

6-25-2020

## School-Family Partnerships and Teachers, Parents and Children

Anna L. H. Wieser  
annawieser84@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/teacher-education\\_masters](https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/teacher-education_masters)



Part of the [Early Childhood Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Wieser, A. L. (2020). *School-Family Partnerships and Teachers, Parents and Children* (Thesis, Concordia University, St. Paul). Retrieved from [https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/teacher-education\\_masters/26](https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/teacher-education_masters/26)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@CSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Teacher Education by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSP. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@csp.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@csp.edu).

School-Family Partnerships and Teachers, Parents and Children

Anna L. H. Wieser

Concordia University, St. Paul

MA in Education: Early Childhood

ED 590 Course Instructor: Dr. Kelly Sadlovsky

Second Reader: Professor Elisabeth Amirahmadi

June 25, 2020

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Chapter One: Introduction.....	4
Chapter Two: Review of Literature.....	8
Misalignment of National Expectations and State Standards for Partnerships.....	8
Family Involvement and Children’s Developmental Domains.....	13
Engaging Parents with Young Children.....	20
Recognizing Parent Beliefs and Experiences.....	26
Building Partnership.....	30
Chapter Three: Research Summary and Conclusion.....	49
Misalignment of National Expectations and State Standards for Partnerships.....	49
Family Involvement and Children’s Developmental Domains.....	50
Engaging Parents with Young Children.....	51
Recognizing Parent Beliefs and Experiences.....	52
Building Partnership.....	53
Chapter Four: Discussion/Application/Future Studies.....	56
References.....	61

### Abstract

Early childhood educators are bound by ethical duty and guided by developmentally appropriate practice to foster opportunities for meaningful parent involvement that contributes to building partnerships with families. However, misalignment of state standards and national expectations send mixed messages about how early childhood educators can effectively engage parents and families and cultivate school-family partnerships. This paper synthesized a collection of quantitative, qualitative, mixed method, meta-synthesis, and meta-analysis studies concerning the relationship between parent involvement, children's learning and development, and school-family partnerships. The studies examined support the idea that parent involvement was a significant contributor to young children's learning and development no matter how parent involvement was defined and that enhanced partnerships were one of the most influential methods. Research revealed that building partnerships with families required educators to be aware, sensitive, and supportive of many aspects of parents' and families' realities. School-family partnerships are also discussed as a foundation for learning communities that recognize teachers, parents, and young children as equitable and active contributors to individual and collective learning.

*Keywords:* school-family partnership, parent/family involvement, parent/family engagement, early childhood education, social-constructivism, developmental domains

## Chapter One: Introduction

Entering into an early care setting can be a challenge for children and families. The success of this transition depends on how well the school and families build relationships together. Children's early learning and development experiences have been shown to affect later school achievement and success in life (Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). Early childhood educators have a responsibility to work together with families to build partnerships that support the healthy development of young children. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), one of the nation's leading organizations in the field of early childhood education, has recognized relationship building between school and home as both an ethical and pedagogical responsibility of early childhood educators that affects the learning and development of children. Section two of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct explains it is a duty of an early childhood educator to build partnerships with families for the sake of children's developmental well-being *and* for the well-being of the learning community as a whole (Feeney, Freeman, & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2018). Establishing reciprocal relationships with families is also one of five guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice as presented in NAEYC's Position Statement: "The younger the child, the more necessary it is for practitioners to acquire this particular knowledge through relationships with children's families" (Copple, Bredekamp, & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009, p. 22). Building partnerships between teachers and families is complex work. These partnerships are fundamental to deliver ethical and developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education.

Families engaged in partnerships need to feel and be recognized as valued contributors sharing responsibility for child development and the learning community. Family engagement in

school life is an important factor that directly and indirectly benefits child development and learning. If early childhood educators are to provide ethically sound and developmentally appropriate care for young children, it is imperative that relationships are fostered between teachers and families. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) proposed viewing school-home relationships on a continuum in relation to children's learning, with family involvement on one end and parental engagement on the other, where involvement is school-oriented and engagement is parent-oriented. When family involvement transitions to family engagement, the roles between school and families shift and a child's learning becomes a shared responsibility (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Zhang (2015) proposed that parent involvement becomes meaningful through desirability, practicality, and effectuality, and suggested that parents and teachers ask the following three questions in relation to the tasks and activities that frame parent participation: Is it desirable? Is it practical? Is it effective? If the answers to all three questions are 'yes' then parent involvement can be deemed meaningful (Zhang, 2015). Sharing responsibility for children's learning transforms the relationship between school and family and becomes the basis for partnership.

While children's learning and development are of primary concern and concentration in the relationships between families and educators, children also deserve to be involved in the planning and decisions that affect their learning. Therefore, school-family partnerships need to be considered through the lens of a learning community that acknowledges the unique contributions from three key players—the teacher, the parent, and the child (Zhang, 2015). Successful learning communities are dynamic and complex webs of relationships based on socially and culturally responsive collaboration, negotiation, understanding, and cooperation, within which school-family partnerships operate. Learning and teaching are social experiences

that take place in a context consisting of social expectations, cultural values, and relationships between people that directly impacts learning and development (Bodrova & Leong, 2007).

Home and school are primary social and cultural contexts that need to work together for the well-being of the child and the learning community. When school-family partnerships are viewed as part of a whole learning community, the child is elevated and recognized as an active contributor with the capability to participate and the capacity to have opinions and make informed decisions about learning. When children, families, and teachers work together, everyone benefits.

### **Conclusion**

This research paper addressed the future of programming and practice in early childhood education through an examination of current research applied to the following question: How can early childhood educators build partnerships with families to support healthy child development? Excellent teachers build reciprocal relationships with families (Copple et al., 2009). Loris Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia approach, gave a profound description of the role of the teacher in relation to parents when he stated, “teachers must possess a habit of questioning their certainties, a growth of sensitivity, awareness, and availability, the assuming of a critical style of research and continually updated knowledge of children, an enriched evaluation of parental roles, and skills to talk, listen, and learn from parents” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 69). Partnerships between school and home begin with teachers being open to change and challenge. The literature review presented in Chapter Two will explore parent involvement and school-family partnerships. First, the disconnection between state standards and national expectations for early learning and development and the impact on programs and practice will be discussed. Next, research outlining the link between parent involvement and children’s academic and social emotional development will be presented, followed by a description of different

approaches to parent involvement and benefits experienced by parents. Chapter Two will close with an examination of considerations and examples of early childhood educators in relation to building partnerships with parents. A summary of the research findings will be presented in Chapter Three. Chapter Four will discuss implications for practice and future research.



## Chapter Two: Literature Review

Family and school are primary sources of developmental influence in a child's life (Sheridan, Knoche, Kupzyk, Edwards, & Marvin, 2011). As children grow, children's relationships with people also grow. Children begin to build and understand their own identities and develop their own perspectives of the world through these relationships. As integral contributors to children's home, school, and community contexts, families and early childhood educators have a shared responsibility to support children's healthy development (Sheridan et al., 2011). Yet disconnects were found to exist between home and school, perpetuated in part by the misalignment of the language of state standards for early learning and development and national expectations for home-school partnerships (Walsh, Sanchez, Lee, Casillas, & Hansen, 2016). The disconnection between state standards and national expectations has impacted programs and practices implemented by schools and educators.

### **Misalignment of State Standards and National Expectations for Partnerships**

Walsh, Sanchez, Lee, Casillas, and Hansen (2016) conducted a study to analyze state standards for early childhood education in relation to family, parents, and home using the Family Involvement Models Analysis Chart (FIMAC) based on the following six national family involvement models: Family Support America's Guidelines for Family Support Practice; National Parent Teacher Association's Standards for Family-School Partnerships; NAEYC's Guidelines for Establishing Reciprocal Relationships with Families; NAEYC's Principles for Effective Family Engagement; Harvard Family Research Project's Processes of Family Involvement and Young Children's Outcomes; and Head Start's Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework. The principles collected from the six family involvement models guided two research questions. The first question examined the extent to which state standards

for early childhood development and learning integrated the principles of family, parents, and home from national models. The second question considered where the three concepts resided in state standards documents, either within the standards or outside the standards in peripheral areas such as the document introduction, principles, or philosophy sections. Researchers created a database using word and term searches that located information pertaining to family, parents, and home within the state standard documents of 51 early learning and development standards from all 50 states and Washington, D.C. From the 51 documents, 3,310 units were collected, and one unit was assigned to each identified sentence.

### **Parent, Family, or Home Not Otherwise Specified**

Results from the study (Walsh et al., 2016) revealed that concepts of family, parents, and home were collectively included in all state standards documents. Units examined were assigned to eight FIMAC categories: (1) Incorporation of Families'/Parent(s)' Home Language, (2) Communication, (3) Community, (4) Advocacy/Decision-Making, (5) Families/Parent(s) in the School Setting, (6) Parent(s)– Families–Child Relationships, (7) Families/Parent(s) as Teachers at Home, and (8) Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified. Findings showed that 76 percent of units that mentioned parents, family, or home fell in the eighth category of *Family, Parent, or Home Not Otherwise Specified*. More specifically 2,525 units out of all 3,310 units examined were categorized into category eight.

### ***Five Themes of Category Eight***

Researchers (Walsh et al., 2016) conducted a separate analysis to further categorize the 2,525 units assigned to category eight and did so with 98 percent reviewer agreement. Five themes were identified within category eight: Information and Principles; Standards About Children; Strategies; Examples; and Miscellaneous.

**Information and Principles.** The first theme, *Information and Principles*, included definitions, purpose of standards, developmental domains and subject areas (with social-emotional being most frequently addressed), child care/preschool setting, culture and diversity, and family as child's first teacher/important in shaping the child. This theme accounted for 37% of the units assigned to category eight and most units fell outside the standards.

**Strategies.** The second theme, *Strategies*, accounted for 27% of the units assigned to category eight. Theme two focused on ways in which teachers could promote and respect cultural differences of families, ways to promote learning at or about home across subjects, and ways to promote learning about family and community. The units for this category were assigned both within and outside the standards.

**Standards About Children.** Theme three, *Standards About Children*, considered what children should know about the concepts of family, home, and community. Theme three accounted for 23% of the units in category eight.

