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Requests for Manuscripts

The school can function as a thriving community. The *School Community Journal* includes articles related to the school as a community of teachers, students, parents, and staff. Family–school relations, site-based management, homework, sociology of education, systems theory, the classroom community, and other topics concerning early childhood and K–12 education are covered. SCJ publishes a mix of: (1) research (original, review, and interpretation), (2) essay and discussion, (3) reports from the field, including descriptions of programs, and (4) book reviews. The journal seeks manuscripts from scholars, administrators, teachers, school board members, parents, and others interested in the school as a community.

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School Community Journal is committed to scholarly inquiry, discussion, and reportage of topics related to the community of the school. Manuscripts are considered in the four categories listed above. Note: The journal generally follows the format of the *APA Publication Manual,* 7th Edition; when online sources appear in the reference list, we prefer direct links. Please make sure electronic links cited are accurate and active. Use italics rather than underlining. Do not use tabs to format paragraphs or tables; please use the Insert Table function for tables and the First Line Indent function for paragraphs. Color for tables or figures is acceptable.

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Thanking My Lucky Stars
In Memory of Herb Walberg (1937–2023)
Sam Redding, Editor Emeritus

It was 1984, and I was launching a new nonprofit with colleagues. I searched the library periodicals for articles on the family's role in children's education. I found a good one by Herbert J. Walberg, a young professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, not far from where I lived in central Illinois. Herb agreed to meet us for lunch at the university, and we explained our intentions. First confirming that the name of the new company included the word "academic," Herb agreed to serve on its board. Thus began a 30-year association between Herb Walberg and the Academic Development Institute and my friendship with a uniquely brilliant, productive, and generous man.

So productive was Herb that he acquired among professional acquaintances, the moniker Mr. Productivity. Maybe that was because of his much-published theory of educational productivity that explained the factors that influence students' academic performance. But also, Herb was personally productive, in ways that seemed effortless and were practiced cheerfully. In any board meeting, Herb was the first to make a motion, first to move for adjournment, and quick to curtail rambling discussion with a concise and logical summation. When the meeting concluded, Herb left on the table all the materials I had prepared. I was deflated until I realized that other board members simply dumped the materials in the trash once they got home. Herb was giving me a subtle lesson on productivity.

Herbert J. Walberg was likely the most-published scholar in the field of education, coming at it from his disciplinary roots in educational psychology and spreading to every corner of the broader field. In 1984, had I searched the library for nearly any topic in education, I would have arrived at something by Herb, and this was early in his career.

Herb introduced me, and ADI, to Benjamin Bloom, James Coleman, Margaret Wang, Roger Weissberg, and dozens of other leading lights in our field. He made the same connections for many others. Connecting people to advance their work was perhaps his greatest satisfaction. When ADI started the *School Community Journal* in 1991, Herb was the magnet that attracted a stellar advisory council. He brought us into Margaret Wang's Laboratory for Student Success at Temple University in 1995. He encouraged ADI and Temple to compete for a new national Center on Innovation & Improvement in 2005, and he edited our first book, which won a publication-of-the-year award from the American Educational Research Association (AERA). I could go on.

Herb asked me to tag along as co-author in articles he wrote, then opened avenues for my own publications. He shared speaking engagements with me. He taught me the practical details of research. Herb occasionally quoted Confucius, more often inserted an apt witticism into a conversation, and humbly claimed that he never had an unpublished thought. He hosted meetings at his apartment in Water Tower Place, where we might have bumped into Oprah Winfrey walking her dog in the hallway. Roger Weissberg and I savored our lunches with Herb at the Ritz in the same building, just floors below. He kept no automobile when he moved from the suburbs to the city, explaining that everything he needed was in the same complex as his apartment. In fact, he traveled frequently via taxi to O'Hare airport and caught flights to every corner of the globe where he was much sought after, including to his cherished post with the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

Herb was the consummate gentleman in behavior and appearance, graciously introducing folks in any setting, snappy in his navy-blue blazer and necktie, trim, health conscious in diet and exercise. He loved to proudly describe each turn in the life of his son, Herb III, from law school student to mountain climber to handball athlete to scholar with his father to Chicago cop. Perhaps his grandest times, as related to me, were with his wife and Herb III's family on vacation in Mexico. He admired Asian culture, especially his wife's native Japan, where Herb climbed Mount Fuji as a 21-year old and again with his son when Herb III was 21.

At the annual convention of AERA in Seattle in 2001, Herb was my roommate for a couple days. He called a few days before the convention to say that he had neglected to secure a room and no rooms were now available. I saw little of him there, as we both pursued our separate but busy schedules. My roomie asked if I would like to visit the Rock & Roll Museum in Seattle, and my colleague Lori and her husband Tracy Thomas joined us. On the way to the museum, we stopped for lunch. During lunch, Herb struck up a conversation with Tracy and Lori. He was especially intrigued that Tracy was a youth minister. Herb proposed they join forces for a new business venture—publishing small booklets to explain succinctly the Bible. This was at the time Herb was chief editor and the brains behind the hugely successful series of educational practice briefs for UNESCO and the International Academy of Education. The briefs were distributed in many languages in more than 100 countries. Herb explained why the concept was also needed in religion. He had once found a Gideon's Bible in a hotel room and decided to study it to better understand the Christian religion. He read it and, he went on, thought it was far too complicated for people to grasp. So why not a series of practical briefs on Bible topics? That business didn't materialize, but Herb never lacked for ideas to combine talents and launch ventures.

Herb, Joe Meyer, and I formed MetaLytics, a for-profit company focused on data analysis in education. Herb landed a couple contracts for us, which brought in some money, but for me, not being particularly productive, this was one demand on my time more than I could manage. No worries, Herb was certain to be on the phone soon with another idea, more typically for a needed publication. He never showed personal disappointment at my failures and was always ready to move on.

Back to Seattle. As we walked through the exhibits at the Rock & Roll Museum, Herb explained that he was once a band member himself, more folk than rock, and that he collected guitars. Lori, Tracy, Herb, and I posed as a band in the museum, holding instruments and gyrating as a photographer snapped our picture and sold us the prints.

In his apartment, Herb arranged his guitar collection around the walls. His library was filled with the books he had authored. His windows opened to a grand view of Lake Michigan and Navy Pier. In his study, Herb sat in an ergonomically designed cockpit with four computer monitors. Four monitors! Mr. Productivity.

Everyone needs a mentor. I thank my lucky stars that Herb Walberg was mine. But then, many other people thank their lucky stars that Herb Walberg was theirs.

A Community Engaged Framing: Building Successful Community Engagement for Schools and Families of Bilingual Students Through Inquiry

Carlas McCauley, Julie Webb, Suzanne Abdelrahim, and Soha Mahmoud-Tabana

Abstract

This article explores an action-oriented research study designed to provide better understanding of ways to leverage school and community partnership through family engagement, focusing on the development and enactment of an approach to nurture family–school partnerships. Specifically, in partnership with seven school districts, a team of educators employed an inquiry cycle to plan and investigate family engagement efforts focused on emergent bilingual students and their families. This project tested the assumptions regarding engagement and supported school districts in the development of a strategy designed to fit the unique educational and community contexts of each participating school. A qualitative descriptive analysis was employed over a two-year period, during which researchers conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups and used an observation protocol and an artifact review protocol. The inquiry process used helped to guide educators to test their assumptions about engaging bilingual families and to personalize their projects to fit into their unique educational and community contexts. Study participants expressed beliefs that successful family engagement requires a sense of urgency and commitment and, overall, reported high levels of motivation and interest in sustaining and expanding family engagement efforts. This study has implications for how educators plan and implement family engagement strategies and initiatives within emergent bilingual school communities.

Introduction

In recent years, family engagement has been given a high priority in education; it is considered an important aspect of education reform and a significant component in the effort to improve schools. This importance is underscored by decades of research suggesting that partnerships between schools, families, and communities can improve student learning outcomes (Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Farver et al., 2006; Jeynes, 2022; Lee & Bowen, 2006; McWayne et al., 2008; Raikes et al., 2006). Partnership between schools, families, and communities have proven to be particularly important as it pertains to serving students from underserved communities. Emergent bilingual students, in particular, can benefit from such partnerships (Durand, 2011; Jeynes, 2012; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012).

The purpose of this article is to explicate the creation and evaluation of a framework developed by a research team at the University of California Davis involving a two-year project designed to collaborate with schools and districts centering around the engagement of families. The research team used this project as a test case for engaging families of students from underserved communities, testing a framework for engagement by focusing on creating partnerships with families of bilingual students. The approach was designed to support teachers and school leaders in fostering and fortifying family engagement efforts with a specific focus on families of emergent bilingual students. This article begins with an overview of the framework. Next, the article describes the theoretical approach, followed by an explanation of how this approach and the corresponding tools were developed. The article then provides a description of the approach and its components. It continues with a section on the research methods and study design, followed by the results of the study that include the findings determined by the research team through an analysis of data that discovered emerging patterns. A discussion of the conclusions generated based on the findings is next, and finally a section denoting the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research concludes the article.

Literature Review

Along with a shared definition, family engagement calls for educators to be explicit about how families can engage in school (Housel, 2020) using cross-language communication practices (Baker, 2011). Yet, caregivers remain a largely

untapped resource when it comes to improving student learning outcomes for bilingual students (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Emergent bilingual students in particular can benefit from such partnerships (Durand, 2011; Jeynes, 2012; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012). The current study focused on bilingual learners; despite the proven connection of school, family, and communities, this group and their families can be left out of school and district engagement efforts due to institutional barriers and personal biases (Housel, 2020). Many factors can influence bilingual families' engagement in school, including caregivers' perceptions of their own language proficiency (Sibley & Dearing, 2014; Turney & Kao, 2009; Vera et al., 2012) or challenges due to scheduling conflicts, lack of transportation, and childcare needs (Sibley & Dearing, 2014; Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015; Turney & Kao, 2009).

Educators should promote interactions that connect home and school experiences (Alvarez, 2014), build trusting relationships (Shiffman, 2019), and make use of the social networks to which bilingual families belong (Durand, 2011). Feelings of exclusion, frustration, and disrespect can likewise act as barriers to participation (Olivos, 2012; Mapp, 2003; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Vera et al., 2012). Families that belong to nondominant groups in the community can feel marginalized by the education system (Housel, 2020; Vera et al., 2012) and report finding it challenging to support their children with schoolwork (Alvarez, 2014). Additionally, some bilingual families may have differing perspectives about what it means to engage in their child's education (Kim, 2009). For example, a U.S.-born family may feel comfortable advocating for the learning needs of their child, yet an immigrant family may consider this to be disrespectful to their child's teacher (Housel, 2020; Mapp, 2003; Vera et al., 2012). Educators should strive to establish common ground with families of bilingual students with regard to engagement in school. A shared definition of family engagement is needed for educators and caregivers to establish trusting partnerships to support student learning. Family engagement is a process used to build positive, goal-oriented relationships with families. Effective family engagement is mutually respectful, sustains families' cultures and languages, and includes genuine efforts to understand each family's beliefs, values, and priorities. It is important to note that the term *family* includes the full range of students' households and caregiver structures. The term *engagement* indicates active participation and a power and opportunity balance between educators and caregivers.

The families, schools, and communities that are most effective at supporting student learning have a shared mission and goals around children's learning and development (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Epstein et al., 2019). Home, school, and community contexts represent overlapping spheres of influence,

where educators and families collaborate to maintain engagement (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). These spheres can be influenced by external factors such as educational policies, practices, historical contexts, and developmental conditions, as well as internal factors including communication and social interaction between home, school, and community participants (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). For the present study, the research team also developed a suite of tools that educators can use to engage with families, community members, and colleagues to strengthen partnerships. These interactions can help develop and sustain the social capital that exists among these overlapping spheres and that ultimately serves to support student learning.

Yosso (2013) expands the notion of leveraging social capital to improve outcomes for students by including additional capital termed "community cultural wealth" that is developed and nurtured in communities of color and includes aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. While forms of capital are acquired by individuals, cultural wealth is meant to be shared within a community (Yosso, 2013). The overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein & Sanders, 2000) is a structure in which stakeholders interact, allowing schools to function as a community via the sharing of combined school community wealth to strengthen relationships, maintain communication, and encourage advocacy, all in service of the shared mission of improving student learning.

The research team developed a framework based on research and approached the work through the lens of three key components: communication, advocacy, and relationships. These interrelated components serve as levers to foster student learning. This framing was influenced by Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein & Sanders, 2000) and Yosso's (2013) community cultural wealth model.

Framework Development

A review of literature around family engagement and existing family engagement frameworks revealed several promising components that had (a) widespread consensus of their importance, (b) a research-based impact on student achievement, and (c) a focus on the needs of bilingual families. In general, currently available frameworks vary in their prioritization of emergent bilingual elementary-aged students and their families, student learning, and feasible suggestions for educators. The research team set forward a design meant to address these gaps and to create a user-friendly approach and a suite of tools for educators to impact family engagement practices in schools.

A unique feature of the research team's approach was the inclusion of translanguaging. Translanguaging is the "process of making meaning, shaping experiences, [and] gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages" (Baker, 2011, p. 288). Beyond basic translation services for parents, the research team approached translanguaging as a method for establishing family–school partnerships, including students' and families' bilingual identities and linguistic resources. Moreover, many other frameworks for family engagement consulted through our review, while providing useful tips for communicating with parents, did not focus explicitly on the role of family engagement in supporting student learning.

Framework Components

The researchers' framing for the project consisted of three key components: communication, advocacy, and relationships. These components interact to foster student learning.

Communication

We used the term communication based on the research, as schools should clarify and provide different modes of communication in languages families prefer (Breiseth et al., 2011) and develop a system of regular, two-way communication (Halgunseth et al., 2013; Houk, 2005). By communication, we refer to the *sharing and exchanging of information regularly between bilingual students, educators, and families using culturally sensitive and translanguaging practices.* Families can support student success by engaging in regular communication with their child's teacher and school. Communication in multiple languages is a realistic need in many schools, and districts legally must provide translated school information and materials to their school population (Halgunseth et al., 2013). It is also necessary for districts to create a translation and interpretation process including hiring bilingual staff when possible (Breiseth et al., 2011). Additionally, educators should review multilingual accessibility features of any tools they consider for family engagement and ensure teachers and families receive the training necessary to leverage it for maintaining school–family communication across languages.

Technology-based communication tools are of critical concern for school–family communication that engages bilingual families because digital equity is not always achieved. Digital equity includes making sure students and families have equal access to technology, such as hardware, software, and the internet. Access to digital technologies provides families with options that open lines of communication between school and home. However, schools may need to offer training in order for families to successfully utilize digital communication

tools. Schools must also provide ongoing information and communication in a variety of ways beyond digital tools, so families without access to technology can receive the same information.

Establishing personal connections with students and families should be the basis of a school's or district's general communication strategy. Educators should endeavor to establish rapport with caregivers in a welcoming environment and make use of culturally sensitive practices to communicate (Garcia et al., 2016). Additionally, a district's communication strategy should be regularly evaluated, including the identification of current communication strategies, assessment of their effectiveness for cross-cultural communication, and the determination of additional communication strategies that may be needed (Garcia et al., 2016).

Advocacy

Schools and districts can partner with families in more meaningful ways that go beyond traditional roles, thus giving them opportunities to be true advocates. *Family advocacy is a process of engaging bilingual families as key decision makers in shaping activities and programs that promote student learning so that schools value diverse perspectives and shape positive bilingual identities.* A key aspect of family engagement is the empowerment of families to be active participants in the planning process of school decisions where caregivers' ideas are welcomed and valued. Educators should identify the types of decisions that families can make and consider how teachers and schools can elicit and incorporate their input.

School and district teams should be comprised of individuals who reflect the diversity of the district community to help ensure that multiple and diverse voices are represented (California Department of Education [CDE], 2017). Practices such as translanguaging may encourage caregivers to contribute to collective decision making efforts because they can make use of their own and other team members' linguistic resources to improve communication and understanding and to help solve problems (Baker, 2011; Wei, 2018). Additionally, district personnel who have roles in distinct programs, such as English Learner services, Title I intervention, and general and special education, should be included to increase the likelihood that family engagement activities integrate into and across district initiatives (CDE, 2017).

When educators plan family engagement activities they should seek to partner with bilingual families during the planning process (McWayne et al., 2016). When parents help to shape the events and programs that support their students, they will be even more invested in seeing these efforts succeed (Breiseth et al., 2011). Caregivers who are encouraged to participate in advocacy roles can become parent leaders who can shape initiatives that truly reflect the concerns, needs, and values of emergent bilinguals and their families (Warren et

al., 2009) and can recruit and mentor families to engage with the school, thus increasing participation among marginalized groups (Breiseth et al., 2011).

Relationships

Few can argue the importance of establishing relationships between educators, students, and their families. School relationships require establishing connections to build mutual trust and support between bilingual students, educators, and families. Teachers and administrators should have an understanding, and value of, the language, backgrounds, and cultural traditions represented in their school community (Epstein & Salinas, 1992) and receive the necessary training in order to engage diverse families (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Educators must also acknowledge that families will likely require different strategies to engage them in their child's education (Epstein & Salinas, 1992).

In spite of potential barriers, educators can encourage families to engage in their child's educational experience. Teachers and administrators should create a school environment and climate in which all students' families are welcomed (Epstein & Salinas, 1992). Educators should prioritize making connections with individuals who have historically been less engaged on campus to begin to create a bond of trust. Trusting relationships between educators, students, and caregivers can positively impact family engagement by facilitating the recruiting and organizing of families to help and support student learning, both at school and at home (Epstein, 2010). Educators will have established trusting relationships with families when they create partnerships in culturally responsive ways, ensure families feel a sense of belonging at school, and collaboratively coordinate family engagement activities (CDE, 2017). Once positive relationships are built, families feel respected, cared for, and are better able to share their ideas and concerns (Auerbach, 2010), thus reinforcing their value to the community.

Engagement in Student Learning

While student learning is referenced in many other approaches to family engagement, student learning is at the core of the work led by the research team. Communication, advocacy, and relationships should be developed cohesively to work *in service of* student learning. *We view learning as the process of constructing new knowledge and practices by connecting to previous knowledge and practices, building upon family and community ways of knowing and communicating.* It consists of making connections between prior and new knowledge, developing independent and critical thinking, and the ability to transfer knowledge to new and different contexts. The ultimate goal of family engagement is to improve student learning, which may require reflection around current

family engagement practices. This includes reaching beyond traditional family engagement roles, such as volunteering in the classroom, and focusing instead on partnering with families to support student learning.

Family engagement leads to positive benefits for students, caregivers, and schools, including improved academic performance and improved family–teacher relationships. The research literature provides ample evidence that families are rooting for their children to succeed in school, but their engagement can have even greater influence than encouragement alone. Family engagement has been shown to positively impact children's development in key areas including early literacy (Durand, 2011), language skills (Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Farver, et al., 2006; Raikes et al., 2006), social–emotional skills (Fantuzzo et al., 2004), and academic achievement (Jeynes, 2012; Lee & Bowen, 2006; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; McWayne et al., 2008). In addition, students whose families were involved in school during their elementary years experienced lower dropout rates in high school, were more likely to graduate from high school on time, and had higher grades (Barnard, 2004). Clearly, when strong family engagement is present, the result is increased student achievement.

Research Methods and Design

In order to better understand the complex and context-specific nature of engaging families of underserved students and, in this case, families of bilingual students, the research team developed a framework to assist schools and districts. As researchers, we used a qualitative descriptive analysis methodology in order to reveal patterns across events and experiences and to gain insights from participants' unique perspectives as they employed the approach outlined by the research team to their local contexts.

Context and Participants

The project was funded through the U.S. Department of Education's National Professional Development Program. The IRB was sought and approved through the University of California Davis. The study was conducted during the 2020–21 and 2021–22 academic years with participation from educators working in 11 elementary schools across eight school districts in California. Educators were invited to participate by email using various educator networks to distribute the invitations.

The research team wanted to gain insight into how educator teams could use the framework and tools to engage the bilingual families they serve and sought answers to the following research questions:

- Q1: What are educator perceptions about the efficacy of the family engagement practices of their school and/or district?
- Q2: What types of family engagement tools are of greatest value to educators?
- Q3: How are the components of the framework demonstrated in educators' family engagement efforts?
- Q4: How does using the inquiry process to articulate a family engagement strategy influence educator enactment of the framework?
- Q5: What do leaders and their teams need to consider when supporting educators' family engagement efforts?

As a part of the project, during year one, a total of 24 educators (including teachers, principals, and district staff) volunteered to participate between March and June 2021. During year two, a total of 23 educators volunteered to participate. Of the 23, 11 were returning participants, and 12 were new participants. Participants included classroom, intervention, and special education teachers, an English learner program specialist and instructional coach, a principal, a paraeducator, and an English learner assistant. Participants self-selected the professional learning activities in which they engaged and received e-gift cards for their participation. The original plan for professional learning and data collection included a combination of virtual workshops as well as visits to elementary school sites and face-to-face interactions with educator participants. Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, all interactions between researchers and participants were completed virtually.

During the fall of 2020, the research team developed a suite of online tools for families, teachers, and administrators that align with the core approach to this work. The research team also led six professional learning modules for teachers and one for parents. The modules were developed through additional tools that promote language and literacy development. Topics for the suite of tools align with and promote the framework, including an overview of the research and tools for communication, relationships, advocacy, and student learning. As a part of the process, we conducted a literature review of the research on family engagement, with attention paid to research that focuses on emergent bilingual students, their families, and how schools can best meet their unique needs. Our goal in designing the approach to the work was to fill the gaps in existing frameworks that lack a focus on student learning and emergent bilingual students and families, and to create a user-friendly framework for educators that would drive the design of the tools produced and provide examples to impact family engagement practices in schools. During the spring of 2021, we conducted webinars to train participating educators around the tools and resources that were developed as a part of the project. The project included eliciting feedback on 51 tools for engaging bilingual families. Participants

were unable to test the tools with families during year one of the study due to COVID pandemic restrictions. Therefore, we were not able to collect data on the effectiveness of the tools in practice or gather data on how bilingual families respond to them in year one.

In year two of the study, the research team reengaged year-one participants and recruited additional participants using an interest survey and virtual meetings. Grant participants engaged with researchers and their team of colleagues during the winter and spring of 2022 to implement the framework in their school contexts and test the corresponding family engagement tools. Teams shared their projects and findings and reflected on key learnings in a culminating virtual workshop in spring 2022.

We used an inquiry process as the pathway for testing the implementation of the framework because we believed it would support team collaboration, help participants adopt a curiosity stance that allows for continual discovery, and keep participant motivation levels high. The inquiry process is used across varied disciplines and is gaining in popularity (Pedaste et al., 2015). Although researchers and practitioners differ in the terminology they use to refer to the phases of inquiry that are employed during an inquiry cycle (Pedaste et al., 2015), they generally include a combination of the following non-linear steps that our research team used to guide participating teams:

- Identify baseline data
- Formulate inquiry question
- Apply new strategies
- Revisit inquiry question
- Collect evidence
- Analyze and reflect
- Consider next steps

A discovery process that includes inquiry cycles (Fong, 2020) offers educators a structure for working toward improving family–school partnerships and acts as a guide when they naturally arrive in new and unfamiliar territory. For educators, it can be challenging to step away from the quick pace of instructional decision making and slow down long enough to grapple with important questions about students and their families. The inquiry process prompts educators to pause and contemplate the questions that need to be answered, with considerable time spent formulating the right questions to ask.

The inquiry process allowed participants the opportunity to focus their projects on work that was meaningful to them in their varied school contexts. This approach meant that researchers could observe how the framework and corresponding tools were employed in natural educational settings. The additional benefit of the inquiry process approach is that study participants gain new skills and insights that they can carry forward to new family engagement endeavors.

Data Collection

Our team used various methods to collect data including pre- and post-surveys, focus groups, interviews, an observation protocol, and an artifact review protocol. Surveys were used to collect information about participant perceptions, actions, and beliefs related to bilingual family–school partnerships. Focus groups allowed our team to capture information about perspectives including similarities and differences in viewpoints. Interviews provided an opportunity to gather individual perceptions and reflections. We used an observation protocol to collect information during and after each virtual workshop with participants. An artifact review protocol provided us with the opportunity to review individual team project results.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to analyze data across sources since causality was not being evaluated. More specifically, content analysis was used to evaluate patterns in the surveys and artifacts submitted by the participants. The analysis of the surveys included direct quotes from participants, summarizing from interviews, and interpreting data from surveys. Additionally, we considered the frequency of which an idea or statement was shared. Data from all surveys and artifacts were summarized into categories connected with the research questions. Narrative analysis and thematic analysis were used for the focus groups and interviews. Our research team listened to the participants being interviewed as well as examined transcripts of these conversations. Themes were identified from the participants' verbal reflections of their experience using an inquiry cycle process. We triangulated the data from each data collection method and established interrater reliability through independent analyses, then comparison, of the data.

Results

Findings from both the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school year data will be presented in greater detail for each research study question. The results indicate that participants in this study worked in schools that were most effective with the communication component of the framework. Yet, the participants identified limited use of communication tools and strategies that were available to school staff. Moreover, participants reported that their schools and/or districts were more effective with communication and relationship building than with family advocacy. However, all participants noted that the COVID pandemic and virtual learning with their elementary-aged students had a negative impact on communication with families.

Q1: What are educator perceptions about the efficacy of the family engagement practices of their school and/or district?

In exploring family engagement in their own school and/or districts, educators shared that they had never participated in professional learning around the topic of family engagement. Despite this, survey participants reported a variety of approaches for engaging bilingual families including holding parent–teacher conferences, hosting family events, making phone calls, sending emails, and distributing newsletters. Many educators noted the importance of translation and interpretation services provided by their schools and/or district and reported making regular use of these resources to connect with bilingual families. Participants reported using technology-based communication tools that prioritize two-way communication between educators and families (including two-way translation features) and believed that determining caregiver communication needs and being trained on using communication tools were important components of their family engagement efforts.

Although translation and interpretation resources are highly valued and frequently utilized, educators reported a need for more staff to translate for families in more languages, and for more opportune translations to satisfy the educators' and families' immediate needs. Participants reported that schools and districts can improve and increase translation and interpretation services by providing educators with access to modern tools and software such as translated robocalls, multilingual texting apps, and video conferencing translation software.

Post-survey reports indicated that participants view relationships as slightly more successful in their schools and/or districts. Educators expressed the importance of building relationships with bilingual families but noted barriers that impeded their efforts, including a lack of access to interpreters for communicating with bilingual families, low attendance of bilingual families at school functions, caregivers' lack of knowledge about and experience with technology use, and limited opportunities to engage in cultural awareness training for staff. Educators shared how they establish relationships with bilingual families by creating a welcoming atmosphere at school and by being active in the community outside of school time. Educators described how they leverage relationships to personally invite caregivers to join school and district committees, thus encouraging engagement and advocacy among bilingual families. Educators also noted that it is important not to make assumptions regarding students and families, nor with family engagement practices.

Educators overwhelmingly reported high levels of confidence in communicating and building relationships with bilingual families. Participants shared that participation in the webinars helped inform their thinking and understanding about family engagement, citing the communication webinar as

particularly valuable. Educators reported that their school could do a better job of engaging families to support student literacy and language learning. Only half of the participants reported that their school uses bilingual family feedback to make improvements.

Q2: What types of family engagement tools are of greatest value to educators?

The study also explored the types of family engagement tools that are of greatest value to educators. Educators strategically supported bilingual family engagement efforts through the creative use of existing tools and resources. Results indicated educators valued a wide variety of tools, including tools that are available in multiple languages, and specifically those designed to share with families. Educators were supportive of using multiple tools with families at the beginning of each school year. Family surveys, in particular, were valued for the opportunity they provide to understand early on what each family can contribute about their cultures to increase the richness of the education provided to all students in the classroom. Educators shared that the self-reflection tools helped them think about how to help families increase their engagement in student learning. Overall, participants indicated that they valued the information embedded within the tools and looked forward to trying new ideas from the tools in the upcoming school year.

During year two of the study, educators strategically supported family engagement efforts through the creative use of existing tools and resources. Many participants modified existing tools to meet their specific needs (i.e., surveys). Participants shared the importance of a uniform communication method for conversing with families that offers two-way translation features. Participants believe it is important to teach families in person how to sign up for and use tech tools such as communication apps and believe it is beneficial to get started using tools at the beginning of the school year, perhaps during a family–school event such as Back to School Night.

Other tools that were widely utilized and valued by participants included:
- family surveys to gather information directly from caregivers
- guide with information on how to improve communication and increase engagement through social media
- bookmarks that include questions caregivers can ask while reading with children
- video for supporting literacy through at-home conversations
- list of picture books that promote translanguaging
- list of translation and interpretation resources, including translation apps

Participants reported positive outcomes from using tools they had not considered before, such as the Social Media Guide. One participant shared,

The Social Media Guide was incredible. I love that examples were given in order to get an idea of how to go about the strategy. I was able to effectively use this tool with success…I would post every other day and keep a close eye on parent posts, comments, and likes. Although this took time, it was very worth it! Students would talk about their activities with their families! One family replied to a post by saying, "We enjoyed this activity so much, we had never thought about doing this and it was so special!" They went on an insect hunt and graphed the insects that they found!

Furthermore, educators valued tools that helped them gather information about their students' families, such as the Values and Traditions Survey: "The Values and Traditions survey will help me form a deeper connection with my families. It may also encourage families to share their cultural values and traditions with my whole class." Some tools encouraged participants to think differently about who should be responsible for family engagement: "I like the idea of enlisting parents to be in charge of getting other families involved…[a] comfortable way to engage with families and give them opportunities to engage with each other."

Participants also reported highly valuing tools such as the Self-Rating Scales because they helped them reflect on their practice and track their progress: "I think it is a good way to find out what my own and our schools' strengths and weaknesses [are]. From the information we get on the rating scale, we will be able to set up goals and a 100-day plan to help us grow." Many participants shared that they have reconsidered what it means to engage bilingual families.

Q3: How are the components of the framework demonstrated in educators' family engagement efforts?

Participant teams selected one component of the framework on which to focus their inquiry cycle and engagement efforts. Communication was the prominent focus in family engagement projects, with participants determining that family communication needs and training in the use of uniform, two-way communication and translation tools were important aspects of their bilingual family engagement efforts. One team shared that a father didn't know how to text but wanted to learn so he could better communicate with the school. Another team noticed a discrepancy in family self-reporting (feeling connected to school) and actual behavior (not reading newsletters nor responding to teacher questions). As a result, the team tested different communication strategies in addition to asking parents what they prefer.

Many participants' family engagement efforts also focused on equity and building stronger relationships with bilingual families. Participants stated that

connections were important, yet had been missing due to COVID pandemic restrictions. Some groups focused on developing meaningful relationships with bilingual families to increase the amount of time parents were reading with their children. These groups expressed the need for caregivers to read aloud in their home languages. Several participants connected with the idea of having families mentor other families as an effective practice for engagement and advocacy. One participant shared:

> I love the idea of parents mentoring other parents. There is such a cultural divide between our bilingual families and our schools. I believe parent leaders could start bridging the gap and start to get our bilingual families not just involved but engaged.

All participant teams focused on gaining information about cultures with which they were not yet familiar in order to understand cultural norms and to build stronger relationships through social–emotional learning. One participant explained: "Our project is all about how to make our classrooms more inclusive and welcoming and making it a safe place for students to learn and to learn about students' culture."

The engagement efforts of each participating team aligned with the framework due to their selection of one framework component and their core concentration on student learning. Participants worked with their bilingual families to encourage students' development of math literacy, make connections between classroom and at-home learning, increase time for reading at home together, and emphasize students' social–emotional learning. Despite focusing on one framework component for the inquiry cycle, teams came to enact all three components of communication, advocacy, and relationships to support student learning. We believe that the reciprocal, interactive nature of the framework components lent themselves to supporting bilingual families in multiple ways simultaneously. For example, one team used text messaging to support families when reading at home by encouraging different literacy activities, and families shared videos of the results (communication, student learning). In order to begin this text messaging effort, the team leveraged their existing relationships with bilingual families and met in person to explain the plan and recruit participants (relationships). These efforts resulted in a group of caregivers signing up to participate, with some parents first asking clarifying questions and one parent expressing the need for support to learn how to text message (advocacy). Another group invited parents to a math night and had families communicate to practice math literacy. They built relationships by providing in-person interaction and provided activities that built connections and trust. The advocacy component was evident when the group surveyed families to get input/feedback and stated they will use these ideas for the next

event. Also, students were empowered to lead math games with families. Each of the teams' projects provided evidence that the launching of one framework component acted as a catalyst for engagement with the entire framework.

Q4: How does using the inquiry process to articulate a family engagement strategy influence educator enactment of the framework?

The research team also explored how the inquiry process aided participating educators to question their assumptions about family engagement and focus their efforts on learning what does work in their unique contexts to support families to engage in student learning. Educators needed support and guidance in order to engage in an inquiry cycle, particularly with the processes of forming an inquiry question and collecting and analyzing data. Teams committing their inquiry questions and action plans to "paper" made it possible for the research team members to clarify plans and support teams to stay on track for successful project implementation and data collection. Teams reported that moving on to the action planning process helped them think through their inquiry questions, making them clearer, more specific, and more concrete. Engaging in a process, rather than swiftly moving to action, allowed space for teams to explore divergent thinking. The action plan structure helped with convergent thinking and, ultimately, making decisions on implementation and data collection. Providing models of the process of crafting an inquiry question was not enough to support participants, so our research team provided additional coaching and support. As a result, participants realized they needed to narrow their inquiry questions to make them feasible. The evolution and refinement of their inquiry questions helped them become more focused on enacting the framework. One participant shared, "Finding the right grain size for the inquiry question was the most challenging task."

Our research team collaborated with educator teams and collectively reached the conclusion that educators have assumptions about family engagement, and the inquiry process is a way for them to safely test their assumptions and learn what does and doesn't work in their own contexts. Teams grappled with data collection and with determining methods, prioritizing quantitative over qualitative, undervaluing observation of family behavior and language as a data source, and confusing family engagement data with student achievement data. For example, one participating team had difficulty recognizing data collection opportunities and was prompted by the research team member to consider: "How can you tell they are engaged? How much talking is going on? What is the quality of the talk? What is the climate in the room?" Guiding questions like these allowed for participants to engage in deeper conversations about the framework components, align the steps they were going to take, and become more purposeful when measuring outcomes.

Despite the challenges of engaging in inquiry cycles, participants reported feeling motivated by the data they collected and excited about finding answers to their inquiry questions. One participant said, "The cycle of inquiry can be an evolving opportunity to support our students and their families. A good team can make a difference!" Participants were eager to share this new learning with colleagues and their principals in hopes of expanding their projects. Some participants hypothesized that their teams could build on their success by tapping into existing school and district resources, such as annual events, technology tools, and curricula. Other participants reflected on the process they engaged in as action researchers and how this experience helped them gain new knowledge. One participant noted, "We were successful by first starting small and testing out an idea through the inquiry process, which was valuable. I learned a lot that will be useful in next steps."

Q5: What do leaders and their teams need to consider when supporting educators' family engagement efforts?

Participants in this study shared several key conditions that they deemed essential for taking part in family engagement efforts, including: creating a supportive climate, cultivating trust, and adapting to the school community. Participants expressed that strong collaboration among educator team members positively impacted their family engagement efforts. They shared that family engagement endeavors require dedication and shared sense of urgency for them to be successful. In order to sustain the work, educators believed that leaders would be wise to begin with those on their staff who are willing, even eager, to do the work. Participants considered their colleagues' positive attitudes, high levels of motivation, and sincere commitment as key factors in their teams' success. They also reported that coaching and support from their colleagues positively influenced their family engagement efforts. A supportive climate can empower educators to take risks and try new strategies, both of which are required for family engagement and school improvement efforts to take place.

Many participants expressed the importance of not making assumptions about what families need, prefer, or know how to do. They shared how important it is for educators to connect with the families they serve in order to learn and understand their wants and needs and to use a variety of tools and approaches to engage them effectively. One educator shared that getting students actively involved and excited to help facilitate learning builds a positive relationship and cultivates trust. Additionally, learning about family and cultural knowledge and experience that might impact communication efforts are important to consider. It is imperative that leaders resource family engagement

initiatives to support educators, students, and caregivers and value and incorporate feedback to nurture and maintain trusting relationships.

Participants expressed the importance of educators continually adapting and evolving their family engagement efforts and to seek continuous improvement opportunities within their school communities. Educators also shared the importance of their teams moving beyond surface level data analysis and continuing to question and test their assumptions. One team realized that their family survey results contrasted with other evidence they had gathered and contradicted their personal experiences with emergent bilingual families. They responded by collecting additional evidence and planned to test new strategies. The timing of family engagement efforts was a common concern among participants, with many holding the belief that *when* their engagement efforts occur during the academic year matters greatly and hypothesized that starting these efforts at the beginning of the school year will have a positive impact on family engagement and student learning outcomes. Alternatively, one participant shared that events that occur simultaneously at the beginning of the school year can make engagement with school more challenging for families because they are simply pressed for time (e.g., the harvesting of local crops coincides with the first two months of the school year). It is important for educators to connect with and understand the families they serve and to make adaptations to engage them effectively.

In summary, the results of the qualitative descriptive data collection and analysis revealed the following findings:

- Bilingual family engagement requires a sense of urgency and commitment in order for efforts to be impactful, and participants reported high levels of motivation and interest in sustaining and expanding their bilingual family engagement efforts at the conclusion of their inquiry cycles.
- The framework provides a guide to an intentional strategy for engaging families of bilingual students.
- The communication component of the framework was prominent in bilingual family engagement projects, with participants determining that family communication needs and training in the use of two-way communication and translation tools used consistently across classrooms were important aspects of their bilingual family engagement efforts.
- The inquiry process helps educators to question their assumptions about bilingual family engagement and focus their efforts on learning what does work in their unique contexts to support bilingual families to engage in student learning.
- Teaching and learning conditions changed due to pandemic restrictions, and participants reported feeling distant and disconnected from their students' families.

- Participants reported their schools and districts effectively engage with bilingual families, yet they describe limited opportunities to participate in professional learning experiences centered on family engagement.
- Family surveys were valued for the opportunity they provide to understand the needs of each family and what they can contribute about their cultures to increase the richness of the education provided to all students in the classroom.
- Participants reported that their schools and/or districts are more successful with the communication and relationship components of the framework than with the advocacy component.

Discussion

Overall, we conclude that the framework can be effective. One finding of this study is that educators need support and guidance in order to engage in inquiry cycles, for which a framework such as this could assist in guiding interactions and discussions with families. In particular, the educator participants needed significant assistance in forming an inquiry question and collecting and analyzing data. As noted by the participants, educators need support in developing a strategy to drive efforts to engage families of bilingual students, and the use of tools and other resources to mitigate language barriers are of significant help. These types of efforts are supported by research as scholars have recently pushed the field to center critical and equity-oriented issues such as examining the ways that educational leaders share power with families that have been historically excluded by schools (Ishimaru, 2020; Khalifa, 2018). Consequently, the enactment of the framework and its components assisted the participants in developing an intentional strategy to support families of emergent bilinguals.

At the heart of the strategy, participants were able to center student learning as a trigger for enacting all three framework components as being the central target for urgency. This is a departure from past practice, moving away from previous models that took a deficit-based approach to "fix" parents (Olivos, 2012). In reviewing the data from the study, several patterns around the enactment of the framework emerged from the data, revealing three topics deemed notable by participants: (a) structured yet flexible approach, (b) resources and support, and (c) continuous improvement.

Structured Yet Flexible Approach

The first topic is the importance of employing a structured approach to family engagement efforts that also allows educators the flexibility to adapt to the needs of the families in their local contexts. Our findings indicate that educators benefited from the structure of the framework because it clearly and

succinctly synthesizes what the research literature deems important for bilingual family engagement, thus making it easier for practitioners to understand, remember, and use. Participants used the framework as a tool for focusing the content and scope of their family engagement projects and for determining their precise inquiry questions. Participants reported feeling overwhelmed by the possible topics and approaches for their family engagement projects, and the framework provided support to help them narrow their focus and design projects that were feasible, measurable, and meaningful. We also discovered that by enacting one framework component to engage bilingual families, participants came to enact all three components of communication, advocacy, and relationships to support student learning.

Participants also expressed appreciation for the flexibility to design projects that matched their needs and those of the families they serve, rather than executing a prescribed program or project. Inquiry cycles provided enough structure to support educator teams to plan, investigate, and reflect on their projects, yet allowed them to make timely decisions and pivots when necessary. The teaching and learning conditions during the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years were unprecedented due to the COVID pandemic and resulting protocols. Participants reported feeling disconnected from their students and families and a strong desire to reestablish relationships with them. The inquiry process helped participants better understand what bilingual families want and need to support student learning, and participants overwhelmingly reported a desire to continue to learn what works and doesn't work to engage families in their local contexts.

Resources and Support

The second topic indicated by participants is the need for additional resources and support to assist them in designing and carrying out family engagement initiatives. Participants suggested that training for staff is needed so that educators can learn family engagement strategies and gain cultural competency that aligns with the needs of their school communities. Educators in this study were creative in how they used their time to meet and collaborate, but they reported the need for more time to plan and test their family engagement projects. Likewise, educators who attempt to design and investigate family engagement projects in their own contexts will likely need guidance on how to engage in inquiry cycles, coaching on how to recognize and test assumptions, and support to analyze data and determine what was learned through the inquiry process. School and district leaders should consider the resources currently available to assist educators in family engagement efforts and be open to acquiring new resources, as well as using existing resources in new ways.

Resources and support for communicating with bilingual families was a top concern for study participants. A consistent, two-way mode of communication between educators and families, available in multiple languages, is a realistic need in many schools. Educators should review multilingual accessibility features of any tools they currently use or are considering for family engagement efforts and ensure that teachers and families receive the training necessary to leverage them for maintaining school–family communication across languages. School and district leaders should also consider moving beyond more traditional communication methods such as hiring translators and interpreters and include additional technology-based resources that can provide timely support for educators and families across the system.

Continuous Improvement

The final topic that emerged from the findings was the notion that, in order for family engagement efforts to be successful, they require tending and nurturing in a continuous improvement model. In the case of family engagement, continuous improvement includes the acknowledgment by stakeholders that family engagement is a never-ending process that is dynamic, not static. This means that educators, leaders, and families will need to work together at every stage of a student's journey through the education system. Stakeholders should expect this journey to evolve over time and should be ready to adapt to changes along the way.

Continuous improvement also includes the adoption of a growth mindset by all stakeholders, including students, so that efforts to engage families are viewed through an asset-oriented lens and stakeholders are encouraged to take risks, try new strategies, and learn from mistakes. The inquiry process utilized in this study offered participants many opportunities to focus on families' strengths, design and test new approaches, use the framework and existing tools in innovative ways, and learn quickly and often. The structure of an inquiry cycle lends itself to a continuous process of learning and measured progress, which can help sustain family engagement efforts. Participants indicated a sense of satisfaction from their participation in an inquiry cycle and reported experiencing high levels of motivation to continue, and expand on, their initial engagement efforts.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The study included a small sample size of 36 educators who volunteered to participate and was spread out among 11 elementary schools and 8 school districts in California. Due to the research occurring at the beginning of the pandemic, all exploration was completed remotely. Workshops, application of

work, and final data were completed by educator teams at school sites and were shared with our research team and fellow participants through virtual meetings. Onsite observations conducted by researchers would have provided additional opportunities to gather data and possibly led to the development of further insight into the enactment of the framework and tools, as well as the inquiry process itself. A larger sample size and different contexts could influence the results of future research.

Data collection by participants occurred late in the school year which resulted in participants reporting feeling rushed to complete their projects. For future study, it may be beneficial to start inquiry projects at the beginning of the school year to allow participants more time to try new approaches and gather data. The results of this study do not address how the timeline of events influenced study outcomes.

Feedback from families was challenging to capture because the first year of this research occurred during full remote learning, and in the second year, families were not permitted to enter school buildings. Our research team encouraged participants to find creative ways to engage families which led to participants considering a hybrid approach that included in-person contact as well as virtual contact. More family feedback may have been informative in drawing study conclusions and implications. Additional research that features families more prominently in the inquiry process could yield important findings.

We chose to engage participants in the inquiry process so that educator teams could lead projects that were personally meaningful and applicable to their unique educational contexts. Additional research into how to maximize the inquiry process for family engagement is needed, as well as research to uncover how leaders can best support teams of educators engaged in inquiry cycles.

Our research team had a collaborative presence with participants during the research and inquiry processes, as they attempted to provide each group a psychologically safe environment to delve into family engagement content and to share honest feedback. Participants reported that creating a supportive climate, cultivating trust, and adapting to the school community were conditions that positively influenced their family engagement efforts. However, more research is needed to identify a comprehensive list of conditions necessary to support and sustain family engagement efforts and to understand how leaders can establish these conditions in schools. The study did not address how educators might share their learning across the educational system. Despite the limitations of this study, the findings are a worthy contribution to the growing body of research that focuses on family engagement and family–school partnerships. However, additional research into how educators spread and scale their work could be beneficial.

Overall, we conclude that the framework can be effective in supporting educators' understanding and efforts to improve family engagement at their schools, particularly for bilingual families. We believe that the reciprocal, interactive nature of the framework lends itself to supporting family engagement in student learning in multiple ways, specifically in the areas of communication, advocacy, and relationships. The employment of a structured yet flexible approach that includes an inquiry process can positively impact educators involved in family engagement efforts. Educators engaged in such efforts require resources and support in order to be successful. Educators can also be strategic and innovative in their use of resources to foster family engagement. A continuous improvement model that includes the acknowledgement by stakeholders that family engagement is a process that benefits from a growth mindset, can help leaders establish the conditions necessary for family engagement initiatives to thrive, particularly in working with students from underserved communities.

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Educators Learning Lessons From Multilingual Family Engagement Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

Cory Buxton, Kathryn McIntosh, Barbara Ettenauer, and Karen Thompson

Abstract

We report on a project to support teachers and district administrators working with multilingual learners as they deepened relationships and understandings with multilingual families in five Oregon school districts. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which radically shifted the ways educators engaged with students' families, we repurposed this ongoing research to answer the question: How did teachers' and supporting administrators' conceptions of and actions to promote multilingual family engagement shift in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? Further influenced by the concurrent national protests for racial justice, we consider how teachers and administrators engaged in liberatory work as they questioned structures that had previously seemed inevitable or unproblematic. Framed using Harro's cycle of liberation, we discuss lessons learned based on systematic data collected from both teachers and administrators from multiple districts and multiple time points before and during pandemic-impacted schooling.

Key words: family engagement, multilingual learners, COVID-19 pandemic, anti-racist education, Teachers Educating All Multilingual Students, educators

Introduction

The ongoing Teachers Educating All Multilingual Students (TEAMS) project supports teachers in five Oregon school districts in developing knowledge and skills for educating multilingual learners. Participating districts span a range of geographic contexts, including large, mid-sized, and small cities, and economically disadvantaged students constitute between 35–60% of the districts' enrollment. Participating teachers complete coursework leading to a state endorsement in English for Speakers of Other Languages or a Dual Language specialization, supported by facilitators and administrators in each school district. Enhancing family and community engagement is a central component of the TEAMS model. To this end, in collaboration with administrators and district-based facilitators, teachers work in partnership with local community organizations to co-design and co-plan education-focused community events with families of multilingual students as part of their professional learning (Ishimaru, 2019; Zeichner et al., 2016).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these efforts to deepen family engagement shifted suddenly and unexpectedly in Winter 2020 from planning large community events, such as health fairs and cultural exchanges, to building individual connections with families focused on their most basic day-to-day needs in the transition to quarantine and remote learning. In Oregon, where this work took place, in-person schooling shut down in March 2020, and Oregon students remained in virtual instruction for longer than much of the country (Burbio, 2021). The concurrent protests for racial justice in Spring and Summer 2020 further pushed teachers and administrators in the project to think about multilingual family engagement in new ways.

While there is a fast-emerging literature (reviewed below) on both teachers' and administrators' experiences during the pandemic, we are unaware of other studies to date based on systematic data from both teachers and administrators from multiple school districts and at multiple time points, including before the COVID-19 pandemic, shortly after the shift to remote learning, and during the second year of COVID impacted teaching. Thus, our analysis allows us to discuss several issues based on empirical data that have not been addressed previously. This includes guidance for educational leaders and teacher educators about how to support individual teachers' creative actions—while also recognizing the need to center collective responsibility and community focus (Cahapay, 2020; Moss et al., 2020).

As teacher educators and researchers with long-term commitments to justice-centered family engagement work, we have been struck by the unexpected impacts of the pandemic on teachers' experiences engaging with their students'

families (Buxton et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021) and on administrators' evolving thinking about the role of family engagement (Brion & Kiral, 2021; McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). We redirected our ongoing research to document and learn from the ways that participating teachers and administrators began to rethink much of what they believed about multilingual families and what was possible or desirable in terms of family and community engagement. Specifically, we addressed the research question: How did TEAMS teachers' and supporting administrators' conceptions of and actions to promote multilingual family engagement shift in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Emerging Literature on Teachers' and Administrators' Experiences During COVID-19

We conceptualize this work as a productive tension between teachers' and administrators' agency—the power that educators can exert to push for desired change—and the broader structures of educational systems that often resist efforts to disrupt the status quo (Buxton et al., 2015). We see the pandemic as a disrupter of structures that typically constrain educator agency. That is, among the many impacts of the pandemic, it opened new agentic possibilities for educators in radical and unexpected ways (Okilwa & Barnett, 2021). As schools transitioned from in-person to remote learning, existing structures were abandoned by necessity, creating the potential for new ways of thinking and acting (Schlegelmilch & Douglas, 2020).

Given the global scope of the pandemic and its impact on education systems around the world, it is not surprising that there is a rapidly expanding literature documenting and analyzing the multiple influences of COVID-19 on education. One focus of this emerging research has been on teachers' responses as schools shifted to remote learning. Much of the work published to date relies on survey data of how teachers responded, both pedagogically and socioemotionally, to the radical shift in their work. For example, Baker et al. (2021) explored stressors (such as technology and communication challenges) and protective factors (such as supportive administrators) that teachers in New Orleans experienced in the first months of quarantine. The study found that teachers who reported experiencing more stressors also reported more difficulty teaching and coping with the pandemic more broadly. Similarly, Gicheva (2021) made use of extant data from the Basic Monthly Current Population Survey to explore changes in the hours worked by teachers during the pandemic. While the common narrative in education has been that the pandemic required teachers to work more as well as differently, this study added important nuance to that storyline. Gicheva found that overall, teachers' hours decreased early in the pandemic, but then increased substantially in the second

year of pandemic teaching, with the work of veteran and female teachers increasing more than for new teachers and male teachers.

Using a large multistate survey, Kraft et al. (2021) explored the challenges that teachers reported as they engaged their students in remote learning, as well as personal challenges teachers faced balancing their professional responsibilities with other life demands. Results point to a large drop in teachers' overall sense of professional success and self-efficacy in meeting the needs of their students during remote teaching. While teachers in all contexts pointed to numerous challenges, teachers in high-poverty schools and schools serving majority African American populations reported these challenges to be most severe. Teachers also indicated the importance of supportive working conditions as critical to sustaining their sense of success, and particularly the importance of working in schools with strong communication, targeted training, and fair expectations during the pandemic. Similarly, Jones et al. (2021) used a small-scale open-ended survey of teachers in one middle school in the Pacific Northwest to study teachers' perceptions of their students' experiences during the transition to remote learning and of how racial inequities influenced the school's pandemic responses. While largely expressing empathy for the challenges their students faced during the pandemic, most teachers in this study continued to present a colorblind and individualized analysis of pandemic impacts, without recognizing the ways that race and other structural features influenced families' pandemic experiences.

Pandemic responses in education also provided new opportunities to understand the roles that educational leaders and administrators play in such times of rapid change to existing systems. While schools were some of the most highly impacted social institutions during the pandemic, most school leaders had little or no training or experience dealing with a crisis of this scope, scale, or duration, yet were still tasked with making critical decisions with lasting education impacts. For example, based on historical data from past education crises as well as open-ended surveys of school leaders in five districts in the U.S. Southwest, Okilwa and Barnett (2021) described school leaders' efforts at leadership in crisis times, concluding that the most effective school leaders in this crisis were decisive in their decision making, able to clearly communicate their decisions, flexible and responsive to change, and seen as both creative and optimistic in their responses. Similarly, Brion and Kiral (2021) reported on American school leaders struggling to balance responses to the two simultaneous pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism. Those they interviewed expressed that in times of educational and social crisis, the decisions that administrators make are central to how well schools can navigate these crises. A

broader international study by McLeod and Dulsky (2021), reflected the global nature of educational leaders' responses to the pandemic, such as increased attention to supporting care and well-being of employees, better alignment of leadership practices with school values around equity, and planning to build more organizational capacity for managing crises. Together, this emerging literature on the realities of leading schools during a crisis provides consistent suggestions for educational leadership about lessons we can take for the future based on varied pandemic responses during COVID-19.

A final focus of the emerging literature on educational impacts of COVID-19 has been research that looks directly at family responses to remote learning during the pandemic. For example, Garbe et al. (2020) sought to understand the experiences of parents during remote learning to inform future education policy and decision making. Using an online survey of 122 parents, the study focused on parents' perceptions of the various educational struggles experienced during quarantine and school closure. Parents highlighted challenges with balancing responsibilities, learner motivation, accessibility of learning materials, and difficulty of meeting learning outcomes. While these issues showed up in unique ways during remote learning, they also reflect long-standing challenges faced by many families in meeting schools' expectations for family engagement in their children's education.

A related study by Davis et al. (2021) examined the association between distance learning and the mental health of parents who took on the role of proxy educators during the pandemic. Using data from a nationally representative survey of over 3,000 households conducted in March and April 2020 (the National Panel Study of Coronavirus pandemic [NPSC-19]) this study highlighted the effects on parents with children who struggled with distance learning. Over half of responding families claimed to have one or more students who were struggling with distance learning at that point. These families with struggling students reported elevated mental distress when compared with families who claimed that none of their children were struggling.

In sum, there is a rapidly growing literature on the educational impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspectives of teachers, school leaders, and parents. However, most of this research is based on survey data, much is based on a single time point, and nearly all look at only one of these three groups of stakeholders. Further, while some theorizing of this work has occurred, many of the studies to date have provided data snapshots and emergent themes of pandemic impacts without application of a clear framework to guide analysis and interpretation. With those limitations in mind, we next share our framing for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

As teachers and administrators in the TEAMS project began to raise new questions about their roles as educators during the global pandemic and shift to remote learning, we applied Bobbie Harro's (2000) cycle of liberation as a critical framework for exploring transformation of schooling conditions. The cycle of liberation draws from critical pedagogy, and particularly the work of Paolo Freire (2018), to view educators' justice-centered agency as acts of seeing and becoming that evolve as new experiences help us learn to read the world in new ways. More specifically, for Harro, this cycle of liberation develops through six phases of action: waking up; reaching out; building community; coalescing; creating change; and maintaining change. We view the first two phases of the cycle of liberation— waking up and reaching out—as representing *intra*personal change focused on one's growing personal awareness and self-education around inequities. The next two phases— building community and coalescing— represent *inter*personal change as individuals build shared understanding with others as they seek to create more equitable opportunities. The last two phases of the cycle— creating change and maintaining change— represent systemic change, through a focus on enacting those agreed upon changes while considering what would need to happen to sustain those changes over time.

We do not view the cycle of liberation as linear or unidirectional; sometimes individuals move backwards before moving forward again or jump ahead, skipping one or more phases. Nor do we believe that everyone enters the cycle in the same place or moves through it at the same speed. By nature of our unique lived experiences and standpoints, some people may need to spend more time in the intrapersonal phases of the cycle, coming to terms, for example, with the prevalence of systemic racism in our education system, while others may quickly move on to building community for making change. Still, this framework allowed us to connect our ongoing thinking about teachers' agency within and against inequitable structures with the kinds of rapid changes and new insights that are prompted by society-wide upheavals such as a global pandemic. Thus, the cycle of liberation became both a theoretical guide and an analytical framing for our data analysis as we explored the experiences of teachers and leaders in the TEAMS project while they engaged with students and families over time through the pandemic.

