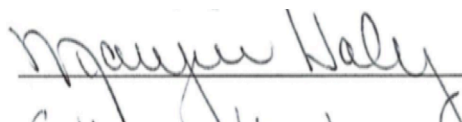


“I CAN REALLY RELATE TO THE FAMILIES”: AN EXPLORATION OF K-3
TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES TO BUILDING
RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES FROM SHARED CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC,
AND IMMIGRATION BACKGROUNDS

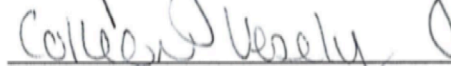
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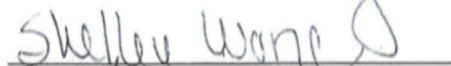
Tiffany P Williams
A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
Education

Committee:



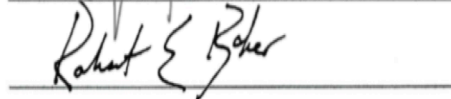
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Program Director



Dean, College of Education and Human
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Summer Semester 2020
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

“I can really relate to the families”: An Exploration of K-3 Teachers’ Perspectives and Approaches to Building Relationships with Families from Shared Cultural, Linguistic, and Immigration Backgrounds

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to every classroom teacher, school staff member and parent that created a relationship with one another, which ultimately enhanced a child's learning experience. It is my sincere hope that educators and families find the individual and collective benefits of school-family partnerships.

Acknowledgements

The journey to this defense has been eight long years in the making. First, I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Marjorie Hall Haley. From my first semester in the doctoral program through my defense, Dr. Haley has been a constant source of support and encouragement. Without her prayers and sincere belief in my ability to complete this work, I do not know that I would be at this point. Next, Dr. Colleen Vesely who gave me space to cry in her office as I dealt with the weight of being a new mom and gave me guidance on ways to navigate a new school system after my family relocated halfway across the United States. Last but not least, Dr. Shelley Wong, a strong supporter and believer in my work from the beginning as well. Dr. Wong encouraged me and celebrated my successes throughout this program.

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It goes without saying that the influence of family support and the frequent “How’s the writing going?” question helped redirect my focus and efforts when I began feeling lost. The love and gentle nudging was instrumental in my doctoral journey. Having a baby, moving from the mid-Atlantic to the southwest, transitioning from working full-time to being a stay-at-home mom, learning to balance family life with my doctoral pursuits, overcoming health challenges and finding ways to gain access to schools in a new city could have been pitfalls without the support of all those mentioned above. For that, I am forever grateful.

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Glossery of Terms

Latinx: pan-ethnic label typically used to describe individuals in the U.S. who are descendants of, or direct immigrants coming from, Latin America. Latinx is distinct from Latina/o because it replaces the “o” and “a” articles with “x” as a means of bringing attention to diverse forms of gender identity and expression that fall outside of the gender binary inherent in the terms Latino or Latina (Santos, p. 8, 2017)

Parent involvement: refers to parent participation in the systems and activities of a classroom or school in ways that support schools as the primary educators, nurturers, and advocates for individual children and for all children enrolled in the program (Office of Head Start, 2013).

Family engagement: refers to ongoing, goal-directed relationships between teachers and families that are mutual, culturally responsive, and that support what is best for children and families both individually and collectively (Office of Head Start, 2013).

Abstract

“I CAN REALLY RELATE TO THE FAMILIES”: AN EXPLORATION OF K-3 TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES TO BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES FROM SHARED CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, AND IMMIGRATION BACKGROUNDS

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George Mason University, 2020

Dissertation Director: Dr. Marjorie Hall-Haley

Teachers’ interactions with students and families are shaped by beliefs, thoughts, and feelings of teachers, which often are not shared by the parents (Gibbs & Powell, 2012). Guided by Social Exchange Framework of Family Engagement and supported by concepts of Intersectionality, the purpose of this research study was to explore teachers’ perspectives on their role in family engagement, and to understand how shared language and culture, between teachers and parents, shaped these relationships. The study included nineteen classroom teachers, in grades kindergarten through third grade, and one parent liaison. Eighteen teachers were Latina and one participant was White. While most of the participants were born in the United States, many were bilingual Spanish and English speakers. With teacher demographics closely matching parent-student demographics, at the research site, many participants shared common experiences with students’ families. Qualitative interview data indicated that teachers identified their connections with

families through shared language, culture and personal experiences. Additionally, teachers expressed an understanding of how shared identities, between themselves and parents, cultivated many benefits in ways they related to parents. Despite the empathy, trust and respect that these common experiences created, teachers were unable to translate these common experiences into deeper relationships with parents. When exploring ways in which their connections with parents could be extended beyond family engagement norms, teachers reverted back to the traditional tools of engaging families that reflected their comfortability and security with school centered activities. Implications centered on creating community focused activities that spark authentic interest from parents and the importance of teachers understanding how multi-layered identities influence decisions in approaching and developing relationships with families.

Chapter One

My professional and personal experiences gave birth to this research study. As a speech language pathologist with over ten years of professional experience in the education setting, where I worked with a variety of students from preschool to high school. Many of my preschool students were in Head Start programs, which is where I was first introduced to formal family engagement models and practices. Throughout my career, I worked with students from affluent backgrounds, culturally/linguistically diverse backgrounds as well as low socioeconomic backgrounds. It was during this time that I started to see the differences in how teachers approached and interacted with the families from these varying backgrounds. I developed relationships with parents on both ends of the spectrum: both those who brought a sense of social capital and agency that forced teachers to sit up and pay attention and those who viewed schools as the authority in their child's education. The launching point for this research study, therefore, was seeing the difference in the way teachers interacted with and responded to outspoken parents versus the parents who rarely spoke up on their child's behalf.

The turning point was a parent-teacher conference that I was asked to attend. The teacher, a White female, discussed the student's grades, shared work samples, and expressed concerns about the student's progress in class. When asked if she had any questions, the parent, whose first language was not English, said "I thought [my child]

was struggling too but I knew you would help her and I didn't want to bother you. I know you have a lot of students in your class.” The teacher quickly reassured the parent that she was welcome to contact the school at any time with concerns or questions. Even with this reassurance, my heart ached for this parent. Here it was almost March and the parent never felt comfortable enough to contact the teacher, express her concerns or request a meeting—all things that I had seen parents with social capital and agency do without hesitation. At that moment, I realized that the teacher or school, either consciously or subconsciously, conveyed or reinforced the idea for this parent that home is home and school is school. Considering the existence of traditional methods of school outreach, what prevented this parent from speaking up for her child? Was it the language difference? Was it cultural respect from teachers and schools? This experience brought me back to my days working with Head Start students and the formal practices required to be used by teachers to promote and foster school–family partnerships. If these practices were also used in elementary schools, would the teacher have been more intentional about reaching out to parents rather than assuming that parents would instinctively speak up?

During these years, I became a mom for the first time, and as my son reached preschool age, my perspective shifted. In my professional career, I experienced situations from a practitioner's point of view. Now, in my personal life, I experienced the parent perspective. Approximately three years before my formal data collection started, our family moved to city where this research study was conducted. For the purposes of this research study, the city is referred to as the Borderland henceforth. The Borderland's

population is overwhelmingly Latinx (specifically, Mexican heritage). Over 80% of the population spoke Spanish. I enrolled our son in a Montessori school where the entire teaching staff's first language was Spanish, and with this experience, I gained a new perspective as a language minority. Not only was I a new mom in a new city, I now needed to learn how to manage my son's academic learning and navigate a school where English was effectively the second language. While the teaching staff was very friendly and inviting, I still felt like an outsider. Even with my Master's-level education and professional experience working with culturally/linguistically diverse students, I found myself hesitant to start conversations with my son's teachers because of the language difference. This experience reminded me of the parent I encountered years before during the parent-teacher conference. However this time, the roles were reversed and I found myself potentially, in similar shoes as the parent.

In my quest to understand more about the local school system, I volunteered in a Head Start classroom. Through that experience, including short conversations with the Head Start teachers at the end of the school day, I was able to gain further understanding of school programs, school activities, and after-school pick up routines. One of the Head Start teachers shared her proud Mexican heritage with me. She also shared how many teachers in the school system were born, raised, and obtained their teaching degrees here in the city. Likewise, many of the families had generational roots in the city as well. She said, "It's like everyone knows everyone here. I can hear a last name and it's likely that I know the family or know someone who knows the family." She continued describing the generational connections that a lot of teachers had to the community. It was her stories,

combined with my personal and professional experiences, that sparked my interest in exploring teacher perspectives of family engagement and how sharing similarities in culture and language shape the development of meaningful partnerships. In Chapter One, I will introduce the purpose of this research study, identify the problem that this research study addresses, and identify its theoretical framework and research questions.

Overview of Current Study

The reality in today's public schools, with respect to diversity, can create challenges for school– and home partnerships, placing teachers and parents on the front line. Research suggests that this divide can be overcome when teachers develop positive, caring relationships with their diverse students; these relationships are critical to maintaining cohesion within schools (Darling, 2005; Stipek, 2006). Research shows that racial diversity amongst teachers can provide significant benefits to students and families. While students of color are expected to make up 56% of the student population by 2024, the current teaching force remains mostly white and does not reflect the changing demographics of the student population. There is limited research on teacher–family relationships where the teachers and parents share similarities in culture and language. The purpose of this research study, thus, was to explore the views and approaches of teachers in their roles as partners in parent–teacher relationships. Additionally, this study sought to understand how shared language and culture between teachers and parents shapes these relationships.

Understanding, acknowledging, and validating the family engagement practices of schools and families is paramount in light of the increasing diversity in the United States.

The US Census Bureau (2018) estimated the US population at 327,167,434. The Latinx population accounts for 18.3% of this number. It is important to note that the US Census Bureau (2018) uses the term Latinx to refer to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South/Central America, or Dominican Republic heritage. According to US Census (2018) population estimates, Texas, the state in which this study was situated, is the second most populous state in the US with 28,701,845 inhabitants. The estimated population for those of Latinx origin living in Texas as of July 1, 2015 was 10.7 million. As of 2015, 72.9% of Latinx people, ages five and up, spoke Spanish in their home. The implications of these numbers are astounding for the state's early childhood programs and public-school system, which currently educate over 3 million children of Latinx/Latino descent (Texas Education Agency, 2018). With ever-growing diversity among students and families, understanding how teachers view and approach their roles in establishing and maintaining family-school partnerships—and what influences their perspectives on developing these partnership—is a critical area of research.

Family engagement is critical to improving the ability of teachers and schools to serve the needs and interests of students and their families. Family engagement is connected to a range of student outcomes, including academic achievement, graduation, and college readiness. Increasingly, education policy and school reform efforts promote family engagement as a student learning and achievement strategy, particularly in schools serving students and families from culturally/linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Parental Empowerment, Navigational Capital, Cultural Capital, and Social Capital in Family Engagement

The term “capital,” here, refers to a person’s amassed knowledge, influence and power (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Family engagement programs, practices, and policies should embody constructs such as parental empowerment, navigational capital, cultural capital, and social capital in design and implementation (Barton et al., 2004; Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Hess & Leal, 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Nakagawa, 2000; Vesley, Ewaida, & Kerney, 2013). It is important that schools understand these components as they relate not only to their family engagement programs but to broadening and deepening teachers’ understanding of how these components can influence their approach to family relationships as well as how families relate to them.

Parental empowerment. An empowered parent is able to be an agent of change who knows how to navigate the educational system, solve problems and successfully advocate for the needs of their children (Holcomb-McCoy & Bryan, 2010; Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012). Schools often reflect social systems that exist in our society. These social systems maintain or perpetuate the power of dominant groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, McCullough, & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Parents and teachers both have a certain level of power in shaping a child’s academic future. Differences in social class between parents with lower levels of education and more formally educated school teachers can result in inequity in the distribution of power in the dynamics of home–school interactions (McWayne et al., 2008). Difficulty communicating with school staff can create tension for parents who

Speak languages other than English or are unfamiliar with school policies and programs.

Many of these parents feel less welcomed at their child's school, creating obstacles to meaningful engagement (McWayne et al., 2008; Griffin & Galassi, 2010). It is crucial that schools use communication practices that are sensitive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the families they serve (Halgunseth et al., 2009; Lareau & Hargot 1999).

Perceived and actual structural barriers can include an unwelcoming atmosphere, limited access to transportation, strict work/training schedules, lower education levels and limited access to books, toys or writing materials (Hindman et al., 2012; Waanders et al., 2007).

Vesley, Ewaida and Kerney (2013) found that many parents rely on their child's early childhood education program for parenting advice and support, which indicates the importance of training teachers and staff to establish and maintain teacher-family partnerships.

Some researchers believe that the current conception of engaging parents in student learning is to provide a laundry list of activities that parents should do with their children (Barton, Drake, Gustavo, St. Louis, & George, 2004). Instead, conversations about engaging parents should include what parents should do but also include meaningful and relevant discussions about the reasoning, purpose, and expected outcome of these activities. Conventional involvement activities instituted by most schools consistently regulate the power to the institution and have a tendency to ignore the needs of the parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Lareau and Shumar (1996) found that a majority of family engagement models promote practices with patterns of unequal power. In this

imbalance of power, parents are not viewed as co-designers and co-implementers of their child's educational experience.

Inequalities that are ingrained in our larger society seem to also appear in the educational system. Oftentimes, school personnel view children of color, especially those living in poverty, from a deficit perspective which implies that there is a lack in ability purely associated to skin color (Harry, Klinger, & Hart, 2005). Research indicates that school personnel often view families of low-income backgrounds as uninterested in their child's education, blame parents for the child's academic challenges, and assume the family structure is dysfunctional (Giles, 2005; Noguera, 2001). Due, in part, to this deficit model view, many family engagement programs do not incorporate principles and practices of empowerment. For these reasons, higher standards for family engagement are vital to empower parents from marginalized backgrounds to establish meaningful parent-teacher relationships and support their child's learning in ways that fit into the context and structure of their individual families.

Van Velsor and Orozco (2007) found that shared stories and voices help parents feel connected with other parents and to view themselves as being valuable. Likewise, shared experiences, culture, and language between families and teachers can foster a deeper sense of connectedness and trust in their partnership. Mitchell and Bryan (2007) found that when isolated or disconnected immigrant families are connected with co-ethnic networks in the school or community, these families may develop a sense of community belonging and build trusting relationships.

Navigational capital. Yosso (2005) defined navigational capital as characteristics and abilities including resilience, cultural strategies, and the use of “individual agency within institutional constraints” to navigate various systems and institutions that may be “permeated by racism” (p. 80). Research into how navigational capital is developed is limited, but previous research in the area focused on the process by which immigrant parents, shaped by individual, family, and community factors, navigate their child’s educational system and how this shapes their children’s academic experiences (Arrellano & Padilla, 1996). An example of navigational capital could be a parent fully understanding their power to go beyond the teacher or school to receive additional educational support for their child that the teacher or school may be denying the child for various reasons.

Parents approach schools with different perspectives on how best to help their children and with different assessments of their power relative to the schools’. These inequities in parental engagement can be traced to issues of social class, race, and culture (Wiggan, 2007). Furthermore, these inequalities can impact practices, processes, and actions resulting in inauthentic parent participation. In order to become more equitable and authentic, schools must eliminate barriers and reduce challenges to meaningful engagement so that all parents have a chance to participate in ensuring educational success for their child. Holcomb-McCoy and Bryan (2010) found that schools can provide comfortable, safe spaces and support groups to discuss the barriers and constraints that parents experience in schools.

Cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to the assets associated with histories, traditions, customs, and norms of a particular group. Lee and Bowen (2006) noted four different ways in which parent's cultural capital is linked to the educational system: personal disposition, attitudes and knowledge, connections to education-related objects, and connections to education-related institutions. As such, the dominant class is able, in effect, to impose its definition of reality upon all other classes. Grenfell and James (1998) argued that some individuals inherit capital through their powerful position in society, which makes them more successful than others in the educational system. This may suggest that most family engagement programs push an agenda of practices that lack sensitivity to factors such as a parent's education level, socioeconomic status, family structure, culture, or language.

Symeou (2008) conducted a study with teachers and parents in urban and rural schools in Texas to examine parent-teacher partnerships. Their findings indicated that although partnerships were formed, teachers still felt as though they knew what was best for the child and that parents should follow their lead. Recommendations from the study focused on schools creating a more inclusive socio-cultural perspective that focused on the child in the context of the family. How can this be truly be accomplished, however, when approximately 80% of teachers are white (US Department of Education, 2016)? Symeou's (2008) suggested that teachers should create spaces and activities where children's home experiences are promoted, valued, modeled, and legitimized.

Social capital. Social capital refers to establishing purposeful relationships and utilizing these relationships to generate tangible and intangible benefits. Horvat,

Weininger, and Lareau (2003) conducted a study to examine the social-class differences between families and school staff and how social capital plays a role in family–school interactions in problematic situations. Their findings suggested that working-class and low-income parents interacted with the school at an individual level and the networks they formed offered little to no support in their efforts. In contrast, middle-class parents often used their networks to act collectively. Even when middle-class parents acted individually, there remained the understanding that they had networks to draw on to support their efforts. Such social capital usage occurs frequently in schools at all levels. Middle-class parents who understand the collective and individual power of their voices are able to interject themselves into their child’s learning with or without invitation from teachers. Parents who have large amounts of social capital are more recognized and validated by the educational system (Lareau, 1987). Accordingly, Kao and Rutherford’s (2007) findings suggested that parents of minority and immigrant children could increase the academic success of their children through interaction with other parents of similar cultural or linguistic backgrounds during school events and activities.

Families

The definition of family developed throughout history to encompass the ever-changing dynamics of interpersonal relationships amongst groups of people. Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2004) grouped the various existing definitions into three general perspectives: structural, functional, and transactional. The structural perspective bases the family unit on “the presence or absence of certain family members” (p. 177). These family members can include parents, children, and extended family members related

through blood or marriage. The functional perspective on family includes definitions stressing the accomplishment of psychosocial functions and tasks. Definitions within this functional perspective focus on the institutional aspects of family in the performance of necessary societal functions such as maintaining a household, socializing children as well as providing emotional and material support. The transactional perspective emphasized transactional behavior in which “groups of intimates, through their behavior, generate a sense of family identity with emotional ties and an experience of a history and a future” (p. 177). Even though Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2004) distinguished between these three perspectives of family, they are not mutually exclusive, allowing for fluidity between perspectives.

Additionally, in some cultures, multi-generational households are common. Extended family members and fictive kin have important roles in caring for and raising children (McAdoo, 2000; Valdes, 1999). Recognizing the importance of all family members, both traditional and nontraditional, is critical in family engagement programs. At least one-half of all children will spend at least one-quarter of their lives in female-headed households. A “semi-extended family structure” is characterized as families made up of fictive kin with some ties to the family members’ original homelands. Recent trends in American families suggest that family structure and meaning will continue to change in the near future. New family structures will likely consist primarily of people of color and will more than likely consist of households that have two primary languages for at least two generations. New family structures will also have social customs, beliefs, attitudes, and communication forms that have not been previously acknowledged using traditional forms of parental engagement techniques (Webb, 2005).

Importance of Family Engagement

Parental engagement goes beyond a parent's participation in an event to include the situations or contexts that influence a parent's decision to participate in a school activity, including their relationships with the teacher and other parents as well as the history of the event, and the resources available to both the parent and the activity coordinators (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004). In the comprehensive school reform efforts of the last twenty years, relationships between families and schools changed from a traditional provider-receiver model to one of partnership or collaboration with shared responsibility between families and schools (Epstein, 1995). Family engagement, therefore, encourages and validates family participation in decision making related to a child's education. This participation occurs through consistent, two-way communication in a collaborative exchange of knowledge (Epstein, 2001; Weiss et al., 2006). Family engagement has long been seen as a critical piece in children's educational experiences and in helping young children prepare for school and a lifetime of academic success (McWayne, Campos, & Owsianik, 2008; Underwood & Killoran, 2012). Students and parents perceive school climate more positively when parents are more engaged (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Moreover, understanding and promoting positive connections between families and schools may be one way of narrowing the achievement gap between white and ethnic minority students (Hindman, Miller, Froyen, & Skibbe, 2012). Research shows that families want more time and resources at home so they can feel more invested in the school-parent partnership. Many families are eager to build relationships with other families and professionals in order to enhance their child's

development and learning, which also benefits the family as a whole (Hindman et al., 2012).

Understanding that most parents are interested in helping their children develop and achieve in school, educational institutions should recognize and honor this interest with impartial fervor and sincerity for all parents. The principle behind the wave of educational reform efforts over the last thirty years is the idea that parental engagement is an essential element in children's academic achievement and social adjustment (Comer, 2005; Epstein, 2001; Henderson, 2002; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Swap, 1993). Scott-Jones (1993) referred to a dominant view in the literature that "family engagement is one of several developmental contexts affecting children's achievement in a complex dynamic manner. Understanding the connections among families, schools and other contexts in which children grow and develop is more important than apportioning responsibility for achievement" (p. 246).

Traditionally, parent involvement is conceptualized as what parents contribute within schools rather than an empowerment of parents to become partners in their child's learning experience. Such engagement can include classroom volunteering, parent-teacher conferences, participating in fundraisers, and chaperoning field trips. Many of the traditional types of engagement do not derive from seeking out how family attributes can enhance a child's academic success and experience. In this traditional engagement model, family activities implemented at home that support children's education might be disregarded and undervalued. These misperceptions of parental engagement practices may lead to a disconnect in the partnership between families and programs (Quiocho &

Daoud, 2006; Wong & Hughes, 2006, Valdes, 1999). McWayne et al. (2008) found that teachers may be unaware of the many ways parents already support their children at home, particularly if work schedules or other obstacles prevent meaningful teacher–parent communication. Family engagement in a child's education is not just relegated to school-based activities but can also take place in the home or in community (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). McWayne et al. (2008) found that these activities reflect a transactional experience between home, schools, and communities. In all family engagement models, both teachers and parents should have a basic understanding and respect of the skills, knowledge, and power that each entity brings to the relationship.

School reform initiatives prioritize family engagement for good reason. When direct outreach is implemented and trusting relationships are created, parents feel included and are even more influential in the academic success of students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Ascher, 1988, Baker & Soden, 1993; Cardona, Jain, & Canfield-Davis, 2012; Epstein, 2001; Weiss, 2006; Marcon, 1999; Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark & Moodie, 2009; Mattingly, Radmila, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kazar, 2002). Schools that are better able to partner with families create greater consistency between home and school environments. Such partnerships require teachers and parents to engage in meaningful relationships with mutual understandings of expectations and trust; this requires open communication between teachers and families. However, challenges to family engagement exist for teachers and parents, especially for those from diverse backgrounds regarding language and culture.

