' views about what behaviors they associate with developing and maintaining relationships with parents. Study participants were not randomly selected; instead the study sample included volunteers that responded to a targeted recruitment. As a result, the findings in this study are specific only to the population studied. The study's findings cannot be generalized to a broader population.

New knowledge and lessons for practice. Despite these limitations, there are two outcomes of the study that have value for the future: (a) an initial step towards new understanding and (b) lessons that can be learned for practice. Because there has been little study of the school social worker-parent relationship, the objective of this study was to provide an understanding of the behaviors school social workers engage in to develop

and sustain relationships with parents. Although, the study method used does not allow for the findings to be generalized to a broader population, the study's findings do provide an initial understanding of school social worker behaviors that are perceived to be associated with building and maintaining relationships with parents. The findings of this study add to the literature regarding family involvement and the role of the school social worker-parent relationship in successful interventions.

It is also my belief that there are lessons to be learned from this study that can be of use in practice. These lessons come from the direct experiences of school social workers. Dupper (2003) defines best practices as "guidelines that are generated by evidence-based research, professional standards, and experience such as collective wisdom". The study's findings are an introductory lesson about what is perceived to be effective behaviors of school social workers in building and maintaining relationships with parents. In the implications section that follows, it is suggested that the findings of this study be used as a suggested set of practice competencies. The study's findings and the suggested competencies to be introduced need to be critically examined by practitioners to see if the lessons are useful in one's own practice (Dupper, 2004; McNeece & Thyer, 2004; Richey and Roffman, 1999) and professional development. Also, further research can add more depth and reliability to the findings of this study in an effort to validate and fine-tune the behaviors and themes identified in this study.

Discussion summary

Addressing a void in the school social work literature, this study examined school social workers' experiences with parents in order to identify behaviors that helped to

develop and sustain relationships with parents. Thirty-eight behaviors were identified from the critical incidents described by the school social workers. From the 38 behaviors, three behavioral themes were identified (a) communication behaviors, (b) showing care and concern behaviors, and (c) working within the school system behaviors. These behavioral themes provide a description about what works in developing and maintaining relationships with parents. Limitations of the study include: (a) my inexperience as a researcher, (b) the responses of the school social workers, (c) the omission of parents' perspectives, and (d) the contextual nature of the study method. These limitations were discussed regarding their impact on the study processes and findings. The findings of this study are an initial step in understanding the dynamics of the school social worker-parent relationship. The following section discusses a set of suggested competencies for school social work practice with parents, based on the findings of this study.

Implications and Recommendations

Developing Competencies from Study Findings

Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo (2003) define competencies as “knowledge, attitude, and skill statements that serve as prerequisites for practice” (p. 213). Competencies serve to guide social workers' behavior within professional practice (Kirk, 1999) and “are the first step in the progression to practice guidelines or best practices” (Peebles-Wilkins & Amodeo, 2003, p. 213).

The three behavioral themes identified from the critical incidents' behaviors are behavioral descriptions of school social workers' behaviors perceived to be effective in

building relationships with parents and maintaining those relationships. It is suggested that the three themes and their subthemes might be seen as lessons about what works to develop and sustain relationships with parents. These lessons are presented here as a suggested set of competencies that could be used by school social workers in their practice with parents. This translation of the themes into suggested competencies puts the themes into working statements for practice, putting the capacity for relationship into an arena that potentially can be taught, observed, and assessed. In reviewing these suggested competencies, it should be emphasized that their validation is needed because the results of this study are limited to the specific population of school social workers interviewed for this study.

The behavioral themes of this study are restated as six competencies listed below.

In communicating with parents, the school social worker will:

- (a) act intentionally; communicating with parents through continuous and varied methods and
- (b) engage in two-way communication with parents to exchange information.

In showing care and concern for parents, the school social worker will:

- (a) display empathic behaviors and
- (b) be respectful towards parents.

In working with parents within the school system, the school social worker will:

- (a) build connections between the school and family and
- (b) assist parents with advocacy with the school system.

The theory and family involvement models underlying this study focus on interacting systems and the relationships between systems. Based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Model, it is the stance of this researcher that (a) humans interact with a social environment that has an impact on their thoughts and behaviors and (b) interventions or services in one part of the system affect other parts of the system. The family involvement models of Epstein (1995) and Swap (1993) build upon the theoretical ideas of Bronfenbrenner (1977) and demonstrate that positive relationships and interactions between the school and the home environment lead to positive results for the student, the parent/family, and the school community. School social workers have a history of working with parents towards positive student outcomes. Translating the behavioral themes of this study into suggested competencies of relationship building and parent involvement calls attention to the dynamics of the school social worker-parent relationship and moves the school social work literature beyond its previous focus on the function of the relationship.