**Examples and Miscellaneous.** Theme four, *Examples*, encompassed examples given within the standards that used or concerned parents, family, and home. Theme five, *Miscellaneous*, categorized the concepts of parents, family, and home found in headings, subheadings, sections, organization or agency names, and included the concept of "homemade". *Examples* accounted for 10 percent of the units in category eight, while *Miscellaneous* accounted for one percent.

### **Inconsistencies for Early Childhood Professionals**

The lack of continuity between state standards and national expectations has resulted in mixed messages for early childhood professionals and has created confusion around professional practice in relation to building relationships and fostering strong partnerships with families

(Walsh et al., 2016). Most mentions of family, parents, or home in this study were not aligned with FIMAC categories defined by national models of family involvement and were found outside of the state standards. For example, two-way communication was stressed in the national standards, yet only accounts for less than one percent of the family involvement strategies and practices presented in state standards. Further, results from the separate category eight analyses revealed that only 22 percent of the units assigned to the eighth category were found within the standards, while 77 percent were found outside the standards in peripheral sections of the documents, revealing that although the intention for early childhood educators to involve families was present, the means for building home-school relationships remain underdeveloped. While the research of Walsh et al. (2016) had limitations—including limited expert perspectives, exclusion of updated revisions, considered only learning and development expectations and standards for preschool (excluding infants and toddlers), and examined standards collectively and not individually for each state or region—the results revealed a disconnect between state standards and national expectations in regard to the role family and parents are expected to play in the learning and development of young children.

### ***No Unified Definition of Parent Involvement***

Evidence of this disconnect was clear in *Examining Understandings of Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Programs* (Hilado, Kallemeyn, & Phillips, 2013), a qualitative study of 10 Illinois preschool administrators' perspectives and understanding of parent involvement and how different interpretations affect programming. Two research questions guided the study: 1) How do administrators of Illinois preschool programs express understandings of the term parent involvement? 2) Are program practices and administrator's perceptions of participating families associated with different understandings of parent

involvement? 10 administrators were chosen from a pool of 843 participants who completed original surveys about parent involvement. The final 10 participants represented six school-based programs, three community-based programs, and one military-based program, all from surrounding counties of Cook County (Chicago) and central/southern Illinois. Five of the final participants reported high levels of parent involvement in programs on the original survey and the other five participants reported low parent involvement. The 10 administrators participated in semi-structured interviews lasting 45-60 minutes, during which participants discussed characteristics of the families the programs served, types of parent involvement programs offered, and the successes and challenges the programs faced in relation to parent involvement (Hilado et al., 2013).

**Flexible Versus Rigid Definitions.** Three themes were identified during analysis (Hilado et al., 2013). First, the 10 participants employed a range of definitions and understandings of parent involvement. Administrators who reported experiencing low levels had a narrow view of parent involvement and defined parent involvement as attending school programs or activities like conferences, education programs, or classroom volunteering. Administrators who reported high levels had a broader view of parent involvement that acknowledged any effort parents made to be involved at home or school in order to support children, teachers, other families, and the community. The second theme was identified as influence of contexts and included transportation issues, misperceptions of the program as just childcare and not educational, cultural/ethnic differences between families and staff, and parents' employment status. The third theme was identified as a correlation between participants understanding of parent involvement and other influential factors such as the role of building relationships with parents, whether the

school had a responsibility to provide supportive policies for families, and whether participants held positive or negative perceptions of parents.

The three themes recognized by Hilado, Kallemeyn, and Phillips (2013) reflect the research of Hornby and Lafaele (2011) which identified four factors that contribute to the gap between literature and practice in relation to parent involvement: 1) parents' beliefs, life context, perceptions, and demographic indicators, 2) child's age, learning difficulties or disabilities, gifts and talents, and behavior, 3) the differing agendas and attitudes of teachers and parents as well as possible language barriers, and 4) historic, demographic, political, and economic issues of society. This literature review examines some of these gaps and proposes ways early childhood educators can begin to build partnerships with families to promote healthy child development. First, the link between family involvement and developmental domains of young children will be discussed, followed by three examples of approaches to actively engage families. Then, research on how parent beliefs and experiences play a role in parent involvement will be presented. Finally, a discussion connects the concepts of listening, communication, and perception as crucial roles in building effective school-family partnerships.

### **Family Involvement and Children's Developmental Domains**

Research shows that children's experiences within the first five years of life are critical to healthy development (Colliver, 2018; Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Boviard, & Kupzyk, 2010). Further research supports that "family involvement is positively linked to children's outcomes in preschool, kindergarten, and the early elementary grades" (Van Voorhis, et al., 2013, p. 75), pre-kindergarten through 12th grade (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Jeynes, 2012; Wilder, 2014), and academic success (Torpor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010). Therefore, preschool experiences paired with active involvement from parents and families at school and in the home have the

potential to become the foundation for academic success and a healthy life. Parents can significantly impact academic and social development of young children. The following studies explored the role of parent involvement on children's academic and social development.

### **Literacy, Math, and Social-Emotional Skills**

*The Impact of Family Involvement on the Education of Children Ages 3 to 8: A Focus on Literacy and Math Achievement Outcomes and Social-Emotional Skills* (Van Voorhis et al., 2013) provided a summary of results from 95 studies (experimental, quasi-experimental, and non-experimental) of family involvement on children's literacy, math, and social-emotional development conducted between 2000 and 2012. Analysis of findings for literacy and math were presented in four categories: learning activities at home, family involvement at school, school outreach to engage families, and supportive parenting activities. The strongest category was learning activities at home while the weakest was family involvement at school. There were more reliable studies to support literacy than math, and social-emotional development was a secondary element measured within some of the studies. The strongest results were associated with parent involvement in learning activities at home and supportive parenting activities categories. General findings from the report support the notion that family involvement positively impacts children's early school experiences from preschool through early elementary years (Van Voorhis et al., 2013).

### **Academic and Social Outcomes**

Powell, Son, File, and San Juan (2010) conducted a mixed method study that examined how parent-school relationships affect children's academic and social outcomes at the end of one year of pre-kindergarten. 13 pre-kindergarten classrooms from 12 schools in a Midwestern city voluntarily participated in the study from a pool of 90 candidate schools that were found to be

not program specific (i.e. Montessori), not affiliated with Head Start, and were part of state-funded universal pre-kindergarten. Participants included 140 children, children's parent/family members, and 13 lead teachers. Children were pre- and post-tested in the fall at the beginning of the school year and then in the spring at the end of the school year. The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey and the Head Start Impact Survey were used to measure children's social and academic outcomes for school readiness. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III, the Woodstock Johnson III Test of Achievement, and the Social Skills Rating System measured children's academic and social skills. Additionally, parents were surveyed about participation at school, participation in learning activities at home, and perceived teacher responsiveness. The quality of teacher's classroom interactions with children were also measured by experts using a reliable scale. Results showed that children with stronger parent-school relationships demonstrated higher scores in academic and social outcomes. Additionally, children linked to parents who reported high levels of involvement scored lower in problem behavior and higher in math and social skills.

Powell et al. (2010) presented a long list of the study's limitations. First, the study did not represent causation but only presented a correlation between parent-school relationships and school readiness. The use of logs and observations of parent-teacher interactions and assigning more than one data point at end of school year could strengthen future studies. Teacher bias about child social behaviors of involved parents could have skewed results, as well, and could be better controlled in future studies. The fact that schools were not randomly selected and included parents and teachers already interested in parent-school relationships make the results of this study difficult to generalize. Finally, a quarter of participants were lost to attrition, with complete data sets collected from only 76 percent of participating children and parents, which researchers



explain could be evidence of the challenges schools experience in reaching out to parents from different demographics. Despite these limitations, a positive relationship between parent involvement and children's social and academic development was evident (Powell et al, 2010).

### **The Getting Ready Intervention**

The Getting Ready Intervention (GRI) is an approach to parent engagement designed and implemented by Head Start (Sheridan et al., 2010). GRI works to promote school-family partnerships through triadic (parent-child-teacher) and collaborative (parent-teacher) relationships, aimed to enhance parent-child as well as parent-teacher relationships. Based on three dimensions of parent engagement—warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness; support for a child's emerging autonomy and self-control; and participation in learning and literacy—teachers work to build effective school-family partnerships through supporting parent engagement and facilitating mutual responsibility for child development and learning. The following two studies examined children's social-emotional and literacy development in relation to parent engagement as a result of the GRI.

### ***Social-Emotional Competencies and GRI***

A randomized control study (Sheridan et al., 2010) measured the effects of GRI on school readiness of 217 preschool children from 28 Head Start preschool classrooms in a Midwest public school district. Parents of the 217 children were also included in the study along with 29 classroom teachers. Randomized assignment was applied at the teacher level, which nested the children and parents within the teacher's assignment. Teachers assigned to the treatment and control groups were trained in GRI, but different methods and topics were covered and presented separately. Additionally, teachers assigned to the treatment group received coaching twice

monthly, one 60-minute individual session and one 90-minute group session, to review and critique video-taped home visits (Sheridan et al., 2010).

**Method.** The study (Sheridan et al., 2010) was conducted over two years, providing data on three cohorts of children, parents, and teachers, utilizing parent questionnaires, parent-child video recorded sessions, and teacher questionnaires. Children were evaluated in the fall and spring each year using the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (interpersonal assessment) and the Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation short form (behavioral assessment), completed by teachers. GRI strategies were implemented during hour long home visits five times per year. Triadic (parent-child-teacher) and collaborative (parent-teacher) strategies were used to focus parents' attention to child's strengths; share and discuss observations about the child; discuss developmental expectations and goals; provide developmental information; make suggestions; and brainstorm about the child's social, cognitive, and communicative development and learning. GRI was treated as an extension of services for treatment group, in relation to "business-as-usual" for control.

**Results.** Results showed that parents in the treatment group engaged with their children significantly more than parents assigned to control group (Sheridan et al., 2010). Children in the treatment group demonstrated significant gains in attachment behaviors with adults, showed reduced anxiety and withdrawal, and increased initiative over time, all evidenced to positive social-emotional competencies. No significant differences were found in relation to behavior problems. Limitations of this study included teachers' possible knowledge of assignment group, no control for classroom instructional practices, lack of data following child behavior changes between home and school, changes in parent behavior outside home visits, and lack of follow up data after children's transition to kindergarten. Regardless, the study (Sheridan et al., 2010)

demonstrates that supported and facilitated parent-child-teacher relationships and home-school relationships significantly impact child social-emotional development.