Family engagement is particularly important for children whose home culture differs from the largely middle-class, white, English-speaking culture of the school system. Classroom engagement practices of low-income and minority families are sometimes dismissed by teachers and school administrators and labeled as a cultural deficit. Theories of cultural deprivation or deficit emerged in education and other social science fields in the 1960s and 1970s, stemming from Oscar Lewis's (1959) suggestion of a culture of poverty among poor populations. Such theories suggested that as a result of limited experience with the expectations of the dominant culture, children from low-income or minority families—usually African American or Latinx—would become frustrated with school, causing detrimental disengagement (Getzels, 1966; Piuck, 1975). Although these theories have been largely discounted by educational researchers, the notion of cultural deficit still influences the underlying attitudes of many schools and teachers when interacting with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds not reflected in teacher demographics (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of school–family partnerships and how teachers' identities influence their approach to and development of these partnerships. The following research questions guided the research:

1. How do teacher's view, make meaning of, and approach their roles in establishing and maintaining family–school relationships?
2. How does parents and teachers sharing a language and culture shape the development of meaningful relationships between families and teachers?

The theoretical framework for this study was Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, and Moodie's (2009) social exchange framework of family engagement. An understanding of the processes involved in developing and maintaining relationships between teachers and families is important in addressing how teachers can cultivate meaningful relationships with parents. Knowing that "people live multiple, layered identities that derive from social relations, history and the operation of structures of power", this research study will also include concepts of intersectionality will be applied as well providing insight into the overlapping components that make up identity as it relates to building relationships with families (Women's Rights and Economic Change, 2004, p. 2).

Chapter One introduced the purpose of this research study, identified the problem that this study, addresses and identified its theoretical framework and research questions. Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature further supporting the need for this research study and providing deeper insight into the study's theoretical framework.

Summary

My personal and professional experiences with teachers and families as a practitioner and with teachers as a parent provided me with a unique dual perspective that fueled this research project. Being a part of a new community in which I viewed my English language dominance as a barrier to creating relationships with my son's preschool was an eye-opening catalyst into this area of research. While the positive impact of family engagement on student learning is well documented, there is limited research on the perspectives of teachers on family engagement in teacher-family partnerships where cultural and linguistic matching exists. As such, it is necessary to

further explore the concepts set forth in Chapter One and how these nuances impact the approach to and development of teacher–family partnerships.

Chapter Two

The purpose of this research study was to explore the views and approaches of teachers of their roles as partners in parent–teacher relationships. This study also sought to understand how shared language and culture between teachers and parents shapes these relationships. In the review of the literature related to parent involvement practices and teacher–parent–school partnerships, there was overwhelming evidence supporting the positive impact of these relationships in diverse populations. The extensive body of literature noted the positive influences of shared identities between teachers and students on student achievement. However, there was minimal literature on how shared identities between teachers and parents shaped relationship development in diverse populations. As such, this research study will serve as a contribution to this gap in the literature.

My literature review will begin by identifying traditional family engagement practices and the legislation that shaped them. Next, I will review the importance of relationships between teachers and families for children’s outcomes, specifically in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The next element addressed will be my examination of family engagement among diverse families and schools. Then, I will explore the literature on how diverse families are expanding the traditional views of family and parenting norms. Lastly, I will introduce the theoretical frameworks that guided this research study.

Impact of Traditional Views on Family Engagement

Parent–teacher relationships in public schools in the United States underwent significant changes over the last century. In discussing perceptions of teachers’ and parents’ roles in the early 1900s, Keyes (2002) cited Willard Waller’s (1932) observations of parents and teachers as natural enemies (p. 109). The basis of Waller’s (1932) argument was that parents and teachers maintain qualitatively different relationships with the same child, especially in regard to affective bonds and spheres of responsibility. As a result, parents and teachers want different things for the child. However, in the past fifty years, the way schools and families view each other changed. As a result of increased awareness of the importance of relationships between home and school, teachers and schools made more efforts to reach out to families. Additionally, families pressed to have their voices heard in schools.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 included language that focused on the concept of family and community engagement (Education, 2001). The legislation called for each school to have a written policy on family engagement and coordination with federally funded programs. In this legislation, particular attention was paid to economically disadvantaged and minority families, inclusive of families with limited English proficiency and those with disabilities. Local education agencies were responsible for disseminating information about these mandates to all schools. Schools were then expected to communicate information to parents about curriculum, standards, and testing and to provide notice of these issues in the parent’s native language (Education, 2001). In this effort, the separation between home and school was to be minimized, providing parents with the information needed to become informed and empowered advocates for and partners in their child’s education. During elementary

school, the expectation was that parents would invest and engage in their children's education. Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, there has been a renewed interest in facilitating parent inclusion in student education due to the legislative mandate on increasing parental involvement in schools receiving Title I funding; this mandate was reiterated in the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015.

School-centered activities have long been the method that schools use to involve families; however, these events are typically nothing more than a measuring stick that schools use to determine how involved a parent is by their physical presence. When parents are physically present at school, it is easier for teachers to view parents as "involved" (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Baker et al., 2016). While the presence of parents makes room for casual or incidental discussion between parents and teachers, Finn (1998) found that this structure does not contribute to students' academic success and has not proven to be a critical element for increasing student achievement. Lau et al. (2011) found that parental support at home has a more significant impact on student achievement than parental presence at school-centered activities. In other words, parents' engagement in education seems to be more important for children's academic success than parents' involvement in their school. Being present at school reflects the norms of middle-class, white families who have the privilege of flexibility to be present for their child's school event or activity. In many native or immigrant working-class families, spending time away from work is not a possibility as their work schedules are typically less flexible (Lareau, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Viewing parent presence at school with regard to the obstacles in their lives, schools have the opportunity to strengthen the relationship of trust between home and school by acknowledging these obstacles and supporting families

in areas of need. When the primary concern of parents is providing food, shelter, or clothing for their children, being present at school-centered activities or volunteering becomes far less important. However, when schools are able to organize resources that parents need to overcome or navigate personal obstacles, parents are more likely to find ways that will allow them to participate in school-centered activities (Lopez et al., 2001).

Turney and Kao (2009) noted that “not all parents are equally equipped to participate at school” (p. 269), pointing out barriers of shared understanding such as cultural and linguistic obstacles, differing understandings of what constitutes success, and expectations of parents’ involvement in schools. In their study, working-class immigrant parents did not share school personnel’s views on expectations of them as it related to parental involvement. Conversely, Lee and Bowen (2006) found that white, middle-class parents may understand or be accustomed to the organizational structure of the school, so participation is not an uncomfortable or intimidating venture for them. Considering the differences in perceptions between immigrant, working-class parents and white, middle-class parents (compounded by a lack of resources that often prevents their physical presence at school), school personnel must, therefore, share information freely with parents, taking time to answer questions and intentionally welcoming parents to participate in the school (Poza et al., 2014).

Jeynes (2010) stated: “For many years, educators, parents and social scientists have conceptualized engaged parents as those who help their children with homework, frequently attend school functions, and maintain household rules that dictate times to do their schoolwork and times for leisure” (p. 1). In order to ensure parents understand what

is expected of them, some schools teach parents how the school and teachers would like them to support their child's learning at home. Suggestions for this could include setting a routine, setting up homework stations, encouraging home reading practices, or sending out home videos that explain how a math concept was taught at school (Barone, 2011; Sheldon, & Epstein, 2005). Teaching parents what is expected of them and providing them with strategies to support academic learning at home can help parents feel prepared to provide these types of support at home. Given this type of teaching, some parents may feel empowered to have discussions with teachers about what is working and what is not. However, teaching parents alone does not create an authentic school–family–teacher relationship because it is not based on a mutual and holistic understanding of what the child needs (Baquendo et al., 2016). Instead, parents are merely expected to follow directions and suggestions provided by the school. These interactions can reinforce the subordinate relationship between parents and teachers as it relates to how they should participate in their child's education.

From a review of the literature, the traditional and pervasive definition of family engagement is not so much the process of engagement but the acts or things that parents do such as investment in resources and supportive behaviors like attending parent teacher conferences, engaging in volunteer activities at school, providing help with homework, or having school-related discussions at home (Epstein et al., 2009). Initial research on family engagement suggests that this form of engagement is correlated with higher student academic achievement, better student attendance, and more positive student and parent attitudes towards education (Epstein, 1991; Christenson; 2000; Olivos, 2007).

However, in Fan and Chen's (2001) meta-analysis of family engagement and student achievement, findings suggested that it is in fact difficult to gauge whether or not the overt actions of parents within schools and at home result in children's academic achievement. How is this possible when parent involvement is such an appealing remedy for all that ails our public education system—specifically, the academic achievement gap of children of color that purportedly begins in early childhood? In answer, Olivos (2007) said that, “for many educators parent involvement means working to reach the goals defined by the schools (administrators and teachers) that reflect only school values and priorities” (p. 18). What seems to be missing, then, are not only the subtleties inherent in the relationships between parents and schools that privilege some goals over others but the specific goals espoused by non-Eurocentric families. Grant and Sleeter (1996) state, “Schools claim to be objective, ‘culture-free’ zones, yet are sites in which white middle-class cultures and discourses are honored and highly valued” (p.45).

Traditional views of family engagement fail to acknowledge and adjust to the shift in school demographics regarding cultural and linguistic diversity. The policy of family engagement is a cultural construct that mirrors the larger culture of schooling, placing the responsibility of academic success or failure on parents. This perpetuates a deficit model that guides much of schools' work with families in education, especially families living in poverty. One way to begin the process of changing this deficit paradigm, associated with low-socioeconomic-status families, is to create policies and programs based on research that embodies the lived experiences of the families served by the programs. With this purpose in mind, I believe that schools need to systematically

and open-mindedly revise their understanding and definition of family engagement to be much more encompassing and inclusive. Given the increasing diversity among the children and families enrolled in schools, we cannot afford to limit policy and practice solely to the perspective of society's mainstream group. The history, culture and practices within schools can shape teacher attitudes, beliefs, and actions about parent roles and responsibilities (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). These factors play a critical role in parent-teacher relationships and can facilitate or deter parents from engaging in their child's learning.

Importance of Relationships between Teachers and Families for Children's Outcomes

The importance of parent-teacher collaboration and its positive impact on children is well documented (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Epstein & Sanders, 2006). While some family engagement practices respond to what leadership believes is right rather than focusing strictly on what policy dictates, in order to fully express the intended purpose of these policies, relationships between schools and families have to be developed and maintained. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) supports the fact that when school-family relationships are not developed appropriately, parental engagement is limited to school-centered activities. In these settings, parents do not feel like partners in the relationship when staff members see themselves as having all the knowledge and insight about children and view parents as lacking knowledge. Such approaches do not adequately convey the complexity of the

relationships between teachers and families that are a fundamental element of good practice (NAEYC, 2009).

The roles and responsibilities of parents in family–school connections—i.e., parent involvement—are viewed through the lens of what parents can do and how those actions fit or do not fit the needs of the child or the goals of the school. This approach to understanding parents’ connections with their children’s education relies upon the deficit model, especially in high-poverty urban communities and school settings (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). The idea that parents should participate in pre-planned, school-centered activities such as open houses, parent–teacher conferences, or science fairs rather than individualizing parental engagement actions alters the balance of power in the relationship between schools and families. Few studies report on initiatives that include parents as equal partners and decision makers but rather position parents in a subservient role to be laden with information on what successful parents do. Research indicates that when families and schools build partnerships and relationships, families are satisfied and parents’ beliefs about their own self-efficacy and empowerment increases (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007). Strong relationships between home and school encourage parental advocacy for children’s education. Epstein (1986) found that teachers can forge meaningful relationships with parents by making careful and consistent efforts to bridge their students’ home and school lives. These efforts by teachers can help parents feel like they have a meaningful relationship with teachers and the school. These home–school relationships are especially critical in culturally and economically diverse communities where parents often report feeling shut out of school events and marginalized by school

and district leadership (Johnson, 2007). Many factors can contribute to feelings of marginalization, including role construction, culture and ethnicity, language, social class, and parent networks. The following sections will address each of these factors.

Construction of roles. The title of “teacher” or “parent” brings with it perceived or inherent roles that are ingrained and reinforced by schools and personal experiences. These roles are constructed by schools, teacher education programs, programs geared towards educating parents, and through the personal experiences of teachers and parents. The literature suggests that one reason parents tend not to be involved in the way schools prefer is that parents often do not understand what schools expect of them (Barone, 2011; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Simpson Baird, 2015). These unknown expectations can create a feeling of uneasiness as many parents look to schools and teachers to set the parameters pertaining to their roles. Additionally, the term “education” has different meanings in different languages and cultures, which can impact role construction. For example, “education” and *educación* do not have similar meanings. In Spanish, the term *educación* encompasses the moral development, good manners, and character shaping (which are the responsibilities of parents) with academic development through school being a secondary emphasis. In English, “education” refers primarily to schooling, training, or instruction, which is typically the responsibility of teachers in public school settings. These differences can contribute to misunderstandings and role confusion regarding schooling, specifically when determining responsibilities of parents and teachers. A bilingual, Spanish speaking parent who is not proficient in English may combine these meanings and view the

primary responsibility of parents as sending well-behaved children to school with teachers being responsible for providing students with academic knowledge and training (Carolan-Silva, 1991; Lareau, 2000; Lau, Li & Rao, 2011; Valdés, 1996). This can lead to unintentional misunderstandings unknown to both parties, wherein parents view their roles differently from the teachers' expectation.

In the context of parents' role construction, Tveit (2009) found that parental role construction developed through parents' personal experiences in schools, their comfort in assisting their child with academic work, and the extent to which they felt empowered to advocate for their children. When parents have a strong foundation for role construction, they use navigational, social, and/or cultural capital to advocate for their children at school (Yosso, 2005). The school does not have to invite these parents to become involved; they will become involved regardless of receiving an invitation or not. However, when parents have a weak foundation for role construction, derived from a poor sense of navigational, social, and/or cultural capital, parents have an unclear understanding of the school's expectations and may await guidance or invitation from the school before inserting themselves into their child's education. As mentioned in Chapter One, it is important that teachers understand the intersecting aspects of capital as it relates to broadening and deepening their understanding of how parents construct their roles as they may explain why some parents seem overly vocal about their child's education and other parents seem hesitant or elusive.

In the context of how teachers construct parental roles, teachers may look at various parent actions as evidence of investment in their child's education. These actions

may include accurate and timely completion of students' homework assignments, being available to support teachers in various ways at school, or being physically present at school events or in the classroom (Lareau, 2000). Constructs of parent roles in education are formed by two main views. The first view, *schools as expert*, sees schools as responsible for teaching parents (Barone, 2011; Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Peña, 2000; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). The second view is *school and home as equal partners* (Baker et al., 2016; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Poza et al., 2014; Ramirez, 2003; Simpson Baird, 2015; Valdés, 1996). Both views value parent–school relationships with the major difference being their assumptions about the importance of accounting for parent knowledge and perspectives.

While those in support of the school-as-expert view recognize that parent input is important, this view typically focusses on school-led training, created to provide guidance for parents on school expectations for their involvement (Barone, 2011). Those in support of equal partnership may also believe that parents require guidance about school expectations, but their primary foci are on meeting parents' immediate needs, developing a relationship with parents to foster continued ownership of the educational process, and the involvement of the community as support for families (Lopez et al., 2001; Calabrese Barton et al., 2004; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009; Carolan-Silva, 2011; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; MacNamara et al., 2003; Poza et al., 2014; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

Schools must ensure that their efforts to develop relationships with parents meet the needs of the parents' communities. When schools tailor their approach to engage parents by meeting their specific needs, schools can clearly show that parent individuality is valued, which creates unique school–family relationships (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004). In developing these relationships, it is important to remember that teachers and parents consciously and subconsciously bring their perspectives and experiences with them, which can impact their interaction and collaboration and may, in turn, influence a student's learning. Much of teaching is impacted by the beliefs, thoughts, and feelings of teachers, which often are not shared by the parents (Gibbs & Powell, 2012). Teachers make classroom decisions based on who they are, what they know, and, ultimately, what they believe and value. Teacher beliefs and values are derived from teacher experiences and the ways in which those experiences shape their understanding and perceptions. Research shows that teachers who can connect and build strong relationships with their students are much more successful in meeting the specific needs of diverse students (Halgunseth et al, 2009).

Halgunseth et al. (2009) defines these strong relationships as those “in which both programs and families contribute resources and work together on behalf of children's well-being” (p. 7). Strong relationships—i.e., those built on trust and mutual respect—provide teachers with the foundations to meet students' needs in more effective, meaningful ways. Creating and developing trust requires vulnerability from students, families, and teachers. Emotions and emotional work are intimately, predominantly present in the vulnerability inherent in establishing strong, trusting relationships.

Teachers who have the trust of their students or student families are likely to foster comforting and productive learning contexts in which students can grow and flourish so the emotional work required to build such relationships become necessary. When a student–teacher relationship includes mutual trust, teachers are able to learn more about that student in meaningful ways as they share more about themselves and their families. With this knowledge, teachers are able to challenge students in ways that help them achieve their maximum capabilities and achievement. In other words, when teachers establish well-developed relationships with students, they are able to understand how their students learn, interact, and engage and how best to support their learning and developmental needs. Johnson (2007) supports the idea that teachers generate knowledge as a result of their experiences teaching. Equally important is understanding where parents, especially ethnically and culturally diverse parents, establish their knowledge in terms of how they experience teachers and schools in general.

Culture, ethnicity and parent–teacher relationships. To best recognize the different cultural groups that make up a school community, one must know the personal stories of the students that attend the school and their families. In some schools, the ethnic backgrounds of the parents differ from that of teachers and administration (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Doucet, 2011; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lightfoot, 2004; Poza et al., 2014; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). This can become a challenge when the teaching staff does not intentionally recognize elements of their students’ cultures, and how cultural differences may shape parents’ understanding of engagement in their child’s learning. An example of how this challenge can create a

disconnect in relationships is parent visibility at school. Research shows that white parents tend to participate more at school than parents from other ethnic groups, which makes them more visible to teachers and school staff (Lee & Bowen, 2006). This visibility can be interpreted by staff as white families being more invested and available to engage in their child's learning through their physical presence at school. However, this may or may not be true depending on each family's individual circumstances. When parent absence from school-centered activities is viewed in a negative light, the contributions of the home on student learning is completely discredited.

Though many teachers may aim to strengthen the home-school connection, when ethnic/cultural disparities exist between teachers and families, schools may unintentionally impose their ethnic majority values on the ethnic minority population, which is a form of domination (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Peña, 2011; Valdés, 1996). When members of the majority group dominate the minority group in interactions, the dominant group inherently places greater merit on their own beliefs and values over those of the non-dominant group. For example, when white teachers dominate interactions with non-white parents, they assert themselves as experts. While this might prove to be true in some academic contexts, it undermines the fact that parents are their child's first teacher and likely have valuable, expert knowledge about their child that the teacher is not privy to. According to Lightfoot (2004), researchers need to be aware of the language of judgment used in parent engagement research, so that educators do not view parenting models that differ from what the school expects as worse than other parenting models. This type of language in research reinforces the assumption that

dominant school cultures have something that non-dominant parent cultures lack, casting the responsibility of schools and teachers as teaching parents rather than partnering with them. One method of countering these assumptions is for teachers to gain a better understanding of their students and their home situations. The most effective way to accomplish this is to conduct home visits (Cassity & Harris, 2000; Lopez et al., 2001; Ramirez, 2003; Walker et al., 2011). This provides parents opportunities to share knowledge of their child outside of the school setting and for teachers to learn about the student in another setting. Home visits may provide a foundation for the teacher and parent to develop a relationship based on mutual respect and trust.

Language and parent-teacher relationships. Language differences between schools and families can create division and hinder the effectiveness of the communication between teachers and parents as it relates to their relationship. Being unable to communicate without the presence of a translator removes the casualness of an unplanned phone call or in-person chat. When a common language is not spoken between teachers and parents, they must make arrangements to secure a translator or use the child as a translator, who may or may not have sufficient vocabulary and language proficiency to translate effectively. Many school districts are now mandated by government legislation to translate school notices into the primary language of parents, but when schools do not make adequate attempts to consider language needs of the families they serve, some parents might interpret the lack of translation as the school not deeming parents as true partners who deserve to be kept informed (Peña, 2000).

In an effort to overcome barriers created by language differences, schools and teachers need to make intentional and individualized efforts to invite parents to be stakeholders in their child's education. When schools make these efforts, barriers that are typically associated with lack of parental presence at school are often reduced (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Baker et al., 2016; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Parents who understand the norms of education in the United States are also more likely to have incidental conversations with the teacher during morning drop-offs and afternoon pickups or to alert the teacher of a change at home that may affect the child at school. Since these norms tend to be unstated teachers may assume these practices are widely known. Parents who have language and cultural similarities with the teachers have more direct access through familiarity with this unstated set of practices and expectations (Lee & Bowen, 2006). In later sections of this chapter, the positive impact of shared language and culture between teachers and families with diverse backgrounds as it relates to relationships will be addressed.

Communication with schools is critical in creating a sense of relationship with culturally and linguistically diverse parents so they feel like an integral part of their child's educational process. (Epstein, 1986; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2011). Multiple research studies found that when schools send home communication to parents, the native language(s) of the parents should be considered (Cassity & Harris, 2000; Peña, 2000; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Simpson Baird, 2015). Another component of this is the individualization of the communication. While schools may translate and send home informational flyers, newsletters, and

calendar items, parents are often more interested in personalized forms of communication from teachers such as information regarding their own child or activities in their child's classroom that are free from educational jargon (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Epstein, 1986; Peña, 2000; Walker et al., 2011).

Social class and parent-teacher relationships. Class differences between teachers and parents is a consistently prevalent topic in the literature as it relates to engagement (Lareau, 2000; McNamara Horvat, 1999; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lewis & Forman, 2002). Lareau (2000) found differences in access to opportunities for children of different class backgrounds when examining the effects of social class on education. Lareau (2000) found that while the school policies assumed a relationship between schools and parents, the individual teachers in her study expected parents to defer to their expertise instead. This dynamic creates a leader and a follower. In the middle-class school that Lareau (2000) studied, teachers and parents tended to take turns as leads in communication, but in the working-class school, parents rarely insisted on this turn-taking style of communication and teachers did not offer to the change in dynamic. A significant difference between the two classes of parents was the role of the parent. In the working-class school, Lareau observed that parents viewed school as an exclusive opportunity for education and teachers as the gatekeepers of this opportunity. Thus, working-class parents may feel intimidated in their interactions and communication with teachers and/or defer to the perspective of teachers as experts, a dynamic in which parents do not question the teacher or offer suggestions based on knowledge of their

child. The class differences in this dynamic thus reinforce the division between home and school.