To understand the possible use of the study's findings as suggested competencies, the remaining discussion about the competencies will (a) highlight family involvement and social work literature that supports the competencies suggested by this study's behavioral theme findings; (b) address a concern about competencies driving practice; and (c) present recommendations for possible use of the suggested competencies in school social work practice.

Literature supporting the suggested competencies. The first communication competency suggests school social workers are intentional about their communications

with parents and apply a variety of methods to develop two-way communication with parents and keep the communication open. Eleven of the 18 school social workers reported making continuous efforts to connect with a parent, while 9 of the 18 school social workers reported a purposeful intention in making contacts with parents.

Christenson and Sheridan (2001) emphasize how intention along with the need for schools to “create formal and informal opportunities to communicate and build trust between the home and school” (p. 129) sets a positive communication tone between the school and parents for a relationship. School social workers, in this study, reported a variety of informal contacts, invitations and introductions, and more formal opportunities as methods they engaged in to communicate with parents. The more formal opportunities to connect with parents reported included phone calls to parents, letters home, conferences, home visits, and emails.

The second suggested communication competency suggests communicating information is an essential skill of social workers for developing relationships (Shulman, 1984). Christenson and Sheridan (2001) appear to agree with Shulman emphasizing an information exchange with parents is a critical component of engaging them in a home-school relationship. Information sharing, the second communication subtheme, which has been translated into the second suggested competency is consistent with both Epstein (1995)'s and Swap (1993)'s family involvement models, which indicate a need for communication between the school and the family that involves sharing information about the school program/curriculum, expectations and hopes, children's progress, assessment and special needs diagnosis (Epstein, 1989; Swap, 1993).

In Epstein's (1989) model, effective communication is one of six types of family involvement. Epstein describes communication between the school and the family as a two-way channel of information about school programs, children's progress, tests and assessments, and activities. Swap (1993) also stresses two-way communication between the school and home as critical in her partnership model of family involvement. Two-way communication is seen as an opportunity for both parents and faculty to share expectations and hopes, information about a child's progress, and the school's program (Swap, 1993).

In efforts to create two-way communication and keep parents informed about what was happening at school, school social workers reported incidents in which both positive and challenging reports were provided to the parent in order to keep parents informed. Christenson and Sheridan (2001) note that communications from the school to the home are typically focused on inappropriate behaviors or a child's challenges resulting in "a parent's perspective that calls from school connotes something bad" (p. 120). Christenson and Sheridan assert the need for effective communication between the parents and the school to have a "positive orientation rather than have a deficit or crisis orientation" (p. 120). The school social workers interviewed for this study certainly reported student challenges to the parents, yet the findings in this study appear to stress the idea that school social workers also need to present positive feedback about a child to the parent. Almost half of the school social workers interviewed, eight of the eighteen, described incidents that they communicated positive things about the child to the parent.

The second set of competencies focus on showing parents care and concern. This idea of care and concern is reflected in the work of Compton and Galaway (1989). Compton and Galaway identify concern for the other to be one of the key elements of effective helping relationships. They describe concern for the other as “the worker sincerely cares about what happens to the client and is able to communicate this feeling” (p. 281). School social workers described showing care and concern by describing empathic and respectful behaviors. School social workers interviewed described critical incidents in which they were able to identify with the parent’s pain and communicate that understanding to the parent by listening to the parent, acknowledging parent feelings, displaying empathy towards the parent, being there for the parent, nonverbal communications, use of the social workers’ own experiences to build empathy and rapport, and use of the parent’s own family of origin experiences to understand the parent’s current situation with their child.

In describing respect for the client, Compton and Galaway (1989) write “it [respect] is unconditional affirmation of the client’s life and needs - wanting clients to be all they can be, and to do all they want to do, for their own sake” (p. 281). This unconditional affirmation towards the client is a nonjudgmental respect for who the client is and what strengths and capabilities the client possesses towards the work ahead (Compton & Galaway, 1989). School social workers described displaying respect by identifying the parent’s strengths, apologizing to the parent, treating the parent with respect, acknowledging the parent, giving the parent space after a disagreement, and getting to know the parent personally.

The last set of suggested competencies focus on behaviors working with the school system. The first suggested competency in this set reflects The National Association of Social Workers' (2002) Standards for School Social Work Services, which stress the need to work collaboratively with parents and school personnel. Anderson-Butcher and Ashton (2004) report that school social workers involved with school collaborations have positive student effects such as improved attendance and academic achievement and parents had better experiences and relationships with school personnel. School social workers described being on school interdisciplinary teams in order to provide comprehensive services for families and the use of the team as a communication method with the parents. Many of the critical incidents reported by the school social workers that focused on working on a school interdisciplinary team reflected the outcome of better experiences and relationships with parents referred to by Anderson-Butcher and Ashton.

