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Teacher and Parental Influence on Childhood Learning Outcomes

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, California State University Los Angeles, 2003

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Previous research has investigated the strategies to develop teacher-parent relationships in preschool programs. However, a gap exists concerning whether or not parents and teachers perceive that their relationships with children directly impact student's learning outcomes. The purpose of this descriptive case study was to determine how teachers and parents perceive the role of professional development, parental involvement, and the teacher-parent relationship on children's achievement. Early childhood experts have suggested that each of these roles contribute to children's learning outcomes. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model served as a framework for this study because it focuses on the connection between home and school that influence children's development and learning. Data collection consisted of 6 parent and 6 teacher interviews from 3 preschools, and were analyzed via inductive analysis for emergent themes. The results findings illuminated the importance of teacher-parent relationships in children's growth and development; the findings also revealed the connection between children's academic skills and teachers' education and training. The study also found that home learning increased children's academic success. These findings are consistent with past research findings that reveal the importance of parents and teachers working together as partners in education to increase children's learning outcomes. This study promotes positive social change by empowering preschool administrators to create policies and procedures that encourage working directly with families and to develop a mission statement to promote increased parental involvement in the early childhood field to support children's achievement.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, who is the head of my life, my mother, and my family. Thank you, God, for giving me the strength to continue this process when I felt like giving up. To my lovely mother Dorothy, who instilled in me at an early age the value of education. Without your love, support, and prayers I would not have completed this journey. To my husband Percy, the love of my life, thank you for putting up with me throughout this process. To my three children Deion, DaJon, and Deja, words cannot express how much I love you. I am deeply sorry for the time we spent apart preparing to complete the process. To my sisters Jessica and Kutu, I greatly appreciate both of you for encouraging me along the way. To my brother Andre, who was an inspiration to me and a role model. To Sister Elaine, Marshe, and Andre (rest in peace), who did not get to see me complete my dissertation, I miss you ALL!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Parents and teachers significantly contribute to children's growth and development. How teachers and parents interact with each other throughout a child's education tends to influence the child's development. Epstein (2011) stated teachers and parents have the appropriate skills to foster adaptive teacher-parent relationships, and that parents are interested in participating in the formal education process. In the United States, there has been an ongoing, national conversation about how to augment parental participation in education and discussion about the relationship of teacher training and education as critical strategies to improve the foundation for children's future success. However, there is a paucity of empirical literature on this topic.

Teachers' preparation and parental support have been identified in the National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards as being requisite in children's development. The NAEYC's (2002) standards have served as a framework to encourage effective parental involvement and to prepare professionals in the early childhood field. The quality of education is link to teachers' preparation and determines a child's learning outcomes (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). Creating and retaining a pool of qualified teachers' qualifications of teachers tend to be a challenge in may preschool programs and the effects of this situation are causing low quality education and academic failure (Geary, 2006). As noted by Saracho and Spodek (2007), the NAEYC has not yet established national standards for teachers working with young children. Saracho and Spodek (2007) stated each state has established childcare regulations for educational standards (p. 84). For example, in California, every preschool teacher is required to have

12-24 early childhood course hours (units) in professional education, which is the pathway to become a certified teacher in early childhood (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015). In addition, Head Start requires teachers to obtain an Associate degree or Bachelor of Science degree in child development or related field, as well as a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential (California Department of Education, 2009). The National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE; 2009) stated preschool teachers should be "highly qualified with specialized early childhood preparation" (p. 188). NAEYC (2002) emphasized that qualified teachers are more effective in working with children to ensure that no child is left behind.

Parents' Impact on Learning Outcomes

Parental involvement is an important element in early childhood education (ECE) and strongly influences children's academic achievement (Neumann, 2009). This importance was recognized in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2002, which stated that parental involvement is an ongoing process that entails participation and collaboration between the home and school and focuses on learning activities and children's academic success (NAEYC, 2002, & 9191.32). A lack of a parental support poses a major concern to the early childhood educational system, with a strong potential to negatively affect children's development and learning. Ratcliff and Hunt (2009) concluded that a lack of parental support in the school system is due to lack of teacher-parent relationships.

The Relationship Between Parental Support and Teacher Preparation

Ratcliff and Hunt (2009) suggested that building an effective relationship with parents is essential for teachers in gaining knowledge and skills needed to accomplish

goals for building effective collaboration. Teachers are in need of formal hands-on training that will provide them with strategies and approaches in working with parents. There is little research on teaching and learning processes that specifically define techniques that would facilitate teachers' knowledge and skills involving parents in their children's education. Ratcliff and Hunt (2009) proposed that a requisite for effective teaching is first-hand interaction with parents, which allows teachers the opportunity to use a variety of techniques and strategies to involve parents in their child's learning.

One of the main challenges that teachers encounter in building effective relationships with parents is teachers' dispositions (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). Dispositions are a person's values and beliefs system, and are linked to their attitude. Ratcliff and Hunt (2009) stated that research has identified several dispositions or elements that are essential for teachers to understand in order to establish relationships with families. They reported that when teachers display dispositions toward parents, the following is included: "(a) positive attitude, (b) engaging families in the learning process, (c) effective communication, and (d) empowerment." These create relationship with families (p. 499). Souto-Manning and Swick (2007) stated, "The negative experiences tend to create a stereotype in some teachers regarding parent involvement" (p. 188). Ratcliff and Hunt (2009) stated that all dispositions are learned through "modeling and assisted performance" (p. 500). Dispositions that teachers exhibit are observed by parents and often replicated. In addition, teachers take courses in college pertaining to working with families to help them understand how to be professional educators and build effective partnerships with parents. Knopf and Swick (2008) indicated that when effective relationships are developed, families have a key role in their children's education.

Baumgartner and McBride (2009) noted that building relationships between teachers and parents promotes positive learning outcomes. Ratcliff and Hunt (2009) concluded their review of literature by stating that teacher preparation programs need to ensure that teachers are provided with hands-on learning experiences in which they will develop knowledge and skills in working with families using a professional disposition to support children's learning outcomes.

The role of parental involvement in education was underestimated until the seminal work of Epstein (2011) on parental engagement. Epstein (2011) argued that parental involvement is a partnership in which the school, family, and community share responsibility for children's "learning and development" (p. 4). The responsibilities included in the exchange of shared information, according to Epstein (2011) consist of "Ideas, activities, and services between one another regarding children's education" (p. 82). Epstein (2011) described six types of family involvement: (a) parenting, (b) communication, (c) learning at home, (d) volunteering, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating. These different types of family involvement provide a framework for educational systems to guide educators in understanding the child's immediate environment and to provide support to parents to help them become actively involved in their children's academic experiences. In addition, this program provides an effective partnership system in the context of how children live and develop. This study explored Epstein's model of parental involvement and how these different types of variations contribute to the ECE field to lay the foundation for building stronger and more effective teacher relationships with families.

McMillan (2005) stated that parents are the child's primary educators because learning starts in the home environment with parents. Amatea (2009) indicated that ECE professionals must understand how to work effectively with parents. There are various types of family structures within society, such as single parent families, gay and lesbian families, blended families, multigenerational families, and adoptive families (Amatea, 2009). Understanding family structures helps teachers work better with parents and prepare children for academic success (Christian, 2006). Parental involvement is a vital element in producing positive learning outcomes and supporting children's education (Driessen, Smit, & Sleegers, 2005; Suizzo & Stapleton, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

The NAEYC (2002) suggested that the lack of teacher's professional development, parental involvement, and appropriate teacher-parent relationships contributes to children's poor learning outcomes. There continues to be a lack of empirical evidence on parent and teacher perspective to support these claims. This study was designed to address this research gap by testing these associations, drawing on teacher and parent experiences and my own insights from teaching in preschool programs. Although researchers have called for the implementation of strategies to facilitate the development of teacher-parent relationships, it is unclear whether parents and teachers perceive that a deficit in their relationships. This study was designed to help close this gap by exploring parent and teacher perspectives about their influence on children's educational outcomes. The role of teacher-parent relationships in ECE cannot be overstated.

A growing body of research has examined the relationship between parental involvement in education and its role in learning (Bartel, 2010). Hill and Taylor (2004) demonstrated that parental involvement is associated with children's learning outcomes. Such research confirmed that teachers should motivate parents to participate in their child's education. Epstein (2011) stated parent participation tends to enhance children's academic skills and creates a partnership between the home and school. In contrast, unqualified preschool teachers and a lack of parental involvement have been shown to be negatively associated with children's achievement of academic skills during the preschool years. Although there is research on these relationships, there is a paucity of information on the perspectives of teachers and parents regarding their perceptions of their influence on children's educational outcomes. This study was designed to add to the literature on this topic.

Nature of the Study

The researcher employed a qualitative descriptive case study to describe the impact of teachers' and parents' perceptions on teachers' preparedness and professional development, parental involvement, and the teacher-parent relationship. These factors were examined in relation to how these perceptions ultimately affected fulfilling children's learning outcomes.

Merriam (2009) stated that a case study is the "process of actually carrying out the investigation, the unit analysis, or the end product" (p. 46). In addition, a case study "is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 2009, p. 46). Further, Creswell (2007) stated that a case study involves "multiple sources of data collection (e.g., observation, interviews, audiovisual material,

and documents, and reports)" (p. 73), which creates rich information for the study. This constructs for a case study because it allows the researcher to use several data methods to examine the role of teachers' and parents' influences on children's learning outcomes.

I collected the primary study data through 12 formal interviews with teachers and parents. I subsequently tagged these journal notes with codes to help compare and identify segments of data such as themes, words, and topics. These data were imported into Microsoft Excel software application for sorting and analysis; I used an Excel template to separate research questions by creating codes. Each category was assigned a letter code (A, B, C, D, E, etc.) in order to understand the themes.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to describe perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the role of professional development and parent involvement in academic achievement. Another objective was to identify and understand potential barriers to building parent and teacher relationships. Although previous research has suggested that student achievement may be linked to teacher qualifications and parental involvement, additional research was needed on how teachers and parents perceive the roles of preparedness, parental involvement, and the teacher-parent relationship in students' academic success.

Some researchers have suggested that teacher education programs are not preparing educators to provide quality education. Qualified teachers have a tendency to understand the following three important factors: how children grow, how they develop, and how to teach them (National Association of Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009). However, a clear understanding of this process from the perspectives of teachers

and parents did not exist prior to this study. As a result, this investigation was designed in part to equip early childhood educators with knowledge to approach teacher-parent interaction with renewed determination. This study promotes social change by increasing the pool of knowledge about the teaching and learning process and how it can be used to develop best practices for parent-teacher relationships. These practices can be shared at the local and district school levels. In addition, defining the role of parents' and teachers' effect on student achievement can be used to influence modification to the NCLBA as it comes up for reauthorization in the next two years in the early childhood field.

Research Questions

This study was designed to identify teachers' and parents' perceptions of the roles of professional development, parent involvement, and the teacher-parent relationship in the achievement of children's learning outcomes. This inquiry was guided by three primary research questions and one secondary question. The primary research questions were:

1. How do teachers and parents determine their roles in children's learning outcomes?

2. How do teachers and parents describe professional development as perceived in relationship to children's learning?

3. How do teachers and parents perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes?

The secondary research question was:

4. What barriers do parents and teachers perceive exist in building relationships?

Conceptual Framework

This research study used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory as its conceptual framework because this theory emphasizes the importance of building effective relationships between parents and teachers related to children's development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized that the school environment and the home environment are essential systems in the development of children's academic skills. According to Bronfenbrenner, the microsystem refers to the environments in which children live such as the home, school, community. This theory was especially applicable because it provides a conceptual lens for understanding home environment as the primary setting where learning is established and school activities are reinforced with the support of parental involvement that is aligned to the microsystem.

According to ecological systems theory a student's home, school, and community need to work together in order for the student to develop academically. Bronfenbrenner's theory provides the theoretical framework of empirical literature regarding building stronger parental involvement systems in ECE and increasing children's development. This research study used Bronfenbrenner's theory as the conceptual framework because it defines ideas about building effective relationships between parents and teachers related to children's development.

Definition of Terms

The research study utilized the following terms, definitions, and concepts within the study.

Child Development Associate (CDA): A permit awarded after successful completion of course requirements and 120 hours of practical experience within the early childhood field (Ackerman, 2004).

Disposition: A demeanor that deals with ethical aspects of professional conduct (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009).

Early childhood education (ECE) programs: Educational programs that provide services to children birth from to 8 years of age (National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators [NAECTE], 2009).

Early childhood education units (ECEU): Collegiate study in early childhood (Debord & Boling, 2002).

Learning outcomes: A child's learning performance in the following domains: language, cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills (NAEYC, 2002).

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC): An organization that provides support for early childhood programs to improve quality education (Morrison, 2004).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA): A U. S. federal law specifying education reforms designed to improve academic achievement (Dee & Jacob, 2011).

Parental involvement: Parents participate and advocate for children's education as well as their overall endeavors (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009).

Quality education: Children's learning outcome that is determined by achievement of a high level of standards (Hyson, Tomlinson, & Morris, 2009).

Qualified teacher: An educator who demonstrates knowledge and skills in promoting children's learning; building a positive relationship with families and the community (NAEYC, 2002).

School readiness: The process of demonstrating knowledge and skills in the developmental areas, which are the foundation for later academic success. (Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Daugherty, Howes, & Karoly, 2009).

Teacher education: The process of acquiring the knowledge and skills needed for teaching young children (Hyson et al., 2009).

Teacher preparation: Programs and colleges that prepare preschool teachers to work with young children in the early childhood sector (Hyson et al., 2009).

U. S. Department of Education: A U. S. federal organization that supports and administers regulations for education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Assumptions

This current study was based on the following assumptions: (a) teachers would be honest and truthful in response to the interview questions as well as in completing the surveys, (b) teacher participants would know something about the impact of the teacher-parent relationship on children's learning, and (c) during the interview, parents would speak openly and honestly in their responses to the questions and the surveys to ensure accurate data.

Limitation and Delimitations

A specific delimitation existed in this case study. The study had a narrow focus, as the interviews involved parents and teachers from three private preschools located in

the inner city of the Los Angeles County area. This study was limited to perceptions of children's learning outcomes and not an actual assessment of learning outcomes.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it is intended to facilitate an understanding of how professional development, the teacher-parent relationship, and parental involvement influence children's achievement. These three elements are linked to quality education (NAEYC, 2002). Professional development includes teachers having the knowledge and skills to promote children's learning and prepare them for future academic success (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). Indeed, if teachers and parents report that teacher preparedness and professional development influence learning outcomes, perhaps teachers will be even more motivated to increase their qualifications. Increasing qualifications will lay the groundwork for teachers to understand the growth and development of young children, and to understand further the theoretical perspective and best practices in working with young children. This process may lead to promoting quality education and preparing children for academic success, which is absolutely essential in ECE.

This study identifies strategies regarding best practices that can be applied to help parents and teachers establish effective relationships. In addition, this case study will empower parents at the school level and provide an understanding of their roles in supporting children's learning. By empowering early childhood educators to become qualified teachers, build collaborative relationships with parents, and improve parental support, this study will contribute to significant social change.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe teacher and parent perceptions of the role of teacher preparedness and professional development, parent involvement, and a teacher-parent relationship in children's learning outcomes. Chapter 1 provided an introduction and overview of the study. Information on the problem and a brief explanation regarding the purpose of the study were provided. The nature of this qualitative case study was discussed and the assumptions, limitations, and the significance of the study were identified. Chapter 2 will include a description of the literature on parents' efforts to participate in their children's education as well as in building relationships with teachers. In addition, information that focuses on the challenges of improving teachers' qualifications in ECE will be reviewed. Also, literature on the topic of teacher education and learning outcomes will be explored. Chapter 3 will address the methodology, including the research design, selection of participants, data collection, and strategies used in the analysis of data. Chapter 4 will provide the findings on teachers' preparation and parental support regarding children's academic achievement. Chapter 5 will provide a summary of the findings of the study, and will include recommendations for future research and implications for social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teacher and parent perceptions of the role of professional development, parent involvement, and teacher-parent relationships in the achievement of children's learning outcomes. Teachers' qualifications and parental involvement are two important factors that significantly impact children's academic success by enhancing children's development during the early years (Barnett, 2003; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). The teachers who have pursued advanced education (Bachelor or Masters degree) tend to understand theories of child development and ECE as well as acquire the ability to apply these theories to their daily teaching, thereby preparing children for lifelong learning (Barnett, 2003). Parental involvement has also been shown to improve significantly the quality of children's achievement learning outcomes (Emanique & James, 2009; Knopf & Swick, 2008; McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009).

The literature review for this study was designed to inform the development of the primary research question through an examination of prior research on how teachers and parents perceive professional development and parental involvement, and of how parent-teacher relationships influence children's learning outcomes. This chapter summarizes research findings that describe a need for training qualified teachers, building stronger parent-teacher relationships, and empowering parental involvement in the ECE field. The conceptual framework emphasizes the importance of establishing relationships between parents and teachers to support children's academic achievement.

The review was accomplished by exhaustive searches of the following electronic databases: Academic Search Complete, EBSCO, Education Research Information Center (ERIC), InfoSci-online, PsycArticles, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. The primary search keywords and phrases included were the following: *building relationship within preschool, educational accountability, parent participation*, *preschool education, and professional development*. Additionally, I accessed numerous education reports to obtain information for the investigation.

The literature review is organized into 10 major sections: (a) a discussion of the the ecological systems theory, which provided the conceptual framework for this study, (b) parental involvement in their child's preschool program, (c) Epstein's model of parental involvement, (d) parental initiatives increases parent participation, (e) parent-teacher relationship supports children's academic success, (f) barriers limits parental involvement, (g) qualified teachers promote student achievement, (h) professional development provides knowledge and skills in working with children, (i) professional development initiatives allow teachers to be accountable for children's learning outcomes, and (j) best practices involves meeting the needs of the whole child and promote learning. These concepts are linked to teachers' and parents' influences on childhood learning outcomes. After an extensive review of these topics, a summary of the literature follows. The discussion of ecological systems theory sets the stage for the discussion on teacher and parent contributors to growth in children and suggests a mechanism by which parents and teachers both fit in a child's educational environment.

Ecological Systems Theory

The ecological systems theory (EST) identifies the human development model and a child's environment in relation to interactions between their immediate environment, such as a child's family or the community (Knopf & Swick, 2008) Bronfenbrenner's (1979) integrated theory of the ecological systems explains growth and development as starting within the context of the child's environment. Bronfenbrenner argued that the development of children and their immediate environmental systems interact with one another and the surrounding community to influence and establish relationships based on communication in the environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that the ecological environments consist of "structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (p. 3). Each structure of this interaction forms effective relationships among parents, educators, and the community that lays the foundation for children's development; according to Bronfenbrenner, if one level of the ecological system theory fails to work together as a system, it negatively affects the child's development. Bronfenbrenner identified the four systems as part of the ecological theory of development: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and the macrosystem; and maintained that consideration of each system is requisite in education research as they all apply to educational processes. Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Zygmunt-Fillwalk (2006) suggested that both parents and teachers are members of a child's microsystem.

The Microsystem and Education

The microsystem in EST consists of the immediate environment in which a child lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Swick, 2007). The immediate relationship and interactions

process deals with family, relatives, school, and so forth. However, many family therapists have hypothesized beliefs and conclusions regarding the family system which is compatible with the EST. Amatea (2009) defined the family system as "any perceived whole whose elements hang together because they continually affect each other over time and operate toward some common purpose" (p. 86). This definition illustrates that a child's family is a unit that is made up of members who work together to pursue a goal, and this system helps shape a person's development because of constant contact.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) asserted that the family plays an influential role in the child's well-being and academic learning. A success or failure event that occurs within the family system tends to impact the entire family structure. For example, a parent losing his or her job will affect the entire family structure because it will be extremely difficult for the parent to provide financially for the family. Amatea (2009) noted every family has developed a system in which they maintain interactions with each other when developing relationships. Bronfenbrenner believed that parents need to develop strong relationships with their children. In addition, effective relationships developed between a child and a parent allows the parent to be active, participate, and reinforce the learning in the home environment. When this learning process occurs the child will have the opportunity to succeed academically.

Gestwicki (2007) described a schoolchild's microsystem as including the school as an immediate environment in which the child lives. It is extremely important that teachers establish an effective relationship with their students and understand they are a product of a family system. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers find creative ways to build effective relationships with children before attempting to help meet their academic

needs (Knopf & Swick, 2008). Understanding the family dynamics empowers teachers to better understand the needs of the child and the family (Son & Morrison, 2010). The degree of interaction and the attachment process between the caregivers (family and schools) within this system influences children's learning outcomes.