Lareau's (2000) research on parents in education showed that middle-class parents tend to have more navigational capital as it relates to the school and school district, which makes them appear more involved in ways that teachers seem to acknowledge and respect. Customizing the way schools address parent needs, therefore, should also individualize the mode in which parents interact with schools and teachers. In working-class communities, the more immediate needs of parents may be locating food, home, and clothing resources. When the school is able to respond to this need and help connect parents with the needed resources, parents are more likely to be open to participating in school-directed events (Lopez et al., 2001). This openness could be an entry to establishing a relationship with the school or teacher.

Importance of parent networks. Most parents have networks, made up of immediate and extended family, friends, neighbors, a religious community, who can be called upon to participate in a child's life based on the needs of the parent. Different networks of people may be activated when parents need assistance with food or allocating resources when dealing with child behavior, development, or academic concerns (Lopez et al., 2001). Before any networks are activated, a parent must first identify the problem or challenge, then decide which members of their network can assist in addressing the issue. McNamara Horvat et al., (2003) found that middle-class families were likely to have multiple networks to call on depending on the need of the family. One factor that contributes to class-based differences in parent networks is the enrollment

of children in extracurricular activities (McNamara et al., 2003). While these activities are not solely available to middle-class families, the fees and time required for participation can be restrictive for working-class families, for whom time and budgets may be limited. However, these extracurricular activities often provide parents with opportunities to develop acquaintanceships that could later be used for networking purposes. Therefore, middle-class parents may have broader social networks that can be activated when problems with schooling occur. Thus, this networking capital assumes a mostly middle-class perspective wherein parents assume an active role in the schooling of their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Lareau, 2000).

Middle-class parents' networks help individuals find support, provide access to peers with whom they can share experiences and discuss parenting, and can also help them advocate as a group for improvements at schools on behalf of their children. For working-class immigrant parents, networks are more likely to be related to survival and success in a new country (Valdés, 1996). McNamara Horvat et al. (2003) support Lareau's (2000) findings that middle-class parents, both native and immigrants, activate their networks as a way to enhance their child's opportunities in school and as a way to take advantage of group-motivated change. Conversely, native and immigrant working-class parents tend to activate networks for need-based reasons such as adapting to a new culture or gaining access to basic resources (Poza et al., 2014; Simpson Baird, 2015).

Parent networks also empower parents to become involved in their child's education in ways in which they feel competent. Carolan-Silva (2011) found that parents in a rural village in Paraguay developed community networks to raise funds and gather

resources in order to have a local school constructed. The school would allow children to stay in their community and not have to travel far away for access to education. When the school was completed, school officials expected the community that had successfully collaborated to build the school to continue their work by academically supporting the students after it was opened. Instead, parents did not activate those same collective efforts toward supporting their children academically, partly because they did not feel confident in their abilities to support their child's education in this manner. This research study reinforces the idea that parents contribute to schools in ways that they feel comfortable and confident.

Family Engagement Among Diverse Families and School

An important but minimally researched area in the literature is the role that positive parent engagement plays in the achievement level of student from diverse backgrounds (Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez, & Aretakis, 2014). For example, given the emphasis on collectivism and family bonds embedded in Latino culture, it makes sense that most Latino parents reported providing informal educational support for their children at home through homework assistance, giving advice, and providing emotional support as found in LeFevre and Shaw's (2012) study. Fine (2014) reported that many low-income Latino families experienced the education system as impersonal and unresponsive to their concerns, resulting in many Latino parents not trusting the school system and becoming fearful of being perceived as undeserving. Additionally, this experience resulted in deep-seated fears and attitudes among many Latino parents toward schools, such as the fear of being put down, either overtly or covertly (Chavkin &

Williams, 1988). Furthermore, few teachers have explicit training in working with immigrant families. Some teachers may, therefore, view immigrant and low-income parents as liabilities rather than assets in their child's education (Hayes-Bautista, 2004; Nicolau & Ramos, 1990).

Practices promoting the participation of parents in student learning not only benefit the student but the parents as well (Larrotta & Ramirez, 2009). Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) found that parent success in impacting their child's learning depends on their beliefs about whether or not their engagement is likely to have a positive influence on their child. Parent engagement also mediates the effects of risk factors such as low socioeconomic status and the educational levels of a child's parents, as shown by a number of studies. These findings highlight the immense positive impact of parent engagement and also the challenges to facilitating its increase. Additionally, the literature supports the fact that parent-to-parent social networks can be a credible and effective option for low-income Latino parents who are learning how to support their children and to more effectively navigate the US educational system (Curry, Jean-Marie, & Adams, 2016; Medina, 2011). Raising parent awareness of the educational system, promoting home-school communication, and encouraging and supporting parent engagement in and outside of the home, therefore, are all means to address the Latino student achievement gap (Auerbach & Collier, 2012; Hoover-Dempsey, Green, & Whitaker, 2010).

For many immigrant parents, going to their child's school, engaging in their child's learning, and participating in school activities can be an unfamiliar and intimidating experience considering the disparity between teacher demographics and

student-family demographics. However, strong relationships among schools, families, and communities are vital to the success of immigrant students (Kugler, E., 2009). The family–school–community systems model proposed by Dearing, Sibley, and Nguyen (2015) emphasized that these connections require investments from all three entities within the system. Schools and communities play key roles in determining the extent to which families are aware of opportunities to be involved at the school, allowing them to take advantage of educational opportunities for their children. For example, schools should be proactive in providing outreach to immigrant families. In an action research project with teachers in primarily immigrant school districts, researchers found that holding parent–teacher conferences in the parents’ neighborhoods or extending hours for parents to attend the conferences could help eliminate many of the barriers facing immigrant parents such as intimidation and inflexible employment hours. Thus, schools in communities with high immigrant populations can serve their community in many ways and adapt as the community’s needs change. School staff should approach family–school relationships with Latino immigrant parents from a strengths-based perspective, recognizing that their language and cultural values positively contribute to their child’s development (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Hernandez, 2003). When families feel that their culture is valued and teachers reach out to them for input, parents often become more involved at the school and in their children’s education (Orozco, 2008).

Impact of Diversity in Schools

Racial diversity in schools provides social advantages for all students, in addition to helping to close the achievement gap (Egalite, Brian, & Winter, 2015; Dee, 2004).

Research found that teachers of color can improve the school experiences of all students while contributing to improved academic outcomes and serve as strong role models for students (Dee, 2004; Klopfenstein, 2005). In spite of these findings on the critical role that teachers of color can play in helping students of color succeed, every state in the US has a higher percentage of students of color than teachers of color (Boser, 2014). When compared with their peers, teachers of color are more likely to have higher expectations of students of color as indicated by higher numbers of referrals to gifted programs (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Additionally, teachers of color were found to employ the following practices to produce positive results for students of color: “(a) having high expectations of students; (b) using culturally relevant teaching; (c) developing more trusting relationships with students; (d) confronting issues of racism through teaching; and (e) serving as advocates and cultural brokers” (Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 180). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the public-school student population is projected to increase in diversity by 2024. NCES predicts that by 2024, white students will represent 44% of public-school students (a decrease from 51% in 2012). The same NCES report showed that the proportion of Latinx students is projected to increase from 24% to 29% by 2024 (US Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016).

Research shows that diversity in schools, including racial diversity among teachers, can provide significant benefits to students and families. While students of color are expected to make up 56% of the student population by 2024, the elementary and

secondary educator workforce is still overwhelmingly white. The current teaching force in the United States does not reflect the changing demographics of the population. The US has seen a dramatic rise in the Latinx population. However, the US Department of Education (2016) reported that about 80% of teachers were white and only about 9% were Latinx in 2012. While percentages for white teachers decreased and percentages of Latinx teachers increased since then, these changes have not kept pace with demographic changes in the US. Approximately 7% of teachers are black and 2% are Asian. Those percentages have not changed since 2012 (US Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016).

Diverse Families and Parenting

Henderson and Mapp (2002) highlight the importance of family by recognizing that family members, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and fictive kin often contribute in significant ways to children's education and development. Multi-generational households are common in some cultures, providing important roles for extended family members and fictive kin in caring for and raising children (McAdoo, 2000; Valdes, 1999). However, traditional parental involvement models in the US school system do not incorporate such diverse family members as active participants in the child's development and learning. The theoretical framework of Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, and Moodie's (2009) family engagement social exchange model speaks to the ways in which schools can address family engagement, specifically in diverse families. Three important components to the framework include cultural sensitivity, adaptability,

and cyclicity. Halgunseth et al.'s framework guided the analysis of my research study and will be discussed further in a later section of this chapter. According to Chavkin (2000), teachers can lead the way in the development of comprehensive family and community involvement policies in their school districts. As Lott (2010) reminded us, "it is essential to recognize that in the US there is an overriding national context in which Euro-Whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality, and middle-class status are presumed normative and culturally imperative" (p. 6). This presumption remains dominant, and as such, acts as the barometer of what is proper behavior. Within the scope of family engagement, then, any form of family engagement that strays from the dominant model is seen as deficient, lacking, and overall, not good practice.

Parenting takes on special importance in a child's development and learning. Everything families experience contributes directly or indirectly to a child's development (Rogoff, 2003). Family experiences are embedded within cultural frameworks that inform all of the details of childrearing, including decisions about participation in formal early childhood education programs. The decision to enroll a young child in an early childhood education program has significant implications for the program-family relationship. Ideally, parents and teachers are mutually interrelated; they strengthen each other as they support the healthy development of children (Schunk, 1990; Swick, 1997). However, we know from the existing literature on family engagement that the relationships between programs and families of diverse backgrounds are often fraught with tension due to a mutual misunderstanding of how the cultural frameworks of each

entity operate and influence each other (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Valdés, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Moll et al., 2005; Doucet, 2011).

Parenting is a multifaceted and challenging process that schools need not further complicate by imposing feelings of inadequacy. Some of the structures inherent in family engagement practices in schools make it challenging for families to engage meaningfully. For example, meetings, field trips, and school assemblies are held during the day, which makes it difficult for working parents to participate. Even more challenging for monolingual family members who do not speak English is the question of language, particularly when schools do not do an adequate job of translating materials or having someone available to communicate with them (NY Immigrant Coalition, 2004). Family engagement is not just a fixed event but a dynamic and evolving practice that varies depending on the context and the resources parents and programs can bring to their actions. The deficit model of thinking that prompts changes in family engagement policy typically position parents as the sole source of either positive or negative outcomes, which can complicate the broader sociopolitical, racial, and economic frameworks that affect the well-being and overall development of young children. It is essential, therefore, to consider the interconnectedness of these various spheres in order for family engagement practices to help develop teacher–parent relationships more effectively.

Theoretical Framework of the Research Study

Through the theoretical frameworks of Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, and Moodie's (2009) family engagement social exchange model as well as intersectionality, this research study will look into how teachers view, make meaning of, and identify with their

multi-layered identities as they impact the development of relationships with parents. In their family engagement social exchange model, Halgunseth et al. (2009) identified resources that should be provided by schools and resources that families should provide in order to help develop strong, meaningful relationships. For the purposes of this research study, only the school resources will be addressed. As an overlay to the social exchange framework of family engagement, intersectionality will be used (in its theoretical format) to explore teachers' identities and how shared experiences, culture, ethnicity, and language shape teacher's views of and relationships with families.

Intersectionality is both a theory and a methodological approach—one which acknowledges the lived experiences of people whose identities represent more than one marginalized group (Dhamoon, 2011; Hancock, 2007). Intersectionality brings with it an understanding that we operate in a world based on a struggle for power that can lead to antagonistic interactions between privileges and oppressed people. The connection of the invisible benefits of social class and power create opportunities and challenges that construct the consciousness and hegemony of the groups with and without power (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

Social exchange framework of family engagement. Halgunseth et al. (2009) created a family engagement framework that specifically focused on diverse families. While this framework can apply to all families, diverse families were the focus in its development. This framework linked components from the ecological systems theory and the social exchange theory, which are critical to strong teacher–parent relationships. Halgunseth et al. (2009) defines a strong relationship as “one in which both programs and

families contribute resources and work together on behalf of children’s well-being” (p. 7). When strong relationships are developed and maintained, family engagement increases, ultimately benefiting the children’s development (Halgunseth et al., 2009). Three important components of the framework include cultural sensitivity, adaptability, and cyclicity. In using this framework, cultural sensitivity should be considered in the development and maintenance of all teacher–parent relationships. This framework is adaptable, meaning that those utilizing it can modify the components according to the child’s age, readiness of the family member, and readiness of the program. Lastly, the framework is cyclical, meaning that as outcomes for the student and the family improve, the strength of the relationship and the family engagement level may also increase (Halgunseth et al., 2009).

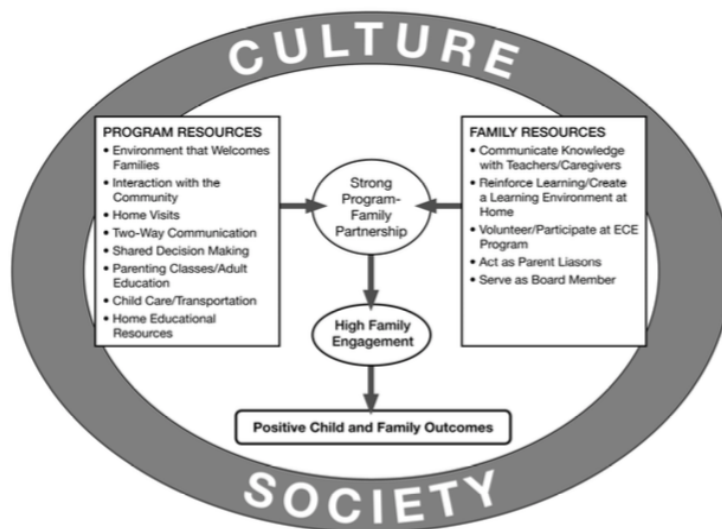


Figure 1

Social Exchange Model of Family Engagement (Halgunseth et al., 2009)

Program resources. In developing meaningful relationships, the following school resources promote student learning and are beneficial to parents: (a) creating a welcoming environment; (b) interacting with the community; (c) conducting home visits; (d) promoting respectful two-way communication with all families; (e) incorporating families in the decision-making process, (f) providing opportunities for adult education and parenting classes; (g) offering resources such as child care and transportation support; and (h) providing resources for extending learning experiences at home. Together, these resources aid in creating the reciprocal relationship discussed earlier in this paper. Further, they allow schools to help parents develop new skills, create social networks, and decrease obstacles for parent–teacher relationships.

- a) ***Creating a welcoming environment.*** In order to encourage family participation in the program–family relationship, programs must provide a welcoming environment to families. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) found that a welcoming program was one of the most influential indicators of family engagement. In order to ensure that all families feel welcomed, schools can celebrate the cultures of all members of the program’s community and include role models from diverse backgrounds. Intangible benefits that result from a welcoming environment (such as feelings of acceptance and appreciation) are also important for promoting relationships with families (Constantino, 2008).
- b) ***Interaction with the community.*** Cultural differences, language barriers, and teacher biases may lead to misunderstandings about families’ desire to participate in their children’s education. These barriers can be mitigated by programs being

involved in the community, learning about the different cultural backgrounds of the children they serve, and hiring staff with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds as the children in the program. By encouraging teachers to interact with families in their own communities and to think about their inherent biases, programs can help limit these barriers.

- c) ***Home visits.*** Kindergarten through second grade teachers who participated in home visits believed they developed more positive relationships with both children and families. Teachers also reported that home visits led to improved communication with parents, enhanced understanding of the child, and greater insight into how the home environment influences school performance (Meyer & Mann, 2006).
- d) ***Two-way communication.*** Communicating with families is often the program's first step toward increasing engagement (Marcon, 1999). It is important that schools use communication practices that are sensitive to the diverse language and cultural backgrounds of the families they serve. Teachers and administrators can communicate with parents through a variety of media including newsletters, e-mails, translated materials, web postings, telephone calls, home visits, videos or photo albums that depict a day in the class, and face-to-face communication (Carlisle et al., 2005). To strengthen two-way communication with families, programs should translate all written communication into the native languages of the families they serve, provide translators for face-to-face or phone communication, use parents preferred method of communication, and focus on

both providing information to parents and gathering their feedback. These techniques help to encourage continuous communication, resolve misunderstandings, and provide more accurate information in a timely manner. (Constantino, 2008; Rous et al., 2003; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

- e) ***Shared decision making.*** Schools must provide families with an opportunity to voice their opinions and share in the decision making around program practices and policies that affect their children. School policies should allow families to participate in leadership and decision-making roles. By including families in the decision-making process, schools promote the value of families' opinions, creating a sense of pride in their child's education. As children enter kindergarten, however, family opportunities to engage in decision making can appear limited. In order to support true parent–teacher relationships, schools must work to balance the power structure and find ways to incorporate the voices of all families across ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- f) ***Parenting classes/adult education.*** Family engagement programs should offer a variety of different resources to families through parenting and adult education classes. These types of courses provide parents with valuable knowledge, skills, and enhanced social networking opportunities, which directly and indirectly affect children's well-being. Schools should provide a variety of adult education classes to families including job training, GED courses, English as a Second Language courses, stress management, first aid, money management, substance abuse classes, and more.

- g) ***Child care/transportation services.*** To encourage the participation of families in school events and meetings, family programs must decrease the number of associated barriers and costs perceived by family members. By providing families with incentives to attend events and resources to overcome transportation and child-care barriers, programs can ensure that families are able to take advantage of the school resources, be involved in program activities, and maintain parent–teacher relationships throughout the school year.
- h) ***Home educational resources.*** Not only can schools provide students with instruction and learning opportunities during the school day but, by understanding their role in the parent–teacher relationship, schools can also help families enhance children’s early learning at home.

Halgunseth et al.’s (2009) framework thus provides guidance for enhancing family engagement for families from a wide range of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds through school resources. By providing families with resources and activities that further the work being addressed in the classroom, teachers can foster a sense of connectedness between themselves and parents in addition to helping families feel more connected to their child’s learning.

Intersectionality. The concept of intersectionality was birthed in the feminist movement as “an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege” (Women’s Rights and Economic Change, 2004, p. 1). In order to look into how teacher views and meaning-making

processes are formed, as they relate to teacher–parent relationships, I will use intersectionality as a supportive theoretical framework to Halgunseth et al.’s (2009) social exchange model of family engagement. Just as Figure 1 (Halgunseth et al.’s social exchange model of family engagement) showed the flow of resources that contributes to strong school–family relationships, intersectionality offers a framework that reflects the layered identities of individuals that are derived from social experiences, history, and the operation of power structures (Women’s Rights and Economic Change, 2004). Three foci of intersectionality that will guide this research study are: (1) understanding that people live multiple, layered identities; (2) understanding that people can be members of more than one community at the same time; and (3) understanding that people can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege. Exploring the impact of shared identities between teachers and families will be the primary application of intersectionality as a theoretical framework in the context of this study.

Crenshaw (1989) used a metaphor of roads intersecting to illustrate how race, class, and gender categories are compounded. She shared, “Consider an analogy to traffic in intersection, coming and going in all four directions ... like traffic through an intersection, [it] may flow in one direction and it may flow in another. If an accident happens at an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them.” (p. 149). In applying this analogy to my research study, the “intersections” are teacher views and meaning making in their approach to relationships with parents. The “flow” is the inter-directional, multilayered identities of the teachers, including personal experiences, ethnicity, culture, and language.

Here, the “accident” in this analogy does not relate to discrimination as in Crenshaw’s (1989) analogy but rather the way in which teachers’ identities impact their approach to and development of relationships with parents and families. The analogy highlights the interconnectedness and the interdependence of our multiple identities. Collins (2000) developed a matrix of domination to illustrate how an individuals’ social position is found within an interlocking system of oppression and privilege. Browne and Misra (2003) stated: “Within this matrix, an individual can simultaneously experience disadvantage and privilege through the combined statues of gender, race and class” (p. 489). For this research study, a revised edition of Collins’ (2000) matrix, titled “Intersecting of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression” (Appendix I), was used to explore the structural dynamics and the multiple identity axes that made up teacher identities. The model’s central tenet is that intersectionality provides space in which the lived experiences of individuals with multiple identity axes such as class, sexual orientation, race, and gender are recognized and affirmed (McCall, 2005).

In teacher–parent relationships, in addition to the school resources that Halgunseth et al. (2009) discussed, the impact of similarities in identity between teachers and parents cannot be discounted. In parent–teacher relationships, it is important to understand that teachers and parents bring multiple identities, perspectives and experiences with them when developing these relationships, which consciously and subconsciously shape their views and interactions with each other. Studies show that teacher views of parents and parent roles can affect the level of family engagement in their child's education both at school and at home (Anfara & Brown, 2003; Smerekar &

Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Turney & Koa, 2010). Much of teaching practice is impacted by the beliefs, thoughts, and feelings of teachers, which often are not shared by the parents (Gibbs & Powell, 2012). Teachers make classroom decisions based on who they are, what they know, and, ultimately, what they believe and value. Teacher beliefs and values are derived from their experiences and the ways in which those experiences shape their understanding and perceptions. In this research study, I explore teacher–parent relationships through the lens of shared identities, which include ethnicity, language and culture between parents and teachers and how these points of similarity can shape the development of teacher–family relationships.

Impact of similarities in identity on teacher–family relationships. Human identity is shaped by many factors such as nationality, race, ethnic group, physical appearance, culture, talents, interests, language, and religion. Similarities in the components of the identities of teachers and families can intersect, creating an opportunities for deeper relationships. Schools with culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse teachers can provide the necessary support structure for student and families with similar backgrounds by developing informal networks and generating rich cultural resources that teachers of color can easily tap into in order to effectively meet the needs of students of color (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Hernandez-Sheets, 2001; Ingersoll & May, 2011a; 2011b; Kelly, 2007; Mabokela & Madsen, 2007). Furthermore, teachers who share similar cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds of their students are more likely to understand the students’ social and cultural world and, thus, are more

likely to appropriately interpret their classroom behavior, putting them in a better position to respond to the development needs of students in their classrooms.

There is a breadth of literature that establishes the connection between the quality of student–teacher relationships and the long term implications on future achievements, engagement, and behavioral outcomes of students (Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995; Finn & Rock, 1997; Johnson et al., 2001; Lee & Smith, 1995; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). The success of teacher relationships with students depends on how a teacher nurtures and responds to the developmental needs of the student (Davis, 2003). The influence of teacher ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status on the quality of student–teacher relationships is supported in the literature (Birch & Ladd, 1997; O’Connor & McCartney, 2006; Steele, 1997). Johnson, Crone, and Elder (2001) found that teacher ethnicity can be important in developing strong, meaningful connections with children. These connections created a sense of acceptance and belonging in students because of their connection to teachers who shared their ethnic identity. . The teacher–student relationship can be seen as an extension of the parent–child relationship as the quality of the student–teacher relationship can influence a student’s social and cognitive development as early as preschool (Davis, 2003). Research shows that students who have early exposure to effective and secure relationships with their teachers are more likely to adjust quickly in school, be academically engaged, develop visual and language skills, experience higher levels of achievement, and exhibit fewer behavioral problems (Davis, 2003; Howes, Hamilton, &

Matheson, 1994; Howes, Hamilton, & Philipsen, 1998). These types of relationships can shape a student's ability to establish future relationships with peers and teachers.