Christenson and Sheridan (2001) encourage school personnel to assist parents with advocacy with the school system in order to strengthen family-school relationships. This idea of parent advocacy is present in Epstein's (1995) types of family involvement, specifically decision making. Yet, the school system can be overwhelming for some parents (Swap, 1992). Swap (1992) stresses the importance of school personnel encouraging parent advocacy because parents offer different strengths and perspectives. Swap goes on stating involving parents in advocacy efforts helps to change the relationship from an adversarial relationship to one of partnership. Advocacy efforts the school social workers described were developing service plans with parent input,

encouraging parents to take action within the school system, and working with parents to problem solve.

Competencies driving practice. Richey and Roffman (1999) stress that competencies are only strategies and do not replace the social worker's need for assessment, evaluation, and decisions done on an individual basis. The researcher agrees with Richey and Roffman that competencies do not replace the need for evidence-based assessment, evaluation, and decision-making sensitive to the client's individual situation or condition. Yet, it is the researcher's stance that assessment, decision-making, and evaluation are interactive processes grounded in the social worker-client relationship. As a result, the behaviors identified in this study and the suggested competencies are an effort to (a) understand the school social worker behavioral factors which build and sustain relationships and (b) use the study's findings in the form of suggested competencies to develop school social worker relationship skills.

The suggested competencies developed from the findings of this study should not be accepted as conclusive or generalizable. They need to be evaluated by practitioners. By critically examining the findings and the suggested competencies, practitioners can evaluate the competencies' usefulness in their own practice (Dupper, 2004; McNeece & Thyer, 2004; Richey & Roffman, 1999) and professional development. Practice evaluation is a key to developing evidence-based practices allowing practice to influence competencies and not be led by the competencies.

Dissemination, transmission, and use of suggested competencies. Proctor and Rossen (2003) emphasize the need for effective dissemination and transmission of competencies so that the competencies can be of use to the practitioner. Yet, Howard and Jenson (1999) caution that there has been a lot of energy and resources devoted to the process of developing competencies and not as much directed at “activities designed to increase their use” (p. 294). Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo (2003) developed a three-tiered strategy for dissemination and use of competencies in social work education that addresses the concerns of Howard and Jenson (1999). The three-tiers for dissemination, transmission, and use of competencies are: (a) the individual social worker or social work student, (b) agency supervision, and (c) trainers (staff development specialists, colleges, and universities). The recommendations that follow build on the idea of the three-tiered strategy for dissemination developed by Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo.

Recommendations

Recommendations for practice: The individual school social worker. The research findings are descriptions of school social workers' behaviors that led to and helped sustain positive relationships with parents. It has been suggested that the themes compromising the study findings might be seen as a set of competency statements about effective behaviors that help to develop and maintain relationships with parents. As a result, the principle implication of the study for individual practice is in the school social worker's development of mindfulness in their interactions with parents. Mindfulness, for this study, is a school social worker's examination of the competencies through study and

implementation, followed by evaluation of the competencies' effectiveness for individual practice.

Richey and Roffman (1999) state that competency implementation in the field will require school social workers to adapt competencies "to accommodate unique client, agency, and community factors" (p. 316). The self-evaluation in this step focuses on the school social worker to critically think and examine the competencies while being sensitive to clients' individuality and whether or not the competencies would be of use in their own practice (McNeece & Thyer, 2004).

Following the self-evaluative step in which the school social worker examines and questions the research findings for him/herself, the school social worker's next step is to integrate the evidence with their own practice (McNeece & Thyer, 2004). McNeece and Thyer (2004) comment that at this stage, school social workers would involve themselves with conferences, continuing education programs, and skills training workshops that would target the competencies identified from this study. Jackson (1999) emphasizes that at this stage, school social workers would test out the competencies within their own practice. School social workers could impact the process of the dissemination of the initial competencies by providing feedback and reflection to the researcher in order to modify and refine the competencies (Jackson, 1999).

The final stage of evidence-based practice for the school social worker would involve their own review and evaluation of how the competencies affected their own work with parents (McNeece & Thyer, 2004). In the first stage of the evidence-based practices process, the focus is on an evaluation of the competencies in an attempt to adapt

the competencies to their own practice, while being sensitive to clients' individual situation and characteristics. In this final stage, the evaluation is focused on how were the competencies implemented and whether or not the competencies need to be amended after practical use.

Recommendations for practice: Supervision. Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo (2003)

state the second medium for the dissemination of competencies is the use of agency supervision. Many school social workers receive supervision individually by a more experienced, higher licensed social worker or through a group format that is overseen and/or facilitated by a more experienced, higher licensed social worker. School social work supervisors using the results of this research would need to be mindful that the themes and the competencies proposed here are an initial step towards developing evidence-based practice competencies for the school social worker-parent relationship. Still, the findings or elements of the findings may prove to be useful in supervision. Supervisors' use of the competencies proposed here would be helpful in the modification and refinement of the competencies.