Methods

Participants and Settings

A total of 42 teachers and 10 education leaders from five Oregon school districts—identified by the pseudonyms Spruce, Juniper, Birch, Oak, and

Pine—participated in the second cohort of the TEAMS project between Summer 2019 and Fall 2020. Table 1 provides a demographic overview of the participating teachers. Each teacher completed at least six online university courses focused on supporting multilingual learners, with most teachers in the program taking these courses together as a group. In each school district, a district administrator and a district-based TEAMS facilitator supported participating teachers in that district throughout the program. These district-level groups held monthly meetings to provide a combination of academic support for the online coursework, logistical support for progressing through the program, and emotional support for the work of teaching more broadly. Prior to the pandemic, these meetings took place in person and served as a convenient opportunity to collect survey and interview data from participants. These monthly meetings took on new significance after the shift to remote learning. While these meetings shifted to online gatherings as well, they became opportunities for teachers from the same district but different schools to strategize and compare pandemic responses and to problem-solve together.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of TEAMS Teachers

	Spruce	Juniper	Birch	Oak	Pine	Overall
Gender						
Female	100%	88%	86%	75%	80%	86%
Male	0%	13%	14%	25%	20%	14%
Race/Ethnicity						
White	78%	75%	71%	88%	70%	76%
Latino/a	0%	13%	14%	0%	20%	10%
Asian American	22%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%
Multiracial	0%	13%	14%	13%	10%	10%
Grade level						
Elementary	67%	63%	86%	75%	50%	67%
Middle	11%	38%	0%	13%	20%	17%
High	22%	0%	14%	13%	30%	17%

The five districts had a variety of similarities and differences in student composition. Table 2 provides demographic information about the K–12 student

population in each district. In all five districts, Latino/a students were the largest minoritized group, but the proportion of students identifying as Latino/a ranged from about 30% in the Spruce district to about 10% in the Juniper district. The Spruce district also had the largest proportion of students who had ever been classified as English learners, at about 30%, and the largest proportion of Asian students, at about 20%. The percentage of students receiving free- or reduced-price lunch ranged from about 30% in the Birch district to 70% in the Pine district.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of K–12 Students in Partner Districts, 2018–19

	Spruce	Juniper	Birch	Oak	Pine
American Indian/Alaska Native	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Asian	20%	1%	10%	1%	1%
Black/African American	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Hispanic/Latino/a	30%	10%	20%	20%	20%
Multiracial	10%	1%	10%	10%	10%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
White	50%	80%	70%	70%	70%
Ever English Learner	30%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	40%	40%	30%	40%	70%
District Size	Large	Medium	Small	Small	Small

Note. To preserve district anonymity, percentages have been rounded to the nearest 10 (where applicable, rounded to 1 rather than 0, to indicate students' presence). For district size, small refers to districts enrolling under 12,000 students, medium refers to districts as enrolling between 12,000–24,999 students, and large refers to districts enrolling 25,000 students or more (Schirm & Kirkendall, 2010).

Data Collection

Data were collected through focus group interviews administered at three time points and a survey administered at two time points. The authors conducted three rounds of teacher focus group interviews and administrator/ facilitator paired interviews in each district: in Fall 2019, prior to the pandemic; in Spring 2020, soon after the shift to remote learning; and in Fall 2020/ Winter 2021, during the second school year impacted by the pandemic. Overall, this resulted in 15 teacher focus groups with between 4–10 teachers each,

and 15 interviews with the administrator/facilitator pairs. The teacher focus groups were limited to one hour in duration to fit within the monthly teacher meetings, and most administrator/facilitator interviews were of a similar length. These conversations were transcribed using TEMI transcription software and analyzed using Dedoose qualitative analysis software to document participants' evolving work with family engagement, using the six phases of Harro's cycle of liberation to frame their experiences.

TEAMS was funded by a grant, which required an external evaluation. Surveys were administered to all teachers in the second TEAMS cohort by the grant's external evaluators, before and after teachers' participation in the program, in spring 2019 and Fall 2020/Winter 2021. The survey was originally designed to provide broad feedback to the funder and to grant personnel. For our analysis, we were able to use this deidentified survey data, aggregated at the district level. These surveys asked teachers broad questions about the impact of their participation in the TEAMS project on their beliefs and practices about educating multilingual learners. Topics included learning from the TEAMS coursework, ideas about multilingual learners, and practices related to family and community engagement, among others. For this study, we extracted the survey items related to family and community engagement. We then sorted these items into categories based on the six phases of Harro's cycle of liberation, allowing us to connect the survey data to our focus group interview data. Only teachers in the project participated in this survey; the district administrators and facilitators did not.

Data Analysis

The resulting data were analyzed using theoretical coding (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014) based on the six phases of Harro's cycle of liberation. Four of the authors were involved in the analysis process. The research team worked together to code several transcripts to develop our analytic codebook (MacQueen et al., 1998), defining and providing exemplars of each code. Table 3 shows the resulting codebook that was used to guide the analysis. Remaining transcripts were divided up and coded by three of the authors, with one author finally reviewing and reconciling differences in codes.

After receiving deidentified survey data from the external evaluators, the authors extracted the survey items that aligned with each phase of the cycle of liberation, as indicated in the codebook. One author then calculated the percentage of respondents indicating that they felt confident or very confident in the practices named in the relevant survey items prior to and after TEAMS participation.

Table 3. Cycle of Liberation TEAMS Codebook

Code Name	Definition of Code	Exemplar Code	Survey Items That Align w/Code
1-1 Waking Up	Becoming aware of a situation that is inequitable or problematic or seeing such a situation in a new way; typically an individual "a-ha" moment	I recognized that I'm not available to answer parents' questions at the times they are available to ask these questions	Make connections between EL and bilingual students' culture and concepts they were learning
1-2 Reaching Out	Once an inequity or problem has been noticed in a waking up moment, reaching out is talking about that inequity with others to try to understand additional perspectives or to get feedback on one's own perspective; requires talking with someone else about the issue but not necessarily with those affected, so teachers discussing these issues in TEAMS monthly meetings is an example	I reached out to peers in my cohort to ask if they're likewise recognizing a disconnect between when parents are trying to help their children and when I've been available to support parents	Collaborate with colleagues to better support EL and bilingual students Gather information about students' home and community resources
1-3 Building Community	In talking with others about an inequity that has been noticed, efforts are made to empathize and see the inequity as a shared issue to be addressed; this building community could involve initial conversations with those who are directly affected with a focus on the new perspective or could also involve continuing with "reaching out" conversations but focused on how the issue affects you as well others (emphasizes an empathy piece that may be missing from "reaching out")	I began trying to contact parents to ask them when they are most likely to have questions for me and the mode of communication that works best for them (text, phone, email, etc.)	Build positive relationships with parents of EL and bilingual students Serve as a resource and advocate for EL and bilingual students

Table 3, Continued

1-4 Coalescing	Once a shared desire to address an inequity has been reached, the group coalesces around a plan to address the inequity. Parents or other stakeholders need to be directly part of this planning for it to be "coalescing." If only the teachers/educators are doing the planning this is either reaching out or building community	Based on parent feedback I consider being available from 9–10 pm, three evenings per week to respond to parent questions and provide academic support. I confirm with parents that this is a better time for them.	Collaborate with community members to better support EL and bilingual students Use information about students' home and community resources to inform your teaching Engage EL families and communities in their child's education
1-5 Creating Change	Once a shared plan for addressing an inequity is agreed upon, communal action begins to create this change. This may involve just one teacher implementing new approaches with their families or multiple teachers trying similar or different things independently or multiple teachers trying the same or similar approaches	I began making myself available later in the evenings three evenings per week for parent communication, asking parents who do connect with me if this time works better for them and reaching out to parents who do not connect with me to remind them of my availability	Teach in ways that minimize the effects of cultural mismatch between home and school Incorporate family and community knowledge and resources in your classroom Provide culturally and linguistically relevant instruction to EL and bilingual students
1-6 Maintaining Change	Once there is action underway to create change, individuals need to share what is working with leaders who have some control over relevant structures and systems. New systems must be created to maintain meaningful change over time and beyond the work of individuals. Needed to prevent burn out, to share what has worked, and to encourage others to try similar approaches	I talked to my TEAMS facilitator and my school principal about the shift I made to be available to parents later in the evening and the positive changes I saw from this shift. I asked what we could do as a school community to build upon this together	None of the survey items connect to maintaining change

Findings: Progressing Through the Cycle of Liberation

As teachers and administrators in the TEAMS project worked and learned together to support their students and students' families in the shift to remote learning during the pandemic, they reflected a range of evolving beliefs and practices that aligned well with our framing of moving through Harro's cycle of liberation. Because we view the six phases of Harro's cycle as aligning with the three broader categories of intrapersonal change, interpersonal change, and systemic change, we pair Harro's six phases to present the findings in three sections. In each section, we describe the relevant phases of the cycle of liberation, considering patterns across the three time points of our data collection, between teachers and administrators, and across the five school districts. We provide illustrative quotes from the focus group interviews to elaborate on participants' thinking and practices related to family engagement during the pandemic. Finally, we summarize the survey responses for the items that align with the relevant phases of the cycle.

Intrapersonal Changes: Waking Up & Reaching Out

Waking Up

Individuals typically enter the cycle of liberation when a critical incident forces an internal change in what the person believes about how society functions and about the opportunities to which different people and communities may or may not have access. This is the waking up phase. For example, White, middle-class teachers may come to recognize that some of the challenges that seemed to show up as "new" problems during the pandemic, such as students having care responsibilities for younger siblings, were not actually new but were existing challenges that became increasingly visible. In the case of TEAMS participants, these challenges associated with the shift to remote learning resonated with other literature reviewed above, including insufficient technology and internet access, students with substantial responsibilities within their families, issues of food and housing insecurity, and basic trust in how the school system operates.

Interviews with teachers and administrators highlighted a range of examples that indicated ways in which they were waking up to inequities that the pandemic made more visible. Analysis of all interviews identified 207 total examples of waking up behaviors, with 36% of these occurring during Fall 2019 interviews, prior to the pandemic; 40% occurring during Spring 2020 soon after the shift to remote learning; and 24% occurring during Fall 2020 in the second year of remote learning. That is, waking up episodes were present over time, but were most often expressed in the months soon after the start

of quarantine and remote learning. Overall numbers and patterns of waking up incidents were largely consistent between teachers (47%) and administrators (53%). Across the five school districts, one district (Birch) demonstrated substantially fewer waking up episodes (13% of the total), and one district (Juniper) demonstrated substantially more waking up episodes (28% of the total). Two quotes, one from an administrator and one from a teacher, provide a picture of typical waking up episodes we encountered:

> One thing we got on quickly was parent connectedness and communicating. What do you have in terms of technology at home? And so, people are saying, yeah, we've got technology. And then we thought, well, no, they actually don't have a laptop. They have a smartphone, but that's really not sufficient to do the online work that you need to do. And then we found out, not everybody has Wi-Fi….So, we've discovered that it's a much larger gap than we thought in terms of families and parents really even feeling comfortable getting on and using a laptop versus their phone. (Birch District leader, Spring 2020)

Often, these waking up insights emerged when a teacher or administrator recognized more clearly how traditional school norms and practices that had been disrupted by the shift to remote learning had previously confounded their thinking about racial and socioeconomic differences, as the following quote illustrates:

> I just really feel like [remote learning] has illuminated huge differences in engagement and ability to participate and complete work…and it's almost painful to look at the two different grade books [for my "accelerated" and "on level" classes]. So, I'm really glad we're not grading. I mean if you were to parse it out and see how much of [the difference in participation] is based on race and how much of it is based on poverty.…It helped me see what was happening in this remote format. (Pine District teacher, Spring 2020)

Reaching Out

In the second phase of the cycle of liberation, individuals begin to broaden their perspectives and seek to extend their understandings of contradictions that are becoming visible. While reaching out episodes involve communicating with others, the focus at this point is still on intrapersonal growth and increased understanding of challenging issues.

Analysis of interviews identified 230 total examples of reaching out behaviors, with 36% of these occurring during Fall 2019 interviews, prior to the pandemic; 43% occurring during Spring 2020 soon after the shift to remote learning; and 21% occurring during Fall 2020 in the second year of remote

learning. Thus, much like the waking up episodes, the shift to remote learning in Spring 2020 prompted substantial increases in teachers' and administrators' articulating efforts at reaching out to others to increase their understanding. One school district (Spruce) described substantially more reaching out episodes (39% of total) than the other four districts, and administrators described more examples of reaching out behaviors than teachers (58% to 42%). Again, two examples, with one from an administrator and one from a teacher, highlight the nature of these reaching out episodes.

> One of our goals now really needs to be to reach out to our Latino community as we start thinking and planning for next year and beyond. Whether we will be hybrid or distance learning again or whatever it will be, we need to know, "What are your specific needs that we can take care of, and what should we think about that we haven't perhaps thought of this spring?" (Oak District administrator, Spring 2020)

While teachers and administrators increasingly perceived the importance of new approaches to build trust and community, they also recognized that academic learning needed support through new ways of reaching out. For example, initial approaches and efforts to contact students in the early days of remote learning were often fruitless and frustrating. Numerous participants pointed to unsuccessful efforts to connect with many of their students and families in the early days of the pandemic, for example:

> I was supposed to tutor these kids, but I've been calling their cell phone numbers. There is no way to reach many of them. Sometimes they have very unreliable communication. Some families, I think they avoid the calls because they are afraid of, if they've received calls before to tell them that their kid is in trouble, that he's not doing his work or whatever. So, it's been frustrating, and we really need some new ways to build reliable communication. (Pine District teacher, Spring 2020)

Survey Items for Waking Up and Reaching Out

Table 4. Percentage of Teachers Reporting Being Very Confident or Confident on Survey Items Aligned With Waking Up and Reaching Out

Survey Statement	Before TEAMS	After TEAMS	% Change
Gather information about students' home and community resources	29%	69%	40
Make connections between bilingual students' cultures and concepts they were learning	36%	71%	35
Collaborate with colleagues to better support bilingual students	69%	90%	21

Three survey items aligned with the waking up and reaching out phases of intrapersonal development within the cycle of liberation. As can be seen in Table 4, overall, most teachers in the study were only confident about using one of these three practices—collaborating with colleagues to better support bilingual students—prior to their participation in TEAMS. However, at the end of their TEAMS participation, most teachers expressed confidence in their ability to engage in all three of these practices.

When taken together, waking up and reaching out episodes highlight growing intrapersonal awareness about the challenges faced by multilingual families, brought about by the intersection of what teachers were learning from TEAMS coursework and what they were learning from teaching through the pandemic. Remote learning helped participants observe educational and broader social inequities in new ways, including how existing school policies and practices have contributed to those inequities. We interpret the strongest difference in waking up responses between Birch district (low) and Juniper district (high) in our qualitative data as based largely on geographic and demographic differences between these districts. Birch district includes a large university and had many support structures in place for multilingual family engagement prior to the pandemic. This can explain fewer waking up episodes due to existing consciousness of these issues. Juniper is a smaller, more rural, and less ethnically diverse district that had less prior support for multilingual families in place, leading to increased numbers of waking up episodes during the pandemic. We interpret the greater number of qualitatively reported reaching out episodes in Spruce district as due to it being the largest, most urban, and most linguistically diverse district. This has resulted historically in more efforts to reach out and engage parents than in other participating districts, and thus may explain greater efforts to continue reaching out to families following the shift to remote learning.

Interpersonal Changes: Building Community & Coalescing

Building Community

In the third phase of the cycle of liberation, individuals come to recognize that they cannot create meaningful and sustainable change alone, and they look to join in liberatory dialogue with others. In the case of TEAMS participants, the fact that they were already working together in district cohorts with support from leadership eased the process of building community within each cohort. Further, TEAMS teachers began building community with families through home visits (in person with social distancing or virtual), as TEAMS coursework helped teachers see home visits as a viable option for enhancing family engagement. Teachers who conducted home visits gained different experiences and insights when compared to traditional phone calls home or

parent–teacher conferences. In addition to home visits, examples of other actions that promoted community building among educators and families included: resource distribution events including both recreational and academic resources; virtual language classes; teacher professional learning sessions about community organizations; family advisory board meetings; new connections between teachers and university professors; outdoor art activities; and renovation and upkeep of community outdoor play spaces. Thus, teachers recognized that exploring new ways of building community could increase empathy and understanding, leading to different engagement outcomes and the potential for closer personal connections.

Interviews with teachers and administrators highlighted efforts to build community in new ways. Analysis of interviews identified 256 total examples of building community behaviors, with 37% of these occurring during Fall 2019 interviews, prior to the pandemic; 28% occurring during Spring 2020 soon after the shift to remote learning; and 35% occurring during Fall 2020 in the second year of remote learning. Thus, unlike for waking up and reaching out, references to building community fell off in the time period soon after the shift to remote learning but then rose again during the second year of pandemic-affected schooling. More variation in building community was visible across the five school districts, with Spruce (36%) district raising substantially more examples than the other districts, and Oak district (11%) raising substantially fewer references to building community. Administrators again identified more total examples describing building community behaviors than teachers (57% to 43%). Two examples provide snapshots of the sorts of building community episodes that were discussed:

> Initially in the spring, when we started the pandemic, I was delivering packages to students in person, and I got to know this family more. And then in the summer…I did some reading tutoring with the student in their backyard…and I got to know the mom and the brothers.…It wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for TEAMS and for the pandemic and just learning about their story.…They are immigrants from Guatemala, and their experiences put things into perspective for me. (Juniper District teacher, Fall 2020)

TEAMS participants also built stronger communities with each other in their district cohorts as they shared their own struggles as parents, trying to support their own children's remote learning. This helped build empathy for the multilingual families in their districts:

> And so, I have seen my daughter who has many comforts in this world, you know…a comfortable living situation, and to see how she has strug-

gled through the isolation even with the technology to connect with her friends every day.…So, she has this easy ability to connect with people, [but] it has really been a struggle for her emotionally and her understanding of who she is and how she belongs in this world…and so, I have thought deeply that if she has struggled, how about all the kids and families who don't necessarily have the comforts we do? (Oak District administrator, Winter 2021)

Coalescing

In the fourth phase of the cycle of liberation individuals come to recognize that talking across differences and gaining new knowledge about inequities can strengthen their resolve to take action together and to consider desirable changes to their business-as-usual practices. Once such a shared desire to address an inequity has been reached, the group coalesces around a plan to address it. Parents or other stakeholders need to be part of this planning for it to be considered an example of coalescing in Harro's model. That is, if only the educators were doing the planning, such episodes were considered to be reaching out or building community. For example, one area of emphasis in TEAMS coursework was for teachers to recognize that norms of child-rearing and home life that differ from their own experiences were not wrong, but just different. Teachers and administrators learned to practice listening to what families said they needed as support rather than what the teacher might assume the family needed.

Our interviews highlighted varied coalescing examples of how TEAMS participants more intentionally came together with parents to consider needed actions. Analysis of interviews identified 116 total examples of coalescing behaviors, with 18% of these occurring during Fall 2019 interviews, prior to the pandemic; 31% occurring during Spring 2020 soon after the shift to remote learning; and 51% occurring during Fall 2020 in the second year of remote learning. This pattern of coalescing examples differs from the three previous phases, with few coalescing moments occurring prior to the pandemic and the greatest number of episodes coming from the final time point during the second year of pandemic teaching. Across the five school districts, Spruce district (38%) again included the most examples of coalescing episodes while Oak (9%) provided the fewest examples, with the following quotes exemplify coalescing episodes:

> We've had closer family connections recently than we've had in the past and with more families because of COVID. We created a care and connection team that specifically revolves around supporting our families. There were things like home visits that were being done initially at the district level, and now we've moved that to the building level. And we

found that its often students letting us know that something's going on, and then our teachers following up right away to find a pathway for the issue, if the student needs clothes, the family needs housing. (Pine District administrator, Winter 2021)

TEAMS participants were also coming to recognize that their students' families had knowledge relevant to academic goals that could support students' learning, as opposed to pre-pandemic, when participants typically only referred to cultural knowledge when discussing what immigrant parents could contribute to their children's learning:

Are we giving value to the things our students are learning at home and the knowledge that families have? Do we recognize when you are using math and science at home? I started looking at students' moms in a different way. Kind of giving her more power like she's an expert too in certain things and really knowledgeable. We can engage families by showing the kids that their parents are knowledgeable and have things to teach. (Spruce District teacher, Fall 2020)

Survey Items for Building Community and Coalescing

Table 5. Percentage of Teachers Reporting Being Very Confident or Confident on Survey Items Aligned With Building Community and Coalescing

Survey Statement	Before TEAMS	After TEAMS	% Change
Serve as a resource and advocate for bilingual students	31%	98%	67
Engage EL families and communities in their child's education	19%	74%	55
Use information about students' home and community resources to inform your teaching	29%	79%	50
Collaborate with community members to better support bilingual students	26%	62%	36
Build positive relationships with parents of bilingual students	61%	81%	20

Five survey items aligned with the building community and coalescing phases of interpersonal development within the cycle of liberation. As can be seen in Table 5, most teachers in the study were only confident about their ability with one of these five relevant practices—building positive relationships with parents of bilingual students—prior to their participation in TEAMS. Despite the struggles with teaching through the pandemic, most TEAMS

teachers expressed confidence in using all five of these practices by the end of their TEAMS participation.

When taken together, building community and coalescing episodes highlight increasing interpersonal awareness about both the challenges that families faced in the transition to remote learning and the strengths families had to persevere in the face of these challenges. As with the earlier phases, teachers and administrators shared similar insights and examples of building community and coalescing to address academic and societal inequities faced by multilingual learners and their families. In these interpersonal phases, one district (Spruce) consistently raised the greatest number of examples during the focus group conversations, and one district (Oak) consistently raised fewer examples of building community and coalescing. These district-level differences can again be explained at least in part by community demographics. Spruce, as noted earlier, is the largest and most multilingual of the five participating districts, with an established multilingual learning department that was already active in supporting family engagement. Thus, Spruce district teachers and especially administrators were able to reference numerous efforts to connect with parents that were in place prior to the pandemic and could be adapted during remote education. Oak district, which is smaller and less linguistically diverse, was in the midst of politically motivated school district upheaval while also confronting the pandemic. Oak district teachers and administrators may thus have felt less secure reaching out to their multilingual families during this timeframe and/or less secure in discussing these issues during the interviews.

Systemic Change: Creating Change and Maintaining Change

Creating Change

In the fifth phase of Harro's cycle of liberation, participants come together and start to build a new culture that reflects the collective identity of the group. Attention begins to shift toward new understandings of systems and structures that cause inequitable conditions and specific changes that might be made.

Analysis of teacher and administrator focus groups identified 125 total examples of creating change behaviors, with 8% of these occurring during Fall 2019 interviews, prior to the pandemic; 18% occurring during Spring 2020 soon after the shift to remote learning; and 74% occurring during Fall 2020 in the second year of remote learning. We can see that efforts focused on creating change took longer to develop but then became prominent during the second year of pandemic-affected schooling. These episodes of creating change were more evenly distributed across the five school districts than other phases. Still, Spruce district (25%) again had the highest number of episodes, and Oak (14%) had the fewest. Between teachers and administrators, administrators again described more total creating change behaviors than teachers (64% to 36%).

Several TEAMS teachers began taking concrete steps to support new anti-racism efforts in their schools in response to a combination of their TEAMS coursework, the racial justice protests of 2020, and their direct work with families during the pandemic, as described by the administrator in Birch district:

> We started a new leadership development group…to become instructional leaders around anti-racist practices. Teachers had to submit an application and talk about why they wanted to be a part of this…and I noticed that there was a solid handful of our TEAMS teachers who applied for this cohort and mentioned…their experiences from TEAMS as part of their motivation for wanting to be in this anti-racist teacher leadership group. (Birch District administrator, Fall 2020)

Other teachers were identifying moments when they had the opportunity and obligation to speak up and challenge the perspectives of colleagues who were failing to recognize structural inequities that influence academic outcomes and perceptions. In the following example, a TEAMS teacher participating in a grade level student support meeting felt compelled to point out how the educator team was focused on students' academic and behavioral issues during remote learning without attention to the lived experiences of the students or recognition of the structural issues that often influence families' abilities to support school expectations:

> And I finally said, "Hey…we are not looking at this through an equity lens. What we expect from one kid, who is home alone with his four-year-old sister that he's taking care of, should not be judged [in the same way] as a kid whose mom is a stay-at-home mom, and they do the work together and turn it in together with all of this support." And I just felt super frustrated having to defend that…but I felt empowered to say, this is not right. We need to be looking at this differently. (Juniper District teacher, Fall 2020)

Maintaining Change

In the final phase of the cycle of liberation, participants recognize that building and sustaining justice-centered learning moving forward requires more than individual or even team efforts from teachers planning and working together. As TEAMS teachers and administrators were still grappling with remote instruction when we conducted our last interviews in Fall 2020 and Winter 2021, their goals for building new systems and structures around liberatory education were more aspirational than operational. For example, multiple TEAMS teachers recognized that despite what they were trying to do to create change, many of their multilingual students' parents still struggled to get the

support they needed because they did not know how to navigate the systems in the communities where they now lived.

Unsurprisingly, teacher and administrator focus groups included fewer examples of maintaining change episodes than any other phase of the cycle of liberation. Analysis identified 53 total examples of maintaining change behaviors, with 13% of these occurring during Fall 2019 interviews, 6% occurring during Spring 2020, and 81% occurring Fall 2020. As with creating change episodes, efforts focused on maintaining change took longer to develop but became more clearly visible during the second year of pandemic-affected schooling. Across the five school districts, Birch district (34%) described the greatest number of maintaining change episodes, while Oak district (8%) provided the fewest examples. Administrators again described more examples of maintaining change behaviors than teachers (75% to 25%). The following quote exemplifies these maintaining change episodes:

> I'm much more able to be a leader in terms of speaking out for equity. Partly because I feel like our district is taking stronger stands when it comes to equity, and so, I feel like when I step forward and speak up for equity, that's going to be heard, but also because of the work through TEAMS which has been really empowering when you can back up what you're saying with, this is what I know from research.…And so, I feel more comfortable pushing back against the status quo. (Birch District teacher, Fall 2020)

Survey Items for Creating Change and Maintaining Change

Table 6. Percentage of Teachers Reporting Being Very Confident or Confident on Survey Items Aligned With Creating Change and Maintaining Change

Survey Statement	Before TEAMS	After TEAMS	% Change
Provide culturally and linguistically relevant instruction to bilingual students	21%	95%	74
Incorporate family and community knowledge and resources in your classroom	29%	79%	50
Teach in ways that minimizes the cultural mismatch between home and school	31%	79%	48

Three survey items aligned with the creating change and maintaining change phases of structural change within the cycle of liberation (Table 6). Most teachers in the study initially lacked confidence about each of these three practices prior to their participation in TEAMS. As with the other survey

items, however, most teachers expressed confidence in all three practices by the end of their TEAMS participation.

When taken together, creating and maintaining change episodes highlight growing awareness of the need to change structures of schooling. As TEAMS teachers and administrators considered what they learned from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as from their participation in TEAMS more broadly, it became increasingly clear that multilingual learners and their families were not being equitably served by the education system. The pattern across districts, with Spruce district high and Oak district low, reflects the same pattern as for building community and coalescing and is likely a result of the same forces discussed above. The pattern for maintaining change episodes, with Birch district high and Oak district low, again reflects patterns that have been mentioned previously. Birch district's location in a university town provided resources and perspectives less common in some of the other districts, while Oak district's heated educational policy debates seems to have tamped down participants' efforts to change school structures.

Discussion and Conclusions

Because we were able to collect systematic data from both teachers and administrators in multiple school districts at three different time points, we can discuss several issues based on empirical data that have not been addressed to date in the literature on the effects of the pandemic on education. We begin our discussion by drawing connections to the emerging literature around teachers' and administrators' experiences and responses to the pandemic. Then, we briefly describe how the project work has continued since the end of the data collection described here. We conclude with suggestions of promising practices for enhancing multilingual family engagement in schools based on lessons learned from the teachers and administrators in this study.

Experiences of TEAMS Participants Compared to Others

In considering how the experiences and ideas of teachers and administrators in the TEAMS project compared to the research literature to date on the COVID-19 pandemic, we note numerous areas of overlap but also several important differences. While the similarities seem largely due to common impacts of the pandemic across the United States and in much of the world, the differences can be explained, at least in part, by the structures and activities of the TEAMS project.

TEAMS teachers reported many of the same challenges of pandemic teaching that have been mentioned in other studies, such as families' lack of needed

technology to engage in remote learning (Baker et al., 2021), struggles communicating with their students and their parents (Kraft et al., 2021), and their own personal struggles to balance their professional teaching role and their roles as parents themselves (Moss et al., 2020). Despite these similarities, TEAMS teachers consistently expressed one important difference. While other studies (e.g., Kraft et al., 2021) show a drop in teachers' sense of professional self-efficacy as they struggled to adjust teaching practices to meet a radically new teaching modality, the survey of TEAMS teachers shows quite the opposite. Nearly all TEAMS teachers exited the project in the winter of the second year of the pandemic expressing increased confidence in most of the practices for supporting multilingual family engagement. We attribute this enhanced self-efficacy, at least in part, to the intentional structures the TEAMS project put in place.

When we consider TEAMS administrators, we find that they likewise discussed many of the same pandemic response strategies that are reflected elsewhere in the literature on school leadership. This included reflecting on an increased need for clear communication (Okilwa & Barnett, 2021), flexible responses (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021), and optimism (Brion & Kiral, 2021). However, as with TEAMS teachers, TEAMS administrators expressed an important difference in their responses when compared to the broader literature on pandemic leadership. TEAMS administrators were often future-focused, highlighting changes that would be needed in the coming years to make their districts more equitable, such as building capacity for equity leadership. This differed from other literature where administrators were largely focused on day-to-day reactive responses needed to keep education systems running during the pandemic (e.g., McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). We attribute this difference at least in part to these administrators' connections to the TEAMS structures, as well as to structures that existed previously in districts such as Birch and Spruce. Support for family engagement in these districts that was already in place at the start of the pandemic could be more readily adapted when compared to districts where such structures needed to be constructed during pandemic schooling.

Promising Practices for Enhancing Multilingual Family Engagement

As schools have returned to updated versions of in-person teaching and learning, achievement data from 2020–22 show large and painfully inequitable learning losses that occurred during remote learning (Wortham & Forgety Grimm, 2022). The TEAMS research reminds us that while it is natural to focus on students' academic progress as a primary concern, supporting that academic progress is a multifaceted effort that requires simultaneous work at the *intra*personal, *inter*personal, and *systemic* levels. Schools need to build capacity at each level, and families can and should be part of that capacity-building.

Building *intra*personal capacity, both for teachers and for administrators, highlights the need for all of us to engage and deepen our personal understandings of families generally, of multilingual families specifically, and of the inequities that have always been part of our education systems in the United States and around the world. This intrapersonal growth can occur through coursework, reading groups, or informal conversations with colleagues, families of students, and others. The key point is to continue to learn the lessons that both the COVID-19 pandemic and racial justice protests can teach us about our education system and how it has always met the needs of some students and families better than others.

Building *inter*personal capacity for teachers and administrators requires further outreach and connection to learn with and for the benefit of others. This *inter*personal capacity-building is supported through professional learning communities that bring together teachers and leaders but must also involve direct engagement with families. There is a long history of teachers and administrators deciding what families need and how those needs can best be met (Barton et al., 2004). Lessons from the pandemic should teach us that supportive family engagement requires two-way exchange and direct communication to understand what families need and want for themselves.

Finally, while intrapersonal and interpersonal growth are both needed to create meaningful change, schools must also build systemic capacity. By its nature, systemic change takes time and the involvement of multiple stakeholders. Harro's cycle of liberation model emphasizes that individual goodwill, desire, and effort to make a positive difference for students can only be sustained when systems and structures are developed to ease this burden on individuals. Otherwise making and sustaining change falls to individuals who feel most strongly called to do this work. The data on teacher burnout and career change show that this is not a sustainable model (Ghanizadeh & Jahedizadeh, 2015). However, one accessible first step is to expand leadership opportunities for teachers and parents to help shape policy and practices. In the final section of this article, we share briefly about ongoing project work that has occurred since the end of the data collection reported here. Specifically, we share ideas about how the TEAMS project seeks to maintain change, the final and most challenging phase of Harro's Cycle of Liberation.

Maintaining Change Via TEAMS

The TEAMS project included supportive structures such as the district cohorts with monthly professional practice meetings for the full duration of teachers' time in the project, opportunities to stay connected as TEAMS alumni, the ongoing involvement of district administrators and facilitators to deepen

relationships over time, and a targeted focus on improving relationships with multilingual families to help everyone involved stay centered on a particular population. Our surveys and interviews indicate successes that resulted, at least in part, from this approach.

We highlight two examples, mentioned in the TEAMS data, of changes that build systemic capacity while strengthening family engagement. First, as schools transitioned back to in-person teaching, some began to develop comprehensive plans for addressing the increased mental and physical health needs of their communities along with increased academic needs (Phelps & Sperry, 2020). This has included adding health clinics, food pantries, and other resources to school sites. Such shifts in our collective vision for the role of schools as hubs for community services (Horn et al., 2015) can never come to fruition without the collective advocacy of families and school personnel. Funding from Oregon's Student Success Act (HB 3427, 2019), which raises taxes on corporations in the state to fund a variety of K–12 education investments, including expanding mental and physical health supports and school meal programs, serves as an important resource for districts' efforts (e.g., Oregon Department of Education, n.d.). This legislation was passed with intensive efforts from a wide range of stakeholders, including the teachers' union and a coalition of community organizations representing marginalized families, and ongoing advocacy efforts by these groups seek to ensure the legislation lives up to its promise (Oregon Partners for Education Justice, 2021).

As a second example, school and district leaders can expand their ideas about the kinds of work teachers should be compensated for, including the very time-consuming but highly valuable family engagement work that we witnessed from TEAMS teachers. We note that U.S. high school teachers already have nearly twice as many student contact hours per week as teachers in many other economically developed nations (Borthwick, 2021). School systems have an opportunity to rethink how we structure teachers' schedules as well as how we compensate teachers in ways that might enhance teacher retention. Again, new funding streams, including Oregon's Student Success Act (2019) and pandemic relief funds, provide opportunities for districts to invest in this work if they choose to prioritize it.

While our first iteration of TEAMS funding has ended, we recently received an additional five years of funding to extend and deepen our work in TEAMS 2.0. Importantly, the funding for the initial TEAMS project, as well as for TEAMS 2.0, comes from federally funded National Professional Development (NPD) grants. NPD grants are funded through an explicit, ongoing provision of the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), "to provide for professional development activities that will improve classroom instruction for English learners and

assist educational personnel working with English learners to meet high professional standards," and among other areas, the grants may focus on "strategies that strengthen and increase parent, family, and community member engagement in the education of English learners" (Title III, §3131). Over the past two years, nearly 100 NPD grants were awarded across the U.S., representing an investment of over $250 million (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The fact that this funding stream is ongoing and is an explicit part of federal law can be interpreted as a mechanism for maintaining change—a recognition at the federal level that building the capacity of educators to effectively serve multilingual students, families, and communities requires a dedicated, specific, robust, and ongoing investment.

Within TEAMS 2.0, we are incorporating a variety of strategies to deepen and maintain change within partner districts. The grant continues to support cohorts of educators in partner districts to earn their ESOL endorsement and/or Dual Language specialization. In addition, each district group is partnering with a local community organization serving multilingual families, co-planning and co-facilitating activities focused specifically on family literacy. We have deepened our emphasis on building not just teachers' but also leaders' capacity through professional learning for the district-based facilitators and for our district partners. The increased knowledge and skills that leaders build will serve as an important mechanism for maintaining change. In addition, we are working to recognize and build the skills of our TEAMS alumni, such as inviting them to serve as cooperating teachers for current TEAMS participants.

As school systems have returned to somewhat updated prior school structures, we must not forget what we have seen and learned about what has and has not worked well (Cahapay, 2020). If we take one lesson from the experiences of educators in the TEAMS project working through the pandemic, it is this: committed teachers can find creative and innovative ways to support their students under the most challenging circumstances for a time, but structural inequities built into our society are bigger than individual responses can meaningfully address. We are continuing the work, recognizing that only when we build a collective and inclusive exchange of voices and ideas can we create meaningful collective action that can bring lasting change for the common good.

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Building an Understanding of Family Literacy: Changing Practices Regarding Homework and Other Forms of School–Home Engagement

Kathy R. Fox

Abstract

School to home communication has often been seen as a one-way path, with homework and other materials serving children and families while teachers were the facilitators. When schools were forced to rapidly switch instruction from face-to-face classrooms to entering kitchens, living rooms, and other spaces to deliver virtual instruction, teachers were suddenly "in" the homes of their students. Findings from this qualitative study of 11 practicing teachers showed a new appreciation for family literacy efforts. Virtual doors were opened so that teachers had increased opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of cultural and academic practices in the home. Teachers now had access to families' funds of knowledge to enhance classroom curriculum and practices in the virtual space. As schools reopened and teacher, parent, and caregiver relationships returned to a more distant space, these participants described small but significant changes in the way they planned to engage parents and caregivers in the future.

Key Words: family literacy practices, homework, bidirectional parent–teacher engagement, home–school connections

Everyone is just doing the best they can. I have learned that it's important to take this into account when working with my students and to understand that I cannot expect the same outcome from all students and their families. I must be understanding of their individual circumstances and work with them accordingly in the absolute best way that I can!

Introduction

What have teachers learned from the virtual "home visits" of the COVID-19 pandemic school year? The above vignette shows how one participant in a pilot study of current teachers, described here, changed their attitudes towards parents. The year of transition from traditional face-to-face delivery of instruction to a variety of instructional virtual models for even the youngest children is of particular interest to the study of school–home engagement. It provided entry into the homes of children where teachers might not have previously ventured. Although the research on home visits is well documented (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021; Power & Perry, 2001; Szech, 2020; Wright et al., 2018), restrictions such as time concerns, privacy, and even fear has held many teachers back from taking this opportunity for true parent/caregiver and teacher exchange in the environment most comfortable for the parent. This is unfortunate because we know that in home visits teachers learn from the families and can better understand and value their contributions. Seizing the moment when teachers were connected with families virtually on a routine basis could help teachers realize the social capital gained from getting to know and understand families and caregivers, just as they expect parents and caregivers could benefit from their experiences with the school community (Lynch, 2021). Ginsberg (2007) described what teachers can learn about parents: "their contributions have helped make the school's curriculum rich and relevant in terms of global awareness. For example, with input from immigrant families, teachers at Barnes recently created story problems for a math unit on double-digit division that originated in real-life situations these families had faced in the process of resettling in the United States" (p. 17). This paradigm shift requires a shift in mindset, "to embracing family engagement as an equity mindset—where you see families as cocreators, regardless of what they look like, what language they speak, who they are" (Stoltzfus, 2021, p. 3).

As a teacher educator, my research interest is in family literacies or those literacy practices that take place in the home and other settings outside of school as an outgrowth of cultural and social capital. The importance of an additive perspective to bidirectional parent–teacher engagement to enhance working with children in the classroom, homes, and community is emphasized. Prior research examined homework as a school to home family literacy practice and how materials, such as homework, school newsletters, and even school forms,

could be viewed as a form of bidirectional or two-way communication from the school to the home and back to the school (Fox, 2010, 2016). Rather than quantify or qualify the effects of homework, the way homework is taken up in the many diverse settings called home that can inform teachers of how best to engage the child and even the family can be examined. How teachers use the information from the home may be referred to as *tapping the funds of knowledge* that exist in the home (Lindahl, 2015; González et al., 2013).

With the advent of the sudden transition to virtual schooling, would a broader definition of the work that teachers were doing with children in the homes now be called "homework?" Getting at the actual practice of this work would warrant an investigation into how parents, caregivers, children, and teachers negotiated homework as a collective team. Graduate students in their final semester of an advanced degree in literacy education—typically in-service teachers with a range of years of teaching experience—consistently expressed the same emotion during this transition period: a sense of loss paired with confusion that often resulted in frustration. In online discussion boards, written reflections on assignments, and anecdotal comments in class, students described decisions being made for them by administrators, complaints from parents and community members about school closings beyond their control, and fear for meeting the needs of the children in the remote environment. As time went on, however, the anecdotal stories began to change. An upside of the conversations with pre- and in-service teachers often included funny stories that emanated from virtually being in the kitchens, bedrooms, and living areas of the homes of their students. Prior to their virtual teaching experiences, current teachers may have missed out on what has been called "lessons from the kitchen table," where families shared stories with teachers on home visits (Ginsberg, 2007). Now, through their virtual teaching setting, tales of pets, younger siblings, extended family members, and children acting naturally as they received instruction in their homes seemed to lighten the challenge of remote instruction. Of research interest was how the dynamics between the home and school might change the way teachers interacted with the families in their future teaching, focusing on homework and other forms of family literacy.

This action research study was implemented to inform other teacher educators about new insights occurring with teachers' adjustments to virtual and blended teaching. An additional hoped-for effect was to inform current pre- and in-service teachers on how to interact with parents and caregivers, particularly in the new virtual climate. (Note: The terms "parents and caregivers" were used to purposefully acknowledge the multiple participants in the home and community of the child.) The initial question was: *What lessons can be learned from practicing teachers to better prepare pre- and in-service teachers for*

parent and caregiver engagement in the virtual environment as well as traditional school-to-home-to-school methods? This overarching question led to a logic of inquiry on homework as practiced in the home setting, as well as other forms of family literacy. As practicing teachers acquire tools to work virtually with children of all ages, backgrounds, and living situations in their home environments, how will parent and caregiver engagement with teachers over in-home instruction change? It was important to consider a beginning teacher in the initial years of the role, contemplating what to "send home" for the first time. It would be easy to see how old habits can return, such as one dimensional and traditional paper-and-pencil homework, especially without an alternative based on research situated in the home.

In this pilot study, a small group of teachers were asked about lessons learned from engaging with children and families during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic school transition to virtual and blended forms of instruction. This was a convenience sample of teachers in a graduate literacy degree program, all enrolled in the researcher's literacy course. Through our previous class discussions, it was discovered that participants were learning to communicate with parents and caregivers in different ways than they had used in prior years regarding both homework assignments and other forms of family literacy activities. After university Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the pilot study was initiated. Questions were designed to discern teachers' attitudes on the benefits of homework, parent communication, and family involvement in homework and the classroom (see Appendix). The evidence described in this small study provided insight for teacher educators on how teachers developed an increased appreciation of parents' and caregivers' relationships with their children from the virtual field trips, much like a home visit in the child's home. At the same time, because participants' responses acknowledged the untapped potential in their exchanges with parents and caregivers for academic engagement and support for their child, teacher educators can see opportunities to operationalize new and innovative bidirectional school–home engagement efforts.

What Prior Research Can Tell Us About Homework

In thinking about what I hoped to learn from this study, I began with assumptions from prior research on homework and other forms of school to home interactions (Cooper, 2001a; 2001b; Cooper et al., 2006; Dell'Antonia, 2014; Fox, 2016; KidsHealth, 2015). Traditionally, in both the colloquial sense and in the literature on the subject, homework has been characterized as a negative and even potentially traumatic event, as a hassle (Beaulieu & Granzin, 2004), as harmful to parent and child relationships (Bennett & Kalish,

2007), with little to no positive effects (Kohn, 2007), or as causing emotional distress (Dell'Antonia, 2014). A book called *Homework Without Tears* sold over 750,000 copies (Canter et al., 1988). In a review of over 120 studies examining homework, Cooper et al. (2006) described a synthesis of findings around the negative effects of homework, citing satiation, denial of leisure time, parental interference, and cheating (p. 7). Contrary to what more current research advocated, such as a more collective approach to family literacy practices, including homework, in the home (Fox, 2016), the majority of resources available on electronic searches continue to describe the parents' role as checking homework after completion (Beaulieu et al., 2004; Canter et al., 1988; Unger, 1991). A current search on homework on the U.S. Department of Education website cites National Parent Teacher Organization guidelines that recommend best practices for homework as having a well-lit place for homework away from T.V. and other distractions (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). "Staying away" from homework as a parent is emphasized, stating, "Too much parent involvement can prevent homework from having some positive effects. Homework is a great way for kids to develop independent, lifelong learning skills" (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 1). A somewhat isolated, non-participatory setting, away from electronics, with a parent as a monitor but not participant is often recommended (KidsHealth, 2015). For optimum conditions, the setting is traditionally recommended as a quiet space, away from distractions, with ample room to work. Special considerations, such as lighting and a student-sized desk, are often mentioned. (Vatterott, 2012). Assumptions concerning homework from prior research on the roles among stakeholders—children, parents and caregivers, and teachers—were consistent. Children were to complete the homework independently, away from distractions. Parents and caregivers were to provide the space for homework and to check that it was completed. Teachers were to provide assignments to be conducted in the home (Beaulieu & Granzin, 2004; Canter et al., 1988; Unger, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 2006; Vatterott, 2012).

What Previous Research Tells Us About Teacher–Parent and/or Caregiver Engagement

Although studies acknowledge the role of parents in supporting their child's homework (Fox, 2010; California Department of Education, 2004), the assumption that these conditions are reasonable and equitable is contrary to a collective approach to family literacy. In truth, scholars have known families live in diverse settings and situations, with their own sets of traditional practices and values that influence their concepts of parent involvement (Boethel, 2003; Chrispeels & Gonzalez, 2006; Fox, 2010, 2016; Ho et al., 2007; Hong

& Ho, 2005). The challenge is to operationalize pedagogy in meaningful ways so that pre- and in-service teachers can see their instructional practices through a culturally relevant lens that examines their diverse settings and situations. Exploring opportunities that enhance and barriers that prevent parent–school engagement is inherent in this critical lens (Anderson, 2014).

Culturally relevant pedagogy, defined as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002, p. 106), is an often-used term visible in programs of teacher education study and course syllabi. In the case of best practices for homework, culturally relevant pedagogy calls for teachers to see homework as a bidirectional opportunity. This approach to homework provides the teacher with opportunities to engage with the family through assignments that promote an exchange of cultural and linguistic information (Colombo, 2005; Cooper, 2001b; Fox, 2016). The goal of designing bidirectional homework in order to understand and build upon diverse literacy practices reflects what Edwards calls *parentally appropriate programs,* stressing the point that "because parents are different, tasks and activities must be compatible with their capabilities," interests, and preferred practices (Edwards, 2009, p. 83).

Virtual schooling is not new, with 501 full-time virtual schools enrolling 297,712 students and 300 blended schools with 132,960 students in the U.S. offering some type of virtual learning in 2018 (Molnar et al., 2019, p. A-1). A 2019 report prepared for the National Policy on Education Council gave a dire description of existing virtual schools in the U.S. and went as far as recommending a moratorium on virtual schooling until the issues were addressed (Molnar et al., 2019). Lack of scientifically based research into successful practices, nonstandard and missing accountability measures, and lack of equity factors both evaluated and/or addressed were some of the concerns. An additional concern provided information on the potential of bidirectional homework and family literacy activities when done with the intent of cultural exchange. Molnar's team found that very little attention was paid to the cross-cultural differences in virtual instruction delivery. The report described lessons as lacking in ways to address the needs of diverse populations. This finding provides a rationale for examining what was learned in the year of virtual instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic so that teachers can better design not only virtual instruction, but also ways to engage diverse parents and caregivers.

Methods

As stated in the introduction, this pilot study emerged as inservice teachers in a graduate language and literacy program held informal conversations,

participated in class activities, and wrote in class discussion boards about their experiences during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant taught at a different school in one of five different counties in the region surrounding the university. Grade levels taught ranged from K–11; classroom designations included self-contained, special education, literacy coach, and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Questions arose regarding the expectations for in-home work through virtual instruction as compared to independent homework practices prior to and during the COVID-19 virtual instruction period. As a researcher, the homework and other forms of family literacy practices were intriguing: What were teachers learning about in-home literacy practices through their virtual interactions with children, their siblings, and other family members? While the greater culture and society were being affected by the pandemic, it was important to capture the phenomenon for teachers, children, families, and caregivers.

A qualitative phenomenology framework was used to examine the survey data and identify trends and outliers. Phenomenology is a theoretical research approach that investigates human perspectives of individuals who are vital to the settings and environment (Giorgi, 1994; Patton, 2002). As in a "telling case" (Mitchell, 1984), the phenomenon is authenticated and valued, with the potential to impact future research. Phenomenology research is primarily concerned with examining the shared experiences—or the phenomena—of a group, in this case, teachers in the new experience of virtual teaching in the homes of the children they had previously taught in traditional classroom delivery. In particular, how group members interpret and make meaning throughout the experiences (Patton, 2002) is an outcome of phenomenology. The lens of phenomenology research was used as a framework to analyze the survey responses.

To explore the phenomenon, a grounded theory approach was needed. Grounded theory is a structured yet flexible methodology rooted in fresh data, "appropriate when little is known about a phenomenon; the aim being to produce or construct an explanatory theory that uncovers a process inherent to the substantive area of inquiry" (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 1). Results of the data analysis would then lead to guiding questions for further study (Walsh et al., 2015). Ultimately, capturing the in-time decisions teachers were making was important to operationalizing the results for teacher education and professional development programs.

The participants in this pilot study were from a convenience sample of in-service teachers in a graduate level language and literacy class. The class members were invited to participate in this study to "explore family literacy practices observed during the COVID-19 pandemic virtual schooling period"

by completing a one-time, open-ended, written electronic survey. Because the project involved in-service teachers completing the survey about their own school sites and classrooms, the methodology protocol was particularly important to establish (Green & Harker, 1988). Participants were informed of their right to participate or decline in the survey without it affecting their course grade. They would not be asked to identify themselves or their school. Because of the intimate nature of the small class, the results would not be shared in class by the instructor. Everyone in the class (*n* = 11) chose to participate and completed the survey.

This pilot study was designed to gather data from teachers' reflections on homework and other forms of family literacy through their new virtual lens. In true inquiry of the phenomenon, the intent of the survey was to capture "a view of the world encompassing the questions and mechanisms for finding answers that inform that view" (Birks, 2014, p. 18) that would eventually affect pre- and in-service teacher development. The survey provided a starting point for the pilot study to build upon for later expansion of the study that would include a wider, more diverse participant group of teachers.

In designing the survey, how to understand teachers' previous thoughts on family literacy practices and how they may have changed due to the transition from traditional in-school instruction to virtual instruction was considered. The participants had all experienced going from face-to-face instruction to virtual instruction at some point over the year prior to the study. In thinking about what new knowledge was desired, questions started with assumptions based on prior research on homework. Survey questions focused on the participants' interactions with families and caregivers. This included queries on their appreciation of homework prior to, during, and after COVID-19 pandemic changes in their instruction. Questions 1–5 addressed homework design, return, and effectiveness. Questions 6–10 focused more broadly on lessons learned on other family literacy practices from the recent virtual engagement with parents and caregivers. The final question specifically asked how their parent/caregiver outreach would change in the upcoming school year after having had the virtual experience with children and families in their homes. A complete list of Questions 1–10 is in the Appendix.

Looking for both trends and outliers in the data, the theoretical tool of critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) was used to analyze survey responses. The data was examined for both scholarly inquiry and for the potential pedagogical impact on current class design. Knowing this pilot study had the potential to lead to a larger study, attention was paid to the design of the questions in order to evoke a greater depth in the participant responses. Questions were left broad and open ended. As in any pilot study, the questions were stated clearly and

so that the responses would yield usable data, yet not necessarily generalizable. Rather, this unique phenomenon suggested a "telling case" approach to the data analysis (Mitchell, 1984). Ways to operationalize the findings to increase effectiveness of the researcher's course design to support pre- and in-service teachers still working through the impact of COVID-19 pandemic were desired. *In-vivo* coding was used to capture statements and phrases from the participants' own language (Miles et al., 2014) that addressed the overarching research questions of how to better prepare preservice teachers for parent and caregiver engagement in the virtual environment around existing family literacies and school work. Even though the responses were anonymous, using a convenience sample of students, there was a sense of the participant–observer in reading the responses.

Results

Evidence derived from this small study provided insight for teacher educators on how teachers developed an increased appreciation of parents' and caregivers' relationships with their children from the virtual home visits initiated by school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Questions were designed to explore teachers' attitudes on family literacy practices, including homework, parent communication, and family involvement in homework and classroom.

Results showed emerging themes. A general lack of appreciation for homework both prior to COVID-19 pandemic school closure and after was expressed. What was called homework, however, was not clearly defined. Teachers stated a deeper appreciation of parents and families' involvement in children's education, as well as parents' and caregivers' growing involvement in curriculum. Some bidirectional benefit was noted from teachers' learning about cultural and familial practices from the return of the homework and the virtual home visits. A mutual sympathy was also expressed in statements describing how challenging the COVID-19 pandemic had been for all stakeholders.

Participants shared mixed feelings about homework and family engagement. The issues with homework seemed to be amplified with the pandemic's closure of traditional face to face instruction, namely parents' perceived lack of participation or overdoing participation in homework. For example, one participant said,

> I have always thought homework was not a necessary component of education. Some families are going to overly support or do students' homework. Some parents are not going to be able to have the time or resources to dedicate to students' success with homework.

No participants described values or benefits of homework.

The most favorable comments were about parents and children spending time together with homework, for example, "Homework should be a time when parents read to and with their children."

The acknowledgement of parents' time with children was described by more than one participant. One said,

> I've tried to involve families as much as possible this year and provide parents and caregivers with concrete steps to help their student succeed as much as possible. Instead of sending home a work sheet with practice problems or spelling words, I try to advise parents what skills their child needs to practice so that the parent can do it in a way that works for them and their student.

Some participants described how their classroom homework policy had changed this year:

> However, I have only been giving "homework" for our Wednesday remote learning days…on the other days when students are in-person, I haven't been giving any homework.

> I decided not to give homework this year, because all work was done at home or able to be completed at home….Instead of thinking in terms of "pages" to complete or read, teachers thought about how many minutes each assignment would take. We all agreed that students should spend more than 30 minutes a day on any one subject.

> This is the first year I have not given homework and I can tell it is a huge relief to my students and families. I am hearing more stories about things they do at home, with their families, that they might not have had time to do when they had daily homework.

Of the 11 participants, all who were currently teaching, six said they did not send homework. Two of the four participants who did assign homework described using a weekly or monthly Homework Choice calendar. This practice, which we had previously discussed in class, gives children opportunity to choose the homework assignments they will do that week. Choices include individual work as well as family, project-oriented work. Two of the four participants said they gave daily homework for the remote instruction days only. For those four participants who said they gave some type of homework, the return was described as 75%, 75%, 75%, and 90%, respectively.

For those seven teachers who said they gave no homework, they acknowledged that this could be different from what parents expected. Examples include: "I do not give homework—this is puzzling to some parents and families, but others are grateful to not have this extra task to complete with their

student," and "Our parents actually have always asked for homework, or complained when we didn't give any, that is why we've been giving it these past few years (we tried to not give it one year and parents freaked)." For those students who do not submit homework as given, it was described as "Most of my students return their take home packets, however sometimes the packets are only partially completed if the student or their families are having a hard time with directions. Sometimes the student also says that they didn't have time to finish or maybe they didn't realize there was a back page to something" and "I have 2–3 students that consistently do not do their remote work. Parents typically do not give a response, or state their child is too stressed out or busy to do it." Participants described how they were responsive to parent requests for digital homework: "In previous years, parents would ask me questions like, 'My child turn this in digitally?' I always said yes, and even created a folder for students to drop assignments into, and be flexible about how children showed evidence of work," and "I do ask students to just color in each time they read to justify our schoolwide program of Book-it."

When asked to describe the benefits of homework in terms of "individual and/or collective," all 11 participants responded that homework is or should be a more collective activity. Several qualified their statements by saying it depends on the family with what type of support they may be able to offer, for example, "…it may not be fair to assume that all families can dedicate time and resources as part of a collective activity." Two of the 11 included the need for individual homework assignments together with collective, more family-engaged homework assignments. One respondent described a practice in the planning stage with another teacher that would involve project-oriented homework that would span across different subject areas. She described the change: "This way, students can work together outside of school with each other and their families."

Participants were asked to describe how they communicated best with parents and caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures. Three modes of submission were given that included email, text messaging, and Class Dojo. Some respondents used two and/or three of these mediums. One respondent identified herself as an ESL teacher with responsibilities across seven grade levels at one school. She stated she had begun a practice she called "family dialogue journals." She described these journals as weekly communication logs between her and the families. Children and family members used the journal beyond the initial use as a homework assignment. She related how a grandmother used the journal to ask about how to help the young child she was caring for. She ended the response by saying, "Next year, I want to use family dialogue journals so that I can learn about home literacies without parents feeling like I'm prying, because everyone will be doing it!"

Participants described their engagement and interactions with parents and caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures. Six of the 11 respondents described the parent participation as very high and/or higher than previous years (e.g., "I have had lots of parent/caregiver participation this year, in the form of texts, emails, phone calls, and participation in our live Google Meets"). Other participants described the range of parent involvement (e.g., "Being that [instruction] is still occurring ONLY through zoom, the parents are usually there to help their children get online and with certain lessons—cooking lessons, etc.—but of course, there are always [children] whose parents are nowhere to be found when something goes wrong with the tutee's end of the zoom call."). Another participant described declining parent interactions as follows: "…some parents have taken advantage of not being able to come in, since this means they don't have to come to IEP meetings or behavioral conferences with the teachers and admin so they are able to avoid it." That same respondent described other parent interactions as "more parents open to texting me with their issues rather than calling, and we haven't had any conferences this year unless absolutely necessary." Three participants described the parent interactions as "very low," "non-existent," and one summed it up with "very low. I hardly get responses from parents. I think everyone is very stressed and overwhelmed."