Teachers are able to influence student academic success, beliefs, and aspirations, in passive and active ways (Goldsmith, 2004; Dee, 2004). In passive ways, teachers can motivate students by being role models. Ladson-Billings (1992) found that the role model effect can even be triggered simply by a teacher's ethnic identity and not necessarily by any specific act or behavior toward the students. For example, the mere presence of Latinx teachers in schools can motivate underprivileged Latinx students to generate bolder future aspiration and set higher goals. In the context of elementary school, young minority students can become more academically engaged just from the sense of comfortability that is created in the classroom with a teacher of the same ethnicity (Dee, 2004). In active ways, teachers can influence student academic success, beliefs, and aspirations by designing lessons and learning materials to shape students' social and intellectual experiences within the classroom (Dee, 2004; Ferguson, 1998).

The quality of the student-teacher relationship also depends on the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students (Davis, 2003). Minority students are more likely to feel alienated and disengaged with school when they hold different cultural frames of reference (Ogbu, 1993; 1994). When minority students perceive a difference between their cultural identities and the dominant cultural identity of the school, they are more likely to disidentify from the school, which can influence the quality of teacher-student relationships. When teachers and students have different cultural identities, there is a higher likelihood of difficulties arising in the interpretation of each other's non-verbal

cues. Additionally, there are likely to be misunderstandings about each other's world views and belief systems (Davis, 2003; Feldman & Saletsky, 1986; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Conversely, if teachers and students share ethnic backgrounds, they may find it easier to understand cultural differences and assumptions. Davis (2003) found that it is also likely that students will be more receptive towards teachers who share their ethnic identities and backgrounds. While the literature is extensive regarding the positive impact of shared identities between teachers and students on student achievement, the research on how shared identity between teachers and parents impacts relationship development in diverse populations is minimal.

The intersections of shared backgrounds, culture, language, and ethnicity can serve as a connective passage to deeper relationships. However, the parties involved must trust and respect each other in order to be vulnerable in sharing these similarities with each other. Additionally, the parties must be open to see and explore the overlapping connections between themselves and others. Becoming aware and acknowledging the intersecting components of teacher identity as they relate to the identities of the families they serve is a critical component of creating and sustaining teacher–parent–student relationships.

Summary

The literature on the positive impact on student achievement caused by shared identities between teachers and students is extensive. However, the limited research on how shared identities between teachers and parents impact relationship development in diverse populations creates a gap in the literature to which my research study can

contribute. A lack of cultural understanding and intercultural communication creates a clash between two cultural interpretations: the teachers' definition of family engagement and parents'. Suspending personal assumptions and the placement of value judgments on cultural phenomena, even temporarily, allows for the creation of an inclusive and expanded definition of what is currently considered the norm in early childhood family engagement practices (Rogoff, 2003). "As children grow up, they need to learn to function well in the society and in the increasingly global economy and to move comfortably among groups of people from backgrounds both similar and dissimilar to their own" (NAEYC, 2009, pp. 13–14). For young children (birth to age eight), this support usually comes from families. Yet, all too often, teachers are positioned as the holders of knowledge of curriculum and programming while families are positioned as the recipients of this knowledge, rendering them as "less-knowing" (Marsh & Turner-Vorbeck, 2010). The best form of support comes from supporting intercultural ideologies, which uses an equal contribution of teacher's knowledge of school culture and families' knowledge of their own cultural practices for the benefit of young children's development and academic preparation.

Chapter Two provided a review of existing literature (further supporting the need for this research study) and also provided deeper insight into the theoretical framework on student achievement that supports this study. Chapter Three, in turn, will describe the research design, procedures, researcher role, and the guiding interview questions used to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teacher's view, make meaning of, and approach their roles in establishing and maintaining family-school relationships?
2. How does parents and teachers having shared language and culture shape the development of meaningful relationships between families and teachers?

Chapter Three

The purpose of this research study was to explore the views and approaches of teachers in their roles as partners in parent-teacher relationships. This study also sought to understand how shared language and culture, between teachers and parents, shape these relationships. This chapter will present the rationale for the methodology chosen to achieve this as well as the research design, research questions, research setting, and selection of participants, data collection methods, data analysis process, and data quality.

Methodological Approach

Qualitative methods provide an in-depth view of the nature of human experiences within the context in which they occur. While qualitative research can involve theory, hypothesis, or generalization, what is to be learned from such research does not solely depend on a particular study design involving and developing such steps (Peshkin, 1993). Observing and understanding how people make sense of their lives is an essential component of qualitative research. Thus, this study included focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews. In order to strengthen my study, I triangulated information sources to determine common themes among the perceptions and experiences described by the interviewees. By using this approach, I carefully considered all aspects, responses, and perspectives, giving me insight into the underlying belief systems related to the participants' educational interactions with families. The research involved dialogue that

drew from personal and professional experiences of the participants. Focus group and one-on-one interviews captured a deeper understanding of what shaped and constructed the participants' approach to the development of family partnerships.

Qualitative research methodology best fit the underlying intent of this research study, focusing on teacher perceptions, beliefs, and expectations with respect to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Humans depend on culture to direct their behavior and organize their experiences (Crotty, 2003). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research allows the researcher to obtain a thorough understanding of an issue; qualitative methods investigate the why and how of decision making, not just the what, where, and when. This level of detail can only be established by talking directly with participants and allowing them to share their experiences, unencumbered by what is expected or what has been read in the literature (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, a small, focused, and purposeful sample was more appropriate to this qualitative research than large random samples. This research study explored the perceptions of 19 current elementary school teachers (teaching kindergarten through fifth grade) regarding school–family partnerships. According to Stake (2006), each unique individual can be examined in the context of group experience, which binds the single cases together. The aim of this study, therefore, was to have participants describe their unique experiences engaging with parents, their roles and approaches in these experiences, and how their personal identities influenced perceptions and expectations within the paradigm of family engagement.

Merriam (1998) acknowledges that a research design must conform to the philosophical as well as logistical constructs of the research's nature; the purpose and

problem of the study should be the primary factors in determining the best approach (Merriam, 1998). Creswell (2012) noted that qualitative methodology should require the researcher to collect data from multiple sources, utilize inductive reasoning, recognize emergent themes, and present a holistic account for the phenomenon or problem being explored. When approaching a particular problem in qualitative studies, the researcher should consider a theoretical lens or conceptual framework informed by certain assumptions (Creswell, 2012). The literature is full of data concerning the positive impact of family engagement on student learning and the importance of parents as co-constructors of their child's learning experience. However, how teachers come to know and assume their roles (as well as what shaped their identities and ultimately influenced their roles) is relatively unknown, especially when the language and culture of the teachers mirrors the demographics of the students and families. As teachers' perceptions are of such an individual nature, a qualitative approach was necessary to gain a better understanding of their experiences and expectations in the elementary school setting.

Research Setting

Silverman Elementary School is a Title 1 school in a city nicknamed the Borderland, which is in the Southwest region of the United States, comprised of preschool to fifth-grade students. Silverman Elementary's student population was 502 at the time of the research study. Enrollment by ethnicity broke down as follows: African-American—less than 1%; Latinx—93.2%; White—5.6%; Indigenous—0%; Asian—less than 1%; Pacific Islander—0%; Two or more races—less than 1%. Additionally, enrollment by student group broke down as follows: Economically disadvantaged—

63.5%; English Language Learners—25.5%; Special Education—12.2%. Teacher demographics in Silverman Elementary’s district indicated that 78% of teachers are Latinx while 19% are white (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

The 2018 US Census estimated the Borderland’s population at 840,758 as of July 1, 2018. Racial demographics were reported as 92% white, 3.9% African American, and 83% Latinx. It is important to note that the Census Bureau defines “white” as referring to “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as “white” or report heritages such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or White. The Census Bureau defines Hispanic, or Latinx, “as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.” It is important to note that the city of the current study is home to the second largest Army installation in the United States. Of the city’s white population, 71% is attributed to the presence of the military installation (US Census, 2018).

Regarding the teacher and student demographics in the research site’s school district (during the 2017–2018 school year), 78% of teachers were Latinx, 94% of the student population were Latinx, and 20% of teachers were white. The state’s teacher and student demographics were reported as 27% Latinx teachers, 52% Latinx students, and 58% white teachers. The district versus state demographics shed light on the uniqueness of the research site as it relates to shared teacher–student ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Permission to Conduct the Study

I gained approval to conduct the study on March 6, 2019 from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at George Mason University (Appendix A). The research application was submitted on March 6, 2019 to the associate superintendent of the research site's school district for approval to conduct the study. I thus gained permission to recruit participants and garnered consent from participants prior to data collection (Appendix D, Appendix E).

Access to Participants

Initial contact was made via email with the principal of Silverman Elementary School (Appendix C). Principal Chavez replied to my email with an invitation to meet her at the school to discuss the specifics of the research topic. I met with Principal Chavez during school hours to discuss the research study. Mrs. Chavez appeared very supportive and encouraged the research study. I provided Mrs. Chavez with the participant criteria for the study, which required participants to be teachers of students in kindergarten through third grade. In my meeting with Principal Chavez, she introduced me to the school's Parent Liaison, Ms. Lopez. I met with Ms. Lopez directly after the meeting with Principal Chavez to discuss logistics such as possible interview dates, availability of rooms in which to conduct interviews, and how to contact teachers to make introductions.

Research Participants

Decisions about whom to include and where to conduct research were an essential part of my research methods. As such, a purposeful selection method was chosen to guide the selection of participants. According to Merriam (1998), "Selecting respondents

on the basis of what they can contribute to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under study means engaging in purposive sampling" (p. 83). Purposeful selection involved intentionally selecting individual subjects and sites to learn from in order to understand a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). The selected form of sampling was "based on an assumption that the investigator wanted to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore select a sample from which the most could be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Deliberately selecting particular settings, persons, or activities to provide relevant information for my research questions was not something that could be achieved using other participant selection choices (Maxwell, 2013).

Teachers. The focus group participants consisted of nineteen ($n=19$) classroom teachers (kindergarten through third grade), interviewed at Silverman Elementary School. Through the demographic questionnaire (Appendix F), given to all participants for completion prior to focus group interviews, the following information was gathered (see Table 1). All participants were female ($n=19$). Seventeen participants ($n=17$) identified themselves as Hispanic. In light of Santos' (2017) definition of Latinx, the participants were represented by the socially progressive term Latinx throughout this research study. One participant ($n=1$) identified themselves as White. Fourteen participants ($n=14$) reported the United States as their country of origin, which was defined on the demographic questionnaire as the country in which the participant was born and raised until age 13. Four participants ($n=4$) reported Mexico as their country of origin. One participant ($n=1$) reported being born in the United States but raised in Mexico. Regarding languages spoken at home, seven participants ($n=7$) reported only speaking

English at home, four participants ($n=4$) reported speaking only Spanish at home, and nine participants ($n=9$) reported speaking both English and Spanish at home. Regarding languages spoken at school, twelve ($n=12$) reported speaking Spanish and English at school while eight ($n=8$) reported only speaking English at school. Regarding the highest college degree completed, twelve ($n=12$) completed their bachelor's degree, six participants ($n=6$) completed their master's degree, and one ($n=1$) completed her doctorate. Length of time teaching ranged from 5 months to 21 years. The length of time teaching at Silverman Elementary School ranged from 5 days to 10 years.

Ms. Lopez. The Parent Liaison, Ms. Lopez, was a first generation, Latinx woman in her sixties. Both of Ms. Lopez's parents were born in Mexico and only spoke Spanish throughout their lives, even after moving to the United States. Ms. Lopez reported that she spoke Spanish and English, with English being her primary spoken language. Her career history included ten years as an instructional aide, with eight of those ten years in special education classrooms. After ten years as an instructional aide, Ms. Lopez resigned to stay home to raise her daughter. When her daughter was of age to attend public school, she imagined that she would return to the classroom, but the position of Parent Liaison became open. At the time of this research study, Ms. Lopez was finishing up her third year in the position.

Table 1

Demographic Inventory Information

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Kinder (n=5)</i>	<i>1st grade (n=5)</i>	<i>2nd grade (n=5)</i>	<i>3rd grade (n=4)</i>
Gender				
Female	5	5	5	4
Male	--	--	--	--
Mean age (in years)	47.5	41.8	40.2	40.25
20-29	2	--	1	--
30-39	1	2	1	2
40-49	1	3	2	2
50-59	1	--	1	--
Ethnicity				
White	--	--	1	--
Hispanic	4	5	4	4
Language spoken at home				
English	1	2	3	1
Spanish	3	--	--	1
Both	1	3	2	2
Language spoken at school				
English	1	2	3	2
Spanish	--	--	--	--
Both	4	4	2	2
Country of Origin				
United States	4	2	4	3
Mexico	1	1	--	1
Born in US raised in Mexico	--	1	--	--
Born in Mexico raised in US	--	1	--	--
Highest degree completed				
Bachelor's	3	4	3	2
Master's	2	1	1	2
Doctorate	--	--	1	--
Total time teaching (years; months)	25;0	53; 8	67;11	34;0
Total time teaching at research site (years; months; days)	15;2	20;6	18;5	4;3;5

Data Collection

The research study took place in the spring of 2019. I used the following methods of data collection: demographic survey, focus group interviews, and a group work session. In order to utilize triangulation for data collection and analysis, I selected these three data sources as each provided a different and valid perspective on the phenomena. Through these data collection methods, I gained the participants' perspectives of and experiences with parent–teacher partnerships as well as insight into the influence of their identities on these partnerships.

Recruitment. I met with Principal Chavez in a face-to-face meeting to discuss the purpose and methods of the research study. In order to conduct the research, access to the Parent Liaison and classroom teachers was required. In order to participate in this research study, the classroom teachers were required to currently teach in grades kindergarten through third. Principal Chavez agreed to send the introduction and recruitment letter to the Parent Liaison and all teachers in targeted grade levels via email. All teachers were contacted via email with an introduction and recruitment letter (Appendix B). I also contacted the Parent Liaison via email with an introduction and recruitment letter (Appendix C). Both emails explained the purpose of the research study, my contact information, and requested their participation in the research study.

Consent. I provided the Parent Liaison with the consent form and reviewed it during the first semi-structured interview, providing space for questions or concerns to be addressed. At the start of the first focus group interview, I provided each participant with a consent form, reviewed the form aloud with the group, and provided space for questions

or concerns to be addressed. Voluntary signatures were obtained by all participants. Creswell (2007) noted that revealing the process and sequence of the proposed study in this way helps participants understand what to reasonably expect during the study and provides an opportunity to ask questions.

The privacy of the participants was protected through the use of pseudonyms in interview transcripts and in reporting results of the research study (Appendix K). All materials associated with data collection and data analysis were kept in a secure, locked file cabinet in my home. All audio-recorded interviews were deleted from recording devices used once transcriptions were completed.

Demographic inventory. I created the demographic inventory in order to obtain information regarding each participant's biographical background and education experience. The inventory consisted of 12 items in open-ended and multiple-choice format, geared towards gaining insight into the following areas: gender, ethnicity, language spoken, country of birth, current grade taught, highest educational level, collegiate areas of study, and length of teaching tenure (Appendix F).

Focus group interviews. At the simplest level, a focus group is an informal discussion among a group of selected individuals about a particular topic (Wilkinson 2004). The primary aim of any focus group is to ascertain participants' meanings and interpretations of a topic in order to gain an understanding of a specific issue from the perspective of the participants of the group (Liamputtong 2009). Methodologically, focus group interviews involve a group of six to eight people who come from similar social and cultural backgrounds or who have similar experiences or concerns. Focus

group methodology is useful in exploring and examining what participants think, how they think, and why they think the way they do about the topic presented without pressuring them into making decisions or reaching a consensus (Vaughn, Shcumm, & Sinagub, 2013). Focus groups provide rich and detailed information about subjects' feelings, thoughts, understandings, perceptions, and impressions in their own words. Moreover, the focus group is a flexible research method as it can be applied to elicit information on any topic, from diverse groups of people, and in diverse settings (Stewart et al., 2009).

For the purposes of this research study, focus group interviews were conducted over two days with teachers separated by grade level. Each group consisted of four to five teachers. Two rounds of interviews were conducted with each group. The first round of focus group interviews consisted of pre-set interview questions with space to ask follow-up questions while allowing the participants to comment as well (Appendix G). The second round of focus group interviews were conducted in a work-session format where participants were given copies of the Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression based on a version of Collins' (2000) matrix of domination as discussed in Chapter Two. Being in a place of privilege refers to the possession of social identities that benefit from oppression. While individuals experience oppression differently based on their social identities, people can be simultaneously privileged and deprived depending on where they fall on the Axes of Privilege. The idea of power as it relates to the establishment and maintenance of parent-teacher relationships guided me to use a revised version of the Axes of Privilege and Oppression (Appendix I).

Semi-structured interviews. The interview is arguably the most widely used method in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are most appropriate for research in which specific topics are to be discussed with some flexibility in the participant's response. Interviews allow the researcher to "capture the perceived experiences of the people and interpret their stories, recognizing that the accounts were filtered through the researcher's concept of reality" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). In deciding to use semi-structured interviews as a data collection method, I anticipated what information would likely be obtained and the setting in which these interviews would take place (Maxwell, 2013). Specific interview questions were constructed and an outline of topics to be covered was prepared before each interview. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed into word documents.

There were a total of two semi-structured interviews conducted for this research study. Ms. Lopez was interviewed on two separate instances—once prior to teacher focus group interviews and once when all focus group interviews were completed. The individual, semi-structured interviews were scheduled according to Ms. Lopez's availability. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. I used guiding research questions during the initial interview with Ms. Lopez (Appendix H). The second semi-structured interview with Ms. Lopez served as a follow-up interview to further explore topics established in the initial interview and to gain clarity on key points discussed in the focus group interviews with teachers.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves “bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of the collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 154). In order to facilitate the analysis process, I used the following methods: data management, coding, memos, data display, synthesis, and interpretation. Data management included collection, storage, and retrieval of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A digital voice recorder was used to record the participant interviews and a password protected filing and saving system was used to store recordings and transcripts.

Handwritten notes were taken during all interviews to guide the development of follow-up questions. All interviews were recorded using two digital voice recorders: the primary recorder and a backup recorder. Through use of a digital voice recorder, I downloaded recordings of the interviews onto a computer and converted the files to MP3 formats. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

After transcribing interviews, I uploaded the data to Dedoose in order to analyze the data and begin the coding process. During the coding process, I developed memos to capture interpretation, thoughts, and ideas of the information being reviewed. Memoing is an analysis of the observations and recorded field notes (Glaser, 1998). For the purposes of this research, memoing was used to record thoughts, questions, ideas, and assumptions to be tested as well as frameworks and emerging ideas to support the analysis process.

The data analysis was guided and informed by a modified grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), an inductive technique that interprets data about a social phenomenon in order to build theories about it. Strauss & Corbin (1998) created a

process of classifying and categorizing data into a set of codes, categories, and themes that represent relationships. In order to gain a deeper understanding of teacher perceptions of family engagement and the influence of shared personal experiences on parent–teacher partnerships, I looked for emerging patterns and themes as a means of coding and categorizing the data in a manner aligned with Saldana’s (2013) code-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry (Figure 2).

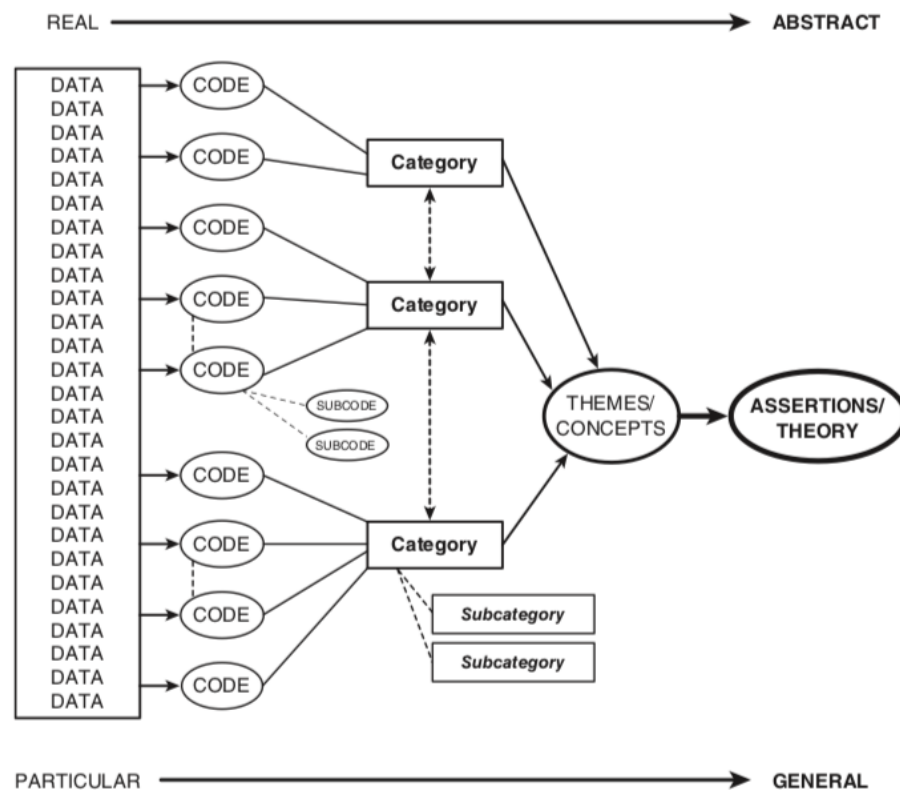


Figure 2

Streamlined Codes-to-Theory Model for Qualitative Inquiry (Saldana, 2013).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) provided three coding techniques for analyzing text data: open, axial, and selective. Open coding was used initially to identify concepts or key

ideas hidden within textual data that could possibly relate to the phenomenon of interest. Next, axial coding was used to assemble categories and subcategories into relationships that could possibly explain the phenomenon of interest. Lastly, selective coding was used to identify a central category and then to systematically relate this central category to other categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). While Strauss and Corbin (1998) described a process of creating open and axial codes together, simultaneous coding was not conducted as a part of my data analysis process.

Open coding. Sipe and Ghiso (2004) bring coding into perspective, stating that the coding process brings in subjectivity, which is ultimately aligned with my personality, predispositions, and professional and personal experiences. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim in a word document and then transferred to Dedoose, a data software program. After transcriptions were completed and re-read along with the audio recordings to ensure accuracy, the initial round of open coding was implemented. I examined the raw data line by line to create inVivo and descriptive codes that identified specific ideas, actions, perceptions, and interactions that spoke to the heart of this research project while remaining open to actively seeking new concepts relevant to the phenomenon of interest (Saldana, 2013). Using Dedoose's analysis software, I linked each code to specific portions of the text for later validation. Some codes were simple, clear, and unambiguous while others were more complex, requiring more critical thinking to make sense of.