In individual sessions, reflective conversations about performance could address the competencies identified in this research study. During supervision, the school social worker could discuss how the competencies identified from this study are being integrated into their individual practice, discuss continuing training needs and opportunities to receive training in order to build on relational competencies, and with the supervisor develop evaluations to monitor their own practice and competency levels (McNeece & Thyer, 2004).

The competencies identified from this study, or portions of them, could be incorporated into a performance review or evaluation tool that could be used by school districts to assess the relationship skills of school social workers. The evaluation/performance review could incorporate individual reflection by the school social worker, the school social worker's supervisor and/or administrator, and parents that utilize school social work services. Review questions could ask the participant to provide incidents in which the competency was demonstrated and what happened as a result. Questions could also ask evaluation participants to provide examples of ways a school social worker did not meet a particular competency and provide suggestions for the improvement of practice services.

In group supervision, the competencies identified could be used as a conversation tool to examine experiences of school social workers in developing relationships with parents. If the supervision group meets monthly over the school year, there is the opportunity to take each competency and discuss each one over the course of a school year. Discussion would focus on specific questions tied to individual competencies, bringing forward case examples for the group to review and provide feedback (Peebles-Wilkins & Amodeo, 2003). For example, the competency of "The school social worker will communicate with parents by engaging in two-way communication with parents to exchange information", questions could be developed that focus on kinds of information, data privacy issues, and experiences related to providing information to parents. Case examples from practice could focus on data privacy concerns that a school social worker

has faced, and the group would work through challenging situations that involve sharing information with parents and families.

Recommendations for practice: Teaching and training. Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo (2003) stress the importance of training institutions and professional development structures as the other tier in their three-tiered model for disseminating competencies and practice guidelines to social workers. Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo recommend that learning institutions become acquainted with competencies that have been developed and participate in research to further develop evidence-based practices. Peebles-Wilkins and Amodeo (2003) encourage social work faculty “to teach practice guidelines (competencies) to students in schools of social work or, at a minimum, introduce the terminology” (p. 217). During the bachelor degree training years, social workers are focused on the generalist model of social work, looking at the person within their environment and the variety of practice interventions at the individual, group, family, policy, and macro levels. One of the primary focuses at this level in a social worker’s training is the understanding of human development and how social workers build relationships.

The competencies identified in this research study could be used to reinforce the relational skills and knowledge base focused on in social work textbooks including Compton and Galaway (1989); Hepworth, Rooney, and Larsen (2002); Sheafor, Horejsi, and Horejsi (1994); and Shulman (1984). At this education and training level, social workers are developing skills in active listening, advocacy, and relationship building through classroom exercises, labs and workshops, and through field experience.

Throughout skill development activities, classroom discussion might focus on the competencies identified in this study to understand how helping relationships are developed and sustained. Student field experience evaluations could require the students and faculty to assess the learning and development of the competencies described in this study.

In Master of Social Work programs, coursework and field experience can be more specialized. Specializations that focus on families and family interventions, children and youth services, or school social work can utilize the competencies to build upon the skills and practice knowledge developed in either the baccalaureate social work program or developed within the first year of the Master's program. Throughout advanced classes, readings, assignments, and discussions could incorporate the competencies to address the development of skills and their implementation within field practice.

State licensing requires school social workers to continue their learning and professional development through self-study, conferences, workshops, and in-services. Continuing education opportunities could be another medium for the discussion, review, and evaluation of the competencies identified from this study. Continuing education opportunities built upon the competencies discussed could focus on family engagement, family involvement, and relationship building.

Recommendations for practice: Research. The relationship between the school social worker and the parent is a significant relationship affecting a child's education. Franklin (2001) encouraged the field of school social work to develop research that aided in the development of evidence-based practices, best practices, for the field. The review

of the literature for this study includes literature that addressed the function of school social worker-parent relationships and the benefits from interventions and services that are implemented from the relationship between the worker and parent. Even then the research to understand the worker-parent relationship is limited. As a response, this study is intended to be an addition to the limited research on the relationship between school social workers and parents, an initial step towards understanding the behavioral elements that create and sustain the relationship as a helping relationship.

A similar study from parents' perspectives would supplement the findings of this study by providing an opportunity to understand the relationship from the parents' view. The findings of this study and a parent- focused study would provide a useful basis for dialogue between parents and school social workers about how school social workers could improve their relationship and practice skills in order to engage parents in relationships focused on student learning and development.

As previously addressed, there is a contextual limitation to the findings and a limitation in being able to generalize the findings to the broader school social work profession. Further research could expand on the work of this study to continue development of identifying effective practice behaviors of school social workers in building and maintaining the school social worker-parent relationship. Additional Critical Incident Technique studies in similar settings would possibly add new behaviors and fine-tune the themes identified in this study and the competencies proposed. Further examination to identify the effective behaviors of the school social workers could also be

done through the use of the Critical Incident Technique with parents, addressing the relationship from their perspective.