Participants were asked what parent and caregiver engagement in the virtual classroom was observed. Answers ranged from parents joining in on Zoom conversations to parents sharing personal issues and concerns about the child to parents and caregivers asking for help for working with the child. Other types of parent engagement were more instructional and shared with the whole class through zoom. Examples included a parent who led a class science experiment, a parent sharing how their family celebrated Easter with the example that "you do not eat chicken the three days leading up to Easter," parents sharing tamale recipes and traditions around a study of Christmas in Mexico, and another child sharing knowledge about building a family garden. One example showed how parents could contribute more spontaneously when the teacher provided that opportunity: "Parents who would join in on activities with us during Zoom time to demonstrate interest in a particular subject such as learning about pumpkins and having the parent bring over different kinds of pumpkins into the viewing screen for the kids to see a different type." One participant described how she purposefully designed bidirectional activities that would include time for families to share family news, events, and traditions: "Completing a family pennant and 'what's on the fridge'; the fridge is an area where students can talk about what is happening at home. I have learned a lot about my family's cultures from this activity." Two participants described how

they hoped to engage parents more in the upcoming year with bidirectional family journals, where teachers and parents and caregivers could write to each other, and more opportunities to participate. Only one participant responded with no additional information or goals for the upcoming year, saying, "Honestly, I can't think of any."

Participants described new ways to address parents and caregivers in the upcoming year. Due to the timing of the survey (i.e., in the last week of the master's program and just three weeks from the end of the school year), all participants were in some stage of transition. Some planned to go on to new roles, others to different grade levels and/or schools, and some to stay at the same job but without graduate school as a responsibility. For their upcoming year the responses reflected a need to keep parent–teacher communication open, even if the school year uses more traditional delivery. Participants mentioned continuing to use Zoom for parent information nights and literacy events. Holding virtual meetings was mentioned by two respondents. Using Google Voice and text messages was described as a desired way to communicate for two respondents, particularly for parents who spoke languages other than English, by using translation features. Sending photos and positive messages to inform parents of students' progress was described by one participant. One participant stated she would send a survey at the beginning of the year, "to see what would be beneficial to them as a parent/caregiver." One participant described what the parents had learned and how she hoped they would now, "but also having them understand boundaries. I think this year has been successful in parents understanding that teachers have lives and responsibilities just like they do outside of our jobs! [participant emphasis]."

The final question asked participants to summarize what they had learned about parents and caregivers from working remotely with children in the homes. Overall participants described respect for the challenges of parenting, for example, "Everyone is just doing the best they can." This was repeated in almost every response, with statements such as "I must be understanding of their individual circumstances and work with them accordingly in the absolute best way that I can!" and "My students deal with so much more than I could ever know or understand when they leave the four walls of school, and I need to be as empathetic as possible while also holding families and students to high expectations." A sense of missed opportunities and desire to work with parents was also evident (e.g., "I have learned that these families have so much potential for learning engagements and that we are missing the opportunities to tap into those experiences" and "Families love to play academic-based games and enjoy using Class Dojo to find out what's going on in the classroom and to communicate").

Some participants seemed to appreciate the experience of being close up with the family through remote learning, "Being virtual seems to break down a barrier between the home life of students and the school environment. It feels less separated when the children are learning from their homes and you are teaching from your home." Other participants noted the challenge of remote learning:

> Children crave routine and attention in a way that isn't negative or based off of rewards. They want to share with their teachers their stories and toys and jokes. Being out this time last year and not getting that end of year experience has made me more grateful for it this time around.

Another participant stated,

> I have learned about what jobs they have, what their home schedule is like, what time they typically get work done based on when the parents are available to help. I have learned that students prefer to be in school rather than doing remote work on their laptop.

The emerging theme from Questions 1–10 was the acknowledgement of parent and caregiver engagement, while at the same time lacking acknowledgement of traditional homework as important to this engagement. "Everyone is just doing the best they can" seemed to sum up many of participants' responses regarding the work across stakeholders. Regarding a more bidirectional and culturally relevant approach to working with parents and caregivers, an additive theme emerged: "Encourage families to be a part of your classroom by keeping lines of communication open. If those lines seem to close, collaborate with other teachers and for feedback about what you're doing and ask them what they are doing."

Discussion

Results from this pilot study showed teachers' declining use of traditional homework as an instructional practice. As in prior research (Canter et al., 1988; Fox, 2010), a lack of return on assignments as well as feeling that homework added stress to the home were noted comments. Responses showed that many participants expressed no need for continuing homework as they knew it. What seemed unclear was a delineation of homework from schoolwork done in the home but submitted electronically. This blurring of lines between academic work done in homes through a virtual classroom and academic work done in the home outside of school hours was not seen as a conflict by participant responses. When a participant expressed, "I don't assign homework,"

this same teacher described her instructional method as teaching virtually four days of the week with one day as "remote." On this day, she reported that she assigned "homework." This implies that the work she assigned from her screen synchronously to the home was considered schoolwork. When off screen and after school hours, it was called "homework." What is not acknowledged in this disconnect of terms is that to a parent or caregiver, much less the child, all work done in the home is homework. All is open to the members of the home. Just as traditional "schoolwork" is a part of the school, all work done in the home is in a sense, "owned" by the home. The lack of cultural awareness cited in the 2019 Molnar et al. report was continued in this aspect of the current study responses.

Another modification to future school–home engagement was the participants' plans to continue electronic meetings with parents and caregivers. Parent conferences and IEP meetings conducted through apps such as Zoom were two ways participants described as working well and something they should continue. Participants described the benefit of email and text messaging for more consistent communication. Programs such as Class Dojo, Remind, Google Voice, and Schoology were named as schoolwide communication methods that offered information not only to and about the child, but also were used to communicate directly with parents (Fox et al., 2020; Laho, 2019).

Successful virtual schooling for multiple children in diverse home settings, when seen through the lens of previously published best practices for homework, goes against the typical guidelines. Instead, teachers see less need for quiet spaces with fewer distractions, and instead see engagement with the child in the home setting over schoolwork as a communication time that includes family members. What Ginsberg (2007) described as lessons learned from families at the kitchen table was valued by teachers in the virtual home visit. These interactive lessons had the potential to contribute to the curriculum, with parents and family members serving as classroom resources.

Results from this pilot study showed that teachers gained a new appreciation for the diverse home settings, needs, and situations of the children with whom they worked. Almost all participants expressed, at least once, a respect for the challenges of parenting a school-aged child during the school closures. Participants acknowledged parents and caregivers as loving providers. The stress of parenting was also acknowledged; "doing the best they can" seemed to be described in multiple ways as something participants learned from the virtual teaching experience.

Implications and Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a paradigm shift for many educators who previously never saw themselves as online educators. Just as for participants in this pilot study, many teachers—in just a few days and/or weeks—transitioned their traditional in-classroom instruction to virtual communication from teacher to the diverse home settings of the children they taught. What lessons from this bidirectional window did teachers learn to affect future engagement with parents and caregivers?

Designing homework to be bidirectional so that it not only informs the family about the academics of the classroom, but also brings information from the family to inform the teacher was a goal stressed to my in-service education students. The "tapping of family resources," a term associated with families' funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 2001), was espoused in my classes and among my in-service students as a common goal. What these readings and exemplars did not do however was make the bridging from school to home and back to school operational for my previous university students. Barriers between school and home were too strong. Regulations against travel, the long working hours of a teacher, and fear of the other, even when this "other" was the parents and neighborhoods of the very children they taught, precluded getting to know the communities of the children. Initiatives like beginning of the year bus rides into the communities (Fox et al., 2020; Rodriguez, 2007) and salary incentives for "growing our own teachers" did not open the door and enter the kitchens and living spaces. Research on summer and holiday learning loss, characterized as the "faucet effect" (Entwistle et al., 2001), added to new fears of academic loss due to disconnection from the brick-and-mortar resources housed in the school. What was missing was a learned, actualized belief that teachers could enter homes; bridge cultural, linguistic, social, and economic gaps; and work with the child within diverse home and community settings.

The study presented here shows initial thoughts from a select group of K–12 teachers. The consistency of their responses regarding homework as an unnecessary practice in their future classrooms showed a disconnect from what they considered work done in the home after instructional hours and that they assigned in the virtual classroom. An increased appreciation for the work of parents and caregivers with children was consistent across responses. The responses that addressed future engagement with parents showed interest in more interactions, more parent participation in the classroom, and more interest in what cultural knowledge the parent and caregiver could bring to the classroom. The participant quoted in the opening vignette acknowledged the missed opportunities of the past that she hoped to change by tapping into

parent knowledge for better teaching. In acknowledgement of the challenges many families faced, teachers described innovative outreach efforts. Using technology for meetings and ongoing communication with parents and caregivers provided more access and consistency. This not only made communication more efficient but provided an opportunity for the parents to have ongoing access to the teacher as well.

The report submitted to the National Educational Policy Council found barriers that were making virtual instruction unsuccessful and even detrimental in some cases (Molnar et al., 2019). Just months after this report was presented, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the rapid and unanticipated closing of schools across the U.S. and throughout the world. Issues such as lack of accountability, consistency, and cultural awareness were described. The current study reported here shows ways teachers, when the virtual window makes it possible, can learn from parents and caregivers, making a bidirectional exchange from school to home and to school again. As one participant stated, she would send a survey in the beginning of the year to ask parents what type of support they would need in the upcoming school year. Another participant designed a two-way journal where she could communicate with parents and caregivers to offer academic support but also to keep on top of family and community needs. These beginning efforts to make real the promise of school–home connections is one unexpected outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic. The forced virtual entry into kitchens and living spaces of the children they taught opened a small window for this group of teachers to view authentic family literacy practices surrounding homework and other school–home work.

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Appendix. Survey Questions

1. Since returning to face-to-face instruction (post COVID-19 initial closing), how has your perception of "homework" changed? Please describe here. [Open ended text box]

2. What method of homework distribution do you most currently use?
   • Daily, depending on daily assignments
   • Daily, on a repetitive schedule (e.g., Monday—Math, Tuesday—Reading to self, etc.)
   • Weekly, with a repetitive nightly routine
   • Weekly, project-oriented
   • No homework
   • Other, please specify [Open ended text box]

3. What is the rate of return on your homework?
   • 100% return
   • About 75% homework return
   • 50%–74% homework return
   • Less than 50% homework is returned
   • I don't give homework
   • Other [Open ended text box]

4. Please describe the type of homework response you get from children, parents, and caregivers: [Open ended text box]

5. How would you describe your parent/caregiver participation this school year? Briefly, in your opinion of best practices in teaching, do you consider homework to be a family (collective) activity or an independent activity for the particular grade level you teach? Please explain your response. [Open ended text box]

6. What forms of parent communication have worked the most effectively for you in this year of COVID-19?
   • Written
   • Phone call
   • Text messages
   • Email
   • Unsure
   • Other, please specify [Open ended text box]

7. How would you describe your parent communication in this year, impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic? [Open ended text box]

8. Please list your best example of families/caregivers sharing their "funds of knowledge" with you and/or in your classroom. [Open ended text box]

9. In what ways, if any, do you plan to increase parent and caregiver engagement this year? [Open ended text box]

10. In summary, what have you learned about children, families, and caregivers over this past year? [Open ended text box]

TeleNGAGE: Promoting Transformative Equitable Collaboration Between Families and Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate, through the lens of Adult Learning Theory, the perceived influence of TeleNGAGE on educators' and families' capacity to collaborate in equitable and transformative ways. Findings suggest that educators' and families' capacity for collaborative problem-solving was enhanced through TeleNGAGE. This social learning space, which supported adult preferences and motivations for learning, created a synergy that led to equitable social status, the application of new knowledge, and innovative approaches to problem-solving. These findings provide insight into equitable collaborative initiatives as educators seek to find solutions to complex problems in their schools.

Key Words: transformative equitable collaboration, family engagement, professional development, online, virtual collaborating, ECHO, TeleNGAGE, family–school–community partnerships, families, teachers, administrators

Introduction

Family engagement has been an integral part of school reform across the United States for decades (Sanders, 2014). The most recent revision to the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), requires schools to reserve at least 1% of their Title I funding to support family engagement. Specifically, ESSA requires schools to develop, in collaboration with parents, a written policy that explains how the school will involve families in education (Texas Education Service Center, 2021). These efforts align with evidence in the literature citing benefits of family engagement including improved grades and test performance (Gonzalez & Jackson, 2013; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) and enhanced student motivation, behavior, attendance, and optimism toward schooling (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; McConnell & Kubina, 2014; Oberg De La Garza & Moreno Kuri, 2014).

Despite these understandings, evidence suggests that collaboration between schools and families is quite rare (Rispoli et al., 2018). Explanations for this rarity include White, middle-class paradigms that drive most engagement efforts yet alienate minority or underresourced families (Alameda-Lawson, 2014), limited educator understandings of student cultural contexts (Epstein et al., 2011), and socioeconomic factors that hinder family access to schools (Bardhoshi et al., 2016). Most recently, Ishimaru (2019) argued for more equitable, less schoolcentric approaches to collaborative efforts. This approach, which Ishimaru termed "transformative equitable collaboration," differs from family engagement by positioning families as co-contributors of knowledge and decision-making. Ishimaru explains that by providing families "a place at the table to contribute their expertise in shaping the education agenda" (p. 2), families, communities, and schools are able to work collaboratively to support students.

Statement of the Problem

While benefits of family engagement are well established, educator approaches to family engagement may not always reflect collaborative efforts, especially in diverse communities (Walker & Legg, 2018). For example, school leaders often rely on traditional, symbolic forms of partnerships that satisfy policy mandates but do little to authentically engage families (Auerbach, 2010). Additionally, communication with parents is typically based on a need to pass on information with little regard for input from parents as a resource to meet student needs (Hirsto, 2010).

In contrast, modern conceptualizations of engagement situate families as active participants in partnership efforts. These collaborative approaches recognize family members as adult learners with corresponding needs of independent learning, recognition of social status, application of knowledge, and self-motivation, key tenets of Adult Learning Theory (Isenberg, 2007; Merriam, 2001). Specifically, by including families in efforts to enhance family–school partnerships, the concurrent development of educator and family dispositions, skills,

and knowledge may support sustainable partnerships (Ishimaru, 2019). The rigorous challenges of the teaching profession and the increasing demand for better educational outcomes have further increased the need for professional development that is grounded in the robust theoretical framework of adult learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

An opportunity for this type of collaborative learning between families and educators was established through Project ECHO in the TeleNGAGE ECHO line. TeleNGAGE was created at Oklahoma State University as a form of professional development that connects families, community members, and school staff (including teachers and leaders at the building and district levels) to strengthen relationships that support student learning. This online professional development platform, established in the Fall of 2020, provides opportunities for one hour twice each month for families, school staff, and community members to engage in authentic conversations through case-based problem-solving, didactic presentations, and dialogue. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate, through the lens of Adult Learning Theory, the perceived influence of TeleNGAGE on educators' capacity to collaborate with families in equitable and transformative ways.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult Learning Theory was utilized to develop research questions and to explain the findings of the study. Adult Learning Theory, introduced by Knowles in 1968, has been espoused in the classical works of Knupp (1981), Langer and Applebee (1986), and Zemke and Zemke (1995). Two pillars enrich the understanding of Adult Learning Theory: andragogy and self-directed learning (Merriam, 2001). Knowles (1980) described andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 43) and pedagogy as "the art and science of helping children learn" (p. 43). The underlying assumptions of andragogy describe an adult learner as someone who directs his own learning, learns from and with a wealth of experience, has needs for learning from a social status, is interested in the application of knowledge, and is self-motivated (Isenberg, 2007; Merriam, 2001). The purpose of self-directed learning is to develop the learner's capacity, foster transformational learning, and promote emancipatory learning and social action (Isenberg, 2007; Merriam, 2001). These assumptions offer insights into how learning opportunities may be designed to meet the specific needs of adult learners.

Self-Directed Learning

Andragogy assumes that adults have an innate psychological need to self-direct their own learning. Self-directed learning does not mean that adults desire to learn independently or in isolation. Rather, they seek to be active agents in

the learning process instead of passive recipients of transmitted information (Knowles et al., 2005). Environments tend to satisfy the need for self-direction when they structure learning as a process of mutual inquiry and position learners as co-constructors of knowledge (Knowles et al., 2005).

Learning From Experience

The second assumption of andragogy is that an adult's accumulated life experiences are a rich source of learning (Knowles, 1980). Specifically, experiences form connected webs of knowledge known as mental models that adults carry with them into new learning spaces. Adults, then, use these existing mental models to filter new information and add meaning to new ideas and concepts they encounter through learning (Clapper, 2010; Mezirow, 1997). Ultimately, these shared experiences become the foundation for the co-construction of new knowledge.

Need to Learn for Social Roles

Another assumption of andragogy is that adults are motivated when learning aligns with the roles they fulfill (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Connecting learning with an adult's social role enhances meaning and the ability to apply new information. The social role of a learner, therefore, has been shown to be a primary reason adults engage in learning activities (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Application of Knowledge

Adults learn new information, ideas, and values most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations (Knowles et al., 2005). Adult learners discern how knowledge is *immediately* relevant to their life situations, particularly how it might be used to solve complex problems they face in their daily lives (Knowles et al., 2005). Therefore, environments conducive to adult learning structure the learning process around problems that adults may encounter or tasks they may complete in practice.

Motivation

The final assumption of andragogy is that when learning opportunities allow for self-directed learning, integration of learners' experiences, equitable social roles, and opportunities to apply new knowledge, the context is likely to ignite intrinsic motivation to engage in the learning process authentically (Knowles et al., 2005). A further explanation is found in theories of motivation such as self-determination theory, which posits that individuals are motivated and self-determined to learn when the environment supports their needs to be active and autonomous learners; to see how learning is relevant to their daily lives; to experience social belonging and connection with a community of learners; to feel competent in their roles; and to find the learning activities

personally meaningful and challenging (Kalenda & Kocvarova, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-determination theory suggests that when these basic needs are met, individuals are motivated for learning (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Literature Review: Families and Education

Students typically experience positive returns when families and schools connect through shared concern to support student learning (Olivos, 2019). Family–school collaboration encourages better grades, enhanced student motivation and engagement in school, increased high school completion rates, and academic improvement (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Chang et al., 2015; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Perna & Titus, 2005; Topor et al., 2010; Wilder, 2014; Xu et al., 2010). Further, the benefits of family engagement on student outcomes (Castro et al., 2015; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Olivos, 2019) have been documented in studies regarding learning in early childhood (Ma et al., 2016), elementary (Lee & Bowen, 2006), middle (Hill & Tyson, 2009), high school (Jeynes, 2007), and even through the freshman year in college (Jeynes, 2007).

Research reporting the benefits of family engagement have had, however, limited effects on partnerships between families and schools (Gordon & Louis, 2009). For example, Smith et al. (2011) describe family engagement as "elusive" (p. 73). Further, policy implementation, which depends upon individual and local factors for success, has resulted in many failed attempts to facilitate authentic and meaningful partnerships (Ishimaru, 2019). Specifically, Hands et al. (2019) explain that community members are engaged in schools "only peripherally, if at all" (p. 468), and Keyes and Gregg (2001) state, "while an urban school is located *in a community*, it is not often *of the community*" (p. 32).

In contrast, transformative equitable collaboration calls for school staff and families to collaborate in ways that mutually support family and educator capacity-building, relationship-building, and, ultimately, systemic capacity-building (Ishimaru, 2017). Grounded in the work of community organizing (Ishimaru, 2014), this process stands in contrast to deficit-based strategies where school personnel and families doubt the capacity and motivation of the other (Ishimaru, 2017; Olivos, 2006). Transformative equitable collaboration seeks to disrupt traditional power structures to include all families, including families of color and low-income families, to promote educational change through context-specific strategies (Ishimaru, 2019). Taken together, the dimensions of goals, strategies, roles, and context challenge the "rules of engagement" in traditional partnership efforts (Ishimary, 2019, p. 5) to recognize cultural wealth that is present in all neighborhoods (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005). Importantly, transformative equitable collaboration repositions leadership as a collective effort (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018). These understandings are important because

race, power, culture, class, and language have been overlooked in many engagement efforts (Baquedano-López et al., 2013), leaving educators with limited knowledge regarding how to effectively engage families in diverse contexts. Further, findings by Smith et al. (2011) indicate that families have varying perceptions regarding their roles in education, and these roles often diverge from school perceptions and expectations. These differences can demotivate the most marginalized families in a community for engagement, despite school efforts.

Context: The ECHO® Platform

As a result of his work as a hepatitis specialist, Dr. Sanjeev Arora created Project ECHO® in 2003 at the University of New Mexico to provide professional development to healthcare workers in rural, remote areas in the state (Arora et al., 2007). Soon after, Dr. Aurora's work expanded to training for healthcare providers across various specialties, including diabetes, obesity, mental health, infectious disease, and others. The ECHO® platform transformed medical practice in New Mexico by taking learning to physicians in resource-scarce communities through online access to training in specialized care. Today, ECHO® is replicated and adapted in 40 countries around the globe (University of New Mexico, 2021). These ECHO® lines rely on technology through semi-monthly synchronous zoom meetings to offer on-demand and interactive training. Each ECHO® session consists of: (a) problem solving through real-life, anonymous, case presentations; (b) short (10–15 minute) didactic presentations; and (c) dialogue to "unpack" the teaching cases and to highlight real dilemmas of practice. Following the "all teach/all learn" mantra of ECHO®, all participants actively engage in collaborative discussions around the case and didactic presentations.

TeleNGAGE

In 2018, the educational leadership faculty at Oklahoma State University, in collaboration with the Center for Health Sciences at Oklahoma State University, adapted ECHO® to the field of education by creating education-related ECHO® lines to provide action-centered, relevant, and goal-oriented professional development for educators. The ECHO® line relevant to this study, TeleNGAGE, was launched in Fall 2020 to meet the needs of educators as they sought to engage families in education. The TeleNGAGE Hub Team, or planning team, consists of one rural school principal, one parent representative, a consultant from a national nonprofit parent engagement initiative, one leader from a tribal nation in Oklahoma (who is also a parent), a classroom teacher, an assistant professor from Oklahoma State University, and a school psychologist. In addition to planning, the Hub Team also assumes responsibility for recruiting TeleNGAGE "Spoke Site" participants. Recruitment is

typically done casually through phone calls, social media, in-person visits, and email. "Spoke Site" participants can include anyone who wishes to participate in TeleNGAGE, and motivation for participation is typically a shared interest in the topic presented. Spoke Site participants have included families, educators (both teachers and leaders), community members, leaders at the State Department of Education, and others who had an interest in education who chose to voluntarily participate in TeleNGAGE. For Fall 2020, the first Spoke Site participants were primarily families and educators with close network connections with the Hub Team. Participation expanded as first-time participants of TeleNGAGE were encouraged to invite their colleagues, friends, neighbors, or community members.

The philosophical underpinning of TeleNGAGE is that collaboration between families and schools will be enhanced as families and schools feel empowered and begin to "see themselves" and "the perspective of the other" in engagement initiatives. Since TeleNGAGE began in Fall 2020, attendance has remained consistent at approximately 40–50 participants per session. Notably, TeleNGAGE began during a very difficult time as schools experienced closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and families and schools were required to work more closely together to support student learning. (Additional information about TeleNGAGE may be obtained from the authors upon request.)

Research Questions

Through the lens of Adult Learning Theory, how did participation in TeleNGAGE foster transformative equitable collaboration between educators and families? Sub questions guiding this inquiry included:

1. How, if at all, has participation in TeleNGAGE met participants' need for self-directed learning?
2. How, if at all, does communication in TeleNGAGE foster participants' wealth of experience?
3. How, if at all, has participation in TeleNGAGE influenced participants' perceptions of their social status?
4. How, if at all, has participation in TeleNGAGE led to the application of new knowledge?
5. What are participants' perceptions of their self-motivation for learning in TeleNGAGE?

Methods

This study utilizes a qualitative case study design. Merriam (2009) defines a case study as an investigation of a subject conducted in the natural setting with

results presented descriptively or as a narrative. Through the distinguishing characteristic of a focus on a bounded system in which a particular phenomenon cannot be separated from its context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), we sought to illuminate educator and family capacity to collaborate in equitable and transformative ways through TeleNGAGE.

Data Source and Sample

TeleNGAGE met a total of 16 times, twice each month for one hour, during Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. Data for the study were collected from all TeleNGAGE didactic PowerPoint presentations and notes. Examples of titles of didactic presentations included, "Managing Conflict in Times of Stress," "Keeping a Strategic Pulse on Family Needs," "Tweaking 21st Century Skills in a Post-Pandemic World: A School-Home Approach," and "Building Bridges of Trust: Relying on Family and Community Values." Data were also collected from TeleNGAGE recorded sessions, interactions in the "chat" feature, and a total of 12 interviews with Hub Team and Spoke Site members. Six Hub Team and six Spoke Site members were invited for semi-structured interviews through purposeful criterion sampling. The invited Hub Team members held a variety of roles including district leader, building leader, classroom teacher, parent, representative from a nonprofit family engagement network, and school psychologist. The purposeful selection of these participants provided access to diverse perspectives. Spoke Site participants included two school building leaders, one district leader, two parents, and one community stakeholder. All participants were invited for the purpose of gaining diverse perspectives. Including data from multiple sources allowed for triangulation of findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), utilizing within-method triangulation to enhance the validity of the data collected (Fusch et al., 2018). The purposefully selected sample is believed to be representative of the larger sample of Hub team members and Spoke site participants.

A potential limitation of the study is that participation in TeleNGAGE required access to basic technology (i.e., phone or computer) and the internet. Families with barriers to these resources are less likely to participate in TeleNGAGE, and therefore, their perspectives would not be captured. While this study followed strict qualitative design to enhance reliability of results, it is possible, and perhaps likely, that the families who participated in TeleNGAGE were some of the most involved families. These families would, therefore, be more likely to persist in their participative efforts, and they would likely possess more efficacy for engagement than their peers who are less engaged. Findings should be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

Data Analysis

All data were analyzed in a constant comparative manner in which the collection and analysis of data were conducted simultaneously (Merriam, 1985). Interviews were used as the primary source of data, and other sources (PowerPoint presentations, field notes from observations, interactions in the chat feature of Zoom) were used as supplementary data. Field notes were taken during observations of TeleNGAGE sessions, and these notes were triangulated with interview data. These notes were also uploaded to the TeleNGAGE website as a resource for participants, serving as a form of member checking. All researchers attended every TeleNGAGE session, and all sessions were recorded so that researchers could go back to rewatch them.

All PowerPoint presentations from the didactic presentations were uploaded to the website. The first step of analysis involved InVivo coding, identifying "a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (Saldana, 2016, p. 128). This coding process helped to identify data chunks that were relevant. After selecting codes, we mined the data to see what might be left out. We then began the second round of coding and reshuffled codes according to how they aligned with the principles of Adult Learning Theory. We did not classify codes that were outliers, codes that did not seem to fit into the principles of Adult Learning Theory. In those few cases, a content analysis process was employed—a process of examining and teasing out core themes from the data collected (Patton, 2002). Themes that emerged included: (a) relationship, (b) authenticity, (c) practical application, and (d) changes in perception. The themes were then utilized to answer research questions. Finally, the theoretical framework was applied in the discussion of the findings.

Researcher Positionality

Consistent with the constructivist approach of enhancing qualitative research validity (Merriam, 1998), it is essential for researchers to acknowledge positionality within the study. All researchers for this study were facilitators and participants in TeleNGAGE. Two of the researchers, the two faculty members, serve on the Hub Team of TeleNGAGE. The three additional researchers are regular participants in TeleNGAGE and other education-related ECHO® lines. Through purposive sampling in this study, we were able to leverage our understandings as university-based researchers to gather data to aid in the understanding of participant perceptions of TeleNGAGE. Therefore, leaning on our constructivist bent, we examined and made sense of data, and we drew on this sensemaking to triangulate and strengthen our findings.

Findings

Relationship

The theme of "relationship" was evidenced in participant comments. Participants explained that they felt they had "a learning network" or "a group of educators who help me learn." One participant explained that she was surprised at how relationships developed over time. She stated, "At first, I thought I would be afraid to speak up, but everyone made me feel comfortable. I really look forward to discussions now." Another participant expressed the same sentiment: "With university professors leading the sessions, I thought we were going to be 'talked to.' What really happened was that we learned together. I appreciate this opportunity to be involved with a network of learners."

Relationship also was stated as a reason that participants "showed up" each time. For example, a participant explained, "I never wanted to miss [a session] because I wanted to see everyone." The value of relationships seemed to be especially important during the pandemic. Participants' schools were mostly closed during Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. TeleNGAGE provided an opportunity to connect with other people during a time when many felt isolated and were searching for answers regarding how to relate during the pandemic. The educators involved expressed appreciation for the opportunity to hear from parents. These relationships deepened as time went on. One educator participant explained, "I would never have thought about the problem that [parent's name] presented in that way. I have gotten to know her through TeleNGAGE, and I think I understand where she is coming from." During a TeleNGAGE discussion of how one parent supported her son's learning during the pandemic, one educator stated, "Wow. You really came through. How can we encourage other parents in our districts to do the same things?" This discussion deepened the relationship between this parent and educators, and it also provided the parent an opportunity to explain the actions that she had taken to support her son's success in school.

Authenticity

Discussions during TeleNGAGE sessions addressed a variety of topics, including cancellation of school cultural events during COVID, administrators accused of racism by students, bullying, parent concerns regarding the use of social media, forgiveness in the workplace, parent misuse of activity funds, and a school's attempt to partner with a Black church to support student learning. Each case represented "real-life" scenarios occurring in "real-time." Cases were presented anonymously by a Hub Team member to protect the identity of all individuals. Discussions went "deep" during problem-solving opportunities as

participants related cases to their own experiences. One educator explained, "These cases really hit home. I think we can all relate [to the topic being presented]." During a TeleNGAGE session, when speaking about accusations of racism, a parent empathized with educators and stated, "You were really in a 'no win' situation. How can you discipline without being perceived as racist?" During the same session, another stated, "We all feel the pressure, but hearing these cases makes me know we are in this together. It helps when people are real about their challenges." Interactions that ensued during sessions represent traits of authenticity among participants, a tendency to behave in ways that reflect deeply held feelings and values for one another. It is important to note that, similar to the theme of relationships, the authenticity of conversations developed over time.

Practical Application

A third theme that emerged during data analysis was the practical application of the suggestions made during case-based problem-solving and didactic presentations. For example, when the topic of forgiveness was addressed, one participant stated, "I never thought about forgiveness being important in the workplace. I have introduced this idea to my teachers. It is making a difference." Another stated, "Attending TeleNGAGE has given me a lot of new ideas to try at school. I have learned so much." When the topic of parent misuse of activity funds was discussed, a participant explained, "This discussion helped me understand how important it is to give someone the benefit of the doubt. I usually jump to conclusions, and that discussion made me realize that I need to really understand what is going on [before deciding to act]."

The theme of practical application was emphasized by almost all participants. Participants stated that they had applied their learning in "quite a few situations" in their places of work or at home. The ability to apply what they were learning was appreciated by participants. During an interview, one participant stated, "It keeps me coming back. I always learn something that I can use."

Changes in Perception

During interviews, participants indicated that because case-based discussions and didactic presentations were relevant and current, they were motivated to reflect upon their own perspectives and beliefs. For most cases presented during TeleNGAGE sessions, participants indicated that they were experiencing, or had experienced, situations that were similar to the presented case. For example, when a parent was offended by a change in policy at her school before the pandemic that made her feel "unwelcome" in the building, TeleNGAGE participants made comments such as "we have made changes too [similar to

the one presented]. I didn't realize how those changes made parents feel." These discussions led to ideas about how to make parents feel needed and welcome, even during school closures. Educators attending this TeleNGAGE session agreed that the pandemic provided significant challenges to effective communication with families. Ideas were then exchanged regarding how to connect even while schools were closed.

A related topic addressed the cancellation of cultural events, such as dinners and social gatherings, during the pandemic. This case included parent explanations of the sense of loss they experienced and the disconnect they felt because of the inability to connect with others in a culturally relevant context. During the session, educators expressed that "they did not realize the depth of difficulty these cancellations had caused [for families]." Educators explained that, after this session, they had a new appreciation for how important it is to understand and celebrate the cultural diversity of their communities. Evidence from TeleNGAGE discussions suggested that having the opportunity to engage in collaborative problem-solving while they are experiencing these challenges caused participants to reflect upon how they were handling similar situations in their own schools and districts.

Answers to Research Questions

TeleNGAGE and Participant Need for Self-Directed Learning

TeleNGAGE provided a platform where participants, who all joined voluntarily and with various learning needs, could express their own insights that reflected their social positions and perspectives. For example, as cases were presented, participants were free to ask clarifying questions and provide suggestions for solutions to problems presented in each case. Because all cases came from real situations or problems, each participant's comments/suggestions enriched discussions and promoted shared understandings. For example, a case from a new school leader who wanted to find solutions for working with parent volunteers provided an opportunity to hear from educators and parents concerning actions a leader could take to enhance relationships with parent volunteers. Comments and recommendations were recorded and uploaded on the TeleNGAGE website to create a resource for future reference.

Parents also indicated that they participated in TeleNGAGE to learn about school policies regarding COVID protocol. This opportunity was especially meaningful because policies were constantly updated and changing as the pandemic progressed. Family members and educators were able to discuss the development of policies and explain how the implementation of those policies influenced all stakeholders. Additional COVID-related resources were

discussed during didactic presentations, including support for psychological needs, transportation, and meal delivery; the latest updates of state policy that influenced local schools were also discussed. Moreover, participants learned how families were facilitating learning at home and the stresses they were experiencing. Because each participant could apply this learning to his/her specific needs, participants' need for self-directed learning was met as this platform addressed their specific, role-related needs.

Participants' Experiences and Co-Construction of Knowledge

The capacity for collaboration seemed to be most influenced through authentic conversation that allowed collaborative problem-solving. Each case-based scenario led to participant suggestions regarding how to address the problem(s) identified in the case. Participants brought their individual experiences, training, and expertise to sessions, all of which were shared to collectively address problems identified in the case. Suggestions for how to address each of these scenarios came from participant training and experiences, including veteran educator experiences and expertise, family member knowledge of how each case influenced family engagement and student learning, theoretical understandings presented by university faculty, specialized knowledge from school psychologists and others with specific expertise, and knowledge of policy initiatives from Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) participants. One example of co-constructed knowledge occurred when a parent participant emphasized the resources available in her church. This parent explained a tutoring and mentoring program that the church made available to all students in the district. As a result, a discussion ensued about how to connect with community partners to address learning gaps exacerbated by the pandemic. The combination of knowledge, expertise, and experience created a wealth of information participants could glean and apply to situations they all were experiencing.

TeleNGAGE and Equitable Social Status

Perhaps one of the most important findings from this study was the ongoing development of relationships that emerged as a result of participation in TeleNGAGE and the crucial role that these relationships played in constructing a new form of parent and educator collaboration—one that gave all participants equitable social status. The structure of TeleNGAGE is designed to value and provide a platform for all voices, as reflected in the "all teach; all learn" mantra of Project ECHO®. Although the learning process was structured to engage educators and parents as co-contributors, there was notable reluctance among parents to share during the first several TeleNGAGE sessions. In early sessions, the facilitator prompted parents to share their perspectives, and

even then, their responses often reflected beliefs that they were not "experts" on the topic. Due to the lack of responses given by parent participants, educators often offered their own experiences as parents.

However, as relationships formed among participants over time, parents became eager and willing to contribute to the discussion during sessions, and positive educator responses to parent ideas seemed to validate their position as co-contributors in the learning process. An example occurred when a parent presented her concerns regarding the influence of the pandemic on learning. Educators indicated that they recognized the effort that she had made to help support her son's learning during school closures. An educator stated, "We have all been thinking about learning losses. This parent did an amazing job with her son [during school closures]. We need to rethink the needs of our students as they are returning to us." Another educator asked, "How can we encourage more families to do what [this parent] has done? How can we extend these efforts [past the pandemic]?" During this discussion, perspectives regarding pandemic closures shifted from that of having just experienced an unprecedented crisis to perhaps having a new opportunity to collaborate with families to support student learning. Suggestions were made for supporting and encouraging collaboration even after the pandemic.

The "all teach; all learn" collaborative problem-solving experience seemed to alter perceptions about how to work together. One family participant explained, "My focus has changed from 'us-them' to 'we.' We all have to work together to help our students learn." One educator stated, "[TeleNGAGE] encouraged me to view family engagement from a different lens." Interestingly, educators often shared perspectives from their experiences as parents. Over time, the lines that had distinguished parent and educator roles seemed to blur, and participants shared equal status in solving the problems presented in the case discussions. Even this diverse population of participants (family members, teachers, administrators, university professors, educational specialists, and community members) became more like-minded in perspectives regarding engagement.

TeleNGAGE and Application of Knowledge

TeleNGAGE was perfectly positioned as a learning opportunity to meet educator and family needs when the pandemic struck. Families and schools relied on TeleNGAGE sessions to stay abreast of the new reality. Parents expressed that TeleNGAGE helped them adjust to the changes that the COVID-19 pandemic "propelled [them] into." Participants explained that they had learned how to utilize the knowledge acquired during TeleNGAGE and were motivated to "try these new ideas." For example, an educator described a method that

she had used to communicate more efficiently with families during the pandemic. She stated, "When [name of participant] made this suggestion, I knew it was something we had to try in our building." In reference to the suggestion of another TeleNGAGE participant about how to engage students during distance learning, one of the comments in the chat session stated, "I love the suggestion of also getting feedback from students. We will try this! It keeps them engaged!"

In addition to the case-based scenarios that characterize TeleNGAGE semi-monthly sessions, didactic presentations provided current information regarding theory, policy, legislation, and reform initiatives. After each short didactic presentation, participants discussed how to apply this new knowledge. Further, didactic presentations were intentionally planned to reinforce ideas and information needed in case-based scenarios. Examples included understanding forgiveness in the workplace, the importance of trust, legal cases involving student First Amendment rights, transformative leadership conversation, and supporting student social and emotional needs during a crisis. Furthermore, numerous comments were made regarding how educators intended to integrate collaborative practices in their districts. One participant stated, "We can't do this alone. We are very dependent on families to help students learn. Knowing what they care about will help us support them." Another stated, "It keeps me coming back. I always learn something that I can use." As participants discussed ways to apply their learning, family and educator practices seemed more aligned, and participants expressed that they had a better understanding of "where [the others] were coming from."

TeleNGAGE and Motivation for Learning

Findings from this study offer unique insight into the motivation of educators and families to participate in collaborative learning spaces, especially when they are designed using principles of adult learning. As participants explained their reasons for voluntarily attending TeleNGAGE, their participation seemed intrinsically motivated. Reasons for their ongoing participation in TeleNGAGE included the opportunity to build relationships and engage in a network of learners; the relevance and practical applicability of learning; and the ability to "solve problems together." Andragogy, along with self-determination theory, provides an explanation for why TeleNGAGE participants were motivated by these factors. As educators and parents built relationships and saw themselves as members of a learning network, they felt a sense of belonging and connection which motivated them to engage in the learning process (Freeman et al., 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2017). When they saw the relevance of new ideas and were able to apply them in their respective contexts, they found value

in learning (Knowles et al., 2005). The "all teach; all learn" aspect of TeleN-GAGE positioned participants as active contributors which satisfied their need to feel autonomous and self-directing.

Discussion

This study integrated two bodies of literature—andragogy and family engagement—to explore how TeleNGAGE influenced educator capacity to collaborate with families in equitable and transformative ways. Evidence in this study suggests that this professional development initiative, which built upon adult preferences and motivations for learning, created a synergy that led to enhanced collaboration and motivation. Findings from this study not only fit within these larger bodies of literature but also extend knowledge in these areas.

Andragogy

Viewing this professional development platform, TeleNGAGE, through the lens of Adult Learning Theory provides insight into professional development in collaborative, self-directed learning environments. Instead of providing information for TeleNGAGE participants to learn or memorize, participants were engaged in solving problems, using reasoning and life experience to respond to case-based challenges and scenarios. Additionally, creation of knowledge was a cumulative process as participants engaged and shared their expertise. This disposition and style of learning connect with Adult Learning Theory in that andragogy highlights the assumptions that adults "come to the table" with their own set of life experiences and motivations, are able to facilitate their own learning, have needs for learning from social status, are more disposed to learning by doing, and are inclined to apply their learning to concrete situations (Merriam, 2001). In describing an environment conducive to adult learning, Knowles (1968) stated that "spontaneity is welcome" (p. 15) and added, "individual, critical thinking is perhaps the best description of the democratic method" (p. 15) for adult learning. At the core of this theory is the assumption that adults are intrinsically motivated to engage in learning when they perceive the environment to meet these needs (Knowles et al., 2005). This study expands this body of literature by exploring adult learning in social learning spaces when these environments are designed to meet the learning needs of adults.

Transformative Equitable Collaboration

Scholars have begun to redefine family and school engagement in the literature, particularly in how the roles of educators and parents are understood. While collaboration with families has long been a goal of schools, evidence suggests that many efforts to engage families have proven less than satisfactory

(DeSpain et al., 2018; Gordon & Louis, 2009). One reason for this challenge is that historically, school-centric approaches to engage families may have demotivated families for engagement. These models framed families as "clients or beneficiaries" (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 353) rather than as decision-making agents, and they alienated families from schools by not recognizing the cultural or social capital that they bring (Ishimaru, 2019). Ishimaru (2019) argued that transformative equitable collaboration—in which families are understood as active agents in shaping educational systems—can, perhaps, bring transformational change to student outcomes.

In contrasting conventional or traditional forms of family–school collaboration with equitable collaborations, Ishimaru (2019) explored differences in the individual vs. collective, the directionality of communication and flow of information, and the directionality of power dynamics. In conventional forms of collaboration, parents offer input that pertains to their individual child (i.e., parents advocate for support their child may need), whereas in equitable collaborations, the focus is on collective and systemic change (i.e., parents advocate for changes that would support *all* children; Ishimaru, 2019). This approach stands in stark contrast to communication in traditional family engagement, which has primarily been unidirectional as educators relay information to parents while family expertise is ignored or underestimated. In equitable collaboration, communication and exchange of knowledge are reciprocal because all parties are understood as bringing valuable expertise to address issues for which all groups share responsibility (Ishimaru, 2019). Finally, power dynamics in conventional collaborations are unidirectional and hierarchical, as educators are viewed as experts and the primary agents of change. Equitable collaborations reposition power from hierarchical to relational (Ishimaru, 2019).

Our findings are consistent with Ishimaru's description of equitable collaboration. The focus of TeleNGAGE is on the collective rather than the individual as educators and families collaboratively solve problems that affect *all* students. The "all teach; all learn" approach creates a flow of communication that is reciprocal, allowing for equitable discussions in which all perspectives are valued. While school-centric approaches to family engagement have brought families and schools together within a power structure that is inherently hierarchical, the structure of TeleNGAGE honors both families and educators as equal co-contributors in problem-solving and decision-making processes. The power resides not in roles or positional authority but rather within mutual relationships. This equitable structure is demonstrated in the following statements: "We need to be able to apologize sincerely when we make mistakes and laugh with families about our missteps. We are learners, too. We need to be genuine" and "I think it is important to listen as much as share."

This study offers insight into the challenges that may emerge when pursuing transformative equitable collaboration. The collaborative structure of TeleNGAGE alone was insufficient in eliciting parent engagement during early sessions. Parents entered the collaborative space with deeply rooted mental models that defined their perceptions of their roles in the process and thus determined how they interacted. Parent participants, however, demonstrated an increase in vulnerability, a greater willingness to share, and a more active role in the learning process as the interaction progressed. For example, a participant stated, "It's getting easier [to participate]. I didn't know, at first, if my opinion would matter." This shift occurred *gradually* as relationships among participants developed. This finding is important because, while collaborative structures may bring families and educators together, entrenched mental models and mindsets may interact with these structures to influence how participants engage (Caniëls et al., 2018). This finding suggests a need for "undoing" and reframing mindsets that have long been shaped by educator-dominated collaborative efforts. Just as participants' models formed over time based on repeated experiences and interactions, building new models for collaboration will likely require time and repeated shared experiences between families and educators.

Finally, TeleNGAGE operates differently than most professional development or family engagement opportunities in that it positions educators and families as "learners" in a social learning space. This collaborative approach to problem-solving seemed to promote school and family connections that were meaningful to both families and school staff. These findings are important because research has consistently shown family engagement to significantly predict positive student outcomes (Topor et al., 2010; Wilder, 2014; Xu et al., 2010). As educators and families collaborate, platforms such as TeleNGAGE may provide motivation for shared educational responsibility for student learning. Specifically, the understanding that parents are a child's "first teachers" and educators assume the role of "in loco parentis" does not necessitate a division or separation of responsibility as a child ages. Instead, shared responsibility for student learning extends throughout a student's formal schooling. Parent engagement tends to taper off as children age (Jeynes, 2016); however, Jeynes (2016) found a significant relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes from pre-elementary, through high school, and even into the freshman year in college. The current study provides insight into development of relationships between families and schools in a collaborative environment that may be sustainable across time.

Implications

Implications for theory include the expansion of Adult Learning Theory to social learning spaces, including online spaces. We have utilized the principles of Adult Learning Theory to explain collaborative practices between families and schools. One of the core concepts of Adult Learning Theory is that adults are motivated for learning when the learning context is designed to meet their unique needs (Knowles et al., 2005). When collaborative efforts are structured around understandings of adult learning, these practices can potentially transform relationships between families and schools. Future research is needed to explore the long-term effects of adult learning and motivation in social learning spaces across time.

Finally, implications for practice include the convergence of perspectives as knowledge was co-constructed through collaborative problem-solving and dialogue. This form of professional development engaged educators and families in a common space that promoted understandings that facilitated relational connections. Professional development resembled relationship-building rather than learning a set of guidelines regarding how to engage families. TeleNGAGE provides an example of professional learning that may be sustainable because it is embedded in the workday for only one hour twice each month, following a low-dose and high-frequency engagement practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2011). While the mid-workday scheduling of sessions may present challenges for some families, the online format allows busy parents and educators from various places to convene together, regardless of geographic barriers that often exist in rural, remote areas.

Conclusion

This study illuminates equitable practice that celebrates the strength and diversity of families and educators and presents a new pathway for collaboration, communication, and shared understanding. Research supports the contention that involving families and community members in decision-making and problem-solving is essential for children's academic and social success (Perna & Titus, 2005; Topor et al., 2010; Wilder, 2014; Xu et al., 2010). Bequeathing educators and families with culturally responsive skills could be a hallmark of effective transformative equitable collaboration. This study provides insight into collaborative learning that may be extended to include all families. Because TeleNGAGE is readily available, at no cost, flexible, and inclusive, it may be a platform upon which schools and families could meet and work collaboratively to transform student learning. It is well recognized, however, that not all

families have access to the technology that makes TeleNGAGE possible. In response, schools could offer families the use of their library or computer labs to enable all families to participate in TeleNGAGE sessions. For families who are not able or comfortable attending sessions on a school campus, schools may be able to work with community organizations or businesses to help families get devices and internet at home or grant families internet access at public places such as a local coffee shop or community center. These additional efforts may help to ensure that all families, especially the most marginalized, have access to conversations and problem-solving that can support the success of all students.

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Parental Involvement with Children's Schooling: Exploring the Experiences of Hmong Parents in Charter Schools

Zha Blong Xiong, Malina Her, and Cahya Yunizar

Abstract

Parental involvement is well-documented in the literature. Although research suggests a strong positive association between parental involvement and children's educational outcomes, few studies have examined parental involvement at home with children who attend charter schools, especially with small immigrant groups such as the Hmong. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how Hmong parents of students in charter schools were involved in their children's education at home and what barriers they faced. This study included 23 Hmong parents (9 fathers, 15 mothers) of elementary school-aged children enrolled in three Hmong-focused charter schools in Minnesota. The results showed several themes related to barriers for at-home school involvement, including work schedules, literacy barriers, lack of spousal support, and multiple children at home. Despite these barriers, Hmong parents also indicated that they sacrificed for their children's education by taking on multiple jobs, created and maintained regular family routines to monitor children's education, and connected children to appropriate resources for homework help, including older siblings. Implications for school administrators and teachers who work with Hmong parents, especially Hmong parents who have children enrolled in charter schools, are also discussed.

Key Words: parental involvement, parenting practices, charter schools, Hmong Americans, family routines, homework help, barriers, literacy, support

Introduction

Understanding parental involvement in immigrant families is timely, given the growth of the immigrant population, especially children of immigrants, in the United States (Cohn, 2015). According to a 2022 report, there are approximately 84.8 million immigrants and their U.S.-born children living in the U.S. (Esterline & Batalova, 2022). It is projected that by 2065 the immigrant population, including their U.S.-born children, will rise to approximately 36% (Lopez et al., 2015). Immigrants, particularly involuntary immigrants, are likely to be poor and live in low-income neighborhoods (Carroll, 2021; Hernandez et al., 2009; Pfeifer et al., 2012). Although low-income immigrant parents are less likely to be involved at the school level in activities such as volunteering in the classroom or parent–teacher conferences, immigrant parents are involved in children's learning in a variety of ways that may not always be recognized by schools (Turney & Kao, 2009). Empirical evidence, including Jeynes meta-analyses (2010, 2011), suggest that parental involvement at home best predicts student success (Boonk et al., 2018; Fan & Chen, 2001). However, most of the parental involvement research tends to focus on White and other racial/ethnic minority families (Dotterer & Wehrspann, 2016; Pearce, 2006), families from other international countries (Ashraf, 2019; Gan & Bilige, 2019), and other immigrant populations whose children are in traditional public schools (Antony-Newman, 2019; Cun, 2020). Few studies have examined parental involvement at home with children who attend charter schools, especially with small immigrant groups such as the Hmong (Lamborn & Moua, 2008; Lee & Green, 2008; Supple & Cavanaugh, 2013).

Investigating Hmong parental involvement is important since the Hmong are involuntary immigrants who came to the U.S. as political refugees (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993). As part of the resettlement, many Hmong chose Minnesota as their destination (McNall et al., 1994) because of its reputation for job opportunities and quality education for children (Pha, 2019). Today, Minnesota is home to the second largest Hmong population in the U.S. (Asian Americans Advancing Justice, 2011). The Hmong population in Minnesota is young and has one of the largest family sizes. For example, the median age of the Hmong population is 25 compared to 38 for Minnesotans (Pew Research Center, 2021), and family size is 5.4 compared to 2.5 for Minnesotan households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

In recent years, Hmong parents were deeply concerned about the quality of the traditional public schools and the lack of heritage language and culture in the curriculum (Adler, 2004; Thao, 2003; William, 2018). As such, beginning in the 2000s, Hmong educators began to open public charter schools as

an alternative school choice for Hmong parents (Pha, 2019; Williams, 2018). Currently, there are a handful of charter schools that focus on Hmong culture and language (Lor, 2021). However, little is known about parents who have children in charter schools in general and Hmong in particular. Therefore, we seek to understand the following research questions: What challenges do parents face at home as they try to support their children's education? How do parents get involved in their children's schooling at home? Understanding home-based parental involvement is important since Hmong parental involvement tends to occur more frequently outside of school (Juang & Meschke, 2017; Lee & Green, 2008; Supple et al., 2010). Like other Asian American parents (Chao, 2000; Sy et al., 2007), Hmong parents tend to engage in structural involvement instead of managerial involvement (Chao, 2000). According to Chao, structural involvement focuses on the day-to-day involvement outside of school that supports children's learning and development, compared to the traditional managerial involvement where parents are expected to be involved in school activities, events, and children's direct academic learning. To better understand Hmong parents' structural involvement, we adopted Grolnick and Slowiaczek's (1994) definition of parent involvement to guide our analysis, which refers to "the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within a given domain" (p. 238). This is similar to Epstein's (1995) first and fourth types of parental involvement wherein parents are responsible for setting a home environment that supports children's learning, monitoring children's activities, and helping children with homework. We believed this definition and types of parental involvement allow us to focus on how Hmong parents "choose to devote their time and energies" (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994, p. 238) at home to be involved in their children's education.

Backgrounds of Charter Schools Focusing on Hmong Language and Culture in Minnesota

Today, there are 7,500 charter schools and campuses across 44 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam, with nearly 3.3 million students enrolled, with the number of charter schools increasing every year (David & Hesla, 2018). Minnesota became home to the first charter school when City Academy was opened in 1992 (Bailey & Cooper, 2009). In Minnesota, there are 164 charter schools, and 65% of these charter schools are in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul) metropolitan area. Currently, there are approximately 56,000 students enrolled in charter schools. Since 2000, more than 10 charter schools that focus on Hmong language and culture [hereafter referred to as Hmong charter schools] have been authorized in Minnesota, enrolling over 7,000 Asian, mostly (90.47%) Hmong, students (Minnesota Department of

Education, n.d.). Most Hmong charter schools are in the seven-county metro area where 97% of the Hmong in Minnesota live (Bailey & Cooper, 2009; Pfeifer et al., 2012). St. Paul has the most Hmong charter schools, and every year they attract a sizable number of Hmong students from traditional public schools (Dernbach, 2022). Yet, there is a dearth of studies focusing on Hmong parents with children in charter schools.

Challenges of Parental Involvement in Children's Schooling at Home

Despite the value charter schools place on parental involvement, many low-income, immigrant parents continue to encounter challenges in being involved in their children's education (Englund et al., 2004; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Studies with immigrant parents found that English language competency plays an important role in their ability to help with their children's school-related work at home (Ashraf, 2019; Crozier & Davies, 2006; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Hmong parents, especially the first-generation immigrants, also lack knowledge of Western education and face language barriers due to their limited formal education prior to the resettlement (Adler, 2004; Yang, 2008). Studies have consistently shown that parents who lack English fluency tend to be less involved (Aung & Yu, 2007; Pho, 2007; Sohn & Wang, 2006). Specifically, Mueller and colleagues (1996) showed that Hmong parents tend to face significant English language barriers and inflexible work schedules. As such, they were less likely to get involved with their children's homework, especially after their children transitioned to the middle and high school grades. Indeed, most adolescents reported that they tend to rely on their siblings for homework help and other educational support at home (Hirayama & Hirayama, 1988; Lee & Green, 2008).

Ngo (2017) reviewed the literature on Southeast Asians, including Hmong, and found that financial hardship was one of the major challenges parents faced as they tried to support their children's education. Other studies also found that low-income parents, like the Hmong, continue to struggle to get involved due to their work commitments (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Smith et al., 2011) and large family size (Stright et al., 2009). For example, Turney and Kao (2009) investigated parental involvement using the ECLS-K (NCES, 2001) dataset and found minority immigrant parents faced significantly more barriers to school involvement compared to White parents, possibly because Hmong and other poor immigrant parents are more likely to face financial hardship, inflexible work schedules, and other cultural barriers (Antony-Newman, 2019; Aung & Yu, 2007; Gilbert et al., 2017; Grant & Wong, 2004; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Pho, 2007; Sohn & Wang, 2006).

Parents' Roles and Strategies Used to Be Involved in Children's Education at Home

Despite language and cultural barriers, immigration status, and low-income backgrounds, research also suggests that immigrant parents tend to view education as a way out of poverty; therefore, they are likely to hold high educational aspirations for their children (Ceballo et al., 2014; Garcia & de Guzman, 2020). Although they may be viewed as less involved in school activities, evidence suggests that immigrant parents, especially Asian American parents, are actively involved in their children's education in different ways at home (Li, 2006), such as monitoring children's activities at home (Lee & Green, 2008), controlling children's screen time (Sy et al., 2007), and providing private tutoring or other additional courses to support children's learning (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). Despite their levels of involvement at home, immigrant parents continue to be viewed as less involved, especially when it comes to school-based involvement such as attending parent–teacher conferences or volunteering at school (Crosnoe, 2010; Ji & Koblinksy, 2009; Snell, 2018).