### ***Literacy and GRI***

A randomized trial, and companion study to the Head Start GRI social-emotional outcomes study described above, was conducted to measure literacy and language skills of children who received the GRI treatment (Sheridan et al., 2011). Researchers utilized results of the Teacher Rating of Oral Language and Literacy (TROLL) and Preschool Language Scale—Fourth Edition (PLS-4) assessments, each employing teacher-report and direct assessment methods, respectively. Sheridan and colleagues (2011) used the same participant sample from the previous study (Sheridan et al. 2010). Results showed significant differences in the rates of change between control and treatment group participants in relation to teacher reports of language use, reading and writing. While the control group was found to improve over time in each area, significantly more growth was reported for the intervention group. After receiving GRI, the average child in the treatment group exceeded 87 percent of the control group participants in language, 89 percent of the control group on the TROLL Reading assessment, and 82 percent of the control group on the TROLL Writing scale (Sheridan et al., 2011).

### **A Broader Look at Research: Parent Involvement and Academic Achievement**

Wilder (2014) used meta-synthesis—an interpretive method used to integrate findings from qualitative studies of similar topics—to examine and find generalizable data from nine meta-analysis studies published in peer-reviewed journals, ranging in publication dates from 2001 to 2012, based on the relationship between parental involvement and children’s academic achievement. Researchers were guided by three research questions: 1) What findings are supported by the majority of meta-analyses included in the meta-synthesis regarding the

relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement? 2) Are the inconsistencies in the findings of meta-analyses due to different definitions of parental involvement? 3) Are the inconsistencies in the findings of meta-analyses due to various measures of academic achievement? Wilder (2014) ascertained the nine studies defined parent involvement in several ways: communication between parents and children regarding school, checking and helping with homework, parental educational expectations and aspirations for children, and attendance and participation in school activities. Academic achievement in the nine studies was measured as either standardized tests or non-standardized assessments including grade point average, class grade, test grade, teacher rating of student academic achievement and behavior.

Meta-analysis demonstrated that there was a strong positive and consistent relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement regardless of definition or achievement measure used (Wilder, 2014). In relation to the first research question, ‘expectations for academic achievement of their children’ was the strongest definition for parent involvement related to children’s academic achievement (Wilder, 2014). No positive relationship between homework help and academic achievement was found. Parent involvement was found to significantly impact children’s academic achievement regardless of grade level. One standout finding in relation to the first research question was that positive relationships between parental involvement and student achievement were generalizable across race. Findings regarding research question two reported that a positive relationship exists between parent involvement and children’s academic achievement regardless of the definition used to describe parent involvement, while findings were inconclusive about the types of assessments used to measure academic achievement relative to the third research question of the study (Wilder, 2014). With

the relationship between parent involvement and children's academic and social-emotional development clearly established, the literature review will next address ways in which parent involvement may be facilitated.

### **Engaging Parents with Young Children**

Parent engagement has been defined as “behaviors that connect with and support children or others in their environment in ways that are interactive, purposeful, and directed toward meaningful learning and affective outcomes” (Sheridan et al., 2011, p. 362). Research shows that regardless of grade level, parent involvement can have significant effects on children's academic achievement (Wilder, 2014), that parent intervention matters (Van Voorhis et al., 2013), and that the pre-kindergarten year may be the best time to promote parent-school relationships, particularly in regard to early childhood programs housed within public school districts (Powell et al., 2010). According to research, parental support and engagement is associated with children's cognitive competence, communication, self-regulation, social assertiveness, self-directedness (Sheridan et al., 2010), and promotes children's autonomy and learning (Sheridan et al., 2011). With guidance, many parents are ready and able to conduct supportive parenting and learning activities at home with young children regardless of socioeconomic, educational, and racial or ethnic backgrounds (Van Voorhis et al., 2013). The following studies addressed school-based parent involvement programs, educator facilitated parent involvement, and self-directed parent involvement approaches that demonstrated how facilitating parent engagement with young children can impact child development and parent behavior.

### **School-based Parent Involvement Programs**

Findings from a quantitative meta-analysis of the existing literature (51 quantitative studies involving approximately 13,000 subjects) examined the efficacy of school-based parental

involvement programs and pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade student achievement (Jeynes, 2012). Jeynes (2012) posited that many researchers and social scientists believe that parent involvement is one of the most critical elements to improving outcomes of urban youth and effectively narrowing the achievement gap. Further, the researcher contended while voluntary parent participation yields higher educational outcomes, school-based parental involvement programs should not be assumed to have the same effect on student achievement. In effort to generate generalizable data on the topic of school-based parent involvement programs, Jeynes (2012) gathered a large collection of studies in order to evaluate the general effectiveness of school-based parental involvement approaches.

Two research questions guided the analysis: 1) Does a statistically significant relationship exist between school-based parental involvement programs and student academic outcomes? 2) What specific types of parental involvement programs help students the most? The studies included in the meta-analysis met the following standards: parent involvement must have the ability to be significantly isolated from other elements, enough statistical information for analysis, and use of a control group. The studies could be published or unpublished. Qualitative studies were not included in the meta-analysis. The results of the analysis supported the notion that school-based parental involvement programs do have a statistically significant impact on student educational outcomes and academic achievement for both younger and older students. Shared reading programs had the highest effect size. Emphasized partnership programs characterized by parent-teacher collaboration to develop common strategies, rules, guidelines and approaches to support youth had the second largest effect size (Jeynes, 2012). An example of emphasized partnership follows.

### **Educator-Facilitated Parent Involvement**

Ansari and Gershoff (2016) examined a Head Start parent involvement strategy for improving parenting skills predictive of children's later academic success. Researchers hypothesized that by becoming involved, parents would learn new ways to improve parenting behavior and in turn help Head Start programs positively impact the lives of children through the development of a parent-mediated mechanism (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). The term 'educator-facilitated parent involvement' is not included in the original study; however, the author of this paper chose to adopt the term to represent the model for clarity. A longitudinal study was conducted between 2006 and 2009, with a nationally representative sample of 1,020 children (51 percent female) and families enrolled in 118 Head Start centers across the nation. Child participants were on average three and one-half years old at the beginning of the program, mothers made up 87 percent of the parent respondents. 41 percent self-identified as Black, 27 percent Hispanic heritage, 22 percent White, and 10 percent identified as other racial group. Single-parent homes represented 66 percent of the sample, 32 percent of children had mothers with less than a high school diploma, and mothers experiencing unemployment represented 44 percent of the sample (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016).

### ***Measuring Parent Involvement and Child Social and Academic Skills***

Ansari and Gershoff (2016) utilized a mixture of codified surveys that collected data on Head Start centers' practical support to families (including transportation, interpreters, and food), teacher staff training in parent involvement (including effective communication techniques and guidance techniques for parent volunteers in the classroom), and obstacles to parent involvement (work, child care, school/training, and transportation). Parent involvement surveys completed by parents were used to measure the frequency parents were able to participate in classroom-

oriented activities (attending parent-teacher conferences, classroom observations, home visits, and volunteering) and center support activities (preparing food or materials, attending workshops or fundraisers, participating in policy development, and assisting with newsletters). Parent surveys also measured the frequency of parent engagement in cognitively stimulating activities with children, the practice of spanking, and use of controlling behavior. Teachers reported on children's problem behaviors, approach to learning, and administered direct assessments to measure children's literacy and math skills. Surveys and assessments were conducted in the spring and fall of years one and two of the study to measure differences. During home-visits and time parents spent in classrooms and at centers, Head Start teachers modeled and guided parents' use of cognitively stimulating adult-child activities, appropriate behavior management techniques without harsh punishments such as spanking, and effective discipline techniques such as calm voice, directive language, and opportunities for children's choice (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016).

### ***Effects of Educator-Facilitated Parent Involvement***

Analysis of the data suggested that, over the span of two years, educator-facilitated parent involvement was found to have an impact on increasing parents' use of cognitive stimulation and lessened parents' use of controlling behavior (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Facilitated parent involvement was also found to have an indirect effect on parents' use of spanking, as a result of engaging with children and using more appropriate and effective strategies to manage children's behavior. Better parenting practices were found to predict children's development outcomes, with cognitive stimulation associated with better math and literacy skills. Researchers found that parent involvement led to less controlling behavior which led to less spanking and fewer



behavior problems, which in turn led to more cognitive stimulation and higher approaches for learning from children (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016)

Limitations of the research include the inability to infer causation, however a strong correlational relationship was present; parents self-reported on surveys which could have affected outcomes; cultural climate of the center was not measured which could affect parent willingness to participate; a conservative association can be made between parent's controlling behavior and children's outcomes; the study did not examine specific types of parent involvement; parent participants were majority mothers, leaving out fathers and other important family members (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Despite the limitations, this study has contributed evidence in support of educator-facilitated parent involvement as an important influence on children's academic development and parent behavior. Parents who are self motivated were also found to benefit from self-directed training and education about child development.

### **Self-Administered Parent Training**

*A Pilot Study of a Self-Administered Parent Training Intervention for Building Preschoolers' Social–Emotional Competence* (Thompson & Carlson, 2017) was a mixed method study that utilized a pre-test/post-test format, and examined the experiences of 12 families whose children were identified as eligible for intervention using a social emotional development program based on the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment—Second Edition (DECA-P2). The DECA-P2 is a 38-item strengths-based assessment for preschool children between the ages of two and five, completed by the parent for the study. Over eight weeks, families read chapters from the DECA-P2 companion textbook about healthy social and emotional development in young children and answered reflection questions about the strategies described in each chapter. Throughout the weeks, families tracked the use of the strategies and during weekly check-ins

summarized their findings in relation to children's social emotional competence and behavior concerns. At the end of the eight weeks, DECA-P2 was administered again in order to compare results with the pre-test. Significant gains were reported between the pre- and post-tests with increased ratings in children's initiative, self-regulation, and attachment/relationships (Thompson & Carlson, 2017).