A phenomenological study could build on the findings of this study addressing the meaning of the helping relationship from the school social worker's perspective, the parental perspective, or both perspectives. The results of such studies could aid in social work education and training to improve the relationships that school social workers have with parents.

There is the potential for quantitative research to address the findings of this study. Quantitative research could be used to in an evaluation or assessment of school social workers' performance focused on the suggested competencies developed from the effective behaviors identified in this study. Parents, administrators, and school social workers could use the assessment/ evaluation tool to provide feedback about school social workers' relationships with parents. Also as mentioned earlier, quantitative research could be used to evaluate and address the effects of education and training focused on the suggested competencies developed from the findings of this study.

I have raised a concern about the focus of research limited to the functions and outcomes of the school social worker-parent relationship, without addressing the tasks or interventions of the school social worker that effect the relationship. To gain further knowledge about the dynamics of the school social worker-parent relationship, quantitative observational studies could be done. Systems focused research could also be done to determine influences within home, school, and community systems that affect the dynamics of the relationship.

Summary

School social work literature has been focused on intervention results rather than what it takes to build and maintain relationships with parents. It is my assumption that engaged relationships create successful interventions because there is an investment by both parties of respect and understanding (Epstein, 1995). The principal objective of this study was to develop understanding of effective behaviors of school social workers in developing and sustaining relationships with parents. Because of its focus on identifying effective or ineffective behaviors by utilizing the reports and observations of those with experience with of the phenomenon of interest, the Critical Incident Technique was used as the methodology for this study.

I audio taped interviews with participants who responded to a request for school social workers to be involved in the study. The interviews were transcribed into text for analysis. Data analysis involved three stages: (a) the identification of the critical incidents, (b) the identification of specific behaviors from the critical incidents, and (c) the development of behavioral themes from the specific behaviors identified within the critical incidents. I identified the critical incidents, the critical incidents' behaviors, and potential behavioral themes across the interviews. A student rater was used to validate the critical incidents, behaviors, and initial themes that I had identified.

I identified 38 behaviors from the critical incidents of the 18 school social worker interviews. These behaviors were grouped into behavioral themes which met a specific frequency criterion. Behavioral themes identified in this study had to be identified in at least 50% of the interviews (in at least 9 of the 18 interviews). As a result, three

behavioral themes were identified: (a) communication behaviors, (b) showing care and concern behaviors, and (c) working within the school system behaviors. Each behavioral theme had subthemes, which supported the larger theme. These identified behavioral themes, subthemes, and behaviors are lessons about what works in developing and sustaining relationships with parents.

The findings of this study are an initial step in developing understanding about what behaviors are associated with creating and maintaining relationships with parents. I used the three behavioral themes, subthemes, and behaviors identified in this study to propose an initial set of practice competencies for school social workers to guide them in their relationships with parents. There is need for further research and discussion with school social workers who apply the suggested competencies in their work with parents to modify and clarify the study's findings.

The findings of this study could be also be used as a basis for other studies intended to further examine the relationship between school social workers and parents. It is my hope that this study provides a starting place for a dialogue about the dynamics of the helping relationship of school social workers and parents with the ultimate goal of fostering academic and behavioral success for children.

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Appendix A- University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board Letter

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

March 25, 2004

Eric W. Hansen
727 13th Ave SE
7
Minneapolis MN 55414

Research Subjects' Protection Programs
Institutional Review Board: Human Subjects Committee (IRB)
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)

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Re: "School Social Workers' Relationships with Parents: A Critical Incident Technique Study"
Human Subjects Code Number: **0402P56207**

Dear Mr. Hansen:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) received your response to its stipulations. Since this information satisfies the federal criteria for approval at 45CFR46.111 and the requirements set by the IRB, final approval for the project is noted in our files. Upon receipt of this letter, you may begin your research.

IRB approval of this study includes the consent form dated March 5, 2004.

The IRB would like to stress that subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the total number of subjects, even if they have no further participation in the study. Please keep this in mind when calculating the number of subjects you request. This study is currently approved for 20 subjects. If you desire an increase in the number of approved subjects, you will need to make a formal request to the IRB.

For your records and for grant certification purposes, the approval date for the referenced project is March 2, 2004, and the Assurance of Compliance number is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Childrens Specialty Healthcare FWA00004003). Research projects are subject to continuing review and renewal; approval will expire one year from that date. You will receive a report form two months before the expiration date. If you would like us to send certification of approval to a funding agency, please tell us the name and address of your contact person at the agency.

As Principal Investigator of this project, you are required by federal regulations to inform the IRB of any proposed changes in your research that will affect human subjects. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Unanticipated problems or serious unexpected adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur. The IRB wishes you success with this research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (612) 626-5654.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Perkey, CIP
Executive Assistant
JP/fm
CC: Marilyn Rossmann

Appendix B- Introductory Letter to School Social Workers

April 7, 2004

Address of Potential Participant

Dear Name of Potential Participant:

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR YOUR HELP IN AN IMPORTANT RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS.