Hmong parents are not the exception to this negative perception, given their language barriers and a history of invisibility (Adler, 2004; Thao, 2003). For example, 75% of school staff in Adler's (2004) study did not think that Hmong parents could support their children's education at home. Yet, studies with Hmong parents and children continue to point to the opposite. Supple et al.'s (2010) study on Hmong college students' perceptions of their parents' parenting using focus groups found several parental involvement strategies parents used to motivate students' schooling, including "giving money or other rewards for good grades, threatening punishment for poor grades, and checking grades" (p. 21). Furthermore, they found that Hmong parents tend to communicate their love to their children through sacrifices they make to give their children a better life compared to their own. Juang and Meschke (2017) conducted a qualitative study with 30 Hmong American young adults and found that their parents were constantly talking to them about school-related subjects and exerting a high level of restrictions on their non-school activities at home. Lee and Green (2008) interviewed 10 Hmong families (adolescent, father, and mother) of higher achiever and low achiever groups and found that both adolescents and parents reported that parents were actively involved in their adolescents' lives by providing ongoing monitoring and controlling children's whereabouts and friends. Xiong and Lee (2005) surveyed over 300 Hmong parents with at least one child who is under the age of 5 and found that 45% to 49% of Hmong parents reported being involved with their children in various tasks, ranging from playing with their children to working on literacy-related tasks to watching television in the same room.

Despite the emerging research on Hmong parental involvement at home, there are still a few gaps in the literature. First, most studies on parental involvement behaviors at home included reports from adolescents and young adults without first-hand accounts from parents (Juang & Meschke, 2017; Supple et al., 2010). Second, studies that included parents either focused on the early childhood years (Xiong & Lee, 2005) or those with adolescent children (Lee & Green, 2008). Focusing on students in the later years of elementary school is of particular interest because development during middle childhood (ages 7–11) years is more strongly associated with long-term school success than development during other life stages (Duncan et al., 2007), and parents are more involved in children's schooling during the elementary years, compared to the middle and high school years (Dearing et al., 2006; Lee & Green, 2008). Lastly, most parental involvement studies have focused on parents and/or children in traditional public schools (Juang & Meschke, 2017; Lee, 2007; Supple et al., 2010). To date, there is a dearth of published studies investigating parents who put their children in Hmong charter schools. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the challenges Hmong parents of children attending Hmong charter schools faced and identify common at-home involvement behaviors and strategies used by parents to help with their children's education.

Methods

Recruitment

Participants were recruited from three Hmong charter schools in Minnesota where their children participated in the Hmong Children's Longitudinal Study which involved over 200 upper elementary students that focused on Hmong culture and language (Xiong et al., 2021). Specifically, the first author met with each charter school administrator to draft and sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) about the study. The first author is of Hmong descent and is bicultural and bilingual in Hmong and English. He has over 20 years of experience working in the Hmong community in Minnesota, especially with Hmong families and children (Xiong et al., 2001; Xiong et al., 2021). Once the MOU was signed, the first author worked with each school administrator to draft an invitation letter in English and Hmong to send home, asking for parents' participation in the study. The bilingual letter was sent to 153 Hmong and non-Hmong parents of fifth, sixth, and seventh graders in the Hmong Children's Longitudinal Study during the spring of 2019. Thirty-four parents (31 Hmong and 3 non-Hmong; 22% response rate) expressed an interest to be in the study, and 25 Hmong parents agreed to be interviewed. The other nine participants refused to participate due to scheduling conflicts or after learning more about the purpose of the study.

Of the 25 participants in the study, there were two participants whose spouses also joined in during the interview. The first spouse of one of the participants (Bao's husband, a pseudonym as are all names below, created to protect the identity of the participants) joined the interview after the first 15 minutes; thus, we were not able to collect his demographic information, and he was excluded from the original count of 25 participants. The spouse of another participant (Chertong) decided to participate in the interview with his wife from the beginning, so we were able to collect his demographic information (see Table 1), and he was included in the overall count. However, we decided to treat all spousal transcripts as one unit of analysis, since both spouses lived in the same household and shared the same children. Additionally, we also decided to remove one participant who refused to continue the interview after learning more about the interviewer. Thus, we were left with a total of 23 participant responses, including the two spouses' narratives as one unit of analysis each.

Data Collection

To ensure quality data were collected, two experienced community members who are bilingual and bicultural in Hmong were hired and trained to conduct the interviews with the first author. Furthermore, the two bilingual and bicultural interviewers were required to observe the first two interviews conducted by the first author, who has more than 20 years of experience in qualitative interviews with Hmong parents, to ensure all interview protocols were followed. Prior to each interview, each interviewer took about five to ten minutes to explain the consent process, answer questions, and acquire written consent from participants before proceeding to the interview. The semi-structured interview—which included questions on the participants' background information and description of their activities, family rules, and challenges to parental involvement—was conducted in Hmong by each interviewer. Interview questions were adopted from the Hmong Children's Longitudinal Study (Xiong et al., 2001), as well as from previous research with Hmong families (Xiong et al., 2008), to capture the diversity of views on Hmong parental involvement behaviors at home. Specific parental behaviors at home were also borrowed from Epstein's (1995) first and fourth types of parental involvement. Sample questions included: What are your typical family activities and routines on a daily basis? Who is usually involved in these activities and routines? Why or why not? Do you have rules in your family? Who is enforcing these rules and how? How do you feel when it comes to helping your children learn in general and homework in particular? Do you have anyone else who can also help your children do their homework? If so, who and how?

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

Name	Family Structure	Age	Age Arrived	Year Arrived	Sex	Education	Employment	Marital Status	# of Children
Bao	Nuclear	35	21	2005	Female	No formal ed.	Assembly	Married	4
Der	Single parent	40	17	1995	Female	HS Diploma	Assembly	Divorced	6
Ia	Nuclear	30	U.S. Born		Female	BA	Nurse/ Supervising PCA	Married	3
Kongmeng	Nuclear	36	15	2005	Male	Some college	IT	Married	6
Ka	Blended	50	15	1984	Female	Some college	Assembly and Self-employed	Married	5
Kalia	Single parent	41	10	1988	Female	BA	Human Service	Divorced	4
Wahoua	Blended	47	19	1990	Male	GED	Unemployed	Remarried	6
Kia	Blended	39	11	1989	Female	BA	Self-employed	Remarried	3
Chertong (couple)	Blended	38	U.S. Born	1980 (Family)	Male	MBA	Self-employed	Remarried	6
Dia (couple)	Blended	35	U.S. Born	1979 (Family)	Female	BA	Self-employed	Remarried	6
Chuepeng	Nuclear	49	19	1990	Male	BA	Human service and Self-employed	Married	5
May	Nuclear	33	19	2005	Female	No formal ed.	Unemployed	Married	5
Mee	Single parent	32	20	2006	Female	No formal ed.	Assembly	Divorced	7
Ong	Nuclear	41	5	1984	Female	BA	Human service and Self-employed	Married	8
Wakai	Blended	52	13	1980	Male	Some college	Machinist	Remarried	9
Pahoua	Single parent	48	22	1993	Male	HS Diploma	Technician	Divorced	7
See	Single parent	52	15	1983	Female	BA	Media and Self-employed	Widowed	5
Song	Single parent	38	25	2005	Female	No formal ed.	Assembly	Divorced	3
Tria	Nuclear	33	U.S. Born	Unsure	Female	Some college	Healthcare	Married	6
True	Nuclear	26	14	2005	Female	HS Diploma	Manufacture	Married	3
Va	Nuclear		16	1988	Female	HS	Unemployed	Married	7
Chiaying	Nuclear	45	35	2004	Male	No formal ed.	Assembly	Widowed, remarried	8
Xue	Blended	40	30	2011	Female	No formal ed.	PCA	Remarried	11
Jouacho	Nuclear	44	32	2004	Male	No formal ed.	Contractor and Driver	Married	6

All interviews were conducted one-on-one, and they took place between February and June of 2019. Ten interviews were completed remotely by phone due to scheduling issues, while the other 15 interviews were carried out in-person at the participants' homes or children's school conference rooms. All interviews lasted for about an hour (range, 48–115 minutes, mean of 74 minutes, with a standard deviation of 17 minutes), except for one interview where the participant decided to stop the interview after learning that s/he knew the interviewer, and all were audiorecorded for later analysis. Despite the different modes used to conduct the interviews, it did not appear to impact the length or substance of the interviews when looking across transcripts. To thank them for their participation, all participants were compensated with $20 in cash.

Sample Characteristics

There was a total of 23 participants included in the analysis for this study, since we treated each set of two-couple data as a single unit of analysis. As such, there were a total of 16 mothers and 8 fathers, with ages ranging from 26 to 52 (M = 40.45, SD = 7.23; note that we included the second spouse's demographic data here). Of participants 20 were foreign-born, and four, including the second spouse, were U.S.-born. Of the foreign-born, 15 of the participants came before 2004, and nine arrived after 2004. Note that those who arrived in the U.S. after 2004 are part of the last migration wave of the Hmong in America from the temple called Wat Tham Krabok, Thailand (Grigoleit, 2006), and are the recent sponsored spouses of U.S. Hmong citizens or permanent legal residents. Most of the participants were either married or remarried at the time of the study (*n* = 17) and had a high school education or lower (*n* = 11). For example, seven participants only had a few fragmented years of adult education or vocational training in the U.S. (See Table 1). All names used in the article are pseudonyms; however, all other demographic information was based on self-reports from the participants.

Data Analysis

Prior to the analysis, a team of seven bilingual and bicultural Hmong-descent persons (five advanced undergraduate family social science students, two community members who worked in social services) were trained to translate and transcribe five of the audiorecorded interviews for coding training purposes. Analysis involved listening to the actual audiorecorded interviews, except for these four interviews (May, Mee, Wakai, and See; Table 1). These four transcripts, along with the other 19 recorded audios, were assigned to a team of seven coders to code based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedures. For reliability purposes, two sub-teams (2 undergraduate and 1

graduate student) were assigned to code the same two randomly selected cases for each research question. Team members used two translated transcripts and listened to the audiorecorded interviews to create initial codes. Initial codes and meaning units developed based on an interpretive open coding proce-dure from each team member were compared and discussed to ensure all team members agreed on the coding. Then the initial codes were used to develop a tentative codebook for each research question. The first author served as an in-ternal auditor to check the initial codes from the codebook against the original transcripts to ensure the codes captured what participants were sharing (Hill et al., 2005). Next, each team member was assigned to code three transcripts us-ing the codebook as a guide and recorded all codes on an Excel sheet. Since the definitions and meanings for the codes in the codebook were further developed during this process, some of the code names were borrowed from the relevant literature, while others were developed based on the texts. Finally, codes that shared the same meanings were grouped into larger themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Rigor

Data collection and data analysis were based on a team approach (Hill et al., 2005); thus, data triangulation was highly valued. All interviews were conduct-ed by three trained interviewers, and all transcriptions and translations were completed by a team of seven trained graduate and undergraduate students in addition to the first author who served as the auditor. Additionally, the team engaged in peer debriefing throughout the analysis when codes, subthemes, and themes were discussed prior to finalization. We believe this team approach allowed us to faithfully represent the participants' voices well (Speziale & Car-penter, 2011).

Results

Challenges of Parental Involvement in Children's Education

Analysis of the transcripts revealed four themes that highlighted the chal-lenges Hmong parents faced with involvement as they tried to involve in their children's schooling: *living in a hurried life; "I don't know how to help my chil-dren": Barriers to homework assistance; lack of help from spouses or ex-spouses*; and *having multiple children at home*. Although the themes are presented in the or-der of frequency of occurrence from most frequent to least, not all themes are presented uniformly due to the limitation and unevenness of the data.

Living in a Hurried Life

Interview data suggest that being a Hmong parent is not easy. We found that parents in this study had to juggle many demands in addition to parenting their children. Our analyses found two challenges under this theme: inflexible work schedules and family obligations. Sixteen participants (67% of the participants and 50% of their spouses or ex-spouses) were employed in nonstandard work, usually involved in manufacturing and self-employed jobs, and had inflexible work schedules. Nonstandard work refers to jobs that require employees to work during the evenings, nights, and weekends or jobs that occur outside the regular working hours of 8:00 am and 6:00 pm (Li et al., 2014). For example, during our interview, both Bao and her husband told us the reality of their inflexible work schedules and their desire to be involved in their children's schooling. Bao's husband, who decided to quit his job to care for his children and parents, said, "If I keep coming home early, the manager may take notice, and it won't look good for me. I could possibly lose my job." Similarly, Ka, a mother in a blended family of five children, also told us the same: "The two older children, I have a lot of time to spend with them because during that time period I was in school, but later on when I started to work, I didn't really have time to spend with the younger children."

In addition to the inflexible work schedules, four participants (17%) also worked a second job or had a side business to make ends meet. As such, these parents told us that they were extremely overscheduled and rarely had time for their family. Ong, a college educated, second-generation mother of eight children, felt that her family does not have enough time together. She said, "Life is very hurried; mom doesn't get to see the dad, and dad doesn't get to see the mom....Our children have their own schedules, and we have our own. There is no time for them [children]." Bao, a mother who came to the U.S. in the mid-2000s, described how busy she is at home as a mother of four this way:

> Ah, my schedule…I work from 6:00 am to 2:30 pm. Then, I come home to pick up my kids, and at 7:00 or 8:00 pm I have my own business—cleaning people's houses.…Yes, from Monday through Friday, I do this all the time.…My husband; he has his own business as well during the day.…In the morning, he takes care of my children to go to school. Then, during lunch, he has a chicken farm, then he goes there to watch his chickens for a bit. Then at 9 o'clock, he takes my older child to work, too.

Outside of their inflexible work schedules and other part-time jobs, all participants also talked about their thick networks of families (*kwv tij*) and relatives (*neej tsa*) in their community (Xiong et al., 2013), who they interacted with on a regular basis. Thus, going out to assist other family members and/or

relatives during the weekends was a common theme across the interviews. The following quotations illustrate how participants frequently mentioned this:

> We have lots of relatives. Some have more relatives than others, so we go join them. There's a gathering almost every weekend. Although we don't have much ourselves.…If our relatives have things going on, we go and help them, which is almost every weekend. (Bao's husband, a father of four children who came to the U.S. in the mid-2000s)

Similarly, Kalia, a college-educated, single mother of four children, told us this:

> My parents live in [City A], and all my brothers live in [City B], while my oldest sister lives in [City C; these are next to each other].…I got together with my parents about once or twice a month. I also attended big family gatherings and [cared for my mom] if [she] needed me to do something for her.

"I Don't Know How to Help My Children": Barriers to Homework Assistance

Our second theme involves barriers participants encountered as they attempted to assist their children's day-to-day homework. Parents who did not have a college education (52%) stated that they lacked the English language and literacy to help their children, especially when it comes to homework. Mee, a single mother who came to the U.S. in the mid-2000s without any formal education, said: "I am illiterate in English, so I don't know.…If it is a story in Hmong, then I can read it to them. But, if it is in English, then I don't know how to read it to them." Other parents also shared Mee's sentiment and told us that they could only help with their children's schoolwork when they were still in first and second grades. Once their children transitioned to third grade or higher, the homework became too complicated and difficult; therefore, they could no longer support their children. Der, a single mother with only a high school education told us this: "If it's about English or reading, then I don't know how to help them. If it's about helping them, then I can only help with first and second grade. Starting third and fourth grades, their homework is hard for me." Kalia, a college graduate, summed it up this way: "As their mom, it's been a long time since I've been in school, so sometimes if they ask me for help, I don't know anything anymore."

Lack of Help from Spouses

Seven parents (30%), especially mothers, talked about the challenge of having to do everything at home without the support of their spouses or ex-spouses. They told our interviewers that their partners tended to take on the traditional masculine role (Thao, 2020) and refused to take on some of the parenting responsibilities at home, including cooking, taking children to appointments, and attending parent–teacher conferences. Ka, a mother in her second mar-

riage who sponsored her husband from Laos, stated that "most of the time, my husband doesn't say much about my children. My husband is around, but he's the one who is working, so he doesn't take care of them much." Der, a divorced mother of six children, went further by telling us this: "Everything is done all by myself; my ex-husband when he still lived with us, he didn't attend conferences or take my youngest son to his appointments. If I don't cook, the kids don't get to eat dinner."

On the other hand, when we spoke to the fathers who participated in our study (35%), they told us that one of the reasons why they tended not to get involved in children's lives was due to the hurried life and language barriers. They espoused that they were the family's providers, usually assigned to take care of their aging parents, and mainly responsible for the involvement with relatives in various cultural and spiritual activities. Kongmeng, who came to the U.S. recently from Laos, said, "I don't really read/teach them [the children], only my wife. My wife is fluent in English compared to me. At times, since I'm not fluent in English, my children would question me and not understand me, so my wife teaches and helps them." Bao's husband, who came to the U.S. in the mid-2000s, summed it up this way:

> We, men, don't really attend parent–teacher conferences. That is because we have to take care of our elders and have to work. If my wife is off work and can attend, she will be the one to go. It's not that I'm refusing to go, but it's because my wife comes back in time from work to go.

Having Multiple Children at Home

In addition to the above challenges, parents in this study also expressed that having several children at home (M = 5.75, SD = 2.09, ranging from 3–11 children per household), especially infants and toddlers in the household (57%), constituted a barrier to engaging in their older children's education. They believe that infants and toddlers need a lot of attention since they are still young and dependent on the constant care of their parents. Having multiple children at home tended to be distracting when it came to providing homework assistance to elementary age children. Jouacho, a father who came to the U.S. in the mid-2000s without any formal education, said: "I don't have time [to take my kids from home to school activities].…We have our small child (three-year-old son) who cries a lot at home and does not want to go places, so it's very difficult." Ong, a mother of eight children, including two toddlers at home (three-year-old son and one-year-old son), also shared that, although she felt confident to help with her children's homework, "My only problem is that there are a few kids [in the house], so I cannot help them all, especially when the homework is hard."

Hmong Parental Involvement at Home

Parents' involvement with children's schooling at home refers to the interaction between parents and their children that focuses on children's schooling (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Based on this definition, four themes emerged from the analysis: *sacrificing for children*, *establishing and enforcing a regular family routine*, *connecting children to resources*, and *advocating for children*. Themes were presented by starting with the most frequently mentioned.

Sacrificing for Children

All participants (100%) expressed that they deeply valued their children's education during the interview. Thus, it was not surprising to find that most parents talked about sacrificing their personal convenience, aspirations, and goals for their children, especially for their children's education. For example, 30% of parents mentioned that they had to quit their job, reduce the number of hours at work, or give up their second job to be home with their children. Bao, a mother of four children whose husband was a stay-at-home dad at the time of the study, stated:

> I told my husband that since we're not making too much or too little [income], he should quit his work.…This way, our children will get more help, receive more attention and support from their father. Right now, my husband quits his job and is now a stay-at-home dad.

Bao's husband, who also participated in the interview, concurred by telling us:

> I'd rather devote some time to my children.…The most important thing is to know that I am going to be a good father for my children and create a goal for my children in the future. Even though I am not educated, my children know that they have a good father.

Similarly, Ka, a mother of five children, shared her experience during the interview. She said:

> He [husband] didn't go to school and went directly to work in a company for a bit. Then, we thought that working in a company was too hard for us since no one helped us to take care of our kids. That's when we came up with the idea to buy a business. Then, we bought this business here, so he [husband] could take care of the kids.

Other parents (22%) said they had to stop going to school, either to improve their English or pursue a college education, to look for a job in order to support their children. A few parents (13%) mentioned that they had to stop their manufacturing jobs so they could start a small business, since small businesses allowed more flexible hours to be with their children.

Creating and Reinforcing Regular Family Routines

Establishing and enforcing regular family routines included three sub-themes: enforcing regular homework hours and bedtime, limiting the use of technology, and getting the family to do things together. First, enforcing regular homework hours and bedtime is a subtheme that was mentioned by most parents (87%) during the interview. Given the limited time parents have with their children, parents wanted to ensure children know what is expected of them at home. For example, most participants (74%) shared that their regular schedule tended to include supper, homework time, shower and self-care, and bedtime. Kongmeng, who came to the U.S. as an international student, said:

> When I arrive home, I help my children with homework. We then eat dinner, take a shower, and I tell them to go to bed early. I will clean the house later.…When my children don't have homework, we sometimes ask them to do certain tasks such as vacuuming, brooming, stacking the shoes, and cleaning the bathroom.

We also found that some parents were less strict, while other parents tended to be more structured as illustrated by See, a single mother with a college education who works in the education field:

> During the weekdays, I go to work and come home to cook dinner for them. They do their homework, then by 8:00 pm they have to go to bed. On Fridays, we have a family night, and on the weekends, we try to do something together as a family. We play games, go out to eat, and see movies. I don't allow my children to play video or online games. They can only play on Friday night and Saturday. They can't play on Sunday because I want them to rest their mind before they go to school on the next day. During the weekdays, they have to go to sleep by 8:00 pm, and on the weekends they have to go to sleep by 10:00 pm. Every night, they have to charge their phones in my room. I'm very strict because you never know, they might get up in the middle of the night and play with their phones. I want to make sure they get plenty of sleep before the next day.

Our analysis also showed that these participants were determined to make a difference in their children's lives at home by being disciplined and persistent to provide them the structure needed to academically succeed. Song, a divorced mother with no formal education who came to the U.S. as a spouse, said, "To be honest, as parents, if we let them have their ways, then they won't be motivated to focus on school."

The second subtheme under family routines that emerged from our analysis focused on *the use of technology at home*. Many parents (65%) talked about es-

tablishing and enforcing rules at home to control the use of technology at home such as tablets, cell phones, video games, and television. For example, Kalia, a single mother with a college education, told us her experience as follows:

> In this era, our children use a lot of technology, so we have to set limits for them. For example, during the weekdays, they have school, so when they get home, they must do their homework first. So, they are given a few hours to be on their technology. But, after that they must be in bed by a certain time. On the weekends, they can do whatever they like but just make sure they have to do their laundry, clean their rooms, and help with the household chores.

Ka, a mother of five children aged 6 to 17 years old, also said that she must tell her daughter every day that when she is done with her homework, she must return the tablet back to be put away. In the morning before she goes to work, Ka would leave the tablet on the dining table for her daughter. To Ka and her husband, "it is good to have limits," because without limits "children may not want to focus on education." Some parents decided not to buy any TV or cell phone for their children, while other parents tried to limit the screen time as illustrated in the following:

> Song, a mother of three children aged 5 to 13 years old, said: "They [children] don't have a TV or anything to watch. They just do their homework…and they say that they are bored, but I didn't buy one for them because…they won't be motivated to focus on school."

> Kongmeng, a father of six children aged 4 to 12 years old, stated: "We don't allow any of these devices [phone, video games] until they come home from school on Friday, to let them touch these devices.…If no one listens, then I'll take them to go stay with their grandparents."

> Tria, a U.S.-born mother with six children ages ranging from 1 to 15 years old, shared the same sentiment: "When her [15 year old daughter] grades are poor, we take her phone away, and I think her phone is a big distraction, so then my husband and I, we took her phone away. So, she knows that if she doesn't keep up with her grades, her phone will be taken away."

The third subtheme focused on *getting the family to do things together*. According to the participants (39%), one of the mechanisms used to control children's behavior was to get the whole family to have at least one meal together per day and/or go out to do something together. Sharing family meals, for example, allowed the family to see each other and check on each other's activities. Bao, a mother of four children aged 11 to 18 years old, said, "For

my family, we have dinner together every night. If it's the weekend, everyone eats breakfast together. We talk, laugh, and tell one another our stories." Ka, a mother of five, concurred:

> For family dinners, my children do eat with me every night, because I don't let them eat in the living room. So even if they don't want to eat, they have to sit at the dining table…whether they like the food or not. I don't care. I still expect them to sit at the dining table.

Other parents focused on other activities that could bring the whole family together, as stated by Kalia, a single mother of four children aged 12 to 22 years old:

> Our family, we do activities together, sometimes we play games, we go walking…when I do yard work outside, they come help me. If I ask them to help me, they do help. All my children are pretty much the same, and they all help.

Connecting Children to Resources

Connecting children to resources included linking younger children in elementary school to get help from their older siblings who are either in high school or college to help with their homework, surfing on the Internet to find resources to help children complete their homework, taking children to the libraries, and putting children into extracurricular activities (Epstein, 1995). Based on our analysis, we found that about half of the parents (57%), especially those who have children in high school or college, tended to ask their older children to help their younger children when homework becomes difficult. Kalia, a single mother who has two children in college, told us the following:

> When I started to work, I didn't really have much time to spend with the younger children…I suggested that they go ask their sisters to help them.…The older sisters took on the responsibility to help the younger siblings, and if the boys knew that I was busy then they would go ask their sisters to read to them, because during that time the two sisters were in high school and the boys were younger, just so that everything is not way too much on me or on them…so we, as a family, try to make everything work as a family.

Ia, a U.S.-born, married mother with a college education, said she used the Internet to help her figure out homework brought home by her children, especially assignments that are difficult to complete as illustrated below:

> When I don't know or remember [how to work on the homework assignment] because it's been a while, I go find the solution because I use

the computer most of the time. When there is something I don't know, I Google and listen to someone to figure it out.

Kongmeng, a father who came with a college degree from Laos, also agreed:

When we don't know the answer, we would search Google to see the steps in order to help my children with their assignments. I am not an educated person from here [U.S.], so watching a 20-minute video from YouTube helps clarify the confusions of the problem.

Advocating for Children

In addition to the day-to-day involvement at home with their children, participants in this study (43%) also talked constantly about their advocacy role, particularly about the decision to switch schools for their children. Advocacy refers to parents who can speak or act on behalf of their children (Wolfensberger, 1977). Despite their challenges to get involved at their children's school, they were actively seeking better opportunities for their children, including moving children to a better, safer school. For example, Wahoua, a father of six young adult children from a previous marriage and four elementary children from his current relationship, stated that:

Since I put my older kids [young adult children] in public schools, there were many different kinds of kids attending there. So, they kept having problems. When the problems got bigger, they had fights and arguments…so I looked at how our Hmong charter schools [had] more Hmong kids and the administrators are Hmong, and they still have the rules that our Hmong people have, and they watch our kids attentively, so I like that.

Ia, a U.S.-born, college educated mother of three children, agreed and told us:

Before they [my children] attended charter school, they were in a public school in School [X], but I felt like their education expectation was below standards…I knew that my children wouldn't succeed there. When they came home, their homework and assignments that they needed help with were below their age…so I decided to move them to a charter school [School A].

Other participants (30%) also wanted their children to be in a place where they could feel a sense of belonging where their culture and language is valued and promoted, in addition to providing safety and academic rigor. Kia, a mother of three children who used to work in the education field, said:

When they're at School A, it looks like they come to see other Hmong students, and they feel like they're in the same group, same race so it

makes them feel more confident in whatever they do; they don't shy away from trying so that makes them feel confident and have a higher self-esteem.

Bao, a mother without any formal education, summed up this way: "Since he's [her 16 year old son] gotten to School A, he's not in as much trouble and is able to learn, read, and write better."

Discussion

Understanding parental involvement in immigrant families, especially Hmong families with children in charter schools, is timely given the rising popularity of charter schools (David & Hesla, 2018; Dernbach, 2022). Parents in this study are among the many who chose to send their children to Hmong charter schools (Bailey & Cooper, 2009; Lor, 2021). Although the reasons behind parents' choice was not explicitly explored in this study, we found that they faced multiple challenges as they tried to balance various roles in their lives, including living in a hurried life, barriers to homework assistance, lacking spousal support, and having multiple children at home. For example, we found that most of the participants (67%) are employed in nonstandard work schedules. Research shows that nonstandard work has become more common in today's economy, and parents who have limited education and/or are part of an ethnic minority community are more at risk to be employed in such jobs (Castillo et al., 2020; Li et al., 2014). Furthermore, we also found that 81% of the participants and 48% of the participants' spouses are employed in either manufacturing or self-employed jobs that are demanding without flexibility. This may be one of the reasons why Hmong parents are less likely to get involved in children's schooling at school (Xiong et al., 2019) as suggested by other studies with low-income parents in different racial/ethnic groups (Antony-Newman, 2019; Aung & Yu, 2007; Gilbert et al., 2017; Grant & Wong, 2004; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Pho, 2007; Sohn & Wang, 2006).

In addition to their inflexible, nonstandard work schedules, parents in our study also must care for their multiple children at home, especially infants and toddlers, sometimes by themselves due to divorce and/or the lack of spousal support, while trying to meet their family obligations with their in-laws and other extended families. Although these findings are similar to what others have found when investigating low-income parents (Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Smith et al., 2011; Stright et al., 2009), they suggest that Hmong in this study have moved beyond refugee-related barriers such as language and cultural barriers (Adler, 2004; Yang, 2008) to structural barriers. Structural barriers require different approaches to engage parents in children's education, and future studies

should include a larger sample size drawing from both traditional public schools, as well as charter schools, to determine the generalizability of this finding.

Interestingly, we also found that parents who have a high school diploma or have limited exposure to the U.S.'s formal education tend to struggle with helping their children's day-to-day homework. This is not surprising since many of the parents in this subgroup stated that they lacked the English language and literacy to help their children complete their homework. Studies with immigrant parents suggest that English language competency plays an important role in their ability to help their children's school-related work at home (Ashraf, 2019; Aung & Yu, 2007; Pho, 2007; Sohn & Wang, 2006). Despite their hurried lives and lack of appropriate literacy skills, our findings suggest that parents still play an active role in their children's schooling at home. First, we learned that many parents in this study sacrifice their jobs, give up their side businesses, or work in different shifts to make time for their children, while other parents try to improve their English, pursue a college education, or look for a job to support their children. Although sacrificing for children has been a major theme in the immigrant literature (Chao & Kaeochinda, 2010; Chen et al., 2014), these specific behaviors have not been documented in earlier studies focusing on Hmong parental involvement. This is likely, in part, because earlier studies included only adolescents in the sample (Supple et al., 2010; Thao, 2020), focused only on parent–adolescent issues or relationships (Lee & Green, 2008; Supple & Cavanaugh, 2013; Xiong et al., 2013), and/or investigated only the challenges parents face (Adler, 2004; Arcan et al., 2017; Hones, 1999) without examining how Hmong parents are involved in their children's schooling at home.

We also learned that parents in this study use the little time they have with their children to set a climate at home with regular family routines, including enforcing regular homework hours and bedtime, monitoring and controlling the use of technology at home, and getting the family to spend more time together in activities such as sharing meals, playing cards, and/or going out to dine or walk together. This active involvement at home has been found consistently with Asian American parents despite their lack of involvement at school (Lee & Green, 2008; Li, 2006; Sy et al., 2007). However, unlike other Asian American parents, Hmong parents, especially those who came to the U.S. as adults without the opportunity to learn English and enroll in higher institutions, still need assistance to support their children's homework at home. Our data suggest that these parents knew very little about online resources to assist their children, with the few exceptions noted under Results. Instead, they tend to mention their older children as the only source of support for their younger children's homework. This finding is consistent with earlier studies with

Hmong parents in the 2000s (Adler, 2004; Thao, 2003), since less educated parents in our study tend to come from the last wave of refugees from Thailand (Grigoleit, 2006) and/or were sponsored from Laos and Thailand by their U.S. citizen spouses. Conversely, we found that parents with a college education are more likely to talk about connecting their children to libraries and using online resources to help their children's homework when they could not help their children. This is not surprising, since earlier studies suggest that parents with higher education tend to be more willing to engage in their children's schooling and display higher expectations of their children (An & Yang, 2018; Gan & Bilige, 2019).

Implications for Practice

When school administrators and teachers think of getting parents to be involved in children's education, they usually think of creating a variety of spaces at school for parents to be a part of, such as parent–teacher associations, school governance (e.g., site councils), holiday events (e.g., Halloween party), or classroom activities (e.g., reading or chaperone; Crosnoe, 2010; Ji & Koblinksy, 2009; Poza et al., 2014; Snell, 2018). This study shows that Hmong families are extremely busy and diverse. Some parents, especially those who came here recently or without a college education, are still limited with certain knowledge and skills to successfully help their children at home, while other parents who have been in the U.S. for over 17 years and have a college education tend to face different issues such as work schedules, divorce, or family obligations. Thus, it is imperative that schools think outside the box by providing the necessary resources and support for parents to be successful in their role as their children's first teachers at home. As Boonk et al. (2018) and Stacer and Perrucci (2013) suggest, parental involvement needs to go beyond what parents do at school to include parent–child discussions and involvement at home and in the community. Additionally, instead of asking busy parents with multiple children at home to come out to be actively involved in school-sponsored activities, schools should find more innovative ways to get parents involved in various school-related activities using Zoom, phone conferencing, or other technologies, especially technologies that schools provide for each child to use. These technologies are accessible and can be assisted by the children if parents do not know how to operate them. Additionally, schools should be more innovative in involving parents in their children's schooling at home and creating afterschool programs and/or online tutoring programs to support children's learning outside of the classroom, especially after second and third grades, when school subjects become more complicated and difficult for parents to assist their children. These innovations are more attuned to how Hmong and other Asian American parents

devote their limited time to invest in children's education (Chao, 2000; Juang & Meschke, 2017; Lee & Green, 2008; Supple et al., 2010; Sy et al., 2007).

Hmong charter schools have an opportunity to support Hmong parents by either doing away with homework, since some evidence suggests that it does not improve students' academic performance in general (Patall et al., 2008), or by educating and coaching Hmong parents about their curricula at school, especially those who have low literacy skills, to check on, communicate about, and monitor children's homework at home (Walker et al., 2005). Studies show that parents who participated in homework help programs tend to enhance their children's homework grade, as well as their overall grade point average (Callahan et al., 1998; Van Voorhis, 2003, cited in Patall et al., 2008). Similarly, schools should also provide more online resources for parents to use to support their children's homework at home, since many of these parents tend to have multiple children, including prekindergarteners, while holding additional jobs to make ends meet at home. Studies suggest that parents who utilize online resources are more likely to improve decision making about children's conditions, as well as increasing parenting self-confidence and understanding of child development (Na & Chia, 2008; Nicholl et al., 2017).

Due to the collaborative nature of the study, findings and recommendations in this article will be shared with school administrators and staff, as well as with the parents at the three charter schools at their various family engagement events and activities, to encourage more conversations about innovative family engagement approaches and parental involvement activities at home. For example, our data as well as other research (Jeynes, 2010, 2011) suggest that parents continue to be involved in their children's education at home despite their daily challenges. As part of the conversation, school administrators, staff, and teachers should be more aware of parents' efforts at home and find innovative ways to strengthen what parents are already doing well.

Limitations

Despite these implications, this study has some limitations. First, the convenience sample of the 23 parents from three Hmong-focused charter schools is relatively small. Thus, their stories may not be representative of other Hmong parents in traditional public schools, nor may they be transferrable to other parents in Hmong-focused charter schools, including those parents who have children in the three charter schools that participated in this study. Moreover, although the analysis was based on a team approach, we did not compare data from the two types of interviews (phone vs. face-to-face). It's possible that this could have biased our findings such that those who were in person may be more likely to share different or additional information compared to phone

interviews. Additional biases could have also been introduced through having multiple interviewers despite all undergoing similar training, as every person's interviewing style and presence may be unique. Lastly, as the primary purpose of our article was focused on at-home parental involvement, we do not know much about school parental involvement, although we do highlight how such involvement at home can impede at-school parental involvement. Thus, future studies should explore the relationship between the different types of parental involvement with Hmong parents who have children at charter schools.

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Teachers' Attitudes Towards Parental Involvement in Israel: Comparing Teachers in General Education and in Special Education

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Abstract

This study examines teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in five areas: general attitudes, passive involvement in the educational process, active involvement in the educational process, giving and receiving services, and school policy. The study mainly aimed to establish what the differences are, if any, between the attitudes of special education teachers and those of general education teachers towards these parental involvement areas. It also examined the correlation between spheres of involvement and teachers' background variables (age, seniority, academic level). The sample consisted of 157 teachers: 71 special education teachers, and 86 general education teachers. Teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire and to indicate desired areas of involvement as well as positive and negative experiences of parental involvement. Significant differences were found between the two research groups in all five areas of involvement. General education teachers had more positive attitudes towards parental involvement than special education teachers. The study highlights the importance of enhancing communication between teachers and parents, especially between special education teachers and parents.

Key Words: teacher, teachers' attitudes, parental involvement, special education, general education, Israel, services, school policy, students with disabilities

Introduction

This paper examined teachers' attitudes to parental involvement from the point of view of teachers working in special education compared to teachers in general education. The Ministry of Education in Israel supports a high level of parental involvement in the education processes. The Special Education Law in Israel allocates a significant place to parental involvement in the education of their child and defines the parents as full partners in the educational process at the schools. Thus, the importance of this study in examining teachers' attitudes to such involvement is established, while examining the difference between special education teachers and general education teachers. As authors, we share personal interest in this important issue. Since we train teachers, our goal is that future teachers will be aware of the significant importance of parental involvement in their educational work and will know how to involve parents in collaborative work that advances the student.

Literature Review

The literature review includes various models of parental involvement, parental involvement in Israel, pros and cons of parental involvement, and teachers' attitudes to such involvement. In recent decades the importance placed on parental involvement regarding what goes on at school, in Israel and around the world, has been constantly increasing (Strier & Katz, 2015). Many attempts have been made in order to understand the complexity of the relationship between teachers and parents. Parental involvement in school is defined as the interaction between the parents and the educational institution, both from a technical–organizational aspect and in the educational process (Fisher, 2016). Parental involvement is expressed in a wide range of actions, related to the manner of parental organization at the school and to the nature of their connection with the school staff. Parental involvement is the result of the desire to minimize the gap between the perception of home and the perception of the school (Fisher, 2018). Dor and Rucker-Naidu (2012) added that parental involvement is related to the parents' expectations and their beliefs regarding their children's academic and educational achievements. The purpose of parental involvement in school is to grow communication channels between the school and the parents and to create a forum for discussion which will enable the parents and the teachers to express their positions, views, and interests, as well as to participate in determining the policy of the educational institution (Miller et al. 2019; Park & Holloway, 2018). In this study, we wish to deepen the knowledge on parental involvement in the education system by performing an in-depth examination of the types of relations between teachers and parents

and their nature, in general education and in special education. This examination was performed while focusing on the teachers' point of view.

Models of Parental Involvement

In Israel, the Ministry of Education sees parental involvement as an essential goal of any education establishment and even emphasizes its importance as an integrative force driving both environments—school and home. The policy of the Ministry of Education in Israel emphasizes the advantages of parental involvement. A Ministry of Education paper published in 2018 (Ritvo et al.) emphasized that the principal and the educational staff are responsible for initiating the collaborative connections and are responsible for the existence of an active parent–teacher association (PTA) in every educational setting. Most principals, in various management levels, are required to lead their teams to act from a position of openness, respect, and trust in their communications with parents, and from that position create encounters, form organizational structures (such as parents' leadership), plan work strategies, and determine education goals. These actions will allow parents to feel part of the educational activity taking place in the establishment their children attend and to feel that they have an influential, involved role as partners, while not compromising the autonomy of the educational staff, their functional sphere, and their professional discretion. This partnership exists in two dimensions—private and systemic. In the private dimension, the principal and the educational staff carry on a continuous dialog with the parents to advance and nurture the student. In the systemic dimension, the staff and the parents interact and discourse on systemwide aspects of the education establishment such as vision, routine, activities, teaching methods, and so on. The education staff invites the parents to participate in a dialog regarding the partnership in both its systemic and private aspects. Inviting the parents into the discourse enables the parents to express their wishes and concerns and helps the staff be attentive to the parental voice (Ritvo et al., 2018).

Parental involvement in school may be expressed in different ways. Raviv (2016) has classified the patterns of parental involvement into several main levels, according to the balance of power characterizing teacher–parent relationships. These levels have been defined as the central models of involvement:

1. Parents as observers: In this model there is a boundary border between the teachers and the parents. The parents do not take an active part in school activities, but rather observe them from the side. Actions of observation include reading school information pages, watching plays prepared by the children, and attending parent–teacher meetings. The parents are passive, dis-involved observers, putting their trust in the teachers to fulfill their

roles properly. According to this model, the teachers and administrators hold all the power, and they are the sole decision-makers and policymakers.

2. <u>Parents as service providers</u>: Schools operating according to this model treat parents as a resource: the parents can benefit the school and promote it. Therefore, the parents are requested to donate material and spiritual resources to the school in order to expand the school's possibilities for activities and the educational variety offered to the students. The parental contribution can be specific to the class in which their child studies or to the entire school. In this model, as in the previous one, the school holds all the power and has the sole right to make decisions and set policies; however, the boundaries are less rigid, and the parents' entrance to the school occurs in more varied opportunities.

3. <u>Parents as partners in dialogue</u>: This model is characterized by continuous dialogue, inquiry, and partnership between the educational institution and the parents. The parents are entitled to approach the educational staff on any matter and may express their opinion and act alongside the educational staff in order to affect a change. The parents and the teachers aspire for equality in resolving problems. The communication between the parents and the teachers does not revolve solely around the children's achievements and functioning, but rather also applies to concrete issues of policymaking and decision-making.

The models reflect different patterns of parental involvement in school, from a pattern characterized by passiveness and lack of mutuality to a pattern characterized by mutuality and cooperation. Parental involvement with its various types has advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Parental Involvement at School

Many researchers (including Boonk et al., 2018; Lusse et al., 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2019) have emphasized the significant benefit that the student may derive from cooperation between his parents and his teachers, both in the educational field and the personal and behavioral field. Parental involvement contributes to nurturing the child's self-esteem, to developing social adaptation capacity, and to improving study habits. The academic achievements of students whose parents are involved in what goes on at school are higher, and the likelihood of violent expressions by these students is lower (Lusse et al., 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Moreover, parents who are actively involved in school show a personal example of contribution and action, thus reinforcing for their children the great importance of contribution to the community (Boonk et al., 2018). Furthermore, a meta-analytical study by Jeynes (2022) found that the components of parents' expectation for significant involvement

with the education staff in school had a significant influence over their children's academic achievements.

Studies show that parental involvement also contributes to the school and the teachers. Involved parents can assist the teachers in obtaining required equipment and organize meetings and lectures. In addition, parents can assist teachers to develop and enrich the curriculum and even provide them with emotional support, which may reduce professional burnout (Talmor et al., 2005). The parents may also benefit from the contact with the school, as they can use it in order to expand the relationship between themselves and their children. Parental involvement enables them to be more closely acquainted with the child's social relations, the children's society, its rules, and function (Paccaud et al., 2021). Moreover, parents who have joined the PTA deepen their familiarity with the school, have a better understanding of the way the educational system functions, and see themselves as active partners in pedagogical, social, and other aspects related to the school environment (Fisher, 2018). When the parents perceive the school as an accepting environment and the teachers express positive communication and encourage open discourse and transfer of information between themselves and the parents, then the parents feel more needed and show higher involvement (Park & Holloway, 2018). Involved parents can realize their own skills and tendencies and promote skills of creativity, leadership, and organization (Wanat, 2010). Therefore, all partners to the educational work at school benefit from parental involvement.

Alongside the many benefits of parental involvement, there are also disadvantages. For example, some studies found that parental involvement might undermine the teachers' personal and professional confidence, mainly when the teachers feel that the involvement encroaches on their professional expertise (Addi-Raccah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012) or includes strong criticism of the school and the educational staff. Parents who exert pressure on teachers may cause the teachers to develop negative stances towards parental involvement and speed up processes of physical and mental exhaustion, even increasing teachers' burnout (Nygaard, 2019). The student might also be damaged as a result of the difficult relationship between the educational staff and their parents. Lack of coordination between the parents and the school might lead to conflicts and lower the student's self-esteem and academic confidence (Lusse et al., 2019).

Parental Involvement in Special Education Settings

Thus far, aspects of parental involvement in general education have been presented. In special education, there are other important considerations. The recognition of the right of parents of children with special needs to be involved

in their child's education is one of the cornerstones of the Special Education Law enacted in Israel in 1988. The law allocates a significant place to parental involvement in the education of their child and defines the parents as full partners in the educational process at the schools. Throughout the school years, parents are invited to participate in meetings and discussions which deal with various issues related to their child. In the amendment to the law in 2018, parents are even given the option of choosing the educational setting where their child will study. The effect of continuous disputes on the special education system far exceeds the effect of similar disputes on the general education system (Collier et al., 2015b). One main reason for the tension between parents and teachers in special education is the issue of expertise. Studies that examined the difficulties in parental involvement (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) found that many parents of children with special needs disagree with the professional staff with regards to the desired teaching methods.

One of the issues which is often a cause for conflict between parents and teachers is the child's individualized education program (IEP). The legal requirement is that every student in a special education environment has an IEP designed for them by the student's educational team. This team must include the parents of the child. The parents' role during the meeting about the IEP is very important. Most of the research, which spans well over 30 years, has shown parents are often excluded, ignored, and in some cases, challenged during IEP meetings (Mueller & Vick, 2018). Studies examining parent's satisfaction of their involvement in designing their children's IEPs found that often parents felt that there were many barriers when working with schools. The parents tend to undermine the professionalism of the teachers and argue that they do not act to advance their children in the way best suited to them (Kurth et al., 2020; Slade et al., 2018).

The conflict between parents and teachers in special education is also related to the nature of the work of teachers in special education. Working with children with special needs requires addressing their wide range needs, since the performance of the student in the educational setting is highly affected by the way they function at home and by their relationship with their parents and siblings. Therefore, it requires significant teamwork and continuous contact between the teachers and the parents, much more than what is acceptable in general education. Oftentimes the relationship between the parents and the teacher in special education is very tense and highly charged. There are often communication difficulties between parents and teachers in special education; the teachers tend to be judgmental towards the parents and may even show disloyalty and disrespect to them (Collier et al., 2015a, 2015b; Gavish & Fleischmann, 2020; Kurth et al., 2020; Miller et al., 2019; Numisi et al., 2020).

Oftentimes the teacher in special education is a figure at whom parents let out frustrations stemming from the fact that their child has unique needs (White, 2021). Constraints and pressures related to fulfilling their many tasks might prevent teachers from creating an effective collaboration with the parents and may lead to negative attitudes towards parental involvement.

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Parental Involvement at School

Many studies (e.g., Fisher, 2016; Raviv, 2016) have examined the subject of parental involvement from the parents' point of view. Parental involvement at school may have a direct effect on the teachers' performance. Therefore, in order to obtain a deep understanding of parental involvement at school and its effects on the teachers' performance and on the education process, the issue must also be examined from the teachers' point of view.

The attitudes of teachers toward parental involvement are usually positive. Teachers show motivation to share with parents and even report a sense of empowerment due to parental involvement, especially when there is an atmosphere of mutual trust and appreciation between the teachers and the parents (Addi-Raccah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012; Fisher, 2016). However, teachers appreciate parental involvement so long as it is suitable to their professional conduct. Increasing influence by parents might damage a teacher who feels that the parents criticize their work and intrude on their professional expertise.

Correlations have been previously found between teachers' demographic variables and their attitudes towards parental involvement. Young teachers with higher education express more positive attitudes compared with older teachers who do not have as much higher education (Gu & Yawkey, 2010). Variables related to the characteristics of the students also affect the attitudes of the teachers. Teachers perceive the relationship with parents of students with behavioral problems, attention disorders, and hyperactivity as more complex and associated with more conflicts (Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012).

Reviewing the studies done in the field shows that the concept of involvement has many facets, and it includes different types of communication between the school and the parent. The uniqueness of the current study is in examining the link between the type of educational setting (general education and special education) and the teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement, an aspect which has not been previously researched in Israel. Thus, the current study expands the knowledge about the teachers' point of view regarding parental involvement and contributes to understanding the ways in which it is possible to develop effective patterns of parental involvement. The hypothesis is that differences will be found and that the attitudes of teachers in general

education will be more positive towards parental involvement in comparison to those of teachers in special education. The study also examined correlations between attitudes to parental involvement and the teachers' background variables: age, seniority, and education.

Method

Participants

The sample included 157 teachers from various schools throughout Israel (general and special education). Of participants, 71 of them teach in special education establishments, and 86 teach in regular education schools; 75 teach in elementary schools (ages 6–12), and 82 teach in junior and senior high schools (ages 13–18). The special education sample included teachers who specialized in special education as part of their training and taught in schools dedicated to special education—a school for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and a school for students with intellectual disability—as well as teachers who taught in special education classes in regular schools: classes for students with ASD, with a learning disability, or with behavioral–emotional disabilities, respectively. The teachers who taught in regular education contexts are teachers who were trained to teach in regular education and taught typically developing students in regular education schools.

The two groups were compared by age, seniority, and academic level. Teacher's t tests revealed no differences between the groups, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Background Characteristics of Teachers in Both Study Groups

	General Education (*n* = 86)		Special Education (*n* = 71)		Group Differences (t)
	M	SD	M	SD	
Age	37.42	8.67	36.3	9.26	.78
Seniority	12.58	9.20	10.66	9.26	1.33

Teachers' academic level in general education schools was distributed in the following manner: BA degree (*n* = 57); 66.3%, MA degree and more (*n* = 29) 33.7%. The distribution among teachers in special education schools included: BA degree (*n* = 45) 63.4%, MA degree and more (*n* = 26) 36.6%. In tests performed to test the differences between the groups related to the background variables, there were no significant differences found related to this background variable ($x^2 = 0.14$).

Research Tools

In the current study there were two types of questionnaires: (1) a questionnaire of personal background variables; (2) a questionnaire to examine the attitudes of the teachers towards parental involvement. The details of the questionnaires follow:

1. Personal background variables questionnaire: the questionnaire was constructed for the purpose of the current study and included four questions on the background variables of the tested: age, seniority, academic level, and the nature of the educational setting (special education schools or general education schools).

2. Questionnaire to examine the attitudes of the teachers towards parental involvement: for the purpose of examining the teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement, a questionnaire with 35 items was used, which included two parts:

a. First part (items 1–32):

The first five items were taken from a questionnaire which was developed to examine the attitudes of teachers in primary school towards parental involvement in a study by Shamay (2008). The original questionnaire by Shamay included 38 items and was divided into five categories. Here we used the first category, which includes five items and refers to general attitudes towards parental involvement, for example: "I would like parents to be involved in the school more than they currently are." The credibility coefficient in this category: .73. The additional 27 items (items 6–32) were based on a questionnaire by Grimberg-Zehavi (2007). In the questionnaire by Grimberg-Zehavi the items were divided into four categories: passive level of involvement in the educational process, a level of involvement of providing and receiving services, an active level of involvement in the educational process, and a level of involvement in policymaking. For the purpose of the current study, all 27 items were used, but the phrasing of the request addressed to teachers responding on the current questionnaire was changed for the purpose of this study. Grimberg-Zehavi asked the responding teacher to state the level of involvement of their students' parents in different areas, as they see it. In the current study, the teachers were requested to state the level they would like the parents to be involved in the different areas. The instruction was phrased as follows: "To what extent are you interested in the involvement of students' parents in each of the following areas?" These items were divided into four categories:

- The teachers' attitudes towards passive parental involvement in the educational process (items 14, 31), for example: "Participation in lecture evenings for parents." The credibility coefficient for this category: .63

- The teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement related to providing and receiving services (items 9, 10, 18, 21, 28, 32), for example: "Resource recruitment"; "Decorating the school and the classrooms." The credibility coefficient for this category: .83
- The teachers' attitudes towards active parental involvement in the educational process (items 8, 15, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30), for example: "Activity in a class parent committee." The credibility coefficient for this category: .89
- The teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement policymaking at the school (items 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 27), for example: "Setting the educational goals of the school". The credibility coefficient for this category: .87

Credibility of .95 was obtained in an internal consistency test (Cronbach's alpha) in this study regarding the entire questionnaire. The respondents were requested to rate the level of their agreement with the statements presented in items 1–5 and the level of interest they have in parental involvement in the different areas presented in items 6-32. The rating was performed according to the Likert scale: 1 (disagree or not interested at all) up to 4 (greatly agree or greatly interested). Higher ratings indicate a positive attitude of the teacher towards parental involvement.

b. Second part (items 33–35):

In the second part of the questionnaire there were three open-ended questions which constitute the basis for analyzing the teachers' attitudes to parental involvement on issues they chose to address themselves, without being limited by the author of the questionnaire. When analyzing the findings of the study, these questions supported the data and also enabled the researchers to refer to issues which exceed the limits of the closed questionnaire. In the first question in this part (item 33) the teachers were requested to specify the areas in which they want parental involvement. In the additional two questions (items 34, 35) the teachers were requested to provide examples of positive and negative experiences regarding parental involvement (see Appendix).

Using the research tools selected for the current research, one can get a comprehensive view of teachers' position on parental involvement, specifically addressing the involvement areas mentioned above, as well as getting the teachers' personal expression through their answers to the open-ended questions.

Procedure

The researchers personally delivered the questionnaires to the teachers who agreed to participate in the study after receiving the approval of the school

principals. The purpose of the study was explained to the teachers, and they were asked to fill in the questionnaires independently during a free hour during the day or during recess. The teachers were requested to fill in the questionnaires accurately, so that the study results provide a situation report which is as credible as possible. They were also told that the questionnaire is anonymous, intended to be used solely for research, and does not include any identifying details. The questionnaire was completed in Hebrew and translated into English for publication purposes.

Results

The findings point to significant differences between the attitudes of teachers in general education and those of teachers in special education in all tested categories: attitudes towards parental involvement in general: $p < .001$, t(155) = 8.32; attitudes towards passive parental involvement in the educational process: $p < .01$, t(155) = 3.07; attitudes towards parental involvement related to providing and receiving services: $p < .001$, t(155) = 7.69; attitudes towards active parental involvement in the educational process: $p < .001$, t(155) = 7.64; and attitudes towards parental involvement in policy making at the school: $p < .001$, t(155) = 6.77. The findings are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Differences Between the Two Study Groups—General and Special Education Teachers in Five Areas of Involvement
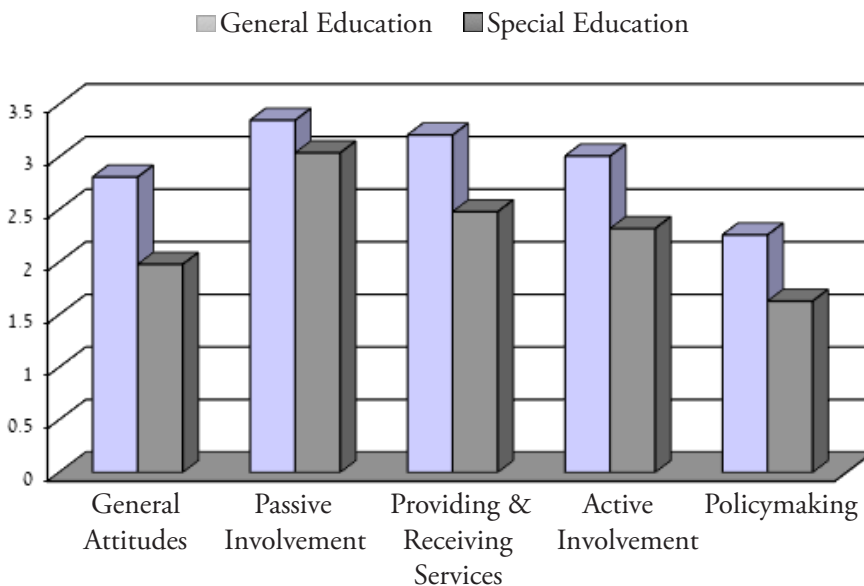
Figure 1 points to differences between the two study groups in all five areas of involvement, with the attitudes of teachers in general education towards parental involvement being more positive compared with those of teachers in special education. (A higher grade indicates more positive positions.) Therefore, the hypothesis was confirmed. Across both of the two study groups, the most positive attitudes are towards passive parental involvement, and the lowest level of interest from teachers regarding parental involvement is in policymaking.

In a Mann-Whitney analysis, no significant difference was found between the attitudes of primary school teachers and those of secondary school teachers regarding parental involvement, Mann-Whitney $Z = .98$, $p < .05$. In order to examine the correlations between the attitudes of teachers to parental involvement and their background variables (age, seniority, and academic level), Pearson analyses were calculated, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Pearson Correlations Between Teachers' Areas of Involvement and Their Background Variables in Both Study Groups

Areas of Involvement						
	Background Variables	General Attitudes	Passive Involvement	Providing & Receiving Services	Active Involvement	Policy-making
General Education	Age	-.13	-.11	-.19	-.17	-.03
	Academic Level	-.11	-.09	-.24	-.04	.06
Special Education	Age	*.24	.18	*.27	.21	.23
	Academic Level	.21	.16	.26	.09	.17

*$p < .05$.
Note. Since there was a high correlation between age and seniority variables ($r = .86$, $p < .001$), only age variable is featured.

Table 2 shows that among teachers teaching in general education there was no correlation between attitudes and background variables. Among the group of teachers teaching in special education there was a significant positive correlation between teachers' ages and their attitudes towards parental involvement in general ($r = .24$, $p < .05$), and there was also a significant positive correlation between teachers' ages and their attitudes towards parental involvement related to providing and receiving services ($r = .27$, $p < .05$). These findings show that even though the attitudes of teachers teaching in special education towards parental involvement were more negative compared with teachers teaching in general education, the older the teachers in special education are, the more positive their attitudes are to general parental involvement and to providing and receiving services.