The Mesosystem and Education

Gestwicki (2007) described the mesosystem as the second level of an ecological system, and it includes an institutional level of interactions between the home, and the school. Children's education not only depends on the role of the teacher, parental involvement also plays an essential role (Hafizi & Papa, 2012). In order to create this type of system it is essential that parents and teachers build relationships that focus on communication (Knopf & Swick, 2008). Interaction between teachers and parents sets the stage for collaboration, which is important in children's learning.

The Exosystem and Education

The exosystem of the ecological system is the "larger level of social system in which the child does not function directly" (Gestwicki, 2007, p. 446). The exosystem extends to community institutions. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that schools should establish partnerships within the community in order to meet the basic needs of the family. The community provides the families with resources and emotional support that will enable them to live a productive life. Some examples of resources are food, shelter, childcare, mental and medical clinics, drug prevention programs, and legal services. Researchers such as Epstein (2011) and Gestwicki (2007) stated the community is fundamental in providing resources for families to meet their basic needs and to empower all relationships within the child's mesosystem, which facilitates children's development.

The Macrosystem and Education

Gestwicki (2007) stated that the macrosystem level reflects the child's morals, culture, values, and laws that tend to have an effect on the child. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), values and beliefs are linked to culture and are influenced by all levels of the ecological system. Amatea (2009) provided an example, stating "the dominant cultural practices and belief systems around individual achievement are affected by what parents and teachers prioritize and value and how they organize their daily routines to achieve their goals" (p. 90). This example shows how the cultural beliefs can influence children's academic outcome.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory shows that when all the systems work together they guide and support the child's development and learning. In this model, four systems—microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem—clearly explain the interconnection among each level surrounding the child and the family. Each level shares common roles and responsibilities that are vital for reciprocal interactions, which set the pathway for developing partnerships (Gestwicki, 2007). Effective partnership is essential in order to understand the overall development of the child and to respect each system's contribution to children's learning. Through effective partnerships, each system can exchange information and work toward common goals and support children's development and academic learning (Gestwicki, 2007). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory can be used as a catalyst for building partnership between systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Effective partnerships between parents and teachers set the pathway for each system to work toward common objectives and support the children's growth and development (Gestwicki, 2007).

Ecological Systems Theory and Parent Involvement

To understand the ecological systems theory, educators should develop an in-depth understanding of parental involvement. The ecological systems theory provides the framework to establish that parental involvement can influence children's learning outcomes. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated the microsystem is the smallest system in which relationships between the child and parent is constructed. When parent-child relationships are formed, parents are likely to participate in their child's education. Parents are thought to be a child's primary educators, and the home environment is where learning begins (Gestwicki, 2007). Parents need to take the initiative to become proactive in school-related events, communicate with the schools, and reinforce activities in the home environment (Gestwicki, 2007).

Parental involvement creates the pathway for supporting children's learning outcomes (Chohan & Khan, 2010; Coleman, & McNeese, 2009; Larocque, Kleiman, & Daring, 2011; McIntyre et al., 2007). Therefore, the current study will focus on developing a conceptual framework by exploring the definition of parental involvement and by evaluating Epstein's model of parental involvement to determine how these different types of variations contribute to the ECE field. The results of this research may lay the foundation for building stronger and more effective relationships with families and increasing parental involvement.

Defining Parental Involvement

Many researchers agree with Bronfenbrenner (1979) and maintain that parents play a vital role in helping foster children's growth and development. The term *parental involvement* is used to describe the role of partnership in children's academic success

(Fehrmann, Keith, & Reimers, 1987). McMillian (2005) defined partnership as "a working relationship that is characterized by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate" (p. 123). McMillian (2005) examined the historical and conceptual perspective of parental involvement by providing 176 parents and 56 providers with questionnaires, and conducting semi-interviews and focus groups. The data was analyzed on four components: "current practice, models of parental involvement, mutual perceptions, and professional training issues" (McMillian, 2005, p. 120). The findings indicated a strong degree of parental involvement according to both families' and teachers' perspectives. The communication method was rated high by teachers, but low by parents. Meanwhile, staff training regarding parental involvement was lacking (McMillian, 2005).

Parental involvement has been described as a way in which parents facilitate children's growth and development (Fan, Williams, &Wolters, 2012; Suizzo & Stapleton, 2007). Parental involvement has been shown to improve "children's academic and school adjustment" (Suizzo &Stapleton, 2007, p. 533). In addition, parental involvement manifests as various roles, such as "volunteering in schools, attending parent-teacher conferences, and home-based involvement" (Stapleton, 2007, p. 533). Parental involvement is defined by Gestwicki (2007) as an:

All-purpose term used to describe all manner of parent-program interaction: policy making, parent education, funding-raising, volunteering time, and even the simple exchange of information of various sorts with staff. Understand a general goal of continuity of care; the desired end involved may be better parenting, better childcare and schools, or both. The parent involvement continuum runs from an

expectation of parent control to complete subservience of parents to professionals.
Parents may be cast in a variety of roles from experts (on their children) to
students, thus putting staff in positions ranging from servants to savants. (p.127)

These definitions imply that parental involvement in ECE occurs in many forms,
ranging from a "low level to a high level of participation" (Gestwicki, 2007, p. 127).
Low-level participation entails activities in which parents engage that do not require the
"decision-making power of the school," such as "newsletters, parent meetings, parent
conference and learning secondhand about their children's life at school" (Gestwicki,
2007, p. 127). High-level participation requires parents to collaborate effectively with
teachers by making decisions regarding their child's education or school-related issues
(Gestwicki, 2007). For example, Head Start is a program that allows parents to make
decisions regarding program-related topics and their child's development.

According to Gestwicki (2007), the Home and School Institute in Washington,
DC, has identified four variations of parent involvement. *Home-school communication*
deals with techniques that build communication between teachers and parents, such as
newsletters, notes, conferences, and telephone calls. *Parent education* provides
opportunities to educate parents in developing a better understanding in regard to how to
work with their children in the home environment. Such opportunities include
trainings/workshops, materials, and videos. *Public relations* ensure that the
school/program displays a positive disposition with parents. Finally, *volunteerism*
provides parents with opportunities to help support the school/program. In addition, to
variations on parent involvement activities, some researchers offer models to describe
successful interactions strategies between parents, education setting, and the community.

Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement

In order to understand parental involvement, practitioners must develop knowledge of Epstein's model of parental involvement that is a highly accepted theory in the ECE field. Epstein (2011) identified six types of parental involvement, which is based on a theoretical framework of "overlapping spheres of influence" (Olsen & Fuller, 2012, p. 134). This theory states that children develop higher academic skills with the support of parents, school, and the community working together. Epstein (2005) expressed this theory can be used to evaluate "teachers and administrators understanding of teaching" and how to facilitate children's learning "with connections of home, school, and community (p. 126). The framework of this study will employ Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement (MPI) in order to: (a) help educators and schools develop effective partnership systems; and (b) implement policies and procedures between the home, school, and community. Epstein's six types of involvement are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Parenting

Epstein (2011) noted that parents enact a major role in raising their children. In order for parents to meet their children's needs, it is vital for schools to support parenting skills and help parents develop strategies to work with their children. Epstein (2011) suggested that schools should collect information on a regular basis such as: "background, cultures, talents, goals, and expectation for students" (p. 419). This type of information will ensure that schools understand how to meet the needs of both children and families. Epstein (2011) further expressed the need for schools to provide workshops

for families to increase their knowledge of child development. Epstein (2011) noted that some parents are unable to attend the workshop due to various reasons such as being "busy with other children, working outside the home, living far from school, feeling unwelcome or frightened by the school, speaking languages other than English, or having other reason for not attending" (p. 420). Epstein (2011) stated that parents who are unable to attend the workshops do not mean they are not interested in their child's education: "The absent parent may be just as caring, loving and interested in their children as the parents who attend the workshop" (p. 420). Epstein believed if parents are unable to attend meetings, or workshops schools should ensure that families receive the information by using a different method.

Communicating

According to Epstein (2011), schools are required to inform parents of school-related events. The communication system is a two-way process of school and family and should involve both parties (Epstein, 2011; Symeou, Roussounidou & Michaelides, 2012). This communication system should exchange information using an effective technique that is easy to understand. Epstein (2011) argued that schools should "write English clearly, and documents should be translated into written major language spoken by students, families, and provided interpreters for parents who speak different languages at meetings and conferences" (p. 425). When communication is clear it will demonstrate that both parties understand their roles and responsibilities in helping volunteer, which leads to children prepare for academic success.

Volunteering

Project Head Start has been identified as the largest federally-funded early childhood program that focuses on improving quality education and supporting parental involvement (Marxen, Ofstedal, & Danbom, 2008). Head Start aims to enhance children's overall development, but a lot of emphasis is placed on promoting children's social competence by involving parents in their children's education (Marxen et al., 2008). In addition, the Head Start model of parental involvement supports the discussion of Epstein's (2011) theory of supporting parent in children's education. Epstein's belief regarding volunteering is that schools should provide a variety of ways in which parents can volunteer at school. Most schools face a challenge in motivating parents to volunteer because "families do not feel valued as volunteers" (p. 437). In order to overcome this obstacle, schools should implement policies and procedures that list ways parents can volunteer in schools. Epstein (2011) asserted that volunteering can be a powerful strategy in motivating parents to participate in their child's education in the home environment.

Learning at Home

Epstein (2011) expressed that learning at home involves reinforcement of activities in the home environment. This type of method involving parents will create effective communication that entails collaboration from school to home regarding such things as homework requirements. Epstein (2011) purported that parents are currently facing difficulties reinforcing homework in the home environment and teachers are not able to help them understand the process.

Decision Making

Parents should be allowed to help make decisions regarding school-related issues (Epstein, 2011). Parents are known to participate in PTA, serve on committee boards, and take on leadership roles. Epstein (2011) noted that schools need to allow parents to take on leadership roles and voice their opinions regarding school related decisions. Once parents are given the opportunity to voice their opinions, the quality of parental involvement tends to improve.

Collaborating With the Community

Epstein (2011) identified the community as an additional resource that contributes to children's learning outcome. The community is a resource tool that provides families with support and helps them raise their children. Epstein recommended that schools should develop partnership within agencies, businesses, and the community. Other researchers purported that these perspective regarding communities are integral to successful outcomes, and that schools should be supported and their philosophies will help meet the needs of children and their families (Gestwicki, 2007). Indeed, Amatea (2009) suggested, "Epstein's focus appears to be on what the community needs to do for the school" (p. 183).

Epstein (1995; 2011) also argued that these models regarding family involvement can be used to build stronger partnership within families, and suggested that the home, school, and community must form partnerships to ensure healthy children and support life-long learning. McMillian (2005) also suggested that to bring about change, teachers must take the responsibility to build strong relationships with parents and understand that parents are the primary educators in children's development. Gestwicki

(2007), suggested that programs should be implemented using six types of strategies to create a "Family Center" to promote collaboration with families and foster children's long-term academic success. In addition, it is important to understand parental involvement initiatives.

Parental Involvement Initiatives

To understand Epstein's parental involvement models and how they are implemented at the school level, it is essential to develop knowledge about parental involvement initiatives. Parental involvement initiatives are being developed at a fast pace in the U.S. educational system (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; Gestwicki, 2007). Several early childhood programs that receive funding are required to adhere to federally-mandated parental involvement requirements. For example, these programs must develop policies/procedures, parent handbooks, and guidelines that involve parent participation (Gestwicki, 2007). Several examples of such initiatives will be discussed here.

Head Start

Head Start programs adhere to performance standards or guidelines that they must follow. The performance standards manual has a component that highlights parental involvement in four areas (Gestwicki, 2007):

1. Decision making about direction and operation of the program membership on the Policy Council;

2. Participation in classroom as volunteers, with the possibility of moving up a career ladder as paid employees;

3. Parents planned their activities; and

4. Working with their own children, along with the center staff. (p. 140)

These parental standards aim to promote strong parental and family involvement in Head Start, providing essential support focusing on quality involvement and creating the pathway for laying the foundation to understand the fullest potential of children's development (Gestwicki, 2007).

Chapter I and Title I

Federal initiatives are funds associated with Chapter I and Title I to support a variety of services within the early childhood sector or school district (Gestwicki, 2007). These programs are known as family-centered and Even Start, and they focus on improving education quality and parental participation. According to Gestwicki (2007), programs are required to implement specific federal guidelines related to parental involvement:

1. provide parents with community resources and services;

2. screen parents and children to identify the appropriate community services;

3. implement literacy programs for parents;

4. provide training for parents to enhance their knowledge and skills in order to support their children's learning;

5. provide children with quality education to ensure they are prepared for long-term academic success; and

6. provide training for staff to enhance their knowledge and skills in working with parents.

Education of Children With Disabilities

The Educational of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 requires U.S. parents with handicapped children to collaborate with professionals in developing their children's

individualized education program (IEP; Gestwicki, 2007). This law provides parents the right to appeal the IEP process if they refuse "the child's diagnosis, placement, or IEP" (Gestwicki, 2007, p. 142). Parents and the multidisciplinary teamwork also work together to develop the individualized family service plan (IFSP), which is geared toward infants and toddlers with special needs. Gestwicki (2007) noted that "the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act of 2004 (PL108-446) included provisions to align special education with the NCLB legislation," thereby mandating that parents have the right to determine if the IEP is linked with state standards for school success (pp. 142-143). This initiative allows parents to participate in the decision making process regarding their child's special education services which is link to parental involvement.

Childcare and Development Block Grant

The Childcare and Development Block grants were funded by Congress in 1990 and provided parents with the right to help evaluate centers and improve quality education in the preschool sector. This authorizing legislation also provided funding to ensure that programs are providing training and resources to educate parents about "child care options and choices, licensing and regulatory requirements, and complaint procedures" (Gestwicki, 2007, p. 143). These grants allow parents to participate in their child's education, which is linked to parental engagement.

No Child Left Behind Act

The NCLBA encourages parents to exercise their rights regarding their children's education. Parents of children who maintain low learning outcomes for two years have the right to transfer their children to another school within the district (Gestwicki, 2007).

When schools fail to adhere to NCLBA standards, parents can place their children in another school (Gestwicki, 2007). In addition, schools must provide parents with the following: (a) schedule of parent meetings, (b) report cards, (c) progress updates, (d) developmental goals, and (e) standardized results about their children's academic learning outcomes (Gestwicki, 2007). Such initiatives and standards are promoted at the federal level and provide the foundation for early childhood educators to promote increased family support. It is important that early childhood practitioners understand the laws regarding parental involvement (Gestwicki, 2007) and develop policies and procedures that ensure stronger early childhood programs by encouraging family involvement.

Research on the Impact of Parental Involvement on Educational Outcomes

During the early years of life, children depend on their immediate caregivers to meet their needs, foster security, and provide love and respect (Gestwicki, 2007). Children develop trust in their parents and caregivers within their immediate environment when their needs are being fostered. When parents and teachers establish effective relationships, it sets the foundation for the developing child to become a lifelong learner. In addition, parental involvement promotes "children's cognitive and social development" (Drissen, Smit, & Sleegers, 2005, p. 510); what Bronfenbrenner would call the microsystem in the ecology of human development (Gestwicki, 2007).

Research on the influence of parental involvement on educational outcomes indicates that parental involvement has been shown to improve the quality of children's education (Bracke & Corts, 2012). Radzi, Razak, and Sukor (2010) conducted a quantitative study to determine the degree of parental support in primary schools located

in Malaysia. A non-random convenient sampling was used to select the 60 participants who were selected for the study. The researchers used Epstein's model to generate the questionnaire and to measure "the aspect of parental involvement favored by primary school teachers and to identify the type of parental involvement favored by the parent from the teachers' views" (p. 259). The types of parental involvement included: (a) parenting, (b) communication, (c) volunteering, (d) home involvement, (e) school governance, and (f) community collaboration.

The results of the study indicated two popular parental involvement activities were included and used more frequently: (1) the home environment in which parents reinforce school activities in the home, and (2) communication practices that enabled parents such as "telephone, letters, and newsletter" (Radzi, Razak, & Sukor, 2010, p. 264). The non-popular types of parental support were "school governance, collaboration, volunteering, and parenting (Radzi et al., 2010, p. 264). The results selected by parents revealed that communication is a preferred type of parental involvement.

The case study was conducted to analyze the effects of parental involvement regarding children's learning outcomes. In addition, the study included completed surveys and selected 26 teachers that participated in an interview. The findings stated that it is imperative for teachers to have an in-depth understanding of "parents" living conditions and to find ways to help parents improve their efforts for their children when education at home and in school" (p. 222). In addition, schools need to bring about change to accommodate parents' needs in order to support effective parental involvement.

Research on the influence of parental involvement on educational outcomes has suggested that parental involvement is associated with children's learning outcomes (Bingham & Abernathy, 2007). Parents who are involved in their child's education tend to create a home learning environment. In addition, parental involvement not only prepares children for future learning but is also shown to help them with their careers and lives in a productive society. However, additional research needs to be conducted on this topic to determine which forms of involvement are most helpful from the parent's perspective. It is essential to address parent-teacher relationship regarding children's learning outcomes.

Research on the Parent-Teacher Relationship on Education Outcomes

Preliminary research indicates that the parent-teacher relationship is shown to influence children's academic performance (Baumgartner & McBride, 2009; Xu & Gulosino, 2006). Within the educational system, teachers are required to build relationship with families in order to encourage parental support. Epstein's (1995) theory supported the position of "within the school, the teachers, and the whole school influence the child. The child's academic and social development is enhanced when these two spheres overlap" (Xu & Gulosino, 2006, p. 347). Epstein (2011) stated that strong parental involvement and teacher participation support children's grades. However, additional research needs to be conducted. It may also be prudent to examine the influence of these issues from the perspectives of the parents and teachers themselves. As no research on this topic has been conducted from this point of view, the current investigation will add to the literature, filling a gap that presently exists. The barriers to

parental involvement require a discussion on challenges that parents face regarding their parental roles.

Barriers to Parental Involvement

Despite the obvious benefits of parental involvement in ECE, it is unclear why strategies to augment parental involvement are not enacted on numerous levels. Some researchers indicate that two barriers exist to increased parental involvement: "the increased workload in implementation and the possibility of boundary problems between staff and parents" (McMillian, 2005, p. 124). Such barriers relate to discipline strategies and the limit of confidentiality (McMillian, 2005). In addition, single parents are not likely to attend meetings and social events due to their work schedule. McMillian (2005) noted parental involvement in ECE tends to be a negative response for parents, which results in further barriers. Previous researchers purport these negatives barriers; however, no empirical investigation exploring parents' and teachers' perceptions of parental involvement has been conducted. The current investigation will examine teachers' and parents' perceptions on barriers to the parent-teacher relationship regarding children's educational outcomes.

The Impact of Qualified Teachers on Outcomes in Early Childhood

A wide body of research has been devoted to exploring the definition of qualified teachers. Qualified teachers who have pursued higher education and specialized training are found to provide quality education (Barnett, 2003; Pineda-Herrero, Belvis, Moreno, & Ucar 2010). According to Barnett (2003), several studies have indicated that teachers' education is connected to children's academic success. Barnett (2003) summarized the concerns for qualified teachers as: "Better-educated teachers have more positive,

sensitive, and responsive interactions with children; provide richer language and cognitive experiences; and are less authoritarian, punitive, and detached. The result is better social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive development for the child" (p. 5). In addition, teachers with higher degrees produce higher quality education, enhance children's overall development, and are described as "more effective teachers" (Barnett, 2003, p. 5). Thompson and Stryker (2010) also stated teacher quality is linked to "student achievement" (p. 189). Lara-Cinisome et al. (2009) expressed that "teachers beliefs about what children should experience is based on quality education" (p.1).

Hyun (2003) focused on the movement toward early childhood standards, linking teachers' qualifications to ensure that no child is left behind academically. In particular, Hyun (2003) examined the significance of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) and teacher preparation. The author quoted Secretary of Education Paige's report, which defined "qualified teachers" as having the ability to "demonstrate verbal ability and content knowledge" (p. 120). Hyun (2003) used this definition to suggest that teachers should have the ability to implement theoretical perspectives into daily teaching an essential skill for teachers. Hyun also noted that school districts around the world are using students' outcomes to determine teachers' qualifications and that " NCLBA and the Secretary's report is a new 'tougher' standard used to ensure that no child is left behind" (p. 120). Indeed, NCLBA ensures accountability on the teachers' part regarding their teaching strategies and also determines individuals' qualifications for providing quality education (Ciyer, Nagasawa, Swadener, & Patet, 2010; Hyun, 2003). Haigh (2007) believed that preschool programs are driven to be "accountable for mandated goals" (p. 57).