This letter is to invite you to participate in a study of school social workers experiences in developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents. This study is part of doctoral research at the University of Minnesota, in the College of Education and Human Development- Department of Work, Community, and Family Education, with an interest in the school social workers and their relationships with parents. As a school social worker, you are an expert at creating and maintaining positive, quality relationships with parents. I would like to hear about your experiences and learn from your expertise.

The study is looking for school social workers who:

- 1.) Have been practicing school social work for over three years.
- 2.) Live in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area.

If you volunteer to participate you would meet with me for a face-to-face interview, with a possible follow up interview. The interview(s) should be about an hour in length. The interviews would be conducted in a setting that is comfortable, safe, and familiar to you. Interviews would be taped with the tapes being later transcribed into text for the purpose of the study. Confidentiality of your participation would be honored and further information about the confidentiality of the study would be explained upon initial contact and again in the start of the interview.

Participation in the study is voluntary. A Barnes and Noble gift card will be issued to all participants completing an interview.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please contact me, Eric Hansen at 612-692-1318 or by e-mail: ehansen@mpls.k12.mn.us by April 30th. If you are not interested, I appreciate your time in reading this letter.

Sincerely,

Eric Hansen
Doctoral Candidate
University of Minnesota

Appendix C- Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

**School Social Workers' Relationships with Parents: A Critical Incident Technique Study
IRB Study Number: 0402P56207**

You are invited to be in a research study of school social workers experiences to identify the roles and behaviors of school social workers that lead to or inhibit developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents. You were selected as a possible participant because:

- 1.) You are a school social worker.
- 2.) You have been practicing school social work for over three years.

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Eric Hansen, a graduate student at the University of Minnesota and two graduate students. Mr. Hansen is being supervised by his advisor, Dr. Marilyn (Marty) Rossman.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is: to identify the roles and behaviors of school social workers that lead to or inhibit developing and sustaining positive relationships with parents.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- 1.) Participate in an audio taped interview of approximately an hour.
- 2.) Participate in a possible follow-up audio taped interview, for clarification about material discussed.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has potential risks: First- possible invasion of privacy; Second, possible probing for personal or sensitive information in interviews.

You may choose not to answer any question or terminate the interview at any time, without any consequence.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in this study.

Compensation:

A Barnes and Noble gift certificate will be issued upon completion of the interview and a thankful acknowledgement of your cooperation for this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only researchers will have access to the records.

The interview will be recorded by audiotape. There will be no identifying information on the tapes. These audiotapes will then be transcribed. Mr. Hansen and his committee of graduate students will then review the transcribed interviews. The researchers and the transcriptionist will have access to the tapes. Once the tapes have been transcribed, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

Please do not make any comments that can identify yourself, parents that you work with, or students that you work with.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the University of Minnesota or your organization (Minnesota School Social Work Association-MSSWA). If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researchers conducting this study are Eric Hansen and Dr. Marty Rossmann . You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Mr. Hansen at (612) 692-1318 or by contacting Dr. Marty Rossmann at (612) 624-3082.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), contact Research Subjects' Advocate line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; telephone (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature _____

Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____

Date _____

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Communication Theme and Behaviors Overview

Interview	School social worker behaviors										Behavioral theme					
	Communicating progress to parents	Making comments about contact the parent	Being intentional about contact with the parent	Having formal contacts/ interactions with the parent	Inviting the parent to meeting or school	Answering parents' questions or concerns	Being sensitive in information sharing with the parent	Getting information from parents	Getting information for and sharing information with parents	Using interpreter to contact parent		Using family contact if needed	Inviting the parent to contact with family	Helping the parent understand child's behavior	Using parent "real" behaviors	
1A	X(2)						X(1)						X(1)	1		
2B	X(3)	X(2)		X(4)	X(1)		X(1)						X(1)	1		
4D	X(4)		X(2)		X(1)								X(1)	1		
5E	X(2)	X(1)	X(1)				X(1)						X(1)	1		
6F	X(2)	X(1)			X(2)									1		
7G	X(2)	X(1)		X(2)									X(1)	1		
8H	X(2)	X(1)											X(1)	1		
9I	X(1)	X(1)		X(2)	X(1)								X(1)	1		
10J				X(1)									X(1)	1		
11K				X(1)									X(1)	1		
12L				X(2)									X(1)	1		
13M	X(2)				X(1)									1		
14N	X(1)					X(1)							X(1)	1		
15O	X(5)	X(1)		X(1)	X(1)								X(1)	1		
16P	X(1)	X(1)		X(1)	X(2)									1		
17Q	X(2)	X(1)		X(3)	X(1)								X(1)	1		
18R	X(1)	X(2)		X(2)	X(1)								X(2)	1		
19S	X(1)	X(1)		X(3)	X(1)									1		
Number of interviews	14	11	9	7	7	5	4	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	18

X- Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.

Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned.

1- This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the behavioral theme.

The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a behavior appeared.

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Communication Theme and Behaviors
Part 1 of 3

Interview	School social worker behaviors				
	Communicating behavior or progress to parents	Making continuous attempts to contact the parent	Being intentional about contact with the parent	Having informal contacts/ interactions with the parent	Inviting the parent to school or meeting
1A	X(2)				
2B	X(3)	X(2)		X(4)	X(1)
4D	X(4)		X(2)		X(1)
5E	X(2)	X(1)	X(1)		
6F	X(2)	X(1)			X(2)
7G	X(2)	X(1)		X(2)	
8H	X(2)	X(1)			
9I	X(1)	X(1)	X(2)	X(1)	X(1)
10J			X(1)	X(1)	
11K				X(1)	
12L			X(2)		
13M	X(2)				X(1)
14N	X(1)				
15O	X(5)	X(1)	X(1)		X(1)
16P	X(1)	X(1)	X(1)		X(2)
17Q	X(2)	X(1)		X(3)	
18R	X(1)	X(2)	X(2)		
19S		X(1)	X(1)	X(3)	
Number of interviews	14	11	9	7	7

X - Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.

Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned.

1- This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the behavioral theme.

The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a behavior appeared.

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Communication Theme and Behaviors
Part 2 of 3

Interview	School social worker behaviors					
	Answering parents' questions or concerns	Being sensitive in sharing information with the parent	Getting information from parents	Getting information for and sharing information with parents	Introducing oneself to the parent	Using interpreter to contact the parent
1A		X(1)				
2B		X(1)		X(1)	X(2)	
4D						X(1)
5E			X(1)		X(1)	
6F						
7G				X(1)		
8H						
9I						X(1)
10J			X(1)			
11K						
12L						
13M						
14N	X(1)	X(1)				
15O	X(1)					
16P	X(1)					
17Q	X(1)					
18R	X(1)	X(2)		X(1)		
19S			X(1)			
Number of interviews	5	4	3	3	2	2

X - Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.
 Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned.
 1 - This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the behavioral theme.
 The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a behavior appeared.

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Communication Theme and Behaviors
Part 3 of 3

Interview	School social worker behaviors					Behavioral theme
	Using extended family to continue contact with family	Inviting the parent to contact if needed	Helping the parent understand child's behavior	Using humor with a parent	Staying "real"	Communication behaviors 1
1A	X(1)					1
2B			X(1)			1
4D	X(1)					1
5E						1
6F						1
7G		X(1)				1
8H						1
9I		X(1)				1
10J						1
11K						1
12L						1
13M						1
14N			X(1)	X(1)		1
15O						1
16P						1
17Q					X(1)	1
18R				X(2)		1
19S						1
Number of interviews	2	2	2	2	1	18

X - Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.
Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned.

1- This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the behavioral theme.

The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a behavior appeared.

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Care and Concern Theme and Behaviors Overview

Interview	School social worker behaviors										Behavioral theme				
	Expressing care and concern to the parent	Expressing the parent and concerns	Acknowledging empathy parent	Displaying empathy towards parent	Identifying parent strengths	Apologizing to the parent	Expressing nonverbal communication	Being there for the parent	Empathize with parent	Discussing family dynamics with parent		Using similar backgrounds to connect with parent	Treating the parent with respect	Acknowledging the parent's space	Having a non-judgmental attitude
1A	X(1)	X(1)					X(1)								1
2B	X(1)	X(1)		X(3)					X(1)						1
4D		X(2)													1
5E															
6F	X(1)			X(1)											1
7G	X(2)	X(2)				X(1)									1
8H	X(2)	X(1)		X(2)									X(1)		1
9I	X(2)	X(1)		X(2)		X(1)								X(1)	1
10J	X(2)	X(1)		X(1)											1
11K		X(1)													1
12L				X(2)		X(1)									1
13M						X(1)									1
14N															
15O		X(1)													1
16P	X(1)	X(1)				X(1)									1
17Q	X(1)	X(1)									X(1)		X(1)		1
18R	X(3)	X(1)		X(3)		X(1)									1
19S		X(1)		X(1)		X(1)		X(1)		X(1)					1
Number of interviews	10	10	8	3	3	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	16

X- Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.

Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned.

1- This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the behavioral theme.

The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a behavior appeared.