In order to better understand the attitudes of teachers to parental involvement at school, the questionnaire included three open-ended questions about areas in which they were interested in more parental involvement as well as positive and negative experiences related to this involvement. The teachers' answers to the open-ended questions were read by each researcher separately and divided according to the categories. The division of the answers into categories was confirmed by a third researcher. Table 3 presents the main areas as stated by the teachers in their responses to these questions. The sections that follow detail the subjects to which the teachers referred according to the categories which appear in Table 3:

Table 3. Areas of Desired Involvement, Positive and Negative Experiences in Both Study Groups

Categories of Quantitative Questionnaire		General Education n = 81			Special Education n = 65		
		Desired Areas of Involvement	Positive Experience	Negative Experience	Desired Areas of Involvement	Positive Experience	Negative Experience
General Involvement	Involvement at Home	10 (12%)	-	-	16 (25%)	12 (18%)	-
Providing and Receiving Services	Enrichment	51 (63%)	32 (39%)	2 (2%)	49 (75%)	23 (36%)	-
	Afterschool Activities	41 (51%)	15 (18%)	2 (2%)	33 (51%)	40 (62%)	3 (5%)
	Resources	30 (37%)	6 (7%)	-	-	-	-
Active Involvement	Involvement in the Educational Area	19 (24%)	5 (6%)	36 (44%)	21 (32%)	5 (8%)	16 (25%)
	Discipline	25 (31%)	28 (35%)	10 (12%)	14 (21%)	21 (32%)	9 (14%)
Policymaking	School Regulations and Procedures	10 (12%)	-	18 (22%)	-	-	32 (50%)

Notes. (a) Only some participants answered the open-ended questions. (b) Some participants related to several areas of involvement.

General Involvement

Involvement at Home

The teachers referred to subjects related to parental involvement at home, for example, general education, emotional aspects, empowerment, and supporting the child's motivation to learn. It should be noted that this is the only area which the teachers raised where the emphasis is placed on the interaction between the parent and the child and not between the parent and the teacher. Among the teachers in special education, there was a higher expectation for involvement at home (25%) compared with teachers in general education (12%). The group of teachers interested in parental involvement at home also reported positive experiences in this area, for example: "the parents understood that their child requires emotional therapy, and this helped a lot."

Providing and Receiving Services

Enrichment

The teachers referred to parental involvement related to initiative and holding enrichment activities in school, for example, lectures, classes, "enriching parent activities," activities around holidays, and workshops. Most of the teachers, both in general education (63%) and in special education (75%), mentioned enrichment activities as their preferred area of parental involvement. For example, a teacher in special education stated: "sharing the organization of activities in the class on special days, 'routine breaker' days." Teachers in both study groups reported positive experiences in this area. For example, a teacher in regular education said: "a lecture to my class on the professional occupation of one of the fathers was fascinating and interesting, and I was grateful for the participation."

Afterschool Activities

The teachers also mentioned activities that fall under the responsibility of the parents after school, such as trips, family trips, parties, bazaars, youth movements, and social activities. Approximately half (51%) of the teachers in both study groups saw great importance in holding afterschool activities. A teacher in special education stated that "mostly in special education, the parents need to be involved in the social area and keep social connections in the afternoon as well." Teachers in both study groups reported positive experiences in this area, and a higher prevalence of positive reports was noted among teachers in special education (62%). For example, one teacher mentioned "the Purim market at the school – the parents were involved and obtained free inflatables, candy, and a falafel stand. They also manned the stations and helped in the event. This involvement saved the school personnel and money."

Resources

The teachers referred to developing the structure of the school, equipment, and money. Only teachers in general education expressed a desire for parental involvement in this area, and even reported positive experiences, for example: "in the financial area, in the area of the school visibility, decoration, and painting the study room." Teachers in special education did not refer to material resources.

Active Involvement in the Educational Process

Involvement in the Educational Process

The teachers described assistance in homework preparation, applying and exercising the studied material after school hours, preparation for tests, and tracking academic achievements. Both study groups stated that parental involvement is important to academic achievement: 24% of teachers in general education, and 32% of teachers in special education. A teacher in general education stated that "I would like for them to take responsibility for high achievements in the studied subjects, applying the knowledge learned, and doing the assigned exercises with the children." Alongside the desire for cooperation on academics, there were reports of frequent occurrences of negative experiences in both study groups, and in particular by teachers in general education. Thus, for example, one said, "Parents also criticize the study methods. This year, for example, they shamed a math teacher on WhatsApp when they decided that she does not teach as they would like." A teacher in special education wrote, "the parent's desire for their child to study math according to their age when the child has significant academic gaps, and they will only be frustrated and will not benefit from it."

Discipline

The teachers raised the subject of boundaries placed by the parents, punishing and enforcing behavior rules expected at the school. In special education the expectation is for cooperation in forming and applying involvement plans in the behavioral area. Some stated that parental involvement is important for discipline: 31% of teachers in general education, and 21% of teachers in special education. For example, a teacher in general education asked that the parents "be more in touch with their children's disciplinary problems." Teachers in both special education and general education reported positive experiences in parental involvement in this area. A teacher in special education stated that "when there was positive or negative feedback for behavior according to the behavioral plan set, there was also change in the child's behavior." Both study groups, the teachers in the general education and the teachers in the special

education, reported negative experiences in similar and low frequencies (12% and 14%, respectively). For example, a teacher in special education wrote that "parents who don't understand the needs and behavior of the child are involved in the behavioral plan and eventually ruin it and disrupt it."

Policymaking

School Regulations and Procedures

The teachers referred to parental involvement in setting rules of the school. Only teachers in general education stated that they were interested in parents' involvement in this area. While this issue was not raised at all in the answers of teachers in special education, it is possible they are not interested or do not expect parental involvement in this area. As for the experiences the teachers had, the teachers in general education reported negative experiences in this area at a higher frequency than their interest in parental involvement in this area. The teachers in special education also reported negative experiences. About half of them referred to this in their responses, for example, a teacher who taught in a school in which the policy was that parents do not participate in their children's birthday party, remarked about "parents who make decisions contrary to the school regulations, such as the participation of parents in the child's birthday in the classroom."

To summarize, the findings of the study show that there are significant differences between the attitudes of teachers in special education and those of teachers in general education in all five areas of involvement which were studied. Teachers in general education showed more positive attitudes towards parental involvement compared to teachers in special education. These findings appeared both in the quantitative part and the qualitative part of the current study. Among both study groups, providing and receiving services was an area of parental involvement which appeared more than any other area as a desired area of involvement and as an area in which the teachers had positive experiences.

Discussion

In this study, the attitudes of teachers who teach in two different settings (general education and special education) towards parental involvement at the school were examined. Analysis was conducted with reference to five aspects of parental involvement: (1) parental involvement in general, (2) passive parental involvement in the educational process, (3) parental involvement related to providing and receiving services, (4) active parental involvement in the educational process, and (5) parental involvement in policymaking at the school.

A quantitative analysis of the answers to the first part of the questionnaire which included closed questions showed a similar trend in the rating of teachers' attitudes to parental involvement among both study groups: the most positive attitudes, which appeared at the highest frequency, were attitudes toward passive involvement in the educational process (such as participation in ceremonies, lecture evenings intended for parents, and parent–teacher meetings) and toward providing services (such as recruiting resources and decorating the classroom). The attitudes which appeared at the lowest frequencies in the teachers' responses were toward active involvement in the educational process (such as participation in a class parent committee and organizing activities) and toward policymaking at the school (such as activities for determining the school's values and goals).

The teachers' responses in both study groups to the second part of the questionnaire, which included open-ended questions, reinforced the findings from the first part. Among both study groups, providing and receiving services was the area of parental involvement which appeared more than any other area as a desired area of involvement and as an area where the teachers had positive experiences, and the teachers often referred to enrichment activities. The teachers in general education also referred to material resources. This finding is consistent with the model of "parents as service providers," according to which the teachers view the parents as a resource (material or spiritual) which may promote the school, but the teachers have control (Raviv, 2016).

Active involvement in the educational process, both in the academic field and the behavioral field, was considered by both study groups as an area where parental involvement is desired, but to a lesser degree than passive involvement. Many teachers stated that they had negative experiences in this area when parents intervened in areas related to teaching methods. Reporting negative experiences was the highest in the area of policymaking, as well as parental involvement in policymaking, which is less desirable among teachers, especially among those in special education. These findings are consistent with findings of previous studies reporting positive attitudes of teachers to parental involvement, so long as it does not intrude on their area of expertise (Addi-Raccah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012; Fisher, 2016; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

It seems that active involvement in the educational process and involvement in policymaking at the school are regarded as an undesirable intrusion to the work methods as well as the professional areas of the teachers. Passive parental involvement or providing services create fewer conflicts between the teachers and the parents; as long as the parents do not take an active part at what goes on at the school, the teachers have no significant reason to fear an intrusion

into their jobs. It seems that teachers find it difficult to implement a dialogue model with the parents, one which enables the parents to influence content, processes, and decision-making at the school.

The findings of the study show that even in areas where teachers are interested in parental involvement, they report a significant percentage of negative experiences, which can be expressed in a difficult, complex, or challenging relationship with the parents. The findings support the assumption that teachers tend to fear significant parental involvement since they do not have the tools to direct it properly, therefore they feel more threatened and less empowered (Addi-Raccah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012).

The hypothesis of the current study was that differences will be found between the attitudes toward parental involvement of teachers in special education and teachers in general education. This hypothesis was confirmed: the attitudes to parental involvement of teachers in general education were found to be more positive than the attitudes of teachers in special education in all five aspects of involvement. It should be noted that teachers in special education did not state at all that parental involvement in policymaking and in setting the school goals are a desirable area of involvement, and half of them even reported negative experiences in that area.

It is possible that these findings can be explained by the nature of the work of the teacher in special education and the intense and demanding relationship between the teacher and their students' parents. Following the intense parental involvement, teachers might often find themselves criticized, which may invoke feelings of rejection of parental involvement and have an adverse effect on their stances towards it. The intense relationship between teachers and parents in the special education settings often become highly charged and filled with conflict. This might be expressed as judgment, lack of trust, and disrespect of the teachers towards the parents, and as suspicion from the parents, difficulty in acting in the child's benefit, and the parents attacking the education system (Collier et al., 2015b; Kurth et al., 2020; Numisi et al., 2020). It is also possible that the characteristics of the students affect the attitudes of teachers in special education towards parental involvement. The research literature found that teachers who teach students with disabilities, and in particular behavioral disabilities, more often perceive the relationship with the parents as problematic and complex (Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012).

The current study also tested the correlation between teachers' background variables (age, seniority, academic level) and their attitudes to parental involvement. Among the teachers in general education, no correlations were found between their attitudes and the background variables, while among the teachers in special education, a positive correlation was found between their ages

and their attitudes. It was found that the older the teachers in special education were, the more positive their attitudes were toward general parental involvement and toward providing and receiving services. This finding is surprising in light of the research literature which reports an opposite trend, according to which young teachers show more positive attitudes toward parental involvement (Gu & Yawkey, 2010). It is possible that teachers in special education succeed over the years in recognizing the value of parental involvement in providing services, and the importance of the initiative and responsibility taken by parents to children in special education in areas which are beyond the general curriculum.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is possible to recommend areas for further research as well as practical recommendations:

1. The current study did not examine the component of burnout among teachers with regards to parental involvement. In studies performed in the subject, a significant correlation was found between parental involvement and their burnout (Nygaard, 2019). Following the increased level of parental involvement at school, it is recommended in a future study to deepen the examination of the effect of parental involvement on teacher burnout.
2. In order to obtain a multidimensional image of parental involvement, it is recommended to receive parallel information from the parents. In addition, it is desired to examine the attitudes of teachers towards parental involvement among different groups of teachers: male teachers; subject-specific teachers teaching various subjects, such as literature, math; teachers who function as homeroom teachers; and so on.
3. It is recommended to deepen the knowledge by performing further studies according to the qualitative approach. These studies will enable an in-depth understanding of the unique attitudes of each group of teachers and the similarities and differences between them.
4. Following the findings, including a course about work with parents as part of the teachers' training is recommended. However, support is required not only during the training, but also during the first years in working in the educational system. Therefore, it is important to create programs for beginning schoolteachers in order for them to receive support in their work with parents, especially with parents of students with special needs. These programs should also encourage educational staff members to initiate activities with parents and to promote partnership with them.

To summarize, the findings of the current study extend the existing knowledge about the attitudes of teachers toward parental involvement and distinguish

between teachers in general education and teachers in special education. The findings support the conclusion that even when the teachers report desirable parental involvement, it is often associated with negative experiences. It is possible that, initially, the negative experiences of the teachers are the result of a flaw in their training process. Teaching students undergo little training on the role of parents in the educational process. Training in this area is important, since it may assist the teachers in understanding the reasons for conflicts and better navigating parental involvement (Koch, 2020; Smith & Sheridan, 2019).

Similar to the reports in previous professional literature, the current study shows that teachers find it difficult to accept parental involvement mostly in areas related to policymaking and setting school goals. Raviv (2016) recommends that schools create structured opportunities for parental involvement and recognize them as equal partners in decision-making. Such shared leadership requires empowering the parents, creating a relationship of trust, and recognizing their contribution to the educational process. However, empowering the parents to make involvement more effective is insufficient; it is also important to empower the teachers in an aspiration to balance the influence of both parties. When both parties are empowered, the attitudes of teachers towards parental involvement are more positive (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009).

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Appendix

A. Teachers questionnaire (Shamay, 2008). The teachers were asked to mark their level of agreement for each statement on a 1–4 scale: 1 (disagree) up to 4 (strongly agree).

1. When I share my decisions with parents, I feel I can influence the things that I care about the most.
2. When I cooperate with parents, I feel that the responsibility is taken away from me.

3. A good school is a school where parents are involved.
4. If it was up to me, I would have completely given up on parental involvement.
5. I would like parents to be involved in school more than they are today.

B. Teachers questionnaire (Grimberg-Zehavi, 2007). The teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which they would accept parental involvement at each area on a 1–4 scale: 1 (not interested at all) up to 4 (most interested).

6. Establishing a formal curriculum.
7. Introducing school innovations.
8. Assisting teachers in solving disciplinary problems.
9. Initiation of afternoon activities.
10. Recruiting resources (finances, materials, equipment).
11. Employing parents at enrichment classes.
12. Determining the teaching methods used at school.
13. Determining the additional program (enrichment).
14. Participation in special activities (ceremonies, holidays).
15. Organizing of trips and family trips.
16. Determining school educational goals.
17. Determining school regulations.
18. School and classrooms decoration.
19. Assisting students with difficulties with their homework.
20. Lecturing about fields of expertise.
21. Organization of bazaars, exhibitions.
22. Assisting teachers in their children's classrooms.
23. Active at the classroom PTA.
24. Active at the school PTA.
25. Cooperating in producing or writing in the school newspaper.
26. Organizing social and cultural activities at school.
27. Cooperation in determining school values.
28. Social Committee activity: decoration, events, etc.
29. Active on educational committees.
30. Active in committees that are established for a specific interest.
31. Attending evening lectures for parents.
32. Organizing group transportation for students for different purposes.
Open-ended questions:
33. State in which areas you would like the parents to be involved.
34. Give an example of a positive experience related to parents' involvement.
35. Give an example of a negative experience related to parents' involvement.

Factors That Shape Helping Relations Between Parents and Teachers: The Case of Israeli Arab and Jewish Parents

Yael Grinshtain and Gal Harpaz

Abstract

The present research examined helping relations among Israeli Arab and Jewish parents by focusing on collaboration between parents and teachers, parental self-efficacy, and help-seeking orientations from teachers: autonomy, dependency, and avoidance of help-seeking. The difference between the two main forms of help—autonomy and dependence—represent different qualities of help which parents can obtain for their children. The current study included 121 Arab parents and 192 Jewish parents who have at least one child in elementary school. According to the regression analysis, Jewish parents reported using higher levels of autonomous help-seeking, while Arab parents reported using dependent and avoidant help-seeking orientations. Furthermore, for both Arab and Jewish parents, high levels of collaboration between parents and teachers increased their tendency to seek autonomous help from teachers. In addition, ethnicity (Arab/Jewish), parental self-efficacy, and collaborative relations between parents and teachers predicted parents' help-seeking orientation in diverse domains. This study highlights cultural differences regarding parents' engagement with teachers. Based on the positive contribution of parents' engagement in general, we recommend conducting a culture-specific intervention aimed at encouraging both parents and teachers to establish helping relations.

Key Words: ethnicity, help-seeking orientations, parental self-efficacy, parent and teacher collaboration, Israeli Arab, Jewish, families, autonomy, dependence

Introduction

The growing prevalence of the neoliberalism approach with its emphasis on principles of the free market, privatization, school choice, and competition renders parents as essential stakeholders and influential factors in the school–family equation (Croizer, 2019; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Lopez et al., 2012). As in other educations systems in the world, these elements are essential in Israel. During the last three decades, extensive theory and research have addressed such constructs as parental engagement, parent–teacher relations, and parental involvement (Addi-Raccah et al., 2021; Epstein & Sanders, 2018; Goodall, 2018; Rattenborg et al., 2019; Sheldon & Turner-Vorbeck, 2019). Since parents represent significant diversity in terms of cultural, ethnic, geographical, and socioeconomic backgrounds, studies on school and home/family/parental relations often aim to establish a context-dependent perspective (Antony-Newman, 2019; Huppatz, 2015; Rattenborg et al., 2019; Reay et al., 2011). The diversity of parents' backgrounds thus offer different ways for the parents and their children to act (Goldsmith & Kurpius, 2018; McWayne et al., 2016). As to ethnic background, much of the past research has focused on immigrant parents as ethnic minority groups and their perceptions and attitudes regarding the learning processes of their children (Sime et al., 2018) and the role of parental engagement among different immigrant ethnic groups (Gilbert et al., 2017; Liu & White, 2017).

In Israel, as elsewhere in the world, multicultural ethnic characteristics are reflected in parents' attitudes and relations with the school. The two main segregated ethnic groups are the Arab and the Jewish sectors. Previous studies have shown that different parent–teacher relations prevail in each group (Addi-Raccah & Grinshtain, 2016; Fisher et al., 2014).

The present research focuses on the diverse attitudes of Arab parents, who are considered an ethnic minority group in Israel, and Jewish parents concerning their respective collaborative relations with teachers as well as their parental self-efficacy and its influence on help-seeking orientations. Based on Nadler (1997), parents' autonomous help-seeking from teachers is defined as seeking the teacher's advice and learning how to eventually deal with a problem by themselves, while dependent help-seeking refers to asking the teacher to fix a problem for them in their coping processes with their children's difficulties in learning (Harpaz & Grinshtain, 2020; Komissarouk et al., 2017). The difference between the two main forms of help—autonomous and dependent—represent different qualities of help (Komissarouk et al., 2017) which parents can obtain for their children. Based on the above, the present study aimed to examine the differences between Israeli Arab and Jewish parents in

terms of their collaboration with teachers and their parental self-efficacy as an influence on their help-seeking orientation from teachers.

Terms Definitions

Collaboration relations: Positive and warm interactions between parents and teachers that are based on mutual respect, honesty, trust, and appreciation, alongside willingness to share information and to contribute to each other.

Parental self-efficacy: Parents' belief in their ability to carry out and take actions with their child which reflect their educational positions and their parental worldview as well as how long they persevere in the face of obstacles and adverse experiences.

Help-seeking orientations: The way a person perceives the social environment and the people around them as a source of assistance when dealing with challenges and difficulties. There are two orientations of help-seeking:

Autonomous help-seeking orientation: Refers to seeking advice and knowledge, developing coping skills, and making use of opportunities to develop the ability to deal with problems independently.

Dependent help-seeking orientation: Refers to seeking a solution by asking someone else to deal with the problem or relying on another person's knowledge and abilities to solve the problem.

Avoidant help-seeking orientation: In contrast to these two help-seeking orientations, there is the avoidant help-seeking orientation which refers to avoidant behavior in terms of asking for help, even at the cost of not being able to deal with difficulty and the possibility of failure in tasks or achieving goals.

Literature Review

Parental Involvement and Engagement as Context-Dependent

Parental involvement has gained a strong presence in diverse educational systems and in the research field (Addi-Raccah et al., 2021). "Parental involvement" is an early term which focused on the variety of ways in which parents participate, volunteer, or support the school agenda (Ferlazzo, 2011). "These early conceptions of involvement were still fundamentally a one-way street and the role of [parents as] 'outsiders' remained largely passive and limited" (Kruse & Gray, 2019, p. 82). Use of the term "Parental engagement" demonstrates a shift in the concept which highlights expectations from parents to be integral, active participants or even partners toward a joint effort (Epstein & Sanders, 2018; Kruse & Gray, 2019).

Ever since parental involvement and engagement became a central focus in the educational system (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Sheldon &

Turner-Vorbeck, 2019), special attention has been given to the school context (Addi-Raccah, 2021; Cummings et al., 2017; Gilbert et al., 2017; Kim, 2009) and the parents' background (Bhargava et al., 2017; Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2022) as shaping parents' engagement and its influence on their children's outcomes (Jeynes, 2007). Parents from low levels of socioeconomic status (SES) background and/or racial/ethnic minority groups cope differently with challenges regarding their involvement in school. Thus, they shape their aspirations for their children differently from parents at a higher status (Auerbach, 2007; Hill & Torres, 2010). Parents in disadvantaged communities tend to be less present in their children's schooling (Lemmer, 2007; Kim, 2009). Following that direction, Kalil and Ryan (2020) suggest mechanisms that underlie diversity in parenting engagement. Alongside financial and time constraints, they highlight information, values, and preferences, "Historically, high socioeconomic status parents have valued 'independent thinking' and 'self-direction' more than low socioeconomic status parents do" (p. 36). On the other hand, studies have pointed out that parent's positive role beliefs can offset the disadvantages in children's development caused by a low SES (Ha, 2021).

In addition, the integration of academic socialization, school-based, and home-based involvement may differ according to the ethnic background (Day & Dotterer, 2018). Following the worldwide increase in migrants who are ethnic minorities, studies have indicated barriers to parental engagement, such as limited language skills and less education, that prevent involvement in the school affairs and fewer opportunities for collaboration with teachers and school (Johnson et al., 2016; Li & Sun, 2019). Yet, while studies regarding cultural differences in parent practices in diverse cultures emphasize language and economic difficulties, they also highlight a shared essence of advocacy and activation for the benefit of their children's success in school and in life (e.g., for Latino mothers in the United States, see Rios & Aleman-Tovar, 2022; for Filipino immigrant mothers in South Korea, see Kim, 2022; for immigrant parents in New Zealand, see Lee & Keown, 2018). As is well-documented in the literature, the process of parental engagement leads to building relations between parents and teachers/school (Epstein, 1995; Sheldon & Turner-Vorbeck, 2019). Collaborative or conflictual relations can thus be shaped by the nature of or openness to different levels of parental involvement/engagement (Addi-Raccah & Grinshtain, 2017). Previous studies have shown that collaborative relations are considered a major tool in education (Oughton, 2010; Whyte & Karabon, 2016) which, in turn, deepen trust between parents and teachers and increase parents' recognition of their abilities to help their children (Bang, 2018).

Parents' Help-Seeking From Teachers

The current study, based on the theoretical framework of Nadler (1997, 2015) is based on helping relations and particularly on the help-seeking orientations of parents from teachers, specifically by focusing on two help-seeking orientations: autonomous and dependent. An autonomous help-seeking orientation refers to the seeking of advice, knowledge, and coping skills, and making use of opportunities and future autonomous abilities to deal with problems independently. Dependent help-seeking orientation refers to seeking a solution by asking someone else to deal with the problem, relying on another person's knowledge and abilities to solve the problem (Nadler, 1997, 2015). In accordance with Nadler's terminology, parents who would like the teacher to give them solutions and answers for their child's problem ask for dependent help, which adversely affects child future coping as well. Another option for parents is to seek advice or guidance that will allow them to deal with the difficulty independently (autonomous-oriented help). In addition, parents may avoid asking for help, often at the cost of coping poorly with their children's difficulties (avoidance). The ability to cope successfully with difficulties in the long run is based on developing skills while dealing with difficulty. When someone else solves the problem for you (dependent help-seeking orientation), the learning needed to develop future resilience is effectively avoided (Komissarouk et al., 2017).

Komissarouk and Nadler (2014) showed that people with an independent self-construct prefer autonomy-oriented help, whereas people with an interdependent self-construct—more common in non-western collectivist cultures—have the tendency toward dependent help-seeking. Additionally, Komissarouk et al. (2017) presented, in a series of five studies in Israel of populations from three different cultural backgrounds (native speakers of Hebrew, Russian, and English), a cross-cultural comparison analysis in both academic and job settings of help-seeking orientation preferences. In all three cultural backgrounds, a self-reported preference for autonomy-oriented help predicted higher ratings of performance, while dependent help-seeking was found to be associated with an avoidance temperament and a performance avoidance goal orientation. They also found that, among Jewish Hebrew speakers, the report of a preference for autonomous help-seeking was higher than among Russian speakers, while the report of dependent help-seeking was higher among Russian speakers, characterized by a more collectivist culture.

Nevertheless, Stanton-Salazar et al. (2001) showed that low SES group members (e.g., Latino adolescents in the USA) avoid seeking help more than the high SES adolescents do. Taking into account the differences in SES between Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews (Lavenda, 2011), given that the SES is

higher in the Jewish population than in the Arab population, we suggest that Israeli Arab parents will be characterized by more dependent help-seeking from teachers and avoidant help-seeking, and that Israeli Jewish parents will be more oriented to autonomous help-seeking. Moreover, recent research indicates that asking for dependent help correlates with low self-efficacy (Halabi & Nadler, 2017; Harpaz & Vaizman, 2021; Vaizman & Harpaz, 2022). Alonso and Little (2019) studied the impact of Australian parents' perceptions on help-seeking behavior for their child's psychological problems; results indicated that the higher the competence the parents felt, the higher the tendency to autonomous help-seeking. It should be emphasized that the measurement of help-seeking in Alonso and Little's study, as in other studies in the field, does not serve as a central distinction pertaining to a help-seeking orientation as made in the present study but rather addresses requests for help in general. In addition, Williams and Takaku (2011) conducted research in the U.S. among international students and found that high self-efficacy is correlated with successful coping with challenges in a variety of contexts due to, among other things, adaptive help-seeking, such as autonomous-oriented help (see also Ryan et al., 2001).

Parental Self-Efficacy

The notion of self-efficacy, in general, and parental self-efficacy, in particular, informs as to how parents act and how long they persevere in the face of obstacles and adverse experiences. Studies have shown that high SES participants display stronger self-efficacy than low SES participants (Lowe & Dotterer, 2013; Murdock, 2013) and that better educated parents possess better parental self-efficacy (Coleman & Karraker, 2000). Moreover, the higher the self-efficacy among individuals, the more efforts they invest in autonomous help-seeking (Du et al., 2016; Eden & Aviram, 1993). Focusing on parental involvement, connections were found between parental self-efficacy (as part of parents' motivational beliefs) and degrees of parental involvement at home (Green et al., 2007). The measurement of the parental self-efficacy was based on parents' beliefs about their personal ability to impact the child's educational outcomes through their involvement. The findings enhance the importance of psychological constructs as directly impacting parental involvement practices (Green et al., 2007).

Following previous studies as described in the literature framework, we hypothesized that a dependent and/or avoidant help-seeking orientation would be negatively correlated with parental self-efficacy, and autonomous help-seeking orientation would be positively correlated with parental self-efficacy. The current study emphasizes parents' help-seeking orientation, parental self-efficacy, and collaboration between parents and teachers that were examined in two

different ethnic groups in order to deepen the context-dependent perspective: Israeli Arab and Jewish parents.

Israeli Arab Parents as a Minority Group

In Israel, the Arab population comprises about 20% of the entire population. The education system operating in the Arab sector functions as a separate and segregated system (Agbaria, 2015), facing serious and different challenges as a minority group in Israeli society (Agbaria et al., 2020; Reingold & Baratz, 2020). More than 50% of the Arab population live in poverty, compared to 20% of Jewish population (Hai, 2013). The Taub Report (Weiss, 2018) describes a divide in educational opportunities between Arab and Jewish sectors, favoring the Jewish sector. Yet the shift that has occurred over the past two decades among Arab citizens—from a traditional to a modern society, characterized by the moving from collectivism to individualism as demonstrated by competitive and ambition-driven patterns (Diamond, 2020)—has led Arab parents to greater involvement and intervention in educational spheres (Agbaria, 2020), perceiving it as an opportunity for success and mobility (Cohen, 2006; Fisher et al., 2014; Freund et al., 2018; Swick, 2009; Zedan, 2012).

A shift from collectivism toward individualism tends to occur when the SES (including education) goes up (Greenfield, 2009), and with that shift can come new views of the roles parents should take vis-à-vis their children and schools. Thus, a shift toward individualism among Arabs may not just indicate movement toward competitive and ambition-driven patterns, but also different ways of viewing schools as well as the roles of all the members of the school community. Yet, it is worth mentioning that this shift is still in process, and Arab parents' involvement in schools is still low in comparison to that of Jewish parents (Zedan, 2012).

The Present Study

The present study focuses on help-seeking orientations from teachers among Arab and Jewish parents in the Israeli elementary school system. From the literature presented, the following four research hypotheses are derived:

1. Differences between Arab and Jewish parents' help-seeking orientation from teachers: Arab parents would be characterized by a more dependent and avoidant help-seeking orientation, and Jewish parents would be more autonomous help-seekers.
2. Correlations between parents' help-seeking orientation from teachers and parent–teacher relations in both Arab and Jewish schools: Collaborative relations between parents and teachers would be positively correlated with autonomous help-seeking orientation and negatively correlated with avoidant help-seeking.

3. Correlations between parents' help-seeking orientation from teachers and parental self-efficacy in Arab and Jewish schools: Dependent and avoidant help-seeking orientations would be negatively correlated with parental self-efficacy and an autonomous help-seeking orientation would be positively correlated with parental self-efficacy.
4. Ethnic affiliation (Israeli Arab/Israeli Jewish), socioeconomic status, parental self-efficacy, and parent–teacher relations would predict parents' help-seeking orientation from teachers.

Methodology

Participants

The research was based on two samples. The Arab sample included 121 Israeli Arab parents (93 mothers, 28 fathers); ages ranged from 20–56 years old (M = 36.84; SD = 7.18); 91% were married, 9% were single parents (divorced or widowed); 7.4% were parents of one child, 22.3% were parents of two, 29.8% were parents of three, and 40.5% had more than three children; 63.6% described themselves as low-working-class, and 36.4% as middle-upper and upper-class. The Jewish sample included 192 Israeli Jewish parents (170 mothers, 22 fathers); ages ranged from 32–55 years old (M = 43.09; SD = 4.35). Of these, 82% were married, 11% were single parents (divorced or widowed), and 7% cohabited without marriage; 6.9% had one child, 25.5% had two, 52.1% had three, and 15.5% had more than three children; 38.3% describe themselves as low-working-class, and 61.7% as middle-upper and upper-class. The Arab and the Jewish parents were all Israeli citizens and lived in Israel.

Procedure

Participants answered questionnaires in Arabic or Hebrew, according to their mother tongue. The Institutional Ethics Committee of the academic institution of research approved the research (No. 3064). Questionnaires in both languages were first examined in a small sample, and modifications connected to background and cultural sensitivities were performed. All the questionnaires were anonymous, and there was no way to identify the participants' identity (other than ethnic background); confidentiality and privacy were thus maintained. Finally, all the participants in the study signed the informed consent form, which included detailed explanations of the research and its potential future publication.

The procedure, which relied on the referral method, was planned in advance. In the first phase, emails using snowballing sampling were sent to groups of parents in different localities based on recommendations that the

researchers received from acquaintances and colleagues. The mails contained links to the questionnaires in both languages. Parents could freely choose to participate in the research. They were also asked to pass the link on to other parents who might volunteer to answer the questionnaires, a procedure that enabled each new participant to suggest another potential participant (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). In the second phase, in order to increase the number of respondents, a request was sent by the researchers to acquaintances and colleagues to upload the questionnaire link on their Facebook page. This was useful as initial responses were not very high, particularly among Arab parents.

Measures

1. Collaborative Relations Between Parents and Teachers (Addi-Raccah & Grinshtain, 2016, 2017, 2021).

This was a 10-item questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree" (e.g., "Teachers consult with parents in relation to their children." For a full description of the items, see the Appendix). Cronbach's α = .82.

2. Parenting Sense of Competence Scale - PSOC (Gibaud-Wallston & Wanderson, 1978, cited in Johnston & Mash, 1989).

This questionnaire has 17 items on a six-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (6) "strongly agree." Nine items (2,3,4,5,8,9,12,14,16) are reverse scored, so that high scores indicate a positive parental experience. It has two subscales: Items 1–9: Satisfaction From a Parental Experience (e.g., "Being a good parent is a reward in itself."). Cronbach's α = .75. Items 10–17: Parental Self-Efficacy (e.g., "I meet my expectations of myself regarding the expertise of my childcare."). Cronbach's α = .78. The Cronbach's α for the 17 items was .85. Similar to Coleman and Karraker (2000), the overall score is used as a measure of parental self-efficacy.

3. Help-Seeking Orientation Scale (Komissarouk et al., 2017)

Participants answered the questionnaire regarding two types of difficulties separately: learning, and social–emotional difficulties. The seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (7) "strongly agree" includes 14 items for assessing three help-seeking orientations: *Dependent help-seeking orientation*: items 1, 2, 6, 8, 14 (e.g., "Instead of dealing with a problem on my own, I prefer to rely on someone who knows more than me."). Cronbach's α = .95 (learning difficulties as well as social–emotional difficulties). *Avoidant help-seeking orientation* items: 3, 4, 7, 12, 13 (e.g., "I do not typically ask for help resolving my problems."). Cronbach's α = .95. and α = .96 for learning

and social–emotional difficulties, respectively. *Autonomous help-seeking orientation*: items 5, 9, 10, 11 (e.g., "I tend to ask for advice from other people regarding the problems I deal with if it helps me cope better."). Cronbach's α = .96. and α = .95 for learning and social–emotional difficulties, respectively.

4. Background Questions

Participants answered questions concerning their gender and age, their family status, the number of children they have, their SES, and place of residence.

Data Analysis

We used SPSS 25 to analyze the data in three stages. First, we ran descriptive statistics based on background variables. Second, we studied differences between the two samples (Arab and Jewish) in the research variables and correlations. Finally, we conducted six hierarchical linear regressions for dependent, autonomous, and avoidant help-seeking orientations: three for seeking help from teachers in the learning domain, and three while dealing with social–emotional difficulties.

Results

The results section is organized according to the four hypotheses:
1. Arab parents would be characterized by a more dependent and avoidant help-seeking orientation, and Jewish parents would be more autonomous help-seekers.
2. Collaborative relations between parents and teachers would be positively correlated with autonomous help-seeking orientation and negatively correlated with avoidant help-seeking.
3. Dependent and avoidant help-seeking orientations would be negatively correlated with parental self-efficacy and an autonomous help-seeking orientation would be positively correlated with parental self-efficacy.
4. Ethnic affiliation (Israeli Arab/Israeli Jewish), socioeconomic status, parental self-efficacy, and parent–teacher relations would predict parents' help-seeking orientation from teachers.

First Hypothesis

Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted to identify the differences between the Arab and Jewish samples concerning the help-seeking orientation (see Table 1). Supporting the first research hypothesis, Arab parents were found to be more avoidant help-seeking than the Jewish parents. Additionally, in line with the first research hypothesis, when they seek help, the Arab parents were

characterized more as dependent help-seekers than the Jewish parents. All of these differences were also obtained in both learning and social–emotional difficulties. Finally, the Jewish parents were more autonomous help-seekers than the Arab parents when dealing with social–emotional difficulties. Thus, the first research hypothesis was confirmed.

Table 1. Independent samples *t*-test for equality of help-seeking orientation means by ethnic group (Jews/Arabs)

Help-Seeking Orientation Domain	Help-Seeking Orientation	Jews (*N*=170) M (SD)	Arabs (*N*=121) M (SD)	*t*-test t(311)
Learning	Dependent help	4.39 (1.35)	5.26 (1.31)	5.60***
	Avoidant	3.52 (1.60)	4.31 (1.58)	4.28***
	Autonomous help	5.60 (1.29)	5.79 (1.28)	1.61 n.s.
Social–Emotional	Dependent help	4.22 (1.43)	5.02 (1.30)	5.06***
	Avoidant	3.33 (1.60)	4.29 (1.41)	5.58***
	Autonomous help	5.71 (1.14)	5.46 (1.18)	1.82*

*$p < .05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

In addition to testing the research hypothesis, significant differences were found in parental self-efficacy between the Jewish sample (M = 4.60; SD = 0.60) and the Arab (M = 3.66; SD = 0.71) one t(310) = 12.38; $p < 0.0001$. The Jewish parents were characterized by parental self-efficacy significantly higher than that of the participating Arab parents.

Second Hypothesis

Supporting the second research hypothesis, positive significant correlations were found in the Jewish sample between autonomous help-seeking orientation from teachers and parent–teacher collaborative relations (dealing with learning difficulties: r = 0.17; $p < 0.01$; dealing with social–emotional difficulties: r = 0.22; $p < 0.001$). In the same way, positive significant correlations were found in the Arab sample between autonomous help-seeking orientation and parent–teacher collaborative relations (learning difficulties: r = 0.24; $p < 0.01$; social–emotional difficulties: r = 0.19; $p < 0.05$).

Additionally, a significant negative correlation was found in the Jewish sample between avoidant help-seeking from teachers and collaborative parent–teacher relations (learning difficulties: r = -0.13; $p < 0.05$; social–emotional problems: r = -0.16; $p < 0.05$). Likewise, in the Arab sample, a significant negative correlation was found between avoidant help-seeking from teachers

and collaborative parent–teacher relations (learning difficulties: r = -0.28; $p <$ 0.001; social–emotional difficulties: r = -0.19; $p < 0.05$). The second research hypothesis was thus confirmed (see Table 2).

Table 2. Correlations Matrix, Arab and Jewish Parents' Samples

		Age	# of Children	Parent–Teacher Collaboration	Parental Self-Efficacy
Number of children	Arabs	.44***	-		
	Jews	-			
Parent–teacher collaboration	Arabs	-	-	-	
	Jews	-	-		
Parental self-efficacy	Arabs	-	-.19*	.18*	-
	Jews	-	-	-	
Learning dependent help-seeking orientation	Arabs	-	-	-	-
	Jews	-		-	-.20**
Learning autonomous help-seeking orientation	Arabs	-	-	.24**	-
	Jews	-		.17*	-
Learning avoidant help-seeking orientation	Arabs	.26***	-	-.28***	-.20**
	Jews	-	.17*	-.13*	-.21**
Social–emotional dependent help-seeking orientation	Arabs	-	-	-	.20**
	Jews	-	-	-	-.14*
Social–emotional autonomous help-seeking orientation	Arabs	-	-	.19*	-
	Jews	-	-	.22**	-
Social–emotional avoidant help-seeking orientation	Arabs	-	-	-.19*	-.24**
	Jews	-	.15*	-.16*	-.28***

*$p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Third Hypothesis

Supporting the third research hypothesis, a significant negative correlation was found in the Jewish sample between a dependent help-seeking orientation from teachers and parental self-efficacy (learning difficulties: r = -0.20; $p < 0.01$; social–emotional difficulties: r = -0.13; $p < 0.05$). In the Arab sample, contrary to the third hypothesis of the study, a positive correlation was found between the dependent help-seeking orientation and the first subscale of parental self-efficacy (social–emotional: r = 0.20; $p < 0.001$). In addition, unlike

the Jewish sample, no correlations were found in the Arab sample between a dependent learning help-seeking orientation and parental self-efficacy. Moreover, supporting the third research hypothesis, significant negative correlates between parental avoidance of help-seeking from teachers and parental self-efficacy were found in both the Jewish sample (learning difficulties: r = -0.21; $p < 0.001$; social–emotional difficulties: r = -0.28; $p < 0.0001$) and the Arab sample (learning difficulties: r = -0.20; $p < 0.001$; social–emotional difficulties: r = -0.24; $p < 0.001$; see Table 2).

Fourth Hypothesis

In order to predict the six dependent variables concerning parents' help-seeking orientation from teachers (dependent, avoidant, and autonomous help-seeking orientation in learning and in social–emotional difficulties), we conducted six hierarchical linear regressions. In the first step, the demographical variables were examined in stepwise regression (ethnicity–Arab/Jewish, age, number of children, SES). In the second step, parental self-efficacy and parent–teacher relations variables were examined (see Table 3). According to the hierarchical linear regressions, three main variables predicted a help-seeking orientation in both learning and social–emotional difficulties: ethnicity (Arab/Jewish), parental self-efficacy, and collaborative parent–teacher relations.

In the learning domain, ethnicity and parental self-efficacy predicted dependent help-seeking: Arabs and low parental self-efficacy parents asked for more dependent help than Jewish parents or high parental self-efficacy parents. Also, ethnicity and collaborative relations predicted avoidant help-seeking: Arab parents who reported low collaboration in parent–teacher relations avoided seeking help more than Jewish parents or parents who reported high collaboration. Collaborative relations also predicted more autonomous help-seeking from teachers in the learning domain (see Table 3). In the social–emotional domain, more Arab parents sought dependent help than Jewish parents; parental self-efficacy and collaborative relations negatively predicted an avoidant help-seeking orientation and the same as in the learning domain: collaborative relations also predicted autonomous help-seeking from teachers. In addition, avoidant help-seeking in the learning domain was positively predicted by the parents' age and by the number of children in the family in the social–emotional domain. For Arab parents, greater age was correlated with avoidant help-seeking in the learning domain, whereas for Jewish parents, a greater number of children was correlated with avoidant help-seeking in the learning domain.

Table 3. Results of the Hierarchical Linear Regression for Predicting Parents' Help-Seeking Orientation From Teachers

	Learning Domain						Social–Emotional Domain					
	Dependent Help		Avoidant		Autonomous Help		Dependent Help		Avoidant		Autonomous Help	
Model 1	β	t	β	T	β	T	β	t	β	t	β	t
Ethnicity (Arab/Jewish)	0.31***	5.32***	0.24***	3.67***	0.13*	2.19*	0.27***	4.62***	0.23***	3.83***	-	-
Age	-	-	0.13*	2.00*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
# of children	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.15**	2.54**	-	-
R² adj.	0.09		0.08		0.01		0.07		0.08		-	
F	F (1,276)=28.27***		F(3,274)=8.63***		F (1,276)=4.81*		F (1,276)=21.34***		F (2,275)=13.18***		-	
Model 2	β	t	β	T	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
Ethnicity (Arab/Jewish)	0.25***	3.24***	0.15*	1.86*	-	-	0.27***	3.34***	-	-	-	-
Age	-	-	0.16**	2.42**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
# of children	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.12*	1.97*	-	-
Parental self-efficacy	-0.19**	-2.64**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.22**	-3.14**	-	-
Collaboration	-	-	-0.17**	-2.62**	0.18**	2.81**	-	-	-0.14*	-2.26*	0.22**	3.36**
Model Summary												
R² adj.	0.11		0.10		0.06		0.07		0.12		0.05	
F	F (6,271)=6.70***		F (8,269)=4.95***		F (7,270)=3.33**		F (6,271)=4.60***		F (7,270)=6.30***		F (5,272)=3.73**	
Δ R²	0.04		0.04		0.05		0.02		0.05		0.06	
Δ F	2.26*		2.54*		2.79**		1.24 n.s.		3.33**		3.73**	

Note. Only significant predictors are presented. *p < .05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Discussion

The present study sought to shed light on help-seeking orientations of Arab and Jewish parents by focusing on the help they seek from their children's teachers while dealing with learning and social–emotional problems, their parental self-efficacy, and parent–teacher collaboration perceptions. In doing so, the study extended the limited scholarship on the orientations of parents toward seeking the help of teachers by comparing the views of two ethnic groups in the state education system in Israel. The findings are discussed below by differences and similarities between the ethnicities.

As for differences between the ethnic groups, participating Arab parents seem to be characterized by higher levels of dependent and avoidant help-seeking orientation in both learning and social–emotional domains, while surveyed Jewish parents are more autonomous in the social–emotional domain. Moreover, high parental self-efficacy correlates negatively with dependent help-seeking orientation among Jewish parents, but correlates positively with dependent help-seeking among Arab parents.

Following these results, similarities and differences between the two ethnicities can be discussed. The findings in the current study indicate that collaborative relations with teachers were found to contribute positively to parents' autonomous help-seeking among both Arab and Jewish parents. Previous studies have indicated that positive collaborative relations are perceived as strongly beneficial for parents, teachers, and students (Addi-Raccah & Grinshtain, 2017; Bang, 2018). In addition, studies that focus on the increase in parental involvement in the Arab population emphasized the move toward modernity and greater openness to individualistic ways among the Arab citizens of Israel (Arar et al., 2018; Freund et al., 2018). Although parents from different backgrounds may construct their roles differently in terms of the academic environment and aspirations for their children (Auerbach, 2007), it seems that Israeli Arab parents perceive their stronger involvement and engagement in the educational process as encouraging mobility toward higher SES (Fisher et al., 2015; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014). On the other hand, schools appear to be enhancing collaborative relations with parents to create a full partnership instead of seeing the parents as a disengaged group, as has been the case in the past (Arar et al., 2018; Dor, 2013; Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014). Collaborative relations can be the key for the desired changes for children. As the findings in the present study indicate, these relations and engagement can be achieved or enhanced by deepening the helping relations, with a focus on encouraging useful patterns of help-seeking.

As for the differences found between the two ethnicities, Arab parents in the present study tend to be more avoidant or dependent in their help-seeking

orientation than their Jewish counterparts. Although the Arab population generally lives apart from the Jewish population, Arab parents appear to limit their involvement by adopting passive strategies in order to to maintain the status quo (Kim, 2009). Adopting these help-seeking patterns may be a result of their low SES (Stanton-Salazar et al., 2001) characterized by low levels of educational capital, that is, knowledge about active ways of getting involved with school and teachers (Khoury-Kassabri & Straus, 2011; Kim, 2009), and by the limited resources that would enable them to help their children (Arar et al., 2018; Gur et al., 2020). Autonomous help-seeking may thus be perceived as unfamiliar and not beneficial for them. In terms of ethnic cultural characteristics, it was found that in individualistic cultures, people who function well tend to perform individual objectives and make decisions by themselves without help from others, while in collectivistic societies people invest less effort to change things (Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014). Since the Israeli Arab ethnic group tends to be more collectivistic (Arar et al., 2013; Cohen, 2007; Eilam, 2002), the orientations of dependent and avoidant help-seeking are more common aspects of their traditional culture. There have been indications of a transition in recent years from collectivism to individualism in Arab society in Israel, ambition-driven and reflected in greater competitiveness (Abduljaber, 2018; Agbaria, 2020; Diamond, 2020). It seems, however, that more support and awareness of options to enhance the beneficial help-seeking orientation are needed. This is relevant for both Israeli Arab and Jewish parents from diverse backgrounds in light of a recent qualitative study conducted among the two groups finding parents activated different orientations of dependent help-giving in their children's homework (Grinshtain & Harpaz, 2021). Finally, the reasons for these less useful help-seeking patterns may be rooted in governance. Since the leadership style among Israeli Arab citizens is characterized as more authoritative than the Jewish citizens (Ali & Da'as, 2017) and centralized (Toren & Iliyan, 2008), "the power is in the hand of the governance which manages the affairs of the school without openness to outside parties, including parents" (Arar et al., 2018, p. 336). Since helping relations are formed by both sides—help-seeking parents and help-giving teachers—it seems that features of the school may serve to maintain differences between the two ethnic groups.

A particularly interesting finding for both groups relates to the inverse correlation obtained between parental self-efficacy and dependent help-seeking parents (Du et al., 2016; Eden & Aviram, 1993). Findings presented in the present study showed that among Jewish parents low levels of parental self-efficacy were associated with high levels of dependent help-seeking. Among Arab parents, however, high levels of parental self-efficacy were associated with high dependent help-seeking. In general, high parental self-efficacy seems to be a

starting point for help-seeking. Thus, the Arab parents may perceive dependent help as a small step toward becoming more involved or engaged with school and are aware of its importance for their children (Fisher et al., 2014). Taken together with the significant differences between the high amounts of dependent help-seeking by Arab parents compared to Jewish parents, it seems that dependent help can apparently be viewed as more beneficial than avoidance and high parental self-efficacy as facilitating the process of helping relationships.

The present study extends the knowledge on help-seeking orientations of Israeli Arab and Jewish parents by pointing out the kind of help they seek from their childrens' teachers while dealing with learning and social–emotional problems, their parental self-efficacy, and parent–teacher collaboration perceptions. Two main issues are worth discussing. First, since Arab parents in general are characterized by high levels of avoidance of help-seeking, high parental self-efficacy is strongly beneficial for them. Encouraging parents to use greater autonomous help-seeking may require a culture-specific intervention, particularly relevant when examining the traditional and collective-oriented approach. An example for insights on how teachers can reach out to and engage parents from collectivistic cultures comes from the Bridging Cultures Project (Trumbull et al., 2003; Trumbull et al., 2020). This project demonstrates the importance of professional development that helps teachers who work with diverse populations have a more informed perspective on their own culture as well as the culture of their students. Zoabi and Savaya (2016) summarized that in a traditional society such as this Arab group, emphasis is given to social cohesion and harmony obtained by conformity with social norms, avoidance of public expression of disagreement and emotional expressions. Thus, in a traditional society, an autonomous help-seeking orientation can be perceived as a disrespectful form of collaborative relations between parents and teachers. As was previously discussed, Jewish education gives more space to parental choice and individualism. Thus, parent–teacher relations are still shaped and influenced by their school policy and not by individual interactions (Addi-Raccah & Grinshtain, 2017). This can be seen as a traditional approach rather than a modern one that focuses on individuals' needs and growth. Moving from a traditional society to a more modern one could be a trigger for learning how to use autonomous help and could create a meaningful step toward realization that parent–teacher collaboration could enhance children's well-being (Trumbull et al., 2020). Second, as a minority group, Arab parents perceive education as highly valuable for their children's future (Fisher et al., 2015; Freund et al., 2018). Thus, focusing on help-seeking in the learning domain may reflect a possible contribution of parents to their children's development in the future.

Conclusions

Parental engagement, as a phenomenon that is broadly studied around the world, was examined in the current research by focusing on collaborative relations between parents and teachers in two ethnic/cultural groups in Israel: Arab and Jewish. The two groups represent minority and majority ethnic groups respectively in Israeli society. The conclusions were divided as to similarities and differences between the groups.

As for similarities, it seems that collaboration between parents and teachers is highly beneficial for establishing autonomous help in both groups. This finding highlights the importance of collaboration in diverse groups and cultures. It also goes hand in hand with the direction of past studies which reflect the moving toward modernity in the Arab society (Agbaria, 2020; Diamond, 2020). As for differences, dependent and avoidant help-seeking orientations were higher among Arab parents. As these orientations are considered less useful, it is important to undertake research to discover underlying cultural norms that are at the base of these orientations. If teachers can understand the cultural differences between Arab and Israeli parents in their likely orientations to their children's schooling—for example, differences in how parents construe their own and teachers' roles—they will be in a better position to encourage parents to participate in new ways.

The present study sheds light on helping relations between parent and teachers as dependent on the educational–cultural context. In particular, it emphasizes that Israeli Arab parents, as part of a minority group, face the challenge of overcoming barriers in order to enhance helping relations options for their children.

Recommendations

We propose to foster parent–teacher collaboration regarding help-seeking norms and expectations for collaboration between parents and teachers. This can be achieved through guidelines and guidance for parents on recommended ways to ask for autonomous help from the teachers, focusing on the implications of autonomous versus dependent help. In addition, teachers should be trained in helping parents to understand beneficial ways to get help that can foster the children's coping abilities in the future. Zhou et al. (2020) argued that supportive parental involvement contributes to students' achievement and that controlling or intrusive involvement was negatively connected to achievement. Addressing the distinction between supporting and controlling involvement as well as the distinction between dependent and autonomous help-seeking might allow parents to apply the implications of these different types of help for their children.

Limitations

Some limitations of this study should be noted. Following the SES variable, the measurement in the sample of the current study indicated a majority of low SES among the Arab sample and a high SES among the Jewish sample. Therefore, although the SES variable was measured for both the Arab and Jewish samples, it was not included in the final analyses. According to Addi-Raccah (2021), the Jewish and the Arab sectors are divided based on SES, and most of the Arab population live in low-SES settlements (Addi-Raccah, 2021). While these differences are not accidental and reflect the differences in the two ethnic groups in Israel, it is worth exploring the theoretical ideas put forward in the present study with other minority and majority groups where SES diversity is significant. For example, measuring the different contribution of ethnicity/cultural features and SES, the variables of the current study should be examined in countries where certain minority ethnic groups are characterized as having meaningful diversity in SES. Moreover, as the present research is based on parental self-reporting, in order to further validate the findings in subsequent studies, we suggest examining this issue through, for example, observational research as well as through validation of parental self-reporting on the opinion of the child's teacher. Further, using qualitative methods by interviewing parents from both ethnic groups might increase our understanding of the motives for help-seeking as related to specific contexts. A deeper understanding of the meaning of the different help-seeking behaviors could thus be achieved.

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Appendix. Items of Parent–Teacher Collaboration

1. Parents contribute to teachers' work.
2. Parents assist in handling problems at school.
3. Parents appreciate the teachers at school.
4. Teachers consult with parents in relation to their children.
5. Teachers respect parents.
6. Parents and teachers work jointly on various themes.
7. Teachers report to parents on their children's learning situation.
8. Teachers encourage parents' involvement in class activities.
9. Teachers collaborate with parents on decision-making.
10. Teachers are honest with parents.

Taking a Collaborative Approach to Our Students' Research in Education Settings

Carla Solvason, Nicola Watson, Jaimie Emily Tillsley, and Daniel Bizarro Correia

Abstract

In the United Kingdom (U.K.), all students who are studying for a Bachelor of Arts degree need to complete a piece of independent research in order to gain their "honours" (U.S. "honors") status. As a university faculty we have very specific ideas about the purpose of this research and the positive impact that we hope that it will have upon the U.K. settings (mainly schools and kindergartens) in which it is carried out, which we discuss in this article. Although our approach would appear successful, this judgement has so far been based upon the evidence of the final, summative project alone. Obtaining a small amount of funding from the university for students to act as co-researchers provided the ideal opportunity to explore the topic further by collecting empirical data from students and settings. Because our original plans for data collection were disrupted by COVID-19, we gained responses through an anonymous survey which enabled frank responses from both students and staff in settings. Although the data collected was, overall, encouraging, it did raise some issues for us, as faculty tutors, to consider. These include the way that we convey the importance of students carrying out their projects *independently* (that is, without university supervisor intervention) to settings themselves, and how we ensure that the students collaborate with settings at *all* stages of the project.

Key Words: dissertation, student research, practitioner research, collaboration, ethics, care, university placements, practicum, United Kingdom, schools

Introduction

In the U.K., a university degree with honors signifies a higher standard of degree than a standard Bachelor degree, and all students who wish to have "hons" added to their Bachelor of Arts (BA) title must successfully complete an independent research study or dissertation in their final year. This means that each year we, as tutors in the Department for Children and Families (DCF, a faculty within the School of Education in a university in central England where we train students who are preparing for a future in kindergarten or early years teaching), support over 100 students in our BA program to carry out research in settings where they will impact upon children, families, and fellow practitioners. In fact, it is highly unlikely that any child in our local district will go through their schooling experience untouched by one of our university students' research projects. This is a responsibility that we take seriously as a department and has involved us reframing the approach traditionally taken to these projects by our students to better suit them and the settings in which research takes place.

Central to this shift in understanding is our students recognizing, whether already employed by the setting or only visiting on placement, that they are *not* experts carrying out research with the aim of developing the work of others, but novices, researching in order to develop self. They are researching with the aim of producing a dissertation that demonstrates "that [they] have learned how to do research" (Phillips & Pugh, 2015, p. 29). It is likely, as novice researchers, that they will make a few mistakes along the way, but as their university tutors it is vitally important to us that these students' interactions in setting are positive—that our students are supporting and not hindering those with whom they are working.

We make clear to our students, who are both practitioners and researchers *in training*, that they are not positioned to cast judgement on the practice of others or to make lists of recommendations for colleagues in settings. Many of these professionals, after all, are far more experienced practitioners than themselves. Instead, we have adopted McNiff's (2010, 2014, 2016) approach to action research, whereby the focus of student research studies is one of *self-improvement*. This does not then preclude the possibility of the research having a positive impact upon the settings, as by sharing their findings with those in the settings they then "stand some hope of influencing the thinking of someone somewhere" (McNiff, 2010, p. 132). The emphasis is a *collaborative* approach to research between the student and settings' staff, whereby there is potential for all (but always, ultimately, the child) to benefit from the learning experience.

