

2016

Early Childhood Educator Experiences Building Relationships with Families in Military-Connected Schools

Yolanda Seabrooks Brown
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Yolanda Brown

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Early Childhood Educator Experiences Building Relationships with Families in

Military-Connected Schools

by

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MS, Walden University, 2005

BA, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2016

Abstract

Early childhood educators working to establish and maintain productive parent-teacher relationships are essential to the success of school-community partnerships in military-connected schools. The purpose of this study was to seek understanding of what early childhood educators had experienced while working with military families. Epstein's model of school, family, and community partnerships provided the conceptual framework for this study. The questions that guided this case study were designed to explore how early childhood educators established and maintained relationships with military families. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with 8 early childhood educators in military-connected schools. Inductive data analysis was used to code the data initially and then to determine these 5 themes: (a) educators used many methods to communicate with families; (b) parent involvement was influenced by educator communication, family life, and school culture; (c) deployments impacted student achievement; (d) strong community resources were deemed necessary; and (e) military children benefitted from having resilient educators. Participants believed timely training addressing the unique needs of military families would be advantageous. A 3-day professional development for early childhood educators was developed to incorporate the findings of this study. School districts implementing the professional development for early childhood educators in a strong school, family, and community partnership will result and will lead to positive social change by increasing the academic achievement, emotional wellbeing, and social welfare of children of military families attending military-connected schools.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my loving husband, Jerry, for his encouragement and support throughout this process. I also dedicate this study to my two beautiful sons, Quincy and Kai. Continue to pursue your dreams and never give up. All of your hugs, kisses, and support of me while writing has been so helpful. Jerry, Quincy, and Kai, I love you very much.

I also would like to dedicate this study to military families and military-connected educators. Military children benefit from your hard work, sacrifices, and dedication. They deserve the best education we can provide them.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge the family, friends, and colleagues who helped me in this long educational journey. I would like to especially thank my mother, Janice Seabrooks-Briggs, who inspired me to be a teacher; my sister and brothers, Alisha Seabrooks Williams, Rafael Seabrooks, and Reginald Seabrooks; and father figure, James Briggs, who have all been my cheerleaders throughout this study. Thank you to my cousins, Keith Burton and Dr. Sonya Burton Archie, for being my sounding board as we walked together through the Walden Doctoral Program together.

I would also like to thank a special group of friends and colleagues who embarked on this doctoral journey with me and provided continuous encouragement --Tianay, Barbara, Cara, Mary, Lynda, and Shannon. The love and support they showed has helped me to progress to achieve this personal and professional goal. A huge thank you goes to my participants. I appreciate the time they took to commit to this research study.

I am endeared to my committee members for continuing to guide me through this process. My wonderful chair, Dr. Bernice Parrott, has held me accountable from day one of this process, and never gave up on me. My committee members, Dr. Mary Ann Wangemann and Dr. Tom Cavanagh, provided endless faith in my ability and gave me meaningful and timely feedback. Thank you to my committee for helping me complete this long-term goal.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Recent research indicated children in military families constantly experience geographical changes and anxiety about deployed parents' safety and issues related to academic achievement while mobilizing to new duty stations and schools (Berg, 2008; Cozza, 2014; Harrison & Vannest, 2008; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Titus, 2000). Promotion of achieving quality education partnerships between schools, families, and communities is often on district school improvement agendas (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012). Despite the rise in programs and resources made available to military-connected families, there is little information on the experiences educators have with military parents to help improve school-family partnerships, especially when families are experiencing transitions and deployments.

Definition of the Problem

The problem that was the focus of this study was a gap existed in literature describing the process early childhood educators use to develop relationships with military families and students. This problem exists despite the fact military-connected schools have school psychologists, military family consultants, military school transition officers, and a host of community programs available to help military families and their dependents. Past research supported that providing adequate collaboration time between educators and parents increased the vision and beliefs held by the professional learning community (Maloney & Konza, 2011), and positive teacher-student interactions are

critical during a student's early years in school (Downer, Sabol, & Hamre, 2010). Spilt, Koomen, and Thijs (2011) stated students achieve academically and gain socio-emotional wellbeing if the teacher experiences positive student-teacher interactions. Educators actively working to have systematic measurements in place to gauge how well programs and grant-funded projects are operating will help assist school-community partnerships in maximizing the potential of reaching families handling academic and behavior issues (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 2009). It was important to study the process early childhood educators use to develop relationships with military families and students to determine if more could be done to enhance this process.

Rationale

The rationale for this study was to gain an understanding about how teachers working in military-connected schools described their relationships with military families and, if needed, to formulate a project to facilitate this process. Early childhood is a time when children are dependent on the adults in their lives to make decisions for their emotional, social, cognitive, and cultural benefit (Loeb & Bassok, 2008; Monti, Pomerantz, & Roisman, 2014; Woodhead, 2006). Early childhood experiences and factors of a child's environment are predictors of how well a child develops relationships with peers, develops school readiness, and achieves academic success (Diamond, Justice, Siegler, Snyder, & National Center for Special Education Research, 2013; Loeb & Bassok, 2008; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, Lloyd, & Leung, 2013).

Military families have to be especially resilient to deal with constant challenges to the continuity of the family unit. Phelps, Dunham, and Lyons (2010) stated when military members are not present in the home daily routines still need to continue. Families must have the ability to reorganize these daily routines to function without the presence of the service member (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2007). Struggles may occur as the remaining family members try to balance the roles and responsibilities held by the service member and overcome separation anxiety (Friedberg & Brelsford, 2011). Therefore, if early childhood educators are aware of the struggles some families may have in getting used to new routines when a family member leaves, they can make necessary adjustments within their own classroom to help young child cope and feel a sense of security.

The Local Problem

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, and Blum (2010) described the experiences of military families and the stress caused by relocating frequently as military family syndrome. Children who felt connected to their environment developed better coping strategies to help deal with moving (Cozza, 2014; Mmari et al., 2010). The focus of this study was the southwestern region of a southern state of the United States with a large military installation. The local setting provided a rich field for studying the experiences of the early childhood educators and their relationships with military students and parents because there were several elementary schools in the area. Parents actively participating in their child's school activities and schools that provide activities for parents to become

involved are high indicators of positive school-family partnership goals (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, Lloyd, & Leung, 2013). Parental involvement of highly mobile children can influence positive student achievement outcomes (Rhodes, 2007; Snell, Miguel, & East, 2009). Teacher discomfort when parents take on leadership roles in the school can cause barriers in the creation of school-family partnerships (Muscott et al., 2008). Two reasons this might happen is because some parents may not know how to express their feelings to a teacher, and some teachers may not feel comfortable seeking the help of parents, especially if their children are having problems in school. Devoe and Ross (2012) stated parents endure a cycle of emotions during deployments. This emotional cycle varies from parent to parent, depending on factors like the timing of the deployment, the mission of the deployment, and the amount of support the family receives from the unit (Devoe & Ross, 2012).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Evidence in the professional literature supported using the skills of education specialists in maintaining relationships between military families and school communities. For example, school psychologists and counselors are in positions to help military families significantly deal with issues that arise from deployments (Sherman & Glenn, 2011; Sparks, 2011). Using school psychologists to communicate the stages of deployment to educators and military families can aid in helping increase their awareness and maintaining support to them as each stage occurs (Pincus et al., 2007). Research

indicated other points to consider for the promotion of strong school-family partnerships, and those included the following:

- Schools striving to have productive learning environments give empowerment to all families (Muscott et al, 2008).
- Counselors at schools have skills instrumental in providing a bridge to communities and families to build capacity for school partnerships (Bryan & Henry, 2012).
- Cultural diversity of parent backgrounds can reflect unique viewpoints concerning educational expectations (Chamberlain, 2005).
- Educators and parents are both essential in the student's overall development (Monti, Pomerantz, & Roisman, 2014).
- Including preservice teachers in learning methods to work with diverse family structures help them to gain perspective on school-family partnerships (Norris, 2010, 2011).
- Social workers in schools could provide a range of services to school family partnerships when caseloads were manageable (Kelly, Bluestone-Miller, Mervis, & Fuerst, 2012).

Evidence presented by Phelps, Dunham, and Lyons (2010) showed at least seven military operations (activities implemented by a military or naval force) occurred with service members deploying from the United States. Thirty-seven percent of the deployments require service members to leave home a minimum of two times (Phelps,

Dunham, and Lyons, 2010). Therefore, it is imperative for stakeholders working in military connected schools to have measures in place to help military children feel successful (Jerles, 2011). This could lead to a decrease in the struggles some children experience with family roles changing at home during deployments.

The purpose of this study was to seek an understanding about early childhood educator relationships with military families with the desire to enhance these relationships if such a need should be identified. Parents and teachers have to work together on communication and to overcome their own perceptions of what their roles are in the school community to work toward the advancement of creating desirable school cultures that embraces positive family-school connections (Brooks, 2005; Price & Mitchell, 2009). If the relationship is lacking between the educator and parent, then miscommunication can occur. Miscommunication between teachers and parents leads to frustration, misunderstandings, and contentious relationships (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2009). Thompson (2009) and Thompson and Mazer (2012) suggested parents achieve higher levels of positive teacher interaction when schools use effective communication strategies to gain parent trust.

Definition of Terms

Deployment cycle: When a military member deploys, five distinct stages have been identified that military families experience including *predeployment*, *deployment*, *sustainment*, *redeployment*, and *post deployment* (Pincus et al, 2007).

Military-connected school: A public or private school around a military installation that services a population of military children is a military-connected school (Brendel, Maynard, Albright, & Bellomo, 2013).

Parent-teacher relationship: This is an interpersonal relationship between a parent and teacher in a school community (Serpell & Mashburn, 2012).

Parental involvement: Parental involvement is parents working together with school and community personnel to meet their children's social, emotional, and academic needs, and parents communicating with their children frequently to address their physical and emotional changes (Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, Lloyd, & Leung, 2013).

School-community partnerships: The connection school members have with the families in the community often extends beyond the context of academic learning (Willems & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2012).

Theory of overlapping spheres of influence: Epstein (2011) identified six types of parental involvement, including the following: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. The school, the family, and the community work together to benefit the student with their interpersonal relationships (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Significance

This study was significant in several ways. First, I highlighted the state of military families today as they faced frequent deployments and separations. Then, I highlighted research on the experiences of active duty military families and their relationships with the school community, especially their relationships with teachers. Next, I summarized key studies that support the mission of schools and communities providing continuous support to military families. Taking these actions was significant because it provided context of the relationship between military culture and school culture. Finally, and most important, I came to an understanding of how the interpersonal relationships parents and teachers developed in school communities contributed to the discussion about how to strengthen school-community partnerships and to the project resulting from this study (Friedman, 2010; Serpell & Mashburn, 2012).

This study is also significant in helping schools further develop the cultural elasticity needed to sustain a military culture bounded to them. Easterbrook and Vignoles (2013) stated people felt more satisfaction when they were able to identify with the group for which they felt attached. According to Blum (2005), students believe they are connected to their school community when school administration and faculty communicate a climate of trust. Therefore, military families are more likely to relate to school communities that recognize the uniqueness of their culture. Military-connected children are more likely to thrive in a school community where they feel they belong. Implications for social changes in educational settings resulting from this study include

having in place important processes teachers and parents can follow to create collaborative interactions that will benefit children within military communities (Eberly & Konzal, 2007; Sack-Min, 2007).

Guiding Research Question

The guiding research question in this study was the following: How do early childhood educators working in military-connected schools describe their relationships with members of military families? In this study, I explored the relationships early childhood educators have with active duty military parents. Although several research studies have investigated the importance of military families needing extra support and resources during a military deployment and noted specific populations of military members (i.e., Navy wives, Army families), most researchers have not yet explored in-depth how parent involvement, early childhood teacher influences, and school-family partnerships influence the outcomes of military parent-teacher relationships in military-connected schools. The latest research efforts have focused on the emotional cycles that military families deal with during deployments, adolescent behavior during deployments, and community resources provided to military families during deployments (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009; Park, 2011; Phelps, Dunham, & Lyons, 2010, Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2007; Sherman & Glen, 2011). The factors that influence early childhood teacher communication with parents, young children's behavior during all stages of deployment, and parent-teacher attitudes within the relationship are still in need of conclusive qualitative research.

Review of Literature

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement (2007) reported the positive influence that parent-teacher relationships have when parents feel they are partners in this collaborative effort. Parents are frequently the first people to introduce children to learning; therefore, it is important to include parents in discussions of student achievement at every stage of a child's educational development (Hilado, Kallemeyn, & Phillips, 2013; Loeb & Bassok, 2008; Monti, Pomerantz, & Roisman, 2014). Research findings reflect a link between communication between the home and school and the amount of success students experience to the beliefs, attitude, and values of parents and the strategies used by parents to discipline and raise their children (Loeb & Bassok, 2008).