Hyun (2003) reported that most existing research on highly-qualified teachers states that early childhood professionals are classified as those teachers who convey knowledge by integrating open-ended questions, utilizing developmentally appropriate best practices, encouraging parental involvement, linking families with community resources, observing and planning activities based on observation results, and implementing the curriculum. Such research suggests that teachers with higher degrees tend to understand how to implement child development or early childhood theories in their daily practices (Ackerman, 2004). Understanding the theoretical perspective helps teachers acquire the knowledge and skills they need to understand how children learn and how to teach them. Therefore, state policymakers should ensure that highly qualified teachers are certified to work with young children. It is essential to address professional development, as teacher preparation impacts children's learning outcomes.

The Impact of Professional Development on Student Outcomes

Although some research has indicated that professional development plays an essential role in supporting children's growth and development as well as in providing high-quality care (Ackerman, 2004; Downer, Kraft-Sayre, & Pinanta, 2009; Landry, Swank, Anthony, & Assel, 2010). Maxwell, Field, and Clifford (2006) asserted that no definition of what constitutes professional development exists. These authors purported three elements that characterize professional development: education, training, and credentials. Maxwell et al. (2006) maintained that education is defined as professional development that occurs within the educational system (i.e., college settings). Training is defined as professional development that occurs outside of college settings; such learning is known as workshop or informal training (Broderick & Hong, 2011; Maxwell, Field, &

Clifford, 2006). Finally, credentials are extremely important in professional development because they are the key to obtaining knowledge and skills in one's professional career as a teacher. Credentials are specialized certifications in areas of training. Neuman and Wright (2010) agreed that high-quality professional development is a process that provides teachers with new innovative techniques and strategies to improve effective hands-on practices for young children. Crawford (2010) noted that professional development is viewed as nurturing early childhood teachers to become long-term leaders by establishing competencies in serving young children. The author stated that effective professional development programs should include: "long-term time frames, active engagement among participants, access to research-based, pedagogical strategies, and the presence of a collaboration, professional community" (p. 32). Programs providing teachers with these types of elements will prepare long-term professional leaders with the research-based strategies regarding knowledge, skills, and best practices in working with children.

The majority of studies have focused on how formal education and training are linked to professional development. Despite the lack of consistency in the terminology of professional development in early childhood, professional development is a component in improving students' achievement (Barnett, 2003). According to Barnett (2003), teachers with high qualifications "appear to be most effective teachers" (p. 5). Understanding the need for teacher qualifications leads teachers to "spend more time and resources on professional educational opportunities" (Helterbran & Fennimore, 2004, p. 267), which are essential for children's lifelong learning. Indeed, Helterbran and Fennimore (2004)

reported, "The 'professional' in professional development implies expertise, pursuit of advanced training, and maintenance of currency in an evolving knowledge" (p. 268).

Catapano (2005) stated that professional development is linked to a model approach known as "teachers as researchers" (p. 264). This model of professional development requires teachers to question children regarding their knowledge and understanding and then "reflect on how the children came to their understanding of concepts" (p. 264). Meanwhile, Hsu (2008) indicated "professional development refers to those processes that elevate the early childhood educator's job-related knowledge, skills, beliefs, understanding and attitudes to higher levels of functioning and practice of serving young children and families" (p. 261).

According to Chitpin, Simon, and Galipeau (2008), "teachers learn about teaching by teaching and from teaching" (p. 2049). Teaching experiences are based on "investigation, experimentation, reflection, and analysis" (Chitpin, Simon, & Galipeau, 2008, p. 2049). Such reflective teaching enables teachers to develop their knowledge and skills even further. According Chitpin et al. (2008), reflective teaching allows teachers to reflect on their teaching techniques using a "systematic and thoughtful way in order to hone their practice or extend it in new ways" (p. 2050). This framework provides teachers with the knowledge and skills to evaluate teaching strategies to determine if they are appropriate for meeting the needs of children.

Chitpin et al. (2008) conducted an empirical study at a Canadian university and determined that effective teaching approaches in the classroom should be linked to the Objective Knowledge Growth Framework (OKGF), a teaching approach associated with professional development. The researchers concluded that this model of professional

development was somewhat similar to Dewey's (1957) and Vygotsky's (1978) theories of teacher training. Both Dewey and Vygotsky believed that practical experience is based on knowledge, which is enhanced through training (Chitpin et al., 2008). Yet Popper's theory of professional development is in truth based on "problems to be solved" (p. 2059). As such, knowledge is based on the understanding of theories in order to solve problems. According to Wasik (2010), professional development is the foundation in which teachers incorporate best practices into fostering children's learning outcomes. It is essential to understand professional development initiatives and teacher qualifications in the early childhood field.

Professional Development Initiatives

During the past several years, great emphasis has been placed on professional development in the early childhood field in relation to children's learning outcomes. Preschool teachers are forced to be accountable for children's academic skills (Haigh, 2007; Stipek, 2006). According to the NAEYC (2005; see also Ammentorp & Smith, 2011), teachers' professional development marks the quality of education in an environment and is linked to children's future learning. In order to prepare children for long-term success, it is vital that ongoing professional development be provided to enable teachers to achieve optimal knowledge and understanding in working with young children.

One such initiative promoting teachers' ongoing development is NCLBA, signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002. NCLBA focuses on academic standards and teacher qualification guidelines to ensure that children are academically prepared for

success (Hyun, 2003) and "can read by the end of the third grade" (Ackerman, 2004, p. 320). Readiness, according to Brown (2010), is defined as:

> The child needs to engage in a particular set of experiences to be ready for school. Through the empiricist lens, early childhood education is framed as an apparatus that provides the child with these skills, knowledge, and experiences he/she needs to be ready for elementary school. (p. 136)

Hyun (2003) noted:

> The NCLBA Act contains the president's four basic education reform principles: stronger accountability for "guaranteeing" results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been "quantitatively" proven to work. (p. 119)

To achieve its goals, the act focuses on putting qualified teachers in classrooms and holding them accountable for children's outcomes. Accountability is the most vital principal of the NCLBA. The U.S. Department of Education highlighted this accountability in several of its guidelines as reported by Hyun (2003):

1. States create their own standards for what a child should know and learn for all grades. Standards must be developed in math and reading immediately. Standards must also be developed for science by the 2005-2006 school year.

2. With standards in place, states must test every student's progress toward those standards by using tests that are aligned with the standards. Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year schools must administer tests in each of three grade spans: grades 3-5, grades 6-9, and grades 10-12 in all schools. Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, tests must be administered every year in grades 3

through 8 in math and reading. Beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, science achievement must also be tested.

3. Each state, school district, and school will be expected to make adequate yearly progress toward meeting state standards. This progress will be measured for all students by sorting test results for students who are economically disadvantaged, from racial or ethnic minority groups, have disabilities, or have limited English proficiency.

4. School and district performance will be publicly reported in district and state report cards. Individual school results will be on the district report cards.

5. If the district or school continually fails to make adequate progress toward the standards, they will be held accountable. (p. 119)

Thus, NCLBA requires teachers to be accountable for children's learning outcomes, where "accountability is linked to standardized content as well as assessment" (Hyun, 2003, p. 119).

Most educators are familiar with NCLBA, which was written for elementary, middle, and high schools. However, "in April of 2002, Good Start, Grow Smart was initiated as the early childhood education reform partner of NCLBA" (Cerabone, 2007, p. 8). The U.S. Department of Education, in collaboration with other organizations, mandated that preschool programs provide high-quality education. Ackerman (2004) noted, "the minimal educational and training backgrounds of most [ECE] teachers impacts the prereading and language skills of the country's most disadvantaged children" (p. 321). As a result, according to the NAEYC (2005), children's learning processes are

impacted, causing academic failure. In addition, the accreditations criteria for teacher educational standards required that:

> All teachers have a minimum of an associate's degree or equivalent. At least 75% of teachers have a minimum of a baccalaureate degree or equivalent in early childhood education, child development, elementary education, or early childhood special education that encompasses child development and learning of children birth through kindergarten; family and community relationships; observing, documenting, and assessing young children; teaching and learning and professional practices and development. (NAEYC, 2005, p. 53)

The NAEYC's (2005) teacher standards also require that teachers have previous experiences working with young children and ongoing relevant training. For example, the recommendation is that:

> All teachers and assistant teachers/teachers' aides have specialized college-level course work or professional development training in knowledge and skills relevant to the specific age(s) or the special circumstances-specific needs of the children they reach. Specialized college-level course work may include core courses that cover these topics or courses addressing these topics specifically. (p. 54)

As such, the teacher standards support a system that ensures that preschool teachers are qualified and capable to work in a preschool program.

The U.S. Department of Education has worked diligently with preschool programs to improve quality education and ensure that all children are prepared for

school, which has culminated in teacher preparation initiatives. The department oversees

programs and has created guidelines for programs regarding teacher preparation. The

federal government also provides funding to improve ECE teachers' preparation systems.

For example, according to Ackerman (2004), the Early Childhood Educator Professional

Grant Program provides funding through Title II of the NCLBA, which indicates:

> Educational consortiums, and/or institutions of higher education can apply
>
> to improve the training and professional development of ECE teachers
>
> who work with disadvantaged children, particularly in regards to school
>
> readiness and literacy skills. (p. 321)

States are also making efforts to provide ongoing professional development. In

Florida, funding is provided for ECE teachers working with at-risk infants, toddlers, and

young children (PARITY) in Head Start, family childcare, or other centers. PARITY has

provided teachers with "classroom mentoring, classroom observation and for credit

coursework for 67 ECE teachers" (Ackerman, 2004, p. 321). Once teachers complete the

program, they receive a stipend. Meanwhile, in Mississippi, educators in the literacy field

motivated ECE teachers to pursue their "CDA, AA, or BA at local colleges and

universities" (Ackerman, 2004, p. 321). The program is constructed in such a way that

teachers enhance their knowledge related to literacy development for young children.

Each classroom is assigned to a literacy mentor who can "demonstrate research-based

practice" (Ackerman, 2004, p. 321).

Tennessee's Early Strategies for Urban Child Care, Education, Support, and

Services (SUCCESS) initiative provides training workshops and videotapes for

participants in order to enhance their literacy knowledge and skills (Ackerman, 2004).

This initiative "enabled 200 ECE teachers in Hamilton County, Tennessee, to receive 80 hours of intensive language and literacy skill development training through a collaboration of the University of Tennessee and eight local education and/or service agencies" (p. 321).

Washington and Oregon implemented a program called Partnerships for Early Childhood Educators in Rural Communities (PERC; Ackerman, 2004), which provides 300 teachers working in Head Start programs and private childcare centers the opportunity to "participate in an 8-month, in-classroom professional development program" (p. 321). Participants receive coaching and support to help them use techniques that facilitate children's overall development in classroom settings. In addition, to these support services, teachers are also awarded financial incentives to facilitate preparation.

Scholarships and Financial Incentives

The federal government has allocated financial funding to help provide ECE teachers with assistance in pursuing higher education. Table 1 illustrates how some states have developed different incentives and requirements for teachers' preparation initiatives (Ackerman, 2004). Each state provides different incentive amounts based on the requirements of the program. Qualified participants were ECE teachers. Colorado's qualification was an AA degree in order to be eligible for the program. Each state encouraged one type of loan or stipend for teachers to pursue their CDA credential, AA, or BA degree by either completing a number of hours working at a center or completion of trainings. Montana State University implemented two different types of awards into their programs. Merit I entailed completing training and Merit II required teachers to

Table 1

State Requirements and Incentives for Preparation Initiatives

States	Qualified Participants	Requirements	Benefits /Rewards
Colorado –The Early Childhood Professional Loan Repayment Program	AA degree	Teachers were required to pursue one from the following: - CDA credential - AA degree - BA degree Teachers were required to work at a center for "30 hours a week for 9 months and the requirement is made at the end of 2 years of employment" (Ackerman, 2004, p. 319)	Loan up to $2,000
Kentucky- Early Childhood Development Scholarship	ECE Teachers	Teachers were required to pursue one from the following: - CDA credential - AA degree - BA degree	Stipend up to $1,400 per year
Montana State University	ECE Teachers	Teachers completed 15 hours a week and applied for an award. The awards were: 1. Merit I: "50 hours of noncredit training" (Ackerman, 2004, p. 320). 2. Merit II: taking college course and leading to a credential or AA or BA degree.	Teachers who complete Merit I received an award of $300. Teachers who complete Merit II received an award of $750.
Tennessee: Early Childhood Training Alliance	ECE Teachers	Teachers completed training based on two levels. Teachers who completed both levels qualified for a CDA credentials. "The training counted for an AA in ECE" (Ackerman, 2004, p. 320).	Upon completion of the program, teachers were provided with an AA degree.

take college courses leading up to a degree. These financial incentives were geared to motivate teachers to become effective early childhood educators who know how to promote children's life-long learning skills (Ackerman, 2008). Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche (2009) expressed that early childhood initiatives serve as a guide in helping preschool teachers meet "educational qualification and receive professional development" to facilitate their educational competencies in promoting children's growth and development (p. 29).

Regardless of both the federal and state government actions to increase ECE teacher preparation initiatives as well as provide scholarships and financial incentives, the field of education continues to lack qualified ECE teachers, which is likely impacting the quality of education and causing academic failure for students (Ackerman, 2004). Indeed, it is important to look beyond such initiatives to find ways to enhance teachers' current abilities and knowledge in implementing best practices in the classroom.

Best Practices in the Preschool Classroom

Some researchers maintain that the foundation for best practices lies in qualified teachers with higher education (Ackerman, 2004). Qualified teachers acquire an understanding of children and their development, which leads them to look at the instructional techniques of best practices based on children's developmental levels. For example, one best practice involves meeting the needs of the whole child "in the social contexts in which he or she lives" (Baum & King, 2006, p. 219). The concept of the whole child is very important in the ECE field and can help teachers develop an understanding of how to promote children's development.

Qualified teachers should have an understanding of children's "developmental characteristics and needs" (Baum & King, 2006, p. 219). To develop an understanding of children's needs, teachers must "get to know the student as an individual" (Baum & King, 2006, p. 220), which requires teachers to identify children's learning styles. As teachers come to understand children's learning styles, they build effective relationships, an important strategy for best practices. Effective relationships enable teachers to provide a stimulating environment that will "lead to personal learning and individual accountability" while demonstrating a sense of respect for children's lives (Baum & King, 2006, p. 219). Consequently, teachers develop the ability to structure age-appropriate learning activities based on the needs of each child (Baum & King, 2006).

Researchers have identified several best practices to incorporate into the classroom to promote learning. One of the pioneers in the field of education, Dewey (1944) noted that it is extremely important for teachers to use problem-solving steps with children in the classroom, which is considered an instructional practice. He labeled these steps as the "complete act of thought," which consists of the following (as cited in Gutek, 2005, p. 345):

1. People who experience challenges during problem solving block or decrease their thinking. During this time, the flow of activity may stop his or her reasoning limiting the capability of the person. This situation can be used for educationally purposes or college groups who need to resolve problems.

2. The following is needed in order to solve problems: (a) identify the problem must be identified, (b) state the cause, (c) set goals and objectives, and (4) locate resources that find a solution to the problem.

3. Once the problem has been identified and resources located to deal with the situation, data are collected and organized to help construct knowledge. During this stage, the teacher scaffolds the children during the learning activities in order to help solve the problem.

4. The conjectural stage consists of the "structured action plan." The individual at this point is able to logically construct knowledge. The goal during this stage is to develop a reflective plan of action to effectively resolve the problem.

5. Implementing the strategies from the plan of action to solve the problem. If the problem is not able to be resolved, the plan of action needs to be re-examined and mistakes identified. A new plan of action will be developed with different strategies to solve the solution.

According to Dewey (1944), the "complete act of thought" or problem solving is the best strategy for teachers to incorporate into their teaching, as this type of teaching strategy enhances children's learning and promotes future development (as cited in Gutek, 2005, p. 344).

Froebel (1898) adopted a different perspective, concluding that an appropriate teaching method is to classify an educator as a "mother" or "teacher" in the classroom. According to Froebel, the role of the teacher is to provide a loving and caring environment that focuses on play. Teachers are responsible for providing guidance and direction in the classroom when children are engaging in activities. Through careful observations, teachers will determine the "gifts" and "activities" that should be incorporated into the classroom to enhance children's creativity and cognitive skills

(Gutek, 2005). It is vital for teachers to implement continuity of care, which helps promote children's academic skills.

Continuity of Care

Hegde and Cassidy (2004) noted that in order to facilitate children's growth and development, teachers must implement continuity of care, which is considered a best practice in the early childhood sector. They defined continuity of care as "the practice of keeping the same caregivers with a group of preschool children, infants and toddlers for two to three years" (p. 133). Continuity helps children build effective relationships with their teachers. In addition, this practice enhances children's overall development and fosters trust between parents and teachers (Hegde & Cassidy, 2004). This process is extremely critical for infants and toddlers because it allows them to bond with their teachers. A secure attachment during the early years will foster growth and development (Hegde & Cassidy, 2004). In fact, the NAEYC ensures that all programs that it accredits implement continuity of care.

Hedge and Cassidy (2004) noted that continuity of care is vital in developing the attachment process, building relationships, and enhancing children's language skills. The authors documented teachers' and parents' views on "looping" or continuity of care. The findings indicated that both parents and teachers felt good about continuity of care in the centers. However, they noted that this process presented a challenge namely, team teaching in each class: "Two teachers with 4-year degrees in each classroom. Therefore, one teacher can continue to loop for 3 years with a new co-teacher, while her former co-teacher returns to the infant classroom" (p. 137). This approach allows children to bond

with their teacher, which is an important skill that children must obtain in order to

develop appropriate in all areas of their domains.

The Program for Infant/Toddler Care (PITC) is a program administrated by a

group of qualified region team leaders who trained ECE teachers within their geography

area to work and provide quality education for infants and toddlers. The PITC framework

is based on helping preschool teachers provide infants and toddlers with a

developmentally-appropriate and nurturing environment, as well as building relationships

and supporting learning (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2009). One of the PITC program

policies is based on continuity, which is defined as follows:

> Continuity of care is the third key providing the deep connections that
>
> infants and toddlers need for quality childcare. Programs that incorporate
>
> the concept of continuity of care keep primary teachers and children
>
> together throughout the 3 years of infancy or the time period that covers
>
> the child's enrollment in care. (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2009, p. 27)

This philosophy of PITC is extremely important for teachers to incorporate throughout a

child's life, especially the early years of a child's development, because this approach

sets the foundation for building trust, security, individualized care, and attachment

(Roopnarine & Johnson, 2009). These best practices are essential for teachers to

implement, which fosters a child's growth and development based on age-appropriate

activities and the needs of each child.

Age Appropriate

A second best practice is a focus by teachers on age-appropriate activities. The

NAEYC has worked very hard to ensure that the field of ECE evolves around

developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), which it argues is key to long-term academic success (Follari, 2011). The NAEYC embraces the theory of DAP based on the work of Jean Piaget. Although the DAP statement has changed several times since its inception, the original statement focused on "the use of a child-initiated, play-based, integrated curriculum that reflected both age and individual appropriateness" (Follari, 2011, p. 57). The revision to the DAP statement in 2009 noted that teachers are required to use teaching strategies that incorporate the following DAP goals:

1. Developmentally appropriate child-directed activities;

2. Meeting children's individual needs;

3. Motivating children to make choices within the environment;

4. Encouraging children to work in small or large groups; and

5. Preparing children for successful lifelong learning by fostering the foundational skills and attitudes they need to be successful in school and beyond (especially literacy and mathematics). (Follari, 2011, p. 58)

In order to determine age-appropriate activities that are meaningful and based on children's development, it is critical that teachers establish effective relationships with children (Baum & King, 2006). Building relationships entails meeting with children individually as well as in small groups. This technique provides teachers with "individual contact" (Baum & King, 2006, p. 220), and developmental progress as noted when stimulating environments facilitate children's growth, development, and cultural, and social appropriateness.

Culturally and Socially Appropriate

Culturally- and socially-appropriate activities are a cornerstone of best practices in early childhood. Allowing children to engage in cultural activities broadens their understanding regarding ethnicity and self-identity. Thus, children's cultural and social contexts should be incorporated into playful activities (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2009).