In an effort to support validity and reliability, a second round of open coding was completed using collaborative coding with the help of a coding partner to eliminate any

unintentional bias in the coding process. Multiple minds bring multiple ways of analyzing and interpreting data, creating a shared interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Weston et al., 2001). My coding partner during the first wave a data analysis, Rhonda, was a doctoral student enrolled in George Mason University's College of Education. She was also a graduate research assistant in the Department of Early Childhood Education. Prior to enlisting Rhonda's assistance with coding, she shared her personal research interests and previous experience with the qualitative research process. In the end, I felt confident in Rhonda's ability to assist with the open coding phase of this research study.

Rhonda and I completed open coding separately, utilizing shared access to the transcriptions in Dedoose. I completed the open coding phase first, after which Rhonda completed her round of open coding. I met with Rhonda via video conference after she completed her open coding cycle to discuss the identified concepts and subjective meanings gleaned from the transcriptions. Saldana (2013) said:

Rarely is the first cycle of coding data perfectly attempted. The second cycle (and possibly the third and fourth, and so on) of coding further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts, grasping meaning, and/or building theory. (p. 8)

As such, the final wave of open coding analysis yielded twenty-seven codes: barriers, comfortability, home-school linkage, parental involvement, outreach (community, familial), parent generalizations, parent training, challenges, successes,

personal/professional adjustments, realizations, culture, demographics, social class, language, personal experiences, teacher characteristics, technology, teacher accessibility, teacher visibility, technology, teacher–parent communication, home visits, respecting personal boundaries, time constraints, school-based activities, and parental attendance. Strauss and Corbin (1998) noted that for each code, its characteristics and dimensions should be identified. In alignment with this notion, I constructed definitions for each code. I used my own naming conventions to define my codes, reflective of the way I made sense of the data (Appendix J).

Axial coding. In the second phase of coding, I looked to establish categories based on relationships between the aforementioned codes. Many of the categories established in this phase were clearly evident in the data while some were more implicit. Strauss and Corbin (1998) contend that categories are needed to reduce the number of concepts worked with and to build a bigger picture of the issues as is essential to understanding a social phenomenon. Even though categories were established and defined in the open coding round, I remained open to the possibility of new, emergent codes as the data were further analyzed. While working to establish categories in this round of analysis, I coded and recoded previously generated codes in an effort to make the categories more refined and conceptual. Saldana (2013) supports this idea, stating that “some of the first cycle codes may be later subsumed by other codes, relabeled, or dropped altogether.... As you progress toward second cycle coding, the researcher might rearrange and reclassify coded data into different and even new categories” (Saldana, 2013, p. 12). After three rounds of coding and recoding, broad categorical groups

emerged that ultimately evolved into themes aligned with the data analysis process in my modified grounded theory.

In developing the categories, I examined these components: (1) which categories represented the circumstances in which the phenomenon was embedded, (2) the responses of the participants to events under these conditions, and (3) the outcomes of the participants actions/interactions. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), as conditions, actions/interactions, and outcomes are identified, theoretical propositions emerge, allowing researchers to start explaining why a phenomenon occurs, under what conditions, and with what consequences. For this research study, the phenomenon of focus was the approach to and development of parent–teacher partnerships from the teachers’ perspective. Actions and interactions were represented by the conditions that influenced teacher views and approaches to these partnerships. The outcomes situated themselves in understanding what influences created successful partnerships from the teachers’ perspective.

The axial coding round yielded four codes: (1) teacher-parent relatability through language, culture and personal experiences, (2) teacher qualities, and (3) convenient parent-teacher communication tools, (4) teacher realizations. Teacher-parent relatability spoke to how teachers viewed similarities in backgrounds between themselves and parents. Teacher qualities spoke to the positive attributes that participants felt contributed to creating an environment in which meaningful relationships could begin and flourish. Recurring topics included: confidence, accessible, responsiveness, compassion, and empathy. The idea of convenient communication tools was prevalent across all grade

levels as the topic of time constraints was discussed. Teacher realizations represented the exploration of how participant identity influenced their approach to and establishment of partnerships with families.

Selective coding. The final phase of coding evolved from the existing categories, generating two intersecting themes: (1) influence of shared personal experiences on parent–teacher partnerships, and (2) traditional views and approaches to family engagement. Coding of new data continued until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning that additional data analysis did not yield any marginal change in the core categories (Saldana, 2013).

Data Quality

Maxwell (2013) noted reactivity and researcher bias as two specific validity threats, which Maxwell (2005) argued should be addressed via triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these criterion help generate trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry, which support the argument that the inquiry’s findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Reflexivity. I understand that my subjectivity is likely to influence my approach to the research. As Peshkin (1998) said, subjectivity is like a garment one cannot remove. However, I remained aware of how my experiences shaped the development of my research questions and sought feedback from my research committee prior to finalizing my questions. As a speech language pathologist with over ten years of

professional experience in the education setting, I strived to establish relationships with teachers and parents that created an environment of honesty and openness that resulted in improving the educational experience of their child.

Epistemology directs the researcher to ask essential questions about how we come to know the realities we are researching. Epistemology is, therefore, in the mind of the knower and “becomes paramount when the relationship between the knower and the known is embodied in the researcher” (Daly, 2007, p. 25). In considering how I know what I know, in order to make meaning from it, I drew from my belief that knowledge is created in the world rather than in the mind. Knowledge is a process of discovering the patterned reality that exists in the world. As a constructivist, I took a reflexive look at my own identity in order to understand my position in viewing and conducting this research study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state, “social reality is a construction based upon the actor’s frame of reference within the setting” (p. 80). As a researcher, I am shaped by my lived experiences. Qualitative research methods, interpreted through a constructivist lens, gave me the opportunity to understand the way teachers approach and develop partnerships with families and how their personal experiences influence the development of said partnerships.

In this research study, the goal was to establish myself as a responsible researcher who could develop and maintain a shared sense of trust and ease between the participants and myself. For this study, neutrality was sought in regard to separating my beliefs and biases from the participant’s personal accounts of their professional and personal experiences in developing meaningful parent–teacher partnerships.

Ethical considerations. According to Creswell (2007), regardless of the approach to qualitative inquiry, a qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during data collection (p. 141). The ethical issues in qualitative research are bound in the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2007). In order to address these ethical issues, I followed the recommendations and requirements from the university and research community. According to Creswell (2007), regardless of the approach to qualitative inquiry, a qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues during data collection, bound in the relationship between the researcher and the participants. In order to address ethical issues, I followed the recommendations and requirements of the university and research community. Gaining approval from George Mason University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research, I made protecting the rights and privacy of the participants a top priority. For the purpose of this research study, the relevant ethical considerations were grounded in the issues of the participants' rights, their informed consent in participation in the study, and confidentiality. The privacy of the participants was protected through the use of pseudonyms in interview transcripts and when reporting results of the research study. All materials associated with data collection and data analysis were kept in a secure, locked file cabinet in my home. All audio-recorded interviews were deleted from all recording devices used once transcriptions and member checks are completed.

Credibility. The credibility of the researcher affects how findings are received (Patton, 2002). Rather than pursuing a specific outcome, I included any personal or professional information that could positively or negatively influence data collection,

analysis, and interpretation. In order to address the issue of credibility, I exposed my identified biases and perspectives as it related to the purpose of the research study.

Additionally, Patton (2002) noted, “studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data consistency checks” (p. 1192). As such, I utilized multiple data sources to achieve triangulation. Data derived from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were compared and cross-checked to ensure that all significant discoveries were reported in the findings.

Transferability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined transferability as the degree to which the results of a qualitative research study can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. Researcher methods must be clearly presented so that the comparable results can be obtained using similar conditions and research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). From a qualitative perspective, transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing. In an attempt to enhance transferability, however, I provided a thorough description of the research context and assumptions that were central to the research study. Ultimately, the researcher is responsible for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer or generalization of research findings into different contexts is (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability. Marshall and Rossman (2006) emphasized that the most important aspect of dependability in qualitative research is the responsibility of the researcher to account for the dynamic, fluid context within which the research occurs. As such, detailed project plans outlining the processes, procedures, and rationale were

routinely written down. Research memos from interviews were kept to assist in tracking personal thoughts and any changes that occurred in the setting (allowing examination of how these changes affected my approach to the study). Lincoln and Guba (1985) support transparency in detailing decisions, strategic changes in methodological approach, and research framework throughout the study as well as in annotating personal reflections during the research process.

Conformability. Conformability indicates that findings are the result of the research rather than the outcome of researcher bias (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). I addressed the issues of conformability by documenting how data are checked throughout the research process. Through detailed documentation, I demonstrated how data were checked throughout the research process, which included conferencing with members of my dissertation committee to challenge any assumptions and critique the analysis of the data collected. In the pursuit of conformability, I also provided descriptions of data audits that were utilized to examine data collected and to make judgments about possible bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Summary

Chapter Three presented the rationale for the chosen research methodology, research setting, participants, data collection, data analysis, and data quality. Chapter Four will provide an explanation of the findings gleaned from data analysis.

Chapter Four

The purpose of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of parent–teacher relationships, their roles, and how their identities impacted the development of these relationships. I explored how teachers viewed the commonalities between themselves and families in personal experiences, language, and culture. Additionally, I looked at how these commonalities impacted their interactions with parents. I sought to gain an understanding of how teachers viewed their roles in family relationships and what actions they took to develop these relationships with parents. Data collection and analysis revealed that while teachers readily acknowledged the positive impacts of shared personal experiences, culture, and language between themselves and parents, the depth of these similarities did not influence how they developed relationships with parents. While the benefits of these similarities were identified, teachers remained tied to traditional acts of engaging with families rather than constructing new ways to connect based on shared backgrounds and experiences. In this chapter, I unpack the benefits of similarities in identity between teachers and parents and identify the disconnect between the benefits and the actions teachers employ to develop relationships with parents.

Relatability: “This is my home.... I don’t feel like I’m judged”

Relatability emerged as an important dynamic in teachers’ relationships with families. Specifically, the backgrounds and personal experiences shared by teachers and

parents contributed to how teachers felt they were able to relate to families' lived experiences. The demographics of the interviewed teachers directly reflected that of the student body, thus reflecting the demographics of the students' parents. Many of the teachers (across all grade levels) described the positive impact of similarities in personal experiences, language, and culture on their ability to relate to parents. The teachers shared personal stories about their heritage, family structure, language learning, and immigration. They shared how these factors influenced the way they viewed parents with similar backgrounds and how it created a sense of connectedness between them. Topics of relatability revolved mainly around similarities in three areas: culture, personal experiences, and language. Through similarities in these areas, teachers felt more connected to parents and their level of relatability helped foster a sense of belonging for students and families.

Shared culture: “Is everybody [here] related? Everyone knows everyone.” In developing relationships with families, having shared culture was seen as beneficial. Culture was discussed as similarities in the teachers' roots in the community. For many of the teachers, these roots, centered on being born, raised, and educated in the same community in which they were currently employed. Teachers believed these roots gave them an empathetic view of parents and families that were also born and bred in and around the Borderland as well as those new to the city. Many teachers crossed the border in and out of the United States into Mexico on a daily or weekly basis. The familiarity of this experience helped teachers connect with parents that shared this experience creating a sense of shared understanding versus judgement. Farah, a bilingual second grade

teacher born in the United States, explained that “Coming across the border, that—to us—it’s like second nature.” Relating this connection to relationship development with families, Laura, a bilingual third-grade teacher, born in the United States stated, “Having that background culture—like, some of us, you know, were raised in [Mexico] and a lot of (families) come from [Mexico]. So ... there’s that culture and background there that helps us.” Anna, a kindergarten teacher born in Mexico, noted the sense of belonging and comfort that shared culture created with students and families in her classroom, saying, “I see the ... moral upbringing that the students have.... I can relate.... My parents were Mexican, I was brought up Mexican ... just all of those cultural things—I think it’s, again, a source of comfort for them.” Anna continued, explaining how this type of comfort from cultural similarities with her students’ parents made her feel a sense of cohesiveness, which made it easier for her to understand and connect with parents.

We also discussed relatability in how teachers’ roots in the community shaped their relationships with parents. Examples of community roots, shared by many of the teachers, were described by those who had multiple family generations with established roots in the Borderland. These teachers felt a sense of direct connection to the fabric of the community. For example, Amy, a bilingual third-grade teacher born in the United States, shared that a family relative had a school (in the same district that the research study was conducted) named after him. When asked how she saw the impact of community and generational connection to the city manifest in her relationships with students’ families, Amy explained:

Well it's community-built.... We're building the community.... My family in particular has been established in [The Borderland].... We actually have a middle school named after ... my father's first cousin.... I've heard other teachers come in that they'll say, 'is everybody related? Everyone knows everyone.'

Amy's generational connections to the community through her family member being honored in having a school named after him could be seen as a power differential. However, while Amy exuded an internal sense of pride, she spoke with humility and sincerity about what she viewed as a true sense of belonging and contribution to the community, not a sense of power over her colleagues and students' families. In addition to her expression of pride in her community, Amy shared her respect for the district's choice to promote from within rather than seeking teachers from outside the community to fill upper-level positions within the district. She felt that seeing those she worked alongside promoted to administrator positions gave her a sense of connection to the inner workings and rationale of decision making at the district level.

In unpacking Amy's experience, there is much to be said for the sense of belonging and being able to recognize how families need to feel welcomed in order to avoid creating conscious or subconscious barriers to connectedness. In Amy's comments, it appeared as though the district also recognized the teachers' sense of community pride. This recognition prompted the district to promote from within, allowing teachers with connections to the district and community to be placed in higher-level positions. This suggested that the leaders make decisions with the perspective of a community member. In Amy's view, community-centeredness guided upper-level

decisions that impacted teachers and families to be formed through a personal connection with the community and families that the district served.

While personal connections to the community made the school a place of comfort for the teachers, many of them also recognized the uniqueness of the Borderland. This uniqueness centered around a sense of personal familiarity within the city and an intentional extension of welcome to those that were not from the city. Stacy, a second-grade teacher who was born, raised, and educated in the Borderland, said:

Whenever I've visited other places, that's when I see that there's ... more diversity out there.... When you go out of town ... it kind of puts you in ... an uncomfortable feeling. And so then when you come back home, it's like a sigh of relief because it's all good. This is what I know. This is my home.... I don't feel like I'm judged.

This sense of belonging and comfort was echoed by many teachers as an explanation of why they intentionally extend themselves in a welcoming manner to parents that may or may not have connections to the community. Amy shared, “we have roots, but I think one of the things that's so important is, when someone is coming in, that we welcome them and that we help them feel at home because, if not, then they feel apart.” Amy and Stacy’s statements, and many others like theirs, recognized the impact of their comfortable sense of connection to the city. Their statements also shed light on the teachers’ belief in the importance of setting a tone of welcome and inclusion as a means to establish trust with parents and families.

Shared personal experiences: “Being an immigrant ... helped me connect with my parents.” The sense of cultural relatability created deep connections for teachers that recently immigrated to the United States. For most of the teachers that immigrated to the United States, going through the immigration process, navigating a new country, and acclimating to a new school system created a meaningful connection with parents who also shared this experience. Third-grade teacher Maria, who was born in Mexico, had only been teaching at Silverman Elementary for five days at the time of the interview. However, she had seven years of total teaching experience. Maria shared:

I think my background being an immigrant and having to go through all the process of getting here and having to go to school, have two jobs, and putting myself through college, and being here without your extended family. I think that helped me connect with my [students’] parents because a lot of them went through the same thing. So when they tell me something, I am like ‘oh, I know. I’ve been there, I know what you mean.’ ... And now the parents ... have more questions, they ... feel more comfortable, and I can understand that because when I got [to the US] ten years ago, I had to go to classes and learn English so I totally get them.

Maria’s personal experience with successfully navigating this country’s immigration system, dealing with being separated from family in pursuit of her goals, and working multiple jobs allowed her to connect and empathize with her students and their parents in ways that are uncommon in education. Many school districts offer continuing education courses or teacher in-services in an attempt to provide insight into the experiences of

immigrant parents or parents from diverse backgrounds. However, the level of Maria's relatability to her students' immigrant parents could not be fully obtained through continuing education courses on diversity or by reading journal articles on the rising immigrant population in schools. Having Maria on the front line, so to speak, in the classroom serves as a beacon of light for any student in her class that comes from an immigrant background. In having this shared experience with her students' parents, she was positioned to go beyond the roles and responsibilities that traditionally identify her as a teacher. She can tap into her own personal achievements and experiences to be an added level of support and perhaps encouragement for the parents of her students. The reflection of self that parents can see in Maria's achievements could have a lasting, positive influence. Through Maria's statement, "I think [my experience] helped me not only connect with the parents but connect with the kids and understand what they go through, you know. When they tell me something, I am like 'oh, I know. I've been there,'" she recognized the significance of her personal experience, using the lessons those experiences taught her to make connections with parents. First-grade teacher Victoria echoed Maria's story and shared that her grandparents immigrated to the United States and her parents were the first generation to go to college and graduate; she understood what the parents of her students were trying to achieve for their kids because she went through the same thing. While the experience of being the first in a family to attend and graduate college is not exclusive to any specific culture, Maria recognized how her experience could be beneficial as a source of support and comfort in developing relationships with parents that may be in the same situation as she was.

Being able to relate to parents through shared experiences also included childhood upbringing as it relates to socioeconomic status and social class. Ms. Lopez, the school's Parent Liaison, shared a very personal account of her upbringing. When her family immigrated to the United States, both her parents were monolingual Spanish speakers. Her father was a farm worker, and while they never went without food or a home, she understood the financial struggles that often came with immigrating to a country without established family ties. She expanded her story:

You know my parents were never involved [in my education]. They didn't speak the language and they worked, and worked, and worked, and they valued hard work, but I can relate to a lot of the families that I see. I can relate. I've been there and I worked in the field. I did things like that. You can overcome that but what do you need? You need some support, some assistance, even just someone to listen—and I do. So ... if you see a passion in me, I think it's because I relate to the community.

Ms. Lopez's story spoke to the heart of parent-teacher relatability through shared personal experiences. Her relatability sparked a deep, empathetic perspective in her relationships with families—so much so that I saw this reflected in her attitude and approach to her work. As is the nature of conducting interviews during school hours, my interviews with Ms. Lopez were interrupted by teachers and parents. In each instance, I informally observed her answer questions, share resources, and offer assistance with a genuine sense of respect, caring, and thoughtfulness to all of those she encountered. Personally understanding the struggles associated with immigrating to the United States

comes with a sense of prideful accomplishment, and rightfully so. Being an overcomer, or being generationally connected to overcomers, instills lasting impacts on one's internal fortitude. Being able to personally share the experiences of the highs and lows of immigrating to the United States, either on a personal or a generational level, allowed teachers to relate to parents in similar circumstances from an empathetic point of view and to serve as examples of what the outcome of parents' hard work and determination could be.

Relatability went beyond shared language, culture, and personal experiences with immigration and citizenship, however. Accounts of the teachers' relatability also uncovered personal biases toward certain parents that connected to the teachers' experiences and backgrounds. The biases discussed stemmed from teacher backgrounds that included teenage motherhood, infertility, and grandparents parenting. Teachers shared how events in their personal lives created negative views of certain parents that subconsciously impacted how they interacted with the parents.

Young parents. Yanet, a first-grade teacher, shared her story of connectedness with parents through her personal experience as a teenage mom. She was truthful about how this negatively impacted her view of some parents,

For me personally, ... we have a lot of young parents and I was a teen parent. However, sometimes it's a little difficult for me because ... with my family growing up, it was like, 'you became a teen parent. Okay, that's it. You're a parent and you have all the responsibility.... You need to grow up.' But I see some of these younger parents and I'm like ... 'Why can't they help?' ... It's hard

for me to understand why they can't sometimes be there for their child or, you know, help.... I guess, for me, I have some resentment sometimes ... like, 'You can do more.' You can always do more. So I guess it's hard for me to understand, and sometimes I have resentment because, like, when I was a teenager it was just, like, 'Okay, now ... my life [is] done.... It's about my kids.' That was it.... I feel like, okay, I came out of it.

Yanet's truthful account of how her shared experience as a young parent fostered a sense of resentment towards young parents of some of her students. In Yanet's view, the young parents were not doing enough for their children as she had been expected to do by her family. Yanet's reflection on how her personal experiences caused her to cast judgement on young parents helped her recognize the root of her judgmental feelings towards them. At the end of the interviews for that day, Yanet said, "I know where it comes from now, so I can do better," referring to how her judgement might be creating a subconscious barrier between her and the young parents of her students.

Statements made by older teachers further explored how teachers' biases towards certain parents can negatively impact teacher views of parents. Older teachers shared that parents are younger now and seeing grandparents raising students is becoming more common than when they first started teaching. They shared various reasons why students were being raised by grandparents, including divorce, parents working out of town, and parental incarceration. Josephine, a kindergarten teacher in her early 50's with ten years of teaching experience, shared her personal experience with young parents:

What I'm seeing a lot of is very young parents. Very, very young parents that—I don't think they have that maturity.... A few years ago, I only had 15 kids in my classroom and, out of those 15 kids, 7 of them were being raised by grandparents ... and honestly those kids were taken care of because the grandparents are older. They were on task with them. They were not behind, but it was just astonishing to me how many kids out of the 15 ... were not being raised by their parents.

While the negative impact of the above-mentioned reasons for a parent's absence cannot be mitigated by teachers, it is important to note how younger parents are viewed by older teachers as it relates to how much they appear to do, or not do, for their children.

Infertility. Erica, a first-grade teacher, also shared how her personal difficulty conceiving a child impacted her view of two of her students' parents:

We have [a] couple of students with really big problems in their houses. CPS is involved. Police [are] involved. It's really bad. So, for me, having a child was really hard ... [I was] seeing doctors [for] years and years to try. So really, if they have a child and they're not taking care of them and not only that, ... you know, things are happening at home, and I'm like, 'Why not take care of your child? Why would you want to hurt [them]?' So yes, most of the parents I feel [that I] identify with because they want to be there for their kids, but at the same time, there are some parents that I feel like they can do more.... It's just frustration.

Nevertheless, teachers noted the importance of identifying and overcoming these biases by approaching each parent as an individual and not letting past experiences force them to make quick, unjustified assumptions in their current or future interactions with them.

Shared language: “Ay chihuahua!” At Silverman Elementary, students were enrolled in either a dual-language classroom or a monolingual classroom. In the monolingual classrooms, the teachers gave academic instruction solely in English. In the dual-language classrooms, the teachers provided academic instructions to students in Spanish and English. The district’s purpose behind offering dual-language programs was to encourage students to continue developing their ability to speak their native language (Spanish) while becoming proficient English speakers. Dual-language teachers obtained bilingual certification to teach in these classrooms. While some of the teachers in the monolingual classroom may also speak Spanish in their personal lives, the expectation was that they provide academic instruction to their students in English. Notably, the languages spoken by the teachers at Silverman Elementary directly reflected that of the families it served, which provided a sense of commonality between teachers and families.