This literature review has three main points of information concerning today's military families and their relationships with early childhood educators in military-connected schools, and those are as follows: (a) parent involvement research definitions (Epstein, 2011; Woodhead, 2006); (b) conceptual framework of Epstein's (2011) school, family, and community partnerships; and (c) the stages and effects of deployment on military families (Louie & Cromer, 2014; Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2007). I searched peer-reviewed scholarly journals using 5 key search phrases in EBSCO, ERIC, ProQuest, and PsycINFO databases: *early childhood education, parent-teacher relationships, military families, military children and parental involvement*.

Early childhood education journals described the phenomenon of parent-teacher relationships in terms of communication between the educators and parents, the cognitive development of young children prekindergarten through third grades, teacher perspectives, and the influences of parent involvement in the education of his or her child. Other keywords used to find literature and studies pertaining to military parent-teacher relationships were *military dependents*, *deployment*, *active duty*, and *school family partnerships*. The focus of this chapter is to review existing research and studies about the experiences with military-connected school communities of active duty service members, spouses, children, early childhood educators, and other school personnel, such as counselors.

Conceptual Framework

School, family, and community support are necessary if students are to feel love and security (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 2009). School, family, and community partnerships cannot simply create successful students. Rather, designed partnership activities should engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own successes (Epstein, 1994). The assumption is that if children feel loved and are encouraged to read, write, calculate, and learn other skills and talents, they will remain in school.

The framework for school, family, and community partnerships employ strategies deriving from Epstein's (2011) theory of overlapping spheres of influence. The overlapping spheres of influence theory identifies the following six types of parent

involvement: decision making abilities, parenting skills, communication, learning at home, volunteer efforts, and collaboration with the school community (Epstein, 2011). Epstein's (2011) researched outcomes, while developing the theory on the overlapping spheres of influence, helped devise guidelines for what a strong school, family, and community partnership should entail. Steps for creating school, family, and community partnerships included schools creating an action plan, obtaining funds for support, identifying starting points, developing an action plan, and continuing to plan, evaluate, and improve programs developed (Epstein, 2011). Effective organizations have members who are content with their work environment. Social factors can include the feeling of inclusion to an organization as well as the feeling of connectedness to social norms that shape the organization (Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2010). Researchers have found military-connected schools are organizations that have been progressively working toward goals and making their communities thrive (Joiner, 2003; Kingston, 2002; Smrekar & Owens; 2003). Action plans have been created to ensure these goals are achieved.

Partnership Effects on Teacher Efficacy and Diverse Learners

Beasley, Gartin, Lincoln and Penner-Williams (2013) completed a study with 139 elementary teachers to find out how partnering with local universities provided support to educators teaching diverse students. The researchers used a modified version of The Elementary Teacher Survey. Results Beasley, Gartin, Lincoln and Penner-Williams showed the following:

- Educators felt most self-efficient when they were able to meet the needs of their students using researched based instructional strategies and differentiation to increase student outcomes for learning.
- Increases in special needs students and English as a second language students in classrooms showed a need for teachers to experience high self-efficacy.
- Sixty-three percent of university partnership graduates felt well prepared to perform duties in their classrooms that included implementing instructional strategies and alternative forms of strategies to help their students learn.
- Seventy percent of teachers believed their instruction helped students complete classwork tasks well.
- Instructional strategies and activities that were used most consistently and effectively with English as a second language learners and students with learning disabilities were graphic organizers, cooperative learning, and preassessments, while flexible groups and learning styles were used infrequently.
- When university partnerships were being used, teachers displayed higher levels of confidence and were encouraged when the effort they put into teaching impacted student learning.

Beasley, Gartin, Lincoln, and Penner-Williams (2013) suggested that teachers with varied experiences could benefit from staff development using partnerships with universities to increase self-efficacy and receive continuous support; therefore, educators working with military families can benefit from partnerships with universities. Most

universities located by large military installations work directly with military personnel and family members who are seeking an education. Epstein (2011) successfully used the approach of university level educators working closely with regular school level educators while working with Johns Hopkins University to complete action research about school-family-community partnerships.

Organizational Climate and School Community Partnerships

Organizational climate, first analyzed in research by Croft and Halpin (1962), is the theory that people generally believe they need to adapt their way of thinking to fit into an established climate. The urgency of stakeholders to create a climate of trust between families and military school communities of practice show evidence of culturally responsive practices within the contents of school improvement agendas. School improvement goals should allow for systematic strategy planning, which target achievement goals of military-connected students (Kingston, 2002). Continuity in school improvement plans translates into cultivating an organizational climate consistently aware of keeping family-school connections at the forefront of decision-making (Blum, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated ecological factors are important to the development of children. For example, teachers are known to have high turnover rates in urban areas, so administration are more prone to create ways to work on teacher retention than a school district that does not have high turnover rates. The organizational structure of urban schools creates mentoring programs for new teachers and establishes professional

development that gears toward teachers maintaining effective classroom environment. Teachers receive special training in managing the emotional needs of students from high poverty situations in urban school settings. Ressler, Doherty, Ferguson, and Lomotey (2015) stated efficient early childhood administrators create a work environment that influences the quality of classroom learning environments.

School and family partnerships are diverse and complex relationships (Beasley, Gartin, Lincoln, & Penner-Williams, 2013; Price-Mitchell, 2009). A theory that applies more specifically to how parents and teachers may perceive their role to be in school communities is role theory (Bredemeir, 1979). Role theory states that people come into situations with background knowledge that serves as a model for how they should interact socially with people (Bredemeir, 1979). Parental roles in their child's education are not the only determining factors to parent involvement. A personal sense of efficiency is also implicated; the level at which the interaction occurs makes a difference (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). In one form of interaction, parent-teacher conferences, the teacher's role is to give parents information about the student's academics, and parents usually receive the information, process it, and provide personal viewpoints based upon the teacher's information. Examining the effects of role theory could help school communities in breaking down preexisting communication barriers that may reside in individuals. Socio-cognitive role typologies help account for the efficiency of individuals in response to social-structural situations (Lynch, 2007).

Military families experience life in unique ways. They relocate often resulting in children experiencing several school transitions (Aronson, Caldwell, Perkins, & Pasch, 2011), they undergo multiple separations and deployment cycles of active duty and reservist parents (Devoe & Ross, 2012; Esposito-Smythers, Wolff, Lemmon, Bodzy, Swenson, & Spirito, 2011; Phelps, Dunham, & Lyons, 2010; Pincus et al., 2004), and they have to deal with increased stress caused by deployment cycles (Friedberg & Brelsford, 2011; Jerles, 2011). Military families need strong school and community partnerships and programs to help maintain resiliency during separation and deployments (Rush & Akos, 2007; Sherman & Glenn, 2011).

Studies have shown parent involvement increases the cognitive and emotional development of children, and children with involved parents have improved achievement in reading and math (Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Shiffman, 2013). Vera, Israel, Coyle, Cross, Knight-Lynn, Moallem, and Goldberger (2012) noted English language learners also benefit from positive parental involvement. The diverse background of military families may affect viewpoints about the schooling process, expectation levels, and communication with the teacher (Chamberlain, 2005). A parent involved with the student's education appears to enhance the child's development (Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Shiffman, 2013; Young, Austin, & Gowe, 2013).

Schools are vital to children learning social skills; therefore, the establishment of mutual trust between home and schools is important to the success of how well children adapt to their school setting (Epstein, 2011; Sanders, Sheldon, & Epstein, 2005).

Woodhead (2006) provided a description of what a school setting is by stating, “An educational programme is a social intervention, whose success depends on the particular characteristics of -- and relationships established amongst -- children, teachers, families, and communities over an extended time period” (p.13). Halgunseth and Peterson (2009) noted as mutual trust forms in school-family partnerships, families and teachers will commit deeper into the relationships. Likewise, if a decrease in mutual trust occurs, the relationship may experience a decline in commitment.

Concept of Parent Involvement

Parental involvement is a multifaceted concept. Researchers define parent involvement as parents actively inserting their personal values and belief systems to influence the development of their children’s lives in physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and cultural capacities (Epstein, 2011; Woodhead, 2006). Positive parental influences provide positive outcomes to a child, and negative influences provide negative outcomes (Hoglund, Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2015). In a physical capacity, parents provide a child with basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Social parental involvement includes teaching a child social skills acceptable to society. Emotional parent involvement involves nurturing a child’s needs to have compassion and understanding. Parental involvement in a child’s cognitive development includes providing appropriate measures to ensure the child has opportunities to grow in academic settings (Hoglund, Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2015). Parent involvement in cultural context includes providing ways for a child to develop beliefs and a personal identity with

communities (Loeb & Bassok, 2008). Strong family engagement thrives in a school culture with strong partnerships in place for the community (Halgunseth & Peterson, 2009). Family engagement also thrives when early childhood program leaders are knowledgeable and create a supportive work environment for the staff (Hilado, Kallemeyn, Leow, Lundy, & Israel, 2011).

Hoglund, Jones, Brown, and Aber (2015) also found the following to be true about parents who were involved with their child's education:

- Parent involvement is a strong predictor of how well a child adjusted to their school environment.
- Parents who spent time checking and monitoring homework increased the value children saw in education and school.
- Students from low-income families with parents involved with their education attributed to literacy gains.
- Children who struggled with schoolwork, had poor behavior, or were socially challenged benefitted from parents assisting them with homework or providing support to the school.
- Parents who responded to an educator requesting them to work more closely with their children were able to see more success in their child's achievement.
- A change in parent involvement can shift a child's academic, social, or behavior outlook in school.

Alternatively, parents who were not involved in their child's education proved to have a haphazardous effect on their child's school achievement. Monti, Pomerantz, and Roisman (2014) noted parents who were not responsive or had little interaction with their child's education tended to bring educational problems to the attention of the teacher. By doing this, parents conveyed the message to the child that school was still important, whether they were actively involved or not. However, a parent's insensitiveness did not help the child substantially in their academic performance at school. Monti, Pomerantz, and Roisman stated the child's competency in academics, such as scores on a standardized test, and engagement in school was low. Parents who spent time helping their child with homework, reading, math, and attending activities helped children understand the importance of school and promoted positive child development.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) stated there needs to be a shift in stakeholders' views when defining parental involvement. Goodall and Montgomery presented a continuum model in which parent involvement upgrades to parents who are engaged in their child's education. The researchers suggested the shift emphasize the importance of parent-child relationships instead of making the relationships heavily based on school-family relationships, so parents feel a sense of ownership in their child's school affairs rather than simply being involved in a series of activities. Goodall and Montgomery had this statement to further say about their model:

The continuum we present here is not a straight pathway, nor is it meant to be seen as such. Rather, it is an attempt to describe a messy web of interactions, so

that schools in particular can gauge their own work, and discern where they can move forward to the benefit of their students. (p. 400)

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) also described their research concerning educators who may draw the wrong conclusions about a family's situation because of differing viewpoints and experiences. This could cause educators to miss opportunities to actively engage families. Goodall and Montgomery best summarized parent engagement on the continuum model by stating:

The continuum we propose shows an acknowledgement that the agency for parental engagement is not, as much of the literature would seem to suggest, with the school, but rather with the parent. Or, better yet, it is negotiated between schools and parents. In the model discussed here, the change in agency would suggest that both parents and school staff undergo a re-interpretation of both their own, and the other's role and agentic positions, as the move along the continuum (p. 401).

Effects of Deployment Stages on Military Dependents

Researchers Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler (2007) identified the stages and effects of deployment on military families. The five stages are predeployment, deployment, sustainment, redeployment, and post deployment (Pincus, et al., 2007). Each deployment is associated with different obstacles and hardships. Families that cannot provide a sense of normalcy suffer from the lack of reorganization of shifted responsibilities (Chandra et al., 2011).

The first stage of the cycle, predeployment, is when the families must prepare for the service member to leave. Families participate in briefings and discussion on how to seek support, and they learn the protocol and procedures in case something should happen to the service member. Wills, family care plans, and securing power of attorney for the spouse are activities of serious importance before the service member leaves for the assignment. The mission may be so grave that families may not even know where the service member is going. Louie and Cromer (2014) noted in their research of 30 military servicemen with children under the age of 6 that as little as a third of their participants prepared their children for deployments. Louie and Cromer (2014) stated 79% of their participants felt their children would not understand what was happening.