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Care and Concern Theme and Behaviors
Part 1 of 3

Interview	School social worker behaviors					
	Listening to the parent	Expressing care and concern to the parent	Acknowledging parents' feelings and concerns	Displaying empathy towards parent	Identifying parent strengths	Apologizing to the parent
1A	X(1)	X(1)				
2B	X(1)	X(1)		X(3)		
4D		X(2)				
5E						
6F	X(1)			X(1)		
7G	X(2)	X(2)				X(1)
8H	X(2)	X(1)	X(2)			
9I	X(2)	X(1)	X(2)	X(2)	X(1)	
10J	X(2)		X(1)			
11K		X(1)				
12L			X(2)		X(1)	
13M					X(1)	
14N						
15O		X(1)				
16P	X(1)	X(1)	X(1)			X(1)
17Q	X(1)		X(1)			
18R	X(3)	X(1)	X(3)			X(1)
19S			X(1)			
Number of interviews	10	10	8	3	3	3

X - Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.
 Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned.
 1- This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the behavioral theme.
 The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a behavior appeared.

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Care and Concern Theme and Behaviors
Part 2 of 3

Interview	School social worker behaviors					
	Expressing nonverbal communication	Being there for the parent	Using social worker's own experience to empathize with parent	Discussing family dynamics with parent	Using similar backgrounds to connect with parent	Treating the parent with respect
1A	X(1)			X(1)		
2B			X(1)			
4D						
5E						
6F						
7G						
8H						
9I						
10J						
11K						
12L						
13M						
14N						
15O						
16P						
17Q						X(1)
18R						
19S	X(1)	X(1)			X(1)	
Number of interviews	2	1	1	1	1	1

X - Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.
Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned.

1- This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the behavioral theme.
The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a behavior appeared.

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Care and Concern Theme and Behaviors
Part 3 of 3

Interview	School social worker behaviors				Behavioral theme
	Acknowledging the parent	Giving the parent space	Having a non-judgmental attitude	Getting to know the parent personally	Behaviors expressing care and concern 1
1A					1
2B					1
4D					1
5E					
6F					1
7G					1
8H			X(1)		1
9I				X(1)	1
10J					1
11K					1
12L					1
13M					1
14N					
15O					1
16P					1
17Q	X(1)	X(1)			1
18R					1
19S					1
Number of interviews	1	1	1	1	16

X - Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.

Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned.

1- This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the behavioral theme.

The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a behavior appeared.

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Working Within the School System Theme and Behaviors Overview

Interview	School social worker behaviors						Behavioral theme
	Using an interdisciplinary team approach with parent	Being an intermediary between home and school	Working with parents regarding child's school transitions	Developing a school service plan with the parent	Encouraging parent to take action within school system	Problem solving with the parent within the school system	Working within school system 1
1A							
2B		X(1)		X(3)			1
4D	X(1)						1
5E							
6F	X(2)						1
7G	X(2)	X(1)		X(1)		X(1)	1
8H	X(1)		X(1)		X(1)		1
9I		X(1)				X(1)	1
10J		X(1)	X(2)				1
11K	X(1)						1
12L			X(1)				1
13M	X(2)	X(1)	X(1)				1
14N	X(1)						1
15O	X(3)						1
16P		X(2)			X(1)		1
17Q							
18R	X(2)						1
19S							
Number of interviews	9	6	4	2	2	2	14

X - Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.
 Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned.
 1- This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the behavioral theme.
 The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a behavior appeared.

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Working Within the School System Theme and Behaviors
Part 1 of 2

Interview	School social worker behaviors		
	Using an interdisciplinary team approach with parent	Being an intermediary between home and school	Working with parents regarding child's school transitions
1A			
2B		X(1)	
4D	X(1)		
5E			
6F	X(2)		
7G	X(2)	X(1)	
8H	X(1)		X(1)
9I		X(1)	
10J		X(1)	X(2)
11K	X(1)		
12L			X(1)
13M	X(2)	X(1)	X(1)
14N	X(1)		
15O	X(3)		
16P		X(2)	
17Q			
18R	X(2)		
19S			
Number of interviews	9	6	4

X - Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.
 Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in
 1- This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the
 behavioral theme.
 The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a
 behavior appeared.

Appendix D- Behavioral Themes and Behaviors: Working Within the School System Theme and Behaviors
Part 2 of 2

Interview	School social worker behaviors			Behavioral theme
	Developing a school service plan with the parent	Encouraging parent to take action within school system	Problem solving with the parent within the school system	Working within school system 1
1A				
2B	X(3)			1
4D				1
5E				
6F				1
7G	X(1)		X(1)	1
8H		X(1)		1
9I			X(1)	1
10J				1
11K				1
12L				1
13M				1
14N				1
15O				1
16P		X(1)		1
17Q				
18R				1
19S				
Number of interviews	2	2	2	14

X - Indicates behavior reflected in the interview.
 Numbers in parentheses indicate number of critical incidents in which a behavior was mentioned.
 1- This column indicates number of interviews reflecting the behavioral theme.

The row at the bottom indicates the number of interviews in which a behavior appeared.