Play

Play is considered a very important best practice in classroom environments. Many educators maintain that play is the key factor in promoting children's development in learning (Lobman, 2005). However, an ongoing debate focuses on the teacher's role in children's play. Some researchers suggest that when teachers engage in play with children, it limits children's cognitive skills and they do not interact (Lobman, 2005). In contrast, other researchers maintain that teachers should actively engage in playful activities with children that promote growth and development.

According to Froebel (1898) as cited in Gutek (2005), play constitutes the foundation underlying the pathway for growth and development in the kindergarten environment. Many theorists in the nineteenth century were against play in the environment because they thought it was "unworthy" for the human mind. However, Froebel (1898) argued, "Play is the highest phase of a child's development of human development at this period; for it is self-active representation of the inner-representation of the inner from the inner necessity and impulse" (p. 54-55). Froebel (1898) further noted that play is a time period when children are engaging in cultural experiences and playful activities, such as drawing pictures on the wall: "These and other activities were a

means of expressing their perception of adult vocations" (Gutek, 2005, p. 267).

According to Frobel (1898) as cited in Gukek (2005):

> Play is the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage, and at the
> same time, typical of human life as a whole—of the inner hidden natural
> life in man and all things. It gives, therefore, joy freedom, contentment,
> inner and outer rest, peace with the world. In holds the sources of all that
> is good. (p. 55)

Lee (2006) conducted a study examining teachers' beliefs regarding appropriate strategies and best practices for 4-year-olds in preschool environments. This qualitative, descriptive study involved "18 preschool teachers from six preschools in Manhattan, who taught in classrooms where most of the children were 4-year-olds, and volunteered to participate in the study" (p. 434). The participants were from diverse backgrounds. The study had two parts: (a) teachers were shown a 10-minute video clip and (b) interviews were subsequently conducted with the teachers, who responded to open-ended questions. The researcher selected nine themes on which teachers could share their beliefs regarding appropriate preschool education: (a) preschoolers should have fun; (b) preschoolers should be attentive and engaged; (c) preschoolers' interests and their everyday lives should be the basis of curriculum; (d) preschoolers should have choices; (e) preschoolers should learn through play, exploration, and discoveries; (f) preschoolers should not be pressured or stressed; (g) preschools' academic learning is not so important; (h) preschoolers' social development is important; and (i) preschoolers' physical development is important. According to the

findings, teachers believed that education should focus on fun experiences during the early years of a child's life. The teachers failed to align fun with academics, believing that children should not be "hurried" to learn, but learning should be fun, enjoyable, and playful during preschool.

The concept of playing with children is a challenge for many preschool teachers, as they are unclear regarding the true meaning of active play (Lobman, 2005). They tend to tell children when to free play but fail to understand the process of play (Lobman, 2005). Lobman (2003) conducted a research study involving two center-based classrooms at a university. The toddler room "served children between 20 months and 3 years of age and the preschool room served children between 3 and 5 years of age" (Lobman, 2005, p. 133). Each classroom was observed for a total of 4 hours within a 15-week span. In addition, each teacher was observed for 30 minutes regarding his/her interaction technique with children. Data was collected from field notes and videotapes over a 3-month period. Data was coded into themes and placed into a number of questions. The outcome of the study stated that use of improvisation enabled teachers to create playful and fun environments. In addition, teachers acquired an in-depth understanding of play, developmental activity, and teacher interaction. Clearly, play is fundamental for children to construct knowledge during the early stages of development. Thus, in order to provide quality education, it is essential that teachers assess children's development while they engage in playful activities.

Assessments

The ability to integrate assessment results in daily activities plays a key role in best practices, although this activity tends to be challenging for some teachers due to their

lack of knowledge regarding the assessment process. Assessments are administered by teachers using a standardized assessment tool to determine children's developmental and academic levels (Baum & King, 2006, p. 222). In addition, assessment outcomes can be used as a guideline to help teachers with planning activities, fostering children's development (Baum & King, 2006), and identifying developmental delays. Conducting assessments helps teachers determine children's learning outcomes.

Research on the Influence of Teacher Preparation in Child Outcomes

Branscomb and Ethridge (2010) conducted a qualitative research project based on an early childhood course at a community college connected to "a research university in the Midwestern United States" (p. 209). The purpose of the study was to strengthen the teachers' knowledge and skills when working with families of infants and toddlers. Seven Caucasian female teachers were enrolled in the course and participated in the study. Teachers completed training and participated in interviews with the parents. The interviews were audiotaped and data were analyzed in order for teachers to write a reflection paper regarding how the findings would be implemented in their professional development practice. The findings were presented at a "national early childhood conference" (p. 209).

The results of the study indicated that parent-branchild separation is more difficult for parents "than it is for the child" (p. 210). Building relationships between teachers and parents is essential to support parents in supporting children's education. In addition, effective communication is the key role in building relationships, and without it there is no chance of any relationship surviving. Without communication, there is no relationship.

The findings concluded that establishing partnerships with parents is important in ECE to determine children's future success.

Mogharreban, Mcintyre, and Raisor (2010) conducted a longitudinal qualitative case study to explore how the preparation programs prepare teachers to understand the connection of learning outcomes implemented in daily instructional practices. The researchers investigated how "teachers use formal and informal information to thoughtfully assess and carefully plan the curriculum" (p. 234). Thirty-nine teachers volunteered to participate in the study and 12 were selected for the second phase. Four out of 12 were randomly selected as final participants. Student's teaching focused on "early childhood/elementary learning and secondary social studies" (p. 235). The racial characteristics of the study participants were "three Caucasian and one African American" (p. 235). Six research faculty members from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction participated in the study. They represented several educational areas such as: "early childhood, secondary social studies, reading, language arts, teacher leadership, elementary education, and curriculum studies" (p. 235). Data was collected from interviews, a classroom observation, and a focus group.

The findings indicated that teachers had a clear understanding regarding the following: enhancing student's developmental domains, developmentally-appropriate practices, and meeting the needs of each student. The challenges encountered by the teachers were how to implement the assessment learning outcomes, and how to implement and plan instructional practices. Teachers are in need of courses that will teach them how to assess children's academic skills and integrated the results into daily practices.

Vesay (2008) conducted a study in five early childhood programs exploring preschool teachers' and staff development experiences through surveys. The participants consisted of 5 administrators, 12 teachers, and 7 teaching staff aids" (p. 289). The teachers' teaching experience "ranged from 1.5 to 26 years, with an average of 10.25 years" (p. 289). Two of the administrators had no teaching experience, and two reported 2-5 years of experience, and one had 28 years of experience. The teacher assistants reported 1-10 years of experience. All participants reported experiences working with infants, toddlers, and children with special needs. Surveys were used to collect data. The survey topics included teacher's education, topics of professional development, and challenges for professional development. The results of the study showed that teachers had strengths in the following areas: "social/emotional development, teaching strategies, classroom/behavior management, early childhood curriculum, and experience working with children with special needs" (p. 293). In addition, the data indicated that planning and implementing staff development is a challenge for administrators due to time and budget. Early childhood programs are in need of additional funding to improve professional development.

Early et al. (2007) used seven studies of early care and education to determine if teachers' education predicts classroom quality and children's learning outcomes. The seven programs that were involved in the study were: Early Head Start (EHS), Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), Georgia Early Study (GECS), More At For (MAF) Evaluation, National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL), Study of Early Child Care and Yolk Development (NICHD SECCYD), and Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Program (PCER) Program. Several variables were used

to answer the set of research questions and a replicated secondary data analysis technique was used to analyze the results:

> This technique involves selecting studies that contain similar information, gathered in the same way, and using common analysis protocols across data sets so that any differences in relations among the variables are attributable to the sample or study circumstances, rather than to different data collection strategies, variable operationalizations (sic), or analysis techniques. (p. 561)

The variables included were highest level of education, bachelor's degrees, majors, classroom quality, and children's academic skills. The participants involved in the studies had to meet the following criteria: (a) collecting data on teachers' education; (b) gathering data about classroom quality, and (c) including data about children's academic skills as well as their development. Five of the seven studies were "statistically representative" because their participants were randomly selected to "represent a known population" (p. 561).

The findings indicated that using seven studies, the data analysis yielded a "null findings report" (p. 573). Two of the seven showed that quality care was higher when teachers had a Bachelor's Degree or higher, one study indicated that teachers with a Bachelor's Degree had lower quality classrooms and "four studies had no association" (p. 573). The conclusion indicated that almost anybody can teach preschool but the results from the study showed "that interpreted cautiously they raise more questions than answers" (p. 573). Several reasons were discussed to determine evidence of associations. The first reason was that the teacher preparation systems might not have trained teachers effectively to teach children. Teachers are lacking theory and teaching practices. The

second reason for lack of association is "those teachers may not receive sufficient support to implement effectively what they learned" (p. 575). Lastly, another reason for these null findings "is that current market forces have stimulated at least a short-term ripple in the labor market for early education teachers. These studies contained large numbers of publicly-funded classrooms (state-funded and Head Start)" (p. 575).

Laferney (2006) conducted a mixed-method study to explore the different components of professional development and their relationship to quality care in early childhood. A total of 336 preschool programs in Oklahoma were selected to participate in the study. The programs sites were visited between October 2001 and May 2002. A classroom at each site was randomly selected for observation. "The average teacher in these classrooms who participated in the study was a female who was married, age 30-39, and employed in the profession for an average of 8.66 years" (Laferney, 2006, p. 15).

The researchers conducted initial visits to each center to observe classroom quality and interview the director. Teachers and directors were provided with a questionnaire at the first visit. The demographic questionnaire addressed the following: "education training, credentials or certifications, professional organizations and early childhood initiatives" (p. 16). Data collectors were trained to use the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) as a measure to conduct classroom observation in determining quality care. The results from the study indicated that "specialized education makes a difference in terms of child care quality" (p. 23). Another concern of the study suggested that teachers who "participated in Child Development Associate (CDA) training had much more knowledge than the number of teachers who had completed a CDA credential" (p. 24).

Saracho and Spodek (2007) conducted a review of 40 meta-analytic studies regarding teachers' preparation in ECE and quality care. The researchers used several databases to search for articles published between 1989 and 2004. The researchers identified 1099 journal studies, including research articles, book chapters, and technical reports or website research reports. Article selection criteria included: (a) an implicit or explicit assumption of teacher preparation related to early childhood program outcomes; (b) a publication in a scholarly, referred document; (c) a presentation as a study; and (d) a focus on the preschool period. The questions were coded and the information was placed into a matrix. The matrix was divided into six components: problem, setting, intervention, data analyses, conclusions, and explanations. The data outcome indicated that a Bachelor's degree was critical. Teachers who had a Bachelor's degree provided activities that enhanced language skills and interacted more with children than teachers without a bachelor degree. All 40 studies supported the hypothesis that education and training affects quality of care.

Research on best practices in the classroom indicates that several strategies can contribute to a child's educational outcome. Information about best practices needs to be shared with ECE teachers, and then understanding of best practices may be augmented during teacher preparation.

Summary

The focus of this research is to describe the role of teacher preparation and parental involvement in connection to children's learning outcomes from the perspective of both teachers and parents. The purpose of the study is to examine the perspectives of teachers and parents about their understanding of the impact that the teacher-parent

relationship has on learning outcomes. This chapter reviewed the literature on the variables proposed for inclusion in the study and examined a conceptual framework based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory can be used as a catalyst for building partnerships between systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Effective partnerships between parents and teachers set the pathway for each system to work toward common objectives and support the children's growth and development, and research on this topic was explored.

The literature review focused on the roles of teachers' preparation and parental involvement, which are linked to children's learning outcomes. Previous research has demonstrated that parental initiatives are mandating schools to support parental involvement. Indeed, Epstein (2011) argued that schools must create systems that: allow parents to participate in school related activities/events of their choice, reinforce activities in the home, and develop community partnerships to provide resources for children and families. This type of environment creates a positive climate that welcomes parents and builds stronger partnership. Furthermore, the literature review has presented information that described teacher's initiatives and the need for teachers to pursue higher education. Research on the impact of teacher preparation on children's educational outcomes was also explored. Qualified teachers are more likely to demonstrate effective teaching methods and best practices during the early years of a child's development, setting the stage for long-term academic success.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study is to describe the

perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the role of professional development and

parent involvement, and to address their understanding of the role of the teacher-parent

relationship in children's achievement. Teacher qualifications and parental involvement

play a significant role in building the foundation for better-educated children (Barnett,

2003; Epstein, 2001). Research has identified and demonstrated that academic success

starts in the early years of a child's development (Logue, 2007). Previous studies have

focused on teacher's education and parental involvement as factors impacting children's

academic skills. However, they do not address involvement of the parent-teacher roles in

children's education sufficiently. This research seeks to add to the literature on the

importance of parent-teacher relationships in children's learning outcomes.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to describe teacher's preparation and

parental involvement's impact on preschool children's learning outcomes. Qualitative

research is based on understanding, how humans operate in the world from the

perspective of others (Merriam, 2009). This type of qualitative research is conducted in a

natural setting, which allows the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of how

individuals operate within their social world. Creswell (2007) defined qualitative research

as based on an assumption that the natural setting is unique and the social context can be

investigated without disconnected variables. Hatch (2002) stated that qualitative research

focuses on accurate descriptions that consist of narratives "that include the participants

being studied" (p. 9). This method was appropriate to my study because I set out to build a case of interpretations by using detailed data in order for the reader to understand the social situation under investigation, as suggested by (Hatch, 2002). I used a social unit consisting of an in-depth multiple case study of teachers' and parents' experiences regarding children's learning outcomes.

This type of research is a constructivist claim because reality is based on interaction with individuals within the social environment in order to understand the context in which humans live and work (Creswell, 2007). In addition, the constructivist approach develops into a narrative report. Quantitative research is a post-positivist claim whereby reality is based on laws, theories, tests, and rules that develop into statistical reports. The concept being researched is to examine teachers' and parents' perspectives regarding their roles associated with children's learning outcomes using descriptive data as opposed to using statistical analysis. Therefore, a quantitative research design will not be used for this research. Qualitative research has a long history of use in anthropology and sociology, but has only more recently come into usage in the education field (Hatch, 2002).

Three other qualitative designs—narrative, ethnography, and phenomenology— were considered but not selected for this study. Narrative studies are a collection of real-life experiences that are revealed through stories that are analyzed using different strategies in order to understand and capture detailed events (Merriam, 2009). A narrative approach was inappropriate for this study because stories are used as a frame of reference and would not provide an understanding of the phenomenon, which was the focus of this

study. Narrative research was not suited for the current investigation because the focus is on "detail stories" which was used to explain human experiences (Creswell, 2007, p.55)

The ethnographic method was deemed inappropriate because the focus of this research was on understanding values and behavior pertaining to sociocultural concepts and exploring them in-depth. Hatch (2002) stated, "Ethnography is the classic form of qualitative research that was developed by anthropologists who spent extended periods of time doing fieldwork within cultural groups" (p. 21).

Phenomenological research is intended to help the researcher understand the participants' emotional aspect of their internal feelings by using life experiences. The phenomenological approach was considered and excluded because it does not examine the unit of analysis.

Case Study

I used a multiple case study design for this research in order to allow me, as the researcher, to develop an understanding of how the studied systems operated within their natural setting, as suggested by - (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). I determined that a case study design was the best fit for the current investigation because it would allow for the exploration of different cases in order to understand how teachers' professional development activities and parental support influence children's learning outcomes. In addition, a case study approach focuses on real-life experiences from the participants' perspectives, providing a detailed description of their interpretations regarding the influence on the achievement of childhood learning. My reason for selecting multiple cases was to investigate the potential nature of parental support and teachers' professional development that tends to influence children's learning outcomes and acquire an in-depth

understanding of how teachers and parents identify their roles in relationship to children's learning outcomes. A multiple case study was especially appropriate for this study because each of the three programs participating in this study served as individual cases within bounded system for examination of teachers' and parents' perspectives regarding their roles in children's academic learning, in alignment with Creswell's (2007) guidelines.

The data collection method of the case study consisted of interviews, and teachers' demographic surveys of the phenomenon in a natural setting, as suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2004). The use of interviews in a case study serves as strong data collection. In addition, it is critical for the researcher to conduct interviews with participants in the study to capture participants' experiences using their own words to ensure accuracy. Therefore, I used open-ended interview questions intended to "encourage participants to explain their unique perspective on the issue at hand and [where] the researcher will listen intently for special language and other clues that reveal meaningful structures informants use to understand their world" (Hatch, 2002, p. 23). The open-ended questions allowed me to focus on the interpretive nature of the inquiry, as suggested by Creswell (2007).

Research Questions

The focus of this study was on teacher's professional development, parental involvement, and how the teacher-parent relationship affects children's learning outcomes. Teacher-parent interviews were used as the data source to answer the following research questions.

The primary research questions were:

1. How do teachers and parents determine their roles in children's learning outcomes?

2. How do teachers and parents describe professional development as perceived in relationship to children's learning?

3. How do teachers and parents perceive their relationships related to children's learning outcomes?

The secondary research question was:

4. What barriers do parents and teachers perceive exist in building relationships?

Purposeful Sampling

The goal of this multiple case study was to explore teacher and parent perceptions of the role of professional development, parent involvement, and teacher-parent relationships in the achievement of children's learning outcomes. Purposeful sampling requires seeking out areas that are expected to produce the richest data. I selected three preschool programs located in the inner city of Los Angeles County as a purposeful sample group from a list by the Resource and Referral Child Care Agency. Programs selected were screened against the following criteria: (a) each site must have a classroom of 4-5 years old, and (b) sites must be represented by the accessible demographic locations in Los Angeles.

I used a purposeful sampling strategy to understand teachers' effectiveness and each participant's role in relation to children's academic achievement. To ensure

credibility in the multiple case studies, the sample size was small for generalization. The 12 participants in the study consisted of two teachers and two parents each from three different early childhood programs. The unit of analysis in each preschool program included a parent and a classroom teacher. Merriam (2009) argued that purposeful sampling is a powerful strategy that guides and captures "information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 77). In addition, Merriam (2009) indicated that the goal and strategy is to understand qualitative research by studying the interpretations of human experiences. Creswell (2007) noted that purposeful sampling is based on the selection of participants and the sites to help the researcher with the problem and the "central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). The research subjects were all women due to their willingness to participate in the study. The men did not accept the invitation to participate in the research study.

The use of purposeful sampling was based on the following logic. First, purposeful sampling would allow the researcher to conceptualize the roles of teachers' professional development and parental involvement that link to children's learning outcomes. Secondly, this type of strategy would "provide information-rich cases" for the study (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Thirdly, the researcher would "create a list of attributes essential to the study" and would select participants that "match the list" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77).

Criterion Sampling

In the initial approach to recruit parents, I participated in a scheduled parent meeting at each center. During the meeting, an explanation and description of the research study was provided to the parents. In selecting the participants, it was important

for each parent to have experience in the phenomenon being explored. The criteria used to determine parents' experience included: (a) attendance at parent meetings and (b) participation in school-related activities. In using this approach to recruit participants, criterion sampling was used to select participants based on the following criteria: (a) each parent had a 4-year-old child enrolled in the preschool program and (b) each parent participated in their child's education. Parents interested in participation were provided with the following: (a) a consent form and (b) a self-addressed stamped envelope. Parents were asked to sign the consent form and mail it back to the researcher's post office box when finished. Parents were selected based on first-come-first-serve basis in regards to receiving the consent form. To recruit teachers, the researcher participated in a staff meeting at each site. The researcher described all aspects of the study. Teachers interested in participation were provided with the following: (a) a demographic survey (see Appendix A), (b) a consent form, (c) an invitation letter, and (d) a self-addressed stamped envelope. Teachers were asked to complete the survey, sign the consent form, review the letter, and mail both forms to the researcher's post office box when finished. Two teachers from each of the three early childhood programs were selected to participate in the interview based on returned consent forms and analysis from the demographic survey. The method used to select teachers for interviews was criterion sampling, which helped the researcher understand the association between teacher's education and children's learning outcomes. Selected teachers were given noticed by phone. Unselected teachers were notified via email, informing them that their participation was not needed in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Creswell (2007) stated qualitative data collection tools are "interviews, observation, and documents" (p. 129). Data collection for this study consisted of: (a) parents' and teachers' interviews, and (b) demographic surveys. These instruments guided the research questions and supported interpretation of how Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system involves parents and teachers in children's learning outcomes.