The benefits of shared language between teachers and families in relationship building was reported prevalently across grade levels. Teachers’ language proficiency ranged from bilingual Spanish and English, to Spanglish (a personalized mix of Spanish and English), to monolingual English. All but one of the teachers interviewed spoke and understood both English and Spanish at varying levels. Bilingual teachers reported being able to personally relate to Spanish-speaking parents and recognized the benefits and challenges that came with learning a second language. Some of the challenges discussed were a lack of confidence in English and a sense of being judged for errors in pronunciation and vocabulary usage. Bilingual teachers used their commonality in

second language acquisition to create a safe space for parents to speak in English or Spanish without judgement. To support this point, Anna, a kindergarten teacher stated:

I think it helps that, most of us, we speak both languages so it helps us communicate with [Spanish-speaking] parents whose kids are in a monolingual [English] class. They feel like they won't be able to communicate with the teacher about how their kid is doing. But I think us being bilingual, most of us, it helps us build that relationship with a parent.

Thus, through shared language, most teachers expressed the benefits of being bilingual, even those who taught in monolingual English classrooms. First-grade teacher, Gabriella, shared:

I think that match-up in terms of parent-teacher demographics is a huge benefit because I have had parents who ... have just come over from Mexico or a Spanish-speaking country and that's the only language that they and their children can communicate in.

Therefore, in the views of bilingual teachers, shared language between themselves and families created a foundational bond that acted as a bridge toward developing relationships with one another. Acknowledging the benefits of shared language through openness to speaking both Spanish and English allowed bilingual teachers to offer a piece of their identity to parents. Teachers sharing this piece of their identity opened a space for monolingual, Spanish-speaking parents and bilingual parents to be vulnerable in speaking their native language without reservations or hesitations. The vulnerability,

created by teacher openness, could thus be fertile ground for the cultivation of trust, which is a critical component in parent–teacher relationships.

The benefits associated with shared language were not always accessible to older teachers. The generational differences in personal experiences with second language acquisition was dynamic. Older teachers discussed the external resistance to bilingualism when they were school age. The younger teachers discussed their lifelong pride of being bilingual and how it helped them connect and relate to bilingual students and families. Older teachers, on the other hand, recalled English being strictly enforced—at home and at school—when they were in primary school due to the mainstream ideology of assimilation. Josephine, a bilingual kindergarten teacher in her early 50’s, shared her experience:

Now the younger generations think it’s cool when people have accents and can speak multiple languages and I think it’s a stigmatism we had—and the older generations of us—that we had to speak English clearly and we couldn’t have accents.

Furthering this point, Ms. Lopez, in her mid-50’s, shared: “I was born in Mexico. I was born in Juarez and we immigrated when I was about four ... so English is not my native language. I was put in a school here, probably [at] about five years old, and ... it was all in English.” While many of the younger teachers acknowledged the English-only method of generations before them, their experiences with bilingualism were of acceptance and encouragement in schools. Jessica, a third-grade bilingual teacher in her early 30’s, shared: “Personally, I feel a little bit insecure when I’m communicating in English, but I

feel that it's something really positive ... because you understand what our students are going through when they're acquiring the second language." Being open about her insecurity in speaking English, Jessica unveiled a personal connection that she could make with parents with similar insecurities. Moreover, the ability to relate to parents that may lack confidence in their English has the potential to develop into meaningful connections with parents.

The benefits of open-minded and vulnerability as well as the exploration and acceptance of language acquisition was not only recognized by parents but by students as well. Through bilingual teachers speaking with parents in Spanish and English, this linguistic flexibility was observed by students, enhancing the parent-teacher relationship into a parent-teacher-student relationship. Victoria, a bilingual first-grade teacher, shared how her openness to language-learning impacted her interactions not only with a new student but with her entire class:

Of course, I'm Mexican, right? And sometimes I do throw some of my vocabulary [around], not bad but like, 'Ay chihuahua!' and the kids were laughing ... so it was fun.... I have this student, ... he would be using some other vocabulary. Not bad vocabulary, but [there was a] language barrier.... I didn't understand him and, I mean, his peers ... were lost as well.

Victoria explained how the new student used a Spanish form of "I have" incorrectly in his attempts to share with the class. Instead of dismissing the student's attempts to share or chastising him to use correct Spanish form, Victoria took the time to dive deeper and tried to gain a real understanding of what the student was attempting to communicate.

After multiple attempts to figure out what the student was referring to, Victoria asked him to show her what he wanted to share. She recalled asking him to bring her his backpack and open it for her. The student did so and pulled out money from Columbia, his home country. Once she realized this, Victoria understood that it was the student's dialectal pronunciation that was causing her not to understand what he said. Victoria allowed the student opportunities to share information with the class and engaged the class in discussions about the student's home in Medellin, Columbia. She shared:

This is very interesting because we don't ... have this here in [the Borderland].

So we talked about other cultures ... It was a great event for the other kids, [they] were like 'wow, really?' So then he started saying some other words and it was really interesting.

Victoria's acknowledgement, appreciation, and respect for the new student's culture, language, and heritage lasted beyond that day's discussion. She asked the student to bring Colombian candies from home to share with the class. Victoria's openness created a classroom experience that she was able to share during parent-teacher conferences with the student's parents. This allowed Victoria to go beyond the typical conference topics and bring individualized information about the student and his adjustment to this new class to the conference. She shared, "It was really nice in parent-teacher conference that the parents said, 'You know what, he's adapting very well.' ... It has been fun."

Victoria's story sheds light on the inclusive mindset that comes with the experience of being bilingual and that can be shared with students and families. While Victoria and the new student did not speak the same form of Spanish, her views on

language-learning and comfort with speaking her dominant language in the classroom created an open mindedness in her students that led them to being open to exploring the language and culture of other countries as well. This open mindedness also helped the new student adapt and feel more comfortable in a new environment. Moreover, the student's adaptability in his new school was noticed by his parents and ultimately helped them feel more comfortable with his experience at school as well. The trickle-down effect of Victoria's openness to exploring language variances and her validation of a key component to the new student's identity is unquantifiable. While language similarities may not always be capitalized on in the classroom, Victoria used language difference as a gateway for her entire class to explore culture and language.

While Spanish is full of dialectal variances, by all accounts, the Spanish spoken in the Borderland includes vocabulary and phrasing that is unique to the area. Through shared language between teachers and parents being so prevalent at Silverman Elementary, teachers understand these dialectal differences. Instead of viewing parents with the mindset of "we don't say it that way," teachers are open to learning these dialectal differences and using them appropriately. Ms. Lopez reiterated the fact that the form of Spanish spoken so close to the US/Mexico border consists of different words and phrasing than are used in formal Spanish. She shared:

I have a cousin that lives ... in Mexico ... because they speak only Spanish.... I pick up a lot of their language and the words that they use.... [It] helps me when I translate notices for parents.... Border Spanish is different and so I learn a lot just

from socializing with my cousins and the way ... they speak and ... that has helped me communicate with parents in their own language.

Knowing the variances in Spanish from region to region, Ms. Lopez's openness to learn from her family members in order to deepen her connections with students' families through her use of familiar phrasing and vocabulary is important in helping families feel welcomed and included at the school. The value of her openness to learn "border Spanish" and apply her new knowledge in her position as Parent Liaison is undeniable.

Countering this open-mindedness was Sarah, the only monolingual, English-speaking, white, European American teacher in the participant pool. Sarah taught in a monolingual English second-grade classroom. She obtained a doctoral degree and was a military spouse. In both focus group interviews, Sarah brought with her an overriding sense of confidence, authoritativeness, and privilege. During discussions about the uniqueness of the Borderland's teacher demographics closely matching the student-family demographics, Sarah commented that the Borderland was the least diverse place that she had ever lived. Sarah masked the validity of her belief in her personal experience teaching in schools where 27 different languages were spoken. Her comment immediately shed light on her unconscious cloak of white privilege, believing that, in a country where the racial majority is white American, the Borderland was the least diverse place that she ever lived. During Sarah's comments, I noticed that Stacy, a second-grade teacher born and raised in the Borderland, looked down at the table with subservient body language. I asked whether she thought the Borderland was diverse or not. With hesitancy, Stacy spoke in a softer voice than she had previously. She shared that she felt

[the Borderland] was diverse and that, with a lot of military families moving to the city, the Borderland was becoming more diverse. Stacy's change in demeanor appeared to affirm her elevated view of Sarah's positionality and power, likely because of the authoritative voice that Sarah spoke with, her whiteness, and monolingual English-speaking status. While Sarah was not dismissive of Stacy's perspective of diversity in the Borderland, she did not appear receptive to Stacy's view of her hometown.

When asked about the impact of her monolingual English-speaking status had on her interactions with parents, she shared:

I don't look at it as a barrier. I teach monolingual [English] and I haven't had any issues with communication with the students that are in my classroom. I've taught in many places. Most of my career was in the [Midwest] area. So you have schools that have 27 different dialects and languages spoken in them ... and so that's certainly more of a challenge.... Here, [if] there's some other language, it's most typically Spanish.... Everything goes home in both languages....

Actually, in my time here, I haven't run across the parents who had a student [in] monolingual [English] that didn't understand English. It hasn't really been a barrier for me.

In Sarah's view, there was no barrier in not being able to communicate with families in a school where the majority of the student-family population was either monolingual Spanish-speaking or bilingual. Her views reflected the cultural and linguistic capital that intrinsically came with her whiteness. The description of her previous employment at a school where several languages and dialects were spoken as being "more of a challenge"

demonstrated her biased view of the student–family population at Silverman Elementary as being easy or less challenging. Sarah’s comments left the impression that she felt she did not need to speak or understand the dominant language of the school population. Perhaps, knowing that all school documents were translated into Spanish for families and that her grade level teammates, along with the majority of the school staff, could translate for her provided some level of comfort for her (as opposed to being in her previous school where translation of certain languages may not have been easily obtained).

Sarah’s perception of her monolingual English-speaking status directly opposed Ms. Lopez’s account of Spanish-speaking parents in the school, however. Ms. Lopez shared, “there are some parents ... that only speak Spanish, and if you want to communicate with them, then it’s going to have to be in Spanish.” The striking difference in Sarah and Ms. Lopez’s experiences with families within the same school was a clear representation of white privilege as it pertains to teacher views on language-learning and openness to language exploration. Sarah did mention her awareness of the way she approached parents of her students, “There is a lot to be said for body language.... I would say definitely be cognizant of your body language.” On the surface, her awareness makes sense: be aware of how you come off to parents. However, in the totality of Sarah’s comments during the interviews, she seemed unconscious about the privilege that came with her whiteness. On the demographic inventory, in the space for teachers to write their ethnicity, Sarah wrote “American” for her ethnicity. Her unconscious privilege was seen even in the way she quickly completed her Matrix of Domination form. The ease in which she completed the form was due to the fact that none of her

responses required deep thought since most of her responses fell on the privileged side of the matrix. Sarah promptly completed her form, placed her pen on the table, and crossed her arms while the bilingual teachers had to think deeply about where to situate themselves on certain axes of the matrix. While many of Sarah's comments directly reflected the knowledge base that came with obtaining her doctorate degree, her supposed awareness of how she appeared to others was clouded by the privileges that she unconsciously benefited from at school.

The accomplishments and challenges that bilingual teachers shared, as it aligned with how they related to parents, gave insight into how they navigated the intersectionality of the oppressed and privileged identity structures in their roles as ethnic and linguistic minorities and as belonging to a privileged social class with the privilege of education. This intersectionality could be seen in examples of the teachers' accomplishments that came with judgement ("I overcame, why can't you?") but also in their ability to empathize with familiar struggles of their student's parents. This served as a demonstration of the invisible challenges that bilingual teachers overcame and navigated in their experiences, both professionally and personally.

Traditional views and approaches to family engagement: "It is challenging to get parents to come in"

Despite the aforementioned benefits of shared language, culture, and personal experiences that most teachers acknowledged, their views on building relationships with families, surprisingly, aligned mostly with traditional views of family engagement. Their views were relegated to parents participating in school-directed activities during school

hours. Even though teachers talked about the importance of community roots, cultural relatability, and shared language, most teachers drew a hard line between being relatable and going into the community to develop school–family relationships. Being able to maintain open streams of communication was a prevalent topic across all grade levels. While it was evident that communication was seen as an important tool, however, teachers did not make any connections in how their means of communication helped develop relationships with families.

The conference rules: “Mom you have to come.” It is important to note that the first round of interviews were conducted the week following Silverman Elementary’s parent–teacher conferences. Many of the teachers shared how many parents attended their conferences. Teachers were prideful and boasted about the percentage of parents that attended their conferences; this sentiment was observed across all grade levels. While teachers did not have percentages of parent attendance readily available during interviews, comments such as, “[I had] good turnout” and statements that quantified parent absence, such as “I was just missing one parent,” were repeated across grade levels. This suggested that teachers took note of who attended and who did not attend. The importance of parent attendance was even supported by Ms. Lopez, the only staff member whose main purpose is to cultivate relationships with parents as the school’s the Parent Liaison. She stated, “It’s rare that you get 100% [attendance].... I always prepare the notices for parent teacher conferences ... and, of course, [the notice] always says ... please join us, it’s important, we’re always trying to get 100% attendance.” Parent attendance at these conferences seemed to be interpreted as a validating measure of the

level importance that parents placed on knowing how their child was performing in school. Parents taking time from their personal schedules to attend these conferences was seen as a reflection of how important parents viewed their child's education as being.

In light of the school's interpretation of parent attendance for these conferences, examples of extensive outreach from teachers to parents were shared during interviews. In addition to the notice that Ms. Lopez sends out to all families, additional outreach described by teachers included phone calls, text message reminders, in-person reminders during drop-off and pick-up, and printed letters that were sent home. Gabby, a third-grade teacher, stated:

We text them.... 'Remember, we have parent-teacher conferences coming up.' ...

We also send notes. We also see that some ... kids are picked up by [parents and we] remind them again and just ... explain what we are going to be discussing [and] talking about during parent-teacher conferences.

The amount of repetitive outreach was aimed at improving parent attendance for the conferences and implied a high level of importance placed on parent attendance from the school's perspective. Sylvia, a kindergarten teacher, acknowledged the lengths to which she went to speak with a parent who was not responding to phone calls or messages about attending the conference,

I call constantly ... I have one [student] right now ... and the good thing is [his dad] picks [him] up so I catch him right away because if you call him on the phone [he] won't answer. If you leave messages [he] won't call you back. I mean, I literally [say to the child,] 'Come on, I need to talk to [your dad]' ... He

showed up for the parent–teacher conference because I explained how important it is.

Sylvia’s relentless outreach to this parent begs the question: did the parent attend because she explained how important the conference was or did the parent attend because he was being harassed? Despite the extended efforts to confirm parent attendance and the school’s interpretive meaning of parent attendance at these conferences, teacher efforts did not consistently yield ideal results. This was exemplified as Sylvia went on to explain that “even if you explain and talk to them [during conferences], they’ll tell you, ... ‘Yes, yes,’ but then you see the homework ... [and] they’re not doing it.” Thus, since parent attendance does not equate to parent investment, there needs to be a different approach to connecting with parents.

As parent–teachers conferences were only held twice during the school year (once in the fall and once in the spring), all of the teachers regarded the conferences as an opportunity to communicate with parents about student grades or test results. Supporting this fact is the third-grade team’s reference to increased attendance at parent–teacher conferences when students entered third grade as this was the grade level in which students started taking state-wide testing. Third-grade teacher Isabella acknowledged this in her statement:

I know a lot of them came [to conferences] because we had just taken a mock STAR [assessment] and we were releasing those results to them. So a lot of them were eager to see how they did on that test ... so that could have been a part of it.

Using test score results to lure parents in for conferences serves to reaffirm the power differential between schools and families. This differential affirms that schools hold the power of disseminating important student information. Parents were effectively enticed to attend parent–teacher conferences by the school choosing to release their child’s test scores during the conference.

Parent–teacher conferences should be renamed to reflect the free-flowing dialogic nature of the genuine conversation that should be taking place between parents and teachers. These scheduled interactions with parents should be individualized rather than a redundant speech of “here are your child’s grades, these are their areas of strength and weakness, here are the grade level expectations for this point in the school year.” If a parent has multiple children in the same school, the redundancy of these conferences must be mind-numbing. There needs to be a breath of freshness and individuality injected into these scheduled, bi-annual meetings with parents. This freshness and individuality could create self-motivated attendance in parents versus obligated attendance.

Thinking outside the box in relation to the rebirth of parent–teacher conferences is necessary to refute the current power differential and facilitate parental ownership of their role in these conferences. Ms. Lopez shared how her 26-year-old daughter created a way to go beyond the norm for conferences in her third-grade classroom at a different elementary school:

[My daughter] suggested to her principal this spring ... instead of doing the traditional parent–teacher conferences she wanted to do a student led parent–

teacher conference.... She spent a lot of time guiding her students ... [about how to talk] to their parents about their experience of third grade.... She prepared her students and she told them to tell [parents] ‘You’re gonna hear it from me. You’re going to see my work. I’m going to explain to you [what it is] to learn third-grade material.’ ... She had 100% attendance because the child[ren] said, ‘Mom, you have to come.’”

Ms. Lopez’s daughter took initiative in thinking outside the box regarding the structure of her conferences with parents. The choice to include her students in the conferences provided parents and students with a sense of pride and accomplishment in the students’ academic work. Again, relying on these biannual conferences as the primary means of interacting with parents is a reductive view of what teacher–parent relationships could be. The conferences should be viewed as a supplementary component of building teacher–parent relationships, not just the primary method of interaction and discussion between teachers and parents.

Activities! Activities! Activities!: “We have a lot of events here at the school.”

School-centered activities were the main response when teachers were asked about ways they engage and interact with parents. When asked to describe how they worked to create relationships with parents and families, teachers shared a laundry list of school-centered activities. Yanet, a first-grade teacher, stated: “I feel like we have a lot of events here ... that encourage the parents to come in.... We have fall festival, ... reading night...” Teachers repeatedly mentioned parent–teacher association meetings, school fundraisers, coffee with the principal, field day events, and holiday lunches in which

parents have lunch with their child in the school cafeteria. While these school-centered activities were thoughtfully put on by school administration, there was minimal space in these activities for teachers to develop relationships with parents through meaningful conversation or interactions. All of the activities provided space for the school and school staff to effectively herd parents into the school for their participation in tightly controlled activities. Across all grade levels, teachers were unable to provide or describe any grade level initiatives or personal extension of themselves towards parents beyond school-centered, campus-based activities.

Three things were clear in the teachers' views of interacting with parents: (1) that parents should come into the school, (2) parents should accept school invitations for school-centered activities, and (3) parents should participate in these activities either during the school day or after school. The responsibility of teacher–parent interaction was placed solely on parents. Even in realizing that parents “are busy, they have things to do, they have little ones,” as Ms. Lopez shared, the unbalanced responsibility placed on parents did not appear to be recognized. That expectations were placed on parents appeared to be the way things were done. I pressed each grade level to identify personal ways that they reached out to parents that went beyond the status quo of traditional family engagement models. The unbalanced nature of parent responsibility and traditional perspectives of parent roles was noted by Cristina, a second-grade teacher: “the ideal parent for me is one that’s comfortable coming to me and ... being open with me about any issue.” Cristina’s comment portrayed the central sentiment supporting the idea that parents should come to school in order to interact with their child’s teacher.

In my pressing teachers to identify personal extensions of themselves (beyond school-directed activities) that helped them develop relationships with parents, many of teachers referenced Ms. Lopez's position as the school's parent liaison and her role and responsibility in reaching out to parents throughout the school year. Anna Maria, a second-grade teacher, explained that "[The parent liaison] is the one mainly that does a lot of activities to involve the parents and grandparents." When teachers were asked to explain her role and responsibilities, many referenced her assistance in contacting parents for a myriad of reasons which included getting school supplies and school uniforms for students whose families could not afford to buy them and translating school documents to be sent home. Perhaps as a deflection of personal responsibility or merely due to her title as Parent Liaison, Ms. Lopez's name was mentioned at every grade level as the go-to person for all things related to outreach for parents and families. It was assumed that the bulk of parent contact and outreach began with her rather than seeing her as a support for teachers in building relationships with parents.

Before any interviews took place, I met with Ms. Lopez at Silverman Elementary School to introduce myself. The day that we met was the school's Thanksgiving day lunch. Families were invited to the school to have lunch with their child or children in the cafeteria. Traditional Thanksgiving food was served to families and students for the holiday luncheon. The cafeteria was completely packed with students and families. When the holiday luncheon was referenced in the interview with Ms. Lopez, she stated:

[At] those events, [parents] get to walk in with their child.... They get to sit with them, ... socialize with whoever's at their table, sometimes it's cousins, aunts,

grandparents, whoever.... We get a good turnout.... I know we'll have a good turnout if [students] get to do something with parents.... We consistently can count on a hundred parents for events where they get to be with their child.

While the belief that parents should bear responsibility for coming to school grounds for activities holds strong in teacher statements, there is something to be said about the concept of building relationships with parents outside of the serious setting of parent–teacher conferences and other seasonal or holiday, school-based activities. Creating opportunities for students, families, and staff to come together throughout the school year could generate a more welcoming and less intimidating setting for parents. In the time between my first and second interview with Ms. Lopez, she shared an epiphany that she had supporting the creation of such opportunities. Her epiphany was based on our first interview conversation regarding consistent parent turnout for parent–child events.

I had a breakthrough when we interviewed last time.... I was mentioning to you that we can consistently bring in a hundred parents for [parent–child] school ... events.... Then why are we fighting it? Why not include the students? ... So then my goal for next year is to have ... cake decorating classes ... guided towards parent and student learning together.... [Parents are] gonna come in and say ‘Oh, this is okay, ... it’s not a scary thing. I felt welcomed.... I’ve met someone who was friendly,’ and ... build on that.... We have a volunteer who bakes ... amazing cakes ... and often brings cakes here for us.... [I will ask if] she’s interested in doing something like that.... It’s a community member showing other community members [how] to do something. So that’s, you know, another good thing.

Ms. Lopez left the second interview excited to share her idea with the school principal, stating, “She’s very supportive [of] my ideas.” Having a school-centered activity that is unrelated to academics but focused purely on engaging and interacting with students and families is a way to start expanding traditional engagement practices. In Ms. Lopez’ idea, she sought to create a positive family-centered, school-based experience in which students and families could learn a new, nonacademic skill together. Moreover, by allowing parents to lead these activities, Ms. Lopez was providing an example of how parents could contribute to the school in ways beyond traditional academic support structures. Additionally, parents learning from parents is a powerful method of creating parents networks, which are critical to increasing parents’ networking capital. These parent networks could help parents find support in parenting, navigating the school and community, and advocating on behalf of their children if needed.