The points above and the ethical values underpinning our faculty's approach have been discussed in a range of previous publications (Solvason, 2016, 2017, 2018). The problem with these publications is that they have all been theoretically or anecdotally based, as we have not had empirical data to determine the impact of this specific approach on either researcher or research setting. Although we have seen "evidence" through submitted dissertations (which, it is important to remember, is an assessed piece of work counting towards a final degree classification), we have not, until now, had opportunity to collate the frank perspectives of both students and settings' staff about their experience of this collaborative research. Our university's "Students as Partners" research scheme, which funds students to play an active role in a research project, provided an ideal opportunity for us to fill this void.

This research project, designed in partnership with two students who had opted into the project (and are named as authors), aimed to:

- develop a clearer picture of the experiences of our students carrying out settings-based research, and

- establish evidence of impact (if any) that students' research has had upon settings from the perspective of setting staff.

We hoped to create the conditions to optimize honest responses from all participants. This would help us to better understand which aspects of our approach were working well and enabling positive collaborations between students and settings, and which needed further development. Our findings will provide food for thought for anyone in a setting that supports students carrying out research, in addition to prompting university and college tutors to reflect upon how they guide students in their research projects.

Literature Review and Contextualisation

Unlike many literature reviews, ours serves a dual purpose—to explore literature related to the student dissertation, but also to further establish how, in some cases, our own approaches are *different* to these. Thus, while discussing the existing literature, we further contextualize our own approaches to student research to make clearer the context for the research results that follow. We note here that the existing literature all focuses upon guiding students in their research approaches; it does not consider how their research might impact upon the setting.

The Purpose of the Dissertation

Before specifically moving on to the type of practice-based research carried out by our students, it is useful to understand the role that the dissertation

plays within the broader student experience. Final-year undergraduate dissertations are a common feature of university courses around the world, including within the discipline of Education Studies (Gibson & Garside, 2017). Usually, undergraduate dissertations involve the collection of empirical data (Gibson & Garside, 2017) and are concerned with the generation of new knowledge (Jacobs, 2017; McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Van der Meulen, 2011), albeit on a modest scale.

There is a considerable body of literature available to undergraduates as guidance to completing a dissertation, and these texts primarily emphasize the procedural aspects of conducting research. For example, Bell and Waters (2017), define the purpose of research as "the attempt to provide answers to questions by collecting and analyzing data and information" (p. 12), and Denscombe (2017) explains research as encapsulating "identifying, measuring, solving a problem, evaluating, and producing guidelines" (p. 5). Texts such as these are designed as useful guides to undergraduates across a wide range of courses; however, our faculty's approach to dissertations embeds some key differences to much of the published work.

Crucial to our approach to research as a department is that ethicality is embedded *throughout* the process, rather than confined to discrete procedural considerations prior to the research beginning. This approach is reflected in the emphases on self-improvement and collaboration, as alluded to earlier, and is firmly entwined with the caring nature of the professions that our students are training for. Many of our graduates will go on to work with children and families, and in recent decades there has been a resurgence in the need for relationship-based practice to be recognized as central to this type of work (Munro, 2011; Trevithick, 2014). Therefore, in our department, *how students conduct their research in relation to others* is key.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2019) recognizes that Education Studies has "its own academic community, its own distinctive discourse and methods of enquiry" (p. 4). The education of children carries with it a moral responsibility beyond that found in many other professions (James et al., 2005), and despite the industrialization of educational systems in the U.K. threatening to squeeze the humanity out of it, Jarvis (1995) advises educators to "be prepared to respond to the current social pressures and retain the ethic of concern for persons that forms the very essence of education itself" (p. 25). This duty of care is magnified when working with the youngest and most vulnerable and their families, where Dadds (2002) suggests the work is a moral endeavor. It is only reasonable, then, that we should view our dissertations in a different light than those carried out in many other subject areas.

The Practice-Based Research Dissertation

As Sanderson (2016) explains, schools and universities are inextricably linked; they "need each other to reach their common and respective goals" (p. 184). Practice-based research projects afford opportunities to work with others in settings, which can be more rewarding for students than working in isolation (Van der Meulen, 2011), but can also present inevitable challenges. On our faculty's BA course, some students will carry out research in settings which are new to them, others will revisit a setting where they have had a previous placement, and some will carry out research in a setting that already employs them. Each circumstance holds unique challenges in terms of the insider/outsider dynamic, possible conflicts of interest, and the negotiation and mutual understanding of the roles of researcher, university student, and practice colleagues. However, as Sanderson (2016) noted, there is often a disconnect between the intentions of the university and the settings' understanding of these. Researching as a visitor can be viewed as presumptive, and researching one's own organization is intrinsically political (Coghlan, 2019); if roles are not tacitly or explicitly understood by all involved, research can be regarded as threatening the status quo or even as subversive.

Costley et al. (2010) point out that where researchers are insiders, they need to draw upon the shared understanding and trust established with colleagues. We would go further and argue that it is the responsibility of *all* practice-based researchers, colleagues or otherwise, to strive to achieve this ethical imperative within their research. This accountability necessitates the foregrounding of the researcher's *self*-development so that there is a praxis of critical self-reflection in the management of dynamic relationships with others, which can counterbalance the more traditional researcher identity as critic, aiming to bring about change for those people and processes external to them (Coghlan, 2019).

Unlike some educational training courses, reflective practice is recognized as core to effective early childhood education and care (QAA, 2019). Since power imbalances in the research process are inescapable, it is important that student researchers reflect upon their "power and privilege as researchers" (Van de Meulen, 2011, p. 1295). Employing highly sensitive and respectful ethical research approaches underpinned by reflection can support both self-development and reciprocity as well as "democratic knowledge development in practice" (Jacobs, 2017, p. 578). Indeed, beyond the fairness of democracy, we make clear to our students that the needs of the other must always take priority in their research settings. Solvason (2017) stresses that, "as practitioners in a caring profession, we have a responsibility to provide for the basic needs of research participants, above and beyond our need to obtain 'valid' research results" (p. 169). Put more simply, the need for good research results should never eclipse our moral duty of care to those with whom we work in the education settings.

The Ethical Imperative

Ethical codes exist to minimize risk of negative impact, either unforeseen or deliberate, as a consequence of research. No matter how small, any research conducted in British universities must comply with the ethical code of its institution. As well as our university ethics policy governing the research carried out by all students, students in our course are also directed to the ethical code specific to research in education—the British Education Research Association's *Ethical Guidelines* (BERA, 2018). There are, additionally, ethical codes particular to the Early Years profession. However, Banks (2009) argues that the problem with such codes is that they are externally generated, that is, they are produced *for*, not *by* the researcher, and as such require no more than compliance. In our department we believe that a vital aspect of successful research is that ethics becomes meaningful to the researchers as they become aware of their responsibility to the "other" in the research.

When discussing the ethical guidance that researchers receive, Banks (2009) suggests that the examples of challenging scenarios found in textbooks can make it seem as though "ethical issues only arise when a problematic case or difficult dilemma is experienced" (p. 3). In this context, ethical consents become nothing more than a "safety net" for when troubles arise. This clouds the reality that all aspects of research, just like all human interactions, are ethically loaded. Punch (1994) discusses how deeply personal research is and that "Entry and departure, distrust and confidence, elation and despondency, commitment and betrayal, friendship and abandonment—are all as fundamental here as dry discussions on the techniques of observation, taking field notes, analyzing the data, and writing the report" (p. 84).

Choosing who it is appropriate to ask, what those questions might be, and how participants can genuinely opt in or out of the research all require the researcher to carefully consider the position and the well-being of the research participants, to empathize. The concept that a signed consent form is nothing more than your evidence *in case complaints arise*, completely obscures the values of care, responsibility, and sensitivity toward the other that should underpin all of our students' research interactions (Solvason, 2017).

By championing an ethical approach which focuses on the values of the researcher within our course, the student is supported in securing a deeper understanding of what it means to be an ethical researcher, rather than a researcher who is ethically compliant (or who is careful to "watch their back"). Our principles are in part based upon the work of Bloor (2010) who views the "do no harm" mandate for researchers as wholly inadequate; instead, he contends that the social researcher has an "ethical *obligation* to bring about a good" (p. 17). This, Bloor argues, should not only be evident in the results

of a research project, but throughout the life of the research. This is a sentiment that we have embedded in our own research approach, meaning that in all research proposals we expect to clearly see how this "good" has potential to positively impact upon *the child,* but we also look for evidence of how sensitive and caring approaches are being considered *throughout* the project to all involved (Solvason, 2018).

What Support Do Our Students Receive?

Our students are prepared for their final year research project through a module which takes place in the previous year. When carrying out research in their final year, students receive six hours of one-to-one support from their dissertation supervisor, as well as four workshops by the dissertation lead, spaced throughout the year. All of this is university-based; tutors do not visit settings. All input is informed by McNiff and Whitehead's (2010) unique approach to action research, characterized by an emphasis on values and positive collaboration with others to co-create new practice knowledge.

Theoretical paradigms are important tools for supporting students to manage the research process while maintaining positive relationships with others. For this reason, it is vital that before beginning their research, students should comprehend the constructivist world view and become aware that there are as many answers to a research question as there are children, or settings, or practitioners (Walker & Solvason, 2014). We establish that a key aim of research is to consider different perspectives, to better "understand…the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221), or to become more aware of others' "rich and contextually situated understandings" (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019, p. 227). As tutors we present the view that without this openness to learn from the views of others, no development in understanding can be made. Or, as Palmer (1998) puts it "Humility is the only lens through which great things can be seen" (p. 108).

Linked to this, students are encouraged to use methodological approaches predicated on the *positive potential* of cooperation. One example is Cooperrider and Fry's (2020) appreciative inquiry model (AI), defined by the authors as the "craft of asking questions that elevate a system's cooperative capacity to apprehend strengths and positive potentials, [to] unite around greater meanings and shared goals" (p. 267). This approach involves focusing on the positive aspects of an organization and learning from what they do well, rather than the tendency of so much research, to focus upon inadequacies to be fixed. The AI approach is inherently positive and collaborative and thus provides students with a framework to present their ideas for research to those in settings as activities which will encourage and nurture rather than finding fault or demeaning.

Another value promoted through the support module is influenced by McNiff's (2010) advice for researchers to be completely open to what they might find out through their research. McNiff (2010) cautions all researchers to remember to hold ideas "lightly and provisionally" (p. 37), to acknowledge the uncertain nature of knowledge, and reject the concept of a single right answer, avoiding temptations towards grandiosity. In other words, to move away from those dissertations which start with: "I'm right, and here's how I went about convincing others I was right," to openings that explain: "this is what I was unsure of, and here is how I went about discovering more about it with the help of others." Similarly, Costley et al. (2010) advocate for a reflexive approach, and Banks (2009) calls for a shift away from professional ethics being considered as an external area of study or a set of guidelines toward ethics being viewed as an everyday aspect of professional life, something which is part of the professional's character. Inherent in an ethical, reflective, and reflexive stance is being open to the ideas of others. Finally, Solvason (2018) suggests that the move away from the concept of researcher as expert to that of researcher setting out on an enquiry into something that they *know little about* (with the help of those in the setting), can make the dissertation a far less daunting prospect for inexperienced students.

Research Methods

Approach

It is impossible to measure in any numerical way the impact of small-scale research projects such as those our students carry out, as "there are areas of social reality which such statistics cannot measure" (Silverman, 2001, p. 32). Instead, our priority when we embarked on this small-scale research was to discover more about the students' and settings' experience of working together to carry out a research project collaboratively and to better understand the perception of both student and setting staff, in terms of what they felt had worked well and what needed developing. In this sense, this research is a case study, for as Stake (1994) explains, a "case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied" (p. 236).

As has been mentioned, the overall dissertation experience for the student is, to some extent, reflected in their final dissertation submission, but we recognized that the assessed nature of this work does not necessarily encourage *total* transparency, particularly if the experience was not especially positive. To enable a more transparent sharing of thoughts around the research experience, we were aware of the importance of removing ourselves as tutors from the equation, and this is where the role of students as collectors of data became

invaluable. In addition it was useful that the students collecting data for us were not from the same course, as this meant that they had no preconceptions of what positive or negative interactions or experiences on our course *should* be. In this position they could genuinely fulfil the role of naïve researchers (Estacio, 2012).

Full ethical approval was gained from the university for us to collect data from both students and settings staff, and all participants were made fully aware of their rights and choices, in line with the BERA (2018) *Ethical Guidelines* before participating. This included information related to what would happen with the data collected.

Data Collection

Although a focus group approach was originally identified as the best way to collect data from the students based upon the principle that "they have the advantage of making use of group dynamics to stimulate discussion, gain insights, and generate ideas in order to pursue a topic in greater depth" (Bowling, 2002, p. 394), unfortunately, our final approach to data collection from students looked quite different. In the initial furore provoked by COVID-19, the whole research project was put on hold. When it was deemed appropriate to revisit the research almost 12 months later, our students were still under elevated pressure, struggling with the additional demands of negotiating their practice experience and studying online and at a distance through the pandemic. For these reasons we did not feel comfortable placing additional demands on them (even if that was only taking part in an online focus group discussion). As a result, we reluctantly changed our data collection method for students to an online survey.

Although survey may have hampered the depth of responses that we received, there were also some advantages. One was that the survey was sent to a wider range of students (n = 96) than would have been included in the focus group interview approach. Another was that the survey enabled greater consistency across the two samples' data collection. We had already identified online survey as the most appropriate way of collecting data from the settings (n = 87), and using this approach for both groups of participants meant that we could present the same range of questions to both practitioners in settings (kindergarten and school teachers) and university students, with just slight changes in wording.

The surveys were emailed to our students through our usual communication channels and were sent out to all settings who were working with one of our final year students. The member of staff at the setting who had worked most closely with the student (usually the student mentor) was invited to respond.

All surveys required the participant to acknowledge that they were over 18 years of age and had read the research information sheet that preceded the survey before they completed their responses.

Some of the survey questions were closed, requiring a simple yes or no answer, for example: "Did you share your research plans with the setting [staff] prior to starting your research?" or "Did your student share their research plans with you prior to them starting their research?" Other questions were more open ended, inviting more qualitative data. For example, we asked respondents whether they felt that the research impacted upon practices or processes in the setting in any way, adding: "Could you please explain your answer?" The survey remained open for one month, with a reminder email sent at the beginning of the final week.

Results

Respondents to the survey included 22% of students (n = 19) and 11% of setting staff (n = 10). Most setting responses were brief, completing the closed questions only. The data were first considered by researchers individually, who identified emerging themes before coming together to compare and verify these. The data were then reduced, identifying whether there were sufficient responses to evidence the key point under investigation, and finally reorganized into a logical argument (Wellington, 2015). The key themes identified are explored below. The voices of the student and setting staff are presented in italics, to enable easy identification. Quotations are followed by part of the code assigned to the individual respondent through the anonymous survey to enable differentiation in responses. We acknowledge that the small percentage of response rate means that we are not able to present these as representing the whole, but the responses still present significant ideas that are worthy of exploration.

A Collaborative Approach to the Research

Across all setting participant and student responses, all bar one student indicated that productive discussion took place between the setting and student before they began their research. The one anomaly was a student's study that did not collect empirical data but was literature based. These initial discussions were reported to take place with a range of staff—teacher mentors, early years leads, teachers, and head teachers—and it was encouraging that two students reported discussing their topics with all practitioners at the setting (502, 326). The setting respondents did not further elaborate on these initial discussions, but most of the students did. Although around half of the student responses suggest that their ideas were simply approved by the relevant staff member,

other responses suggest a genuinely collaborative approach between setting staff and student, for example:

> We discussed what would be best for me and the setting that would benefit us both. (023)

> We discussed topics I was interested in, and they think would benefit the school. (755)

> My idea was taken on enthusiastically as I explained I would use outcomes to try to improve practice. (679)

Additionally, some students showed real sensitivity to the needs of the setting and initiative in their identification of an area of study. For example, one student responded that their topic emerged through observation in the setting (502) and another that they had "cross-referenced" their own areas of interest with those highlighted in the school improvement plan (577). Another student reported taking extra care with the approach, aware that it was a sensitive topic, explaining, "I wanted to explore children's mental health but wanted to clarify with the teacher what topic would be suitable and ethical" (109). All students who carried out their research in a setting reported that they were able to decide on a topic that was potentially beneficial for both themselves *and* their colleagues in the setting.

Although all staff and student responses indicate that data was collected in a sensitive and nondisruptive manner, six of the students said that they had not explicitly discussed their means of collecting data with the setting staff. Three students, on the other hand, said that they had altered their approach as a result of this discussion. Several students reported changing their approaches due to the restrictions of lockdown, but the comments below indicate a sensitivity toward their settings that goes beyond simple practicalities. They shared:

> I aimed to give them the questionnaire on the slowest day around the time children were asleep, so it gave them the opportunity to do it with little distractions or disruption. (739)

> [I] changed data collection methods in order to adhere to COVID risk assessment and minimize pressure on participants due to being in lockdown. (577)

Research Impact

All students who collected empirical data reported sharing their findings with the setting staff. In their dissertation support they are strongly encouraged to choose an approach to sharing findings that is suitable for the setting, and it was encouraging to see the range of ways that this was done. They included:

- I created an information poster of the highlights of the data collected (109)
- Formal letter (755)
- A chat [informal discussion] and a poster (360)
- I plan to send an email to all participants stating my key findings. I also plan to do a short letter to parents of children who took part (126)
- I will advise the headteacher of my findings in person, and I will email to thank participants and inform them that way (235)
- I plan to send emails to all my participants; as it was small scale it is possible (796)
- Presentation. Have emailed this to staff so that it can be reviewed at their convenience (577)
- Staff meeting and power point presentation (922)
- During staff meetings at certain intervals during the research project (326)
- Inset day training (502)
- Leaflet (739)
- Dissemination poster (509)
- 1:1 meeting (453)

Encouraging as this is, the responses of the setting staff seem more inconsistent in this area. One staff respondent mentioned that: "I feel that the research helped the staff to rethink their practice to include more math opportunities for the children" (718), indicating that the research had been shared in a helpful way. And another said:

> I think that, particularly under the circumstances, she has been very well supported by the University and that there is a strong positive impact on the setting as a whole for student research within the settings. (965)

Only four of the staff respondents stated that the findings from the research had been fed back to them (which is perfectly viable; after all, the range of setting represented in the data may be entirely different to the range of students), yet seven of the staff respondents shared their perception that the research had impacted upon the student. This is a little incongruent as it is fair to assume that it was necessary for staff to be aware of the research outcomes in order to recognize their impact upon the student. Interestingly, two of the staff responses refer to the fact that the student had increased their confidence through carrying out the research. One setting staff explained it this way:

> She has grown in confidence when making suggestions to changes in practice that will positively impact the children, with the knowledge to thoroughly explain her ideas. (965)

Similarly, six student responses referred to the impact that the research had on their own practice. These responses demonstrate the ultimate aims of this

research approach—to improve practice for the benefit of the child and the family. Responses include:

> Although I have not finished yet, I can already see how much it affects my beliefs. I would even like to go further and explore the topic more. I am considering change of a career to be involved with families more, rather than children. (679)

> Knowledge gained from Lit Review to empower learning strategies. (376)

> My understanding is strengthened so hopefully my practice will be enhanced. (326)

> I know strategies which will help improve communication with parents. (739)

> It has made me realize how important many different aspects [are that] can help a child's emergent literacy skills. (360)

> A greater understanding of parent partnership. (671)

Some students shared how their research had impacted upon both them *and* the setting. For example, this student communicated how she had seen impacts upon colleagues in practice and how the setting had begun "working with one of the organizations discovered during my literature review to make long term curriculum changes" (577). Another student (502) mentioned that a new policy was being written for the setting as a direct result of her research.

When the students were asked whether they had received feedback from their settings after their research, some of their responses suggested further evidence of impact. These included the research providing opportunity for staff at the setting to appreciate the quality of work that they were already carrying out, with this student sharing: "They were shocked with how many different methods of communication they used because it was everyday practice; they forgot they were using them" (739), as well as identifying areas for further improvement. Other students shared how their research findings "showed gaps in what the parents thought" (755) and how a setting "used the data collected to re-evaluate the lay out of the setting" (360). These present genuine, impactful examples of partnership and knowledge exchange and development between setting, staff, and student.

Expectations of Faculty Tutors

It is important to recognize our own areas for improvement as faculty tutors, and one response that we received from a setting's member of staff suggested that tutors should take more of an active role in the student research. It said:

I have a new student, too—just started Year 1 (foundation degree) [first year of a two-year undergraduate degree course] on a part-time basis. With this student we are having regular practice partners meetings during this year over "Teams" [video conferencing]. For the student currently completing her independent study, this has not been the case. I feel if, as practice mentors, we had this type of support with our current student, I would have been able to give her better advice and guidance during the process. It would also be really good to have information on previous "outstanding" independent studies to support discussions with students around the types of studies they could research. Sometimes they do not realize how aspirational they can be and don't always challenge themselves. (360)

This is very useful to us, not because we agree that we should be more involved with the student in their setting, but because it makes clear to us that we need to explain more clearly to settings' staff our department's position in terms of our dissertation students. Our view is that, as final year undergraduate students, these researchers are about to leave with a BA (Hons) degree and professional responsibility as *leaders of practice*. Their research project is an opportunity to rehearse that leadership role, and we purposefully keep our distance. Our students' context is very different to those just beginning a Foundation Degree. The data suggests that we need to far more explicitly state this to staff at the settings.

Discussion

The timing of this research was unfortunate. Given that the research took place during the COVID-19 pandemic when those in settings were experiencing an unprecedented period of flux and increased workload, the low response to the survey was as expected. Most of the setting staff responses were brief, completing the closed questions only, but we were still appreciative of this considering the extremely traumatic period from which they were emerging, and the responses are worthy of respectful scrutiny. We have taken some key points for consideration away from the data, which we discuss below.

A Collaborative Approach to the Research

Student responses indicate that productive discussion took place between staff at the settings and students before they began their research. It could be argued that because our dissertation module is framed upon cooperation, this finding reflects nothing more than compliance, a necessary component, and by itself insufficient to demonstrate a praxis which promotes collaboration and

the co-creation of practice knowledge (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010). However, that some student discussions were with a range of practitioners or even *all* of the staff carries more credence in terms of demonstrating a genuine embodiment of the values introduced through this module—the need to seek respectful and *shared* understandings (Costley et al., 2010) and a democratic approach to knowledge creation (Jacobs, 2017). Likewise, although the staff responses indicate that all student data collection was nondisruptive, this could reflect the "sensitive and respectful ethical research approaches" as extolled by Solvason (2017, p. 174), or it might indicate that setting staff were merely untroubled or uninvolved beyond the initial discussions regarding research proposals. Indeed, the fact that six students confirmed their data collection methods were *not* discussed with their setting signifies a need for students to more appropriately keep staff involved *throughout* their research, rather than only at the initial and end stages. Nonetheless, findings do indicate clear evidence of students' reflective practice (QAA, 2019) and management of dynamic relationships with others (Coghlan, 2019) in their efforts to prioritize the needs of settings rather than the outcomes of their dissertations.

Evidence of Impact

The evidence of positive impact on individual students is clear. Our preexisting anecdotal evidence from reflections within dissertations correlates with the findings that some students had grown in confidence and gained insights into future career paths. It was also reassuring to see that this was consistent with staff perspectives on their students. Regarding evidence of impact on *settings,* that the findings showed some students understood the benefits of shared understanding and trust (Costley et al., 2010) and consciously strove to effect these, implies a reciprocity which in itself achieves the ethical imperative "to bring about a good" (Bloor, 2010, p. 17), albeit implicitly. It was gratifying to identify additional, tangible instances of positive impact upon settings such as policy development, adaptations to physical environments, and illumination of good practice in the tradition of appreciative enquiry (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020).

Conclusion

The limitations of this research are clear—this was a small percentage of an already relatively small sample of approximately 100 students and settings. It cannot be deemed as representative. In addition, we did not have the opportunity to more deeply explore the emerging themes through interview. In further research it would be really interesting to discover how our particular approach

to research compares with other practice-based BA degrees—whether it is, indeed, as unique as we perceive it being. It would also be extremely helpful to revisit our original plans to interview students about this to delve more deeply into individual student experiences of research in practice.

As with all valuable research, this is both a useful affirmation that, at least in some cases, our teaching about ethical and caring research is seeing fruition, *we are getting it right*; whilst simultaneously presenting us with some future challenges. It is extremely rewarding to see that at least some of our students, even when carrying out research in the most challenging of pandemic circumstances, were able to make a positive impact upon their settings, with colleagues, children, and families. But as tutors, we also have some issues to address, and these include:

- How we encourage *all* our students to view research as an ongoing negotiation and collaboration with the relevant setting staff, and not as a situation where initial permission is gained and findings are fed back.
- Consideration of the most meaningful and appropriate ways for us, as a faculty, to open a dialogue with settings about our student research, our expectations, and what they should anticipate.

We espouse respectful and reciprocal understanding in research, but, as these responses suggest, it may be that our side in the setting staff/student/university communication triangle is the side that is missing. Perhaps conveying a wealth of information concerning aims and values to *students*, even *final year students*, is not enough. Perhaps we need also to make our intentions more explicit to *setting staff*. In this vein we also encourage settings to take a more proactive approach with students that mention research as part of their responsibilities within the setting. Question your students on the purpose of their research and how their discoveries might possibly impact upon the children and families that you support. If you have any doubts or any queries about this research, be sure to follow them up with the education institute contact that you hold for the student. Do not allow ambiguity where the best possible experience for the children in your care is concerned.

In response to the data discussed above concerning previous research, the DCF now regularly share summaries from student dissertations with partners in a quarterly research newsletter sent out to settings. Not only does this share some of our student research findings, but it also provides a useful source of Continual Professional Development (CPD) for settings. However, more clearly conveying research expectations to settings is something that remains for us to take forward if we are to effectively model the behaviors that we are expecting from our students in terms of an openness to, and learning from,

different perspectives. If we can convey these values more effectively, then that may provide an opportunity to open more channels of respectful, honest, and *ongoing* communication between setting staff and students in the process, with better outcomes for the child and the family always in mind.

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Social and Emotional Learning and Community-Based Summer Implementation

Saterah Bigham and Sara C. McDaniel

Abstract

Preschool aged children's social and emotional adjustment impacts their behavior across settings. Providing high-quality early intervention services that enhance social and emotional skills can help prepare children for formal schooling and improve social and behavioral outcomes. The summer prior to Kindergarten presents a unique opportunity for community-based settings to implement social and emotional learning initiatives. One program that has been found to be efficacious in increasing social and emotional competence and reducing problem behaviors with younger populations is the Preschool Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (Preschool PATHS) program. The purpose of this study was to examine implementation fidelity and social validity of the Preschool PATHS program offered in a community-based setting in the summer. Findings suggest that agency staff can independently implement the Preschool PATHS program with fidelity. Furthermore, ratings revealed that the intervention is socially valid and deemed acceptable by agency staff. The results are presented along with implications for future practice.

Key Words: social–emotional learning, summer learning, implementation, community-based program, Preschool Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies

Introduction

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process of integrating thinking, feeling, and behaving to become aware of oneself and of others, manage one's

own behaviors and those of others, and make responsible decisions (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). The core competencies of SEL include the ability to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, take the perspective of others, establish and maintain relationships, engage in responsible decision making, and manage interpersonal feelings successfully (Durlak et al., 2011; Zins & Elias, 2006). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identified five core competencies associated with social and emotional learning as (1) self-awareness, (2) self-management, (3) social awareness, (4) relationship management, and (5) responsible decision-making (Brackett & Rivers, 2014). In terms of SEL, learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging, and meaningful (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). SEL is fostered through successful relationships over the course of the lifespan.

Early Intervention and SEL

Young children who display patterns of persistent disruptive behaviors can later develop more intensive behavioral challenges that are difficult to change. In turn, these children spend less time accessing the educational curriculum and fall behind in many academic and developmental domains. Access to early intervention programs is a critical component of a child's later success in life (Denham, 2006). Currently, there is an increased need for services that address the mental health, social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive needs of children at an early age to mitigate negative influences on development. What Works Clearinghouse published a practical guide on preparing young children for school to identify actionable, evidence-based practices that support early learning and to better prepare children to enter formal schooling. The first key recommendation in the practice guide is to consistently provide engaging instruction in social and emotional skills (Burchinal et al., 2022). Research has indicated that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrate 40% more delays in social–emotional functioning, and almost 20% exhibit disruptive behavior problems that impact school adjustment (Bierman et al., 2008). This is consistent with the research conducted by Fantuzzo et al. (2007) who found that early classroom disengagement was associated with lower cognitive, social, and motor outcomes, as well as lower performance on math standards. Several researchers have reported that preschool children who have difficulty connecting socially to others and the learning environment perform poorly in school readiness domains prior to Kindergarten (Coolahan et al., 2000; Fantuzzo et al., 2003, 2004, 2007). As children transition into formal schooling years, emotional expressivity, or outward expressions of positive or negative emotion, may be an important marker of adjustment (Denham,

2006). Maladjustment and poor social and emotional skills impact academic, behavioral, and social functioning, exacerbate further mental health concerns, and can impact the trajectory of a child's life.

Preschool Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)

The Preschool Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (Preschool PATHS; Domitrovich et al., 2007) curriculum is one program that has been found to support the social and emotional needs of young children and has been implemented in various settings. According to Bierman and Motamedi (2015), Preschool PATHS is based upon four basic domains of SEL which include friendship skills and prosocial behavior (e.g., sharing, helping, taking turns), emotional knowledge (e.g., recognizing and labeling core feelings), self-control (e.g., using the "turtle technique"), and social problem solving. The turtle technique includes recognizing your feelings, stopping your body, tucking inside your "shell" and taking three breaths, and coming out when you are calm and can think of a solution (Domitrovich et al., 2007). Researchers who have examined the possible benefits of the Preschool PATHS program have recently found that after completing the curriculum, children made significantly greater gains in emotional knowledge and emotional recognition skills, vocabulary and literacy skills, and social problem-solving skills (Domitrovich et al., 2007). Furthermore, in recent studies of the Preschool PATHS curriculum, researchers found that children made greater gains in emotional knowledge and emotional recognition skills and concentration and attention skills (Hughes & Cline, 2015; Mihic et al., 2016). After completing the curriculum, children demonstrated a reduction in relational aggression, conduct problems, and hyperactive and impulsive behavior (Bilir Seyhan et al., 2019; McClelland et al., 2017; Sanders et al., 2020). The literature base regarding the Preschool PATHS curriculum consists mainly of studies in which the curriculum was implemented in a school context.

Community-Based SEL Programs

Young children spend most of their time in non-school contexts (Downey et al., 2004). Summer can serve as a pivotal time in intervening with young children prior to the start of formal schooling to ensure that they have the social–emotional competence to engage in goal-oriented learning and prosocial interactions in kindergarten. This is especially true for young children growing up in poverty. SEL programs can be implemented in various settings, and summer-based programs have been beneficial for preschool aged children (Graziano et al., 2014; Gullota, 2015; McDaniel et al., 2021). In one of the very limited studies available that focus on SEL as an early intervention tool to enhance

school readiness for children the summer prior to Kindergarten, Graziano et al. (2014) examined the impact of an eight-week summer learning program for preschoolers. Graziano et al. (2014) found that the program was implemented with fidelity, was well received by families as evidenced by high levels of attendance and satisfaction, and led to large and reliable improvements in the domains of school readiness, behavioral, academic, and self-regulation as documented by observational and standard assessments. However, the program was implemented by university-based researchers and not local summer community agency staff. The most recent study that examined Preschool PATHS in a local neighborhood YMCA summer day camp setting was the study conducted by (McDaniel et al., 2021). Intervention groups were led by graduate research assistants. Ratings were completed by teachers across three time points, and they found positive outcomes for children who participated in the area of social–emotional well-being.

Environments in which children spend time offer prime opportunities to offer interventions so that children can utilize social and emotional skills across contexts (Devaney et al., 2006). Community-based programs including after-school programs offer children the unique ability to foster social–emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2020). Out-of-school programs can enhance social and emotional skills because there is often a more relaxed schedule in which children can engage in hands-on activities with peers with adult feedback and modeling (Schwartz et al., 2020). However, community-based settings and afterschool programs also face considerable difficulties with implementing SEL interventions for children as well. Barriers to offering SEL programming include a lack of available tools and resources and a lack of professional development opportunities (Durlak et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2020). Programs offered during the summer face challenges such as limited time in the summer to offer interventions as compared to having an entire academic year to implement, as well as limited staff and organizational buy-in (Terzian et al., 2009). Implementation of these evidence-based programs and the social feasibility and usability of these programs needs to be explored further.

Implementation Fidelity Issues With Community Programming

Program implementation is a critical component that is examined in relation to the use of evidenced-based interventions in schools and in community contexts. The degree to which a program is administered as intended is a prominent definition of implementation fidelity that is found in the literature (Durlak, 2017; Yeaton & Sechrest, 1981). Implementation fidelity is one of the single greatest factors that can impact the effectiveness of an intervention (Bruhn et al., 2015; Durlak, 2017; Durlak & Dupre, 2008). Durlak et

al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL programs and found that only 57% of school-based SEL programs included implementation data. Collecting fidelity information in community settings for SEL programs can be complex due to factors such as lack of funding, lack of available resources, and privacy laws (Domitrovich et al., 2010). For example, research on implementation fidelity of the Preschool PATHS program has typically included self-report data as opposed to data collected from independent observers (Humphrey et al., 2018). The information available regarding strategies and components that support successful implementation of SEL programs are scarcely reported, use only self-report methods to gather implementation fidelity ratings, and provide limited information into the dimensions that support implementation fidelity.

SEL Programs and Social Validity

According to Wolf (1978), social validity is: (a) the assessment of the social significance of the goals of an intervention, (b) the social acceptability of the intervention procedures, and (c) the social importance of the effects of the intervention (Finn & Sladeczek, 2001; Kazdin, 1981; Schwartz & Baer, 1991; Van Houten, 1979). Perceptions of relevant stakeholders can be obtained from questionnaires and interviews, and gaining this critical information can offer insight into the contextual fit of an intervention and ensure that early learning centers offer these needed interventions. Research conducted by Marchant et al. (2012) indicated that higher levels of implementation fidelity are associated with higher ratings of acceptability or social validity. Social validity research is often underreported, and research stops short of addressing perceptions of out-of-school staff and SEL programs.

There is an extensive evidence base that supports the effectiveness of early intervention services and SEL programs in schools. However, there is a gap in the literature examining implementation fidelity and social validity of the Preschool PATHS program in a local neighborhood YMCA summer camp setting led by agency employees. There is an identifiable link between higher rates of implementation fidelity and social validity (Wollersheim Shervey et al., 2017); however, there is limited information regarding these topics in relation to early SEL interventions for preschoolers. To truly assess whether children are benefiting from SEL programs, we need to better understand the degree to which teachers or out-of-school staff can implement the Preschool PATHS program as it was designed and their overall perceptions and beliefs about the program. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine implementation fidelity and social validity of the Preschool PATHS in a summer camp setting. The present study was designed to answer the following quantitative research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ 1): How effectively can community implementers implement the Preschool PATHS Program with fidelity in a summer camp setting? Do implementers differ on fidelity?

Research Question 2 (RQ 2): Do outside community implementers view the Preschool PATHS Program implemented in a summer camp setting as socially valid for their community? Are there differences between types of community implementers (e.g., graduate research assistants and YMCA counselors)?

Method

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at a YMCA in the United States with a historically minority predominantly Black/African American and high poverty population. The location locale code is "small city" as the YMCA served and was located in a diverse community with around 100,000 community members. The local neighborhood YMCA offered a summer day camp for children in the community. The YMCA is a 175-year-old faith-based organization that focuses on youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. The YMCA provides services and opportunities to children who are from a lower socioeconomic background. The children attended the camp Monday–Friday from 7 am–3 pm. Extended hours after 3 pm were considered after care hours for parents who needed childcare.

There were four adult participants who served as group leaders for this study. Participants were selected from the University of Alabama and local YMCA staff. The adult participants varied in terms of their education, ethnicity, and years of working with children. The first research assistant was a Caucasian female, and the second research assistant was an Asian American female. The two YMCA camp counselors were both African American females. Out of the four adult participants, two were pursuing bachelor's degrees in education (i.e., sophomore and senior classifications). The other two adult participants were pursuing advanced graduate degrees in school psychology. All four adult participants had at least one year's experience working with children at the local neighborhood YMCA. A substitute group leader was trained in case of a leader being absent; however, her assistance was not needed. The inclusion criteria for the research assistants were as follows: (a) must be currently enrolled as a graduate student at the University of Alabama, (b) must have completed the Preschool PATHS training, (c) must have experience working with children, and (d) must be approved for employment through the university. Inclusion criteria for the YMCA camp counselors were as follows: (a) must be approved for employment by the YMCA, and (b) must have experience working with

children, and (c) must have completed the Preschool PATHS training. The consent for participation for this program was obtained from the participants.

The YMCA setting was chosen due to the demographics and availability for a summer enrichment opportunity. The YMCA provided two separate learning spaces to ensure that noise and interferences were minimized. The intervention room was conducive for lessons as it resembled a typical classroom environment. Children were recruited to participate in the groups through the YMCA summer camp's enrollment sessions. Parents were invited to register their children for summer camp, and a table was set up that provided information about the Preschool PATHS program. There were eight six-year-old Black/African American preschool-aged children in each group, totaling 16 children. Group one was led by the research assistants; group two was led by the camp counselors. For this study, parental consent was obtained from the parents and caregivers of children in the intervention groups. Informed consent was also obtained from the four adult participants. Once recruitment was complete, participants were randomly assigned to the two groups that were co-led by the adult participants.

PATHS Training and Implementation Procedures

The adult facilitator participants were asked to complete a training session with the primary researcher that consisted of a one-day, face to face preparation that included reviewing the procedures of the study, the primary intervention tools, and information related to teacher and child prosocial interactions and positive behavior management strategies. Materials in the training included a formal overview of the theoretical framework of SEL, SEL rationale and domains, overview of school readiness, and foundational principles of the Preschool PATHS programs. Each lesson and unit of the Preschool PATHS curriculum was reviewed as well as data collection procedures and confidentiality. All materials were provided for participants by the primary researcher. Materials were kept in a locked storage space on the university campus.

The Preschool PATHS program was offered Monday–Thursdays during the months of June and July. The summer camp day consisted of breakfast, swimming or other designated activity, free play, Vacation Bible School, brief academic lessons, and then lunch. When children were dismissed for lunch, the four adult participants were able to work with children from 12 pm–3 pm. Two lessons were covered daily by the YMCA counselors and the research assistants. Modifications to the dates or any needed make-up dates were set aside for the first week of August. Children regularly attended the groups, and makeup dates were not utilized. Fidelity checks were implemented weekly by the primary researcher.

Preschool PATHS Curriculum

The Preschool PATHS curriculum consists of 44 brief (15–20 minute) lessons that include stories, pictures, and puppets that coincide with explicit skill instruction (Bierman & Motamedi, 2015). There are nine units that comprise the Preschool PATHS curriculum. According to Bierman and Motamedi (2015):

> Preschool PATHS focuses on basic social–emotional skills in four domains: (1) friendship skills and prosocial behavior (e.g., helping, sharing, taking turns); (2) emotional knowledge (e.g., recognizing and labeling core feelings); (3) self-control (e.g., using the "turtle technique"); and (4) social problem solving. (p. 142)

Measures

Fidelity

Implementation fidelity was measured by utilizing a treatment fidelity checklist that was created by the primary researcher. The checklist included a detailed description of the overall objectives and specific objectives in the Preschool PATHS manual. The number of components of each objective and the degree to which they were covered were noted (e.g., not at all, partially, or fully). The Likert scale for the Fidelity Checklist was designated as 1, 2, and 3 (1 = "not at all," 2 = "partially," 3 = "fully"). This scale was designed because the graduation of the objectives could not be further delineated. The scoring for each section of the lesson was summative and multiplicative. Twelve lessons across two intervention groups at the early, middle, and end phases of implementation were observed by the researcher, totaling 30% of all lessons taught in each intervention group.

Social Validity

Social validity was measured at the middle and at the completion of the study by administering a questionnaire to the group leaders. The acceptability of the intervention program was assessed by using an adapted version of the Intervention Rating Profile, 15, (IRP-15; Witt et al., 1984). The IRP-15 is a measure that is based upon the construct of social validity which refers to a stakeholder's view of the social significance of the intervention goals, acceptability of the intervention procedures, and the social importance of the intervention goals. This scale takes 10 minutes to complete. The composite scores for the IRP-15 rating scale range from 15 to 90, with the highest scores indicating the highest levels of acceptability of the treatment. According to VonBrock and Elliott (1987), mean ratings on the IRP-15 of 52.50 are considered acceptable ratings. Witt et al. (1984) have reported excellent internal

consistency or reliability (coefficient alpha = .98) for the total score, which is calculated by summing item ratings (range 15–90), and Rhoades and Kratochwill (1992) and Witt et al. (1984), indicated that the IRP-15 has a factor loading that ranges from .82 to .95 on a single factor, which supported the construct validity of a general acceptability measure.

Results

Implementation Fidelity

Implementation data were collected to ensure that the program was implemented with fidelity and consistency according to this study's protocol. Table 1 contains the descriptive findings which address Research Question One. The research assistants obtained a mean fidelity rating score of 90%. The YMCA camp counselors obtained a mean fidelity rating score of 82%.

Table 1. Implementation Fidelity Percentages Across Lessons (Research Assistants' Lesson Percentages by Lesson with Mean)

L2	L4	L10	L12	L18	L20	L26	L28	L34	L36	L40	L42	M
78	100	72	67	100	100	100	100	100	88	81	95	90

Table 2. Implementation Fidelity Percentages Across Lessons (YMCA Counselors' Lesson Percentages by Lesson with Mean)

L2	L4	L10	L12	L18	L20	L26	L28	L34	L36	L40	L42	M
100	78	67	89	83	67	67	100	67	88	81	95	82

Implementation Differences

The observer endorsed lesson components as 1 "Not at all", 2 "Partially", and 3 "Fully" for each goal and objective that was specific to the lesson observed. An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the research assistants and the YMCA camp counselors with respect to the implementation of the Preschool PATHS program with fidelity. Table 3 shows that Research Assistants were statistically different from YMCA Camp Counselors with respect to the implementation of the Preschool PATHS program with fidelity (p = .002) which is statistically significant. Inspection of the two groups indicated that the average score for research assistants (M = 2.59) was significantly higher than the score of the YMCA camp counselors (M = 2.42). The difference between means was .17 on a 3.00-point scale. The effect size d was approximately .33 which is a typical or medium effect size according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines for the behavioral sciences.

Table 3. Implementation Fidelity Scores

Variable	M	SD	T	DF	P	D
Implementation With Fidelity						
Research Assistants	2.59	12.60	3.20	72	.002	.33
YMCA Counselors	2.42	11.80				

Social Validity

The impact of research assistants and camp counselors implementing the Preschool PATHS program at a YMCA summer camp on their perceptions of social validity was assessed using a pretest and posttest Intervention Rating Profile-15 (IRP-15) by Witt and Elliott (1985).

Research Assistant Perceptions

The score on the IRP-15 ratings for Research Assistant 1 was 45 at the midpoint of the intervention, which was reflective of a low level of treatment acceptability. Research Assistant 1 provided a score of 79 at the endpoint of the intervention, indicating a high level of treatment acceptability. Research Assistant 2 provided a social validity score of 76 at the midpoint of the intervention, indicating a high level of treatment acceptability. Research Assistant 2 also provided a social validity score of 77 at the endpoint of the intervention, indicating a high level of treatment acceptability.

Table 4. Perception of Social Validity of PATHS by Graduate Research Assistants

Participants	Midpoint Rating	Endpoint Rating
Research Assistant 1	45	79
Research Assistant 2	76	77

**Scores range from 1–90, acceptable level of social validity is 52.5

YMCA Counselor Perceptions

The score on the IRP-15 ratings for Camp Counselor 1 was 64 at the midpoint of the intervention, indicating a moderate level of treatment acceptability. Camp Counselor 1 provided a social validity score of 76 at the endpoint of the intervention, indicating a high level of treatment acceptability. Camp Counselor 2 provided a score of 55 at the midpoint of the intervention, indicating a moderate level of treatment acceptability. Camp Counselor 2 provided a social validity score of 72 at the endpoint of the intervention, indicating a high level of treatment acceptability.

Table 5. Perception of Social Validity of PATHS by YMCA Counselors

Participants	Midpoint Rating	Endpoint Rating
YMCA Counselor 1	64	76
YMCA Counselor 2	55	72

**Scores range from 1–90, acceptable level of social validity is 52.5

Differences in Perceptions

An independent sample *t*-test was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the research assistants and the YMCA camp counselors with respect to their views of the social validity of the Preschool PATHS program with fidelity. Table 6 shows that there was no statistically significant difference between research assistants and the YMCA camp counselors with respect to their views of social validity of the Preschool PATHS program with fidelity ($p = .263$). Inspection of the two groups indicated that the average score for research assistants (M = 5.20) was not significantly higher than the score of the YMCA camp counselors (M = 4.94). The difference between means was .26 on a 6.00-point scale. There was no effect size because the test was not significant.

Table 6. Differences in Perception of Social Validity of PATHS

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*T*	*DF*	*P*	*D*
Social Validity With Fidelity						
Research Assistants	5.20	.01	1.743	2	.263	NA
YMCA Counselors	4.94	1.90				

Discussion

SEL is quickly becoming one of the most important initiatives in schools to meet the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of children (Gibson et al., 2015). Although much of the existing literature base focuses on K–12 SEL, researchers are now focusing on the critical developmental period of the preschool years to provide early intervention services to children to create better outcomes in adolescence and adulthood. Because of constraints and limited resources, community partnerships have emerged as key contexts that can be utilized to support social and emotional development for young children (CASEL, 2021). Community contexts and early learning centers offer extended educational opportunities for children, especially during the summer months. To better prepare children for kindergarten and to sustain growth from Pre-Kindergarten, the

summer months provide a critical period to intervene with the preschool-aged population (Graziano et al., 2014). Although extensive research has been conducted into the efficacy of SEL programs (CASEL 2021), little attention has been paid to what supports fidelity of implementation. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to the social validity of preschool SEL programs.

There were two main findings drawn from this study, both regarding implementation science variables and with research to practice translation implications. It is imperative that educators not only use evidence-based interventions that produce positive effects, but also understand the acceptability of the intervention, and whether it is feasible and can be implemented under varying conditions (such as a summer program). Studying these important variables is gaining traction in the U.S., but for PATHS, specifically, is still in the preliminary stages. For the first finding, the Preschool PATHS program may be an acceptable intervention and a socially valid intervention for summer format delivery. Second, university-based researchers and community stakeholders, together, can implement the Preschool PATHS program with fidelity in a summer camp setting under real-world conditions.

Social Validity

Most of the PATHS literature has reported quantitively on social–emotional competency outcomes resulting from PATHS implementation and compared to other conditions. Less is known about the social acceptability from the perspectives of students and children, their families, and educators. The Humphrey 2013 study reports qualitative findings from interviews completed regarding the need for PATHS and intervention acceptability. However, these are elementary students and educators. Even less is known regarding the acceptability of the Preschool PATHS curriculum. The first primary finding that the PATHS program was perceived as acceptable was not surprising, but given the novel application in a summer program, was important. Overall, participants rated the Preschool PATHS program as socially valid. The participants' ratings of social validity increased from the midpoint to the endpoint of the intervention. The ratings are consistent with large-scale survey data which suggests that most teachers feel that SEL is valuable and has positive outcomes for children in schools (Buchanan et al., 2009). However, the findings from this study of the acceptability of this intervention across both research assistants and camp counselors is in contrast to the report by Aarons (2005), who found that a higher level of education or being an intern was related to more positive attitudes and perceptions of evidenced-based programs in general. Preschool PATHS specifically has been implemented across numerous Head Start and preschool programs and elementary schools with success (Bierman et al., 2008; Crean & Johnson, 2013; Domitrovich et al., 2007; Nix et al., 2013).

Implementation Fidelity

Implementation fidelity refers to the level of adherence to how the intervention was designed, and includes quality of implementation. Across the PATHS literature, implementation fidelity is poorly reported. Only a few studies report intervention dosage (Berry et al., 2016; Humphrey et al., 2016) which is one critical component of implementation fidelity, along with quality. In this study, research assistants and camp counselors collaboratively implemented the Preschool PATHS program with moderate levels of implementation fidelity. There was a significant difference between Research Assistants' and Camp Counselors' abilities to implement the program with fidelity, even though the effect size was small. Research assistants achieved a level of 90% implementation fidelity over the course of this intervention, with camp counselors achieving a level of 82% implementation fidelity. The manualized program included group leader prompts and step by step directions that guided implementers through the lesson goals and objectives and helped them to achieve moderate levels of implementation fidelity. This aligns with findings from a 2003 PATHS implementation quality study regarding the importance of implementation quality, adherence to fidelity, and the ability of facilitators to implement with fidelity (Kam et al., 2003). Furthermore, implementation fidelity findings from this study are consistent with research conducted by Elliott and Mihalic (2004), Fagan and Mihalic (2003), Gottfredson and Gottfredson (2001), and Spoth et al. (2011), indicating that high levels of implementation can be achieved under real world settings for universally based interventions. The quantitative findings from this study were consistent with findings from Spoth et al. (2011), who found that evidence-based programs can be implemented by community stakeholders, with the primary responsibility of implementation being led by community members rather than university-based researchers. One major limitation to this study was the small sample size, which limits the generalizability of this study. However, this study does create a path for further analysis of community-based summer SEL programming implemented by community staff.

Implications for Future Research

A large-scale adoption of a SEL program is driven by the quality of the intervention and the perceived usefulness or importance of the intervention. Future research and practice should provide guidelines or best practices for community-based SEL programs in summer camps or out-of-school learning environments for children. Exploration of what factors lead to the greatest implementation fidelity and successful adoption of a program in these varied contexts would contribute to this literature. Researchers should also examine

what training and professional development opportunities lead to high levels of SEL program implementation in community-based settings. Information regarding ways to monitor implementation should be explored to inform practice for community stakeholders to determine how community settings can ensure that quality implementation is sustained over time. Future studies should address the longitudinal impact of SEL programs in community-based summer learning contexts and how social validity impacts long-term support and use of SEL programs. Additionally, researchers should ask parents social validity questions and address parent perceptions of children's growth with attention to qualitative methods that would include open-ended questions or conducting focus groups. Finally, longitudinal studies related to community scale-ups of SEL programs will provide useful information for policymakers and key stakeholders.

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Evaluation of a School-Based Program Designed to Improve the Mental Health in Children: A Collaborative Approach

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Abstract

This article describes how evaluators and stakeholders could combine their expertise to collaboratively evaluate a program designed to promote mental health in the school environment. The program, called Youth Mental Health First Aid USA (YMHFA), was designed to help young people cope with the early stages of mental health concerns. Specifically, the desired short-term outcomes of this evaluation were to (a) communicate the effectiveness of the program, and (b) determine the effectiveness of the eight-hour training. Data was collected from a survey questionnaire to staff members. Descriptive statistics were used to inform recommendations for the next steps in the development of the program. The Model for Collaborative Evaluations (MCE) was selected in this formative evaluation to actively engage the key stakeholders as collaboration members throughout the evaluation process. Implications for using the MCE in evaluating the mental health program are discussed. Overall, responses showed that the implementation of the mental health program impacted participants' schools positively.

Key Words: mental health program, school environment, model for collaborative evaluation, logic model, Youth Mental Health First Aid, YMHFA, training, professional development, school staff, prevention, intervention

Introduction

Research has shown a need for more mental health training and services in schools (Moon et al., 2017) as this may help to foster a positive school environment where children's social/emotional concerns are acknowledged and addressed. Previous studies have cited that schools are an appropriate setting for helping students with their mental health concerns (Atkins et al., 1998; Beidas & Kendall, 2010; Haggard et al., 2007); however, there are often needs related to the implementation of these programs that arise for schools (Adelman & Taylor, 1999; Brenner et al., 2007; Climie, 2015; Dinkmeyer & Dinkmeyer, 1984; Milovancevic & Jovicic, 2013; Weist et al., 2006). One program that aims to fill this need is called the Youth Mental Health First Aid USA program (YMHFA). This is a public education program initiative to teach parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, and other citizens ways to help adolescents that are facing a mental health issue, addiction, or facing a crisis (Mental Health First Aid USA, 2016). This article addresses how evaluators and key stakeholders could combine their expertise and provide a more comprehensive, collaborative approach to evaluate the YMHFA.

Youth Mental Health First Aid Program

YMHFA is part of the Mindful Schools Project/Florida AWARE program that is dedicated to establishing safer environments and increasing awareness in the community of issues related to school-age children's mental health (Kelly et al., 2016), as well as to improving knowledge to respond to youth mental health crises in the early stages. The main function of YMHFA is to train adults that interact with children in the schools and in the community about the risk factors associated with mental health.

The YMHFA is an eight-hour public education program that aims to teach participants about the warning signs of mental health issues in school-aged children. The course trains the participants on ways to provide initial help for children when they display those signs. It further provides information about the importance of early intervention and teaches participants the initial steps to support an adolescent in need by applying a five-step action plan. It is important to note that although this program is targeted towards helping adolescents aged 12–18, the district being evaluated also offered this training for elementary school staff. Possible reasons for offering the training to elementary school staff may include taking preventative measures to help students younger than 12 or supporting overage students nearing 12 in the fourth and fifth grades.

The Five-Step Action Plan

The YMHFA manual (2012) describes the five-step action plan to be followed by the adult as an effective way to work with the child or adolescent in a crisis situation or who is showing signs of mental health concerns. Once trained, the adults are identified as a first aider. The five steps are listed in order of actions A, L, G, E, E and is given the name of ALGEE plan (YMHFA, 2012).

Action A: Assess for risk of harm or risk of suicide. The first aider should give support to any potential crises that could happen: whether the crisis displays in self-harm (e.g., finding the helpee in high need for help, displaying signs of panic attack, aggressive behavior, a high anxiety state) or signs of non-suicidal harm or injury.

Action L: Listen nonjudgmentally. The first aider should use empathetic listening when working with youth who are dealing with mental health issues, showing respect and understanding, allowing the helpee to express their thoughts freely, and listening to them nonjudgmentally.

Action G: Give reassurance and information. The first aider offers emotional support and gives hope, as well as information on how to deal with daily tasks that seem stressful to the young person. This action requires that the helper has some knowledge in mental health.

Action E: Encourage appropriate professional help. The first aider makes the young person aware of the professional help that is available to them. In those cases, parental involvement is needed to find the appropriate professional help.

Action E: Encourage self-help and other support strategies. The first aider helps the youth to find some support within their immediate social environment; this could be a trusted adult at school that is a valuable resource to the child in need.

The steps do not need to be followed in any particular order by the first aider to insure proper and effective implementation. The YMHFA manual (2012) notes that flexibility is key in providing help. Depending on the need of the child, not all five steps may be necessary in the process of providing first aid. The first aider should make a good judgment to whether to follow all the steps and what order the individual's situation requires, depending on the condition of the student.

Study Design: Evaluation Approach

The education field commonly relies on program evaluation to study the results and to determine the value of programs applied in schools. According to Scriven (1991) evaluation is a tool that determines the merit, worth, or value of

an evaluand, or things that are measured. For the purpose of this study, a collaborative approach using the Model for Collaborative Evaluations (MCE) was used in this formative evaluation. A logic model served as a guide to illustrate how the program was perceived to occur throughout the collaborative evaluation (see Figure 1). A survey designed to address the perspective of school staff was used to help in answering the evaluation questions.

From a broad perspective, collaborative evaluation belongs to the *use* branch of the evaluation theory tree described by Alkin in *Evaluation Roots* (2004), which was concerned with enhancing evaluation use through stakeholder involvement. Collaborative evaluation requires a substantial degree of collaboration between evaluators and specific stakeholders in the evaluation process to the extent that they are willing and capable of being involved (e.g., Fetterman et al., 2018). Specifically, collaborative evaluators are in charge of the evaluation, but they create an ongoing engagement between evaluators and program staff resulting in stronger evaluation designs, enhanced data collection and analysis, and results that stakeholders understand and use (Rodríguez-Campos, 2012).

