Urban and Rural Secondary School Parents' Sense of Community in Alberta, Canada

Bonnie L. Stelmach, University of Alberta, Canada
Marcela Herrera-Farfan, University of Alberta, Canada

Abstract
For decades educational researchers have been pursuing the question, how do you increase parent involvement in schools? With this question, educators and policymakers are curators of parent involvement, resulting in practices that tend to be school centric. Adages such as "it takes a whole village to raise a child" are invoked, but whether and/or how parents feel part of a school community is rarely interrogated. This research redirected the study of parents in schools from the typical question of "involvement" by asking, what makes parents feel in community in their children's schools? We focused on secondary school parents since research shows parents' involvement declines at this level, and they feel displaced on the school landscape. Based on semi-structured interviews with 18 parents of rural secondary schools and 13 parents of urban secondary schools in Alberta, Canada, we describe parents' sense of community in terms of McMillan and Chavis' theory, including the categories of membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. In rural contexts boundaries between school and the external community are porous, which can enhance parents' sense of community because they have multiple opportunities to engage. Urban parents feel anonymous to teachers and staff, and security measures literally lock them out of the school. Both groups experience gatekeeping by other parents, which suggests that the school-home dynamic is influenced by parent-parent dynamics, and not simply how parents and teachers relate to each other.

Keywords: parent participation, school community, secondary school

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Secondary school educators think parents have "disappeared" because they do not see them at the school like they did in younger years. But secondary school parents report feeling displaced in the schools and not needed by teachers, so they move behind the scenes to support their children (Stelmach, 2013). Robinson and Harris (2014) demonstrated statistically that traditional parent involvement strategies, such as helping with homework and volunteering in school, have negligible and even negative impacts upon secondary students' learning (Robinson & Harris, 2014). These suggest that involvement may not be the best construct to imagine school-home relations at this level. Our study offers a new angle by asking instead, what makes secondary school parents *in community* in their children's school?

Situating the Question

Discourses of involvement and partnership have dominated since the 1990s (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Lareau & Shumar, 1996). The focus of parent involvement has been on schoolcentric (Lawson, 2013) practices that have become institutionalized; parents are expected to value a form of supporting their children's learning that is teacher-directed and teacher-valued. This ultimately positions parents to be judged by educators and by other parents who align with this paradigm. Despite leading scholar Joyce Epstein's (2019) suggestion that the home, school and community work together in a bi- and tri-directional manner, parent involvement tends to be narrowly defined in ways such as helping with homework, volunteering at the school or for school-sponsored events, attending parent-teacher conferences, or performing other home-based activities that correspond to school expectations.

Kim and Sheridan (2014) differentiate between structural and relational approaches to family-school partnerships. A structural approach captures traditional parent involvement activities, those they define as "scripted objectives rather than interpersonal processes" (p. 4). They critique structural approaches because they are punctuated activities that may have immediate, but not generalizable, impact, particularly when considering children's learning needs as they age. By contrast, relational approaches emphasize how families and educators "cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social emotional, behavioural, and academic domains "(p. 5). They promote "an integration of structural and relational elements, enveloped within a partnership orientation" (p. 7). Along this vein, Harris and Robinson (2016) also argue for reframing traditional concepts of parent involvement through the metaphor "stage-setting" (p. 188). Stage-setting occurs through parents conveying the importance of education and by creating a life space for children that is conducive to learning. What makes Harris and Robinson's framework distinct from traditional parent involvement activities is that "stage-setting aims can also be achieved without employing any traditional parental forms of involvement" (p. 192). While these researchers have opened the door to interrogate how the field has been conceptually monopolized by terms such as involvement and partnership, their focus is epistemological and ultimately remains focused on what parents do and how this impacts upon students' academic outcomes. A focus on community is a shift toward the ontological for it seeks to understand parents' *being* rather than doing, which seems to us to be a primordial condition for involvement and partnership to occur.