Teacher Interview

In the teacher interview, the researcher used 10 open-ended questions (see Appendix B) to understand teaching practices, professional development, parentteacher relationships, parent involvement, and children's learning outcomes. Each teacher was interviewed face-to-face on site for approximately 90 minutes. Each interview began with the researcher verifying consent to participate in the study and informing the participant that the interview would be tape-recorded. Information gathered from the interview was used to answer research questions. The questions included: (a) How do teachers and parent determine their roles in children's learning outcomes? (b) How do teachers and parents describe professional development as perceived in relationships to children's learning? (c) How do teachers and parents perceive their relationships related to children's learning outcomes? and the subquestion (d) What barriers do parents and teachers perceive exist in building relationships? These questions determined the congruence of the participant's beliefs about training, experience, parental involvement, and other factors that contribute to children's learning outcomes.

According to Merriam (2009), the purpose of the interview is to collect information in order to understand the participant's interpretations regarding the research

topic. In addition, Merriam (2009) noted that interviews are the appropriate method to use in case studies. The purpose of the interviews was to communicate with the participants in order to understand and determine the meaning of teachers' and parents' personal views regarding their roles in children's learning outcomes. Hatch (2002) stated interviews are used to unfold the "meaning structure that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (p. 91). Johnson and Christensen (2004) indicated interviews are used for researchers to delve into the participant's mind and to develop an understanding of his or her interpretations and knowledge regarding the focus of the study. Merriam (2009), Hatch (2002), and Johnson and Christensen (2004) all suggested that qualitative interviews should consist of open-ended questions to allow the participants to express their experiences from their points of view in order to gather relevant data. The interview questions were designed and based on the research questions and connected to the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system to examine the roles of parents and teachers associated to children's learning outcomes.

Parent Interview

A formal interview protocol for parents developed by the researcher was used (see Appendix C). Each parent was interviewed face-to-face on site for approximately 90 minutes. Each interview began with the researcher verifying consent to participate in the study and informing the participant that the interview would be audiotaped. Ten open-ended questions focused on parental support. They included the teacher's professional development, parent-teacher relationship, and children's learning outcomes. Data was collected from the interview to answer research questions for determination of participants' interpretations regarding their parental roles, teacher's professional

development, teacher-parent relationship, and other factors that influence their child's

academic skills. The questions include: (a) How do teachers and parents determine their

roles in children's learning outcomes? (b) How do teachers and parents describe

professional development as perceived in relationship to children's learning? (d) How do

teachers and parents perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes?

and the subquestion (d) What barriers do parents and teachers perceive building

relationships? The researcher used interviews as the primary method of data collection in

this qualitative study. The secondary methods were journals on interviews to compile

detailed and reflective notes.

Data Analysis

Hatch (2002) reported that "data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is

a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to

others" (p. 148). Hatch defined analysis by indicating it deals with "organizing and

interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover

relationships, develop explanations, and make interpretations, mount critiques, or

generate theories" (p. 148).

Data collection for this study consisted of formal interviews. The researcher used

journal notes, also known as an audit trail. This strategy helped guide the analysis process

by gathering ideas and data. A journal was used to record the researcher's reflections

after each interview in order to generate more data. Merriam (2002) referred to the "audit

trail" as the process in which the researcher uses a journal to record "memos throughout

the study. What goes into this journal are your reflections, questions, and decisions on the

problems, issues, ideas you encounter in collecting data" (p. 27).

The researcher transcribed all of the audiotape recordings for accuracy. The researcher used the typological analysis strategy for interpreting data. Hatch (2002) noted, "Typologies are generated from theory, common sense, and/or research objectives, and initial data processing happens within those typological groupings" (p. 152).

Raw data was collected and organized into categories or themes and coded. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim to identify information linked to the research questions and findings. In addition, transcripts of the interviews were placed into themes using a typological analysis. Themes were abbreviated with codes in order to produce emerging codes or new categories gathered from data. Codes allowed the researcher to identify concepts that showed a pattern within the typological strategy in order to understand the final phenomenon. The purpose of the coding system was to analyze the research questions and identify themes linked to the conceptual framework in order to understand the roles of teachers' education and parental support to children's learning outcomes. In addition, it helped refine the data into a system that identified similarities and differences that were easy to interpret.

The parent interview precoding consisted of coding for perspectives of the teachers' roles, professional development, parental involvement, teacher-parent relationship, and children's learning outcomes. The teacher interview categories consisted of teaching practices, teacher-parent relationship, and children's learning outcomes. Colors distinguished the categories from one another. After data was coded, the researcher used NVivo 10 to analyze the patterns (similarities and differences) among the themes identified and then to generate a report.

In qualitative research, the discrepancy in cases is used to achieve rigor (Creswell, 2007) and confirm verification. Every case in this study was reevaluated regarding the analysis and the discrepancy of the study. After evaluation and when no discrepant cases were identified, the determination made by the researcher was complete.

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness, the researcher used member checking, triangulation, and an audit trail to ensure internal validity and reliability. Creswell (2009) noted that validity determines the strength of research in a qualitative study. In addition, validity is used to "determine if the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher" (p. 195). Several strategies were used in this study to demonstrate accuracy of the results. First, upon completion of the interviews, member checking was implemented to ensure that participants' responses were accurate. Creswell (2009) noted, "Member checking determines the accuracy through taking the final report back to the participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate" (p. 196). After the interviews, the researcher conducted member checking by interacting with the participants to ensure that the responses were accurate.

Second, the researcher used a triangulation approach. Creswell noted, "Triangulation deals with different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes" (p. 196). The researcher used a triangulation approach to collect data using a combination of interviews, member checking, and debriefing, which contributed to the reliability of the study. Finally, an audit trail was used to gather data from interviews and field notes. The

researcher used an audit trail by keeping a journal throughout the study to reflect on and interpret the data to ensure reliability and validity.

The Role of the Researcher

The role of the qualitative researcher in the study included selecting participants, interviewing, documenting, and exploring the roles of teachers' preparation and parental involvement regarding children's educational outcomes. The researcher purposefully selected two teachers and two parents from three different sites that matched a list of criteria. The teachers were selected based on their willingness to participate. The parents' criteria included: (a) each parent had a 4-year-old child enrolled in the program and (b) parent participated in their child's education.

During the parent and teacher meetings, the participants were provided with a letter regarding the study, a consent form, self-addressed stamped envelope, and a demographics survey were given to the teachers. After collecting written consent forms from each participant (teachers and parents) and surveys, the researcher scheduled an interview with participants that were selected for the study.

Next, the interview protocol was implemented. An audio recorder was used during the interview if the participants provide permission. After the interview, the researcher reviewed interview notes with participants to ensure no data or substantial information for the study was missed.

The process involved reading the transcripts several times and making comments (codes) on the form that were linked to the research questions and literature. Codes were assigned and placed in categories based on data that was same. The coding system generated an interpretation of how teacher professional development and teacher-parent

relationships were aligned to children's academic success. An explanation of how parental support influenced children's academic success was also derived.

Johnson and Christensen (2004) indicated that qualitative research is open-ended and less structured. Researchers who conduct qualitative research may experience bias. The research impacted the validity of the study because selective sampling and recording of the information was used to interpret and analyze data.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher obtained informed consent from each participant indicating his or her approval (see Appendix D). Participants were told at the outset that they would be able to withdraw from the study at any time and that their responses would be kept confidential and anonymous. Parents and teachers were informed that each group (parents or teachers) would not be privy to the other group's responses. Each participant was treated with respect and his or her perspective was valued. All data collected was secured in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office and maintained under Walden's guidelines. The names of the participants were kept confidential and not revealed at any point in the study.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted on April 23, 2010. It took approximately 4 weeks to collect and analyze data. The pilot study was conducted in order to explore the roles of teachers and parental support in regards to children's learning outcomes. The purpose of the pilot study was to demonstrate the determination of logistical issues to help the researcher make changes if needed to improve the quality of the study. The pilot study focused on the following logistical points: (a) classroom observations and interviews; (b)

collecting, organizing, and analyzing data; (c) evaluation surveys and interview questions for understanding; and (d) checking for validity and reliability of results. The outcome of the pilot study indicated the following: (a) the need for additional programs to be recruited to ensure a larger sample size for study, (b) the revision of two questions on the parent survey, and (c) the revision of two research questions.

Summary

This chapter described the qualitative case study design employed in this study. A case study was selected for exploring teacher's professional development and parental involvement, as these factors affect preschool children's academic success. This chapter included a description of the qualitative research, selection process, data collection, and analysis procedures. Multiple data sources, member checking, and triangulation discussed in relation to the validity of the study. The ensured reliability of results was achieved through triangulation and an audit trail. Information was also provided on ethical considerations and the outcome of the pilot study.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to describe the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding the role of professional development and parent involvement in a child's academic achievement. Data were collected through two sets of interviews with six teachers and six parents. In addition, for further validity and reliability, I also performed audit trails and member checks with the participants, and triangulated all three sources to strengthen the results of the study. This chapter reports the data analysis and findings of the study in relation to the primary and secondary research questions.

Research Questions

The primary research questions were:

1. How do teachers and parents determine their roles in children's learning outcomes?

2. How do teachers and parents describe professional development as perceived in relationship to children's learning?

3. How do teachers and parents perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes?

The secondary research question was:

4. What barriers do parents and teachers perceive exist in building relationships?

Participants

The participants in the study were six teachers and six parents who had first-hand training and education on the focus of this research; teacher and parent perceptions of student outcomes. The teacher participants all had training and education to address my queries about their involvement in their children's education and, therefore, their learning outcomes; details about this training and teacher demographics are presented in Table 2.

In this and other records, the participant's names were replaced with pseudonyms to protect participant privacy to make it easier for readers to identify and track study participants. Tanya and Erika indicated they had received their Bachelor's degree as their highest level of education. Maria and Sylvia also stated they received their degrees from an unidentified college. Alicia held a doctorate and Lisa held an Associate's degree. Maria and Sylvia did not obtain a degree but stated that they had to finish 12-36 ECE units in order to qualify for the position. Alicia and Lisa majored in psychology as their Associate's degree discipline, Erika majored in liberal arts; and Maria failed to state her discipline. Tanya, Alicia, Lisa, and Erika had child development backgrounds. Tanya identified child development as her Bachelor's degree specialization, also pursuing ECE as a Master's degree specialization. Alicia had other related education. Maria, Lisa, Erika, and Sylvia specified that the field was not applicable to them. All six teachers also had continuous training and workshops to improve their professional abilities. Lastly, overall participants had 0-19 hours of training completed.

Data Collection Process: Management of Data and Emerging Themes

The three sources, interviews, audit trails, and member checks were all gathered and recorded securely by me. I used the computer software program NVivo10 by QSR to facilitate and organize the analysis of data by transcribing, coding, and protecting the data of the participants. For discussion purposes, the researcher termed the responses with the most number of occurrences or the highest frequency as major themes. The other perceptions shared with relatively fewer occurrences were termed minor themes. These themes are identified in the result section of this dissertation.

Table 2

Breakdown of Teacher Demographics

Name	Highest Level of Education	If you did not obtain degree, how many ECE units?	Discipline of Associate Degree	Discipline of Bachelor's Degree	Discipline of Master-r's Degree	Training Location	Training Sessions Completed	Training Hours Completed
Tanya	Bachelor's degree	Other- BA in Child Development	Child Development	Development	Early Child-hood Education	In- service workshops, 2-year college courses, 4- year college courses, & graduate courses	Curriculum/teaching strategies, assessments (DRDP-R and ECERS), & program and person growth	19 hours or more
Alicia	Doctorate	Other- 36 ECE units	Child Development	Psychology	Other related field- Special Education	In-service workshops, resources /referral agencies, graduate courses, & child development training	Curriculum/ teaching strategies, special education, assessment (DRDP-R &ECERS), health/safety, & DAP	19 hours or more
Maria	Some college	Other- 32 ECE units	Early Childhood	N/A	N/A	On-site training & in-service workshops	Curriculum/teaching strategies, special needs, assessments (DRDP-R & ECERS), health/safety, and child development	6-10 hours
Lisa	Associate's degree	Other- 32 ECE units	Child Development	Psychology	N/A	On-site training & 2-year college courses	Curriculum/teaching strategies, special needs, assessments (DRDP-R& ECERS), program &person growth, child development, and DAP	11-13 hours
Erika	Bachelor's degree	Other- 27 ECE units	Child Development	Liberal Arts	N/A	Resources /referral agencies & 2-year college courses	School/home partnership, assessments (DRDP-R &ECERS), health & safety, & FDAP	6-10 hours
Sylvia	Some college	12-24 ECE units	N/A	N/A	N/A	2-year college courses & NA	Child development	0-5 hours

Data Analysis

I employed three methods of data collection for this qualitative descriptive study: (a) content analysis of the teacher interviews, (b) content analysis of parent interviews, and (3) audit trails/member checks after every interview. For the first and second sources of data collection (teacher interviews and parent interviews), I used qualitative content analysis; 10 themes emerged from the data gathered. Meanwhile, the audit trails and member checks were also analyzed and reviewed for the triangulation of data. According to Mayring (2003b), the objective of content analysis "is to analyze texts or other material of communication in a systematic way; not only concerning its content but also the context of the materials" (p. 190). The content analysis approach allowed me to analyze text data through the process of using open-ended questions during the interviews. Coding and identifying themes of patterns was used in order to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers and parents role of professional development, parental involvement, and the teacher-parent relationship as influencing children's achievement.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) defined content analysis as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the context of data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p. 1278). These two definitions and the content analysis' characteristics allowed me to finally decide that this method was most suitable for the analysis of the interviews. I carefully followed the critical steps for content analysis specified by Naidu and Jarvela (2006).

1. determination of the unit analysis;
2. development of segmentation procedure;
3. determination of the reliability of the segmentation procedure;

4. development of coding categories and rules; and

5. determination of the reliability of the coding categories. (p. 98, as cited in

   Sappleton, 2013, p. 232)

The procedure adopted was based on content analysis, which was completed by coding to identify themes.

After completing this analysis, I took steps to improve the validity and reliability of the study by performing a triangulation all three sources of data collected (teachers interviews, parents interviews, and audit trails/member checks). According to Denscombe (2007), triangulation means an "improved accuracy of validation, triangulation focuses on the validation of the findings in terms of their accuracy and authenticity" (p. 138). Denscombe (2007) also added that triangulation "can be used to develop a line of inquiry, building on findings produced by a different viewpoint which in this sense, the triangulation is used to compliment information from other sources (p. 138). Polit and Beck (2008) then described the triangulation process as a method that "involves the use of multiple data sources for the purpose of validating conclusions" (p. 543). Therefore, triangulation reinforced the reliability of the results from the three data sources.

Teacher Interviews

Research Question 1 (Teachers)

This question asked, "How do teachers determine their roles in children's learning outcomes?" The first data source used to answer this question consisted of interviews with the teachers using three prompts. The major and minor themes identified to answer the first research questions were based on the following interview questions:

1. Describe how your professional training or education supports children's education.

2. What qualities do you feel are important to support children's learning outcomes? Please elaborate.

3. How would you motivate parents to participate in their child's education?

I identified the major themes from the teacher-participants' responses using the Software program NVivo 10.

Analysis. The first major theme pertained to the teacher's ability to adjust and adapt to students' needs in order to determine their roles in children's learning outcomes. It received three occurrences out of the six teacher participants, representing 50% of the total sample population. Table 3 identifies the major and minor themes determined in response to Research Question 1.

Table 3

How Do Teachers Determine Their Roles in Children's Learning Outcomes?

Major and Minor Themes	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Major Theme 1: Flexibility to adapt to the students' needs	3	50%
Minor Theme 1: Motivation to get involved in students' learning	2	33%
Minor Theme 2: Patience to develop the best method of learning for students	2	33%
Minor Theme 3: Planning and preparation for children's activities	1	17%
Minor Theme 4: Observation of children's needs and behaviors	1	17%

Overall, I consider the first major theme, the flexibility to adapt to the students' needs, to be one of the most significant findings of the study. Baum and King (2006) stated that meeting the needs of the whole child is critical in the ECE field and can help teachers understand children's developmental levels and create activities that promote children's learning outcomes. Teachers are asked to use developmentally-appropriate practices in the classroom, which promote "young children's optimal learning and development" (p. 16). This teaching approach enables teachers to use knowledge about child development and to adapt activities based on children's age and developmental levels (NAEYC, 2009). The teacher participants shared the following reflections:

Tanya stated that through flexibility and the ability to interact with students, the teachers' roles in children's learning outcomes would develop and improve:

I should be flexible because you may have a goal in my mind but, however, that goal may not fit that child at that time because they may want to know about step A before you go to step B. And you want to jump to step C, but they're not getting the full understanding of everything. So that's why you have to be flexible and just be intentional with your teaching. So, like, you have a game in mind or you have some outcome that you want the child to exceed and achieve at the moment, just be intentional with that and a lot of one-on-one interactions with them.

Erika highlighted the significance of flexibility when it comes to teachers and their students' learning outcomes. She stated:

Number one, most important to me is flexibility. You have to be very flexible with children. You cannot expect them to do as you plan. Sometimes you plan one thing and they decide that "Well, I don't—I don't really like [it]. I don't really have an interest in what you're talking about." So then you have to provide a different approach. Okay, maybe you don't like this, then we need to try something new.

Sylvia shared that flexibility is important especially when things do not go as planned. She stated the following:

Number one, most important to me is flexibility. You have to be very flexible with children. You cannot expect them to do as you plan. Sometimes you plan one thing and they decide that "Well, I don't—I don't really like [it]. I don't really

have an interest in what you're talking about." So then you have to provide a

different approach. Okay, maybe you don't like this, then we need to try

something new.

The first minor theme was motivation. The motivation to get involved in students'

learning was identified by two of the six teacher participants or 33% of the total sample

population. The participants shared the following. Alicia shared that the motivation to

improve students' learning outcomes is the best indicator in determining their roles as

educators. She stated:

> Children need to be motivated. Motivation to me is the most important piece.
>
> Children need to be interested in doing the activities, engaging children in
>
> activities and art. Of learning, it's not about teaching technique. It's about a
>
> matter of children learning and getting involved with the task, sort of
>
> experiencing and exploring and developing their sense of cause and effect and
>
> cognitive skills. So to me, it is motivation. I prefer motivation. And the other
>
> word that I can use is child-initiated activities; what they like to do; what the
>
> children like to do. It's based on their motivations too.

Lisa also emphasized the importance of motivation in order to determine their roles as

teachers and educators in children's lives. She suggested that: "You need to be motivated.

You have to be caring, hardworking, and that's pretty much it. You just have to want the

best. So, motivation will be the top one."

The second minor theme identified was patience. The patience to develop the best

method of learning for students was identified by two of the six teacher participants or

33% of the total sample population. The participants shared the following. Maria stated

that patience is an important trait to develop: "That's number one. If you're going to go in this field, you need a lot of patience." Lisa also mentioned patience as one of the important traits in her role as a teacher: "You need to have patience. You have to be caring, hardworking, and that's pretty much it. You just have to want the best. So, patience will be the top one."

The third minor theme identified was the planning and preparation for children's activities. This theme was identified by only one of the six teacher participants or 17% of the total sample population. Erika shared that preparation and planning also helps in determining teachers' roles in children's learning outcome as planning allows them to provide for the individual needs of the children. She stated:

Always plan ahead because, if not, that's when all problems occur. When you're not prepared and you're doing your activities, the children are out running around. You don't provide the attention that they need. You don't engage with them because you're busy trying to cut whatever your activity was going to be about, setting the tables, putting paint [out], when everything should be there before they start the work.

The fourth and last minor theme identified was the observation of children's needs and behaviors. This theme was identified by only one of the six teacher participants or 17% of the total sample population. Erika also added that being observant permits teachers to know their students better and thus determine their roles in their learning outcomes. She shared:

You have to be observant because a lot of the times, children will tell you many things just with their behavior. They don't really have to say words, but just how they interact with each other and with adults, we can learn a lot.

Summary of Research Question 1. Themes were determined based on the teacher's responses to interview questions. The major theme identified was flexibility. Four major themes were identified as well: motivation, patience, planning/preparation, and observation. These themes are accepted and encouraged principles and best practices used for classroom management. In addition, this will help promote children's learning outcomes. According to Dewey (1957) teachers should integrate instructional practices (problem-solving steps) with children's time in the classroom, which enhances development and move them forward in their learning. The National Association Education of Young Children (2002) noted the role of the teacher is to conduct observations and provide a caring environment that entails patience while children engage in hands-on activities. Teacher flexibility allows them to consider children's developmental levels and implement changes needed to promote learning. In addition, using observation allows teachers to identify "activities" that foster critical thinking skills (NAEYC, 2002).