The authors used the MCE, a framework that has provided important advances in collaborative evaluation and is grounded in the American Evaluation Association's Guiding Principles (Rodríguez-Campos, 2012). This model has been introduced in many countries around the world in a wide variety of settings including business, nonprofit, and education. Specifically, the MCE has been used in multisite and multiyear evaluations at the national and international level and for both formative and summative purposes (Rodríguez-Campos, 2015).

This collaborative evaluation was concerned with the short-term effects of a mental health program on the school environment in a Florida school district from the perspective of staff who participated in the YMHFA training. The short-term outcomes of the mental health program are defined as those results that can be observed on average within the first two years of implementation (Hayes et al., 2011). The desired short-term outcomes of the mental health program evaluation that were identified in the logic model are (1) to communicate the effectiveness of the program, and (2) to determine the factors that supported the implementation of the program in the schools.

Questions

The primary purpose of this study was to evaluate the implementation of the program from the school staff perspective. The study was conducted in one of the largest districts in the Southeast region, and it comprised more than 13,000 employees and more than 150 schools. The following main questions were addressed:

- How do school staff perceive the effectiveness of the eight-hour training to implement the program?
- What factors supported the implementation of the program at your school?

Stakeholders

A stakeholder is defined as a person who has invested in the company or organization by either sharing ownership of the firm or by being assigned duties and responsibilities which requires this person to act in the best interests of the firm (Zimmer, 2015). Although there are no decisions about to what extent a stakeholder should be part of the evaluation, stakeholders have to be involved in the evaluation process to a certain degree (Carr & Bradley-Levine, 2016). Taut (2008) found that the extent to which a stakeholder is involved in the evaluation depends on the desired outcome of the study and the nature of the evaluation.

The MCE was used to transform the evaluation of this program into a joint responsibility process between the evaluators and collaboration members (specific stakeholders who work jointly with the evaluators). For the purpose of this evaluation, the key stakeholders identified from the school system invited to become collaboration members included: the director of student services (evaluation client), the senior manager of psychological services for the school system, and the director and trainer of the program under evaluation. The roles in the collaborative effort were multifaceted and clearly defined to avoid overlap, maximizing the benefits of their contributions. In addition, roles were suited to everyone's interest, skills, and availability. With this type of evaluation, it was possible to achieve a holistic learning environment by understanding and creating collaborative opportunities.

Participants and Instrument

Participants invited for this study were school staff in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools, who were employed by the school system under study and who volunteered to participate in the eight-hour training of the program (n = 414). Of the 414 staff members who attended the training, 73 staff members chose to participate in the survey. An informed consent was sent to the participants. In order to maintain confidentiality and protect the staff identity and email addresses, the director of student services sent the link through email to participants directly from the school district office. A week later, the primary author drafted a reminder email and requested its delivery from the director of student services.

This evaluation study employed a survey that was developed by the primary author to gather data about the effectiveness of the program from school staff

perspective. Twelve questions were identified to meet the purpose of the study. The survey took approximately 7–10 minutes to be completed. The questions were informed through the literature reviewed and through the input of the stakeholders involved in the delivery of the program. Prior to being submitted to participants, the survey was pilot tested for improvement purposes. School staff that participated in the survey were given four weeks to respond to the questions. Of the 73 participants, 48% worked at the elementary school level, 26% were from the middle school level, and 26% were at the high school level. Of survey participants 30% were teachers, 22% were school psychologists, 20% were school counselors, 10% were school social workers, 1% were paraprofessionals, and 1% were school nurses; among the participants were 8% that checked "other." For the years of experience, 44% had been working with the school system for more than 10 years, 11% had between 8–10 years, 15% had 5–8 years of experience in their position, 18% had 2–5 years of experience, 7% of the participants had 1–2 years, and 4% had less than one year of experience. Some (45%) indicated that they attended the training because their employer asked them to, 53% attended out of interest in the training, and 67% attended to earn professional development credits.

A logic model was used to evaluate the outcomes (see Figure 1). The primary elements of the visual representation of the logic model consisted of *inputs, outputs,* and *outcomes*. Inputs include the school's resources, such as materials and trained educators to teach the components of the program to participants. The training and encouragement of the employees to attend so as to increase participants' knowledge about mental health and how to respond to initial signs of distress in adolescents represented the outputs. The outputs support the evidence that mental health is correlated with low academic performance (Ogle et al., 2016). There is also evidence that delivery of mental health services in the schools promotes positive outcomes (De Laet et al., 2015; Morcom, 2014; Ogle et al., 2016; White, 2011).

Figure 1. Logic Model of the Mental Health Program

Program: Youth Mental Health First Aid USA Logic Mode
Situation: Mental Health Program in Schools

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes		
What County Schools are invested in	*Activities*	*Participation*	*Short*	*Intermediate*	*Long*
	What we do	*Who we reach*	*Expect to see*	*Want to see*	*Hope to see*

Material Resources

Trainings

Technology for monthly data collection

Supplemental material (manuals)

Financial Resources

Trainers

Materials cost

Professional development cost

Offer trainings in YMHFA for identification initial signs of mental

Encourage participation in the training of YMHFA

Increase knowledge for school staff

Ensure trainers are certified and materials are available

- School staff in Schools

- Who trained with YMHFA program

- Who wish to participate in

County Schools staff

Parents

Community

Caregivers

Communicate the effectiveness of the YMHFA program

Determine to what extent the program promotes positive environment

Learn about perceived barriers to implementing the YMHFA program

Increase knowledge about effectiveness of program at Schools

Decision making about the implementation of the program

Improving the conditions to support YMHFA implementation

Increasing the number of staff trainees in YMHFA program

Increase in staff use the core elements of the program

Optimized implementation for of the YMHFA program in County Schools

Improve mental health services in for County Schools Students

YMHFA to serve as model for students

Assumptions

- Questionnaire to staff members who participated in YMHFA training

External Factors

- Restricted time frame for data collection (from January 2016 to February 2017)

Collaborative Evaluation

There are multiple reasons for collaborating with stakeholders throughout evaluations (Azzam, 2010; Orr, 2010). For example, collaboration could improve relevance, shared ownership, and accuracy of evaluations (Rodríguez-Campos, 2012). Several collaborative methodologies exist (Fetterman et al., 2014), each has advantages and disadvantages. In this instance, we use the MCE to actively engage key program stakeholders through the evaluation. The MCE is a framework for guiding collaborative evaluations in a precise, realistic, and useful manner (Rodríguez-Campos & Rincones-Gómez, 2013). The model revolves around a set of six interactive components specific to conducting a collaborative evaluation in order to establish priorities and achieve a supportive evaluation environment (Rodríguez-Campos, 2015): (a) identify the situation, (b) clarify the expectations, (c) establish a collective commitment, (d) ensure open communication, (e) encourage effective practices, and (f) follow specific guidelines (see Figure 2). Within an MCE approach, evaluators retain control while collaborating with stakeholders. This arrangement helps safeguard the credibility of evaluation products, while integrating collaboration into the design (Hicks et al., 2017).

Figure 2. Model for Collaborative Evaluations
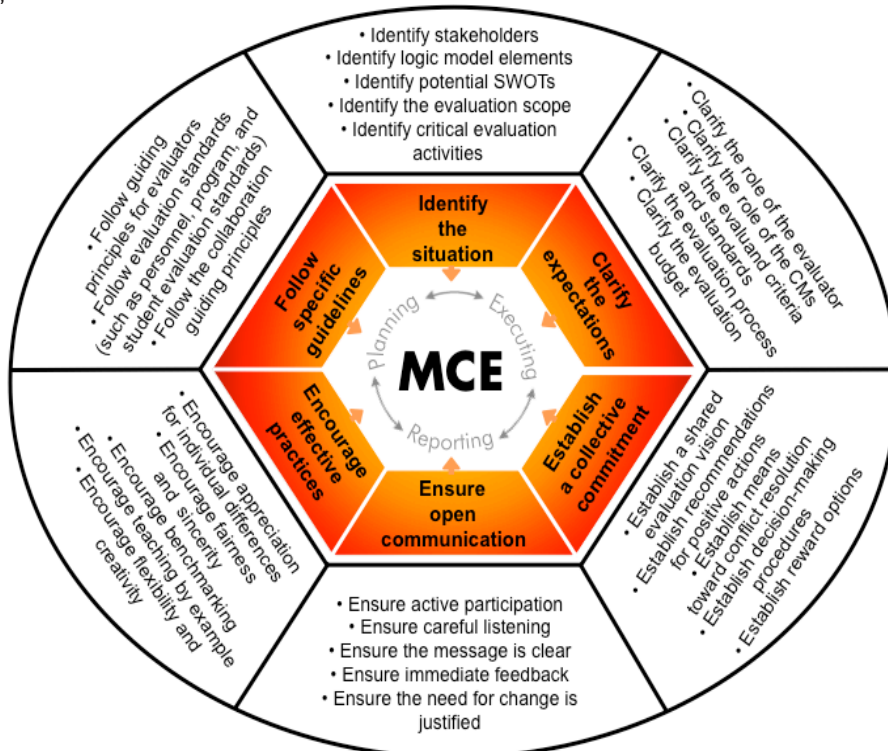
Note. From *Collaborative Evaluations Step-by-Step*, by L. Rodríguez-Campos & R. Rincones-

The six components of the MCE model provide a framework for planning, executing, and reporting when evaluating a program. Each of the six components includes subcomponents that further help to describe the nuances within each component. The MCE model was used within this evaluation as it helped to inform and connect to the evaluation questions (i.e., How do school staff perceive the effectiveness of the eight-hour training to implement the program? What factors supported the implementation of the program at your school?). For example, the first component, identify the situation, helped to provide a better understanding of the importance of this program being viewed from the perspective of school staff that are in direct contact with children. This is especially important given that school staff has a substantial role in communicating with the students at varied capacities, and some staff members play a role in collaborating with many more professionals in creating an environment that support students' well-being. The second component, clarify the expectations, helped to clarify the role of the evaluator and the key stakeholders. For example, this was communicated through meeting with stakeholders: after initial contact with the collaboration members (i.e., the director of student services, the senior manager of psychological services for the school system, the director and trainer of the program under evaluation), an important role of the evaluators in the process was to develop and disseminate a survey with active input from the collaboration members. For instance, the role of the director of student services, a key stakeholder, was to select participants from the database for school staff who attended the training for the program. The link was sent directly from the school district office in order to maintain confidentiality and protect staff identity and email addresses.

The third component, establish a collective commitment, helped to collaboratively monitor the decision-making process. This was clearly communicated through a timeline that described the planning with the stakeholders for all activities regarding the implementation of the program and describing the responsibilities of the people involved. The fourth component, ensuring open communication, helped to ensure that formal and informal communication strategies were clear. This component was accomplished by consulting with the stakeholders about the actions taken throughout the study, such as the questionnaire development that was reviewed by stakeholders and the progress reports that informed the stakeholders about the status of the data collected and the general progress of the evaluation. The fifth component, encourage effective practices, helped to establish procedures or systems for producing a desired effect within a collaborative evaluation. This was ensured through creating a

timeline table to ensure proper planning and meeting the deadlines. Regarding the sixth component, follow specific guidelines, this was ensured by implementing guidelines to provide direction for a sound evaluation. These guidelines served as a model for the evaluators and the collaboration members to use.

Study Phases

The first step of the study was to meet with the key school system stakeholders. Following the MCE model (Rodríguez-Campos, 2015), the purpose of the initial meeting was to identify the situation, to clarify the expectations, and to establish a collective commitment. For example, some of the areas that were discussed included the interest in conducting a collaborative evaluation and gathering information about the way the program is being implemented. A second meeting with the stakeholders supported the last three components of the MCE model, to support open communication, to ensure effective practices, and to follow specific guidelines. For example, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was conducted and approved by the school system. Policies and procedures were also clearly communicated and agreed upon—steps and methods to be used, as well as a timeline for conducting the evaluation.

Results

The evaluation questions and the results are reported from the 73 surveys that were completed and returned. The first four questions related to the demographics, such as level of school where they work, the position, the years of experience, as well as the reasons they attended the training. Answers to these questions were reported above. While survey Questions 7, 9, and 11 provided perspective related to the perceived effectiveness of the eight-hour training, Questions 5 and 6 directly addressed the first evaluation question: "How do school staff perceive the effectiveness of the eight-hour training to implement the program?" (Question 5. "Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the effectiveness of the program?"; see Table 1; Question 6. "Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the five elements of the Youth Mental Health First Aid USA action plan"; see Table 2). For example, for Question 7, more than half of the participants (53%) said that they use the skills between one time and five times a week. For Question 9, 71% either strongly agreed or agreed that they are provided with enough mental health resources for students in need. Question 11 related to how the school staff were able to translate the skills to the students in their school setting. The majority (58%) of the 73 participants believed that the skills extended somewhat to significantly to the school setting.

Table 1. Participants' Perceived Effectiveness of the Eight-Hour Training (Question 5)

	Complete-ly Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Neutral		Somewhat Agree		Very Much Agree	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Received useful training	1	1.37	1	1.31	3	4.11	21	32.88	47	64.38
Training helped me become more prepared to help students emotionally	1	1.37	1	1.37	5	6.85	24	36.99	42	57.53
Training helped me to become more likely to respond to a student in distress	3	4.11	1	1.37	11	15.07	18	24.66	40	54.79
Training helped me become more confident with the ability to refer to specialized services	2	2.74	1	1.37	10	13.70	20	27.40	40	54.70
I perceive that the program is a positive addition to my school	1	1.37	1	1.37	4	5.48	17	23.29	50	68.48
The program helped promote a positive school environment	1	1.37	1	1.37	6	8.22	19	26.03	46	63.01

Table 2. Perceived Effectiveness of the Components of the Program by Participants (Question 6)

	Completely Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Neutral		Somewhat Agree		Very Much Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
As a result of training, I am able to assess risk of suicide or harm for a student in distress	1	1.37	3	4.11	9	12.33	26	35.62	34	46.58
As a result of training, I am able to listen nonjudgmentally	2	2.74	1	1.37	10	13.70	21	31.51	40	54.79
As a result of training, I can give reassurance and confirmation to a student in distress	1	1.37	2	2.74	8	10.96	21	28.67	39	53.42
As a result of this training, I can encourage appropriate professional help to a student in distress	1	1.37	1	1.37	10	13.70	20	27.40	40	54.70
As a result of this training, I can encourage self-help and strategies to a student in distress	1	1.37	1	1.37	12	16.44	20	27.40	39	53.42

According to Question 8, 78% perceived that the program somewhat to greatly affected their school environment. For Question 10, when asked to choose from other topics to learn about, 62% of the 73 participants were interested in receiving training related to mental health. While survey Questions 8 and 10 provided perspective related to factors that supported the implementation of the program at participants' schools, Question 12 ("Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the extent to which these factors play a part

in implementing the Youth Mental Health First Aid USA at your school.") addressed the second evaluation question: "What factors supported the implementation of the program at your school?" The factors included support from school administration, effective partnership with community mental health local agencies, positive climate at the school, involvement of faculty and parents, active communication with teachers, private counseling rooms and time, concern about stigma related to receiving mental health support, and staff members that the students are comfortable talking to regardless if they had the training. Factors also included beliefs that constitute a barrier to implementing the program. According to Question 12, the majority of participants perceived that the requirement of time within the school schedule (77%), as well as physical space for training (85%) can constitute a barrier to implementing the program. The majority of participants also perceived that another barrier related to the implementation of the program is the belief that students are hesitant to seek help because of stigma attached to receiving mental health support (74%), as well as the belief that schools were not the ideal settings for providing mental health care (51%) (Table 3). These factors could support educators in helping their students within a school setting.

Table 3. Factors that Affect Implementation of Mental Health Program in Schools (Question 12)

	Completely Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Neutral		Somewhat Agree		Very Much Agree	
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*	*n*	*%*
Implementation of the program requires support from school administration	1	1.37	0	0	1	1.37	14	19.18	57	78.08
Implementation of the program requires effective partnership with local community mental health agencies	1	1.37	0	0	1	1.37	22	30.14	49	67.12
Implementation of the program requires a positive climate at the school where students feel safe and supported	1	1.37	2	2.47	3	4.11	17	23.29	50	68.49

Implementation of the program requires quality assurance strategies such as faculty and parent involvement in the process	1	1. 37	1	1.37	5	6.85	18	24.66	48	65.57
The belief that students are hesitant to seek help because of stigma related to receiving mental health support constitutes a barrier to implementing the program	1	1.37	6	8.22	12	16.44	31	42.47	23	31.51
The belief that students would rather talk to adults they feel comfortable with regardless of the adult training constitutes a barrier to implementing the program	4	5.48	4	5.48	14	19.18	27	36.99	24	32.88
Program implementation requires active communication or referrals from teachers	0	0	0	0	5	6.85	27	36.99	41	56.16
Program implementation requires physical space/private room	2	2.74	1	1.37	8	10.96	28	38.36	34	46.58
Program implementation requires within school schedule	0	0	0	0	17	23.29	26	35.62	30	41.10
Belief that schools are not an appropriate sector for mental health program implementation	10	13.7	8	10.96	18	24.66	13	17.81	24	32.88
Belief that emphasis in school is on academic achievement rather than mental health/wellness	0	0	5	6.85	11	15.07	18	24.66	39	53.42

Discussion and Recommendations

For evaluation Question 1, school staff who underwent YMHFA training generally responded positively. For example, participants reported finding the training beneficial and incorporating its components more frequently into their work with students. Additionally, they felt more confident in their ability to address and respond to students' emotional needs by providing them with the necessary mental health resources. In a YMHFA evaluation study conducted by Jorm et al. (2010), findings similarly revealed that the training increased the teachers' knowledge and confidence in helping the students with their mental health needs; teachers reported a positive impact on the students by giving more information in the area of mental health.

For evaluation Question 2, based on the participants' perspective, the implementation of the program was marked by a higher number of positive factors, including quality assurance strategies such as faculty involvement in the process, supportive administrative policies, active communication with teachers, and a positive school climate. Several studies that evaluated implementation of the YMHFA program support the results of the current study. For example, Bond et al. (2018) conducted a study on the implementation of YMHFA in secondary schools; they identified several factors that were critical for successful implementation, including having dedicated staff and faculty to guide the program and school leadership support. Jorm et al. (2010) conducted a study on the dissemination of the YMHFA program; they identified the support from key stakeholders as an advantage to the implementation of the program. Climie (2015) suggested that implementation of mental health programs requires that schools actively communicate with teachers and staff through training them in the mental health issues and educating them about the ways to support children in the schools. Hart et al. (2018) examined the effectiveness of schoolwide implementation of YMHFA on students' and teachers' mental health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors and found that schools that received YMHFA reported a significant improvement in their overall school climate.

On the other hand, in the current study, there were fewer negative factors, such as the requirement of time within the school schedule and resources as well as physical space or a private room for training. Another barrier in the study related to the implementation of the program is the belief that students are hesitant to seek help because of stigma attached to receiving mental health support, as well as the belief that schools were not the ideal settings for providing mental health care. Several studies (Hart et al., 2019; Jorm et al., 2010; Richardson et al., 2015) evaluated the implementation of YMHFA in an academic setting and identified several barriers to successful implementation of the YMHFA program, such as limited time and resources and challenges in

reaching and engaging the target population. Richardson et al. (2015) also found that stigma was another significant barrier to YMHFA implementation. In a study by Jorm et al. (2005) in the implementation of the YMHFA, the authors noted that school settings may not be the most ideal for implementing the program; they suggested that it may be more effective when delivered in community settings, as there may be greater flexibility to tailor the program to the specific needs of the participants. Thus, our results provide similar findings as other studies in the evaluation of the YMHFA program.

This collaborative evaluation examined the perception of school staff regarding the implementation and effectiveness of YMHFA. It determined the extent to which it improved the mental health environment of the school from its personnel's perspective. The MCE seemed to provide an increased shared ownership among key stakeholders that may have optimized their receptivity to the findings. For example, we made sure to involve all relevant key stakeholders (e.g., director of student services, senior manager of psychological services, school staff) throughout the entire process from the initial planning stages to the final dissemination of results. This included active engagement in the development of the evaluation plan, data collection and analysis, as well as follow-up to gauge understanding and implementation of changes. By including stakeholders in this way, we were able to foster a sense of ownership and investment in the evaluation process. As a result, the client and key stakeholders accepted and acted upon the findings, leading to meaningful improvements in the program being evaluated. Collaborative evaluation is a highly effective approach as it provides stakeholders with the opportunity to have a voice in the process, which in turn increases their buy-in and commitment to implementing recommended changes (Rodríguez-Campos, 2015).

Results showed that the mental health program under evaluation achieved what was intended and desired short-term outcomes were met. A conceptual framework or logic model served as a guide throughout the collaborative evaluation; it reflected that the feasibility of the program short-term outcomes, or intended goals, was evident to school personnel. Creating an environment that supports mental health prevention and intervention to students in schools allows for added proficiency in dealing with mental health issues for students. There is evidence that delivery of mental health services in the schools promotes positive outcomes (De Laet et al., 2015; Morcom, 2014; Ogle et al., 2016; White, 2011). In the short-term outcome of the program, the effect of the mental health program on the school environment was ranked as desirable among the participants. Gryglewicz et al. (2018) conducted a study that aimed to evaluate the YMHFA program in a school setting and similarly found evidence of the effectiveness of the YMHFA training. That study also found

that staff who received the YMHFA training reported an increased ability in helping at-risk students with mental health issues (Gryglewicz et al., 2018), which was also consistent with the current study.

This evaluation introduced several considerations for collaboratively evaluating the impact of implementing a mental health program in schools. The MCE helped to understand and account for the nature of the work and the full range of stakeholders in the collaborative evaluation process, leading to sound and useful results and recommendations. The following summarizes the recommendations for improved implementation of the YMHFA mental health program in schools. These recommendations were based on the responses to the evaluation questions; they were developed with the assistance of the collaboration members and shared with relevant stakeholders for their feedback.

Recommendation 1. Based on the fact that 78% perceived that the program somewhat to greatly affected their school environment in a positive way, stakeholders should continue to seek input from staff members in regards to implementing the program. This will allow the stakeholders to gain continuous perspective about the impact of the program on the students. To achieve this goal, stakeholders can send a survey every other month to the trainees with two to three questions that are intentionally created to help with improving implementation outcomes (Koundinya et al., 2016). It is also recommended that the district encourages a follow-up with a focus group session with the participants that attended the training within a short amount of time after the training (Koundinya, et al., 2016). The focus group could be led by a district employee who has expertise in the mental health program offered and the components associated with it. Discussions could revolve around brainstorming opinions and detailed information about personal experiences in implementing the program. Focus groups can also be an opportunity to seek clarification or ways to advance the program.

Recommendation 2. Based on over one-third of the participants (33%) marking that they do not keep track of how many times they use the skills they learned to help the students, it is recommended that staff members who participated in the training be encouraged to keep data on the number of times they help a student in need using the components of the program. Encouraging those responses supports an accurate representation of the skills used from the program. To achieve this goal, it is suggested that within the bimonthly survey, one of the questions reflects the number of times participants used the skills. This will help to generate more accurate data as the participants will be required to complete it and send it monthly to the district office.

Recommendation 3. Based on the fact that many (62%) of the participants were interested in receiving training in the area of mental health and well-

being, it is recommended that the district provides additional workshops in those areas of interest.

Recommendation 4. Based on the staff members who attended the training reporting its positive impact on the school environment, and out of a large number of employees of more than 13,000 in the district, less than 5% participated in the training, it is recommended that the school district reconsider how the program is being promoted and offered. The district can look into offering the program with several options for different days and times as well as different start dates to span over an entire school year.

Recommendation 5. Based on the high percentage of participants indicating the importance of implementing the program to help foster a positive school climate, it is recommended that the district encourages the use of the YMHFA training in order to help promote a supportive and caring environment. Given that the program targets adolescents between the ages of 12–18, it was expected that the highest rates of responses would come from either middle or high school staff. Interestingly, the highest rate of responses (48%) came from staff working in elementary schools; therefore, this recommendation is especially relevant to elementary schools, where it serves as a prevention measure to disciplinary problems at higher grade levels.

Recommendation 6. Based on the fact that a high percentage of participants (73%) agreed that the implementation of the program requires support from the administration, it is recommended that the district offers additional professional development opportunities to administrators. Administrators could benefit from learning about the perception of staff members and the positive outcomes of the program. Administrative faculty are school leaders, and as such they can encourage staff attendance and support program implementation fidelity.

Recommendation 7. Based on the good rate of response by elementary school staff (48%), it is recommended that elementary schools adapt and implement the training at the elementary level. Even though the training is designed to target adolescents between the ages of 12–18, the participation from elementary school staff in this study supports this recommendation. This could reflect the pressing emotional and developmental needs of the elementary children in the district.

Limitations and Strengths

Although the survey asked the participants (*n* = 73) their school level and what position they held, the district did not provide information on the position or school level of the staff members who attended the training (*n* = 414). Therefore, we cannot tell whether the survey respondents' demographics

correlated to who attended the training or whether the numbers were higher or lower in various areas. Staff members who felt overwhelmed with the demands of their jobs may not have found the time to complete the questions; this could have impacted the number of participants who completed and returned the survey. Another limitation is that the participants who chose to complete the survey may have a strong background or interest in the topic of mental health in schools; this could potentially have caused the sample to be skewed, as their answers may have been based on their own ideas of mental health. Furthermore, participants self-selected in this study, which also limits the generalizability of the study since it is not based on a random sample.

Another potential limitation of this collaborative effort was the difficulty in evaluating all aspects of a program with absolute objectivity, due to rationalizing and constructive activity of the evaluator's analyses. On the other hand, this collaborative evaluation had its special strengths. It united the goal of the district and participants and students, which is to design pedagogical elements in order to help inform the implementation of the mental health program. As a result, everyone was eager to embark on the evaluation process as collaboration members. Clearly, the level of involvement varied among everyone who collaborated in the effort and was based on their skills, ability, and availability. The evaluation findings were used to reflect upon lessons learned and share findings with the key stakeholders and external parties (Fetterman et al., 2018).

Conclusion

Mental health must be prioritized in the school setting in order to achieve academic and behavioral success (Adelman & Taylor, 1999). According to Atkins et al. (1998), schools are an appropriate setting for children to access mental health. Evaluators and stakeholders combined their expertise to provide a more comprehensive implementation of the collaborative evaluation. Although the mental health program was perceived by school staff to be effective, next steps should include the other community agencies and partners that participated in the training. For example, parents or guardians, police officers, and mental health agencies' employees could share their views about the program components.

The questions established at the beginning of this evaluation led to interesting results, whereby the multiple perspectives of stakeholders were addressed in a collaborative manner. Hence, the evaluation results were able to provide a useful basis for guiding the decision-making process, because people worked collaboratively while understanding the program and its interactions within its total system. The evaluation provided sound evidence to support suggested changes, along with recommendations for improvement. Therefore, the

major contribution of this collaborative effort was an increase in understanding and use of its results by working with the stakeholders in order to expose the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

The evaluation findings were used to reflect upon lessons learned and, in presenting the results of the evaluation to the various stakeholders, the dynamic role of collaboration toward the program's outcomes was emphasized. A key element in the findings was the level of engagement and interaction among key stakeholders regardless of ability. It was through a consistent encouragement of the stakeholders to focus on individual strengths that supported a strong sense of fairness and sincerity as the evaluators conducted each phase of the evaluation. While attending to the intended and unintended effects of the collaborative relationships, the MCE provided an increased shared ownership that also led to an increased quality of information for decision-making and receptivity of findings. The MCE provided an important learning opportunity on how to conduct a collaborative evaluation step-by-step and account for its full range of stakeholders (Rodríguez-Campos, 2015).

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The Association Between Teaching Practices and Students' Perceptions of Being in a Classroom Community of Engaged Learners

Tasha Seneca Keyes and Ryan D. Heath

Abstract

Past research suggests that a sense of belonging to a community is developmentally important for adolescents and affects their engagement in school, especially during the transition to high school. However, little research examines the teaching practices that simultaneously foster classroom belonging and behavioral engagement to create a classroom community of engaged learners. This study investigates the association between specific teaching practices (i.e., lesson organization and structure, academic support, and student–teacher trust) related to students perceiving they are in a classroom community of engaged learners. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to analyze survey responses of 16,137 ninth grade students in a large urban school district. Results show a positive relationship between the way a teacher organizes their classroom lessons and activities, the level of academic support, and student–teacher trust towards students perceiving they are in a community of engaged learners. These findings differ across student characteristics (e.g., race, sex, living in a high poverty neighborhood, special education status, grades). The findings suggest that teaching practices that are generally considered by educators within the profession as good instructional practices may also be key for creating a community of engaged learners.

Key Words: classroom belonging, behavioral engagement, teaching practices, community of engaged learners, high school students, teachers

Introduction

Belonging to a learning community has been identified as an important and malleable psychological mindset that is crucial for students' academic performance. However, researchers and educators continue to question how to develop it within a school setting (Farrington et al., 2012; St-Amand et al., 2017; Tillery et al., 2013). Community has been defined in various ways, but scholars acknowledge that community only exists when members experience feelings of belonging, trust, and safety (Block, 2018; Furman, 1998; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Osterman, 2000; Strayhorn, 2018). Research demonstrates that belonging is a fundamental psychological need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1970; Osterman, 2000), especially for adolescents. Adolescence comprises a critical period of cognitive, psychosocial, and emotional transformations (Hines 2007; Kreniske et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2011). Thus, adolescents need more time with their peers, as their friendships play a critical role in their identity development and social support (Quinn & Oldmeadow, 2013; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Belonging is likewise associated with students' engagement in the classroom. Research has shown a positive relationship between elementary and middle school students' academic engagement and their sense of belonging (Battistich et al., 1995; Craggs & Kelly, 2018; Hughes & Cao, 2018; Osterman, 2000; Pendergast et al., 2018; Solomon et al., 1996). Unfortunately, as students move through secondary school, school engagement declines (Eccles et al., 2018; Martin & Collie, 2019; Wang & Eccles, 2012; Wang & Holcombe, 2010) along with their sense of belonging (Anderman, 2003; Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Gillen-O'Neel, 2021; Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Even though less research focuses on the transition from middle school to high school, some say this is when belonging varies (Benner & Graham, 2007, 2009), while others indicate it is a time when it declines the most (Liu & Lu, 2011; Wang & Eccles, 2012; Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011). High schools tend to have larger classrooms that are more heterogeneous and impersonal, with increased expectation for academic performance but less support than their middle school environment (Benner & Graham, 2007; Hanewald, 2013; Sánchez et al. 2005; Simmons & Blyth, 2017). High school educators recognize that fostering community and belonging affects students' educational trajectory, such as graduating from high school with a GPA that will allow them to enter either postsecondary education and/or work (Allen et al., 2018; Waters et al., 2010). But high school educators face challenges to do so, including being overworked and feeling pressure to focus on academic achievement rather than social–emotional needs (Kraft et al., 2015; Osterman, 2000). This issue is particularly salient in struggling urban school districts, where many students have

low test scores and schools are placed on probation and at risk of closure (Kraft et al., 2015; Sánchez et al., 2005).

Literature Review

Community, Teaching Practices, and High School Students

A sense of community has long been recognized as an important construct in research. Seymour Sarason (1974) focused on the psychological sense of community and defined it as "the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, [and] the feeling that one is part of a larger, dependable, and stable structure" (p. 157). Expanding upon this definition, Glynn (1981) identified several central components required for a sense of community, including homogeneity, interdependence, shared responsibility, and common goals and values. McMillan and Chavis (1986) reviewed the early community literature and defined a general sense of community as "a feeling that members have a belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9). Rovai (2002) identified school community as a two-dimensional framework. Drawing from the work of McMillan and Chavis (1986), the first dimension of a social community reflects students' senses of attachment, trust, safety, interdependence, and belonging (Rovai, 2002). The second dimension, a learning community, was developed from the work of Glynn (1981) and Royal and Rossi (1997) and is the degree to which students feel there is a set of group norms and values to which their group membership meets their educational goals and expectations (Rovai, 2002).

Conceptualization of community has since expanded to include additional elements. Wenger (2010) discusses a conceptual framework with three important elements for building a community. The first element includes defining what community means for its members, how to contribute to it, and how to hold one another accountable to it. The second consists of developing norms and routines based on the member's interactions and transactions with one another. The final element of community is where all members share and have access to the resources within the community (Wenger, 2010). The resources may include necessities, like money, food, shelter, or clothing, but they could also entail things like knowledge, a common language, or routines. The resources needed in a learning community, like a high school classroom, tend to focus more on developing a common language, a shared knowledge, and established classroom norms and routines. The teacher is paramount in helping the learning community to obtain and sustain these resources.

Educational trends have supported that to improve academic outcomes it is important to attend to students' social and emotional needs (Velasquez et al., 2013) and that when K–12 educators adopt caring pedagogies their students have better learning outcomes (Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Hayes, 2003; Keyes, 2019; McNamee et al., 2007; Ritchie & Rigano, 2002; Rogers & Webb, 1991; Watson et al., 2003; Wentzel, 1997). Positive teacher–student relationships are considered one of the most salient school-based relationships (Booker, 2021; El Zaatari & Ibrahim, 2021; Juvonen, 2007; Keyes, 2019; Košir & Tement, 2014; Lee, 2012). Research shows that the role of the teachers is critical for promoting students' psychological sense of belonging and community (Allen et al., 2021; Ellerbrock et al., 2014; El Zaatari & Ibrahim, 2021; Juvonen, 2007). When students have a sense of belonging within a classroom community, it supports them to value the tasks of the class while also fostering feelings of competence and self-efficacy regarding those tasks to promote their academic achievement (Dewsbury & Brame, 2019; Zumbrunn et al., 2014). For example, when teachers communicate with care and respond in a timely way to students' learning needs, there is an increase in compliance with the classroom norms and the expected classroom behaviors outlined by the teacher (Ellerbrock et al, 2014; Juvonen, 2007; Keyes, 2019; Kiefer et al., 2015). Several empirical studies examine the association between teaching practices and belongingness at the college level; few investigate what is happening in high school (Barron & Kinney, 2021; Freeman et al., 2007; Silver Wolf et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2018; Zumbrunn et al., 2014).

An essential component of an effective learning environment includes inclusive and supportive teaching practices which leverage the power of a classroom community (Dewsbury & Brame, 2019; Freeman et al., 2007; Johnson, 2009; Keyes, 2019). The classroom climate is shaped by quality teacher–student and student–student relationships to reflect warmth and respect for all members, which are vital to promoting a classroom community because they signal that everyone's contributions are important (Dewsbury & Brame, 2019; Johnson, 2009). In a study by Chiu et al. (2016) they examined survey and test data from 41 countries using multilevel analysis and found that when adolescents perceived a strong relationship with their teachers, had consistent teacher support, or the classroom climate was highly structured, students had a greater positive sense of belonging at school. These findings are consistent with previous research documenting that when teachers employ supportive, meaningful, and caring teaching practices in the classroom, there is an increase in student motivation, satisfaction with school, and academic achievement (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Goodenow, 1993; Johnson, 2009; Keyes, 2019; Klem & Connell, 2004; Murray & Murray, 2004). Similarly, other researchers have shown when

teachers and students have positive interactions with one another, it affects students' emotional, behavioral, and cognitive engagement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019; Fredricks et al., 2004; Furlong et al., 2003; Keyes, 2019). When teachers create classrooms that are effectively managed and have clearly organized lessons, along with appropriate levels of academic support, students are more likely to engage (Chiu et al., 2016; Corso et al., 2013; Ellerbrock et al., 2014; Juvonen, 2007; Keyes, 2019; Pianta et al., 2012; Reyes et al., 2012). One benefit of these teaching practices is that most high school teachers are already implementing many of them in their classrooms. What remains unclear is if they also contribute to student perceptions of being in a classroom community of engaged learners.

Current Study

In acknowledgement of the interconnection between community, engagement, and belonging, a measure was developed using high school student interviews to capture the aspects of community that promote their sense of belonging and behavioral engagement in their ninth grade classrooms (Keyes, 2019). The measure, Community of Engaged Learners, is used in the current study to test its association to teaching practices (e.g., teacher support, lesson organization) that are typically implementing in high school classrooms. We hypothesize that: (1) students' reports of specific teacher practices will be positively associated with students' perception of being in a community of engaged learners; and (2) students' reports of being in a community of engaged learners will vary by sex, race/ethnicity, neighborhood socioeconomics, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) status, and GPA.

Methods

Data and Sample

This study draws data from a districtwide survey administered to elementary, middle, and high school students across a large urban school district and from administrative data linked to student responses. In 2014–15, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) had 396,683 students (preK–12) in the district, with 183 high schools (9–12) and 30,366 ninth grade student (CPS, 2021a). The racial breakdown districtwide was reported as White (9.3%), Black (40.1%), Native American/Alaskan (0.0%), Hispanic (45.7%), multiracial (1.1%), Asian (3.5%), Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (0.1%), and unknown (0.8%; CPS, 2021a). During the same school year, 15.6% of ninth grade students were receiving special education services, 8.91% were bilingual, and 86.48% were classified as being economically disadvantaged (CPS, 2021a).

The *My Voice, My School* survey is administered in partnership with the University of Chicago and CPS. The survey results are publicly available and are used as an accountability tool for school improvement as well as a research tool. The present study used a subsample of ninth grade students (*n* = 16,137) from 103 schools. Students were randomly selected to take one of two versions of the survey, with one version including the Community of Engaged Learners measure (described below) and one without the Community of Engaged Learners measure. The survey was given in the fall semester of 2014, and administrative data was collected at the end of the 2014–15 academic year. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined this study exempt because the study used secondary and deidentified data.

Measures

Measures were drawn from existing questions from the *My Voice, My School* student surveys and school administrative data. The Community of Engaged Learners measure was developed from qualitative interviews with ninth grades students in a Chicago public high school (Keyes, 2019). Students were asked questions about factors that influence their behaviors when they are in classrooms where they have a sense of belonging and are highly engaged and when they do not (Keyes, 2019). The other survey measures (i.e., lesson organization and structure, academic support, teacher–student trust, school-level SES) were developed by University of Chicago Consortium on School Research and have been used extensively to study CPS (2021b; see Appendix for full list of survey measures). These items have been validated and used for several decades with public school students and have demonstrated adequate reliability and separation in the large samples (psychometric properties for all survey measures are available upon request). The psychometrics of all survey measures were tested using Rasch analysis using the Winsteps software program (Linacre, 2016). School administrative data included student background information such as sex, grade, free- or reduced-price lunch status, special education status, course grades, and neighborhood poverty.

Wenger's (2010) elements for building community were considered when creating the Community for Engaged Learners measure as well as in the inclusion of lesson organization and structure, academic support, teacher–student trust, and school-level SES. For example, Wenger's (2010) first element indicates that community is built when it is clear what community means and how to contribute to it and hold one another accountable. This element can be seen in the first two questions of the Community of Engaged Learners measure that ask about class participation and feeling one's true self, which is how students can contribute and hold one another accountable to the classroom community.

Wenger (2010) points to community norms and routines which can be found in the question asking students about making mistakes and in the lesson organization and structure measure. Wenger's (2010) last element of community is where all students share and have access to resources within the community. In a high school classroom this may be academic support, feedback, clear instructions, trust, respect, and feeling successful.

Student-Level Measures

Community of Engaged Learners. Drawing directly from the study by Keyes (2019) and using Wegner's (2010) conceptualization of community, there are five items that ask students to rate the extent to which they: (1) are interested in participating in class discussions/activities?; (2) feel comfortable being their "true self"?; (3) perceive there is agreement within the class that making mistakes is needed to learn the material?; (4) feel successful when doing the work for this class?; and (5) perceive they receive enough "step-by-step" instruction and support to do the work in this class? (1 = Not at all, 2 = A little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Mostly, and 5 = Completely).

Lesson Organization and Structure. A four-item measure asked students to report the organization and structure of the class routines and activities, such as "It's clear to me what I need to do to get a good grade." Items were scored on a scale of 1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree. A complete list of the survey items used for this study are found in the Appendix.

Academic Support. A five-item measure asked students the extent to which they agree with statements such as, "The teacher for this class notices if I have trouble learning something" (1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree scale).

Covariates. Several covariates were extracted from administrative data, including indicator variables for racial/ethnic identities, males, IEP (0 = no, 1 = yes), and for GPA letter grades (for each A, B, C, D, F: 0 = no, 1 = yes). These were included in analyses at the student level.

School-Level Measures

School-Level Socioeconomic Status. Additionally, several covariates were included at the school level. This includes an indicator variable for whether the school was in a high-poverty neighborhood (0 = no, 1 = yes), drawn from school administrative records. This variable has been found to be more sensitive than the free and reduced lunch variable (Ehrlich et al., 2014).

Teacher–Student Trust. This five-item measure asked students how much they agree with statements such as "I feel safe and comfortable with my teachers at this school." Because the survey question is about teacher–student trust within the school, it was aggregated to the school level indicating a trusting school climate (1 = Strongly disagree to 4 = Strongly agree scale).

Analytic Approach

To test the study hypotheses, hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) was used to accommodate the multilevel data (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Woltman et al., 2012) and the multiple parameters of the survey measures produced from Rasch analysis (Luppescu, 2013). Rasch analysis was applied to the Community of Engaged Learners, academic support, lesson organization and structure, and teacher–student trust measures. Rasch analysis of survey items produces two psychometrics: a person-level score and an estimation of measurement error; analysis of these two metrics can be handled using HLM (Luppescu, 2013). These items are standardized to have a mean of 0.0 and SD of 1.0; slight deviations from this are possible and expected, given this study uses a subsample of a larger school district population.

Four hierarchical linear models were run using the HLM7 program (Raudenbush et al., 2011): (1) an unconditional model with only a Level 1 measurement model, as described above; (2) a two-level model with Level 1 measurement model plus classroom-level teacher practice variables at Level 2; (3) a three-level model including Level 1 measurement model, Level 2 teacher practices, and school-level SES and school-level teacher–student trust at Level 3; and (4) a three-level model that includes all measures from model 3 and all student- and school-level covariates.

The interclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was computed using the covariance estimates within the unconditional means model (see Table 2, Model 1 in the Results section), which gives the proportion of the total variance that occurs between schools. Previous research shows that values between .05 and .20 are common in cross-sectional HLM applications in social science research (Muthén, 1991, 1994; Muthén & Satorra, 1989; Spybrook et al., 2006). Roberts (2007) suggests that ICC should be an initial indicator, but small values should not immediately rule out the use of HLM. To assess model fit, the differences in deviance statistics between the models were assessed and chi-square statistics and pseudo values were computed (Anderson, 2012). Lastly, the results were compared to the results of the fixed effects with robust standard errors to rule out issues with normality, homoscedasticity, or multicollinearity (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

Survey item-level missing data was handled using Rasch analysis, which will generate individual scores using the remaining survey items. Missing data on other items was less than 5% and was handled using list-wise deletion (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics for the analytic sample (N = 16,137) appear in Table 1. The sample was primarily composed of youth of color, and the gender split was 51% females and 49% males. Most students (85.8%) in this sample qualified for free or reduced lunch. The racial demographics and students that qualify free or reduced lunch within the sample are consistent with the entire school district.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Student-Level Variables	Mean (SE) or %
Race/Ethnicity	
Black	33.77%
Latino	49.40%
White	9.92%
Asian	4.29%
Native American	0.33%
Multiracial	1.20%
Pacific Islander/Hawaiian	0.14%
Unknown	0.94%
Male	48.32%
High Poverty	14.39%
Special Education	12.33%
GPA	2.63 (0.94)
A	14.83%
B	38.25%
C	30.37%
D	11.08%
F	5.46%
Teacher Practices	
Lesson Organization and Structure (standardized)	0.14 (0.13)
Academic Support (standardized)	0.00 (1.00)
School-Level Covariates	
Social Economic Status Composite	0.14 (0.13)
Teacher-Student Trust (standardized)	0.00 (1.00)

Rasch Analysis

Overall, the Rasch analyses indicated strong psychometric properties for the measure of Community of Engaged Learners as well as the specific items. In Table 2, the infit and outfit statistics for all individual items of Community of Engaged Learners are shown as acceptable. Table 3 has the Rasch person reliability and separation statistics for the predictor variables. Table 4 shows a correlation matrix between study variables and suggest no multicollinearity.

Table 2. Psychometric Properties of Community of Engaged Learners from Rasch Analysis

Mean (SE)	0.0 (1.00)	
Separation:	2.82	
Reliability:	0.89	
Item-Specific Parameters	Infit	Outfit
(1) Are you interested in participating in class discussions/activities?	0.86	0.81
(2) Do you feel comfortable being your "true self"?	0.99	0.86
(3) Is there agreement within the class that you have to make mistakes in order to learn the material?	0.85	0.81
(4) Do you feel successful when doing the work for this class?	0.69	0.63
(5) Do you receive enough step-by-step support to do the work in this class?	0.81	0.73

Table 3. Rasch Person Reliability & Separation Statistics for Predictor Variables

Measure	Person Reliability	Separation
Lesson Organization and Structure	0.40	0.81
Academic Support	0.22	0.52
Teacher-Student Trust	0.85	2.38

Hierarchical Linear Modeling

Results from HLM models are shown in Tables 5 and 6. Table 5 lists the associations of student-level controls with the Community of Engaged Learners measure. Table 6 displays regression coefficients, variance components, model fit statistics, and the ICC. The ICC of the unconditional means model (ICC = 0.076) indicates a small proportion of the total variance that occurs between schools. Importantly, the unconditional model results did show a very small and statistically significant variance in the school-level intercept, suggesting that a student's perception that they were in a community of engaged learners significantly varied across schools ($< .001$).

Table 4. Correlation Matrix for Major Study Variables

		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1.	Community of Engaged Learners	--	--	--	--	--
2.	Lesson Organization	0.54***	--	--	--	--
3.	Academic Support	0.54***	0.65***	--	--	--
4.	Teacher Trust	0.10***	0.14***	0.13***	0.11***	--

Note. ***$p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Associations of Student-Level Controls with Community of Engaged Learners

	Mean	p-value
White	-0.30	0.002
Native	-0.45	0.075
Latino	-0.53	<0.001
Multiracial	-0.58	0.004
Asian	-0.69	<0.001
Pacific Islander	-0.23	0.592
Male	0.25	<0.001
High Poverty	0.09	0.094
Special Education	-0.05	0.431

When comparing the intercept for unconditional model (-0.509, $p < 0.001$) to the final Model 4 with all covariates and school level variables (-0.537, $p < 0.001$), the variation is limited and contribution to the effect sizes was small, suggesting limited explanatory power to the covariates. To measure the magnitude of the variation among schools in their mean perception of being in a classroom community of engaged learners, the plausible values were calculated and ranged from -0.641 to -0.377. The reliability estimate for this model was 0.306. The Level 2 residual was not significant of students perceiving they are in a community of engaged learners within a school For each model, the fixed effects and fixed effects with robust standard errors were similar, suggesting no severe violations of the assumptions (results not shown).

Table 6. Regression Coefficients on Major Study Variable, Variance Components and Model Fit Statistics for Hierarchical Linear Models

Parameters	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Regression Coefficients (Fixed effects)				
Student-Level				
Intercept	-0.51***	-0.55***	0.56***	-0.54***
Lesson Organization and Structure		0.03*	0.03*	0.04*
Academic Support		0.06***	0.06***	0.05***
School-Level				
Student-Teacher Trust			-0.09*	-0.03
Variance Components (Random effects)				
Residual (σ^2)	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.08
School-Level Intercept	0.005***	0.004***	0.003***	0.002
Random L1 Reliability Estimate	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.06
Random L2 Reliability Estimate	0.31	0.27	0.25	0.14
Model Summary and Fit				
Deviance statistic	41819.096	41695.911	41690.393	41622.237
Number of estimated parameters	3	5	7	21
χ^2 statistic	198.73558	76.50772	70.98919	Full Model
Degrees of freedom	18	17	15	–
p-value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	

Notes. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$; regression coefficients for covariates are available from the authors upon request.

Teacher Practices

Teacher practices had a significant but small effect on a student's perception of being in a community of engaged learners. Therefore, teachers who had their lessons organized and structured well had an effect of students' perceiving they were in a community of engaged learners ($\beta = 0.035$, $p < 0.05$). As expected, teachers who provided academic support to students had a positive association to students' perception of being in a community of engaged learners ($\beta = 0.055$, $p < 0.001$), but it was much smaller than expected.

Student Characteristics and Covariates

Table 5 shows the associations between the Community of Engaged Learners measure and student characteristics with and without other study variables, respectively. Interestingly, several trends appeared that were inconsistent with our hypotheses. Results suggest that students from all racial groups had a lower sense of being in a community of engaged learners compared to Black students. For example, Latino students, which are the largest racial group (49.4%) in the school district (β = -0.14, p < 0.001) and Asian students (4.29%) were less likely to feel they are in a community of engaged learners (β = -0.135, p < .01) than Black students (33.77%). Counter to our hypothesis, male students also have a higher perception (β = 0.078, p < 0.001) of being in a community of engaged learners than females. Neither living in a high poverty neighborhood nor school-level SES composite was associated with the Community of Engaged Learners measure in HLM model 4. Contrary to our hypotheses, students with a special education status have a greater (β = 0.06, p < 0.05) sense of being in a community of engaged learners, and their school-level teacher–student trust numbers were not statistically significant. Lastly, students with an A average GPA had a slightly greater (β = 0.055, p < 0.01) perception of being in a community of engaged learners as compared to B students, though there were no other significant differences from B students to those with a GPA of C or lower.

Discussion

There is an ever-increasing need for K–12 educators to better understand how to construct classroom communities that engage students, especially because students are not interacting in the physical classroom the same way as before the 2020 global COVID-19 pandemic (McCartin, 2020). Although the literature has highlighted the importance of promoting community in classrooms and schools (Farmer et al., 2019; Fredricks et al., 2004; Goodenow, 1992; Osterman, 2000), few studies have examined how specific teacher practices may contribute to a classroom learning community.

While this study examined specific teaching practices for in-person classrooms and their relationship to how high school students feel and behave within a classroom learning community, many of these teaching practices might be generalized to an online classroom setting as well. The results from this study found that there was a small significant association with the Community of Engaged Learners measure. Consistent with the academic support literature (e.g., Klem & Connell, 2004; Libbey, 2004; Osterman, 2000) the HLM analysis suggests that academic support is an important teacher practice

for students' perception that they are in a classroom learning community. Academic support is providing clear instruction while also equipping students with the necessary skills to accomplish the designated tasks independently and meet the learning goals and class expectations (Deci et al., 1981; Ghaith, 2002; Jang et al., 2010). Researchers have found that academic support affects student's psychological sense of belonging (Allen et al., 2018; Osterman, 2010). When positive teacher–student relationships are developed, the teacher often gains knowledge about their students that help them to anticipate the academic (and sometimes psychological and social) needs of their students (Keyes, 2019). Engaging instruction along with autonomy-supportive teaching promotes students' tendency to engage in learning because they value what they are learning or find it interesting (Certo et al., 2003; Roth et al., 2007; Wentzel et al., 2018).

Likewise, teachers who effectively organized and structured their lessons contributed to students' perception of being in a community of engaged learners. The small positive effect between teacher practices and students' perception of being in a community of engaged learners is evidence that what teachers do in the class are important for promoting community. For instance, when the class lessons and activities are clearly structured, they help students to feel a sense of control, autonomy, and competence over their own learning (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Reeve & Shin, 2020; Skinner et al., 2008), encourage higher order thinking (Singh et al., 2020; Zohar & Dori, 2003), and integrate prior knowledge and concepts (Emmer & Stough, 2001; Kwok, 2021; Stough et al., 2015). A teacher's knowledge and use of various instructional learning methods are critical to maximize student engagement (Ibrahim & El Zaatari, 2020; Reyes et al., 2012). However, additional research is still needed to explore the significance of other classroom factors, such as connection or conflict with peers, positive or negative attitudes towards course subjects, time of day, and teacher characteristics that may affect high school students' feeling a sense of community within their classrooms.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, school-level SES was unrelated to students' perception about being in a community of engaged learners. One explanation for this finding could be that, while students bring their outside of school experiences into the classrooms, teachers can promote belonging and build community in their classrooms regardless of the economic conditions of students' neighborhoods or homes. Another possible explanation for no association between the SES composite and the Community of Engaged Learners measure may be related to how low SES status affects most students in the study, and therefore does not emerge as a contributing factor. A Turkish study examined the social contexts of schools using structural equation modeling to identify the social

and contextual factors within Turkish schools to understand which are instrumental to enhance students' sense of belonging (Cemalcilar, 2010). The model tested students' satisfaction with their social relationships in the school (student–teacher, student–administration, student–student) and their satisfaction with the school environment (e.g., physical features, supporting resources, perceived violence), finding that students attending low SES Turkish schools are accustomed to insecurity in their environment, both in and out of school, and for these students their neighborhood environment may not be considerably different from their school environment (Cemalcilar, 2010). These findings may help to explain why the SES composite at the school level used in this study did not contribute to students feeling they were or were not in a community of engaged learners.

Previous research has found that teacher–student trust is an important factor because it affects the climate of the classroom and benefits the quality of social interactions (Russel et al., 2016). Teacher–student trust also influences positive student behaviors and helps students to feel more comfortable asking questions and expressing unpopular opinions (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Lamborn et al., 1992; Russel et al., 2016; Watkins, 2005). However, our findings suggest that when teacher–student trust is measured at the school level, it is not possible to predict students' experiences in the classroom; teacher–student trust was not associated with a community of engaged learners. Lastly, it is important to highlight that the statistically significant variance in the school-level intercept suggests that students' perceptions that they were in a community of engaged learners significantly varied across schools, indicating that school-level factors are important for creating a community of engaged learners and need to be tested in future research.

Student Characteristics

The findings raise important questions about differences among students—specifically, by their race/ethnicity, sex, special education status, and SES. Counter to hypotheses, Black students reported the highest levels on the Community of Engaged Learners measure, Latino/as and Asian students had the lowest rates, and White students reported rates almost as low as Latino/as and Asians. Some studies have hypothesized that racial minority students would report lower classroom belonging due to the negative academic stereotypes linked to belonging to different racial groups (Garcia-Reid, 2007; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Ibañez et al., 2004), while others find that racial/ethnic minority students do not have lower school belonging (Bennett & Sani, 2003; Booker, 2006; Goodenow, 1993; Voelkl, 1997). The mixed findings across studies may reflect varied school and community demographics or characteristics.

The complex nature of racial and ethnic identities and the negative stereotypes associated with different groups means school and classroom belonging requires different meanings for different groups (Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Osterman et al., 2000, 2010. In this study's school district, Asian (3.9%) and White (9.9%) students are underrepresented, which may negatively affect their sense of belonging, engagement, and the Community of Engaged Learners results. Black and Latino/a students are the majority, and the schools they attend tend to be racially and socioeconomically segregated from others in the school district. Although not ideal, this segregation into majority Black schools may be an important factor for creating a racial and/or cultural sense of community that positively contributes to how Black students perceive the sense of belonging and engagement in their classrooms. For high schools with majority Latino/as students, this effect may be blunted due to language barriers for some Latino/as students and their families in schools where teachers are primarily White and English-only speaking (Loveland, 2018). Also, the percentage of Latino/as students that are undocumented in this school district is empirically unknown; however, it is understood that they exist in greater numbers than expected. Despite legislative efforts to provide a pathway to citizenship, being undocumented increases concerns and fear about being deported. "Without access to formal citizenship to assert their rights, their claims to belonging, grounded in their cultural citizenship, are shaky" (Gonzales et al., 2015, p. 337). The unique challenges faced by undocumented students can decrease their sense of belonging and community in school because the lessons they learn in school about meritocracy and democratic participation are in conflict with their lived experiences (Gonzales et al., 2015). Lastly, the concerns and fears about deportation may also be prevalent among documented students but who have family and friends who are not and are still under threat (Rivera, 2016).

Inconsistent with our hypothesis, findings show that male students were more likely to perceive being in a community of engaged learners than female students. Bonny et al. (2000) conducted a study about disconnected seventh–twelfth graders in eight public schools with Grade 9 as the median grade level. They found that boys reported feeling more connected to school than girls did (Bonny et al., 2000). This finding is contrary to some research that show females adhere more consistently to teacher's behavioral expectations and are thought to have a stronger sense of belonging and classroom community than their male counterparts (Anderman, 2002; Banse et al., 2010; Hughes et al., 2006; Kenny & Bledsoe, 2005; Voelkl, 1997). A longitudinal study by Gillen-O'Neel and Fuligni (2013) indicated that ninth grade girls' belonging was higher than boys; however, over the course of their high school careers, girls' belonging declined, but boys remained stable. In a recent meta-analysis, sex

was only weakly associated with school belonging overall, but girls tended to feel a greater sense of belonging than boys (Allen et al., 2018). Future research should consider ways to address the variation of students from different sexes perceiving they are in a community of engaged learners as well as their differing confidence levels in school.