Sergiovanni (1994) wrote, "community building must become the heart of any school improvement effort" (p. xi). In educational research community has been invoked as a truism, particularly when it comes to parents. Our review of the literature turned up one phenomenological study in 1997 that examined rural parents' school experiences (McLelland), but community theory itself seems to have been given little attention in educational research. One exception was a recent study by Angelle (2017) who employed McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community theory to investigate how high school principals create a sense of community for students. Our study assumed community itself was not static or universal, and that it was not merely something to be shaped by teachers or principals, but conceptualized through the experience of parents.

Data Collection

Our study sought insight into both rural and urban parents' sense of community. Rural is an important inclusion in empirical research about parents considering in the lone published literature review we found about parents (Semke & Sheridan, 2012), only one was identified.

Assuming that feeling in community is a socially constructed experience 'we gathered data using semi-structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005) with 21 rural and 13 urban parents of secondary schools. Our study was situated in Alberta, Canada where we both work and study. Canada, too, is a relatively unchartered territory in rural educational research about parents in particular; Semke and Sheridan's (2012) literature review included one Canadian study conducted in a remote First Nations community.

Our definition of rural corresponds to that provided by du Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman, & Clemenson (2001). They define rural regions as those outside of commuting zones of urban centres that have 10,000 or more inhabitants. A "0" in Canadian postal codes also denotes rural, and the sites in our study met that criterion.

Rural data collection occurred on site through multiple visits to three publicly funded secondary schools located in two rural towns with populations under 3000 inhabitants. We refer to these as School 1, School 2, and School 3. School 1 was a non-denominational junior/senior high school with grades 7-12. In that same town, School 2 was a Catholic K-12 school. Their student populations were fewer than 300 students. Though in the same town, they were from different school divisions.

School 3 was located in a town more than three hours away. School 3 was a Catholic K-12 school with a student population of less than 600. School 3 reported a First Nations student population of more than 60% but Schools 1 and 2 were relatively composed of White students. Families of Asian and First Nations descent were among the minority in all these schools. None of these parents volunteered to take part in the study.

Through multiple site visits, we contextualized the data through school observations at school council meetings and other events, and by exploring the towns.
School newsletters and automated phone call outs were used to recruit parents to participate. Among the 21 rural parents interviewed, 16 were mothers. Two fathers

were interviewed individually, and the three other fathers participated in interviews with their wives. All interviews were conducted in person. Three parents from School 3 were First Nations, but our sample was not ethnically representative.

Data collection with urban parents took place after all rural parents were interviewed. Given the geographical distance of cities in Alberta, we solicited the support of Alberta's provincial parent organization, Alberta School Councils Association (ASCA), to recruit urban parents through their newsletter, and interviewed some parents by phone. Parents volunteered from cities that ranged in size from about 100,000 to 1,000,000, and were located in central and southern Alberta. Among these, one parent recently immigrated to Canada to pursue doctoral studies, and another had been in Canada for over 10 years. Data collection for this study began in 2014 and was completed in 2018.

Theoretical Framework

McMillan and Chavis' (1986) sense of community theory heeds both relational and territorial considerations, and thus was appropriate for our purpose. Since schools are grounded in concrete space, it makes sense that the nature of the space in which schools reside might impact upon whether and/or how parents feel in community with schools. McMillan and Chavis propose four elements in their sense of community theory. The first element, membership, is defined as "the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness" (p. 9). Membership is further characterized as giving members a sense of security and emotional safety, identifying with others through relations, and feeling valued because of one's contributions and investments to the group. The second element is influence, which they define as a feeling among members that they matter to the group, and that the group matters to them. To feel a sense of community, one must not only feel like they have influence over the group, but that the group can have influence over individuals. This results in cohesion. The third element in McMillan and Chavis' sense of community theory is what they call integration and fulfillment of needs. The term "reinforcement" is central to this element; to feel in community members must experience reward. In other words, when people feel their needs and sense of purpose are met within a community, their commitment to it is reinforced. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a shared emotional connection is critical to the strength of a community. Through frequent, quality interactions, and a shared understanding of experiences – including those not personally lived—forge emotional connections.