Teachers are often asked to think about how their professional development is linked to students' learning outcomes. Teacher professional development typically addresses information gathered from children's learning, training, and child development classes. It is the implementation of these components that is in question.

Research Question 2 (Teachers)

This question asked, "How do teachers describe professional development as perceived in relationship to children's learning outcomes?" The results for the second research question were gathered from teacher interviews. The results of teachers' perceptions are presented here. The major and minor themes identified to answer the second research question were based on the following interview questions:

1. Describe how you engage children in developmentally-appropriate activities.

2. How do you promote children's individual needs?

3. How do you actively encourage children to make choices within the environment?

4. Why is parental involvement essential in the development of children's learning outcomes?

I identified the major theme from teachers' responses aided by the NVivo 10 software program to address Research Question 2.

Analysis. The major themes identified were: information gathered could be used for children's learning, training allows new ways to deal with student's issues with learning; and child development classes are needed for different learning strategies. All three themes received two occurrences or 33% of the total sample population respectively. Table 4 identifies the major and minor themes determined in response to Research Question 2.

Table 4

How Do Teachers Describe Professional Development as Perceived in Relationship to

Children's Learning?

Major and Minor Themes	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Major Theme 2: Information gathered could be used for children's learning	2	33%
Major Theme 3: Training allows new ways to deal with student issues with learning	2	33%
Major Theme 4: Child development classes needed for different learning strategies	2	33%

The three major themes answering the second research question are significant to

the findings of the study. The second major theme identified was that the information

gathered from professional development could be used for children's learning, contingent

upon the teachers' acceptance of professional development and the implementation of

new information that they gather. Formal education and training are associated with

professional development. NAEYC (2002) found that ongoing professional development

provides teachers with knowledge and understanding in working with children. Wasik

(2010) indicated that professional development is the framework for implementing best

practices and promoting children's learning outcomes. The participants shared the

following.

Tanya shared that the information she gathered from the college classes she participated in could be used to support her own professional development and at the same time positively affect the children's learning affect the children. "Because the information . . . I'm learning within those classes—I'm able to use it with the children that I'm working with now." Alicia stated as a professional learner, she needs to be updated with changes and developments in society in order to learn and share them with the students. She said:

The fact is that I'm a professional learner. I'm not satisfied with what I know. I want to learn more because the field has been changed and it's changing. What I know is good, but again, you know, so many things—wonderful things—have happened. If I don't go to school, if I don't take—if I don't go to conferences, don't take courses, I don't know.

The third major theme, that training allows new ways to deal with student issues with learning, pertained to the teachers' development through their determination to improve and develop as professionals for the benefit of the students. The participants shared the following. Maria emphasized how professional training allows further development as a teacher and as a result, positively affects the students' learning. She stated:

My training, it teaches me new ways to deal with different problems. Like sometimes, when I go to the trainings, I'll ask a question about what should I do in certain situations and a lot of the people who are in the training have had similar problems which have helped me—or new things to use, you know. It gives

me more things than maybe I haven't tried. So, it teaches me different things a lot. My trainings have been very good.

Lisa shared how training developed her ability to deal with different students and helped them improve their learning outcomes:

These classes [teach you] to deal with certain behaviors. For example, I went to special needs training and this taught you how to deal with children with autism. Or, they will also have trainings [where] you have to deal with kids who are maybe abused or things of that matter. It's kind of basic—they do have a book. What they have—they show you can do this or you can do that. But also, it's kind of like you will need to go because every situation is different. Every child is different. We don't know what kind of backgrounds they come from or anything like that; what they go through at home. So you just need all-around training as well as—I guess you will call it just common sense.

The fourth major theme, the child development classes for different learning strategies, pertained to the teachers' professional development by attending child development classes to better assist their students. The participants shared the following. Erika took classes on child development to assist the children in their own development through different strategies. She stated:

Well, I took classes in child development. Although my major was first liberal arts, I started working as a teacher's assistant in elementary and I enjoyed working with children. So then I pursued my AA in child development. I have learned about different theories and, through the teachers, different strategies to work with the children being served.

Sylvia also took classes on child development to help in working with children. She shared: "So my professional education, what I've—well, I've taken college classes based on child development, which really helps me work with children. All the tools that I learned in my classes, I could use them with the students."

Summary of Research Question 2. The results associated with Research Question 2 described teachers' perspectives regarding the relationship between professional development and children's learning. Specific themes emerged: (a) information gathered regarding children's learning, (b) training, and (c) child development classes. These themes are linked to professional development strategies, which are used to help teachers learn and support children's academic skills. Kyriakides, Creemers, and Antoniou (2009) conducted a study that explored the instructional teachers' role, which affects student's learning outcome: "The model focused on five dimensions: (a) frequency, (b) focus, (c) stage, (d) differentiation, and (e) differentiation" (p. 14). The frequency is measured by number of activities integrated in a lesson plan. The focus is based on the purpose or objective of the lesson plan. The stage is associated with the time allotted for children to participate in a particular activity. The quality component is based on "the process of teaching level of student engagement in the learning process" (pp. 14-15). The differentiation component refers to individualizing teaching based on student's learning styles. The five teaching strategies, known as the dynamic model, demonstrate effective approaches, used in training and in child development classes to promote children's and adult learning. Teachers are seldom questioned about their relationship with parents regarding children's education. Effective

parent-teacher relationships produce harmony in children's growth and development

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Research Question 3 (Teachers)

This question asked, "How do teachers and parents perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes?" The results for the third research question were gathered from teacher interviews. The results of teachers' perceptions of their relationships with parents are presented here. The major and minor themes for the third research question were based on the following interview questions:

1. How does the parent/teacher relationship affect children's learning outcomes?

2. How are positive relationships established with parents?

I identified the major themes from the teachers' responses aided by the NVivo 10 software program to address Research Question 3.

Analysis. The fifth major theme is a significant finding of the study. The theme received six occurrences from the six teacher participants or 100% of the total sample population. This theme identified the positive effects of having an effective partnership with the parents encouraging harmony in student's learning. Teachers suggested that they are more able to perform their jobs and tasks to the fullest and the best of their ability with parental support. Table 5 identifies the major and minor themes identified in response to Research Question 3.

Table 5

How Do Teachers Perceive Their Relationship with Parents Related to Children's

Learning Outcomes?

Major Theme	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Major Theme 5: Effective partnership encourages harmony in students' learning	6	100%

The fifth major theme is a very important finding of the study. All participants

agreed that effective partnership between parents and teachers support student outcomes.

Epstein's (1995) theory supports the vision of "within the school, the teachers, and whole

school influence on the child. The child's academic and social development is enhanced

when these two spheres overlap" (Xu & Gulosino, 2006, p. 347). According to

Bronfenbrenner (1979), children's education is based on parental involvement and the

role of the teacher. In addition, effective parent-teacher partnership supports home

learning and later educational outcomes (McNaughton & Vostal, 2010). The participants

shared the following.

Tanya believed that effective partnerships between parents and teachers allow

smooth and effective learning for students as they see one accord at home and in school

as well. She stated:

I really think it really helps—when the teachers and parents are collaborating

together as partners, and also they're coming together as an effective partnership.

Because you can have a partnership, but it can be ineffective. But when it's an

effective partnership between the teacher and the parent, the child's school—

because they see that the teacher and the parents are of one accord and what's being taught at home is being taught at school, and so they're on the same level. And also, sometimes parents that have long work hours, it's hard for them to be their child's primary teacher. So, it is if you're saying parents are the first—their child's first teacher, but sometimes aren't the only teachers that teach their child.

Alicia shared that the parent-teacher relationship is a key factor in children's learning. Having a strong foundation at home and in school could improve their study habits greatly. She offered:

To me, parent-teacher relationship should be one of the key factors of child's learning equation in ECE. I want to extend it to elementary level too because I think parents play a major factor in children's learning and their goal setting for the academics for who they want to be and what they want to do, how they are going to improve their study skills. It's the foundation. It's the skill—the families basically work with their kids and the school. We do but not at, you know, at the early programs. When they go to school, to elementary school, then this becomes one of the tasks of the teachers.

Maria also highlighted how a positive parent-teacher relationship affects the students' learning and development. She stated that:

When you have a good relationship with the parent, the parent feels comfortable to come to me and say, "You know what? My child, when he is here, he does more for you. How can I get him to do it at home with me?" And we try to work something out and I try to talk to the children and say, "Tomorrow, maybe I want you to tell me what you did with your mommy," and that kind of—you know. So,

it's good when parents like the teacher and the teacher likes the parent and there's

been communication for their child.

Lisa shared an example showing how communication plays a big part in affecting and

building a relationship with parents:

I believe that relationship affects them 100%. I love to talk to my parents. I tell

that because . . . I introduce myself. I like to get comfortable with my parents so

they can feel comfortable and come and see me to express any problems, concerns

that we have in regards to their child. I'd like to keep open communication.

Honestly, myself, I communicate with my parents at least every other day about

their child's concerns. So, if I see—I'll say for example, "Hey, I know that such

and such is a little down or a little edgy." Or, "I've noticed that at home he's doing

all of his work but when he gets to school he's not doing any of this." So, little

things like that. I'd talk to them every other day. I really do. I try to talk to them

every day even if it's just 30 seconds. But the main goal is to elaborate, and

communicate with each other.

Erika shared that parents and teachers working as one allows harmony and a smooth

learning process for the children: She stated:

Well, I think it's a very important relationship because a lot of the time, like I

always tell the parents, we're your support but we need to work as a team because

if I do one thing here and you do another thing in the house and it gives the child

mixed signals, so what am I supposed to be doing? The child is able to do one

thing here and then when you go home, you say, "Oh no, don't worry about it.

You can make a whole difference . . . you know, it happens and sometimes it's

very difficult.

Sylvia also stated that parents are very important as they help the teachers with the

students:

I would say that, well, parents are very important because they're the ones that

help us with the students. If they need help, we'll always go to parents and just

ask them to help us as well at home. It's not just what they do at school but it's

very important for parents to do part of it at home.

Summary of Research Question 3. The results associated with Research

Question 3 addressed how teachers perceived their relationships with parents, which

focused on effective partnership. Partnership creates harmony in the classroom and

motivates parents to promote children's learning outcomes (Epstein, 2011). Epstein's

(1995) theory expressed that the school and parent's relationship is critical in fostering

children's education. The child's overall development is shaped when the spheres (home,

school, and community) work together well (Xu & Gulosino, 2006). In addition,

collaboration is a powerful tool in establishing positive learning environments, both at

home and in the classroom (Epstein, 2011). This method involves communication

between parent and teacher regarding homework requirements, a simple connection that

helps builds reciprocal relationships. The relationship between teachers and parents plays

an essential role in supporting children's learning. When relationships are not established,

barriers are created that tend to affect the school's climate and the child's education.

Research Sub-Question (Teachers)

This question asked, "What barriers do parents and teachers perceive exist in building relationships?" The results of this focus question were gathered from teacher interviews. The results of teacher's responses are presented below. The major and minor themes in answering the research sub-question were based on the following interview question: Are there any barriers that might hinder you from establishing a relationship with parents? Please explain.

I identified the major themes from teacher interviews aided by the NVivo 10 software program.

Analysis. The sixth major theme that emerged was the barriers teachers perceived exist in building relationships with parents. The sixth major theme received four occurrences of the six teacher participants or 67% of the total sample population. The sixth major theme identified teachers' perception of the lack of interest and participation from parents. Table 6 identifies the major and minor themes determined in response to the research sub-question.

Table 6

What Barriers Do Parents and Teachers Perceive Exist in Building Relationships?

Major and Minor Themes	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Major Theme 6: Lack of parent participation	4	67%
Minor Theme 1: Parents who have personal issues do not focus on building relationship with teachers.	2	33%
Minor Theme 2: Language barrier for the non-English speaking parents	1	17%
Minor Theme 3: Parents who are in denial of their children's issues	1	17%

The sixth major theme, the lack of parent participation, is considered by the researcher as an important finding of the study. McMillian (2005) stated that parents' work schedules and problems between teachers and parents are barriers causing lack of parent participation. Single parents are especially unlikely to participate in their child's education due to their work schedule. Mahmood (2013) conducted a study in New Zealand that focused on early childhood teachers who struggle with establishing relationships with parents during their first year due to not understanding the demand of their job as a teacher. The findings showed that teachers were not able to communicate or build relationships with parents due to three reasons: (a) teachers were not able to involve

parents in their child's education, (b) lack of communication on parents' behalf, and (c) parent hostility (pp. 74-75). Therefore, it is essential that parent-teacher relationships are reciprocal. Successful partnerships are not "possible without the active and willing participation of all members" (Mahmood, 2013, p. 81). The participants shared the following.

Tanya admitted that another barrier is the lack of parent participation. Maria shared how parents who do not like to participate and cooperate hinder teachers from fully establishing a relationship with them:

If I see that a parent is just—knock on wood—I hope I never get a parent like that, but sometimes when a parent comes, like, oh my God. This parent doesn't like to volunteer. This parent doesn't like to talk. This parent—I said, okay, so I won't go there, but I'll start by being nice and I'll say, "Good morning. How are you? Oh look, whatever his or her child is, you came so nice and everything. I hope you have a nice day," and I start a relationship. I've had a lot of "hard parents" from other programs; when they come to me they usually like me.

Lisa stated that the attitude of parents can be a barrier, especially when they lack interest: "Attitude for sure is one, as well as interest." Sylvia shared how the lack of participation from parents affects the children's learning outcomes:

Some parents, we try . . . we tell them what's going on with the class and sometimes I think it would be when they just don't want help us, maybe. We tell them the problem and if we ask them of . . . to help us at home as well and they just . . . don't just say, "Okay, we will." But sometimes we see that the child was—it's still the same.

The first minor theme identified was that parents have personal issues and may have the focus or ability to build relationships with teachers. This perception received two occurrences of the six teacher participants or 33% of the total sample population. The participants shared the following. Alicia shared that one barrier is having to deal with parents who have different issues going on in their lives and thus do not have the focus and interest to get involved with building relationships with them. She expressed that:

> The first barrier is that when you work with working parents, their time is limited.
> I've done teleconference calls with them. I've done face-to-face meetings with
> them. Let me tell you, it's not easy especially when the families are in a process
> of getting divorced, facing personal issues. They are in it and they are having
> emotional, social, financial, economical, you name it, hard times. It's a hardship.
> It's a change. It's a transition. It's an adjustment, but at the same time they have
> to deal with an educated person like me asking hundreds of questions or trying to
> understand what's going on in their lives. And it's hard for an adult to share all
> their personal information with someone else. At least I can put myself in their
> shoes and feel it. It's not easy to come and say, you know what, my husband is in
> jail. Or, I'm losing my place because I'm unemployed.

Maria also echoed that personal issues and problems of parents could also be a hindrance: "Something's going on in their lives. Issues that occur in life that they think that everybody's against them. So, I just . . . I give them their space. I don't stop trying every morning to say good morning."

The second minor theme identified was the language barrier for the non-English speaking parents. This perception received just one occurrence of the six teacher

participants or 17% of the total sample population. Tanya shared that the first barrier would be the language barrier between parents and teachers for some non-English speaking parents:

> The number one barrier is, although it doesn't affect this setting, but however it can affect any type of child setting because we're open door policy and we can— we encourage all ethnicities and all races here. But if we were to have a Spanish-speaking parent come up to me, that will be a barrier because I have a challenge with speaking Spanish. So, that's one of the barriers.

The third minor theme identified was that parents are in denial of their children's issues. This perception received just one occurrence of the six teacher participants or 17% of the total sample population. Erika shared a unique barrier when parents are in denial that their children have problems and issues at school:

> So I see a need for a child to may be evaluated because of so many things, not just one, you know, it's two months of observations already. It's not one day, it's not one thing. It's many days and many times, many instances. So you tell the parent, "This is what I see, here's my evidence. How do you think that you can help your child? Do you need any resources? I can help you with resources. And sometimes they are in denial. They just don't want to accept there's any problem; that their child is okay and as far as we know in our center, we cannot really make the children or the parents be evaluated. It's a choice. So I know as long as you have that evidence, they have to go through the process, but they're little like, it's by choice. So I think that would help a lot.

Summary of the Sub-question. The following themes were identified from the participant's responses: lack of parental participation, personal issues, language barriers, and parental denial. The themes are linked to barriers that prevent teachers and parents from establishing a relationship in addition to impacting children's learning outcomes (McMillian, 2005). In order for teachers and parents to establish a relationship, barriers must be addressed by using effective communication (Epstein, 2011; Knopf & Swick, 2008).

The findings indicated that professional development in the early childhood field is connected to children's learning outcomes. Teachers are required to establish reciprocal relationships to encourage parental involvement. The effect of parental involvement on educational outcomes significantly improves the quality of children's education (Epstein, 2011). Parents are often asked how they determine their roles in regards to their child's education outcomes. The role of the parent sets the pathway for children to learn and succeed academically. The roles typically include volunteering, seeking help from family, and seeking help from school and teachers.

Parent Interviews

Research Question 1

This question asked, "How do parents determine their roles in children's learning outcomes?" The second set of data was determined from the interviews with the six parents. The results of parents' perceptions are presented here. The major and minor themes for the first research question were based on the following interview questions:

1. Describe parental involvement in your own personal definition.

2. How does parental involvement influence your child's education?

3. What perspective do you have regarding reinforcing activities at home to support your child's learning outcomes?

4. Are there any barriers that might hinder you from establishing an effective relationship with your child's teacher? Please explain (sub-question).

I identified the major themes from parent interviews aided by the NVivo 10 software program to address the research questions.

Analysis. The sixth major theme received four occurrences out of the six parent participants or 67% of the total sample population. The seventh major theme pertained to how being involved and volunteering in school allow the parents to determine their roles in their child's learning outcomes. Table 7 identifies the major and minor themes determined in parents' response to Research Question 1.

Table 7

How Do Parents Determine Their Roles in Children's Learning Outcomes?

Major and Minor Themes	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Major Theme 7: Being involved and volunteering in school	4	67%
Minor Theme 1: Seeking help from the whole family	1	17%
Minor Theme 2: Seeking help from the school and the teachers	1	17%

Overall, the seventh major theme, being involved and volunteering in school,

 is considered a result in the study. Epstein (2011) stated that volunteering is an effective tool which encourages parents to participate in their child's education. The participants shared the following. Valerie shared that she is always involved in her child's education and learning process, which determines her role as a parent. She stated:

> Well, I'm always involved. I'm always asking them questions. If I can, I'll volunteer. I do suggest a lot of things. They might not like that. If I see that other schools are doing certain things, I will tell them, you know, schools are doing other things or if other teachers are doing other things, I would suggest them having to do the same thing.

Connie also stated that being involved in a child's education is essential as the child can see the crucial role that she plays as a parent, which is beneficial in a lot of ways. She noted:

> Me being involved in my child's education is very important because I know what she's learning at the moment. I can assist with her learning and I know where she's at. So, if she sees I'm involved and excited about what's taking place, what she's learning and what she's doing, it gives her the drive to want to do better and achieve to do it even more. If she comes home, she's had a spelling test and she receives a five out of five, I'm like, "Oh, great job! You did an excellent job!" Or even if she comes home and she didn't do so high, she got a three out of five, I'm like, "It's okay. Don't worry. Next time, we'll just have to study more. Mommy will go over it with you some more," and different things like that.

Debra stated how parental involvement again is another factor and how it allows certain roles of parents to emerge. She indicated:

It influences a lot. You have to be involved with your child's education because no one else will. I don't believe that is the teacher's responsibility to influence your child's learning. You should be able to—step 1 is at home. They learn by sight, especially at a preschool age. I have a 5 and 7-year-old and they learn everything from home. A lot of things they pick up from school because they are around it all day but you're the parent. They learn by what they see you do, not by what you tell them to do. So, I feel like you have to be—parent involvement is you have to be very involved in your child's life or they can easily get sidetracked in the wrong thing when they get out into the real world.

Monica shared how she determines her role through getting help from the teacher and at the same time getting actively involved in her child's learning. She shared:

So the first is kind of getting help from the teacher because we could still do it at home and sometimes when kids go to school and when they go to the house, they kind of, like, forget what they learned in school. So they get to have more time and probably part of the teacher doesn't have—like with my kids, the numbers he knew but he didn't know them in order. So even with watching TV, so I kind of like, you know how the numbers are there 1 to 10, so he knows them by order.