Teachers and school counselors are often alerted that a mother or father is leaving for deployment ahead of time. This allows time for deployment groups to meet and assess how well the student will adjust to the change. Sherman and Glenn (2011) gathered some important facts concerning just how many children are affected at any given deployment cycle with this statement:

Married service members account for half of military families, and their children span the entire developmental spectrum. Approximately 40% are under five years old, 33% are school age (six to eleven), and 25% are teenagers (12-18). Some specific family constellations may pose increased risk for difficulties with deployments, including dual military families (6.9% of the military population),

single active duty parents (5.4%), and families with special health care needs (7.3%). (p. 17)

Researchers have noted several conclusions concerning behavior and other academic issues during or after deployments. Parenting skills diminish after deployment (Gewirtz et al., 2010). Mental and behavioral health visits increase by as much as 11% during deployments in the 3 to 8-year-old age group (Gorman, Eide, & Hisle-Gorman, 2010). Behavior disorders saw a 19% rise; stress disorders attributed to an 18% increase in young children (Gorman, Eide, & Hisle-Gorman, 2010; Lemmon & Stafford, 2014). Increased discipline problems at home (particularly among boys), and increased demands for attention arose (Rosen, Teitelbaum, & Westhuis, 1993). In some cases, a student's standardized test scores can deviate from the normal curve equivalent (NCE) by at least 2% (Engal, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2008). Academics show a downward trend in some students (Esposito-Smythers, Wolff, Lemmon, Bodzy, Swenson, & Spirito, 2011; Sparks, 2011).

Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, and Richardson (2009) noted that while deployments can have positive effects on military dependents and increase feelings of pride and friendship, young children may not be fully aware of the reason the parent had to leave. Also, because of inexperience with deployments, school-aged children of military families may suffer from feelings of isolation, fear, anxiety, and powerlessness (Aronson, Caldwell, Perkins, & Pasch, 2011; Chartrand, Frank, White, & Shope, 2008; Jerles, 2011; Pincus et al., 2010). Rodriguez and Margolin (2015) had similar findings to add to the

research, stating some families felt distressed from having little contact with the deployed family member, and when contact was made, it sometimes increased the amount the anxiety young children and spouses felt because it reminded them of the service member's absence.

Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, and Richardson (2009) conducted a study including 12 schools with Army and Army Reserve/National Guard military dependents. They wanted to describe how deployments affect the social, behavioral, and emotional reactions of children. The study used interviews with teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors to obtain a broad spectrum of viewpoints from the school setting. These researchers acknowledged the stress military families experienced during deployments, but the voices of members from military school settings were not represented to the maximum potential. The results of the research indicated school staff believed deployments did decrease some student productivity, but other students could develop coping strategies to help with social and emotional functioning.

Jerles (2011), Harrison and Vannest (2008), and Aronson, Caldwell, Perkins, and Pasch (2011) agreed parent education level, income, community support, family support, and mental health are constant variables that influenced the outcome of how military families experienced deployment. Jerles (2011) revealed more than 70,000 dependents of active duty reservists and National Guard had active support from their communities although they were not exposed to lengthy deployments. With the increase of deployment cycles, an increase in social, emotional, and behavior issues led to reduced student

achievement. A decrease in test scores raised concerns for how military-connected schools are going to assist the military student population with school support (Engel, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2008).

Implications

This study sought to promote social change in the way school communities communicate about resources available to parents of military members, especially if the family dealt with a deployed parent because this brings about additional stresses to children (Friedberg & Brelsford, 2011; Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, R., 2009; Sparks, 2011). Schools with mostly military-connected students had plentiful information readily accessible on several websites to address parents' questions and provide information on how schools can involve parents and help dependents academically (Titus, 2007). My study resulted in a project that will contribute to improving teacher and military parent relationships so that military students are more effectively served. Sharon and Nimisha (2009) reported the following regarding parent and teacher perceptions:

Linear regression analysis revealed that parents' perceptions did not predict their involvement, nor did teachers' perceptions predict their amount of communication as reported by parents. While parents' and teachers' perceptions did not predict involvement in this study, perceptions of children's general academic abilities should be further explored in relation to family-school partnerships. (p. 22)

Summary

To summarize, in Section 1 I discussed the support students in military-connected families receive from dedicated teachers and educational support specialists to help them

achieve. I also explored the consequences military families face resulting from deployments. Educators work together with school specialists within the school to help provide additional support and structure to students having difficulty with behavior or achievement. Research supports developing strong school and community partnerships to enhance the productivity of parent-teacher relationships and student-teacher relationships (Cattanach, 2013; Epstein, 2011; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Willems & Gonzalez-DeHass, 2012). This study included a qualitative case study research method using prekindergarten through third grade educators and specialists as participants. In Section 2, I discuss the methodology used in this study, describe the criteria used for seeking participants, provide justifications for the sample size, and describe the data collection procedures, data analysis, and validity in establishing procedures.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

This section provides an overview of the research design I chose for this study, participant criteria and justification, procedures used to gain access to participants, data collection methods, and the data analysis I carried out to reveal the themes that emerged. Ethical concerns are also addressed. The following supporting research questions helped with educators revealing details into their experiences:

1. How do early childhood educators communicate with military families?
2. What early childhood training experiences do educators have to prepare them for working with young children in military families, especially during times of deployment?
3. What early childhood training experiences do educators have to prepare them for working with young children in military families?
4. What professional development would benefit early childhood educators to strengthen their relationship with military families?

Research Design

I considered using a phenomenological research design for my project study around school and family partnerships in military-connected schools. The phenomenon in this case was parent-teacher relationships formed by early childhood teachers and military families. Educators experience a high volume of students coming in and out of the classrooms regularly, and active duty families experience a high volume of mobility.

The phenomenon of military mobility added with a rigorous deployment cycle requires military families and educators to have resiliency, dedication, and fortitude. A challenge to a phenomenological study design is the time needed to gather, what Creswell (2012) referred to as, assumptions philosophical in style so concepts are abstract and not easily identified.

I also considered an ethnographic research design because military families classify as a cultural group. Rubin and Rubin (2005) claimed ethnographic studies describe norms, traditions, and values shared by a group of people who portray aspects of their identity. The people in the military culture have a shared set of beliefs and behaviors, interact with each other over the duration of a military service member's career, represent a small population compared with the amount of citizens residing in the United States and its territories, and speak a military language with which its members can identify no matter in which branch of the service they serve. Educators who work in military-connected schools also are a part of this culture. They often know what it feels like to experience high annual turnovers because of military mobility, can relate to behavior and academic issues associated with military deployments, and are subjected to the same military rules and regulations military families adhere to if working on a military installation. According to Creswell (2012), ethnographic research requires extended lengths of time to collect data. One major challenge for completing an ethnographic study is that I moved frequently for over 22 years as a military spouse, so I

easily identified with the military culture and was challenged with the task to avoid compromising the study with my own experiences and biases.

The narrative and grounded theory research designs were not considered for the following two reasons: (a) I wanted to conduct a study that involved more than just a few select voices of early childhood educators and active duty military families needed for a narrative study, and (b) Creswell (2012) suggested using grounded theory when there is not a theory developed enough to help explain how people experience the phenomenon. I believed there are sufficient theories available to support that military families need extra support during times of deployments and that an educator needs to build relationships with parents in the school setting. Therefore, grounded theory was not necessary to study my research problem.

After carefully considering the alternative research approaches, I determined a case study was the best design for a project study about school and family partnerships in military-connected schools. Qualitative researchers compiling information on military families frequently use the case study approach, as this reveals an in-depth portrait of understanding about a group's lived experiences. Creswell (2012) stated researchers who successfully build rapport with the participants can gain their confidence. The use of a case study approach worked well for researching military families. Military culture has a built in bounded system that members experience such as traveling extensively, adhering to military rules and regulations, and adjusting to new settings. A challenge to doing a case study approach for this project study was that a multitude of empirical case studies

about military families and parental involvement already existed. Creswell (2007) believed “having enough information to present an in-depth picture of the case limits the value of some case studies” (p. 76). A case study gave me the flexibility of selecting participants beyond the local military base.

Participants

Criteria and Justification

Early childhood educators who had experience teaching children with a deployed military parent was a criteria I used to select participants. Participants ranged from prekindergarten to third grade educators, specialists educators, and educators who retired in the past 2 years. I used purposeful sampling of certified teachers and specialists at military-connected schools near a military base in a state located in the southeastern part of the United States. Creswell (2007) stated it is best to select participants who “can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Goodson (1992) believed that daily life influences teachers over short- and long-term periods of time. Therefore, I believed it was important to select participants who had been working in military-connected schools for at least 3 years and had spent 2 of those years teaching early childhood. These individuals provided a variety of experiences to draw upon for a wider spectrum of knowledge concerning deployments and how the deployments affected their students. Purposefully selected participants gave broader comparisons to make between nonmilitary and active duty parent-teacher relationships.

The target sample size was 10 educators, to include early childhood educators, specialists, and recently retired teachers who worked a minimum of 2 years in grades prekindergarten to third at a military-connected school. The interview process was completed once saturation was reached. The justification for selecting this small sample size was to show how educators are in a position to provide a well-rounded view of teacher perspectives on parent relationships in the military community. Creswell (2012) suggested interviewing until saturation is met. Characteristics I sought for the early childhood educator sample size were active communication with the parents, professional knowledge, experiences with deployments, and the values and beliefs held while teaching in military-connected schools. The actual participants who met the criteria had worked actively with early childhood military children for several years in different settings.

Procedures to Gain Access to Participants

Procedures to gain access to participants included sending a written letter request seeking permission from the district superintendent to conduct research. The letter request included information about the purpose, significance, and expectations of the proposed study. I also submitted copies of the completed proposal approved by Walden's Institutional Review Board and a copy of my human ethics training certificate. Once the request and proposal had been reviewed and approved by the superintendent, I sent principals in the district a letter of permission to conduct research. Once a principal agreed to allow me to interview educators, I invited teachers who met the criteria to participate in the study. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary.

Methods used to establish a relationship with the participants involved using follow-up phone calls or emails and being available to answer questions and concerns.

Ethical Concerns

The methods I used to contact participants were through email communication and telephone calls. The measures I took to provide ethical protection for the participants were to: have an authorized approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (10-03-14-0018164), use confidentiality in email transmissions (through use of the blind carbon copy feature), provide information relevant to the study to help the participants with making an informed decision to proceed, assign the participants numbers to conceal identification of names and settings, and provide the participants with documentation of my consent form approved by Walden's IRB. The participants were given the opportunity to decline or withdraw from the study at any time. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying factors of the participants were eliminated while reporting the results.

Data Collection

According to Creswell (2012), the case study approach requires the researcher to: (a) collect data from participants based on their experiences; (b) collect data from participants using an interview that expands the breadth of their experiences, which sometimes results in talking with a participant more than once; (c) document the data collected using a reliable method of recalling details from the interview like journals and taped recordings, and (d) establish what data collected will help the researcher adequately develop themes and statements in relatable terms for intended audience. I applied

Creswell's strategies while collecting my data. From the data, I was able to discover several related topics which were ultimately grouped into 5 main themes.

Purposeful sampling was used to attract eight qualified participants who met the criteria of having taught for a minimum of 2 years in military-connected schools. Using an interview protocol I created as my data collection instrument, I interviewed educators who were experienced with deployed parents of military children. I explained to the participants the protocol I had set up, which included using open-ended questions in an interview for educators (Appendix B) and retired educators (Appendix C). The four essential interview questions for the early childhood educators were the following: (a) What can you tell me about the relationship you have with parents who are in the military? (b) What early childhood training experiences have you had to help you prepare for working with young children in military families? (c) What best practices in teaching do you use to help start and maintain relationships with military families? (d) What professional development would benefit you the most to help strengthen your relationship with military families? These questions were chosen to elicit feedback that would help me to delve deeper into the personal relationships educators cultivated while being responsive to the needs of military families. The benefits of having actively teaching and recently retired teachers as participants helped me to build a comprehensive picture of similarities that overlapped in their experiences or differences that helped inform me of gaps in practices that existed.

Creswell (2012) stated that a researcher possessing some of the same experiences as the participants can have benefits and challenges. My common experiences with the participants allowed me to draw from my rich history as a parent actively involved in military-connected schools. I have kept journals of my own experiences as a military parent and have a long-standing, running record and documentation of what school administrators thought of my professional skills as an educator of military dependents. During my teaching career, I have taught students in military-connected schools in small towns, rural areas, a large metropolitan city, the suburb of a small city, and in an overseas environment. Creswell (2007) stated that for qualitative research “bracketing personal experiences may be difficult for the researcher to implement” (p. 62). To help bracket, or put aside my own beliefs and experiences, I used a reflective journal to write my thoughts down after reviewing transcribed information. I assigned the participants a number (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) to maintain confidentiality. I used a computer template to sort the participants’ comments according to the interview guide topics.