Our initial analysis of the transcripts followed what Saldana (2013) calls structural or holistic coding. Using this approach we took a "grand tour" (p. 64) of the data, attending to the conceptual elements of McMillan and Chavis' theory and identifying phrases that aligned with the framework and responded to our research questions. In a second cycle, Marcela reduced the codes into "big ideas", creating a multi-page document that provided a skeleton of potential themes to answer our research question. To interpret the big ideas into themes, we followed Freeman's (2017) notion of categorical thinking. Categorical thinking allowed us to account for the variety of descriptions that parents used when talking about community. These descriptions were categorized into the four elements, which were akin to a classification system that Freeman discusses in categorical thinking. This research

advances the conversation about parents by injecting a conceptual focus on community, a term with current and universal appeal.

Interpretations and Discussion

These data point to differences in whether and/or how urban and rural parents experienced community through or with their schools. One parent who lived rurally but had a child in a nearby city school captured a clear difference:

At [name of school] it's rural—very much a sense of community….I find that parents are much more friendly, and, you know, easier to talk to…In the city at [name of school]—very different sense of community. It's more superficial….More pleasantries, like they smile and nod. They will say hello, but that's as far as it goes.

In the following parents are given pseudonyms. As we did not visit urban schools, and parents participated from various parts of Alberta, we used the generic term "urban parent" instead of referencing a school.

Membership

McMillan and Chavis (1986) characterize membership as "a feeling of belonging" (p. 9). There was clearly a difference between urban and rural parents in this regard. While rural parents used terms like "family" to describe their children's schools, urban parents used words like "anonymous", "rejected", "impersonal" and "distant" to describe their experiences. Community for urban parents was about their and their children's one-on-one interactions with teachers and staff. By contrast, rural parents included their experiences in the external community when talking about school. There was no clear boundary when it came to school community and external community.

When asked if she felt she belonged, one urban parent replied, "No, I don't actually, to be honest." Most urban parents echoed this sentiment. We were surprised to learn that front office staff played a central role for these urban parents' sense of community considering that researchers emphasize educators in this regard (Lin, Isernhagen, Scherz, & Denner, 2014; Ruitenberg & Pushor, 2005). Most, however, described felt like they were introducing on office staff:

When I walk into the high school and the office staff are not helpful and kind of curt with you, that doesn't make you feel in community at all, you know what I mean? (Tammy, Urban Parent)

Urban parents were shocked how unfriendly secondary schools were. In elementary, teachers and principals knew them by name and who were their children, they knew other parents, and they felt "it was personal" (Urban Parent). Events such as parent orientations provided limited opportunities for building connections, and these even these failed to feel connective. Jenn described Meet the Teacher night: "we just sat in the classrooms and listened to them (teachers)….We tried to introduce ourselves, but by grade 9 we didn't even go." One parent reported "I haven't been able to really meet any of [child's] teachers" (Tammy, Urban Parent). Parents 'knew' their children's teachers by "[catching] a glimpse" (Petra) on the first day, or seeing their

picture on the website. Such descriptions depict the parent-teacher relationship as that of strangers.

Community was seamless in the rural contexts; what was experienced in the external community translated into feelings about the school and vice versa. Like urban parents, these rural parents had less contact with the secondary school compared to their children's elementary schools unless their children were involved in extracurricular activities. But unlike urban parents, rural parents achieved membership through other activities that involved youth, or contributed to community in a larger sense. Through these activities, parents got to know youth and other parents, and felt they belonged because they contributed to children's welfare.