Limitations may play heavily on the results of this study, however (Thompson & Carlson, 2017). Researchers reported that participants self-selected and had high treatment motivations. Despite 11 of the 12 participating families being enrolled in Head Start, all parent participants had graduated from college or had some college experience, which are much higher education levels than typical Head Start populations. Participants also self-reported findings which could have affected impartiality. Without a significantly larger sample size, a control group, and ways to control parents' findings, the results of this study cannot be generalized. However, parents reported completing an average of 97 percent of the reading, 93 percent of the reflection questions, and 96 percent of the brainstorming questions, which demonstrated high integrity. Parents also reported employing learned strategies 79 percent of the time during the week. This type of flexible method to train parents is suggested by researchers as an effective way to develop parent engagement skills (Thompson & Carlson, 2017). The previous sections of this literature review have discussed the link between parent involvement and children's academic and social development and the impact of different types of parent involvement on parent behavior. However, engaging parents in children's learning and development goes deeper than changing parent behaviors and requires educators to recognize the beliefs and experiences that parents hold in order to develop more effective relationships and build emphasized partnerships, as research has suggested, to fully support children's learning and development.

### **Recognizing Parent Beliefs and Experiences**

Studies have shown that parent's beliefs shape whether and how they engage with children's learning and literacy development (Van Voorhis et al., 2013). "Parents' attitudes towards their children's schooling are more significant in influencing children's performance in schools, than either variations in home circumstances or in schools" (Sims-Schouten, 2016, p. 1393). Children's academic performance and achievement, pro-social behavior, positive approaches to and participation in learning are all related to parental promotion of learning and valuing education and an enriching home environment (Sheridan et al., 2010). Parent beliefs, attitudes, and promotion of education are all important factors, but in order to be present and engaged with a child's learning and development, parents also need to be supported. Research showed that health and level of education, as well as the number of adults in the home, are important variables that can impact parents' effect on child development and learning (Sheridan et al., 2011). Expanding the typical parent variable beyond the mother, to include other important family figures and primary care givers, can greatly impact the data collected about children's home learning contexts.

#### **Family Values**

*"We keep the education goin' at home all the time": Family literacy in low-income African American families of preschoolers* (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017) is a qualitative interview study that captured 20 mothers' first-hand impressions about the literacy development practices used at home with their preschool-aged children. Interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes were conducted with each participant. Information was gathered about literacy practices in the home based on how mothers were supporting children's kindergarten readiness and how other people present in the home were assisting in the literacy efforts. After in-depth processes to

accurately transcribe, codify, and metaphorically analogize the discussions with great care to preserve the participants' meaning and integrity of purpose, three common constructs were identified. First, mothers were actively engaged in promoting literacy. Second, literacy teams comprised of interdependent family members including adults and minors also supported literacy development of preschool aged children in the home. Thirdly, the supportive family members operated within a division of literacy labor such as reading, writing, letter recognition, and numeracy (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017).

The findings of Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez (2017) are juxtaposed to the generalized assumptions that low-income African-American children are all at risk of failing school, come from unsupportive households, with mothers who have low education levels, and are neglected. Researchers called for more dynamic categorizing of demographic information that goes beyond just mothers to include other kin to more accurately portray the support systems from which low-income African-American children come. The researchers also presented the family-resiliency framework, a concept that encourages educators and researchers to consider how multigenerational families work together. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2017) addressed stereotypes and generalizations about African-American families and the perceived lack of involvement in early childhood education. The researchers illustrated that some families do not conform to typical constructs and adds to the research base that speaks out against the blanket assumption that minority families do not care about or have the ability to positively influence children's education (Jeynes, 2014; Van Voorhis et al., 2013). The concepts of parents' social and resource capital and the generalizations surrounding race, socio-economic class and education were found to be closely related to academic achievement.

### **Parent Social and Resource Capital**

In a mixed method study, Schlee, Mullis, and Shriner (2009) examine the extent to which parents' social capital and resource capital predict academic achievement in early childhood. Data on parent's social and resource capital was collected through parent interviews consisting of approximately 500 questions pertaining to school experiences, childcare, parent characteristics, child health, family structure, parental involvement in school, home environment, and cognitive stimulations. Parents' social capital was measured by parent involvement with school, family structure, and marital status. Parents' resource capital was measured by education level, income level, home environment, and cognitive stimulation. Completed parent interviews were coded, analyzed, and compared to the standardized achievement test data from children's Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K) of 1998-1999. Data from the ECLS-K included 14,810 children (evenly distributed between males and females) from around the United States: 32 percent from the South, 25.5 percent from the Midwest, 22 percent from the West, and 18.2 percent from the Northeast. Caucasian children represented 57.2 percent of the sample, followed by African Americans at 12.8 percent, children of Hispanic decent represented almost 20 percent, Asians with six and one half percent, and American Indian and Native Hawaiian each less than two percent. Direct assessments were used to gather data on children's math, reading, and comprehension skills during years 1999 and 2002 (Schlee et al, 2009).

Schlee et al. (2009) used multiple regressions to analyze the data sets in relation to parent social and resource capital. Compared to Caucasian children, Black and Hispanic children scored lower on reading and math achievement tests. Parent resource capital was found to be the best indicator for childhood academic success, including access to a home computer, engaging in

home literacy activities, and social economic status. Parent involvement was considered high social capital. Children living in two-parent homes scored higher on academic achievement tests and “parents who were actively involved with their children’s schools, such as attending open house or acting as a school volunteer, had children with significantly higher academic achievement scores” (Schlee et al., 2009, p. 232).

### ***Social and Resource Capital and the Achievement Gap***

Schlee and colleagues (2009) highlighted the glaring reality of the gap in achievement between Caucasian children and children from other marginalized populations. While social capital in terms of parent involvement had a significant impact on children’s achievement in school, it is important to view in context the relationship between achievement and resource capital. Parents with the means to provide stable home environments and engage in activities that support learning and development were better able to make positive impact (Schlee et al., 2009). A limitation to the study remained as assessments and interview questions were possibly skewed toward Caucasian culture with higher socio-economic status, as part of an unfair system that inherently discounts the experiences and perspectives of historically marginalized groups, therefore inaccurately measuring parents’ social capital and ignoring cultural capital.

Research has demonstrated that parents are able to support their children’s learning in many contexts including at home, at school, and in the community, and parents do so in a variety of ways. Regardless of socioeconomic, educational, racial, or ethnic background, parents who feel supported and have guidance are ready and able to engage in activities that support children’s learning and development (Van Voorhis et al., 2013). Parent involvement has also been recognized as a possible contributor to reducing the achievement gap (Wilder, 2014), a strong motivation for change in policy and practice. Therefore, the definition of parent

involvement needs to be responsive to cultural and individual characteristics (Wilder, 2014). The next section will discuss different aspects parents and educators need to embrace about one another to develop strong relationships in order to build partnerships that support children's development.

### **Building Partnerships**

Home-school partnerships are important during the preschool years and involve meaningful connections across developmental contexts, facilitate continuity, and support transitions during a time when parents are learning how to navigate children's education (Sheridan et al., 2010). "Preschools that can successfully extend support for learning to the home context may be the most successful in promoting children's school success" (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016, p. 562). Research has shown that emphasized partnerships between home and school can be effective ways to engage parents and support children's development and learning (Jeynes, 2012), while discontinuities in home-school practices can have negative effects on development in relation to children's behavior, social, language, and motor skills (DeGioia, 2013). "Children benefit when parents and teachers work together as partners in education" (VanVoorhis et al., 2013, p. 1). The following studies demonstrated how listening, communication, and the perceptions held by teachers and parents play important roles in building school-family partnerships.

### **The Role of Listening and Communication**

*Barriers to parental involvement in education: an explanatory model* (Hornbey & Lafaele, 2011) and the follow up study *Barriers to parental involvement in education: an update* (Hornbey & Blackwell, 2018) identified a gap between research literature and school practices regarding parent involvement. Research indicated that "parental involvement is an important

element of effective education for children of all ages” (Hornbey & Blackwell, 2018), but discrepancies persist. Four factors were described that contribute to the gap between home and school: 1) parents’ beliefs, life context, perceptions, and demographic indicators, 2) child’s age, learning difficulties or disabilities, gifts and talents, and behavior, 3) the differing agendas and attitudes of teachers and parents as well as possible language barriers, and 4) historic, demographic, political, and economic issues of society (Hornby& Lafaele, 2011; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

### *Assessing Strategies*

A study was conducted involving a sample of different schools located in the south-west of England, all varying in enrollment sizes and representing populations from both urban and rural areas, with a wide range in socio-economic status (Hornbey & Blackwell, 2018). Of 29 schools invited, 11 agreed to participate in the study. Based on the four factors identified by Hornby & Lafaele (2011) listed above, the following six questions were developed: 1) Does the school follow a written policy on parent involvement? 2) What school-based activities are used to encourage parent involvement? 3) In relation to parental involvement, have school policies or practices changed over the past five years, and if so how? 4) What key influences have helped to bring about these changes? 5) What are barriers to parent involvement? 6) How is the school overcoming barriers to parent involvement?

Researchers recorded interviews with head-teachers (the equivalent role to principals in the United States) from each school (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Analysis of the interviews revealed that while each of the 11 schools studied acknowledged the significance of parent involvement, only one school had a separate written parent involvement policy. Other schools included parent involvement in school improvement plans, home-school learning policies, or



safeguarding policies (guidelines to prioritize the wellbeing of children). The schools all employed a variety of strategies to engage parents (newsletters, websites, teacher-parent meetings, parent association, open house, performances, exhibitions, school fairs, school-family events, sports). Many schools also offered parent education classes, email and social media connections between home and school, and extended school hours. Seven schools had changed or modified strategies for parent involvement, influenced by a combination of the head-teacher's vision, children's well-being and welfare, needs of the community, parent interest, professional development, and best practice (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

### ***Identifying Barriers***

Identified barriers spanned the following categories: parent and family factors, parent-teacher factors, societal factors, and practical barriers (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Examples of parent and family factors were parents' own negative school experiences, failure to understand the importance of early school experiences to later life success, parent time management, parent low literacy levels, trauma or crisis, parent age, single parent households, family language barriers, and lack of father involvement. Parent-teacher factors included teachers feeling a lack of time to spend on parents, lack of training to work effectively with parents, staff waiting for parents to bring up issues, families' fear of judgment or criticism by teachers, and miscommunication between parents and children. Schools identified various societal factors effecting parents such as employment status, attendance rate, community awareness, mental health issues, racism/prejudice, religion, and instances of parent aggression. Practical barriers included school hours that were incompatible with parent work schedules, staff attitude, and internet/computer access. Several schools indicated that it was important that staff be committed to working with parents, that communication and transparency were key to building

relationships, that all parents needed access to the offerings of parent involvement, and that listening to and asking parents what mattered was important.