Permission to conduct research was received from the local school superintendent and principals. Eight active and retired educators consented to participate in the study. Consent forms were kept confidential according to the rules of Walden University’s IRB standards. Precautions were taken to remove any personal identifying information associated with the participants. The data will be safely stored for 5 years and then disposed of. Participants were not compensated for participation.

The data were collected over a period of 9 weeks from eight participants. Interviews were coded immediately following each interview. I used a data matrix I created on my personal computer using Microsoft Word to help keep track of the coded information and kept a reflective journal to help me frame my understanding of the information gathered. Creating the data matrix provided a sufficient source to locate and compare participant answers to the research questions and to look for potential themes. Member checking occurred to gather additional feedback about the conclusions reached from the data collected. I did not hold any supervisory roles over the participants.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis phase, I used a systematic approach of looking for significant themes and patterns. For the qualitative case study data analysis, I used the following layout recommended by Creswell (2007, 2012): (a) provide a description of my own experiences as an educator and parent working with military families, (b) devise significant statements of how my participants experienced the phenomenon, (c) turn the significant statements into meaningful themes, (d) write a detailed description of participant experiences to help the audience feel connected to what participants thought during this time of distress, and (e) try to provide the audience with the details of the life of an early childhood educator teaching children needing special attention during times of deployment. Following these steps helped me ensure the themes and patterns were each given proper attention to detail to conduct further analysis.

I used inductive data analysis to decipher the themes and patterns revealed in my data. After thoroughly examining participant interviews, I made decisions on how to frame the analysis. Early childhood educators had several different experiences depending on the assignments held in military-connected schools. Therefore, Hatch (2002) suggested approaching the beginning stages of inductive analysis with light boundaries rather than tightly constructed ones. This increased the opportunity to create domains that related well with each other instead of forcing concepts together.

I used open coding to break larger domains into smaller categories. The large domains in my study were: communication in parent-teacher relationships, parent involvement, deployments, community resources, and teacher professional development. Miles and Haberman (1994) suggested using data displays to help create a visual image of the data collected from participants. I took the larger domains and broke them down into the following smaller categories: frequency and formats teachers used to communicate with parents, strategies teachers used to reach out to military parents to encourage parental involvement, deployment resources available in the schools and in the community for teachers and military families, and training that would benefit educators to maintain relationships with parents.

Once I formulated more conclusive ideas about my framework, I began to write a concise outline connecting the main ideas. I was able to conduct a deeper analysis of the categories for each domain with a focused lens rather than the wider one with which I

began. I concluded the inductive analysis by reading through the data again to locate specific excerpts that exemplified the descriptions I included in my outline (Hatch, 2002).

Evidence of Quality

Member checking was used to ensure accuracy of the interviews. Participants were provided an interview transcription and given the opportunity to review and clarify their statements for accuracy (Creswell, 2012). Triangulation of the data occurred from collecting data from educators at different stages in their current teaching practices and educators who were retired with several years of practice. Two colleagues who currently work with early childhood military children served as peer reviewers to help determine if my interpretation of the data were descriptive and free of bias (Creswell, 2012).

Discrepant Cases

Planning the project study from the results of the data collection and analysis helped inform some of the opinions and beliefs I have held concerning military children and their education. After a careful examination of the data and looking for any skewed or overlooked facts, I was able to determine that one discrepant case was present. Most of the participants had positive overlapping experiences concerning communication with military-connected families. Two educators believed email communication was ineffective compared to having face-to-face meetings and completing personal phone calls to parents.

I researched studies about the effectiveness of email communication between parents and teachers. Research showed that email communication can be an effective tool

to communicate with parents as long as it is not overused or done in an untimely manner to tell parents of problems that their child may be having at school (Grant, 2011; Reilly, 2008; Thompson, 2008; Thompson & Mazer, 2012). Email communication can help to rectify any misinterpretations and misunderstandings that can occur between parents and teachers. Reilly (2008) stated that even negative encounters with parents in email can lead to a resolution and help build parent-teacher relationships. The discrepancy found in the data was eliminated upon finding supporting details to corroborate how the two participants felt, which described a commonality that happened in parent-teacher communication.

Understanding and describing the essence of the participants' experiences allowed me to describe social change and actions that will occur as a result of my study. My final report fulfilled the purpose of movement to social action. Open discussion can continue to develop in the education forum about how military families and early educators can work together to build and maintain positive school-family relationships.

Timeline

The interviews and data analysis of the project study were completed during the winter semester of 2015 after approvals from the superintendent and principals were obtained in 2014. Once IRB gave permission to go forward with data collection, participants were invited by email and sent a description of the study in the consent form. I interviewed until saturation was met. Saturation occurred when no new information emerged from the literature reviewed to establish the foundation and essence of the study.

When interviews were concluded, the data were coded immediately. I created a data matrix from a Microsoft Word document to assist with organizing and managing my data into domains and categories, which were interpreted to find themes. This information allowed me to recognize the need for professional development and to create a professional development plan to address teachers working together with military families to build and sustain positive relationships in military-connected schools.

Findings

Five themes emerged from the data analysis. Theme 1 was educators utilize several methods to communicate with parents. Theme 2 was how parent involvement depends on teacher communication, military family life at the time, and school culture. Theme 3 was deployments caused a variety of reactions and emotions in children. Educators went above and beyond their duties to extend support to families. Theme 4 was having strong community resources was helpful to educators, but more training would be beneficial. Theme 5 was early childhood educators are resilient in how they help military children feel connected to their new school environment.

Theme 1: Educators Utilize Several Methods to Communicate With Parents

Communicating with parents can be done in a variety of ways. Most participants agreed that face-to-face meetings were the most effective ways to communicate with parents. However, emails, text messages, newsletters, and phone calls were viable options. According to the American Federation of Teachers (2010), effective communication from the teacher to the parents involves the following order:

(a) initiation, (b) timelines, (c) consistency and frequency, (d) follow-through, and (e) clarity and usefulness of communication. Having this order in mind increases the likelihood of sustaining positive school-family partnerships (American Federation of Teachers, 2010). McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, and McClowry (2013) stated that teachers who are supportive emotionally and respectfully create space where parents are able to voice their opinions in a comfortable manner. This may be one reason a few of the participants used emails and texts sparingly, opting more for personal interactions with the military families.

Participant 3 stated:

My experience with military parents is that, for the most part, they wanted to be involved in their child's progress but often were focused on more pressing issues at home so that sometimes the child's needs were less important. This was especially the case when one parent was deployed or was about to be. I encouraged parents' involvement by requiring that they review the child's work and behavior each day, and I had regular meetings and phone calls. Email and texting was not as effective as a phone call or face-to-face conference.

Participant 6 shared:

I had varying responses from parents in regard to communication and maintaining a positive relationship. For the few parents who did not communicate well with me as their child's teacher, I had to respect their choice, and at the same time let

them know of any concerns I had with their child and possible solutions; in other words TRY and keep the lines of communication open.

Participant 2 said:

I offered flexibility by holding the meetings over the phone or by teleconference, rather than face-to-face meetings. There is obviously a need for sensitivity toward the stresses and challenges of having a parent deployed. Making contact with the family through phone calls, email, or text to check in and offer support were a part of developing strong parent communication and school-home relationships.

Participant 1 said:

As I have done throughout my teaching years, I sent home a daily report. My parents knew they could write back and communicate easily. Although we had no email, I found it easy to send a simple note or make a quick call to the parents. For a few years, I did lengthy monthly newsletter covering many areas.

Participant 5 said:

I call and send notes to parents to invite them for special projects or school programs. Even if it is an art project, this gives a feeling of involvement and belonging. I find most military families are happy to hear from me or participate in a school activity. I don't use emails or texting with these families; they respond better with a more personal approach.

Participant 8 said:

In my classroom I like to keep parents informed of what's going on. Some of the ways I keep them informed are by sending home completed weekly assignments that require their signature and an area for comments in case there are grades in question. We have a website with all assignments posted. I use a text messaging system to give important last minute reminders. We send home flyers, and we ask for volunteers to help out with school-related functions and in the classroom.

Theme 2: Parent Involvement Depends on Teacher Communication, Military Family Life at the Time, and School Culture

Some of the participants had the privilege of seeing an influx of military families migrate to their schools because of the expansion of the base. Information once regulated to schools on the military installation now pertained to their schools as well. Participants felt they rose to the challenge of meeting the demands of the families, striving to involve parents on all levels of interactions that would benefit their children. They were able to see military parents were just like everyone else, wanting to be involved in their child's education. They also were able to identify ways in which they could improve getting the parents involved if they were reluctant about what role they could play in their child's new school setting, or if they had just experienced personal changes in their own lives (i.e. new to military lifestyle, blended families, deployments) that resulted in a shift in normal family routines.

Fan, Williams, and Wolters (2014) expressed parents' involvement and interactions with their children influence the level of self-efficacy, beliefs, and self-motivation. Fan, Williams, and Wolters stated the following:

Because children are continuously interacting with their parents, parents' involvement with their children is a key aspect of the social environment that not only provides close observational models but also influences the development of children's beliefs about themselves. From this perspective, therefore, aspects of parental involvement may provide a powerful influence on students' motivational beliefs and behaviors related to school through their connection to students' perceived self-efficacy (p. 22).

Participant 3 stated:

My experience with military parents is they, for the most part, wanted to be involved in their child's progress, but they often were focused on more pressing issues at home that sometimes the child's needs were less important. This was especially the case when one parent was deployed or was about to be. I encouraged parental involvement by requiring they review the child's work and behavior each day and with regular meetings and phone calls.

Participant 2 emphasized:

I don't wait for an opportunity to make contact with a parent. I am involved in communication from the start of the process – a referral for special education and on out through meetings, parent conferences, etc.

Participant 4 provided this insight:

Parental involvement is a key to any classroom and the educational experience. The more families are involved, the more value students tend to put toward school. I explain how being involved shows your child school is important and you care. For those parents that work and cannot physically come to the school, I have sent home prep work projects (cutting, grading, tearing out workbook pages, etc.) to be completed. I also have encouraged families to attend any evening school functions that may take place. That is also a good time to meet other families, their child's friends, and possibly others in a similar situation that they are presently experiencing.

Participant 6 had this to say about how a lack of communication is handled.

For the few parents who did not communicate well with me as their child's teacher, I had to respect their choice and at the same time let them know of any concerns I had with their child and possible solutions; in other words TRY and keep the lines of communication open. I had other parents who were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder which involved the parent going away from the family for individual therapy at one point.

Participant 1 stated:

In later years, I saw fewer parents come into the classroom, and far fewer in volunteer roles. With privacy issues, they could no longer help with classroom organization and were restricted to mainly party helpers. The school no longer

had monthly "open house" days and many moms were now working, so they were unable or unwilling to participate. I also have seen a change in the family structure and attitude in the last ten years of teaching. There was a huge increase in single parents, or families blended through divorce. Parents are younger and newer to the military.

Theme 3: Deployments Cause a Variety of Reactions and Emotions in Children Prompting Educators to Go Above and Beyond Their Duties to Extend Support to Families

Deployments cause significant hardships for military families. One research study conducted on children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) showed a 13% increase in visits to medical facilities for behavioral or mental health during a parent's deployment rather than if the parent was home (Hisle-Gorman, Eide, Coll, & Gorman, 2014). Another study revealed Army children experiencing a parent's deployment of nineteen months or more tended to have lower test scores on standardized tests compared to other dependents with parents in different branches of the military (Sparks, 2011). Participants agreed communication was important in maintaining a positive relationship with the deployed members and their loved ones left behind. Participant 1 shared that deployments were not always the supportive network it is today between families and home.

Participant 1 recalled:

Deployments were mainly for small units then or for special units such as Rangers. In the beginning, I recall that there was very little communication allowed between families and soldiers. As time passed, deployments became routine. Students seemed to adjust better, and the soldiers were coming home for frequent visits. However, as her class started to experience a higher volume of family deployments, she said, “I encouraged the children to write letters and make things for their dads.”

Participant 6 shared this sentiment:

My number one goal was to always be accessible by various means including phone, notes home, meetings, after school, or email. I also sent home a weekly report detailing daily behavior and homework return. My class sent care packages to deployed parents, and each student wrote letters of support to them detailing classroom activities. Some of the military parents did upon return to the U.S. visit our class and share with the students what their support meant to them.