The metaphor of family was commonly invoked when rural parents talked about their school. "They know who I am. They know who my kids are" (Kari, School 1). Whereas urban parents had limited opportunities to engage with teachers and other parents, it was hard to avoid interactions in a small town, and these rural parents felt this reinforced connections:

It actually has helped my daughter within the school, too, because even though it is just running into somebody at IGA, it is still a personal contact and you get to know each other a little bit better even just from that. It breaks down a couple more barriers. (Nelly, School 3)

It is not just that when rural parents go to the school that they are known, but that the school was an open space in which they felt at home. They did not have to get buzzed in and report to the office as some urban parents explained. "No one directs you to the office anymore….it's not uncommon to walk through the hallways" (Harold, School 3).

Familiarity to and with others led to trust and a sense of security, an important element of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). "You are not anonymous like you are in the city" (Heidi, School 2). Knowing people established trust and a sense of safety: "Oh, hey, I know you, and I've seen you do this, so you're okay" (Dianne, School 3). Sandy (School 3) explained this is why the school felt like family: "They're an extended part of my family for that simple reason –I'm entrusting them with my children. And their safety is a big deal." This sentiment extended into the town; people watched over and helped each other's children. Rural people "stepped up" to sickness, death, house fires, breakdowns during harvest.

What seemed to be different for urban and rural parents was that urban parents relied on teachers and school staff to create a sense of belonging. If they encountered cold and impersonal office staff, or if they saw the principal standing at the door and greeting people in the mornings, this made a difference to how they felt. Membership for urban parents was contained within the school and created by teachers and school staff, but for rural parents membership in the external community translated to membership in the school.

Weaved throughout the description of these rural communities as friendly, however, were admissions of cliques and elitism. Long-term residents, referred to as "legacy parents" or "generational" families, belonged because of history. Newcomers,

including those who had lived in the town over a decade were mindful of the importance of navigating this fact:

Once you get into the school there is a sense of community, but it's hard to break that barrier….You gotta almost connect with a family that's a legacy family. (Lila, School 3).

Parents native to these places were equally conscious of their advantage:

I think generational families are the ones that have the real sense that—well, I still feel like [this school] is *my* school, you know what I mean? Whereas when you're coming into a place, it's not—you don't have the tie to it like the rest of us do, you know? (Tina, School 1)

It was easy to identify the legacy and generational families walking through these schools; one could trace the names on current trophies or honor rolls to the graduation composites of decades past. These symbolized who truly belonged.

Influence

Both urban and rural parents acknowledged that "when kids come to the high school you see a little bit more of the hands-off with parents" (Tina, School 1). They still needed, however, to feel like they were "an important part of the education process" (Uma, Urban Parent). The basic tenet of influence in the sense of community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) is that "members are attracted to a community in which they feel that they are influential" (p. 12). In our study, urban parents were primarily individually oriented toward their children such that the extent to which they felt they were influential depended on whether and or how the school responded to their advocacy. Rural parents tended to be other-oriented; the welfare of children beside their own was within the scope of their intentions and impact.

Petra, an urban parent who had recently immigrated to Canada had mixed experiences when working with her children's school: "I feel like I can go in and ask questions….and somebody will answer me. Even if it doesn't work the way I wanted to, I feel like I was heard, you know? They listen." Knowing "[their opinions are valued and heard" (Emma, Urban Parent) made parents feel part of the school. But by far the most common narrative we heard from urban parents was frustration over their inability to advocate for their children when they were struggling in school, or the feeling that parents were not wanted at the secondary level. Not being able to get their "foot in the door" was a metaphor commonly invoked.

Urban parents felt that they had to "work harder" (Delia, Urban Parent) to develop a relationship with teachers. Some parents felt that the school intentionally "put a brake on"(Uma, Urban Parent) or gave the message, "I'm the educator and you're not (Nathan, Urban Parent). Others were chastised for "hovering" (Deena, Urban Parent). Indeed, Emma described such an experience: "The message I get is, "Oh my God, you're driving us crazy. Stop phoning, stop emailing, stop asking for stuff. It's not reasonable" (Emma, Urban Parent). At the highest level of powerlessness parents removed their children from the school.