Hornby and Blackwell (2018) found that schools were embracing parent involvement as a central component to programming, while adopting a variety of approaches to parent outreach and support. A younger generation of parents was also found to be more open to communicating, particularly through social media and text message. Schools also were beginning to acknowledge their evolving role as collaborative members in community life. Effective leadership became an important role in school operations, while the need for planning and developing an intentional “whole school” approach to parent involvement was recognized. Hornby and Blackwell (2018) illustrated the importance of understanding what questions to ask when developing awareness about the role parent involvement plays in a school’s ethos. DeGioia (2013) describes how miscommunication and misunderstanding can also be a barrier to building effective partnerships.

### *Communicating Across Cultures*

DeGioia (2013) studied the need for clear and direct communication between families and educators in an early childhood context concerning the practices of eating and sleeping, two consistent elements across all cultures. A qualitative approach was used to gather information about continuity between home and school from educators and families from three different childcare settings in Sydney, Australia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants consisting of nine early childhood educators (ranging from untrained to university trained teachers) and family members (13 mothers, 4 fathers, and one older brother) of children under three years old. Families represented second-generation Greek and Spanish citizens as well as migrants to Australia from Pakistan, India, Iraq, Phillipines, China, and Samoa.

**Micro- and Macro-Culture.** Addressing cultural differences between families and educators, DeGioia (2013) described the importance of recognizing micro- and macro-cultures. Micro-culture was defined as an individual's unconscious behavior influenced by cultural beliefs, norms, and values. Macro-culture was defined as cultural aspects that are akin to ethnic identity or country of origin that include symbolic behavior, rituals, customs, and traditions. Macro-culture was further described as assumed through socialization early in life from family and other important people such as early childhood educators. Language and literacy were identified as constructs of macro-culture.

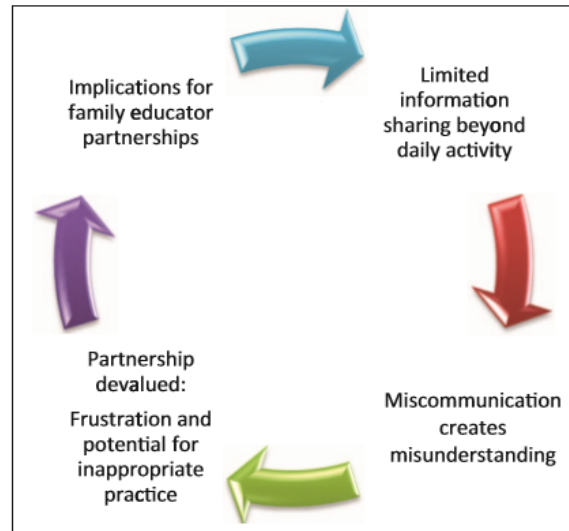
**Language Considerations for Interviews.** An attempt was made by researchers to accommodate for language differences (DeGioia, 2013). Translated materials were offered in advance and families were given the option to use a translator provided by the research team during interviews. One school deemed it appropriate to translate information into Vietnamese and Mandarin, while the other two schools chose to communicate in English. One of the schools used the study as an opportunity to support English language learners. Only one family accepted the offer of a translator.

**Questionnaires.** Additionally, educators and families of children under three from three other early childhood centers in New South Wales were invited to participate in semi-structured questionnaires (DeGioia, 2013). The questionnaires used different questions from the semi-structured interviews and focused on communication between educators and families about caregiving practices. Translation of the questionnaire was offered, but English was deemed appropriate for the family participants by the center directors. Language accessibility could be viewed as a possible oversight and limitation to this study, as well as the lack of information about the demographics of the families included in the questionnaire portion. A deeper

description of the questions asked in both the interview and questionnaire portions of this study would have also lent to transparency and effectiveness.

**Communication Processes and Home-School Continuity.** DeGioia (2013) found that oral communication was the most used mode of exchanging information about a child between families and educators. Topics that concerned oral communication ranged from sharing about a child's day, sharing child-rearing practices and routines, staff acknowledgement of families and providing information to families, coping with inconsistencies, and decision making. Translating and/or interpreting information was also recognized as important for educators and parents, as well as children, in order to support the flow of information about the program to adults and meet children's needs. Respecting and carrying out parent requests was found to be important to staff, however children's acquisition of the English language was a point of discontinuity between home and school. Parents wanted children to learn English at school, while teachers wanted to support the children's home language. The discrepancy and inconsistency of language usage illustrated disempowerment, which DeGioia (2013) described as "a loss of control, unwillingness or discomfort in sharing information or knowledge" (p. 117).

**The Cycle of Misunderstanding.** Ultimately, families chose these childcare centers to help children integrate into mainstream Australian society and learn English, while educators wanted to engage and support children in their home cultures. DeGioia (2013) identified this misunderstanding as a result of miscommunication, which is illustrated in The Cycle of Misunderstanding as follows (DeGioia, 2013, p. 119, Fig. 1):



In relation to the study, the Cycle of Misunderstanding developed in the following way:

1) Families and educators used oral communication to discuss daily activity at school. 2) Miscommunication created misunderstanding when acting on assumptions of others' expectations or intentions. 3) Family-educator partnerships became devalued as families felt disempowered and educators felt resentful. 4) Implications for building trusting family educator partnerships was jeopardized and created more discontinuity and disempowerment (DeGioia, 2013). The study demonstrated the need for educators to depend on clear communication strategies, rather than act upon assumption, while respecting the values and expectations of families, in order to develop effective partnerships between home and school. When educators and families act on assumptions, misunderstandings occur based on miscommunication, which could be prompted by perception (or misperception).

### **The Role of Perception**

A pair of studies set in the South East of England investigated positioning theory as a lens through which early years practitioners and parents need to view their roles in school-family partnerships (Sims-Schouten, 2016). Positioning theory—"concerned with revealing the explicit and implicit patterns of reasoning that are linked to the way that people act towards each other

and how they construct themselves and their own position within this” (Sims-Shouten, 2016, p. 1393)— was used to explain individual and collective perceptions and assumptions that parents and teachers have of themselves and each other.

### ***Study One: Practitioner Viewpoints on Home-School Connections***

The first study was quantitative in nature and utilized a questionnaire presented to two groups of early years practitioners; participation was voluntary (Sims-Schouten, 2016). Approximately one half of the participants had less than two years experience, while the other half had five or more. Each group was engaged in post-secondary programs in the field of early childhood education. All participants were female, ethnically, and economically diverse. Participants in the first group were from all over the United Kingdom, between the ages of 20 and 30, worked part-time in the childcare field while attending an undergraduate program full time. Participants in the second group were local to the South East region, between the ages of 24 and 55, and worked full-time in childcare settings while also attending university. Collecting responses from two different sets of practitioners was meant to increase the validity of the study (Sims-Schouten, 2016).

**Method and Results.** Participants responded to questions related to practitioner’s perceptions about positioning in parent-teacher relationships (Sims-Schouten, 2016). Using a scale where one equaled strong disagreement and five equaled strong agreement, questions measured practitioner’s confidence talking to parents about a child; whether parents were willing to talk about children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development; and whether parents and teachers each played a key role in a child’s social and emotional wellbeing. Participants were also asked to rate from most important to least, what influenced infant behavior in day care: home situation and relationship with parents; the child’s character and temperament; how the

infant is settling in; relationship between parents and practitioners. Results of the questionnaire reflected significant differences between group one (less confident) and group two (more confident) in regard to talking with parents about issues concerning the child. Both groups viewed parents as willing participants; 96 percent of all participants agreed or strongly agreed that parents play a key role, while similarly 91.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed that practitioners play a key role. Both groups also valued home situation and relationship with parents as most important to infant behavior, while only 17.6 percent of participants strongly agreed that the relationship between parents and practitioners was most important (Sims-Schouten, 2016).

***Study Two: Positioning and Perspectives in Parent-Practitioner Collaboration***

Study Two was a qualitative study that explored practitioner and parent perceptions; all participation was voluntarily (Sims-Schouten, 2016). Seven ethnically and economically diverse focus groups were formed from 34 participants: three groups of early years practitioners (all groups mixed gender), two groups of mothers with children between two and four years old (all female), and two groups were a mixture of mothers and practitioners (one group mixed gender). Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and consisted of four to seven participants. The unstructured focus group discussions were prompted with the topic “how parents and practitioners work together to support child development and behavior in early years setting” (Sims-Schouten, 2016, p.1397). The recorded discussions were analyzed and synthesized based on how and when participants spoke and what participants said.

**Findings.** Perceptions of participants from each group manifested in positioning related to other group members and between parents and teachers (Sims-Schouten, 2016). Parent focus groups discussed the concepts of parent responsibility for child behavior, parent involvement,

duties and responsibilities of the parent, and parent-child relationships. Mixed group results showed that parents positioned practitioners as positively impacting children, while practitioners engaged more in relation to children's home situations and background, referring to parents as engaging with children through good or bad practices. Practitioner focus groups positioned parents as children's first teachers, but that parents also often had skewed priorities in relation to children. Rather than focusing on parent intentions, practitioners discussed parenting practices and families' social and cultural backgrounds as factors that made parent-partnerships difficult to cultivate. Practitioners conversely were positioned as pro-active during the practitioner-only focus group discussions (Sims-Schouten, 2016).

**Comparison of Studies One and Two.** Sims-Shouten (2016) identified discrepancies that existed between parents and practitioners perceptions. Study One showed that 64.9 percent of practitioner participants viewed child's home situation and relationship with parents as most important to infant behavior and only 17.6 percent ranked parent-teacher partnership as most important (Sims-Schouten, 2016). Study Two illustrated the tendency for parents to be positioned as deficient, while teachers were only ever positioned positively, as supportive and engaging. Results of this study, while not representative or generalizable, shed light on the work needed to dispel negative perceptions, labels, and stigmas that parents and practitioners carry about themselves and each other in relation to children's learning and development (Sims-Schouten, 2016). If parent and practitioner perceptions were shown to affect the development of home-school partnerships as established above, how are children's perceptions about learning affected?