Participant 4 shared:

I have had a few individuals come back and tell me that they appreciated the words of encouragement I had given them regarding how strong they are and that they can make it through a deployment. It often comes after the event, not during. The family member that was deployed has thanked me for supporting and encouraging their spouse while they were away. It has also been expressed that it

is a good feeling to know that their child's teacher is caring and understanding of the situation and they can relax when their child is away at school.

Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, and Richardson (2009) noted early childhood children may not know why their parent had to leave. Therefore, taking the time to secure the emotional wellbeing of the military students is an excellent strategy. Participant 2 said with sincerity, "There is obviously a need for sensitivity toward the stresses and challenges of having a parent deployed."

Participant 4, a twenty plus year spouse of a now retired military member said:

I do not think my relationship changes with families when faced with a deployment. It would be more of a reminder that I too have been through these situations and reassure them that I am there for them should they need anything. I let them know that times may be difficult, but they CAN and WILL make it through this process. I let them know that there will be good and bad days, but you need to take it one day at a time. If I see that the family member(s) may be insecure, I reassure them that they are strong and they will make it through this event/deployment, etc.

Participant 8 shared this about an experience with a deployed parent:

One of the parents was placed on deployment, while being a single parent, and she was able to maintain a close connection with her child's education via email. She also was open to having Skype sessions during the day to be included in the class activities. There were a few behavioral issues in the beginning, but after

connecting with the mother, conferencing with the student, and showing extra attention, she soon got back into the groove of working hard and learning.

This theme affirms how dedicated educators are when it comes to finding ways to communicate with military families. Educators work with their students when a parent is deployed. The many courses of actions taken by educators and the spirit in which these actions were delivered, showed commitment, generosity, and warmth.

Theme 4: Having Strong Community Resources is Helpful to Educators, but More Training Would be Beneficial.

Depending in part on their families' health, stability, and resilience, they may fall behind in school, regress in their development, or display emotional or behavioral problems. This is not to say that military children are doomed to troubles or permanent damage. Many thrive in the face of challenges, but these challenges are significant, and we must help military children cope with them.

Participants felt providing timely trainings will help them prepare for the issues military families may have when they arrive to school. Kudler and Porter (2014) stated some students may display behavior or emotional problems when faced with challenges to the overall condition of the family, including stability and the ability to cope with changes. Participants expressed the following ideas:

Participant 6 shared:

I did not have any early childhood training specifically geared toward military families before I began teaching. In fact I did not have children from military

families in my class in the early years of my teaching. However, as the base started to expand, we did start having these children start to trickle in. Their enrollment did continue to increase, and one year I had 25% of my class from military families. Because of this increase at our school, we did have a family counselor come from the base and discuss problems children and their families face and what services were available for them, and she left teachers with phone numbers for referrals. This was really the extent of what specific training we received, which was very limited. I would have liked this training expanded to include more in depth examples and even gotten into group discussions with fellow teachers which was solution oriented and to further share personal classroom experiences.

Participant 3 shared:

Since I also was an experienced pastor, my dealing with people involved with the military was a great influence in how I was able to help these children and families. I believe that teacher training programs should have a great focus on communicating with families. It was my experience that the child's success ultimately was tied to the whole family.

Participant 7 stated:

Training on how to help or understand what military families go through would be helpful. It would help us to understand the fears and emotions they go through and how we can better meet their needs.

Participant 4 felt all school members should be involved with trainings.

I feel it is important to include office staff and support services staff (i.e. Instructional Assistants, speech and language, OT, PT, Counseling) to be included in these discussions and trainings so that ALL members of the school are on the same page with regards to what is involved in military life and the struggles and rollercoaster ride military life brings at times. A united, educated school team can be an additional support group for the student and families who sacrifice so much for our freedom.

Participant 5 shared:

I had very little experiences with military families with the exception of a few friends that had military parents. My training was being employed at a school with a large military population. I did not have any formal training at college. My school district would bring guest speakers to in-services to provide information and tips on working with military children and their families. Our local base should provide counselors and staff to give some insight into developing strategies that can be used with parents and students and what services are available to the military population.

Participant 8 shared:

It might be beneficial to have professional development in ways to help support families during deployment or ways to help students manage the transitions that

they may face as they get used to picking up extra responsibilities at home and in school.

Theme 5: Early Childhood Educators are Resilient in How They Help Military Children Feel Connected to Their New School Environment

Moving to new geographical locations every 2 to 4 years can help a person gain insight and perspective about how people in different cultures live. While it can bring a level of excitement to military families, it can also cause stress. DiTullio (2014) noted students in classroom environments with teachers having resilient qualities led to students feeling safer and able to move past their mistakes easier. DiTullio (2014) stated educators must revisit their curriculum frequently to look for opportunities for students to become engaged in their work and succeed.

Participant 5 showed resiliency when helping a Japanese student transition into her class. She stated:

Many of the students have traveled to foreign countries, and they enjoy sharing their experiences. Most of my students came from Japan, so we would work on a Japanese unit, learning about the country, foods, customs and culture. I used videos to give the students a look into a different culture. The students enjoyed sharing their personal experiences. One student came from Japan and taught the class how to do some simple origami shapes.

Participant 3 stated:

I tried to show a genuine concern for the children and expressed that to the parents. Children generally know when the teacher cares and takes that home to the parents.

Participant 8 shared:

At one of my schools, we had military liaisons. This person will meet with the military student in a group session or individual counseling sessions. We also invite military members to interact with the students during our school functions.

Conclusion

Section 2 of the study contained details of methodology, research design and approach, participant criteria, evidence of quality, data collection procedures, and data analysis. It also provided the timeline used to complete this study and my findings. A review of the data gathered along with a review of recent literature showed educators used their working knowledge of military-connected families to demonstrate effective strategies to establish relationships. These strategies included reaching out to families to establish communication, showing care and providing comfort to young children experiencing deployments, consistently being a beacon of support, and encouraging parents to be involved with their child's academics. More careful scrutiny of the data, however, revealed that the teachers were limited by their lack of training and knowledge about military families and about available resources related to military families. Theme 4 especially supports the need for staff development related to military families and

available resources; therefore, I developed a staff development to further educate teachers in these areas. Participants acknowledged military families were under a lot of stress from military transitions and deployments and felt they could benefit from training beyond a few faculty meetings. Findings showed participants felt district trainings or ongoing training throughout the school year to include all faculty and staff working with military-connected children would be beneficial.

Theme 1 discussed the communication methods educators used to build and maintain relationships with families during initial meetings and throughout the year. Theme 2 revealed how teachers felt parents depended on them to develop positive parent teacher relationships. Fan, Williams, and Wolters (2014) believed children benefit from having interactions with their parents. Therefore, the children would also benefit from seeing their parents having positive interaction with their teachers. Theme 3 revealed the hardships military families faced when deployments were present in the students' lives. Participants used this time to extend extra warmth and care to families, oftentimes increasing the contact with the parent through phone calls and sending letters and care packages from the school to the deployed parent. This is especially important for young children as they try to figure out why the parent had to leave and how to go about life without their deployed parent there for support (Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, & Richardson, 2009).

Theme 4 delved into community resources educators felt would benefit them. Some participants stated they would like to have training that provided clarity. In

addition, others felt like they needed examples of the outcomes with the families once they have passed along phone numbers of community representatives. Theme 5 addressed resiliency in educators, and how they can help military children feel connected to the new environment at the school. All of the themes show a combined effort to demonstrate how parents and educators work together to build and sustain parent-teacher relationships. The findings showed each of the participants had a range of educational expertise and knowledge that contributed to a deeper understanding of how educators connected with military families. Section 3 will describe the project created from the data.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

This purpose of this study was to understand experiences early childhood educators had while working with military families. A 3-day professional development was designed to incorporate the ideas expressed by participants. This will address the problem of early childhood educators not having professional development beyond brief faculty meetings. According to the findings, the participants expressed they could benefit from professional development that provides: (a) a continuum for establishing and maintaining relationships with military families, (b) an understanding of the emotional and physical effects transitions and deployments have on their families, (c) training beyond just having a faculty meeting about the resources available in the community for their military-connected families, and (d) knowing how they can have sustainable school family partnerships with military families during the critical early childhood development years.

Components of the professional development are comprised of information and activities to help participants gain awareness of how to help military families feel connected to the school community, especially during deployments. It is also beneficial to help educators develop strategies for building relationships with military families. The professional development will allow educators to work in whole groups, small groups, and as partners for peer interactions.

Description and Goals

The purpose of this project, entitled “Building and Sustaining Parent-Teacher Relationships in Military-Connected Schools,” will be to provide educators with quality researched-based training to promote educators building and maintaining strong and positive relationships with military families. Another purpose is for educators to have the knowledge needed to mentor and assist new educators in developing a skill set to partner with parents effectively for the benefit of their children. The workshop will engage educators in 3 days of invigorating collaborative activities. While the workshop can be completed at any phase of the school year, it is encouraged to be completed during the first semester of the year to maximize the potential of burgeoning relationships.

The project will provide a needed resource based on the findings from the research describing early childhood educators’ relationships with military families. In Section 2, analysis revealed that participants felt additional training was needed by school districts. Goals for the project are to increase positive early childhood relationships with military families and provide opportunities for early childhood educators to connect with literature and community resources available to help them assist military families during transitions and deployments. To fully implement the professional development, several opportunities were planned for educators to give and provide feedback, actively participate and collaborate with their colleagues across grade levels, and watch video clips and PowerPoints to coincide with the workshops. Accommodations and materials

were planned for a faculty of up to 25 educators. It is also important to note the professional development was designed for face-to-face meetings to benefit participants.

Rationale

This project was chosen because findings showed that early childhood educators want to be prepared to deal with circumstances parents and students from military families face and that there is a need for more staff development. The choice of project was a 3-day professional development plan because participants expressed a desire and need for additional training. The professional development plan will provide workshop participants with critical background knowledge on military families. It will help put the pieces together by using the findings of this study to promote relevant engagement between peers and facilitators about early childhood educators feeling that while having open communication and reaching out to new families is a great starting point, strategies and resources need to be put in place to continue to build the parent-teacher relationship successfully. Early childhood educators are tasked with shaping a child's academic and social growth. With the high mobility lifestyle military families endure, they need educators to help their children meet developmental milestones during these crucial early years.

Data were collected from experienced active and recently retired educators who could provide insight into elements needed to build and sustain parent-teacher relationships. The data revealed while communication thrived with parents using a variety of methods, little to no training was provided to participants about building and

sustaining relationships with military families. The educators leaned on their natural ability to connect with families, experiences with families facing hardships in general, and their ability to communicate to account for gaps in not having official training. The planned professional development workshops will provide opportunities and strategies that early childhood educators can use to help address the themes brought about from the data collected.

Findings from this study showed participants felt it was very important to have a thorough understanding of military families beyond what a routine faculty meeting could provide. Participants also expressed the frustrations they knew military-connected children experienced during transitions and deployments and knew recommending additional school and community resources could help bridge gaps in school, family, and community partnerships. A few experiences participants described were recommending students to counseling with trained professionals, services in the community that focused on preparing families for deployments, and special attention to deployed family members. It was important to build time into the professional development that helped educators gain the necessary background knowledge of military family trends, reflect on their continued value in the development of early childhood military-connected students, and strive to have the resiliency needed to keep reaching out to the military parents to stay involved in their children's lives.

Review of the Literature

This review of literature is presented in two parts. In the first part, I will discuss the literature that justified using a professional development session as an effective way to provide content to early childhood educators seeking to help the military-connected children they serve. In the second part of the literature review, I will present an overview of the topic choices for the professional development as they relate to the themes and findings. I used Google Scholar and Walden University's research databases (EBSCO, ERIC, SAGE, Academic Research Complete, ProQuest, and the Teacher Learning Center) to search for relevant literature. Literature was obtained by searching for these key words and terms: *professional development*, *professional learning*, *teacher training*, *early childhood workshops*, *resiliency training*, *adult learners*, and *parent-teacher communication*. This process continued for each topic using the most recent research available. Early childhood educators sometimes receive fewer opportunities for professional development due to limited or reduced school budgets (Weber-Mayer, Piasta, & Pelatti, 2015). Therefore, I also reviewed websites, adult and children's books, videos, and articles pertaining to military families to get a complete and accurate viewpoint of tools available that could enhance planning a cost efficient professional development.

Professional Development

Professional development includes providing interesting and thought-provoking topics, information, and activities that are focused on growing the skills and

understanding of professionals in their fields. Educators need to be provided information that is accessible and easy to apply. Presenting information in a variety of formats can increase the effectiveness of delivery to workshop participants (Guskey, 2012; Stewart, 2014). School faculties have a diverse mix of people; therefore, it is important to provide opportunities for participants to collaborate and give feedback about what they are learning. Such activities give presenters of the professional development a chance to walk around and gauge how well the information they are providing is being received. Stewart (2014) noted that participation in professional development from educators increases when they have a vested interest in what they are learning.