By contrast, rural parents felt they influenced youth in a positive way. Yolanda (School 1) had initiated a youth group in the town, saying, "I can always see those kids that are lonely or just need someone to encourage them. So that's the kind of thing that I focus on mostly, and that's the youth center." As a baseball coach in town Gerry (School 3) said, "That makes me feel special because I'm connecting with kids. I try to build friendships with kids so that they can trust me." They had in-school influence as well, such as organizing book fair, milk program, yearbook, and drama programs.

There was, however, the perception that some parents had more influence than others. Sports parents ruled in these rural towns, for example. Deena was well aware of how sports was privileged:

My kid's not good at sports and why should they be forced to do track and field? But they still do it. So why can't it be the same thing for this academic kind of thing?

Influence was also related to history. The legacy parents referred to in the previous section were perceived by newcomers as being the "default" for the school when they were seeking contribution or looking for parent leadership. These parents further enhanced their influence because in the spirit of continuing certain legacies they created booster clubs who raised funds for the school.

Integration and Fulfilment of Needs

McMillan and Chavis (1986) claimed that "a strong community is able to fit people together so that people meet others' needs while they meet their own" (p. 13). What motivated these urban and rural parents' behaviour, and what were their reinforcements? Urban parents expressed a need for communication, and intimate knowledge about their children's school experiences. Rural parents tended to focus on helping others, and making things happen to maintain or improve the community. Information made urban parents feel in community; contribution made rural parents feel in community.

Urban parents lamented losing touch with their children's daily school activities. Tina (Urban Parent) said, "I know that they've gotten away from sending out paper copies of anything, but I would just love to get an email from them just to say, 'hey, this is our monthly update' or whatever." Digital portals provided parents access to their children's progress on a daily basis if they chose, but the "cookie cutter comments on report cards" (Leanne, Urban Parent) generated from such programs felt distant. They preferred "old-fashioned way" face-to-face communication. Jenn (Urban Parent) kept a handwritten letter from a grade 7 teacher saying, "it made us feel connected." This poignantly demonstrates the impact of the personal touch.

Connections were improved if parents knew the teacher "looked at [their children] individually." But significant frustration was expressed by more than one parent who tried to advocate for their children. Some, like Leanne (Urban Parent), reported feeling shut out: "I was completely out of the loop of what was happening….I tried for months, I tried to get information from them and they just wouldn't, they would not give it….I think they found that I was irrelevant in the process….there wasn't any feeling in community."

Some parents sought out school councils as a way "to kind of know what is going on behind the scenes" (Tammy, Urban Parent), but most accounts of school council were less than complimentary. It was either "formal and very directed by the principal" (Nelly, Urban Parent), or they perceived the principal as treating it like "it's a bit of an obligation" (Kara, Urban Parent) rather than a genuine venue for engaging parents. Dalia (Urban Parent), who was extensively involved with school councils throughout her children's schooling said, "It's not the involvement or the parental input that there is in elementary." Another reason school council did not strengthen a sense of community was that it was perceived to be a "closed group" (Nathan) with "their own agenda" (Kelly). Dalia (Urban Parent) said introductions were not made at meetings, "so it's awful because you don't know who you're sitting with even" (Dalia). Thus, these urban parents did not feel meaningful connection to teachers or other parents.

Rural parents, on the other hand, were driven by a need to be, and to be known as, active contributors who were connected to others doing the same. Whereas information reinforced sense of community for urban parents, action reinforced rural parents'. Community itself is a rural person's purpose (Wuthnow, 2013), and this propelled parents into action not only for the preservation of community, but as a condition for being a parent and community member. "If you want the community to give to you, you have to give to the community" (Sandra, School 2) captures the idea that community is action oriented, not something to be received. One developed a sense of community by "stepping up" and "mak[ing] your environment your home" (Tara, School 1). Even small gestures affirmed people's sense of belonging, as Heidi (School 2) indicated: "I know they could do it without me, but it makes me feel good knowing that they want me to help."