Communication: “It’s just so much easier.” Across all grade levels, teachers acknowledged the importance of communicating with parents. Special attention was paid to consciously communicating positive student experiences rather than just negative student experiences. Positive communication was seen as a way to develop relationships by gaining parent’s comfortability and respect. Admittedly, this idea of positive communication came with teaching experience, as Zoe, a second-grade teacher, stated: “When I started teaching, I feel like the only times I would communicate with parents was when there was something wrong.... I set a goal ... to send at least one positive bit of news every week.” Zoe also shared that acknowledging the need for balance in the types of communication with parents helped her with parent relationships throughout her

career. “[It] makes them more comfortable coming to you,” Zoe added. Using communication as a means to create comfortability between parents and teachers was viewed as important to teachers. However, the bulk of teacher comments related to the challenges of getting in contact with parents.

Teachers discussed the challenges associated with sending home paper notes in student backpacks and the difficulty of making phone calls to parents during the school day. Time constraints that kept teachers from contacting parents in a timely manner and long wait times in getting responses from parents were recurring complaints from teachers. Teacher challenges in contacting parents were even recognized by students, as third-grade teacher Jessica explained:

I think ... the kids don’t really think that teachers and parents communicate.

They still have ... in the back of their mind that a teacher says ‘I’m going to talk to your mom,’ and then maybe [the] teacher didn’t get to mom or you write a note and then the note got lost or misplaced.

Across all grade levels, teachers shared the same sentiment, understanding the importance of communicating with parents but finding it challenging to find effective means to do it. When asked how they overcome these barriers to communicating with parents, the use of technology was referenced at every grade level.

The use of technology, specifically smartphone applications such as Remind and Class Dojo, was mentioned during interviews. Teachers believed that the challenges of communication were offset, in some ways, through the use of smartphone applications. After sharing how even students recognized the challenges for teachers contacting

parents, Jessica stated: “I believe that this technology has really impacted and assisted due to the fact that we’re all immediate.” Many teachers described the applications as easy for parents to use. Under the guise of making it easy for parents to contact teachers, it was obvious that teachers appreciated the benefits of using technology as a means of instant communication with parents. Statements such as “It’s just so much easier. You already know that, once you send that message, it’s an instant notification. So you don’t have to go through the child,” (made by Sarah, a third-grade teacher) reaffirmed the benefits that teachers saw in using smartphone applications. An added bonus, in the eyes of teachers, was the fact that the applications came with a feature allowing teachers to see when parents read a message. As Sarah said, “You know they received it because you ... get notification that it was read.” She went on to reference parents that never returned calls or replied to messages: “It’s the elusive parent.... ‘Yeah, I know you read it.’” These smartphone applications that were initially seen as communication tools thus evolved into electronic monitors that gave teachers a way to verify that messages were seen.

Veronica, a third-grade teacher, framed this type of monitoring as a means of documenting that parents were provided with information. She stated that knowing if messages had been read was “to back us ...[proving] that we are letting them know...” The idea of documenting when parents were given certain information bloomed into documentation of behavior issues during the school day as well. Victoria, a first-grade teacher, found the application helpful in the area of documenting behavior. She stated, “It’s our documentation ... if we’re having any issues [with] behavior and ... it’s printable, and it shows everything. There’s no hidden secrets and everything is there.”

Even with the ability to see when messages are read, parent responsiveness did not increase. In fact, the application's feature of allowing teachers to see when a message was read created a new level of teacher frustration, knowing the message was read but still not responded to. Stacy, a second-grade teacher, voiced her frustration on that point:

I message parents, you know, 'Your child is missing this.' ... you can see on this app ... that they read it but they don't respond. So ... I'll send another one. And, again, it's read but no response.... Even a phone call ... you don't get a response [to].... I mean, there's only so much [you can do].

Thus, while use of the smartphone applications provided a new way to reach parents instantly and a way to document the information provided to parents, it did not solve all of the challenges in communicating. Perhaps, in the situation that Stacy described, the parent felt criticized by the message referencing the student missing an assignment and decided it was better not to respond, especially after receiving another message and then a phone call. This type of repeated contact to a seemingly unresponsive parent could create distance or friction in a developing partnership; no one wants to be harassed.

Accessibility: "It's very important to be open and transparent." While technology was seen by teachers as a convenient tool for communicating with parents, the use of technology was also seen as a way for teachers to make themselves more accessible to parents. Through the use of smartphone applications, teachers felt more accessible to parents. They also felt better equipped to easily contact parents and to be contacted by parents throughout the school day. This type of application-based communication was seen as a time saver as it did not require teachers to schedule a

meeting in order to discuss day-to-day classroom topics, including student behavior, schoolwork, and academic progress as well as parent assistance with homework. First-grade teacher Sandra attested her affection for using technology as a way to make her accessible to parents anytime. She shared:

I love it because any of the parents can text me at any time during the day and ask me questions. I can communicate with them, like, if there is something happening the next day ... and I think the parents are really liking that because they can just ask me a question whenever they want.

Sandra's sentiment was echoed by many teachers. The concept of instant contact throughout the day constituted accessibility in the views of the teachers. However, while sending quick messages through a smartphone application can be alluring and has its place in the day-to-day teacher duties, contact and communication are not synonymous. While being available for contact throughout the school day is an important component of accessibility, there needs to be space for teachers to expand their contact with parents into true dialogue. This dialogue cannot be solely centered around student behavior, schoolwork, academic progress, or homework completion. Being available for parents to contact at any time it is not a complete picture of accessibility. There should be space for compassion and visibility in teacher accessibility that sheds light on teachers' humanity. When I discussed this expanded idea of accessibility with teachers, a new awareness of their experiences with parents arose in the interviews. Teachers shared that many of their students are shocked to see them outside of school doing things in the community such as grocery shopping. Comments such as "We have lives too!" and "We don't live at

school!” were comically interjected to explain their thoughts on seeing the shocked face of a student outside of school. Furthering this idea, Marie, a kindergarten teacher, shared: “I think that parents ... who are ... emotionally upset about something ... appreciate if they do get a response at 8:00 in the evening.... I think that helps build that relationship...” Valerie extended Marie’s expanded idea of accessibility, saying: “Everyone has something going on.... When something happens in my life that [is] tragic, I need my parents to know.... I think it’s very important to be open and transparent.” Marie and Valerie’s sentiments were shared by other teachers as well. Teacher comments spoke to the humanistic side that was missing in their general idea of accessibility. The idea that students are shocked to know that teachers move about the community in the same ways as students and their families do reinforces the institutionalized positionality of teachers as one-dimensional beings. While teachers continued giving examples of using smartphone applications to show compassion and awareness to parents, their ideas about what accessibility consists of and the importance of visibility in the community were expanded through our discussions.

Teachers also believed that making their classrooms accessible to parents made them feel connected to the classroom. Through the use of the smartphone applications, teachers discussed sharing videos and pictures of day-to-day tasks with parents. An example of this was Sarah’s account of how she uses the Class Dojo application “almost daily.... [It’s] where we post pictures and our classroom stories of different things that we’ve been doing ... like weekly celebrations that we have.” Creating a way to bring

parents into the classroom was seen as a way to make parents feel more connected and welcomed. As Farah shared,

I think that [in] good communication ... with the parent ... you're always communicating with them and letting them know how their child is doing and through the applications ... I think that makes them comfortable enough to say 'Okay, yeah, I want to be part of this,' and be involved in [their] child's education.

Thus, virtually opening the door to the classroom by sharing pictures and videos with parents during the school day was seen as a useful tool in bringing parents into daily activities. Understanding that relationship development must include two-way communication between school and home, I asked the teachers if parents were encouraged to share videos and pictures with teachers of their child at home doing various family activities. No teachers acknowledged offering this option to parents. However, as I suggested offering parents the option of sharing pictures or videos of their children, teacher comments and body language indicated an openness to this idea.

My terms. My turf: "There is a security in the setting of the classroom."

Throughout the interviews, the teachers spoke of traditional approaches to developing partnerships with parents. One of the most resounding ideas attached to their approaches centered around maintaining the status quo that school is school and home is home. Teacher comments expressed a sense of comfortability in knowing that all school-related topics or issues were to be addressed on school grounds. If parents wanted to address topics with the school, the teachers' (and the school's) expectation was that parents come

to the school to do so. While teachers expressed views that upheld the separation of school and home, they expressed a sense of wanting to establish comfort and trust with parents, allowing parents to feel comfortable sharing personal matters that might impact student learning. In discussing how teachers establish this comfort and trust with parents, teachers shared how some parents are hesitant to share personal information regarding home life. Laura, a third-grade teacher, stated: “We’re just trying to assist.... We’re not trying to judge their lifestyle.... We all have challenges.... We just want to make things better or shed some light on something and ... understand what ... the dynamic [is] at home.” Laura’s statement revealed a sympathetic understanding that everyone has “challenges” and that teachers do want to know about the home life of their students, especially when it impacts student learning. Despite wanting to know about the home dynamics of their students, the mere mention of home visits created a grumble in the interview room with each grade level. Immediately after being asked about home visits, Jessica, a third-grade teacher, shook her head and stated, “We don’t do that.” Her body language—arms crossed, voice firm—did not suggest any openness to the idea. The teachers’ reaction to the idea of home visits reinforced the idea that teachers viewed school as school and home as home. If parents want teachers to know about home life, parents are expected to come to the teachers in order to share this information.

Teachers that rejected the idea of home visits cited safety concerns, time constraints, fear of overstepping boundaries, and concerns about giving the perception to parents that teachers were checking in on them. Marie, a kindergarten teacher, stated:

I feel like maybe for some parents it would be like, ... 'Why are you at my house?... You're invading my personal space.'... For others, I don't know, maybe they would welcome it ... but I don't know about time.... We're always short on time. There's not enough time in the day to complete everything we need to do.

Amy, a third-grade teacher, explained how personal boundaries could be stepped on. She stated:

I feel the same way as [Marie] does. We do feel like you're overstepping that boundary. You've got to be careful about that because you want to try to create that trust with that parent and ... if they see you [at their home] they're like, ... 'What's going on?'

Second grade teacher and military wife, Sarah, had experience conducting home visits as a requirement at another school in a different state. She voiced concerns about safety:

I would feel much less comfortable in ... public school traveling to a house [where] I had no idea what the home environment was like. Not that I knew what the home environment was like in the military community but you have a safety net of knowing it was a military community, they are a military family and so there are certain things [that] are guaranteed in that.

Sarah furthered her reasons for not supporting home visits by citing a lack of authenticity from the family due to the teacher's presence in a child's home: "They probably feel like they have to put up some sort of ... front almost.... I just feel like it would be a little discomfoting." As Sarah did not have personal experience with home visits in the Borderland, her discomfort perhaps was rooted in her own fears or perceptions, reflecting

her personal discomfort with the idea of home visits rather than parent discomfort at having a teacher in their home. Alternatively, perhaps her views were created from thoughts of her child's teacher coming to her home and what that would feel like to her.

Across all grade levels, there was only one teacher who spoke positively about home visits. Rebecca, a first-grade teacher, previously worked at a different school that required home visits for their students. She shared that home visits were a very powerful way to get to know families and become more connected to them. She went on to describe her experience with home visits:

Well, in the past I used to teach at a school where we had a new principal and he started ... home visits. So at the beginning all the teachers like, 'Yeah, I don't want to do it,' but I think it was very nurturing to see to go to older kids. Most of the kids lived in the apartment complex. So we were in the middle of the apartment complex just sitting down and playing with the kids and talking to the parents. And for me it was eye opening because I could see ... the reality that we [teachers] lived in had nothing to do with what they were living in. Some of the kids were by themselves at their apartments ... most of the parents were working and they were inviting us to their apartments.... It was a little sad to see that one of my students ... didn't have a bed.... They have only one bedroom. So sometimes they sleep on the floor and the parents sleep in the bedroom and then they switch. So with reality like this, you cannot see [it at] a school ... but after you go to a home visit, then you can see.... So after that I could see I was more flexible with the kids and I could see, well this one is sleeping in my classroom

because he didn't sleep, he slept on the floor last night. So things like that that you can see whenever you go to these places and you get to meet the parents, meet the kids, and see how exactly they live. And I'm up to that ... We had to go every month and even the last time I took my kids with me.... I mean, it was different. The reality was different but it was very nice too. They were super nice and they were happy to see [us]. They were expecting us every time.

Without the home visits, perhaps Rebecca would have labeled her sleepy student as unmotivated without considering how his home life could be impacting his ability to learn. Conversely, without the home visits, perhaps Rebecca would have passed judgement on the sleepy student's parents for not ensuring that he was getting adequate rest at home. A myriad of negative interpretations could have been possible without the principal of Rebecca's school requiring monthly home visits. After Rebecca shared her positive experience with home visits, the realizations that she came away with, and how it reshaped her view of students in her classroom, the body language of the first-grade group relaxed a little with head nods and facial expressions that indicated a subtle sense of shock. Rebecca's testament to the positive implications of her home visits shows that breaking the status quo of separation between home and school can be an impactful and eye-opening experience for teachers.

Summary

The positive influence of shared language, culture and ethnicity in developing partnerships with families was clear throughout teacher interviews. The closely matched teacher-parent demographics at Silverman Elementary created an opportunity for deeper

levels of connectedness between teachers and families. Similarities in diverse backgrounds of families and teachers opened up possibilities for teachers to view families in a personal and familiar way, making the relationship more approachable and meaningful. Unfortunately, these positive benefits did not prompt teachers to think outside the box and go beyond the status quo in developing relationships with parents. Practices reinforcing boundaries between home and school and one-way communication with parents through heavy reliance on technology aligned with deeply engrained traditional approaches to family engagement.

Many of the teachers shared that the interviews opened their eyes to the richness and uniqueness of their connections to their community as it related to developing relationships with families. Three teachers shared planned changes to the way they would communicate and interact with parents going forward as a result of the discussions in the interviews. This leaves hope for positive changes going forward. It only takes one teacher to make a change that causes a ripple effect in the thoughts, approaches, and actions of other teachers.

Chapter Four identified the findings of the data analysis process. Chapter Five will provide a discussion of these findings as well as implications for future research.

Chapter Five

In Chapter Four, I identified the findings garnered from the data analysis process. In Chapter Five, I will discuss the findings as well as their implications for teaching practice and future research. The purpose of this research study was to explore the views and approaches of teachers in their roles as partners in parent–teacher relationships. Additionally, this study aimed to understand how shared language and culture between teachers and parents shaped these relationships. As stated in previous chapters, there is a rising population of students and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in US public schools. Despite this increase in diverse students and families, teacher demographics have remained mostly white. In Chapter Two, I highlighted the research supporting the positive impact that shared backgrounds between teachers, students, and families can have on student outcomes and parent–student–teacher relationships. Despite the depth of literature documenting the importance of these positive impacts, there was little literature on how shared identities between teachers and parents shaped relationship development in diverse populations. As such, this research study served as a contribution to this gap in the literature.

Implications for Practice

In this section, I will identify three implications for practice by schools and teachers associated with this study. First, teachers should be provided with opportunities

to dissect the makeup of their identities in order to explore biases in their approach to meaningfully connecting with parents of students in their classrooms. Second, schools and districts should recruit teachers that share the language and culture of the schools' dominant population. Third, teachers and schools should cultivate new ways of interacting and building relationships with families that go beyond traditional tools of engagement. The following sections will discuss each of these implications as it relates to existing literature and the findings of the present study.

Exploring teacher bias and identity. Teachers and parents bring their perspectives and experiences with them when developing meaningful partnerships. These perspectives can impact their interactions, relationships, and collaborations in ways that may influence a child's learning. Studies show that teacher perceptions of parents and parents' roles can affect the level of family engagement in their child's education both at school and at home (Anfara & Brown, 2003; Smerekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Turney & Koa, 2009). The history, culture, and practices within school communities can shape teacher attitudes, beliefs, and actions about parent roles and responsibilities (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). These factors play a critical role in parent-teacher relationships and can facilitate or deter parents from engaging in their child's learning. However, identities and biases can become so ingrained that teachers fail to realize how they impact their views of and interactions with parents. Therefore, teachers need opportunities to explore the layers of their identities in order to uncover biases that they may hold towards certain groups of parents or families. These introspective opportunities are not provided in typical faculty meetings, professional learning communities, or continuing education

courses. In my interviews, many teachers saw the benefits of looking inward and expressed a desire for more of this type of exploration in the future.

Teacher bias. The findings of this study uncovered the negative impact that conscious and subconscious biases have on teachers' views of certain groups of parents and families. The conscious biases identified in this study were towards young parents and families dealing with child protective services. The subconscious biases identified in the study were rooted in privilege as well as linguistic and cultural capital related to openness in language exploration and language learning. Giving space for teachers to uncover and acknowledge these biases is important in helping them understand the nexus of their perspectives. Gaining this understanding could lead them to right the wrongs of their ingrained ideals and judgmental attitudes toward certain parents or families. The space for teachers to explore these topics should consist of small group work sessions (divided by grade level) that are guided by a professional with experience in the areas of intersectionality, family engagement, and multicultural/multilingual education. These work sessions cannot be a "one and done" operation. Gaining teacher trust in the bias exploration process cannot be achieved in one meeting. Multiple meetings throughout the semester or school year would allow sufficient time for teachers to become vested in the importance of un-layering their identities and uncovering their biases in a safe space. This "long game" approach would be beneficial for teachers and ultimately their students and students' families.

Teacher Identity. The first component of Halgunseth et al.'s (2009) family engagement model was cultural sensitivity. The idea of cultural sensitivity was

embedded in the interviewed teachers' stories about the language and culture of their families. The uniqueness of the Borderland, having generations of families who were born, raised, educated, and employed in the city, created generations of teachers that could relate to families on topics of second language acquisition, immigration, and US citizenship. The similarities in culture, language, and personal experiences between families and teachers created an empathetic relationship that afforded teachers more opportunities to create meaningful connections with parents. The level of personal empathy that most of the teachers shared with parents of students in their classes was significant. Their empathy created open-mindedness towards diversity, which translated into teachers' respect and appreciation for the diversity among their students' families. This respect and appreciation is the pipeline to establishing trust with parents, a key component in relationship building. Creating and developing trust requires vulnerability from students, families, and teachers. Emotions and emotional work are intimately and predominantly present within the vulnerability of establishing strong, trusting relationships. Teachers who have the trust of their students or student's families can create comforting and productive learning environments in which students can grow and flourish.

Recruitment of teachers that reflect student population. Schools with culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse teachers can provide the necessary support structures for students and families with similar backgrounds. This support comes from schools developing informal networks and generating rich cultural resources that teachers of color can easily tap into in order to effectively meet the needs of students

of color (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Hernandez-Sheets, 2001; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Kelly, 2007; Mabokela & Madsen, 2007). Teachers of color develop more trusting relationships with students, particularly those with whom they share a cultural background (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). In the context of this study, by employing teachers that shared the dominant language, culture, and experiences of the student and family population at Silverman Elementary, the school provided opportunities for parents and teachers to connect on a personal level. The personal connections that teachers shared with families in this study generated unparalleled relatability that was shown to create positive student learning experiences, a welcoming school environment, and a sense of validation, trust, and respect in the views of teachers.

Going beyond traditional family engagement practices. Schools educating students from low socioeconomic and/or culturally diverse backgrounds have an even greater responsibility to develop meaningful relationships with families. Prevalent topics associated with traditional views of family engagement in this study included parents attending school-centered activities, parent visibility at school, and parent-teacher communication. I argue, however, that we cannot attach parent success or failure to the overt actions associated with traditional family engagement models because these ideals discount contributions of families that do not fit a Eurocentric cultural standard. Critical components in relationship building practices that were missing in the findings of this study were opportunities for two-way communication, interactions with the community and shared decision making. These components were also identified by Halgunseth et al.

(2009) as integral resources that schools can provide to families in order to build strong relationships. These three areas will be discussed in the following sections.

Two-way communication. Challenges to building relationships with parents centered mostly around communication and access to parents. This challenge was offset, in some ways, by the use of technology. A commonality surrounding the topic of technology was the ease and effectiveness with which teachers could communicate with parents and vice versa. However, use of this technology appeared one-sided; most of the communication was initiated by teachers. This lack of communicative reciprocity begs the question of whether teachers and parents viewed the smartphone applications as merely a digital bulletin board that provided reminders, classroom updates, and snapshots of student work. Establishing sustainable and meaningful relationships can be difficult to achieve through one-sided communications where the goal is ultimately to impart information to parents rather than extending opportunities for teachers to learn more about the experiences of their students' parents. Encouraging parents to share aspects of the student's home life through the use of technology could generate improvements in two-way communication between parents and teachers.

Interactions with the community. The nature of home-school relationships becomes critical (especially in culturally and economically diverse communities) when parents report feeling shut out of school events and marginalized by the school and district leadership (Johnson, 2007). Incorporating community-focused activities into school agendas is important in creating family-school-community partnerships. Knowing that parents are likely to become involved in their child's education in ways

they feel competent to do indicates the importance of schools helping families create parent networks (as discussed in Chapter Two). During interviews for this research study, Ms. Lopez (the school's parent liaison), was inspired to create opportunities for parents to lead other parents in non-academic activities at school. Through the literature, we know that among working-class families, parent contributions to school can look different than traditional contributions of white, middle-class families. This should be reflected in the ways that schools decide to become partners in the community.

Shared decision making. Parents approach schools with different perspectives about how best to help their children in school and with different assessments of their power relative to that of the school. The inequities of parental engagement can be traced to issues of social class, race, and culture (Wiggan, 2007). These issues continue to be strong predictors of family engagement (Lareau & Shumar, 1996). Furthermore, these issues can impact practices, processes, and actions, resulting in inauthentic parent participation. In order to become more equitable and authentic, schools must eliminate barriers and reduce challenges to meaningful engagement so that all parents have a chance to participate in ways that result in educational success for their child.

The apparent stress of tracking down parents to confirm their attendance and continuously reminding them about upcoming conferences begs the question: does parent attendance equate to parent investment? If the purpose of the parent-teacher conferences is to inform parents of their child's grades, a report card can do that. If the purpose of the conference is to deliver test scores, the post office or school website can do that. If the purpose of the conferences is to reiterate the importance of completing homework, a note

in an agenda can do that. Kao and Rutherford's (2007) findings suggested that parents of minority and immigrant children could increase the academic success of their children through interactions with other parents during school events and activities.