Effective Planning. Professional development stemming from effective planning can lead to adult learners having vested interest. Guskey (2014) suggested using a backwards planning format that included the following ordered steps: (a) learning outcomes for the student, (b) think about how implementation of the new practices will occur, (c) decide what kind of support is needed from the organization, (d) think about the desired outcome for the educator in relation to the knowledge that will be gained, and (e) plan activities that will optimize the learning experience. Guskey stated that effective planning is the key to professional learning taking place. If the planning lacked cohesiveness, quality, and a strong content focus, the professional learning might not produce successful results (Guskey, 2014). Guskey also felt no matter if the professional learning format was traditional (i.e., conferences, workshops, and coaching) or in a more

current learning format (i.e., online communities, data teams, individual improvement plans), it had to begin in a significant and substantial way to really matter to educators.

Adult Learners. Adult learners thrive in an environment where honest sharing about experiences helps validate their experiences and what productive struggles they have faced in the classroom. One way this can be achieved is to have a facilitator the participants can identify with. Shaffer and Thomas-Brown (2015) researched using a coteaching model during professional development. Adult learners can benefit from having cofacilitators deliver professional development. Shaffer and Thomas-Brown listed many reasons why this was a good strategy. If we coteach effectively in the classroom, then applying these same strategies to adult learning environments would be a good example as well. Let us look more specifically at adult learning for a rapidly increasing population of early childhood educators' professional development.

Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators

Online education as a tool. Research findings showed the internet was used for a variety of purposes personally and professionally. Weigel, Weiser, Bales and Moyses (2012) surveyed 816 early childhood educators. Weigel et al. concluded there were several benefits of using online professional development to deliver quality learning opportunities for early childhood educators. Professionally, educators were able to complete formal trainings related to their work with young children, locate instructional materials and resources designed to keep them abreast of current research, and use online tools (i.e., webinars, podcasts, and blogs) to increase their knowledge base on topics close

to what they were teaching_ (Weigel, Weiser, Bales & Moyses, 2012). Weigel et al. related how the use of the internet can enhance professional development for early childhood educators.

Quality. Professional development is meant to increase the opportunities for educators to learn new information that will lift their quality of teaching to a higher standard, decrease the level of inequality, and lessen the gap between schools with little resources and schools with an abundance of resources to greater serve the school community. Bruch, Gamoran, Hanselman, Grigg, and Collares (2008) researched the quality of professional development for teachers. These resources can be social, material, or human resources (Bruch et al., 2008). Weigel et al. (2015) recommended early childhood educators have access to quality literature featuring best practices that are research-based to improve their professional learning opportunities.

Connecting themes to the professional development

The professional development is entitled, “Building and Sustaining Parent-Teacher Relationships in Military-Connected Schools.” Each topic in the project was chosen to support the findings after data were collected from early childhood participants. Data analysis yielded results reflecting limited continuous professional development available to support early childhood educators in their work with military-connected children and families. In Section 2, five themes emerged from the interviews: (a) communication was critical in establishing and maintaining relationships with military families, (b) parent involvement was linked to teacher communication and the quality of

life the military families were experiencing, (c) during deployments military families are under a lot of stress and benefitted from the support of caring educators, (d) educators having knowledge and sharing community resources available to military families would be beneficial, and (e) early childhood educators are resilient.

Communication and parent involvement. Theme 1 findings revealed a need to include a workshop where participants can delve deeper into the parental involvement. Theme 2 findings revealed military-connected parents experienced fluctuations in their involvement with the school. Palts and Harro-Loit (2015) concluded in their study of communication patterns between parents and teachers who taught at the primary level there is a significant differentiation of parents who want to constantly know what is going on with their child at school and parents who seemed less attentive. Palts and Harro-Loit stated some parents are active while others are passive. This was evident in the responses from participants regarding the research questions about communication and parental involvement.

When I asked participants about their methods of communication, answers varied. Participant 1 recalled decreased levels of parent involvement when a spouse went back to work. Participant 3 said parents wanted to be involved, but other issues at home might have prevented them from actively participating. Participant 6 stated trying to keep a parent informed, even if they were nonresponsive, meant preserving to keep lines of communication open, so the parent would know of concerns pertaining to the child. Participant 2 felt deployments presented challenges to parents, and opted to make

teleconferencing a major option instead of face-to-face meetings. Participants 1, 5, and 8 sent home notes and made phone calls frequently to keep parents informed.

Garner, Arnold, and Nunnery (2014) described the academic and emotional obstacles military children face and the challenges present within schools. The researchers examined the support children received academically if a network is in place to give emotional and social support and examined the school community partnerships. The passive parents limited their communication with educators. Active parents kept the channels of communication open and wanted to be kept informed frequently. Palts and Harro-Loit (2015) stated some parents are active while others are passive.

Communication during deployments. Findings in Theme 2 suggested military family life determined parent involvement during deployments. Participants 1, 4, and 6 employed ways to keep communication open with deployed parents. Included in the professional development are opportunities for educators to self-reflect and examine educator practices with parents to keep them involved, express their negative and positive experiences, and explore strategies to help maintain parent-teacher relationships that may seem hard when deployments occur. Houston, Pfefferbaum, Sherman, Melson, and Brand (2013) examined the effects of the frequency of communication between family members and the deployed service member. Their research took place before, during, and after the deployment over the course of over a year and half. Communication included telephone calls, emails, and text messages. Children had elevated stress when they were not able to communicate with the deployed parent and turned to siblings or the non-deployed parent

to discuss frustrations about the deployment (Houston, Pfefferbaum, Sherman, Melson, & Brand, 2013). Garner, Arnold, and Nunnery (2014) agreed military children held stress levels beyond their nonmilitary counterparts due to experiencing frequent moves, parental absences, and deployments. Louie and Cromer (2014) noted in their research that 80% of communication between deployed parents and their young children took place using video call tools like Skype, while email was used sparingly.

Technology that helps link children to their deployed parents proved to be beneficial most of the time; however, texting made some youths feel negatively about the family's situation. Houston et al. (2013) suggested children need to have a support system in place at school and home (i.e., counselor, teacher, peer, sibling) to help them whenever they are not able to communicate with the deployed parent or to help alleviate any misunderstandings that may occur from an email or text message. Waliski, Kirchner, Shue, and Bokony (2012) recommended that school counselors be used as a main support for crises intervention, evaluation of a child's mental state, and offer parents educational resources to help them when deployments arise. Another suggestion was for parents to consider having their children participate in camps, recreation, and programs offered in their local area that will provide opportunities to connect with other families going through deployments.

Military family structure. Findings from participants pointed to little direction given on how to address needs that may emerge during deployments. I felt it necessary to have a session in which participants could take a deeper look at the demographics and

trends of military families. Marriage, divorces, single parenting, blended families, education levels, and socio economic levels are just a few examples of demographics that impact how young children experience deployments. Participants 1 and 4 had dealt with deployments for a major part of their military lives. Participant 3 stated how parents were sometimes focused on other issues at home instead of tending to the progress of their child at school, especially if the family was experiencing deployments. For the professional development, including the topics of military family structure and parent-teacher relationships to address themes 2 and 3 would provide an opportunity for educators to make connections of how their communication with military families is not only essential in the maintenance of the relationship, it also may influence how early childhood educators proceed with their interactions in the family.

This topic is placed on Day 1 for workshop participants to develop a sense of how military family structure may impact how the family is able to adjust during transitions and deployments. Clever and Segal (2013) stated the diversity of military families cannot be captured through a single lens. During this workshop, participants will be tasked with identifying true and false statements about military deployments, sharing the positive and negative experiences they had with military families during deployments, and looking at books written for military children to plan a lesson.

Demographics. Findings showed participants felt having background knowledge of military families would help them connect their prior knowledge to their student's current situation, whether it was transitions or deployments. Participant 1 noticed the

demographics of her class change over the years with increases in single parents, blended families, and younger military families. Participant 6 noticed higher post-traumatic stress disorder cases in families. Participant 8 discussed a single parent's child having behavior issues.

Including background knowledge of the composition of military families with young children in school can help educators make informed decisions about the student's academic achievement and social behaviors. Clever and Segal (2013) highlighted some recent data trends that I plan to share at the beginning of the training to help participants gain a deeper perspective of the military-connected children they service:

- By 2011 there were over 726,000 spouses and one million children in active duty families;
- By 2011 there were almost 410,00 and over 743, 000 children in national guard and reserve families;
- Some service members stayed in the military an average of 10 years, while others stayed in for 20 or more years to gain retirement benefits;
- Over two-thirds of the active duty military forces were comprised of members under 30 years old;
- About 56% of active duty members are married, while just under 48% in the national guard and reserve are married;
- About 44% of active duty homes had children;
- Women made up almost 15% of active duty service members.

Creech, Hadley, and Borsari (2014) provided this additional information from their research that will further help explain recent data trends to the participants:

- About 23% of veterans have a minimum of one child under the age of 18 living in their household.
- Just over 2 million service members have deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq, and approximately 1 million of them are parents.
- Increased problems with behavior occurred in children up between the ages 1-4 years old.
- Hospital visits for children under 2 years old swelled by 7%.
- School aged children up to 12 years old experienced some form of anxiety after a parent deployed.
- Early childhood children between the ages of 3 to 5 experienced an increase in psychological problems.

The professional development participants will be able to discuss how their classroom teaching practices have been shaped by these statistics. This information could lead to a deeper understanding of some of the behaviors participants have observed with their students. The participants will gain insight about how they can continue to strengthen their relationships with families experiencing some of these aspects of military culture.

Kudler and Porter (2013) analyzed what the focus should be when building communities of care for military children. Kudler and Porter recommended identifying

military-connected students upon entrance to the community schools and other institutions as the initial step to meeting the needs of these children. The next step should be to have policies in place to help teachers and other community workers, such as pediatricians, learn about the culture of the military, the hardships they face, and about deployments. Once the community of care is established, military families can then begin to find the support and services they need to help children.

Deployment Cycle. I included in the project a workshop with a Powerpoint Presentation entitled, “The Emotional Cycle of Deployments,” as a segue into discussions of how deployments help or hinder parental involvement (Devoe & Ross, 2012). The findings from Themes 2 and 3 revealed participants needed to know more about the effects of deployments. Participants felt they went out of their way to make sure their students were getting the attention they needed to be successful, but sometimes they ran across obstacles with deployment situations. Participant 7 stated understanding the emotions and fears families experience during deployments was important.

Johnson and Ling (2012) stated children are vulnerable during deployments and frequent transitions, so it is imperative to understand the effects of deployments as well as what helps children demonstrate resiliency. Creech, Hadley, and Borsari (2014) recommended more research be completed to examine post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). More research should be completed describing the emotional and behavioral outcomes of deployments on children and the parental interactions service members returning from deployments have with their children.

In Themes 2 and 5, participants shared they would like training that involves sharing strategies to help military families overcome the stress they feel during transitions and deployments. Fathers, especially, felt stressed during family separations. Walsh et.al, (2014) stated fathers of young children often felt as if they have missed important milestones in their children's lives. According to a study completed of 71 military fathers from 14 different installations, fathers felt it was important to promote family values consistently, be present emotionally when they were home, and maintain trust in their relationships with their children (Willerton, Schwarz, Wadsworth, & Oglesby, 2011). The research study also described how fathers wanted to continue their obligations to their family despite the distance by communicating frequently with their families (Willerton, Schwarz, Wadsworth, & Oglesby, 2011).

Resiliency. Resiliency is a desired quality for educators to have when working with military. There are several research articles and books that discuss the positive link between resiliency and military families. Blaisure, Saathoff-Wells, Pereira, Wadsworth, and Dombro (2015) shared several stories in their book showing the value of resiliency as demonstrated from military families experiencing transitions and deployments. Dedicating time during the professional development for educators to discuss and reflect on resiliency may influence how educators decide to continue to sustain their relationship with families. Participants in my study spoke of doing follow-up calls when working with children; they need to be aware of the delicate balance military families need to endure frequent transitions and lengthy separations. My findings showed participants were

resilient by having dedication and the desire to make sure military children's needs were being met while in their classrooms.