The first minor theme identified was involving help from the whole family. This perception received just one occurrence of the six teacher participants or 17% of the total sample population. Jessica stated that the influence of involvement from the family helps in determining their roles as parents better as this action positively affects the children's education. She shared:

Oh, it influences child's education a whole lot. I think it's a greater percentage if

she's getting the support from me and her father, and sometimes even her

grannies and grandpas. It helps her. So anything that helps is good in my book. If

I wasn't helping or my family wasn't helping, I think it will be a more negative

impact, so it really helps a lot. It influences a lot.

The second minor theme that followed was the act of involving help from the

school and the teachers. This perception received just one occurrence of the six parent

participants or 17% of the total sample population. Mary receives help from the school

and her child's teachers in dealing with her child even at home. She indicated:

I don't know, because when she's home with me, she's a total different person

than she's at school. At school, she's very well-behaved, she's very this and I

come in sometimes and I've told him, "How do you guys deal with her? She

doesn't do that here." So then they sit down and they talk to her with me there:

"Look, you need to behave, you need to listen. Your mommy is talking to you.

Your mommy does this because she loves you and she doesn't want you to get

hurt," so they always really, really helped. I was having issues in the morning.

She did not want to get dressed. She would yell and scream, and they talked to her

and my issue is gone.

Summary of Research Question 1. The theme identified by the parents was

based on their perception of teaching from the home environment. This understanding of

the importance of home instruction and student support encourages parents to support

their child's school success and later educational outcomes. Parental engagement should

start at home and positive learning is required in the home environment to promote children's achievement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory focuses on the child's development. At the microsystem level, parents are viewed as the first teachers in the home environment and their role is considered to be important (Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011). Epstein's theoretical framework regarding the overlapping spheres states that children develop better academically with the support of parents, teachers, and the community working together as a unit (Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011). Parental involvement has a profound impact on children's development and learning. The above data shows that parents who are actively involved in their child's education tend to provide a rich home learning environment. Parents who are actively involved in their child's education tend to provide a rich home learning environment.

Research Question 2 (Parents)

The question asked, "How do parents perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes?" The results for the second research question were also gathered from the data derived from the interview questions. The results for the parents' perceptions are presented here. The major and minor themes for the second research question were based on the following interview questions:

1. Describe how you communicate with your child's teacher?

2. Describe how your child's teacher allows you to help make decisions regarding school related activities.

3. Describe how your child's teacher identifies community resources that contribute to your child's learning outcomes.

4. Describe how your child's teacher supports parenting skills and strategies in working with your child.

I identified the major theme from parent interviews aided by the NVivo 10 software program to address the research questions.

Analysis. The theme identified was that teaching the fundamentals at home allows increased learning. The eighth major theme received six occurrences of the six parent participants or 100% of the total sample population. The eighth major theme pertained to how being involved in a child's learning process allows increased learning. Table 8 identifies the major and minor themes determined in response to Research Question 2.

Table 8

How Do Parents Describe Parental Involvement as Perceived in Relationship to Children's Learning?

Major Theme	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Major Theme 8: Teaching the fundamentals at home encourages increased learning	6	100%

Overall, the eighth major theme, which was how teaching the fundamentals at home encourages increased learning, is considered to be an important outcome of the study. Children's home learning environment is vital during the early years and supports lifelong learning (Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011). The parent participants shared the following reflections. Jessica stated that parental involvement aids the child's learning

through teaching the basic fundamentals of both life and education from home: "My parental involvement is also teaching my own child what's going on in school and, you know, the basic fundamentals of life at home." Valerie shared that she does not just leave the learning to the teachers and ensures that she is involved to increase her child's learning further. She stated:

> I'm very involved. As far as school goes, it's very important to me, so I'm, right now I mean, I give them a lot of work. We do a lot of reading. We do play and they get their playtime and everything, but school is really important to us, or to me. I don't just leave it up to the teacher. It's everything, I think. I really don't think it's up to the teacher. The teacher has 26 up to 30 kids to take care of, and as a parent, if you're not on top of it, then the teacher can't do it all, so it's very, very, very important.

Connie also emphasized that doing their parts as parents from home allows positive effects in children's learning. She suggests that:

> Parental involvement is basically being involved with your child at home. At school, you're communicating with the teachers and staying in touch in what's going on and doing the connection of what's taking place at school to reinforce at home. And parent involvement could be participating, going on field trips with the children, reading stories to the children in the classroom, or providing materials and things that the children need while at school.

Debra shared that parental involvement pertains to the bond that is built in terms of the child's education even from home. She indicated:

Parental involvement is basically when you are a parent with the child and you

guys have a—what is it, a parent-child bond—making sure that you're involved in

your kid's school life, their personal life, just pretty much life in general. You

don't want to overwhelm them and not give them—you want to make them

comfortable, so you want to be able to build a rapport with the child so that if they

ever get into a situation or anything like that, they will be able to speak to you or

come to you without being scared. That's about it.

Monica also emphasized how taking the time to be with her child allows the involvement

to positively affect her child's learning outcome. She stated:

I'd take more times in the afternoons after school and work to talk about his day

and to ask him what he learned and probably help him more in like what the

teachers are concerned with him learning at the time, and I take my time to play

with him sometimes and see what he's into during the day.

Mary stated that being involved in her child's overall well-being also improves her

learning outcomes. She stated that: "It's pretty much the involvement in everything she

does—manners, her education, everything just generally of her person."

Summary of Research Question 2. The following themes were identified from

the participant's responses: involvement and volunteering in school, seeking help from

the family, and seeking help from school and teacher. These themes are identified as

parental roles that foster children's long-term academic success (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;

Epstein, 2011). Parental involvement activities include: assisting children with

homework, demonstrating skills, reinforcing activities in the home environment, and

motivating children to participate in instruction (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). These

activities are ways parents can help their child with educational outcomes. When parents volunteer in school, teachers should provide a "meaningful task in order to use their talents and time wisely" (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009, p. 3). Parents are often asked to evaluate their relationship with children's learning outcomes. Parent and teacher relationships require improvement and sustainability to facilitate those outcomes.

Research Question 3 (Parents)

This question asked, "How do parents perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes?" The results for the third research question were again gathered from the parent interview questions. The results of the parents' responses are presented below. The major and minor themes for the third research question were based from the following interview questions:

1. Describe your relationship with your child's teacher.

2. How does the parent-teacher relationship affect children's learning outcomes?

I identified the major themes from the sets parent interviews aided by the NVivo 10 software program to address the research questions.

Analysis. The ninth major theme that emerged was how parents perceive their relationship is related to children's learning outcomes. Improving and maintaining parent-teacher relationship is needed so that the children's learning is maximized. It received six occurrences of the six parent participants, 100% of the total sample population. Table 9 identifies the major and minor themes determined in response to Research Question 3.

Table 9

How Parents Perceive Their Relationship Related to Children's Learning Outcomes?

Major Theme	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Major Theme 9: Improving and maintaining parent-teacher relationships so that the children's learning is maximized	6	100%

Overall, the ninth major theme, improving and maintaining parent-teacher relationships so that children's learning is maximized, is identified as another highly important outcome in this study. Effective relationships between teachers and parents set the stage for learning (Epstein, 2011). The participants of the study shared the following. Jessica admitted the relationship between the two parties is indeed crucial as a good relationship allows the learning of the children to be maximized:

> I think it's a great relationship. Open communication, positiveness (sic), and we both have the same goal, you know, for my child to learn in a positive environment. It affects their learning outcome greatly. There has to be, in my book, a good parent-teacher relationship or else your child is not going to learn as much. It does impact learning because children look at—when the parent is talking to the teacher, they are looking at their parent's facial expressions, the teacher's facial expressions. They notice how the teacher treats them, you know. I think it has a great impact. I think that's the parent's job.

Valerie shared that she has had a good experience with the teachers as they work together for the benefit of the child. She indicated:

> I've had a good experience with the teachers. I mean, they listen to me, I listen to them. We listen to each other's opinions and we work together. I ask what they're

working on and they know what I'm doing at home, so it's actually been a good

experience.

Connie also highlighted the good relationship that she shared with her child's teacher.

She shared:

My relationship with my child's teacher is very close. Like I said, I do

communicate with her every day. I feel like she's an excellent teacher. We have

formal and informal conversations together. She's easy to approach. Any

concerns or any issues, she's always open to speak with me and help me through

whatever I'm dealing with. So, our relationship is really, really, really close.

Debra echoed how a good relationship can affect the child and his or her education

positively. She stated:

My relationship with my child's teacher is awesome. We have a very good

rapport. We communicate through whatever means is necessary and it's always

been that way because I make sure that the connection is there as soon as I meet

the teacher.

Monica stated that communication with the teachers helps in developing the learning

outcome of the child. She shared that:

Every time I come with the same questions—how was his day, if she has any

concerns with my children—which I really appreciate her telling me. We have

communication, giving her my trust to tell me any problem. I've been getting help

from them and . . . they tell me every time they see something different on him

that probably they're not liking it or sometimes they do, so they give me the

opportunity of knowing that I'm not going to let something happen to him, change

his attitude one way to another. So, I am really thinking that they're going to tell
me everything they see wrong in him.

Mary shared that although her relationship with the teacher is not great, she cannot
complain, as the teachers are dedicated in helping her child's learning and well-being to
develop. She stated:

No, it's not bad at all but I'd never tell you it's not great. I'm willing to think it
could be better, maybe if I would dedicate more time but with the schedules that
we have, just not being able to see each other—but like I tell you, I have no
complaints really, really. She's been here since she was 2 months old and I love
this place.

Summary of Research Question 3. The major theme identified in response to
Research Question 3 was improving and maintaining parent-teacher relationships to
maximize children's learning. To establish effective relationships, teachers need to
support and strengthen parental involvement. Teacher attitudes tend to impact parental
involvement. When teachers welcome parents in the environment and display a positive
attitude, parents are more likely to participate in their child's education. In addition,
effective communication improves relationships with parents and teachers (Barnyak &
McNelly, 2009). Positive relationships between parents and teachers contribute to
children's school success (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 2011).

Research Sub-question (Parents)

This question asked, "What barriers do parents perceive exist in building
relationships?" The data source consisted of parent interviews. The results of the parents'
responses are presented here. The major and minor themes for the research subquestion

were based from the interview question: Are there any barriers that might hinder you from establishing a relationship with your child's teacher? Please explain.

I identified the major theme from the parents' responses by using the NVivo 10 to answer the research questions.

Analysis. The tenth and last major theme that emerged, which was the barriers which parents perceive exist in building relationships, was that there were no perceived barriers as they were content with parent-teacher relationship. The tenth major theme received four occurrences out of the six teacher participants or 67% of the total sample population. Table 10 identifies the major and minor themes determined in response to the research sub-question.

Table 10

What Barriers Do Parents and Teachers Perceive Exist in Building Relationships?

Major and Minor Themes	# of occurrences	% of occurrences
Major Theme 10: No perceived barriers, contented with parent-teacher relationship	4	67%
Minor Theme 1: When the teachers are not fulfilling their duties	1	33%
Minor Theme 2: Lack of time to participate	1	33%

Significantly, the parents had no perceived barriers, as they were content with their parent-teacher relationship. This result is considered by the researcher as one of the most vital results of the study. The participants shared the following. Jessica stated that

he does not perceive any barriers based from his experiences as a parent as open communication has helped the relationship and his child greatly: "No barriers, not in my situation. I like the open communication. You know, it's just about keeping informed. I want to know what's going on with my child because I care and I love her." Connie also shared that there are no barriers based on her experience. Debra then stated that she also has not experienced barriers when it comes to parent-teacher relationship. Monica said that she has not encountered any barriers at the moment.

The first minor theme that followed was the barrier of teachers not fulfilling their duties. This perception received just one of the six parent participants or 17% of the total sample population. Valerie shared that when the teacher is not doing his or her job as a teacher then problems come in: "If they're not teaching and doing their job, yes, as a parent, you just give up and you have to do your own thing, I guess."

The second minor theme that followed was the lack of time to participate. This perception received just one occurrence of the six parent participants or 17% of the total sample population. Mary stated how she just does not have the time to build a relationship with the teacher, which becomes a barrier as well: "I don't have time."

Summary of Subquestion. The subquestion focused on barriers that parents perceived in building relationships with teachers. The following barriers identified included teachers not fulfilling their duties and lack of time to participate. Teachers must understand their role and responsibility as an educator in order to support parental involvement as well as to enhance children's learning (McMillian, 2005). Epstein's model deals with the family, school, and community as the groundwork for the "optimal development of children" (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 38). When these models interact

and work together, stronger partnerships are established to support lifelong learning (Epstein, 2011). Therefore, it is important that barriers do not exist or, if they do exist, they are eliminated.

Secondary Source: Audit Trail

The researcher followed each interview with audit trails or journal notes wherein the researcher took down the most significant perceptions shared by the participants in each of the questions asked. Also, this step consisted of the researcher giving the notes to the participants and they were allowed to review the notes and notify the researcher if the information was accurate or inaccurate, according to the experience or feelings of the participants. The perceptions, which the researcher believed to be crucial for the findings of the data and worth incorporating in the next stages, were highlighted and jotted down in the audit trails. Based on the 12 journal entries by the researcher, all responses found in the interviews matched the entries that the researcher took down and noted during the course of the interviews. The researcher's analysis discovered several corrections from the participants but they were just anecdotal and not connected to the research questions presented in the study. These notes allowed the researcher to perform member checks immediately after each interview.

Tertiary Source: Member-Checks

The third part of the interviews ended with member checks, which also provided proof or evidence of trustworthiness. I asked the participants during the last two parts of the interviews to say, "delete or correct" as I repeated the answers of the participants to ensure that they were 100% accurate. This use of member checks allowed the participants to add other ideas that they may have missed during the first parts of the interview and at

the same time permitted them to delete the words or phrases, they deemed to be wrong or inappropriate per interview question. In conclusion, the member checks permitted the researcher to go back again and make sure that the information gathered was based on personal interpretations, their feelings and their experiences. All participants agreed that the data obtained during the two phases of interviews were correct and accurate after the member checks were performed.

Evidence of Quality

For this qualitative descriptive study using a content analysis, the researcher established the validity and reliability by applying and incorporating the following research characteristics of credibility, transferability, dependability, and lastly, an intercoder reliability. The researcher built the credibility of the study by certifying that the issues investigated were constant and identifiable throughout the study. It was also ensured that the face-to-face interviews with the six teachers and six parents were not disturbed or ended suddenly to avoid miscommunication or misinterpretation when gathering responses during the interviews. Another factor of credibility emerged when the use of a thorough content analysis for the themes and invariant constituents was carefully followed by the researcher. The researcher then also completed audit trails and member checks with all 12 participants after every interview to determine the accuracy of the extensive and broad interview transcripts. For the transferability of the study, the researcher reflected, in her research journal, every phase and stage of the content analysis process, where she also included her own observations for further validity and reference. The notes were then secured and will be protected for a period of at least 5 years as required by most universities in the United States. Conformability was then accomplished

by having the 12 participants certify and agree to the truthfulness of what they have shared by reviewing the researcher's interpretation of each interview after the initial interviews took place. Lastly, the researcher also achieved intercoder reliability by coding the data logically with the help of the computer software program NVivo10 to form the themes and invariant constituents of the qualitative descriptive study.

Conclusion

The triangulation conducted by the researcher allowed further validation of the 10 major themes that were developed as well as the invariant constituents discovered according to the perceptions, feelings, knowledge, and experiences of the parent and teacher participants. With the triangulation of the three sources, the following results were formulated as seen in Table 11 (teachers) and Table 12 (parents).

Table 11

Final Results Based on the Triangulation of Sources for the Teachers

Research Questions	Answers
How teachers determine their roles in children's learning outcomes	Flexibility to adapt to the students' needs
How teachers describe professional development as perceived in relationship to children's learning	Strategies gathered from professional development support children's learning
	Training allows new ways to deal with student issues with learning
	Child development classes improves teacher's ability to implement different learning strategies
How teachers perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes	Effective parent-teacher partnership allows harmony in students' learning
The barriers that teachers perceive exist in building relationships	Lack of parent participation

Table 12

Final Results Based on the Triangulation of Sources for the Parents

Research Questions	Answers
How parents determine their roles in children's learning outcomes	Being involved and volunteering in school
How parents describe parental involvement as perceived in relationship to children's learning	Teaching fundamental skills at home allows for increased learning
How parents perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes	Improving and maintaining parent-teacher relationships so that the children's learning is maximized
The barriers, which parents perceive, exist in building relationships	No perceived barriers, contented with parent-teacher relationship

The teachers shared their experiences regarding children's learning outcomes and the researcher summarized their interpretations in answering Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4. The teachers described their roles in adapting to students' needs. The NAEYC (2009) stated that teachers are required to understand the principle of child development and how children learn, which helps teachers adapt activities based on each child's level of development. Teachers described professional development as participating in trainings and taking child development classes. National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (2008) stated that professional development helps teachers improve their teaching practices. The teacher participant stated that they believed they displayed an effective relationship with parents. Epstein (2011) indicated that reciprocal relationships between parents and teachers promote children's success. The participants expressed that lack of parent participation can be identified as a barrier that impacts relationship building. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) stated several factors that

cause parents not to participate in their child's education, which include the "attitude of parents and teachers, language, political and historical demographic, and economic" factors (pp. 45-50). These factors are classified as barriers causing parents not to support their children's learning. The parent participants shared their viewpoints regarding children's learning outcomes and the researcher summarized their interpretations in answering Research Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4. The parents identified their parental role as related to involvement and volunteering in school. Barnyak and McNelly (2009) stated that parents should participate in school-related activities, which improves children's grades. The participants described parental involvement as a role in which they teach basic skills at home to increase learning. Rodriguez and Tamis-LeMonda (2011) stated that home learning experiences enhance early development and future academic success. The participants indicated that parent-teacher relationships should be improved and maintained in order to enhance children's learning. Murray (2010) expressed the relationship between parents and teachers has a positive effect on shaping children's achievement. In addition, interestingly, the participants stated that no barriers existed in their relationships with their children's teachers.

Summary

In Chapter 4, the researcher provided the analysis and discussion of the results of the parent and teacher interviews, audit trails, and member checks conducted with the 12 participants. The responses of the participants were used to produce the answers for the three research questions and one subquestion, which were all strengthened by the triangulation of the data.

A list of themes was identified that reflected how teachers and parents influence children's learning outcomes. Ten themes emerged based on the participants' perceptions, feelings, and knowledge. The teachers' themes included: (a) flexibility to adapt to the students' needs, (b) strategies gathered from professional development support children's learning, (c) training allows new ways to deal with student issues with learning, (d) child development classes improve teachers' ability to implement different learning strategies, (e) effective parent-teacher partnership allows harmony in students' learning, and (f) lack of parent participation. The parents' themes included: (a) being involved and volunteering in school, (b) teaching fundamental skills at home allows increased learning, (c) improving and maintaining parent-teacher relationship so that the children's learning is maximized, and (d) no perceived barriers; content with parent-teacher relationship. The findings indicated that in order for children to be prepared for future academic success, professional development, parent-teacher relationships, and parental involvement all influence children's educational learning.

Chapter 5: Interpretation, Implications for Social Change, and Recommendations

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine perceptions of teachers' and parent's roles regarding professional development and parent involvement related to children's learning outcomes in U.S preschools. I selected this research topic to address a gap on parents' and schools' collective work in supporting children's learning. In this chapter, I analyze the conceptual framework, research questions, interpretation of findings, implication for social change, and recommendations for action and future researcher. In addition, I share my experience in conducting this research through a reflection as a researcher.

I used purposeful and criterion sampling to select six teachers and six parents from three preschool programs in Southern California. The participants shared their experiences in face-to-face interviews regarding their roles in professional development and parent involvement related to children's educational outcomes. The interviews guided the topic relating to the influence of teachers and parents on childhood learning outcomes. I asked open-ended questions during the interviews to avoid limiting participants' responses in addition to exploring the perceptions regarding their role in professional development and parent involvement to improve children's academic achievement.

The data collection for this qualitative study included three sources: (a) parent and teacher interviews, (b) audit trail, and (c) member checks. In order to ensure validity and reliability of the study, I triangulated all three sources of data. I also used a software program, NVivo 10 QSR, to organize the analysis of data by transcribing, coding, and

identifying themes. The themes showed how teacher and parent relationships impact on childhood learning outcomes.