Implications for Future Research

The review of literature related to family engagement practices and teacher–parent–school partnerships showed overwhelming evidence supporting the positive impact of these relationships within diverse populations. While there was a plethora of research noting the positive influences of shared identities between teachers and students on student achievement, there was minimal literature on how shared identities between teachers and parents shaped relationship development in diverse populations. Based on the findings, the implications for research lie heavily in three areas: (1) identifying ways in which teachers and schools can create meaningful, community-focused activities that spark authentic interest from parents, and (2) use of intersectionality tools to understand how multi-layered identities influence the decisions teachers make in approaching and developing relationships with families.

Community-focused activities. The findings from this study revealed a heavy focus on school-centered activities in present school practices, which relied on parent attendance. Relying on parents to attend these activities during or after school hours, created an imbalance, placing responsibility on parents to make themselves available to attend. Using parent attendance as a measuring stick of parent investment in their child's education is unfair to working-class families. Future research exploring how parents manage these unfair school expectations would be beneficial to schools and teachers.

There is literature supporting the positive impact that home visits can have on relationship development between teachers and parents (Cassity & Harris, 2000; Lopez et al., 2001; Ramirez, 2003; Walker et al., 2011). However, despite the literature on home visits, most teachers in this study did not support home visits, citing concerns for personal security and time constraints. Future research looking at the ways parents believe schools can become better community partners would be beneficial to school and families.

Influences of intersectionality on decision making Through use of my revised matrix, based on Collins' (2000) Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression, teachers were able to unfold the layers of their identity in a new and innovative way. The methodological implications of my research findings is critical to future work in this area. The findings speak to the importance of using interactive tools that guide participants to become self-aware which promotes self-evaluation for teachers. Understanding how teachers come to know what they know and how that knowledge influences the way they navigate the world is important in understanding what shapes the decisions teachers make. My findings suggested that future research in this area, structured as work sessions conducted over time, could be beneficial in helping teachers become aware of how their multi-layered identities impact three areas: the way teachers see the world; the way teachers approach relationships with families; and the way teachers interact with families. This awareness would guide teachers toward uncovering the origin of their biases, privilege, and capital, which impact all interactions with families. Teachers in my study shared how discussions about intersectionality helped them look at the layers of their identities in a deeper way. Teachers were honest in

sharing how events in their personal lives created negative views of certain parent groups. Creating this awareness in teachers could help them make conscious decisions about their interactions with families going forward. Additionally, research focused on how shared culture, language, and personal experience can enhance parent–teacher interactions from the perspective of teachers and parents would be beneficial to the research field as well.

Generalizability

Qualitative research is often criticized for its lack of generalizability. Conversely, quantitative research is criticized for being too general (Stake, 2006). In this qualitative study, I studied a specific group of teachers to explore teacher–parent partnerships. Maxwell (2013) suggests that generalization can be separated into two parts: internal and external. Internal generalizability focuses on being able to generalize the findings within a specific group. External generalizability refers to the generalizability of findings beyond the specific study. In light of these distinctions, internal generalizability may be possible for the findings of this study. In understanding the limitations of the study’s generalizability, I did not focus on generalization but rather on developing adequate description, interpretation, and explanation of the research problem (Maxwell, 2013). For these reasons, I can confidently say that the study’s findings are generalizable to the teachers in the study, but not beyond this group.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study was that I was an outsider. By being an outsider, I had limited time to establish relationships with the teachers. Having too little rapport could allow teachers to be engaged intellectually without revealing any deeply personal

information. However, Seidman (1998) made the point that the kind of rapport established between the researcher and subject is just as important as the amount of rapport. The second limitation of this study was its sample size. While the research design of a small qualitative study provided an opportunity to learn details about each teacher, the small sample size places limits on the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, the sample size and the environment from which the sample was selected can be viewed as possible limitations in this study. The third limitation of this study was derived from the design of the research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). By interviewing teachers in a focus group setting, some teachers may have been reluctant to share information which could potentially be viewed as negative towards themselves or other teachers in the group. The fourth limitation of the study was self-reporting. The topics addressed required teachers to reflect on actions and inactions that may cast a negative self-image as it related to the development of the teacher–family relationship. The fifth and final limitation of this study was my bias, created by many years working with teachers and families as a speech therapist. Over time, I developed personal opinions, shaped by various experiences that impacted how the data were interpreted. I attempted to ensure that my personal biases did not influence the data analysis through multiple rounds of coding, use of a coding partner, and discussions with committee members.

Conclusion

It was noted early on that most teachers categorized the term “family engagement” as activities initiated or directed by the school or district, which aligned

with the Head Start (2013) working definition family involvement principles as outlined in chapter one. This definition differentiated involvement from engagement in that involvement referred to parent participation in the systems and activities of a classroom or school in ways that support teachers; whereas engagement was defined as ongoing, goal-directed relationships between teachers and families that are mutual, culturally responsive, and that support what is best for children and families both individually and collectively (Head Start, 2013). With the varying levels of relatability between teachers and families through shared culture, language and personal experiences, teachers reverted to traditional methods of interacting with parents. Missing in all of the data was the reason why teachers reverted to traditional methods despite the varying levels of relatability.

While conducting this study I learned how to navigate a school system as an outsider; something that was new to me. I learned that teachers can operate with a fish bowl mentality. As this relates to this study, teachers were so immersed in their community that they became unaware of the uniqueness of their setting. From the literature, I learned that the disparity between student-family demographics and teacher demographics is growing. Silverman Elementary was a very unique school in that many teachers were born, raised and educated in the community in which they were now employed. The positive impact of shared culture, language and personal experiences on teacher-parent relationships was seen at very deep and personal levels in the teachers' stories. At the start of this study, I felt that being an outsider to the community and school system would negatively effect the quality of my results. However, being an

outsider proved to be an asset that allowed me to see what most of the teachers took for granted, namely the special bness of their school's inherent connection to the community. Being able to shed light on this with teachers through this research study was very meaningful for me.

In preparing for this research study, I did not anticipate the impact that participating in this study would have on the teachers and parent liaison. Participants shared personal ways in which working through my revised version of the Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression helped them see themselves and their experiences in a new light. This unexpected occurrence resulted in a positive impact of this research. It will play a significant role, I feel, in contributing to the literature on teacher identity, bias, and teacher-parent relatability. In the grand scale of this study, there needs to be concerted efforts by schools and school districts to implement important changes in their family engagement practices. A challenge facing many schools, as I saw in my professional experience, is how to establish and develop meaningful parent-teacher relationships that foster collaboration, reciprocity, and trust. In order to overcome this challenge, schools need to recruit teachers from backgrounds that closely match that of the growing diversity of student-family populations in schools. Statistics show growing diversity of the student population in US public schools and research clearly shows the impact of shared culture and language on student-teacher relationships and parent efficacy in navigating their child's education. In knowing the aforementioned statistics and the research, schools are now obligated to meet the needs of the student-family population. Gone are the days that schools can draw a line in the sand separating school

from home. Doing so would be intentionally turning a blind eye to the importance of school-family relationships. Schools are also called to understand the demographics of their student-family population and go beyond school-centered activities to support the needs of working-class parents as it relates to family engagement. The imbalance of responsibility placed on parents to come into schools in order to be seen as “invested” in their child’s education is unfair and unacceptable. No longer can schools restrict parents’ contribution to meeting the school’s needs without schools contributing to families and communities in meaningful ways. Schools must create safe spaces for parents to express their views and needs, both individually and collectively. Schools need to facilitate the creation of parent networks so that parents can establish networking capital that research has shown as instrumental in improving parent advocacy. These changes can happen when schools acknowledge their shortfalls, in these areas, and show thoughtful signs of willingness to build relationships with families and communities. The results of the present study serve as notice to schools that the time for change has arrived and the status quo will no longer be accepted.

Appendix A

Stamped IRB Approval



Office of Research Development, Integrity, and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D6, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: March 6, 2019
TO: Marjorie Haley
FROM: George Mason University IRB
Project Title: [1396001-1] Family Engagement in the Borderland
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: March 6, 2019
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The George Mason University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form unless the IRB has waived the requirement for a signature on the consent form or has waived the requirement for a consent process. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the IRB office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed (if applicable).

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This study does not have an expiration date but you will receive an annual reminder regarding future requirements.

Appendix B

Introduction Email for Teachers

Good morning,

My name is Tiffany Williams. I am a PhD candidate conducting research about family engagement. My research is centered on the perspectives and experiences of kindergarten through third grade teachers as it relates to the success and challenges of creating solid family-teacher-school partnerships.

Group interviews and completion of a brief questionnaire will be required as part of this research study. Your estimated time commitment will be approximately 2 hours. Your participation in this research study will give insight into the value of partnerships between schools and families. All research material will be kept confidential and stored in a secure location.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please reply to this email at xxxxxx@xxxxx.com. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at XXX.XXX.XXXX.

Thank you,

Tiffany Williams

PhD Candidate, George Mason University

xxxxxx@xxxxx.com

Appendix C

Introduction Email for Parent Liaison

Good morning,

My name is Tiffany Williams. I am a PhD candidate conducting research about family engagement. My research is centered on the perspectives and experiences of kindergarten through third grade teachers as it relates to the success and challenges of creating solid family-teacher-school partnerships.

One-on-one interviews will be required as part of this research study. Your estimated time commitment will be approximately 1-2 hours. Your participation in this research study will give insight into the value of partnerships between schools and families. All research material will be kept confidential and stored in a secure location.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please reply to this email at XXXXXXX@XXXXX.com. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at XXX.XXX.XXXX.

Thank you,

Tiffany Williams

PhD Candidate, George Mason University

XXXXXXXX@XXXXX.com

XXX.XXX.XXXX

Appendix D

Informed consent form for the Parent Liaison

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to understand the perceptions and experiences of teachers and school staff in area of family engagement. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in one, one-on-one interview with the researcher. The total time commitment for participating in this research study is estimated to be 1-2 hour.

RISKS

There are no expected risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than for further research into family engagement and family-school partnerships.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. Your name will not be included on surveys or other collected data. Pseudonyms will be used on the demographic inventory and in other collected data. Only the researcher and principal investigator will have access to the identification key.

Audio recordings will be used during interviews to record participant responses to interview questions. Audio recordings will be transcribed for the purpose of data analysis.

Audio files will be stored in password-protected accounts on a password protected laptop which will be in constant possession of the researcher. All data will be destroyed after data analysis has been completed, but not before five years, following the conclusion of the study ending.

Identifiers may be removed from the data and the de-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants.

There is one exception to confidentiality. It is our legal responsibility to report situations of suspected child abuse or neglect to appropriate authorities. Although we are not seeking this type of information in this study, nor will you be asked questions about these issues, we will disclose them as required under the law if discovered.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

Your decision to participate in the research study, or not to participate, will have no effect on your standing in the school. No research data will be shared with the school. Inclusion criteria for on-on-one interviews include school staff who: (a) agree to participated in two, one-on-one interviews; (b) voluntary completion of demographic questionnaire; (c) be at least 18 years of age; (d) currently hold position as principal.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Tiffany Williams and Dr. Marjorie Haley. Tiffany Williams is the researcher for this study. Tiffany lives in Borderland, TX. She can be reached at XXX.XXX.XXXX for questions or to report a research-related problem. Dr. Haley is the principal investigator and a professor in the Department of Multilingual/Multicultural Education at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. She may be reached at (703) 993-8710 for questions or to report a research-related problem.

You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703.993.4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research. This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

Print Name

Signature

Date of Signature

Appendix E

Informed consent form for Teachers

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to understand the perceptions and experiences of teachers in area of family engagement. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire and participate in two focus group interviews with the researcher. The total time commitment for participating in this research study is estimated to be 2 hours. Audio recordings of all interviews are required.

RISKS

There are no expected risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than for further research into family engagement and family-school partnerships.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. Your name will not be included on surveys or other collected data. Pseudonyms will be used on the demographic inventory and in other collected data. Only the researcher and principal investigator will have access to the identification key.

Audio recordings will be required during interviews to record participant responses to interview questions. Audio recordings will be transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. Audio files will be stored in password-protected accounts on a password protected laptop which will be in constant possession of the researcher. All data will be destroyed, through deletion from password-protected laptop, after data analysis has been completed, but not before five years, following the conclusion of the study ending.

Identifiers may be removed from the data and the de-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants. Although focus group participants will be asked to keep the contents of the discussion confidential, due to the nature of a focus group, the researcher cannot control what participants may say outside of the research setting.

There is one exception to confidentiality. It is our legal responsibility to report situations of suspected child abuse or neglect to appropriate authorities. Although we are not seeking this type of information in this study, nor will you be asked questions about these issues, we will disclose them as required under the law if discovered.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

Your decision to participate in the research study, or not to participate, will have no effect on your standing in the school. No research data will be shared with the school. Inclusion

criteria for targeted population include teachers who: (a) agree to participate in two focus group interviews; (b) voluntary completion of demographic questionnaire; (c) be at least 18 years of age.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Tiffany Williams and Dr. Marjorie Haley. Tiffany Williams is the researcher for this study. Tiffany lives in Borderland, TX. She can be reached at 678.571.7922 for questions or to report a research-related problem. Dr. Haley is the principal investigator and a professor in the Department of Multilingual/Multicultural Education at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. She may be reached at (703) 993-8710 for questions or to report a research-related problem.

You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703.993.4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research. This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

Print Name

Signature

Date of Signature

Appendix F

Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete this form and return on the first day of interviews. If have any questions or concerns about this form, please contact Tiffany Williams at XXX.XXX.XXXX.

Biographical Information:

1. Gender: _____
2. Date of Birth: _____
3. Ethnicity/Race: _____
4. Language(s) spoken at home: _____
5. Language(s) spoken at school: _____
6. Country of Origin (*Country where you born & raised until around age 13*):

Educational Information:

1. What grade do you currently teach (circle one): K 1st 2nd 3rd
2. What is the highest degree completed:

Less than high school	High School	Associates (2-year degree)
Bachelors (4-year degree)	Masters	Doctorate

3. If you attended any amount of college, what was your major and minor areas of study:

a. **Major** _____

b. **Minor** _____

4. List all grade level(s) have you taught in the past. Circle the grade level that you taught the longest: _____

5. How long have you been teaching (number of years and months): _____

6. How long have you taught at Silverman Elementary (number of years and months):

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions

Area of Focus: Perception of parent roles in family engagement

1. What actions would your “ideal” parent take to show investment in their child’s education?
2. How do parents communicate with questions/concerns re: their child’s classwork and/or grades?
3. What types of activities do you expect for student’s parents to do with them at home to support their child’s education?
4. What challenges restrict parents from being more active in their child’s education?
5. What is the general sense of parent support, communication and effort in your grade level to be an integral part of their child’s education?

Area of Focus: Teacher roles in establishing family-school partnerships

1. What are some challenges you’ve had in working with your students’ families?
2. What do you feel is your role in creating partnerships with parents?
3. How does Silverman ES support, encourage or restrict teachers in developing meaningful relationships with parents?

Area of Focus: School’s role in actively engaging parents

1. How have school expectations for family-school collaboration changed during your career or time at Silverman Elementary?
2. In what ways does Silverman Elementary help parents become more active in their child's education?
 - a. In what ways could Silverman ES improve in this area?
3. How does Silverman ES do to improve parent-school relationships?

Areas of Focus: Benefit/Challenge of shared language/culture between teachers and parents

1. What are the benefits to speaking the same language as the parents of your students?
2. How does sharing similar cultural norms impact your relationship with parents?
3. How does being situated on the boarder of Texas and Mexico impact parent trust in teachers and the school?

Appendix H

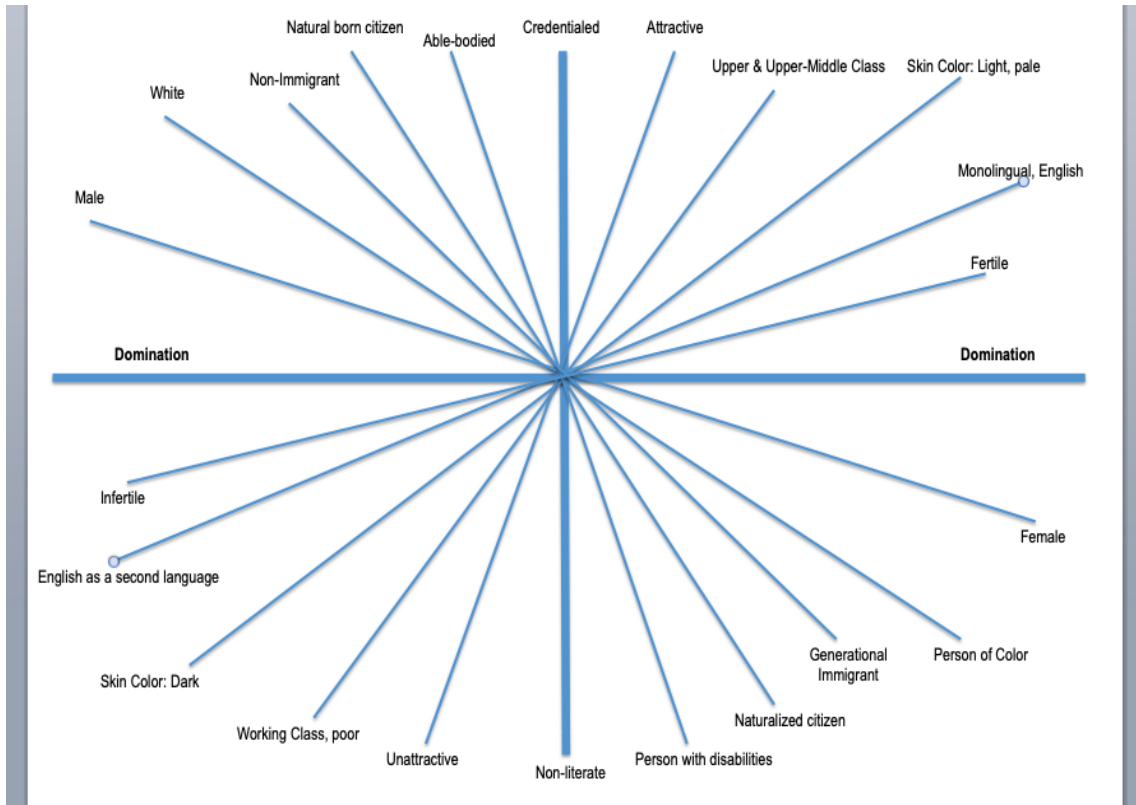
Parent Liaison Interview Questions

1. What are your roles and responsibilities of Parent Liaison here at Silverman Elementary?
2. Tell me about how you see families engaged in activities at Silverman Elementary?
3. In the research field, there are overlapping themes associated with family engagement versus family involvement? What differences do you see in these terms?
4. What activities does Silverman Elementary offer in an attempt to get parents involved in their child's day-to-day school activities?
 - a. How do these activities encourage families to become engaged in meaningful relationships with teachers and the school?
5. Does Silverman Elementary offer before/after school activities that require parent participation?
6. What is the process for parents to volunteer at the school or in their child's classroom?
7. What is your professional background?
 - a. What other jobs/careers have you held before taking this position?
8. How long have you worked at Silverman Elementary as Parent Liaison?
9. What are the most rewarding parts of your job?

10. What are the most challenging parts of your job?
11. What additional activities or initiatives do you think would be helpful in encouraging more parents to volunteer or participate more in school functions or activities?
12. How are parents made aware of your role and the purpose/availability of parent volunteer office?
13. When parents volunteer in this office, their child's classroom or in the school, how are they encouraged to return again?
14. If you had 20+ parents show up to volunteer on a regular school day (i.e., no special school activity), in what capacity would you use them?
15. What incentives, if any, are parents given when they volunteer?
 - a. School volunteer recognition assembly?
 - b. Volunteer breakfast/lunch?
16. How do you see race and ethnicity as playing a part in the development of parent-teacher relationships?

Appendix I

Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression



Revised Intersecting of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression (Collins, 2000)

Appendix J

Open Codes and Definitions

Barriers: obstacles that teachers felt prevented them from establishing relationships with parents

Comfortability: the conscious intent or perception of teachers to establish comfort in parent relationships

Home-school linkage: any teacher-made connection to bridge home and school together

Parental Involvement: school activities teachers mentioned that align with parent volunteering in school

Outreach: (community) activities conducted within or outside of the school that are purpose to impact the entire community; (familial) activities conducted within or outside of the school targeting specific families

Parent generalizations: subjective statements made by teachers that place labels on groupings of parents

Parent training: school led trainings for parents purposed to impart knowledge

Challenges: events that teachers felt made establishing relationships with parents more difficult

Successes: events that teachers felt made establishing relationships with parents easy or easier

Personal/Professional Adjustments: changes that teachers have made either in their personal or professional lives that facilitate relational development with parents

Realizations: teacher “ah ha” moments where new thoughts were realized

Culture: discussion related to cultural similarities between teachers and parents

Demographics: discussion related to similarities in race/ethnicity between teachers and parents

Social class: discussion related to similarities in socioeconomic similarities between teachers and parents

Language: discussion related to similarities in primary or secondary language(s) between teachers and parents

Personal experiences: discussion related to similarities in internal or external events between teachers and parents

Teacher characteristics: specific traits that teachers mentioned as being helpful in establishing relationships with parents

Technology: any technological equipment or applications that teachers use to communicate with parents

Teacher accessibility: discussion related to the ease or challenge of teachers being contacted in-person, via phone, text or email

Teacher visibility: discussion related teachers being seen at school or community events

Teacher-parent communication: discussion related to verbal or written communication between teachers and parent

Home visits: discussion related to teachers visiting parent homes

Time constraints: discussion related to teacher views on time

School-based activities: discussion related to school initiated activities on school campus

Parental attendance: discussion related to parents attending school events, conferences, or functions

Appendix K

Participant Descriptions

Pseudonym	Grade Level	Ethnicity	Language(s) Spoken	Country of Origin	Teaching experience
Anna	Kindergarten	Latinx	Spanish and English	Mexico	4 years
Patricia	Kindergarten	Latinx	Spanish and English	United States	6 years
Marie	Kindergarten	Latinx	English	United States	5 months
Josephine	Kindergarten	Latinx	Spanish and English	United States	10 years
Valerie	Kindergarten	Latinx	Spanish and English	United States	4 years
Victoria	1st	Latinx	Spanish and English	Mexico	7 years

Rebecca	1st	Latinx	Spanish and English	Mexico	15 years
Yanet	1st	Latinx	Spanish and English	Mexico	12 years
Erica	1st	Latinx	English	United States	8 years
Gabriella	1st	Latinx	English	United States	10 years
Maria	2nd	Latinx	Spanish and English	United States	15 years
Farah	2nd	Latinx	Spanish and English	United States	2 years
Sarah	2nd	White	English	United States	21 years
Zoe	2nd	Latinx	English	United States	10 years
Amy	3rd	Latinx	Spanish and English	United States	14 years
Jessica	3rd	Latinx	English	United States	10 years
Laura	3rd	Latinx	Spanish and English	United States	3 years

Maria	3rd	Latinx	Spanish and English	Mexico	7 years
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Biography

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