Participant 3 felt a student's success relied heavily on a military family's ability to cultivate good influences. Wadsworth (2013) evaluated some of the ecological circumstances military families encountered, and noted the families endure frequent transitions, lengthy separations, and dangerous deployments, especially families with service members in Special Forces. The time away from parents can cause some children to feel anxiety (Boberiene & Hornback, 2014). Likewise, it also can induce severe anxiety in the adults left behind to care for the family (Kees & Rosenblum, 2015). Military families having knowledge of resources accessible to them are crucial according to this statement, "Understanding the risks confronting military-connected children and families require a thorough understanding of their resources" (Wadsworth, 2013, p. 416).

Resiliency in military families. Families that shared their feelings openly with each other were able to quickly disseminate areas of concern that needed to be addressed; the ability to solve problems, have support socially, and were responsive to family needs demonstrated resiliency. Resilience occurs when children shows developmental readiness to adapt to the contexts and interactions they have with their families and schools (Blaisure, Saathoff-Wells, Pereira, Wadsworth, & Dombro, 2015; Boberiene & Hornback, 2014). Wilson, Chernichky, Wilkum, and Owlett (2014) identified pertinent outcomes about communication patterns found in military families managing long separations. When the family endured significant stressful events, resiliency can prevail

depending on the coping skills the family possessed (Wilson, Chernichky, Wilkum, & Owlett, 2014).

Resiliency in military children. Military children are resilient when they are able to meet the challenges Johnson and Ling (2013) reported the resilient nature of military children while studying research from a 10 year span. Johnson and Ling highlighted some advantages military children developed reflecting resilient qualities despite frequent moves: (a) children are able to reinvent themselves if they were not pleased with their previous image with peers; (b) moving frequently can actually improve coping skills; (c) families are able to receive routine checkups and referrals through the military health care system for overall wellbeing; and (d) support systems such as camps, religious organizations, community resources are readily available to those residing on or near a military installation. Guzman (2014) stated military children have persevered and shown resiliency by adjusting to stressors successfully, unless there was an inadequate support system.

Conclusion

To summarize, each day the professional development will focus on topics to help increase educator knowledge to maintain positive relationships with their military-connected families. Day 1 will focus on providing background knowledge and statistical figures about military families. These facts and figures will help frame the work ethic, stability, and pressures military families face. It also includes support available to the educators and military families beyond a faculty meeting. Day 2 will focus on

encouraging the early childhood educators while stressing the importance of their daily role in the lives of young children. The design allows for role-playing opportunities, which closely examine Joyce Epstein's abundant and noted research about parent-teacher relationships and dynamic school-community partnerships. Day 3 will focus on resiliency training for educators who work with military connected schools. Daily journaling encourages educators to connect newly learned material to possible applications in their teaching practices. Using a variety of formats to deliver the professional development will give the participants a well-rounded experience while working and learning with their peers.

Project Description

Needed Resources and Existing Support

Human resources are needed to make this professional development a success. The facilitator needs to establish rapport with the intended audience, distribute materials to participants, lead discussions, keep the training time aligned with the educators' school day, and adjust the workshops according to any issues that may arise during the training. Human resources are needed to examine evaluations and conduct further investigations into making the training useful for future workshop participants. Existing support would be having ample space and time to conduct to professional development and having physical resources, such as chart paper, writing utensils, and reflection journals. Other resources and support to consider is having the appropriate technology (projector, laptop, and computers) needed to show the videos, PowerPoints, and Prezi presentations.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

An anticipated barrier for the project would be insufficient time to discuss subtheme topics. Also, one part of the professional development requires educators to use technology to complete a workshop activity task. Educators would need to have the space available for them to complete this portion effectively. In addition, stakeholders who want to implement a full professional development about military-connected schools may have financial constraints that may hinder this process. A solution for the potential barriers is for the district or school administration to conduct a needs assessment survey to address perceived training gaps. Another solution is for the facilitators to preview the site where the workshops are to be conducted to make sure the proper technology is available.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

I would like to offer the professional development during the first quarter of the school year or on professional development days designated throughout the school year calendar. I would use a variety of methods to present the information in my project, such as a PowerPoint presentation, guided discussions, brief video segments, and activities that require small group and whole group participation in different time increments so as not to lose the audience. Appendix A has the order the project would be presented. Workshop participants will be provided with a teacher journal to take notes and do self-reflections. An opportunity for teachers to share their thoughts and feelings will be provided throughout the workshop activities. The timetable would include to receive permission

from district and school administrators to conduct a needs survey with early childhood educators, select a location 45-60 days prior to the professional development, conduct the workshops in a 3 day series or during 3 days designated for professional development throughout the school year, and provide educators with ongoing literature, community resource support, and online websites that would promote maintaining resiliency while working with military families.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The primary role and responsibility of the facilitator would be to present the topics. The facilitator is important in their role because “the teacher is viewed as an active agent in the construction of professional knowledge about teaching and learning” (Castle, 2013, p. 270). I would seek permission from the school district office during the summer before the school year starts to have my professional development agenda approved for implementation. If permission is granted, I would then try to secure school sites available and willing to hold the professional development. The outline of how the professional development would be presented would be forwarded to the overseeing administrator at the site/s chosen. The facilitator would be the main presenter except for the workshop that has community program representatives discussing resources available to educators and military families.

Project Evaluation

At the conclusion of the professional development, educators will be given a formative evaluation form to provide feedback about the usefulness of the training they

received. I designed the evaluation to help determine if the workshop activities were viewed as meaningful learning opportunities by early childhood educators. Guskey (2014) stated professional development needs to include efforts that are systematic to promote growth and change. The justification for using this type of evaluation is it will provide me with timely information to help plan future staff development. The formative evaluation will include a rating scale of the professionalism, knowledge, and delivery of the professional development as well as an opportunity to express what workshops appealed most to the participant's learning style. One desired outcome of the training is for educators to have a deeper understanding of their importance to maintaining trusting and positive relationships with military families. Another desired outcome is for educators to utilize literature and community resources available to assist military-connected children. The overall evaluation goal is to develop and plan effective future professional development that will increase the productivity of the workshops. The key stakeholders are administrators, educators, school counselors, military transition counselors, parents, students, and community members representing organizations that support military families. Other stakeholders may include school level organizations such as the parent-teacher organization, community resources (i.e., Military Partners in Education) who work with students, and universities that partner with schools for the benefit of their preservice educators.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

Research indicates student achievement increases with parent involvement (Cattanach, 2013; Goodall and Montgomery, 2013; Hoglund, Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2015; Snell, Miguel, & East, 2009). It is well documented that military families deal with several stressful events in their lives (Aronson, Caldwell, Perkins, & Pasch, 2011; Buehrle, 2014; Harrison & Vannest, 2008; Park, 2011). An educational leadership professional development can increase educator knowledge of military families support needs in the classroom and the school community.

The local community has several early childhood educators working with prekindergarten to third grade students in military-connected schools. Military families and their children will benefit from educators who understand military families' complex lives and disruptions caused by deployments (Wadsworth, 2013). Clever and Segal (2013) noted in their research how federally funded family readiness programs were started in the 1960s by community organizations to address the stress of military families. The project would assist educators acquiring further knowledge of how to support these families. Military-connected children would benefit from having strong support systems in schools to help them work through problems they encounter from deployments and transitions, and community resources that provide opportunities for social connections.

Far-Reaching

A sustaining relationship is formed when early childhood educators connect with parents and provide needed information. Castle (2009) indicated several early childhood educators possess these qualities: (a) knowledge, (b) competence, (c) commitment, and (d) are advocates for students benefitting from “developmentally and culturally appropriate practices” (p.8). The project may promote social change across the nation in military-connected schools by advancing parent and school community partnerships, and providing early childhood educators with relevant and timely professional development on a continuous basis. The end result of the staff development could be increased student learning and higher achievement in military students.

Conclusion

Section 3 presented a project based on the data collection from 8 participants and analysis of that data. The data analysis resulted in 5 themes connecting ideas to 4 research questions. Workshops were designed for the project to address the gap in practice of professional development for early childhood educators working to build and maintain relationships with military families. Section 3 provided the rationale, timetable for implementation, and implications for social change. Section 4 reflects on the project’s strengths, limitations, scholarship, self-analysis, and future research. The project itself is located in Appendix A.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

Section 1 of this study stated the problem at the local level was that a gap exists in literature describing the process early childhood educators use to develop relationships with military families students. The data collected in the study suggested that there is a need for effective professional development to assist early childhood educators with strategies to strengthen interactions with military families. I used a case study method to examine the experiences of eight actively teaching and recently retired early childhood educators and specialists. While educators have been doing well in communicating with families, even during stressful deployment times, they still believe they can better serve this population of students with purposeful training that will enhance their practice. Once my data were gathered, I planned a project that addressed the need that I identified. Having training in the form of a professional development would be cost effective and a convenient way to educate early childhood educators about how they can more effectively serve military-connected students. A two page summary of my study and project will be shared with participants and principals in hopes that they will be interested in participating in the staff development. The plans will also be available in my dissertation for others to use as desired.

Project Strengths

Educators sharing their experiences with their colleagues, findings supported by the conceptual framework of Epstein's (2011) school, family, and community

partnerships, and practical ideas used to support educators are the components that made the project strong. The topic of parent-teacher relationships in military-connected schools is relevant to the needs of the school districts surrounding the military base. Other strengths of the project would be providing awareness of the deployment cycle to educators and illustrating the importance of support to deployed families. Military families feel connected to the school community if they feel they belong. Clever and Segal (2013) stated the diversity of military families cannot be captured through a single lens. Developing a connection to the workshop participants through shared values and beliefs held as educators and placing the early childhood aged student as the focal point helped to build and maintain positive teacher child experiences, as well as establish trust. The project was grounded in the guiding principles of Epstein's research about school, family, and community partnerships (2005, 2009, 2010, 2011); the research compiled by Martin, Hawkins, and Richardson (2010) about how children are effected by deployments; and research about professional development that is effective with early childhood educators.

The study's participants worked in the prekindergarten through third grades in general education, special education, and intervention programs in their schools for several years of combined experiences. Some worked exclusively at military-connected schools, while others were at schools that grew into military populated schools over time. This allowed for multiple experiences to be shared concerning how parent-teacher relationships developed through communication techniques the educators provided to

military families. To effectively communicate with parents, the actively teaching educators had the advantage of using technology (emailing, texting, newsletters, and websites), while retired teachers used face-to-face meetings, phone calls to the families, and classroom letters home. Face-to-face meetings and phone calls were considered best practices to use when communicating with families, while emailing worked well to keep deployed family members up-to-date. The professional development workshop can be extended to upper elementary, middle, and high school educators to provide background, insights, and suggestions about how to use the knowledge learned to sustain the relationships they have maintained with military families. While the workshop is intended to span 3 days, it could be done at faculty meetings or during professional development days to maximize time and to allow for greater numbers of educators to participate in discussions.

Project Limitations

The project's design was based on information gained from recently retired educators as well as actively teaching educators in grades prekindergarten through third. The project does not include upper elementary, middle, or high school educators. Therefore, the professional development workshop ideas were established from a small sampling of professionals from the broader spectrum of military-connected educators who work with children and adolescents. Implementation of the professional development as outlined in Appendix A would add evaluative feedback of the effectiveness of the workshop modules.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

This project's goal was to provide early childhood educators with training relevant to their parent-teacher relationships with military families. The data revealed that actively teaching and retired educators believed they were able to make connections and communicate with military families even though they lacked any formal training about how to do so. The analysis of the data also revealed the educators felt parent involvement depended on what was going on in the military families' lives at the time, such as deployments, being new to the military lifestyle, or methods the educators or schools used to try to reach out to them if they were new to the school community.

One recommendation to remediate the limitations is to implement the professional development. This will provide immediate feedback on the effectiveness of workshop activities and discussions. Another recommendation is to invite and include military parents of early childhood children to participate in some of the workshops pertaining to resiliency and parent involvement. Having the voices of parents at workshops could add a layer of depth for educators to understand the type of support needed by some families or to develop strategies for reaching uninterested parents. There could be an underlying cultural difference, language barrier, or other family members such as grandparents or guardians taking care of the children while a single parent is deployed.

Including upper elementary educators would provide experiences of what the students need beyond the first few years of schooling. This would also apply to middle school and high school educators. A final way to address the limitations is expanding the

professional development to use online training methods. This would be advantageous to provide a cohort type forum for several educators to collaborate with different schools servicing military families from other branches of the military.

Scholarship

Pursuing the doctoral degree for the past several years while still experiencing the transitions and problems as a military spouse and mother has deepened my role as a scholar-practitioner. For the past 2 decades, I have been committed to working with military families either teaching in military-connected schools, teaching schools on military bases, or tutoring military students in need. These experiences have helped me gain perspective on the pedigree needed to complete such an undertaking.