This study explored the perceptions of teachers and parents using the conceptual framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. This model guided the study by exploring how the school environment (mesosystem) and the home environment (microsystem) function as important systems promoting children's learning outcomes. In addition, this model explored the importance of building reciprocal relationships between parents and teachers for children's academic success. The findings, although quite important, differed in significance for each research question. Not all teachers and parents agreed regarding the role of professional development, parent involvement, and the teacher-parent relationship in influencing children's achievement. Some teachers reported that their education and previous training helped them to understand how to work with children. All parents stated that teaching their children at home increased their children's learning. All teachers and parents agreed that building relationships is very important in fostering children's development. The findings showed a significant difference regarding barriers that exist in building relationships. Teachers reported that some parents lack interest and participation due to personal issues, language barriers, and work schedules (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parents' responses differed. Some indicated no barriers exist in building relationships, whereas others stated that they lacked time and teachers are not doing their job (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The findings regarding the teachers' demographics showed various levels of education ranging from some college to a doctorate, teachers participated in ECE classes ranging from 12- 36 units, various

disciplines were reported, training was provided on site and at colleges /universities, various training topics were identified, and length of training ranged from 0-19 hours.

This inquiry was guided by three primary research questions and one secondary question. The primary research question were:

1. How do teachers and parents determine their roles in children's learning outcomes?

2. How do teachers and parents describe professional development as perceived in relationship to children's learning?

3. How do teachers and parents perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes?

The secondary research question was:

4. What do parents and teachers perceive exist in building relationships?

Interpretations of Findings

Ten themes emerged from the three data sources, reflecting how teachers and parents influence children's academic skills. The teachers' themes included: (a) flexibility to adapt to the students' needs, (b) strategies gathered from professional development support children's learning, (c) training allows new ways to deal with student issues with learning, (d) child development classes improve teachers' ability to implement different learning strategies, (e) effective parent-partnership allows harmony in students' learning, and (f) lack of parent participation. The parents' themes included: (a) being involved and volunteering in school, (b) teaching fundamental skills at home allows increased learning, (c) improving and maintaining parent-teacher relationship so

that the children's learning is maximized, and (d) no perceived barriers, content with parent-teacher relationship.

Interpretation of Findings for Research Question 1: Teachers

The first research question was, "How do teachers and parents determine their roles in children learning outcomes?" The first theme to emerge from this research question based on the analysis of the teachers' responses was the importance of flexibility and adapting to the student's needs. Some teachers agreed that meeting the needs of the whole child helps them understand the child's developmental learning outcomes. This can be achieved by creating lesson plans that reflects each child's developmental levels (Baum & King, 2006). The teachers in this study also stated that flexibility regarding children's development is important for teaching and for providing different ways to work with children. This finding is consistent with the revised Developmentally Appropriate Statement (NAEYC, 2009), which called upon teachers to be aware of individualized children's needs, and described this approach as a best practice for teaching preschool children. The findings support the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, emphasizing that teachers are members of the microsystem in which their role is an important part of children's wellbeing and academic learning.

Interpretation of Findings for Research Question 2: Teachers

The second research question was, "How do teachers describe professional development as perceived in relationship to children's learning?" Three major themes were identified based on the teachers' responses to the interview questions corresponding to this research question: (1) information gathered could be used for children's learning, (2) training allows new ways to deal with student issues with learning, and (3) child

development classes improve teacher's abilities to implement different learning strategies. Based on the interviews, some teachers believed that their training and education enabled them to develop a better understanding regarding how to work with children. This finding is congruent with that of Crawford (2010), who claimed that professional development helps teachers develop competencies in working with young children and supporting children's academic learning. The teachers in this study all acknowledged professional development as a useful way to raise student achievement. This aligned with Wasik's (2010), statement that professional development provides teachers with knowledge and skills in addition to helping them understand how to support children's growth and development.

Interpretation of Findings for Research Question 3: Teachers

The third research question was, "How do teachers perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes?" The fifth theme to emerge in response to this question was that effective partnership encourages harmony in student's learning. All six teachers believed that partnership creates harmony and influences children's academic skills. Research has shown that the parent-teacher relationship also influences children's academic performance (Baumgartner & McBride, 2007; Xu & Gulosino, 2006). Some of the teachers reported that communication plays a major role in building relationships because it influences children's learning. Epstein's (1995) theory supported the position that schools and teachers should work together to support children's academic skills. Working together requires teachers to communicate because it is important to building relationships with parents and supporting learning (Epstein, 1995). The study result

supported Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory, which states the importance of collaboration between the home and the school.

Interpretation of Findings for Subquestion: Teachers

The subquestion was, "What barriers do parents and teachers perceive exist in building relationship?" The sixth theme, which unfolded from this research question based on the teacher's interpretation, was lack of parent participation. The teachers claimed that some parents do not like to participate or do not have time to participate in their children's education; this issue tends to prevent them from establishing relationships with parents. MacMillian (2005) indicated that a parent's work schedule is a barrier that affects parental involvement. According to Epstein (2011), the use of communication between parents and teachers is essential, which helps deal with barriers and supports parent participation.

Interpretation of Findings for Research Question 1: Parents

The first research question was, "How do parents determine their role in children's learning outcomes?" The seventh theme linked to this question and based on the parent's responses was their involvement in volunteering at the school. The parents noted that being involved in their children's education is extremely important for them. In addition, the parents reported that their involvement plays a major role in helping their children learn. This finding supported Bronfenbrenner's (1979) view that family plays a vital role in the child's wellbeing and academic learning. In addition, this result is linked to Epstein's beliefs that volunteering is a powerful strategy capable of creating a pathway to stronger parental involvement in the home environment.

Interpretation of Findings for Research Question 2: Parent

The second research question was, "How do parents describe parental involvement as perceived in relationship to children's learning outcomes?" The eighth theme associated with this question and reflected in the parent's interpretation was that teaching the fundamentals at home allows for an increase in learning. During the interviews, the parents stated that teaching the fundamentals at home allows for an increase in learning and is very important for children's academic skills. Parents reported that learning involved both parents and teachers. This finding is consistent with Bronfenbrenner (1979), who believed that the home environment is the microsystem level where education starts.

Interpretation of Findings for Research Question 3: Parents

The third research question was, "How do parents perceive their relationship related to children's learning outcomes?" The ninth theme, which surfaced from this question, as well as the interviews, was that improving and maintaining the parent-teacher relationship maximizes children's learning. The parents in the study stated that their relationship with teachers is important for their children's learning. Parents believed that the relationship could affect their children's education. Also, they believed that communication is critical in helping to build this relationship. The finding supports Epstein (2011) and Bronfenbrenner (1979), who suggested that relationships between teachers and parents contribute to children's learning outcomes.

Interpretation of Findings for Subquestion: Parents

The subquestion was, "What barriers do parents and teachers perceive exist in building relationships?" The tenth theme, which emerged from the subquestion and the

parents' interpretation, was that there were no perceived barriers and that contentment existed in terms of the parent-teacher relationship. Most parents reported perceiving no barriers regarding their relationship with the teacher. Yet, it must be noted that two parents relayed that the teachers are not doing their job and that they, the parents, lack time to participate. MacMillian (2005) stated that teachers must perform their duties in order to encourage parents to participate in children's education in addition to building relationships.

Implications for Social Change

The study's implications for social change are significant. First, the results of this study may empower preschool administrators to create policies and procedures regarding parental involvement, possibly outlining a variety of ways in which parents can be involved in school related activities. In addition, helping parents understand their role and feel welcomed in the school environment is important for social change. The need to create an atmosphere justifying the purpose of parental engagement and partnership was identified. Second, preschool administrators should develop a mission statement regarding the importance of parental involvement that might help teachers set the tone for developing positive relationships with parents. Third, preschool administrators could use a survey to assess parents' interest and knowledge regarding their children's education. The results from the survey might inform teachers regarding appropriate school-related activities or events that may be best suited for the parent. In addition, ways to communicate with parents may be determined. Lastly, preschool administrators should provide training for parents on a regular basis, which could support parental engagement.

The early years of a child's life tend to be a critical period for future learning (NAEYC, 2009). Parental engagement and teachers' professional development have an impact on children's learning outcomes. Parental involvement carries great value in helping to increase children's performance and achievement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 2011). The societal transformation that is needed focuses on stronger parental engagement and building teacher-parent relationships in ECE. Implications for social change relate to transforming the strategic organizational structure of preschool programs by empowering administrators and teachers to create a positive climate that will encourage parental involvement and develop partnerships with parents to produce positive outcomes for children.

Recommendations for Action

The results of the study indicated that some parents lack interest and participation in their children's education. There is a great need to increase parental engagement in ECE to prepare children for future academic success. I would recommend the following actions:

1. Community colleges and universities could create a course that encourages student field experiences to include working and interacting with parents at preschool sites;

2. The Department of Education could mandate that all preschool programs that receive state or federal funding develop policies and procedures for parental engagement;

3. The Department of Education could mandate all preschool programs provide ongoing training to enhance parents' knowledge regarding their children's education;

4. The Department of Education could mandate that all preschool programs provide ongoing training to enhance teachers' knowledge regarding child development topics in addition to working with parents;

5. Preschool administrators could implement school-related activities that involve all parents;

6. Preschool administrators could create an atmosphere that welcomes parents and makes them feel comfortable;

7. Preschool administrators could provide parents with a parent handbook at the beginning of the school year;

8. Preschool administrators could hire a Parent Involvement Specialist to encourage parents to participate in school learning opportunities;

9. The Department of Education could mandate that parents attend at least two meetings within a year with teachers; and

10. A parent resource room could be provided for parents to obtain resources and meet with other parents.

These recommendations can be promulgated by preschool administrators and implemented in programs to help promote stronger parental engagement and support children's academic learning.

Recommendations for Further Research

Multiple researchers have recognized teachers' professional development, parental involvement, and teacher-parent relationships as essential components that are essential to children's academic achievement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 2011; NAEYC, 2002). Therefore, teachers and parents need to develop an in-depth understanding regarding the purpose of parental engagement and the building of teacher-parent relationships in the education system. Research shows that parent engagement and teacher-parent relationships supports children's learning and prepares them for future success (NAEYC, 2009). To assist with this issue, additional research is needed to expand the understanding of parental involvement and teacher preparation in the early childhood field. Based on the research findings, I propose the following:

1. Additional qualitative research that examines the barriers that parents face regarding their parental roles, to address the limited number of extent studies that address this topic.

2. A qualitative case study exploring how preschool teachers develop relationships with parents.

3. A qualitative study examining the years of experience that create a competent teacher.

This type of research may identify the influencing factors that affect parental engagement in order to bring about needed social change.

Researcher's Reflection

I have always had a passion for teaching and learning. My knowledge of early learning, the importance of professional development, and the lack of parental involvement motivated me to seek an in-depth understanding of the effects of each on student achievement. Understanding the importance of parental involvement and professional development related to children's education outcomes guided me in developing this research study. As the researcher, I assumed several significant behaviors: (a) ensuring that the participants were respected and felt comfortable sharing their feelings, knowledge, and experiences; (b) understanding the need to use triangulation to develop an in-depth understanding of the data results; (c) ensuring not to interrupt the participants during the interview in order to avoid personal bias; and (d) avoiding facial expressions in order to maintain a professional demeanor.

I encountered some challenges during the study, which included: (a) working around participants' schedules to arrange interviews; (b) some participants forgot about their scheduled interview appointments; and (c) some participants did not return consent forms within a timely manner. I had to make several calls and send emails to the participants asking them to mail the consent forms and to confirm their schedule interview appointment. This might have been resolved had I expected this response and acted in a more proactive manner by reminding participants closer to their appointments.

Overall, this research experience has been beneficial to my academic career. I have developed a deeper understanding about qualitative research and how to bring about social change in higher education by developing new courses to prepare teacher education students for the early childhood field. In addition, I have learned that teachers

and parents are trying hard to prepare students for success yet need help and support from preschool administrators. Such help should focus on organizing a strategic system regarding parental engagement and helping teachers use effective techniques in establishing relationships with parents.

Conclusion

In this qualitative case study, I examined six teachers' and six parents' perceptions of their roles regarding parental engagement and professional development related to children's learning. Data was collected from 12 participants, which included three sources: interviews, an audit trail, and member checks. I used a software program, NVivo 10 QSR, to organize, transcribe, code, and identify themes.

The findings suggest that there is a need for preschool administrators to plan, implement, and evaluate their parental involvement and professional development programs. These findings could be built into the various professional development programs conducted by universities and other colleges. It is apparent that administrators should: (a) develop a parent engagement handbook, (b) create parent involvement policies and procedures, (c) provide in-service trainings for teachers so they can learn how to use effective strategies in motivating parents to participate in their children's education, and (d) provide teachers with strategies in dealing with parents who have personal issues and do not focus on building relationships. The handbook might help parents understand the importance of participating in school-related activities or reinforce learning in the home environment. In addition, such training would provide parents with effective home strategies to promote children's learning. Finally, I would like to recommend that all preschool administrators develop comprehensive parental

involvement and professional development systems, thereby preparing children for long-term academic success.

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Appendix A: Demographic Teacher Survey

Teacher's #____
Center_____

_____

Please read each statement and select the appropriate response(s) that addresses your background education. All information you provide is confidential.

Part I - Teacher Education
1. Highest level of education completed (SELECT ONLY ONE)
   o High school diploma or GED
   o Some college
   o Associate degree
   o Bachelor's degree
   o Master's degree
   o Doctorate

2. If you did not obtain a master, bachelor's, or associate's degree, how many early childhood education (ECE) units have you completed? (SELECT ONLY ONE)
   o 0-3 ECE units
   o 3-6 ECE units
   o 6-12 ECE units
   o 12-24 ECE units
   o Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)____

3. What is the discipline of your associate's degree? (SELECT ONLY ONE)
   o Early Childhood Education (ECE)
   o Child Development
   o Education
   o Other related field (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____
   o N/A

4. What is the discipline of your bachelor's degree? (SELECT ONLY ONE)
   o Child development
   o Early Childhood Education
   o Education
   o Other related field (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____
   o N/A

5. What is the discipline of your master's degree? (SELECT ONLY ONE)
   o Child Development
   o Early Childhood Education
   o Education

      o Other related field (PLEASE SPECIFY)_____
      o N/A

.

6. What Child Development Permit do you obtain? (SELECT ONLY ONE)
   - o Assistant
   - o Associate Teacher
   - o Teacher
   - o Master Teacher
   - o Site Supervisor
   - o Program Director
   - o N/A

Part II- Teacher Training
Please read each statement and select the appropriate response(s) that addresses your training experiences.

7. Where do you receive training regarding child development and early childhood education? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)
   - o On-site training
   - o In-service workshops
   - o Resources & referral agencies
   - o 2-year colleges courses
   - o 4-year college courses
   - o Graduate courses
   - o Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)_____
   - o N/A

8. Identify the training sessions that you have completed within the last year? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)
   - o Curriculum / teaching strategies
   - o School/Home partnership
   - o Special needs
   - o Assessments (DRDP-R and ECERS)
   - o Program and person growth
   - o Administration
   - o Health and safety
   - o Environmental design
   - o Child development
   - o Lesson planning
   - o Developmental Appropriate Practice
   - o Content instruction (literacy, math, science, and social studies)
   - o Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____

9. How many hours of training have you completed within the last year? (SELECT ONLY ONE)
    o 0-5 hours
    o 6-10 hours
    o 11-13 hours
    o 14-18 hours
    o 19 or more hours

THANK YOU for taking time to fill out the Teacher Survey- Preschool Education.

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Questions

Interview questions aligned to research questions.

1. Describe how your professional training or education supports children's education. (1)

2. Describe how you engage children in developmentally appropriate activities. (2)

3. What qualities do you feel are important to support children's learning outcomes? Please elaborate (1)

4. How do you promote children's individual needs? (2)

5. How does the parent/teacher relationship affect children's learning outcomes? (3)

6. How are positive relationships established with parents? (3)

7. How do you actively engage children to make choices within the environment? (2)

8. How would you motivate parents to participate in their child's education? (1)

9. Are there any barriers that might hinder you from establishing a relationship with parents? Please explain (subquestion).

10. Why is parental involvement essential in the development of children's learning outcomes? (2)

Appendix C: Parent Interview Questions

Interview questions aligned to research questions.

1. Describe parental involvement in your own personal definition. (1)

2. Describe how you communicate with your child's teacher? (2)

3. Describe how your child's teacher allows you to help make decisions regarding school related activities. (2)

4. Describe how your child's teacher identified community resources that contribute to your child's learning. (2)

5. Describe how your child's teacher supports parenting skills and strategies in working with your child. (2)

6. How does parental involvement influences your child's education? (1)

7. Describe your relationship with your child's teacher. (3)

8. What perspective do you have regarding reinforcing activities at home to support your child's learning outcomes? (1)

9. How does the parent-teacher relationship affect children's learning outcomes? (3)

10. Are there any barriers that might hinder you from establishing an effective relationship with your child's teacher? If yes, please explain (subquestion).

Appendix D: Teacher Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a qualitative case study regarding factors that contribute to preschool children's academic success. You were chosen for the study because you are a teacher at The Jeffrey Foundation. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by researcher Michele Benjamin, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to understand factors that contribute to preschool children's academic success, by examining teacher and parent perceptions of the role of professional development, parent involvement, teacher-parent relationships, and any barriers to the teacher-parent relationship on learning outcomes. The focus is to conceptualize the roles of professional development and parental involvement in the connection to children's learning outcomes from the perspectives of teachers and parents.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Complete a demographic survey identifying levels of education and teacher education experience, sign the consent form and mail both forms to the researcher's PO Box address when complete.
- Two teachers from each of three early childhood programs will be selected to participate in an interview with the researcher based on the information gathered and analyzed from the demographic survey. Teachers will be selected to reflect a wide range of diversity. Three teachers will be selected regarding levels of education, and three teachers will be selected regarding teacher's training experiences. Six teachers will be invited to be interviewed based on the diversity of education and teacher training experiences and the interest shown by returning documents speedily.
- Participate in a 90-minute teacher interview with the researcher.
- After the interview each participate will review the transcripts for approximately 30 minutes.
- After the interview, the researcher will conduct member checking to ensure data is accurate. This process will take 30 minutes.
- The interview will be audiotaped
- The interview will take place at each site in a private conference room.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at The Jeffrey Foundation will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during

the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
There are minimal risks related with this study, which you may experience stress due to time constraints. The benefit of being in the study may evolve around learning additional information about children's development and how to prepare children's for long-term academic success.

Compensation:
The researcher will provide a gift card valued at $15.00.

Confidentiality:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Maryanne Hunter Longo (Committee Chair) at maryanne.longo@waldenu.edu or the researcher via (310)547-7263 and mbenjamin623@sbcglobal.net. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **03-27-14-0056954** and it expires on **March 26, 2015.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent
_____

Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature
_____

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature
_____

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, his or her email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix E: Parent Consent Form

You are invited to take part a qualitative case study regarding factors that contribute to preschool children's academic success. You were chosen for the study because your child is attending The Jeffrey Foundation. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by researcher named Michele Benjamin, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to understand factors that contribute to preschool children's academic success, by examining teacher and parent perceptions of the role of professional development, parent involvement, teacher-parent relationships, and any barriers to the teacher-parent relationship on learning outcomes. The focus is to conceptualize the roles of professional development and parental involvement in the connection to children's learning outcomes from the perspectives of teachers and parents.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
- Sign consent form and mail to researcher's PO Box.
- Participate in a 90-minute parent interview with the researcher.
- After the interview each participate will review the transcripts for approximately 30 minutes.
- After the interview, the researcher will conduct member checking to ensure data is accurate. This process will take 30 minutes.
- The interview will be audiotaped.
- The interview will take place at each site in a private conference room.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study. No one at The Jeffrey Foundation will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
There are minimal risks related with this study, which you may experience stress due to time constraints. The benefits of being in the study may evolve around learning additional information about children's development and how to prepare children's for long-term academic

Compensation:
The researcher will provide a gift care valued at $15.00

Confidentiality:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the study.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Maryanne Hunter Longo (Committee Chair) at maryanne.longo@waldenu.edu or the researcher via (310)547-7263 and mbenjamin623@sbcglobal.net. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **03-27-14-0056954** and it expires on **March 26, 2015.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

_____

Participant's Written or Electronic* Signature

_____

Researcher's Written or Electronic* Signature

_____

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