Research finds that students attending low-income schools tend to report feeling less connected to their teachers and to school in general (Battistich et al., 1995; Olsson, 2009). In a meta-analysis, Korpershoek et al. (2020) found lower belonging and educational ambitions among lower SES students. The neighborhood schools that students attend is closely tied to their family SES. Whereas, the family SES has been found to predict students' sense of belonging in school with small effect sizes (Ma, 2003). Interestingly, our study measured poverty at both the school level and the student level, and we found poverty did not impact students' perceptions of being in a classroom community of engaged learners. One reason may be because over 80% of the students (K–12) in the urban school district are considered economically disadvantaged (CPS, 2021a). Disentangling race/ethnicity, neighborhood, and high poverty schools is problematic in our understanding students' sense of belonging to school and its association to fostering a learning community of engaged learners.

Also contrary to the hypothesis, students with a special education designation had a higher perception of being in a classroom community. This is counter to research findings that students with learning disabilities are less accepted when compared to their non-disabled peers (Frederickson & Furnham, 2004; Sale & Carey, 1995). Some students with disabilities have elevated self-reports of loneliness, anonymity, victimization, and lower levels of school participation (Chen et al., 2015; Frederickson & Furnham, 2004; Pijl et al., 2008; Sabornie, 1994). The quality of support and integration level of special education services across the school district may affect the level of stigma and belonging students' feel. For example, if students in a self-contained classroom have little or no access to peers without a special education individualized plan, they may not feel as much stigma. However, if a student with a special education designation is in an inclusive learning environment with typical learners and has been incorporated well into the class, they may not feel stigmatized but feel a sense of belonging to a community of engaged learners. Future research might distinguish whether students with a special education designation attend school in inclusive environments versus self-contained classrooms.

Lastly, findings were consistent with the hypothesis suggesting that students with an A average GPA have significantly higher perception of being in a community of engaged learners. Research shows that students with higher levels of academic achievement may have a greater sense of belonging than students with lower levels (Booker, 2004; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Ma, 2003).

Limitations

The interpretation of these findings needs to be considered in the context of the study's limitations. One limitation involves the measures used in this study. This study relied on self-report data from ninth grade students, which may be subject to bias and only considers the students' perspective. Future research might utilize data that compares perspectives of different students within the same classroom as well as teachers' perspectives. In addition, the data used for this analysis is cross-sectional, and thus no causal inferences can be made. Also, this study only examines the 2014–15 cohort of ninth grade students in the school district, and the results could be vastly different in other grades, thus limiting the generalizability of these findings. Lastly, this large school district has high schools that are structured differently—some are selective enrollment where students must apply and be accepted to attend while other high schools have enrollment based on where the student resides. Certain high schools may also have an arts program, International Baccalaureate programs, and/or Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) within the high school. This high school structure may impact students' sense of belonging, particularly if the school community values one program over the other. In addition, the communities where schools are placed across the school district are racially segregated which impacts the classroom composition across high schools. Some high schools have majority Latino/a, Black, or White student enrollment, and a few of the high schools are racially mixed. Future research may consider how the structure and racial composition of a school may affect students' sense of belonging and community. These factors may be affecting the results because they were not accounted for and would be important to consider for future research. Accepting these limitations, this study nevertheless provides important questions and implications for community psychology research and practice in schools.

Conclusion

Classrooms that promote community help all students feel safe, respected, and valued while promoting learning and engagement. The present study explores teaching practices and their association to a measure of a classroom of engaged learners. Rather than assessing new, time-consuming strategies about ways to build community in their classrooms, we focus on the teaching practices that many educators already employ and provide information about which practices create community and for whom.

Our findings demonstrate a small but statistically significant relationship between teachers' structured and organized lessons and activities and their

academic support to the Community of Engaged Learners measure, though association on this varied across the 103 high schools. The findings for race/ethnicity and sex towards being a community of engaged learners were different from the literature. For instance, Black students in this large urban school district had higher rates of being in a community of engaged learners when compared to White and Asian students, which may reflect a positive outcome due to the segregation and racial isolation within high schools with majority Black or Latino/a students. But Latino/a students had a lower perception that they were in a classroom community compared to Black students which may be related to language barriers or immigration status in this urban district. Also, our finding that male students tended to perceive they were in a community of engaged learners at higher rates than females is interesting in light of the mixed findings about how belonging and community vary by sex. On one hand, our findings are a clear indication that more research is needed to explore the complexity of student identity, community, and belonging. On the other, they also suggest a clear importance to students' psychological sense of belonging in a community of engaged learners and the teacher's role in facilitating that community.

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Appendix. Survey Items

Community of Engaged Learners

(1) Are you interested in participating in class discussions/activities?

(2) Do you feel comfortable being your "true self"?

(3) Is there agreement within the class that you have to make mistakes in order to learn the material?

(4) Do you feel successful when doing the work for this class?

(5) Do you receive enough step-by-step support to do the work in this class?

1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=Somewhat, 4=Mostly, and 5=Completely

Lesson Organization and Structure

(1) How much do you agree with the following statements about your {class}?

(2) I learn a lot from feedback on my work.

(3) It's clear to me what I need to do to get a good grade.

(4) The work we do in class is good preparation for the test.

(5) The homework assignments help me learn the course material.

(6) I know what my teacher wants me to learn in this class.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Strongly Disagree 4=Strongly Agree

Academic Support
How much do you agree with the following about your {class}?
The teacher for this class…
(1) Helps me catch up if I am behind.
(2) Is willing to give extra help on schoolwork if I need it.
(3) Notices if I have trouble learning something.
(4) Gives me specific suggestions about how I can improve my work in this class.
(5) Explains things in a different way if I don't understand something in class.
1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Strongly Disagree 4=Strongly Agree

Student–Teacher Trust
How much do you agree with the following statements?
(1) When my teachers tell me not to do something, I know he/she has a good reason.
(2) I feel safe and comfortable with my teachers at this school.
(3) My teachers always keep their promises.
(4) My teachers will always listen to students' ideas.
(5) My teachers treat me with respect.
1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Strongly Disagree 4=Strongly Agree

"Blood, Barf, or Beyoncé"—Building Community and Establishing Procedures in the First Six Weeks of School

Kelley Mayer White and Kelly Vossler

Abstract

Previous research has established long-term benefits for children's successful transition to kindergarten. Yet a majority of the research focuses on teacher and school practices that occur before the first day of school, and less is known about instructional practices teachers use to build community and establish procedures at the beginning of the school year. The current study involves in-depth observations of one highly effective kindergarten teacher during the first six weeks of school. Results indicate the teacher intentionally spent time building relationships with individual students from the moment they arrived. She modeled respect and kindness throughout the day and gradually introduced procedures in an interactive and engaging manner. The study has important implications for practitioners and for future research.

Key Words: classroom community, classroom management, procedures, beginning of the year, teacher–student relationships

Introduction

The first few days of school are critical for children's positive adjustment to kindergarten. When children begin kindergarten, they enter a whole new world with unfamiliar social, behavioral, and academic expectations (Pianta & Cox, 1999). Previous research has established that children who make a

smooth transition to kindergarten experience long-term cognitive and literacy benefits and are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college (Barnett, 2011; Chetty et al., 2011; Claessens et al., 2009; Quirk et al., 2017). Numerous studies have looked at the transition to kindergarten more broadly. Typically, these focus on how schools engage with parents, caregivers, and children about kindergarten before school begins (Early et al., 2001; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Though the practitioner literature provides numerous suggestions as to how teachers might support children in the classroom during the first weeks of school, there is a limited amount of empirical research studies that investigate in-depth *how* students are welcomed into the classroom community and introduced to procedures in the first weeks of kindergarten. The present study aimed to address this gap in the research through focused observation of one kindergarten teacher during the first six weeks of school.

Theoretical Framework

The present study was informed by the work of Nel Noddings and the ethic of care in education. Based on her belief that children are much more likely to respect adults with whom they have established a relationship characterized by trust and care (Noddings, 2005), we wanted to know more about how teachers set the stage for this in the early days of kindergarten. Through our observations, we were able to focus on both the carer (the teacher) and the cared for (the students) and how the impact of their actions might influence one another as they began getting to know each other. This study is also informed by Noddings' work on moral education (2003) and the impact of teachers who model care and provide intentional opportunities for students to practice the act of care.

Noddings argues the purpose of schooling should go beyond academics and focus on explicitly teaching students to care for themselves and others, as well as plants and animals (Noddings, 2013). She views students as "apprentices of care" as they navigate classroom life. In her view teachers have a moral imperative to discuss relational themes as they arise and problem solve social dilemmas with children collaboratively. This study intended to further explore how caring relationships develop in the context of today's classrooms.

Review of Research

Previous research has established children are afforded multiple benefits when they experience closeness in relationships with teachers. Closeness is generally defined by positive interactions, open communication, and warm feelings between teachers and children (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Students in relationships higher in closeness were more engaged in their work,

participated in class more actively, exhibited better work habits, demonstrated more prosocial behavior, and tended to like school more (Baker, 2006; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hipson & Séguin, 2016; Klem & Connell, 2004; Ladd et al., 1999). Children who received higher amounts of instructional support from teachers also performed better on language and literacy assessments (Cash et al., 2019).

Conversely, conflict in the teacher–child relationship is often correlated with poor outcomes for children. Children who experience conflict in the teacher–child relationship may exhibit externalizing behaviors, have less self-control, become less engaged in school, and experience difficulty connecting with classmates (Collins et al., 2017; Ferreira et al., 2022; Heatly & Votruba-Drzal, 2017). Some children also perform worse on academic measures and this holds true across their years in elementary school (Li et al., 2022).

At this point, no one disputes the value of teacher–child relationships for young children's learning and development. However, fewer research studies focus more explicitly on *how* teachers build those relationships at the beginning of the school year. Meltzoff (2001) described how one effective teacher built classroom community in a kindergarten setting. Meltzoff spent 2–3 days per week observing the class from the beginning of the year on. She identified and organized her findings around 10 foundational strands for building community: shared leadership, responsiveness, communication, shared ethics, cooperation as a social process, shared history, shared environment, commitment, wholeness, and interdependence (Meltzoff, 2001). In this classroom, children helped determine classroom rules and consequences and all worked together to care for their classroom space. The teacher spent a great deal of time explicitly teaching social skills and helped children learn to cooperate and negotiate with one another when using classroom materials. Each of the children had a voice but also learned to adjust their language and behavior in response to classmates.

Additional studies have uncovered key teacher behaviors for effectively managing the classroom and keeping students engaged. These include use of eye contact, attention signals, direct commands, and specific praise (Bohn et al., 2004; Briere et al., 2015; Emmer et al., 1980; Hutchings et al., 2007; Joseph et al., 2016; Yassine et al., 2020). Effective classroom managers use pre-corrective statements, explicitly teach expectations and use proximity to redirect off task behavior (Reinke et al., 2018). Teachers who knew students' names from the moment they entered the classroom and consistently listened to students' thoughts and needs and responded compassionately were also rated as more effective at classroom management; they also provided students with choice and gave them a role in creating the classroom rules (Bohn et al., 2004). Whereas,

recent research has found teachers who exert more control over students and express more negative affect and emotions are less effective in their teaching (Poulou et al., 2022).

Transitions in effectively managed classrooms were smooth and short, and teachers addressed inappropriate behavior immediately and then quickly moved on (Emmer et al., 1980). Children's literature was used to help students understand routines and procedures, and the class rehearsed routines until they were mastered; effective teachers also intentionally modeled being kind to others and recognized when students were kind to classmates (Bohn et al., 2004). In fact, Leinhardt and colleagues (1987) found effective teachers spent a significant amount of time explaining and modeling procedures and setting expectations on the first day of school. In that study, teachers planned carefully and introduced additional procedures gradually across the first week (Leinhardt et al., 1987).

In contrast to a majority of the studies reviewed which focus primarily on management and procedures in first grade and above, the current study fills a gap in the research by making use of in-depth observations in one kindergarten classroom during the first six weeks of school, which is typically a very challenging time of the year. This study took place in a high needs school where a majority of children came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Previous research suggests children in these settings find the transition to school extremely challenging (Lloyd & Hertzman, 2009; McWayne et al., 2012), and teachers report students from low-income backgrounds sometimes have difficulty following directions and working independently (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Primary research questions for the present study included:

1. How does a highly effective kindergarten teacher build individual relationships with students and build classroom community during the first weeks of school?
2. How does a highly effective kindergarten teacher facilitate positive peer–peer relationships during the first weeks of school?
3. How does a highly effective kindergarten teacher establish procedures and routines during the first weeks of school?

Method

The present study made use of a qualitative case study design. This was justified given the exploratory nature of the research questions and our desire to describe contextual conditions in detail (Yin, 2003). Data was collected through participant observation and informal, unstructured teacher interviews. The principal investigator spent 20–25 hours per week in one kindergarten

classroom for the first six weeks of school (Aug. 19–Sept. 30). After the first six weeks, the principal investigator spent the remainder of the school year observing an additional 1–2 hours per week. While there, the principal investigator took detailed field notes, capturing a majority of the dialogue that took place between the lead teacher and children throughout the day. This resulted in over 100 pages of notes. Informal interviews with the lead teacher took place across time and were less than 30 minutes each week. These often occurred informally during transitions or planning periods. Notes on what the teacher said were kept in the same notebook mentioned above.

Participants

School

The study was conducted in a Title I-funded, public elementary school in an urban setting in the southeastern United States. The school serves approximately 300 students enrolled in prekindergarten through fifth grade. The average class size was 18, and there were approximately 2–3 classrooms per grade level in kindergarten and above. Roughly 60% of teachers at the school had advanced degrees. Approximately 85% of students lived in poverty based on free or reduced lunch status; 93% were African American, 4% White, and 2% Asian. The school is authorized as an International Baccalaureate (IB) Program and recognized as a Capturing Kids Hearts (CKH; see https://www.capturingkidshearts.org/) showcase school for its focus on relationship building practices. CKH is a schoolwide model for character education that involves extensive teacher training and personalized support.

Teachers

The lead teacher, Ms. M, identified as a White female and had been teaching at the school for three years, though she had been teaching elementary school for a total of 13 years. Ms. M was assisted by Ms. K who was an African American female who was pursuing a degree in education and had been working at the school for several years at the time of the study. Ms. M holds a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education, Master's in Literacy, and is licensed in Early Childhood Education through the state. She regularly serves as a leader and mentor within her school and for the larger school district. She also regularly supervises student teachers as part of a preservice teacher education program at a local university. Ms. M was selected for this study by the principal investigator based on previous observations in her classroom using the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) standards for effective teaching as a lens (see https://www.niet.org/). In these observations, Ms. M's teaching was rated as highly effective, particularly in the domains of

Instruction and Environment. She used a variety of instructional strategies, set clear and rigorous expectations, and kept students engaged throughout the day. She also regularly recognized positive behavior, anticipated students' learning difficulties, and paced instruction appropriately.

Students

The kindergarten class was composed of 19 students on the first day of school. All student names that appear in the results section are pseudonyms; 16 of the students had attended the school's prekindergarten program. Two of the others attended preschool elsewhere, and one was entering school for the very first time that year. Parents identified 42% of the students as female and 58% as male; 89% were African American, and 11% were White. Approximately 74% were from low-income backgrounds based on free and reduced lunch status.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using the constant–comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which involved multiple readings of the data. This method is supported by grounded theory. Grounded theory is an inductive approach to data analysis which allows a researcher to derive themes directly from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, open coding was employed to determine key practices used by the teacher. For example, "says good morning right away" and "gives compliment." Next, axial coding was used to establish connections between the first set of codes produced. For example, "warm start to the day" was an axial code used to bring together the two codes in the previous example. Subsequent readings of the data involved coding materials into each category, often referred to as selective coding. This resulted in the identification of six major themes addressing the first research question, three addressing the second research question, and ten addressing the third. Each category is represented by a separate subheading in the results section.

Trustworthiness was established through regular member checks with the teacher (Birt et al., 2016). Throughout the data collection period, the principal investigator would share observations with the teacher and ask for clarification or confirmation. After coding the data, the teacher was able to confirm results by reflecting on her own perspective and experience and how it was aligned with the researcher's coding scheme and interpretation to triangulate the data.

To promote trustworthiness, the principal investigator made use of prolonged engagement (Henry, 2015) and observed for multiple hours a day on multiple days each week over the first six weeks of school. Beyond that, she continued to observe for several hours one or two times per week for the remainder of the school year. While there she focused on keeping field notes

objective and tended to record only what could be heard or seen. She refrained from using labels in the notes such as "good" or "happy" and instead recorded behaviors like "teacher smiles" and "maintains eye contact" to document positive affect.

Positionality

Data was collected and analyzed by the first author. Both authors are White, cisgender females with multiple years of experience teaching in settings similar to the classroom of focus in this study. Neither are from the city where the research took place, but both have been working in the state for more than 10 years. The principal investigator and first author is a college professor at a four-year, public institution and has been engaged in researching teacher–child relationship quality for the majority of her career. She has completed multiple courses on research methods, observation, and interviewing techniques. Multiple check-ins with the teacher of record helped prevent bias in interpretation of the data.

Results

How Do Effective Teachers Build Individual Relationships With Students During the First Weeks of School?

When investigating relationship building in the classroom, six themes arose from analysis of the observation and interview data. Each is discussed in more detail below, but they include: the teacher engaged in warm, individual interactions with children; modeled kindness and care; and used a variety of relationship-focused routines across the day. She also valued students' identities, regularly communicated with families, and made consistent use of positive affect and language when interacting with students.

Warm Individual Interactions

Individual interactions between Ms. M and her students were responsive and warm. On the first day of school (and every day thereafter) she made sure she greeted students as they arrived, often saying things like, "I am so glad to see you Jamari. How was your soccer game last night?" She frequently hugged them upon arrival and tried to spend a few minutes with every student. This time was typically characterized by lots of smiling and laughter, which seemed to increase over the weeks as students became more comfortable in their new environment.

Ms. M also made sure students' basic needs were met first. For example, one of the first questions she asked once they arrived to school was whether they'd had breakfast. If not, she immediately sent them to the school cafeteria to eat.

During morning meeting, if students made requests for a particular song or activity to be repeated, she would happily comply. She also frequently made time to answer student-generated questions during read-alouds and discussions. This was true even when discussing more difficult topics like "code red" drills (for school shootings). These examples illustrate Ms. M's attempts to build what Noddings (2005) referred to as an "ethic of care." Students were learning they could trust Ms. M to care for them from the first day of school.

While she had high expectations for all students in regards to their attention and participation, she seemed especially attuned to the needs of two students with autism. She regularly adapted her instruction and eagerly provided them with accommodations. One student wore noise canceling headphones, and the other was allowed to sit where he chose at all times. A third student was repeating kindergarten with Ms. M as his teacher. Despite his academic and behavioral challenges, she tried to promote him as a leader among his peers and often asked him to help or take on additional responsibilities. For example, on the first day of school when she introduced how to sit on the carpet, she asked him to demonstrate it for the class. She said, "Oh, Blake knows how to sit and listen. Can you please show your new friends how we do that in this room?"

Ms. M made multiple attempts to help children feel seen as individuals. Each day the morning meeting included a morning message highlighting a different student and something they could do. For example, one day it said, "I see Kamryn and he likes to ___." Then Kamryn (or the target child) would decide what went in the second blank (e.g., "jump up and down"). The children were often asked to demonstrate. Other times Ms. M allowed students to bring in special books from home, and she read them aloud to the class.

Modeling

Ms. M served as a strong model for emotion regulation and regularly took advantage of opportunities to demonstrate this for students. When one child became disruptive and unsafe during morning circle, Ms. M remained calm and said, "I will talk to you when I am ready, but right now I am upset" and modeled taking deep breaths to calm herself. In another instance, she told a child, "You are allowed to be mad but not scream." When students talked out or over her during whole group instruction, she would often respond by saying, "I am feeling frustrated because people are talking over me." This modeling embodied Noddings' push for there to be rich dialogue between those who are learning to care for one another (Noddings, 2013).

In general, Ms. M created a climate where mistakes were viewed as opportunities to learn, underlining her belief in the concept of growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). In fact, one of the main consequences for misbehavior involved "time

to practice at recess" where students would meet with her to briefly discuss the issue and practice whatever they had done wrong. For example, one day when Jaden had trouble focusing during whole group instruction, she engaged him in role play during recess which gave Jaden a few minutes to practice sitting appropriately and paying attention to the speaker.

Relationship-Focused Routines

Ms. M made use of a variety of relationship-focused routines across the school day. The morning meeting was structured in a way that began the day positively and provided opportunities to share and connect with one another. Ms. M typically waited to begin the meeting until all students had arrived at school. First the class would sing the "Welcome to School" song by Stephen Fite, and everyone would greet a classmate. Students were then usually asked to rate on a four-point scale how they were feeling, and Ms. M offered words of encouragement. She would quickly scan the room to see how everyone rated themselves and then say things like, "Oh wow, Karlyle is having the best day ever" or "Keevin's at a two…you can handle this, buddy" while making eye contact with each of them.

Diverse Materials

Ms. M used a variety of materials to make sure students' identities were represented in the classroom. Students could see themselves reflected in classroom texts and materials. Ms. M had a large classroom library with lots of multicultural literature. In one of the informal interviews, she mentioned it was important to her that her students could see children who looked like them in books. She also displayed multiple photos around the room of the children in the class versus displaying premade, commercially produced posters. Ms. M made multiple attempts to make sure students' families and identities were valued. Characters in the texts read aloud, pictures on the walls, and music videos often included African Americans and other people of color.

Parent Communication

Ms. M regularly checked in with students' families and made a positive call home to each individual family before the end of the first week of school. She sent home daily reports on student behavior. Often these focused on sharing kind or helpful acts displayed by students. For example, she wrote in one child's folder, "I was proud of Samaria today when she hugged a friend after she'd fallen on the playground." In my informal interview with her, Ms. M described wanting to share positive information with families whenever she could, but she also wasn't afraid to call or text home when children exhibited a pattern of misbehavior. Sometimes she would even get children to talk to their parents

via phone in the middle of the school day. Once she invited a parent in to see how her child was behaving during whole group lessons. This was followed by a meeting with the teacher, parent, and child. The principal investigator was not present for the meeting, but Ms. M mentioned the three had worked together to discuss strategies for improving the student's attention skills and engagement in class and set a time to check in a few weeks later. Ms. M also regularly invited parents to volunteer in the classroom. For example, on weekly "Welcome Wednesdays," a different parent volunteer would sign up to help monitor the group and read with individual children during reading workshop.

Affect and Language

Overall, Ms. M's affect was positive. She was often seen smiling and laughing. She frequently held hands with students and gave lots of hugs and high fives. She made eye contact with each of them when greeting them and actively listened to their ideas when called on. She maintained high energy and a positive attitude throughout the day, even when things were not going as planned or students misbehaved.

As she worked to get to know students in the first weeks, she often shared about her own family and pets. She frequently gave small compliments to students on items of interest like a fun pair of socks or character on a lunch box. She also made sure students knew they were missed if they came late to school or missed a day. In general, her language in the first few days of school was largely focused on safety and kindness, and she often redirected student behavior in connection to those. For example, "hands are for helping…and hugging" and "walking keeps us safe." This was similar to the teacher in Meltzoff's (2001) study whose class motto was described as "Everyone gets to feel safe and comfortable and do their important work."

How Do Effective Teachers Facilitate Positive Peer–Peer Relationships in the First Six Weeks of School?

Three themes address how the teacher of focus facilitated positive peer relationships. Each is discussed in more detail below; they include how the teacher was intentional and explicit in teaching social skills. She also led multiple team-building activities to help students get to know one another and regularly referred to the class as a family.

Intentionality in Teaching Social Skills

To model effective peer–peer relationships in the first six weeks of school, Ms. M spent time modeling prosocial behaviors. During morning meetings, she had students make eye contact, greet one another back, and she emphasized listening when classmates were speaking. Previous research has identified

the importance of scaffolding these interactions for students. For example, the kindergarten teacher described in Meltzoff's study (2001) had a speaking and a listening chair to define each person's role as children tried to problem solve a situation.

More than once Ms. M said to students, "we only use kind words in this classroom" and recognized students who showed kindness to others. For example, Samaria asked a friend if she was okay after she had fallen, and Ms. M publicly acknowledged her for it. When Devon had trouble finding a space to sit during morning meeting, she told his classmate, "look—you can tell Devon 'there's room right here.'" These examples illustrate Noddings' thoughts (2013) on school as an essential context for learning *how* to care for one another.

Ms. M modeled respect by stating things like "when someone is speaking, we'll be quiet…that's respectful" and emphasized "not laughing when others make mistakes." She even explicitly modeled how to respond when someone asked to be partners. This connects back to Noddings' work (2003, 2013) on the need for teachers to demonstrate how to care for others. Personal space was addressed by reading a simple book about "being a space saver versus a personal space invader." She also read the children's book, *Decibella and Her 6-Inch Voice* by Julia Cook to discuss speaking at an appropriate volume. Following the read-alouds, she consistently used language from the books to redirect and/or reinforce children's use of the behaviors introduced. It was clear Ms. M understood her role in building students' personal competencies or "the something other" parents hope to see develop in young children as they progress through school (Redding, 2014).

Team Building

During morning meeting and throughout the day, Ms. M facilitated several group games and partner activities. She used a strategy called "Stand up, Hand up, Pair up" to help children find a partner and encouraged students to thank one another once the partner activity came to an end. When students were sharing, she taught them to use a hand signal when they agreed with the speaker or could connect to their story. For example, when Benny told a story about her love for playing with her dog, Ms. M modeled using the "me too" hand signal to indicate she also had a dog at home that she enjoyed playing with.

Class as a Family

Ms. M often spoke about the class as a family and highlighted their interdependence. When a child was slow to respond or needed redirection, she often said things like "we are waiting on you, don't let your class down." When students used a four-point rating scale to indicate their moods, she told classmates to "check on friends who rated themselves a two or one…you might need to

build them up today." After introducing and practicing a new routine, she generally rated the class as a whole on how well they followed procedures and expressed their need to work together to improve the next day. Also, students who completed work early were often asked to "help a friend."

When one student was causing a distraction in the middle of morning meeting, Ms. M told her "you are not being fair to your classmates." Meltzoff (2001) described this as responsiveness, or the idea that "we" should come before "me" in a classroom community. In the most extreme cases, Ms. M sent students away from the group for a few minutes and told them they "weren't welcome" in the circle if they were being unsafe (rolling on floor, kicking others, etc.). Admittedly, this practice sounds harsh and is generally discouraged, but Ms. M always welcomed the student back after a few minutes. During an interview she admitted this strategy was typically used as a last resort. This example highlights the complexity of teachers' decision making when it comes to meeting the needs of the larger group versus those of an individual student and how sometimes those two things are in conflict.

How Do Effective Teachers Establish Procedures During the First Six Weeks of School to Enable Children's Positive Experiences With and Success in the Classroom?

Ten themes address how the teacher of focus established procedures during the first six weeks of school. Each is discussed in more detail below; they include: Ms. M provided scaffolding and modeling when introducing routines and gently redirected students as needed. She provided student choice, kept them engaged, and developed procedures with student input. She demonstrated strong planning skills and intentionality in her teaching and regularly explained the purpose behind activities.

Scaffolding

Ms. M began establishing procedures and provided scaffolding from the first day of school. She intentionally kept routines simple and then built in additional steps on subsequent days. For example, after they were greeted on the first day, students were simply asked to hang up their backpacks, walk to an assigned seat, and begin working on a simple coloring page. The next day an additional step in the morning routine involved having students sign in by writing their names on a large piece of chart paper. As students became more comfortable with these initial steps, the morning activities became more complex. Rather than coloring, students were eventually allowed to choose a morning bin of manipulatives (unifix cubes, chain links, pattern blocks, etc.) to work with quietly at their table. In the first weeks of school, students were assigned seats at small

tables. In later weeks, they were provided with more flexible seating options, like sitting on the floor or using bean bags or wobbly stools.

Gentle Redirection

In general, when students were off task, Ms. M redirected behavior positively and quickly moved on. She would often simply call a student's name to get their attention or use proximity. One student with autism was regularly asked to sit near her because he had a strong need to touch her to stay focused. She frequently held his hand or allowed him to fidget with her clothing which seemed to soothe and interest him. Ms. M focused on telling students what to do, instead of telling them what not to do, for example, using commands like "please walk" rather than "don't run" or "we are listening" versus "no talking."

When students had trouble saying goodbye to their families at arrival, Ms. M and her assistant worked hard to redirect the student's attention. One young girl, Denaya, cried every morning for the first two weeks. Ms. M and her assistant addressed this by having Denaya help out with small classroom tasks like cleaning tables, laying out materials, or collecting items from students' backpacks. Often by the time Denaya completed the task, she had stopped crying and was ready to begin the day.

Student Choice

Ms. M worked hard to give students choice across the school day. When Damien was struggling to clean up his materials, Ms. M asked him if he wanted to pick up the red blocks first or the green. She was also respectful to students even when they caused distractions or said hurtful things. Often she addressed students individually and quietly. When addressing the group, she rarely raised her voice and instead said things like "I am not going to talk over you; I am waiting for you to have a calm body and a quiet voice." When individual students became overly disruptive to the group, Ms. M stayed calm and asked them to "take a break" at their seat, or the teaching assistant would take the student on a walk around the school.

Ms. M eventually allowed them to choose their own seats after describing how much she appreciated that right as an adult in staff meetings. She described students' behavior as a choice, too, and explained it was their choice to follow rules or not. She empowered students as leaders when allowing them to model for the class: "I like the way you did that, Samaria. Can you show the class?" When students had trouble sharing or working together, she told them to "be problem solvers" and work it out. She asked questions to facilitate these problem solving sessions rather than jumping in with solutions. For example, when two students were having trouble sharing manipulatives in their morning tub, she sent them to the carpet and told them to figure out how they could

better work together. Sometimes when the two children could not solve it on their own, she sent classmates over to help or presented the problem to the whole class for suggestions. Only when students had trouble generating solutions did she offer her own.

Modeling and Guided Practice

Ms. M spent an extraordinary amount of time modeling procedures in the first weeks of school. She began by demonstrating what students should do and then had a student to try and asked his/her classmates "what they noticed" about their behaviors. For example, on the first day of school, Ms. M took the students on a "little field trip to the bathroom." She demonstrated how they should ask permission to go (using a hand signal), walked quietly over to the restroom, closed the door, flushed the toilet, and washed her hands. She even demonstrated how to wait appropriately if another child was already in the bathroom. After the first demonstration, she allowed students to ask questions and then did it again but asked students to tell *her* what should be done next at each step. Finally, a student was asked to demonstrate, and classmates pointed out what their classmate did correctly.

Sometimes procedures were introduced with short, teacher-created books. For example, before learning about fire drill or lockdown procedures, the students heard about them from short stories. Once the procedure was introduced, Ms. M took simple photos of students completing each step and displayed these on "Standard Operating Procedures" (SOP) charts. When students had trouble following procedures, they were often referred back to the chart. Sometimes Ms. M would playfully complete the procedure inappropriately and have students identify what she had done wrong. This was engaging for students because they thought it was funny.

Similarly, when introducing a new set of materials, Ms. M worked with children to create a "yes/no" chart describing what should and shouldn't be done with the materials. On the second day of school, they made a chart like this for crayons. The next few times the class used crayons, she reviewed the chart. Sometimes she even read the "no" side in a deep, funny voice. The charts were driven by student ideas and were developed organically. For example, on the third day, when a student intentionally broke a crayon, she added "breaking" on the "no" side of the chart.

When Ms. M began working with small groups, she taught procedures that built students' independence and allowed her to stay focused on small group instruction. Students were playfully taught they should only interrupt her in the event someone was bleeding or vomiting or if an important visitor "like the famous singer, Beyoncé" came in the room. In later weeks, when students tried to

interrupt the group, she would point to the chart and redirect them by asking, "Is it blood, barf, of Beyoncé?" Most would quickly return to what they were supposed to do given their issue did not fall into one of those three categories.

Throughout the first weeks, as she introduced new routines and procedures, Ms. M emphasized progress over perfection and worked with students to set goals for improving performance, which is connected to principles of growth mindset or the idea that with effort and dedication one can improve (Dweck, 2006). Beginning in the second week of school, Ms. M worked with the class to determine a class goal. The first was "I will control my body even when I am upset." Then, the class brainstormed solutions, which included "ask the person to stop" and "ignore." Finally, the class worked together to suggest consequences. They came up with things like "sitting out" and "calling home." Students were reminded of the goal across the day and referred back to the poster when receiving a consequence.

Authenticity

Ms. M provided her students with authentic reasons for behaving appropriately. Examples included "put your name on your paper so we know whose backpack it should go home in" and "sit on your bottom so the people behind you can see." Every now and then she explained how she also had to follow rules as an adult and empathized with students who were having difficulty. For example, she told them how she was known for being late to family events and described how it often upset her brother and father because they would have to wait for her.

Encouragement

Given the emphasis on progress and growth over perfection (Dweck, 2006), Ms. M was quick to notice and acknowledge students behaving appropriately or those trying to turn behavior around. Even children who were sent away from morning circle for disruptive behavior were often quickly praised for turning things around and were then welcomed back to the group once their behavior improved.

Ms. M also picked her battles in the early weeks and chose to ignore minor infractions or disruptions to keep the activity moving along smoothly. For example, if a child in the back was rolling on the carpet but otherwise listening, she did not address it. Similarly, when a child shouted out an answer instead of raising their hand, often she focused on their enthusiasm instead of admonishing them for speaking out of turn. She often referred to a student's first offense as "just a mistake" and reiterated "we all make mistakes."

Engagement

Students seemed engaged by Ms. M's style and delivery. She presented content and instructions using a genuinely enthusiastic tone of voice. Her interactions with students were playful, and her responses to their comments and questions were often very animated. She worked hard to get and keep their attention making use of a variety of attention signals. For example, when she said "hands on top" the students would reply with "means we stop" while putting their hands on their heads. Even when she taught them this signal, she made it feel like a game. Occasionally she would speak to students in a whisper to change things up and make them "really have to listen." She also frequently incorporated movement activities and dance (or "shake") breaks.

Active Listening and Observation

Ms. M made use of teacher observation and strong listening skills to determine students' needs. She seemed to understand children's innate desire to communicate and be seen. She taught them to use finger waves in the hallway when they saw siblings, friends, or other familiar adults. During morning meeting she gave students time to talk with a partner since they wouldn't all get a turn to share with the group each day. To reinforce children behaving appropriately, she took photos of them. These were sometimes hung in the room and/or sent home for families to see. She often said things like "I am calling on Curtis because he raised his hand" to encourage others to follow suit. Other times students were given a special star necklace to wear when they were doing something she wanted others to emulate, for example staying focused during independent reading. Every now and then she used food to reinforce appropriate behavior. For example, candy or goldfish crackers were given to individual students who stayed on task during writing workshop or walked quietly in the hallway. In a follow-up interview, Ms. M acknowledged use of food was not always ideal or practical but thought it did occasionally motivate students. While she praised individual efforts and behaviors, she also worked hard to encourage and reward the group's success. Sometimes she would challenge the group to "work together to come to the carpet faster tomorrow."

She was particularly in tune with student needs on the first day of school, anticipating many of the students' questions and addressing them early on. Several asked about lunch and recess during their first 30 minutes in the classroom, so Ms. M's initial morning meeting included a brief description of the plan for the day so students were reassured she had made time for their favorite activities.

Clear Expectations Developed Democratically

Procedures were not just established by the adults in the room; Ms. M allowed students to provide input and developed procedures democratically. In

the beginning weeks of school, Ms. M worked with the class to develop a so-cial contract versus presenting students with a set of rules she had come up with on her own. This began with multiple discussions on how the children wanted to be treated and resulted in four main ideas. It was also informed by parent suggestions Ms. M had collected during open house, which took place just a few days before school began. A majority of parents attended as it was their first opportunity to meet the teacher. They were asked to respond to two questions: (1) What do you want your child to learn in kindergarten? and (2) What character traits do you want your child to exhibit while at school? Par-ents responded on a notecard, and Ms. M read a few aloud to children each day to generate ideas. She reported her students "really appreciated hearing what their parents had to say." The resulting social contract included a promise to be "learners," to be "respectful and responsible" and to have "fun." Once they decided on these, the whole class celebrated by eating "social contract salad" where a different fruit represented each of the four promises. Children signed the contract to demonstrate their commitment to obey it, and it was regularly referred to in transitions and in connection to student behavior. For exam-ple, "I see Talia following the social contract and being a learner by raising her hand." Similarly, when students misbehaved, they were often asked to reflect on their behavior and consider whether it violated the promises made. For ex-ample, when Emy pushed a classmate while lining up, she was reminded she had "promised to be respectful in the classroom" and was asked "is it respectful to push?"

Planning and Intentionality

While it was clear Ms. M was very intentional and often stopped to review written lesson plans in transitions, she also followed the lead of her students. She regularly reflected on practice out loud ("well that didn't go as planned") and with her teaching assistant, and actively monitored and adjusted the plan throughout the day/week. Ms. M also frequently jotted her reflections direct-ly on a printed copy of the weekly lesson plans. She also made an intentional effort to keep her language focused on learning, which included simple things such as referring to the students' seats as "learning spaces." Their writing jour-nals and materials were also kept in individual plastic bins that were referred to as students' "offices." One day when students were learning phonics, she took out bubbles and blew them over their head describing them as "thinking bub-bles" to help the children come up with answers. She instructed the students to "let them fall into your brains" and not to get up and chase them.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain in-depth insight into how one effective teacher developed classroom community and established procedures during the first six weeks of kindergarten. Results indicate the teacher facilitated warm, nurturing interactions with individual students across the day and used a variety of relationship-focused routines. Research has established through daily interactions with children, teachers create psychologically supportive environments that communicate they know and value their students (Longobardi et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2012; Wang, et al., 2020; Williford et al., 2013).

While child outcomes were not measured in the present study, the results support previous research on the value of individual teacher–child and peer relationships for children's learning and success in school. Closeness in teacher–child relationships is associated with a variety of child outcomes and is thought to mitigate children's risk for adverse experiences later in school (Hughes, 2011; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1992; Pianta et al., 1995). In fact, a meta-analysis of over 60 studies found a positive classroom climate is consistently associated with children's social competence and academic performance (Wang et al., 2020).

Furthermore, research has documented that children's connectedness to classmates is associated with their satisfaction in school (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). In general, multiple studies have found children who have stronger relational ties in the classroom tend to perform better academically, demonstrate less disruptive behaviors and are more engaged in their learning (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Burchinal et al., 2002; Hosan & Hoglund, 2017; Skinner & Pitzer, 2012; Yassine et al., 2020).

In regards to supporting peer relationships, the teacher of focus in the present study regularly referred to the class as a school family and intentionally planned opportunities for students to get to know one another. Research on culturally responsive classrooms emphasizes the need for teachers to build caring communities where students can take risks, laugh, and trust one another (Brown, 2004). In these classrooms teachers explicitly discuss the value of relationships and help students make connections between their interests and backgrounds (Bondy et al., 2007).

The current study confirms previous research on the importance of teaching procedures gradually over the first few days (Bohn et al., 2004; Reinke et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2012). Emmer et al.'s study (1980) found effective teachers introduced only the most salient procedures (bathroom, getting a drink of water, etc.) on the first day of school so as not to overwhelm students. Our findings also highlight the importance of involving students in decision

making and shared leadership (Wells & Reeder, 2022). The teacher of focus in Meltzoff's study (2001) explicitly told students they would all be teachers that year, and the teacher identified herself as a learner alongside her students. Shadiow (2009) describes how engaging in this work can build shared trust because it provides an opportunity for the teacher and students to coconstruct the first days of school.

One limitation of the study is that it describes only one teacher. However, given its singular focus, the principal investigator was able to describe the teacher's actions in rich detail. Although the generalizability of the current results must be established through future research, the present study contributes to the body of evidence on the importance of the first days of school in setting the tone for a positive and productive school year. Future research should investigate this topic with a larger population of teachers to see how prevalent some of the identified practices are in other classrooms. Furthermore, future studies might also investigate how use of the identified practices relates to child outcomes later in the school year.

It is our great hope that the detail provided in this study could inform practitioners seeking to improve their practice as they prepare for the next incoming class of students. It was clear from interviews with Ms. M she put a lot of time and thought into her planning. To be most effective, teachers need significant time to plan for the first weeks of school intentionally and thoughtfully. Teachers identified planning time as one of the most important factors in meeting students' individual needs (Daniel & Lemons, 2018) and research has found it critical for addressing disruptive student behavior (Reinke et al., 2014). Lack of adequate planning time is one of the top reasons teachers leave the profession (Podolsky et al., 2016).

Teachers should be given the autonomy to focus on relationship building before jumping headfirst into content. Teachers should also give themselves plenty of time to introduce classroom procedures and provide lots of opportunities for students to practice routines early in the year. Furthermore, teachers might reflect on small steps they could take to develop a more democratic classroom, for example, having students help determine the classroom rules or decide how many people might fit in each play center to keep everyone safe.

Meeting a class of incoming kindergartners requires a lot of planning, since students enter kindergarten with a variety of experiences with formal schooling. Given that some of the students have never set foot in a formal classroom, kindergarten teachers must work especially hard to establish new procedures while also developing a safe and warm classroom environment so students feel comfortable and ready to learn.

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Book Review of *Everyone Wins! The Evidence for Family–School Partnerships and Implications for Practice*

Rebecca Bauer

For decades, researchers have emphasized the impact that family, school, and community partnerships have on student success and well-being. Effective partnerships are tied to a variety of positive outcomes for the entire community, including improvements in student grades, test scores, graduation rates, attendance rates, levels of student engagement and teacher retention, and a decrease in suspensions and disciplinary issues (Mapp et al., 2022). While the evidence base for family–school partnerships has been steadily growing for half a century, the moment has never been more opportune for substantial change. The COVID-19 pandemic provided families with a window into the classroom and educators with a window into their students' homes. Families and schools needed to collaborate in unprecedented ways. Now the question remains, how can schools leverage what they learned about families instead of returning to the status quo? The book *Everyone Wins! The Evidence for Family–School Partnerships and Implications for Practice*—written by Karen L. Mapp, Anne T. Henderson, Stephany Cuevas, Martha C. Franco, and Suzanna Ewert—not only makes a compelling case for family–school partnerships, but also offers actionable recommendations for cultivating these partnerships.

Anyone who is part of a school community can benefit from reading this book. School and district leaders are best positioned to make use of the book's recommendations for implementing systems change at a large level, whether adopting a Community Schools model or instituting parent–teacher home visits. However, educators will be most able to create change quickly at the classroom level by putting into practice the strategies to strengthen relationships

with families. Lastly, there are also helpful takeaways for parent and community leaders, particularly in understanding how community organizing can be a lever for change.

The book is divided into an introduction; four chapters that highlight the impact and benefits of family–school partnerships for different audiences—(1) students, (2) educators, (3) families, and (4) schools, districts, and communities; and a final chapter on the implications for practice. The chapters succinctly offer research summaries, real life examples, and recommendations through the use of vignettes, bulleted lists, charts, and other visuals.

The introduction depicts why now is the time to double down on family–school partnerships, highlighting the progress that has been made at the federal and state level, as well as investment from the philanthropic sector. Next, the section provides a brief and useful historical summary, referencing political wins and research milestones for family engagement beginning in the 1960s. The section also includes a glossary of terms and breaks down the definition of family engagement: "a full, equal, and equitable partnership among families, educators, and community partners to promote children's learning and development, from birth through college and career" (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 16), describing the meanings of "full," "equal," and "equitable." One of the most valuable components of the introduction is the outline of the book and what essential questions each chapter answers. The outline will help readers who want to prioritize the sections most relevant to their role or community context.

The first chapter focuses on the ways students benefit from strong family–school partnerships. Like each of the chapters that follow, the section opens with a short vignette illustrating a real-life example and proceeds to lay out research and best practices that illustrate big ideas. The chapter highlights Child–Parent Centers—which provide opportunities for caregivers to strengthen their connection to their children, the school, and the community—as a best practice in early childhood that supports children's long term success. The resources offered at Child–Parent Centers vary, but include opportunities to connect with other families, volunteer in the classroom, receive parent education, or participate in GED classes. The first chapter also illustrates the impact of structured conversations to build trust between parents and teachers, particularly through parent–teacher home visits.

In addition to these holistic approaches, the chapter features short-term interventions that lead to academic success, including encouraging families to prioritize shared reading experiences and math games to build basic skills. Throughout the book, the authors emphasize that effective communication between home and school is the cornerstone of high-impact family–school partnerships; this chapter explores the power of text messages and personal

calls to strengthen relationships and to increase family engagement and student motivation. The chapter even delves into a topic that eludes many: partnering with families in middle and high school. The authors focus on the elements of a strong transition program to keep families engaged in high school and organize strategies in the chart, "Beating the Odds: Components of an Effective Program to Engage High School Families" (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 35). While the importance of creating more just and equitable school systems is embedded throughout the book, the end of Chapter 1 addresses the topic explicitly, calling for conflict-resolution practices that rely on "radical healing" strategies (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 36) and the removal of structural barriers to engagement through community organizing. The first chapter presents a thorough explanation of the ways students benefit from strong family–school partnerships, effectively synthesizing research on what impacts student success and articulating strategies for putting that research into practice.

The second chapter focuses on the ways that educators benefit from strong family–school partnerships. The authors demonstrate how connecting with families in meaningful ways can challenge teachers' preconceived notions and disrupt implicit bias. The chapter shares a firsthand perspective from a teacher whose parent–teacher home visit fostered an appreciation for the child's family and culture. Given the current climate of teacher shortages and low morale, one of the biggest takeaways from this chapter was the description of the Allensworth et al. study (2009) that found that teachers are more likely to stay in schools when they have trusting relationships with families. The chapter also illustrates how the outdated idea of family involvement which "tells parents how they can contribute" and in which teachers' goals are to "serve clients" may not benefit educators; however, family engagement which asks teachers to build relationships by "listen[ing] to parents and what they think, dream, and worry about" will help to retain educators (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 48). While the chapter primarily discusses how educators can shift their own mindsets and practices to create change, the final section acknowledges that the issue cannot be resolved one teacher at a time, at least not without resources, leadership, and infrastructure. Buy-in from educators is an essential component of any effort to improve family–school partnerships. The chapter illustrates how taking the time to build relationships with families can pay dividends in the long run, but would be stronger if it included shorter term benefits to family engagement, as well.

The third chapter focuses on the ways that families benefit from strong family–school partnerships. The chapter revisits the practice of parent–teacher home visits, this time from the perspective of the parent. The vignette that opens the chapter illustrates that parent–teacher home visits can empower

families and make them feel valued. Beyond parent–teacher relationships, the chapter highlights how effective family–school partnerships provide opportunities for families to connect with each other, not just as acquaintances but in ways that allow them to develop meaningful networks that can provide support. The chapter emphasizes the importance of cultivating leadership skills among families. When parents and caregivers see themselves as leaders, they feel empowered, their family becomes better connected to the community, and the school reaps the benefits of the leaders' dedication to the community.

Chapter 3 also digs into the wide variety of barriers that families face when engaging with the school and cautions against making assumptions about families. In addition to urging schools to think about childcare, transportation, work conflicts, and other common barriers, the authors prompt readers to consider how the families' past experiences, cultures, or identities might affect the way they engage. Lastly, the chapter highlights ideal communication practices, describing that communication should be "clear, open, and ongoing" and should focus on painting an accurate picture of student performance (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 77). While it's unsurprising that family–school partnerships benefit families in general, the chapter articulates how stronger family–school partnerships more effectively engage marginalized or underrepresented families.

The fourth chapter focuses on the ways that schools, districts, and entire communities benefit from strong family–school partnerships. The chapter describes how families can play a key role in school improvement, using community organizing to create lasting reform. The authors highlight the Mediratta et al. (2009) study that outlines how Austin Interfaith organized its community to achieve major wins. By mobilizing families and engaging district officials, the group elevated the needs of Black and Latinx students and successfully advocated for grant funding that resulted in additional staff and other resources, including bilingual teachers, special education teachers, a parent support specialist, and an ESL class. In turn, school climate and student performance improved in Austin.

The chapter also highlights other replicable reform efforts, including the districtwide implementation of Community Schools in Oakland, California and several individuals who utilized a co-design model to invite families to the table. The chapter notes that in areas that are low in social capital, establishing and maintaining systems for strong family–school partnerships can be particularly challenging, and addressing the root causes of inequities is often a crucial first step. If a major purpose of education is to graduate informed citizens who can contribute to society, there is an inherent connection between family–school partnerships and the wider community. The chapter effectively outlines how entire systems can be transformed by family–school partnerships and how community members can play a role.

The final chapter, like the introduction, offers a helpful recapitulation of the book, including summaries of the major findings across all four previous chapters. For the action-oriented reader, Chapter 5 also succinctly identifies six recommended practices:

1. Intentionally cultivate relationships of trust and respect.
2. Start family engagement early.
3. Communicate clearly and continuously.
4. Focus on equity.
5. Prepare educators at all levels to work with families.
6. Extend networks and partnerships. (Mapp et al., 2022, p. 105)

The book also includes summaries of all of the studies mentioned for readers who would like to dig deeper into the research.

Overall, this book offers a thorough overview of the latest research and practices in family–school partnerships, and it does an impressive job communicating research in terms that will resonate with practitioners at all levels. However, the second chapter focuses very heavily on how family–school partnerships can enhance teachers' practice without emphasizing how it can improve their day to day life. In our current teaching climate, educators care about their long-term professional development, but also want to know how family–school partnerships can help them get through the day. To more effectively make the case to teachers, researchers need to shine a light on the ways caregivers can lighten teachers' loads by helping in classrooms, supporting with administrative tasks, and reinforcing learning at home. The book makes the strongest case for the impact family engagement has on families, school leaders, and school systems, but also has useful content for educators, administrators, and youth program leaders at all stages of their career.

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Book Review of *A Place Called Home: School–University–Community Collaboration and the Immigrant Experience*

Catherine Dunn Shiffman

A Place Called Home: School–University–Community Collaboration and the Immigrant Experience, edited by Jack Leonard and R. Martin Reardon (2021), showcases an array of school–university–community collaborations. This volume is a valuable resource for university faculty, researchers, and school and community leaders who are considering or developing collaborations. While these chapters focus on the immigrant experience, there are also many lessons for the broader field of school–university–community collaboration.

In the introduction, Reardon explains that the "concept of place is the dominant theme that unites the chapters" (vii), contending that "place can be boiled down to its essence" (p. viii). This chapter also briefly relays the immigrant educational experience. After reading the remaining chapters, the rendering of place seems to be a less dominant theme than that of collaboration. There was a missed opportunity to explore the nature and history of collaboration across and among schools, universities, and communities in general, and in the context of the immigrant educational experience specifically. How is collaboration defined? What can prior research tell us about collaborations among schools, universities, and communities? What is known about collaboration and engagement approaches that support the immigrant educational experience? This discussion would have provided readers with an interpretative framework for reflecting on the different manifestations of collaboration in the book. The book also does not include a conclusion chapter. This, too, would have helped readers identify themes and divergent patterns across the collaborations. There are a variety of sources readers might reference to explore theoretical and

conceptual underpinnings of collaboration among schools, universities, and communities (e.g., Auerbach, 2012; Henig et al., 2015; Ishimaru, 2017; Miller & Hafner, 2008; O'Connor & Daniello, 2019).

The volume includes 10 chapters that each describe a specific university–school–community collaboration and a final chapter that provides a general overview and set of recommendations for supporting Latino/a students. Most of these collaborations have been in place for years. The 10 collaboration-specific chapters offer research, theoretical, and historical grounding that is helpful for understanding each unique partnership. These frameworks are valuable resources for collaboration developers, researchers studying these collaborations, and students in university programs learning how theory can inform collaborations. While each chapter focuses in greater depth on one dimension of the collaboration (e.g., the collaboration itself, the process, or research), most offer insights about multiple dimensions. Several chapters introduce well-established collaborations such as the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), community schools (see Coalition for Community Schools), and the Youth-Plan, Learn, Act Now (Y-PLAN; see the chapters by Eppley et al., Montemayor & Chavkin, and Provinzano et al.). These chapters are good starting points for interested readers. More information can also be found on the respective websites of these initiatives.

Five chapters describe a collaboration with a leadership development focus to strengthen participation in school–community collaborations. Chapter 1 (Montemayor & Chavkin) describes the IDRA history and education café model for coalition development and community capacity-building in South Texas. The education café model is grounded in principles of family and distributed leadership. Needs are identified by community members, and then relevant actors work together to address the need. In addition to providing a good overview of IDRA and the model, it would also be useful to understand more about the process components. Given the fluid nature of the collaborations and shifting coalitions, how do projects move forward? How is leadership enacted to do that? Chapter 5 (Eppley et al.) focuses on the processes for fostering meaningful youth engagement in community planning. This chapter is a valuable introduction to the Y-PLAN developed through the University of California, Berkeley. This chapter identifies strategies for youth skill development that capitalize on their assets such as linguistic capital. Chapter 6 (Susnara et al.) presents an Alabama-based Parent Teacher Leadership Academy that has been in operation since 2006. The chapter focuses on one initiative—the Hispanic Parent Leadership Academy—that is grounded in Mapp and Kuttner's 2013 Dual Capacity-Building Framework. The authors provide readers with details about components of the model such as the curriculum. Chapter 8

(Candelarie et al.) describes the university's advising role to support a charter school and community leaders at neighborhood-based learning centers and findings from a research study. This leadership development-focused collaboration incorporates equity-based design and improvement science principles for school improvement. In addition to providing an example of how to integrate these principles into a collaboration, the chapter offers a nice introduction to social and community capital as a theoretical foundation and a conceptual model for building school-based community capital. Chapter 10 (McCleery & Olsen) describes the King County Play Equity Coalition that studied the physical activity needs for youth in the Seattle area. The chapter offers a detailed description of the coalition and useful recommendations for conducting collaborative community-based research.

Chapter 3 (Niu-Cooper et al.) describes a more traditional collaboration that emphasizes building parent knowledge and skills to engage with their children's schools. This Michigan-based tutoring program for adult African refugees is a partnership between a church organization and Grand Valley State University faculty. The authors describe changes to professional development for ESL teachers and teacher candidates as a result of this collaboration. This chapter, however, would have been strengthened with a discussion of the local school efforts to engage this group of families.

Four chapters had as their primary focus a study conducted by university researchers for or with schools or communities. Chapter 2 (Xiong et al.) describes the Minnesota-based Hmong Children's Longitudinal Study and includes lessons for fostering greater collaboration and input from schools to support research. Chapter 4 (Provinzano et al.) presents results from a program evaluation for a community school implementation in a Mid-Atlantic state. In addition to providing useful information about the community schools model, this chapter is an example of an evaluation design and demonstrates how researchers can contribute methodological expertise to a school–community initiative. Chapter 7 (Colvin et al.) describes focus group results and the study's impact on the participants. Specifically, these focus groups explored community member perceptions of citizenship in a rural Iowa community that had experienced a significant demographic shift. Participating in the focus groups contributed to community-building by creating opportunities for having conversations about citizenship—something many had never done. Chapter 9 (King et al.) presents results from a university student survey conducted at three Canadian universities to understand transitions into higher education. The authors ground their analysis in intersectionality and Tinto's work on belongingness to explore the transition from high school to university, the role of family, and experiences with discrimination. The value of this study is the

large sample. While the reported results focused solely on immigrant students, it would have been interesting to compare these results with other student groups in the study.

Most chapters reference immigrants and refugees generally rather than groups from specific regions of the world. Immigrants and refugees include individuals who have recently arrived and those who have been in the country for a long time. One collaboration focuses specifically on parents who are African refugees (Niu-Cooper et al.). Another chapter concentrates on Hmong students and families, and includes a useful short history of Hmong immigration and their U.S.-based education experience. The most frequently referenced immigrants in the book are Latino/a. As noted previously, the final chapter of the book (Hancock & Wiggan) takes a broader brush to collaboration, with a focus on improving educational access and outcomes of Latino/a students. This chapter offers a conceptual framing of the needs and opportunities for collaborating to support Latino/a students.

The majority of chapters were authored by individuals affiliated with universities. As such, these initiatives are described from the perspective of one institutional partner in the collaboration. It would have been interesting for the book and individual chapters to incorporate more school and community perceptions of the collaboration. That said, the book can help collaborators envision a range of roles university partners might play such as evaluator, researcher, financial resource, or technical expertise and support.

In sum, this edited volume is valuable for exploring and enacting collaborations among universities, schools, and communities to support immigrant youth and families. The chapters are highly readable. The breadth of collaborations coupled with the readability make this a worthy resource for university faculty, researchers, and school and community leaders exploring or engaged in collaborative work. The book and individual chapters might also be used as case studies for exploring conceptions of community and community-based research in teacher and educational leadership preparation courses.

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