***Parent Involvement and Teacher Perceptions on Children's Competence and Achievement***

In *Parent Involvement and Student Academic Performance: A Multiple Mediation Analysis* (Torpor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010), researchers measured the significance of the correlation between parent involvement and student achievement by examining children's perceived cognitive competence (defined by children's beliefs and confidence in the ability to complete academic tasks) and the quality of student-teacher relationships (defined as the teacher's perception of closeness between students and teacher without over-reliance or dependency, and lack of conflict). In this quantitative study, 158 children participated—71 male and 87 female, age seven (a subsection from a longitudinal study following 447 participants originally recruited at age two). 105 children were classified as European American, 42 were African American, 7 were biracial, 4 were of other ethnicity, and all came from different levels of socioeconomic background ranging from lower to upper class (Torpor et al., 2010).

**Measures.** Researchers measured the areas of Parent Involvement, Student-Teacher Relationship, Perceived Competence, Academic Performance, and Intelligence using various methods (Torpor et al., 2010). A teacher version of the Parent-Teacher Involvement Questionnaire was used to measure teachers' perceptions of parents' positive attitudes toward their child's education. Student-teacher relationships were also measured using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale—a questionnaire about teachers' perceptions of teacher relationships with children and child's behavior in relation to teacher. Children's perceived confidence was measured using the Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children. Children's academic performance was measured using the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test-Second Edition. An academic performance rating scale was also completed by teachers for each child participant. Children's IQ was also measured using the Wechsler

Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition. Data was collected from children and mothers (demographic information) over two visits to a laboratory where assessments were administered by a graduate student during one-on-one sessions. Several months later, to give enough time for teachers to become familiar with the children and mothers enrolled at school, data from teacher questionnaires was collected (Torpor et al., 2010).

**Results.** Two analyses were performed; the first was a regression model of four mediators, the second used the Sobel test to examine further the remediation of the independent variable from dependent and mediating variables (Torpor et al., 2010). Parent involvement was considered the original independent variable. Two dependent variables were identified as child's standardized achievement test score and classroom academic performance. Two potential mediators were identified as child's perception of cognitive competence and the quality of the student-teacher relationship. Four regression models took place to analyze for each mediator and variable. Analysis showed that increased parent involvement was significantly related to children's increased perception of cognitive confidence, significantly related to the increased quality of student-teacher relationships, and that cognitive confidence was related to higher achievement test scores, while student-teacher relationships were related to children's academic performance. Unexpectedly, children's perceived cognitive competence emerged as an independent mediator in the Sobel test and had stronger significance than parent involvement in the areas of achievement test scores, classroom academic achievement, and student-teacher relationship (Torpor et al., 2010).

The study was not without limitations as data used was cross-sectional, gathered in different settings and at different times, and reported data was heavily dependent of teacher responses (Torpor et al., 2010). These limitations could contribute to an incomplete picture of the

effects parent involvement could have had on student achievement. Parent involvement (according to teacher reports) influenced children's cognitive competence and academic achievement, as well as teacher-student relationships. However, children's own perceptions of cognitive competence, the confidence to understand and learn, were found to be even more significant (Torpor et al., 2010) which could possibly be related to research that states "as children are likely to harbor similar attitudes and beliefs as their parents, having high parental expectations appears vital for academic achievement of children" (Wilder, 2014, p. 392). How can teachers and families cooperatively support children's cognitive competence through partnership? Whyte and Karabon (2016) contend the dynamic of the traditional roles of parents and teachers needs to be dismantled.

### ***An Ethnographic Approach to Building Partnerships***

*Transforming teacher-family relationships: shifting roles and perceptions of home visits through the Funds of Knowledge approach* (Whyte & Karabon, 2016) examined the use of ethnography in order to build collaborative relationships between families and teachers. Researchers suggested that transformational relationships must be established through trust and reciprocity, requiring teachers to adopt an asset view of families, and to consider culture as a resource. The Funds of Knowledge (FoK) approach—a framework developed to "connect with and respect the lived experiences and practices at home through reshaping classroom pedagogy to build on diverse cultural ways of knowing" (Whyte & Karabon, 2016, p. 208)—was identified as a model that could support building partnerships between home and school. In an effort to understand and deconstruct the traditional teacher-parent relationship, teachers participated in professional development that embraced culturally responsive teaching and FoK (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Over a two year period, three cohorts of pre-kindergarten teachers, met weekly

for two and one-half hours to read, reflect, and discuss early childhood, math, and home-school connections. Data for the study was collected from the third cohort, of which participants came from many different settings including public schools, Head Start programs, community centers, parent co-op's, and university lab childcare centers. Two center directors participated in the third cohort as well as three bilingual support teachers. One teacher participant was male. Participants had a range of teaching experience from recent college graduates to over 20 years.

**Method and Findings.** Participants were asked to choose one focal child who was different from the participant in two of the following ways: race, class, language, or gender. Participants then developed interview questions to use during three home-visit experiences. Before and after each visit, teachers were asked to write about experiences in Home Visit Reflections. In addition, according to FoK approach, group conversations were facilitated to support teachers in building meaning and understanding around the home-visit experiences. Participants then used the information gathered from families to develop educational activities. Whole class and small group discussions from 50 class sessions were recorded and the Home Visit Reflections from each participant were collected. The data was analyzed and codified according to three themes that demonstrate how teachers navigated the experience of ethnographic home visits: learning to learn from families, the strength of traditional teacher roles, and the desire to connect (Whyte & Karabon, 2016).

***Learning to Learn from Families.*** Many participants felt nervous and excited at first, not knowing what to expect, how families would react to questions, and not wanting to offend or intimidate families. Participants assumed that ethnographic home-visits originated in places of discomfort. Once home-visits were underway, however, participants had mixed reactions and apprehension lingered. Some teachers with prior relationships with parents from frequent

interactions at school reported that the home-visits were successful. Others, particularly teachers from Head Start programs discussed the apprehension felt from families, and assumed the reaction was due to the unique nature of the ethnographic visits as opposed to the typical home-visit structure of Head Start programs.

***Strength of Traditional Teacher Role.*** Teachers struggled to commit to the role of learner in relation to families, often reverting to direct inquiry about different subjects and complements about parenting practices. Head Start teachers had the most difficulty navigating the model, teaching to the families rather than learning from them. Family expectations of ethnographic home-visits were another hurdle that many participants experienced. Participants reported that parents had trouble understanding the purpose of the visits or what to expect from the experience. Some participants expressed strong evidence of the power the teacher role holds, as some families expected a home inspection.

***Desire to Connect.*** Teachers wanted to feel connected to families. Participants viewed the home-visit experiences as a tool to connect to children's home life in order to support learning through relationships with families. Some participants felt quantity of visits was important to feel comfortable talking with families, while others believed more in quality of encounters. Teachers practiced using the FoK experiences to enhance teaching practices through deeper connections with children and families, not solely focused on school achievement, but on the reciprocal relationships that support learning and development.

Whyte and Karabon (2016) investigated teachers' thoughts, feelings, and reactions to conducting ethnographic home visits as a way to build stronger relationships with parents and children. Research presented a critical view of how ethnographic home-visits can be a difficult but important step to building trusting partnerships with families. When the purpose of home-

visits was shifted away from school-focused agendas toward a shared understanding between teacher and family, teachers were able to glean how to become learners, researchers, and facilitators of partnership. An example of what partnership in action can look like was presented by Colliver (2018) in a study that not only empowered teachers and families to work together to support children's interests and learning about numeracy, but embraced the developmentally appropriate practice of child initiated play.

### **A Practical Example of Family-School Partnership**

*Fostering young children's interest in numeracy through demonstration of its value: The Footsteps Study* (Colliver, 2018) focused on how parents and teachers could support and foster children's interest in numeracy through child-initiated play. Family partnerships were sought to spark children's curiosity and thinking in multiple settings and circumstances, while promoting consistency and collaboration between home and school. The Footsteps intervention worked to embrace play based learning as a venue for learning about numeracy. The following research question guided the study: would participating children play more with numeracy if exposed to adult demonstrations of numeracy practices.

The relatively small study followed one control group and two intervention groups, one for numeracy and one for literacy (Colliver, 2018). Participants were enrolled in three randomly selected early childhood centers, without a dedicated numeracy or literacy program, located in suburban Sydney, Australia. After an invitation was extended to teachers and family members of four year old children, educators and families of 17 children agreed to participate, seven girls and 10 boys. Six children were assigned to the numeracy intervention group, five to literacy, and six to the control group. Each intervention group and the control group were given sets of materials pertaining to literacy or numeracy. Parents and teachers of participating children demonstrated

problem solving activities for 15 minutes, three times a week, for four weeks, using the materials and scripted problems pertaining to literacy or numeracy depending on treatment. No script was used with the control group. Adults were instructed to demonstrate problem solving near children who were not fully attentive or completely distracted. If a child showed interest, adults were instructed to make the child wait until the demonstration was finished, which showed that the task was valued and considered important by the adult. When demonstrations were not in action, demonstration materials were made available to children.

Children's numeracy and literacy skills were measured pre- and post-intervention spanning four weeks, using the Early Mathematical Patterning Assessment (EMPA) and the Letter and Word Recognition and Written Expression subtests of the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement III. Observations were recorded during children's free play noting the number of times and the length of time children chose to engage in literacy or numeracy activities that resembled the demonstrations. Observations were only gathered at childcare centers for consistency. Interviews were conducted within seven days of the culmination of the study and again after three months to measure long-term impacts (Colliver, 2018).

Participating educators noted that there was no significant difference at baseline between the use of numeracy or literacy between the intervention groups and the control group (Colliver, 2018). During the four week time period, children in the numeracy intervention group spent significantly more time engaging in numeracy activities than the literacy group spent on literacy, or the control group on literacy or numeracy. However, there was a drop in interest during week three of the literacy intervention and another during week four in the numeracy group. Some children in the control group were reported to show interest in the materials at the beginning of the study but quickly lost interest without any support or guidance from adults. There was no

significant improvement in math scores. Literacy scores for the literacy treatment group on the Letter and Word Recognition test did improve. 81.8 percent of participating parents and teachers observed increased interest in numeracy and literacy from children and 64 percent of parents attributed children's increased abilities in numeracy and literacy to the Footsteps intervention (Colliver, 2018). Despite the use of skill assessments in this study, the goal was to foster and evaluate children's interest and use of numeracy and literacy in play, not necessarily to only improve skills. The study was limited by the small sample size and findings were inconsistent, but the manner in which parents and teachers worked together led by child-initiated play to support children's development was a practical example of family-school partnership in action.