Because community was valued in and of itself, this created expectations, and ultimately people were judged according to whether they measured up to these expectations. Being busy was not accepted as a reason to not get involved because "spending an hour here, spending an hour there makes a big difference in [students'] lives" (Sandy, School 3). Action differentiated the insiders from the outsiders, as Mandy (School 2) indicated: "If you're not out there, you aren't part of it." Newcomers were especially vulnerable in this regard. Ultimately, they expected newcomers to take the initiative, as Wendy (School 2) said, "Don't wait for the invitation to volunteer at the school. You just need to be there. Go. Show up….That's how you get kind of brought in quicker I think." But it was not that simple. Like the urban parents in our study, some of these rural parents joined the school council as a way to stay connected to the school, only to encounter gatekeepers who thwarted others' efforts to contribute their ideas.

Shared Emotional Connection

The "definitive element for true community" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 14) is shared emotional connection. On this element there was clearly a difference in what parents' experienced. Context had much to do with this.

While some of these urban parents had positive experiences with the school by making connections with individual teachers or the principal, overall they did not experience the "community of spirit" (p. 14). The fundamental element that was

missing was interaction. Urban parents did not necessarily live in the neighbourhood of their children's school; consequently, interactions were limited. Some parents made connections with other parents through their children's performance-oriented activities, but at other school-sponsored events, such as open house or orientation parents reported being "just kind of anonymous faces in the gym" (Jenn).

A number of factors impeded urban parents' emotional connection. First, having no interactions with school staff themselves, parents were apt to judge the sense of community according to their children's experiences. When children described school staff as "cold" or "mean" parents believed that was how it was. But also, in their own limited interactions, parents did not feel like they were genuinely invited to participate: "It feels like the reaching out to parents or the involvement of parents is just a box that needs to get checked on their end, you know" (Nelly). Third, there were structural impediments. Pick up zones, where parents naturally socialized in elementary, did not exist because parents waited in cars instead of standing at the entrance—sometimes at the request of their teenagers. Having to get buzzed in and report to the front office—safety measures in many schools—was "off-putting" (Nathan). And technology, though convenient for getting information about their children's progress, was impersonal. Petra's comment captures a core issue: "For me community is something like you can meet, where you can share, that you can interact with people…So at this school, I don't think there is sense of community." These urban parents were isolated both from the school and other parents.

Rural parents talked about "loving" their schools and towns. They described the schools as having an open door policy where parents were free to pop into the school to visit a teacher or principal, and formalities such as signing in were waived.

Because it was typical for parents to bump into other parents and teachers outside of the school, these casual meetings were reinforced familiarity, and strengthened emotional bonds. As Lena (School 3) explained, "It's good to see that, going through a grocery store and then meeting a teacher, and them saying how impressed they are with your children." Parents commonly joked about how long it takes to buy groceries or pick up the mail because they always ran into someone and ended up in lengthy conversations. The familiarity that was established through these interactions also created the impression of sameness. This was binding, but also polarizing. Not being seen out and about in the community was as powerful as being seen. Absence was interpreted as rejecting the community or having disdain for it, and this led to defensive posturing, as in Dianne's (School 3) comment:

It's the ones that come in that are missing their Starbucks and can't wait to get out of town for the weekend. I find that those ones I'm not too sure how to make them part of the community.

One had to be seen supporting local businesses, join in on activities like curling, and accept invitations to things that might not have been that interesting, all for the sake of showing acceptance of what already existed. Those who claimed there was "nothing to do" had a "snotty" attitude, and were subject to disdain for rejecting the place.

Students were a key source of emotional connection for parents, and everyone in fact. Students were celebrated in the local newspaper, and even community members who did not have school-aged children attended events where students were involved. Graduation, for example, was iconic, as Tara (School 1) explained: "People from the community love to support the grads here. And they will come out. Businesses will be closed for the afternoon of grad so that people can be accommodated. It's a big deal."

These rural parents had the advantage of a small-scale locale, and we believe this contributed to their emotional connection. Given the size, interactions happened naturally and were not restricted to the school; therefore, these rural parents had opportunities to enhance connections in ways that the urban parents did not.

Conclusions: Entryways and Boundaries

We conclude with three central observations:

1.   When thinking about community, the reference point is crucial (Jason, Stevens, & Ram, 2015). Secondary parent involvement cannot simply be recast from an elementary school mould. Urban and rural parents differed in agency with respect to negotiating community within these new conditions. Because community resided within the school and its context, it is perhaps not surprising that urban parents attributed their lack of community to what school staff did or did not do for them. Boundaries are porous between school and town in rural contexts, giving rural points multiple orientations to each other (McClelland, 1997).
2.   Teachers are encouraged to be border crossers (Sanders, 2009) and to make schools more familycentric (Pushor, 2017). This discounts the role that parents play in each other's sense of community, in both friendly and gatekeeping ways.
3.   A finding unique to rural communities is the role "legacy" parents play in boundary setting. Legacy parents have deep roots in the school and community, which means they already think it is *their* school. Their emotional connection creates a weave so tight that others may have a difficult or impossible time passing through.

Acknowledgements

References

Christenson, S., & Reschly, A. L. (2010). *Handbook of school-family partnerships* New York : Routledge.

du Plessis, V., Beshiri, R., Bollman, R. D., & Clemenson, H. (2001). Definitions of rural. *Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin, 3*(3). Statistics Canada 21-006-XIE.

Epstein, J. L., & Associates. (2019). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Freeman, M. (2017). *Modes of thinking for qualitative analysis.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2005). The interview: From neutral stance to political involvemnet. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 695-727). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE

Jason, L. A., Stevens, E., & Ram, D. (2015). Development of a three-factor psychological sense of community scale. *Journal of Community Psychology, 43*(8), 973 – 985.

Kim, E. M., & Sheridan, S. M. (2015). Foundational aspects of family-school connections: Definitions, conceptual frameworks, and research needs. In S. M. Sheridan & E. M. Kim (Eds.), *Foundational aspects of family-school partnership research* (pp. 1 – 14). Cham, CH: Springer.

Lareau, A., & Shumar, W. (1996). The problem of individualism in family-school policies.

Lawson, M. (2003). School-family relationships in context: Parent and teacher perceptions of parent involvement. *Urban Education, 38*(1), 77 – 133.

Lin, S-Y., Isernhagen, J., Scherz, S., & Denner, P. R. (2014). Rural educator perceptions of parent involvement in public schools: Perspectives from three states. *The Rural Educator, 36*(1), 40 – 56.

McClelland, J. (1997). Knowing and being known: Parents' experiences with rural schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 13*(2), 108 – 116.

McMillan, D. W., & Chavis, D. M. (1986). Sense of community: A definition and theory. *Journal of Community Psychology, 14*(1), 6 – 23.

Pushor, D. (2017 Winter). Familycentric schools: Creating a place for all parents. *EdCan Network.* Retrieved from https://www.edcan.ca/articles/familycentric-schools/

Robinson, K., & Harris, A. L. (2014). *The broken compass: Parental involvement with children's education.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ruitenberg, C. W., & Pushor, C. (2005). "It's not about colour-coordinatingthe napkins with the table cloth:" Hospitality and invitation in parent engagement. *Prinicpals Online, 1*(1), 32 – 35.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Sanders, M. G. (2009). Teachers and parents. In L. J. Saha, & A. G. Dworkin (Eds.), *International handbook of research on teachers and teaching* (pp. 331 – 341). New York, NY: Springer.

Semke, C. A., & Sheridan, S. M. (2012). Family-school connections in rural educational settings: A systematic review of the empirical literature. *School Community Journal, 22*(1), 21 – 47.

Stelmach, B. (2013). *Case studies highlighting secondary school community council (SCC) members' and jurisdiction perspectives on SCC roles in school improvement in Saskatchewan.* Unpublished manuscript, Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada.

Wuthnow, R. (2013). *Small-town America: Finding community, shaping the future.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Contact email: bonnies@ualberta.ca