### **Conclusion**

This literature review illustrated the complexities that surround building effective family-school partnerships. Despite the fact that national expectations and state standards are misaligned, early childhood educators remain accountable for fostering reciprocal relationships with parents and families that support young children's growth and development. Parent involvement has been proven to have a significant impact on young children's academic and social emotional development. Early learning experiences have long-term effects into later life. Parents and children benefit from engaging in cognitively stimulating activities. Educators are responsible for reaching out to support parent's growing understanding of child development and many methods have been shown to be effective including school-based, educator-facilitated parent involvement, and self-directed parent training programs. Parent behavior is not the only variable when fostering parent involvement and building partnerships between home and school. Educators need to consider many factors that influence parents and children, which include: values and beliefs; life experiences; social, resource, and cultural capital; language and



communication; perceptions of parents, teachers, and children; and power dynamics. Educators need to be aware of all these elements while also being open to change. Partnerships are cultivated over time and take effort to maintain from everyone involved, teacher, parent, and child. When parents and teachers can work together, parents, teachers, and children benefit. The next chapter will present a summary of how parent involvement impacts teachers, children, families, and partnership.

### Chapter Three: Research Summary

Research has shown that parents play a role in supporting and influencing learning and development in young children (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016; Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017; Jaynes, 2012; Powell et al., 2010; Schlee et al., 2009; Sheridan et al., 2010; Sheridan et al., 2011; Thompson & Carlson, 2017; Van Voorhis et al., 2013). Parents are a child's first teacher and parents' decisions can have lasting effects on a child, including the decision to enroll a child in early childhood programming. Choosing the right early childhood program can be wrought with compromises about cost, location, philosophy, among many other considerations. Not least are the potential relationships that can be cultivated between parents and teachers who take on the shared responsibility of educating and caring for children. Parents want to feel supported. Parents want to have peace of mind that their children are safe, well cared for, and engaged in rich learning opportunities. Some parents experience minimal barriers in their search for high quality care and education, while many more parents are left with little choice or access to high quality early childhood programming. No matter the situation, early childhood educators are ethically bound to providing developmentally appropriate care and education, which includes cultivating effective relationships with families (Copple et al, 2009; Feeney et al, 2018). This research paper was guided by the question: How can early childhood educators build partnerships with parents to support children's development? There are three key players present in this question—teachers, parents, and children—all in relation to the central concept of parent involvement. Research has shown that teachers, parents, and children are all affected by the concept of parent involvement in different ways.

#### **Misalignment of State Standards and National Expectations for Partnerships**

Research indicated that a misalignment of state standards and national expectations exists. Parent involvement was acknowledged in state early learning and development standards

as an important aspect for school success, but effective practices or guidelines were lacking. In fact, most instances found pertaining to the concepts of parents, family, and home were not situated within the actual standards, but existed in peripheral or unspecified sections of the standards documents (Walsh et al., 2016). The disconnection between national organizations' expectations and state standards has projected mixed messages upon early childhood educators about how to approach parent involvement. The discrepancy was made evident in the many interpretations of what qualified as parent involvement by teachers, administrators, and programs that guided practice and implementation (Hilado et al., 2013; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Jeynes, 2012; Wilder, 2014). A more flexible perspective of engagement that focused on quality of encounters and parent effort put forth to connect with teachers, families, and community was perceived to have more positive effect on school-family relationships than rigid lists of predetermined events with a demand for mandatory attendance (Hilado et al., 2013; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). While a unified approach to parent involvement could better support programs across states and regions, parent engagement is left to the determination of programs and even down to individual educators.

### **Family Involvement and Children's Developmental Domains**

Parent involvement has been considered a key component affecting academic success and social emotional development of children (Powell et al., 2010; Sheridan et al., 2010; Sheridan et al., 2011; Van Voorhis et al., 2013; Wilder, 2014). Research examined showed that parents who engaged in learning activities at home and employed supportive parenting practices were positively associated to children's literacy, math, and social emotional development (Powell et al., 2010). Parents who supported children's autonomy, employed responsive attitudes toward behavior, and who engaged in cognitively stimulating activities were found to significantly

impact areas of children's social-emotional and literacy development (Sheridan et al., 2010; Sheridan et al., 2011). A strong positive and consistent relationship was found to exist between parent involvement and academic achievement regardless of grade level, race/ethnicity, or definition used to define parent involvement. Parental expectations were found to have the most effect (Wilder, 2014). While children's perceptions can be influenced by teachers and parents, children's own perceptions of cognitive competence were found to be even more significant in relation to achievement, academic performance, and student-teacher relationships (Torpor et al., 2010).

### **Engaging Parents with Young Children**

Research demonstrated that when parents are engaged, children and parents benefit collectively, though the ways in which parents and families are engaged matters. Jeynes (2012) found that typical school-based parent involvement programs often included opportunities to connect with parents through parent-teacher conferences, curriculum events, children's performances, or classroom volunteering. However, research showed the most effective programs in relation to student achievement were shared reading programs and programs that fostered emphasized partnerships with families (collaborative relationships between parents and teachers who work cooperatively together to develop rules, guidelines, and approaches to support youth) (Jeynes, 2012). Ansari and Gershoff (2016) found that parents also benefitted in facilitated partnerships with educators, where educators took on the role of guide to support alternative parenting techniques and engagement strategies with children. When parent behavior was adjusted to engage with children using practices of cognitive stimulation, responsive behavior management, and effective discipline techniques, there was a compounding effect. Research found that parent engagement fostered by educator facilitation led to less controlling

parent behavior, resulting in less spanking of children and children's expression of fewer behavior problems, which in turn led to more cognitive stimulation and higher approaches to learning in children and parents (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Motivated parents were also shown to have success in supporting children's social-emotional development as a result of education and reflection about child development paired with intentional approaches to parenting behavior (Thompson & Carlson, 2017). Research demonstrated when parent involvement programs are successful at changing parent behavior, parents and children both benefitted. While changing parent behavior can be a factor in supporting children's learning and development, it is not the purpose for building school-family partnerships.

### **Recognizing Parent Beliefs and Experiences**

Research indicated that educators need to be aware of and sensitive to parents' beliefs and lived experiences. Family structure plays a role in children's learning and development and should not be overlooked or taken for granted. Research has viewed mothers as the primary parental figure, but rarely considers other family members as relevant supporters in children's learning and development. Research revealed supportive literacy engagement that reached beyond mothers' participation and further engaged organized participation of extended family including adults and older siblings was justifiable as an important and effective contributor to children's development (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017). Parent's social and resource capital were also found to be relevant contributing factors to children's academic achievement. While social capital was found to influence children's achievement, parents with more resource capital were better positioned to impact children's achievement. Parent resource capital was also identified as a possible contributing factor to the achievement gap (Schlee et al., 2009), a critical

issue that directly influences the need for better and more effective parent involvement practices such as emphasized school-family partnerships.

### **Building Partnerships**

Educators dedicated to school-family partnerships need to find ways to build relationships while being sensitive to and understanding family dynamics and situations. Research demonstrated that successful school policies and practices reflected the needs of the learning community and worked to overcome barriers that impeded access and opportunities for school-family partnerships. Schools that embraced parent involvement as a central component to programming adopted various approaches aligned to child, parent, and community needs (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Cultural sensitivity and responsiveness was another foundational principle cited by research to be important in fostering relationships between parents and educators. Cultural misunderstanding and/or miscommunication between home and school as a result of language barriers or other factors can sabotage partnership building efforts. When communication was not effective between teachers and parents and assumptions became the basis for decision making, relationships devolved into a cycle of misunderstanding and resulted in disempowerment and frustration (DeGioia, 2013). Assumptions are linked to perceptions. Research has shown that teachers' and parents' perceptions of one another can impact how relationships develop. While teachers perceived parents to be important contributors to children's learning and development, teacher attitudes often positioned parents as deficient while positioning educators as engaging and supportive (Sims-Schouten, 2016). Research found that if partnerships are to be successful, teachers and parents need to honestly confront their perceptions of themselves and each other, especially in relation to the power dynamics of traditional teacher-family relationships.

Teachers are traditionally viewed as holding positions of power, leaving parents or family members subordinate to the knowledge and skill of the teacher. Research demonstrated that an ethnographic approach to school-family relations can intentionally dismantle the traditional power structure of the teacher-parent dynamic to empower families and create more equitable teacher-family relationships. Through home visits, early childhood teachers were able to encounter families from a position of learning. While communication and expectations between teachers and families were not always clear, the foundation for deeper connections and partnership was fostered because teachers were able to embrace multiple roles as learners, researchers, and facilitators of partnership while acknowledging the knowledge and expertise unique to each family (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). A practical example of parents and teachers working cooperatively together showed one approach to shared responsibility that supported math and literacy inquiry in relation to child-initiated play (Colliver, 2018). Although results of the study were limited, Colliver (2018) demonstrated how school-family partnerships engaged teachers, parents, and children in shared research in an uncomplicated, straightforward way, while focus remained on and respected children's approaches to inquiry through play.

### **Conclusion**

Despite inconsistency between state standards and national expectations for early learning and development, teachers have the capacity to foster strong partnerships with parents to support children's learning and development. Parent involvement has been shown to have positive and significant impact to children's academic and social emotional development. Parent involvement was also found to benefit parents through better understanding of child development and improved parenting skills. However, changing parent behavior should not be the only focus for school-family partnerships. Consideration for beliefs, values, family structure, social and

resource capital, cultural awareness, perceptions, and the dynamics of teacher-parent relationships must be part of the process when building and maintaining school-family partnerships. Valuing young children's development and learning through developmentally appropriate practice should be the cornerstone of future school-family partnerships. Chapter Four will discuss the implications of the research presented here and proposals for future research.



#### Chapter 4: Discussion and Applications for Future Research

Building partnerships between families and schools is developmentally appropriate practice especially when working with young children (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Copple et al., 2009) as well as an ethical duty of early childhood educators (Feeney et al., 2018). Including and engaging parents in active support and management of children's development is important to providing early care and education to young children. Families are children's first teachers and must be considered significant contributors to children's development. This research paper has unfolded an intricate map of parent involvement in relation to teacher's practice, children's learning and development, parent's engagement with young children, and the considerations that contribute to building partnerships with families. How can these concepts effect current practice and influence future research?

Early childhood educators can build partnerships with families to support children, but more needs to be done to unify and guide the profession. Walsh and colleagues (2016) bring to the forefront the discrepancy between state standards and national expectations for parent involvement and research shows that this is directly impacting programs and early childhood educators and families. Paired with a tedious lack of clarity in definition and with multiple concepts surrounding what constitutes involvement, engagement, and partnership within the context of the American early childhood education (Edwards & Kutaka, 2015), the mixed messages that educators receive and families perceive concerning the role of parents in partnership with schools weakens the early childhood field. To some it seems that parent involvement is just another box to check off on a list of requirements. To others it becomes a wellspring of deep connections to learning and development across generations, cultures, and communities. The field of early childhood education needs aligned standards and expectations to

act as a unifying core that can offer guidance to those directly working to support children's development and learning (Goffin, 2013), effectively uplifting failing programs without stifling other programs engaged in flourishing parent involvement practices.

When school-family partnerships only focus on children, the learning between teachers and families may go unseen, which can be detrimental to school-family partnerships long term. Research clearly illustrates the need to consider a long list of contributing factors each individual brings to the partnership. Behavior, beliefs, values, life experiences, social-, resource-, and cultural-capital and contexts, language and other modes of communication, listening, perspectives and assumptions, positioning in relation to traditional teacher-parent dynamics, power dynamics between teachers, parents, and children; all of these elements intersect within each person and contribute to partnership. Awareness, sensitivity, and acknowledgement of these elements are crucial to the effectiveness of school-family relationships. Whyte and colleagues (2016) demonstrated how ethnographic home-visits in the Funds of Knowledge approach are structured to support all of these important intersecting elements. While the study only examined initial encounters between families and educators, the aspects of time commitment, effort, and dedication required for long-term practice were not overlooked. This approach can seem daunting, as it did for many of the participants in the study (Whyte et al., 2016), and requires a shift in thinking from all involved. However, as the expectations and standards for early learning and development in the United States are revised in the hopes of becoming progressively more unified, the potential for a more balanced approach to pedagogy and practice, including a focused approach to school-family partnerships, is possible. The learning that takes place between teachers and families must be valued and recognized in order to sustain high-quality school-family partnerships. Future studies that follow long-term ethnographic school-family

partnership programs could further support and enhance understandings of the complexities and intersectional relationships between schools and families.

Effective partnerships between educators and families are important for the healthy development of young children, but where is the child positioned in relation to the school-family partnership? Are parents and teachers the only ones allowed to make decisions about children's learning? Do children have the capacity to be involved in the decision making processes that affect their learning experiences? Many of the studies included in the literature review of this research paper positioned young children as subjects to be tested and measured, with value attached to skill level and achievement. Often times, these measurements are taken through practices deemed inappropriate according to standards established by experts on developmentally appropriate practice, which can severely undermine and underestimate children's capabilities. It is clear what researchers gain from these methods, but what are the children gaining in these scenarios? On the other hand, Colliver (2018) took a different stance, intentionally designing a study which honored children's time and approach to content while engaging parents and educators as partners in research. The study was not without flaw, but it does start a conversation about how research can more aptly and equitably include children's voices in early childhood education. Researchers, educators, and parents need to keep asking 'Is the goal of educational research to raise scores or is the goal to shape future generations?' While not mutually exclusive, these questions do temper the purposes of and intentions surrounding educational research and should not be taken for granted. Edwards and Kutaka (2015) dare to further ponder "is it necessary for us to focus on learning skills and school achievement as the sole or predominant rationale for school-family partnerships? Are there other ways to think about the benefits, short- and long-term, that focus on the well-being and quality of life experienced by all of our children,

families, educators, and ultimately, communities?” (p. 24). Future research that recognizes the role of the child as a contributing and relevant stake holder in relation to research and school-family partnership would further expand perceptions of children as active rather than passive participants in education.

To remedy these issues, school-family partnerships need to be considered through the lens of the Learning Community. Learning communities are dynamic and complex webs of relationships and knowledge building, negotiation and understanding, collaboration and cooperation, between teacher, parent, and child. Each member of the learning community has the potential to be changed, to grow, and the opportunity to learn. Children’s learning and development are of primary concern and concentration in the relationships between families and educators. Therefore, parent engagement becomes one aspect of the Learning Community. Zhang (2015) posits that meaningful parent involvement is constructed through desirability, practicality, and effectuality and that the voices of “all members of the community of practice be heard in the meaning making of parental involvement” (p. 118). As such, parent involvement is a construct based on the context of the Learning Community, which is directly influenced by the active participation and motivations of teacher, parent, and child. Future research that can effectively marry qualitative data honoring the complex dynamics of parent involvement in different contexts with quantitative data could lend deeper insights to effective Learning Communities.

### **Conclusion**

This research paper was guided by the question: How can teachers build partnerships with parents to support healthy child development? A set of considerations is offered as a path to shared responsibility of learning between teachers, parents, and children. Unified standards and

expectations of school-family partnerships could support deeper connections between home and school. Honoring parents as complex individuals while supporting and facilitating parent engagement with children are key components to building strong partnerships that support children's healthy development. Recognizing children as vested participants in their own learning and contributors to school-family partnerships effectively pulls back the lens expanding the view of a two-way teacher-parent relationship to incorporate multi-faceted relationships between teachers, parents, and children (Zhang, 2015). Children, even young children, have the competence and ability to be responsible and take ownership in learning. "The child, along with peers and adults, is a protagonist in his or her own development" (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998, p. 274). Embracing young children as contributors and active members of school-family partnerships can further transform early childhood programs into complex and dynamic Learning Communities. Through sharing control, developing questions, making observations, and working together, teachers, parents, and children *all* become connected and empowered.

### References

- Ansari, A. & Gershoff, E. (2016). Parent involvement in head start and children's development: Indirect effects through parenting. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78(4), 562-579.
- Bodrova, E. & Leong, D. (2007). *Tools of the mind: The Vygotskian approach to early childhood education* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J: Merrill Prentice Hall
- Colliver, Y. (2018). Fostering young children's interest in numeracy through demonstration of its value: The Footsteps Study. *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, 30(4), 407-428.
- Copple, C., Bredekamp, S., & National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, D.C: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- De Gioia, K. (2013). Cultural negotiation: Moving beyond a cycle of misunderstanding in early childhood settings. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 11(2), 108-122.
- Edwards, C. P., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. E. (Eds.). (1998). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach--advanced reflections* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Edwards, C. P., & Kutaka, T. S. (2015). Diverse perspectives of parents, diverse concepts of parent involvement and participation: What can they suggest to researchers?. In *Foundational Aspects of Family-School Partnership Research, Vol.1*, 35-53. Springer, Cham.
- Feeney, S., Freeman, N., & National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2018). *Ethics and the early childhood educator: Using the NAEYC code* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

- Goffin, S. G. (2013). *Early Childhood Education for a New Era: Leading for Our Profession*. Teachers College Press.
- Goodall, J. & Montgomery, C. (2014) Parental involvement to parental engagement: A continuum. *Educational Review*, 66(4), 399-410.
- Hilado, A. V., Kallemeyn, L., & Phillips, L. (2013). Examining understandings of parent involvement in early childhood programs. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 15(2), n2.
- Hornbey, G. & Lafaele, R. (2011). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An explanatory model. *Educational Review*, 63(1), 37-52.
- Hornby, G. & Blackwell, I. (2018). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An update. *Educational Review*, 70(1), 109-119
- Jarrett, R. L., & Coba-Rodriguez, S. (2017). "We keep the education goin' at home all the time": Family literacy in low-income African American families of preschoolers. *Journal of Education for Students Places at Risk*, 22(2), 57-76.
- Jeynes, W. (2012). A meta-analysis of the efficacy of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students. *Urban Education*, 47(4). 706-742.
- Powell, D. R., Son, S. H., File, N., & San Juan, R. R. (2010). Parent-school relationships and children's academic and social outcomes in public school pre-kindergarten. *Journal of School Psychology*, 48, 269-292.
- Schlee, B. M., Mullis, A. K., and Shriner, M. (2009). Parents social and resource capital: Predictors of academic achievement during early childhood. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31, 227-234.

- Sheridan, S. M., Knoche, L. L., Edwards, C. P., Boviard, J. A., & Kupzyk, K. A. (2010). Parent engagement and school readiness: Effects of the Getting Ready intervention on preschool children's social-emotional competencies. *Early Education and Development, 21*(1), 125-156.
- Sheridan, S. M., Knoche, L. L., Kupzyk, K. A., Edwards, C. P., & Marvin, C. A. (2011). A randomized trial examining the effects of parent engagement on early language and literacy: The getting ready intervention. *Journal of School Psychology, 49*, 361-383.
- Sims-Schouten, W. (2016). Positioning in relationships between parents and early years practitioners. *Early Childhood Development and Care, 186*(9), 1392-1405.
- Thompson, R. N. & Carlson, J. S. (2017). A pilot study of a self-administered parent training intervention for building preschoolers' social-emotional competence. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 45*, 419-426.
- Torpor, R. D., Keane, S. P., Shelton, T. L., & Calkins, S. D. (2010). Parent involvement and student academic performance: A multiple meditational analysis. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, 38*(3), 183-197.
- Van Voorhis, F. L., Maier, M. F., Epstein, J. L., & Lloyd, C. M. (2013). The impact of family involvement on the education of children ages 3 to 8: A focus on literacy and math achievement outcomes and social-emotional skills. *MDRC*.
- Walsh, B. A., Sanchez, C., Lee, A. M., Casillas, N., & Hansen, C. (2016). Family concepts in early learning and development standards. *Early Child Development and Care, 186*(7), 1034-1059.



Whyte, K. L. & Karabon, A. (2016). Transforming teacher-family relationships shifting roles and perceptions of home visits through the Funds of Knowledge approach. *Early Years*, 36(2), 207-221.

Wilder, S. (2014). Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: a meta-synthesis. *Educational Review*, 66(3), 377-397

Zhang, Q. (2015). Defining 'meaningfulness': Enabling preschoolers to get the most out of parental involvement. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 40(4), 112-120.