Research sessions were intense, often lasting for several hours in one sitting. Editing and revising were tedious. The interview process was exhilarating when finally having the opportunity to have my interview questions come to life. Coding to look for themes was enjoyable as I saw educators talk about the same ideas, challenges, and concepts that I have experienced while teaching. I have experience teaching early childhood, upper elementary, and middle school military students. I felt it was special to give the early childhood educator a voice since they are underrepresented in research.

Project Development

My chair, methodologists, and university research reviewer were instrumental in helping me organize and pinpoint exactly what needed to be written to effectively devise a pertinent project. While attending to the details of the project, I considered the

audience, the activities which will keep the professional development enjoyable, and the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Once I started to write the project's outline, I used prior knowledge of workshops I have attended for staff development and my 2 years of experience from being a school improvement leader at a large school. The logistics of scheduling a professional development relies heavily on space allocation, time, and financial resources.

I laid a few parameters down while developing the project. I wanted to decrease the amount of time participants spent sitting and listening to information. Also, I wanted to increase the time spent on activities and participation for active engagement. Finally, I wanted to include time for educators to write down their thoughts because I use journaling frequently for my own self-reflections in my personal and professional life. Establishing these few parameters allowed me to write each day's worth of activities with enthusiasm while using the results and themes to guide the development of the project. The formative evaluation form (located at the end of Appendix A) provides a place for workshop participants to give timely feedback about whether or not the professional development met the learning goals and objectives set forth in the project.

Leadership and Change

As an educator who shied away from leadership roles in the school in my early teaching years, mainly from the fact that I was always the new teacher because of military moves, I was the consummate observer of leadership. At one school, my principal encouraged me to join the school leadership team. She assigned me roles and

duties to help build my confidence in leading peers, and she gave me critical feedback when I needed to learn how to adjust to colleagues' attitudes and receptiveness. When I began teaching at an overseas military school, I assumed a coleadership role for the school improvement team. With the school having over 60 staff and faculty members, I learned quickly how to use the critical feedback my former principal advised. In time, I felt comfortable asserting my opinions, thoughts, and research in helping the faculty to reach conclusions on school improvement plans and goals.

From that point on, I was able to confidently cross over into other schools to become an active participant of a school improvement team for accreditation, help plan professional development for teachers, and learn how to use my people skills when working with colleagues. I developed networking skills and became a better school leadership team member as we worked for the greater good of our military school community. This project can help influence change in the productivity of military-connected schools' professional development plans just as it has increased my level of understanding about the amount of time researchers have dedicated to studying the needs of military students. It also can promote change within the protocol that schools follow to address mental and behavior issues in students experiencing deployments.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

This project gave me the opportunity to expand my research role beyond the classroom. Merriam (2002) suggested looking purposefully for differences in participants' experience with the phenomenon. I have experienced the effects of

deployment as an early childhood educator and a parent. I have been able to locate, review, and formulate my own interpretations of the research related to military families, deployments, early childhood educators, theories, and conceptual frameworks of parent involvement. I now understand the importance of justifying and communicating my results for validity and reliability.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

Conducting research has refined my knowledge base of what qualitative research encompasses. My ability to critically review research created occasions for me to share what I have learned with colleagues, teammates, administrators, and parents. This in turn, has taught me to critically review my own opinions about how I communicate with parents when discussing their military dependent during a parent-teacher conference and in emails, notes home, and other face-to-face impromptu meetings and phone calls that need my attention. I keep in mind, as I have before, what the families are going through, and I let the students know they are not alone if they feel a certain way after their parent deploys or when it is time to move again. I have been able to move theory into practice. An example of this was when a German family with twin boys was deciding if they should take their boys back to Germany. The mother believed the children were missing out on academic opportunities from not being in a German school. She ultimately decided that the communication and support she received was outstanding. She decided to stay in the area rather than go back to Germany the following school year.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

I enjoyed designing a project that will help early childhood educators learn research-based strategies for helping military families and their children. Educators can sometimes lose up to half of their class in 1 school year only to have those students replaced with new students looking for acceptance. While educators press forward, I learned that they need support. A few of the participants mentioned educators need counseling to have a forum to vent issues they may be having while working with families in duress. Some schools have counselors and military family consultants who provide emotional support in the classroom and in deployment groups for children.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

As I reflected on the importance of this work, I recalled how hard transition were for my family at different junctures. One needs a strong support system in whatever geographical location he or she lives, which is often times far away from home. Military people need people who care and take the time to get to know them, the family, and family situation especially when a spouse is deployed for a long assignment. It is more than just having friends with whom to visit and have recreational fun, it is about building a true connection that helps one sustain and get through hard times. A school's educators were one of the biggest parts in helping me work with my children academically, socially, and physically. Community resources were important including wife volunteers; religious organizations, which sponsored deployed children going to camps; military family life consultants available in school; and school activities like sports that kept my

children active. I have learned it is important for researchers to keep providing us with timely information about the military family structure, how to cope with the emotional cycle of deployments, and effective learning strategies to build resiliency by all members of military-connected schools to keep military children in a comforting and welcoming environments.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

Military families have always faced the challenges of starting anew in different communities (Blaisure, Saathoff-Wells, Pereira, Wadsworth, & Dombro, 2015; Clever & Segal, 2013; Knopf & Swick, 2008; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Mmari, Bradshaw, & Blum, 2010; Park, 2011). The professional development will assist educators with pinpointing planning tools to help strengthen their relationships with military families. The training provides early childhood educators with opportunities to meet with colleagues to collaborate beyond a single faculty meeting about strategies that can reinforce best practices and strategies. After delivery to different faculties across several states and school districts, the workshops will increase awareness of how educators need to be resilient in striving for quality parent-teacher relationships in military-connected schools. When military students experience less stress and parent-teacher relationships improve, students' achievement and learning will most likely improve as well.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Future research can be developed about the role of military parents in increasing academic performance of students. The professional development can also extend into

middle and high school years. The effects of deployments on mental and behavior health has received some input from researchers, but more can be done to seek understanding about what types of therapy, counseling, or teacher interventions work best for students. Additional research needs to be done to analyze parent-teacher relationships of military children with learning disabilities. Research should be completed with educators near military installations who are in training programs to become teachers or transitioning into teaching from other careers to gain their perspectives and experiences, which could increase overall knowledge of military families before entering the education workforce fulltime. Research efforts must continue to document the effects of deployments on military families and explore the complexities of military lifestyle on the academic achievement of military children.

Conclusion

To conclude, early childhood educators have an important role in building and sustaining parent-teacher relationships with military families. Researching this topic has given me the opportunity to capture the essence of what it is like to be an educator in today's military-connected schools. While military families endure frequent moves, deployments, and different school communities, the educator is instrumental in helping make these transitions go smoothly. Educators must show resiliency, strength, compassion, and dedication to continue to forge positive relationships with families. The purpose of this qualitative research study and resulting project was to explore the experiences early childhood educators had with military families and to enhance parent-

teacher relationships, which may result in less stress and greater learning in military children. The project created as a result of the data collected will provide a professional development opportunity for early childhood educators to further deepen their knowledge of military family research that could influence and strengthen their teaching practices. Building and maintaining positive parent-teacher relationships during the early childhood years with military families is an extensive and ongoing challenge today's educators face. Having educators dedicated and committed to this challenge is instrumental in helping military children become productive citizens and workers of our future workforce.

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Appendix A: The Project

The Project

From Home Front to School Front: Building and Sustaining Parent-Teacher Relationships
in Military-Connected Schools

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February 2016

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Introduction

This professional development is entitled “From Home Front to School Front: Building and Sustaining Parent-Teacher Relationships in Military-Connected Schools”. It consists of three days of workshop activities designed for educators who work with early childhood grades prekindergarten through third. The goals of the professional development are for participants to leave with a thorough knowledge base of what military families need from teachers and the school community to build and maintain positive partnerships. This professional development is designed for three days, but it can be broken down into segments as district finances and time allows. The workshops will work best if it is implemented in the order of sequence it is designed. However, the activities can be implemented over different professional development days in the school calendar year.

Objectives for each day are written at the beginning of each section. Teachers need learning objectives to guide their professional development for efficacy, fostering a deeper understanding of concepts presented, and to make connections between their own experiences and the topics about which they are learning about (Cwikla, 2003). Educators will have an opportunity to reflect on what they learned at the end of each day’s sessions in a teacher journal. Castle (2013) stated early childhood educators consistently use reflection as a daily practice to identify areas in which they would like to make improvements. Hedges (2010) noted teachers using self-reflection guide professional learning strengthen coherence between theory and practice.

Competency in effective professional performance takes time, practice, development, and refinement. That is why professional progress is a developmental process. “Being professional means that early childhood practitioners and leaders are constantly in the process of reflecting on and rethinking what they do in order to make improvements” (Castle, 2009, p.4).

Each day of the professional development will begin at 8:30 and end at 3:00. An opening activity is scheduled from 8:30-9:00. Using icebreakers can optimize participation and support establishing a focus of learning shared by the group (Chlup & Collins, 2010). The workshops will cover military family trends and statistics, deployments, community resources, early childhood education, parent-teacher relationships, and resiliency training. Roundtable discussion activities held after lunch provide a setting for participants to see and hear what their colleagues have to say about specific topics. A “parking lot” (a designated area educators can post questions they may have using sticky notes) will be used to answer questions as breaks occur. A formative evaluation will be used at the close of the last day to provide feedback about the effectiveness of the professional development.

Day 1: Military Families, Deployment Cycle, and School-Family Partnerships

- 1. Workshop 1: Current Trends in Military Family Statistics**
- 2. Workshop 2: Deployment Cycle**
- 3. Workshop 3: School, Family, and Community Partnerships**

Purpose:

The purpose of the first day of professional development is to involve participants with activities that build capacity for working with military families. This means they need to have a thorough understanding of military family trends, the deployment cycle and its effects on parent-teacher relationships, and what community resources are available to help them assist military families.

Objectives:

1. To analyze the current trends and statistics of military families
2. To identify and compare the different stages of the deployment cycle and its effects on the families
3. To explain the advantages and disadvantages of how the home life may hinder or enhance the parent-teacher relationships at school
4. To connect educators with community members who have resources available to assist them military families with transitions and deployments

Outcomes:

1. Educators will be knowledgeable about military family structures
2. Early childhood educators will identify resources for their students that will help them cope with deployments

Day 1: Military Families, Deployment Cycle, and School-Family Partnerships**8:30-9:00 Introductions and Icebreaker Activity**

Participants will be asked to introduce themselves, state their role at the school, and share how long they have worked with military families. The presenter will then give some background information on what led to their interest in this research. The presenter will state the “norms”, or rules, to enhance participant comfort (i.e., A workshop participant will record the norms given on chart paper to be displayed for the duration of the workshop as each group share what they wrote in their smaller group. The participants will make a teacher journal using notebook paper, construction paper, and markers to write personal notes and self-reflections in throughout the professional development.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Have name tags available at each seat. Have participants write an adjective that describes their hidden talent under their name.
2. Have participants introduce themselves and state the word they chose.
3. Materials: name tags, markers
4. Teacher journal materials: notebook paper, construction paper, markers, stapler
5. Give participants about 10 minutes to construct their teacher journal.

9:00-10:00 *Workshop 1: Current Trends in Military Family Statistics*

9:00-9:30 **Activity 1:** Workshop participants will be given an envelope containing 20 statements about military families, such as education, income levels, and ages of parents, marriage and divorce rates, PCS moves, and behaviors of young military dependents. Working in small groups of 4-5, they are to separate the statements into the categories True or False.

9:30-10:00 Participants will engage in a discussion about the statements. The statements include the current trends of military families, to include such things as parent education, income, child behaviors, and marriage statuses, how frequently families move. Research from Clever and Segal (2013), Creech, Hadley, and Borsari (2014), and Hosek and MacDermid Wadsworth (2013) will be used to help provide insight to educators about the diverse demographics and financial outlook of military families. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts about the statements as they are presented. The presenter will clarify any misconceptions about why a statement was true or false.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Instruct participants to get into groups of 3-4 for the T/F activity.
2. Materials— regular sized envelopes, 20 statements precut
3. Have participants work with partners closest to them. Pass out envelopes. Give 10 minutes to complete activity.

4. After participants finish the activity, read a statement and discuss the answers to the questions.
5. Questions to ask to conclude this session: What was something new you learned? What were you shocked to learn? Have you felt the effects of certain statements in your class?

10:00-11:30 *Workshop 2: The Deployment Cycle*

10:00-10:15 **PowerPoint: The Deployment Cycle**

The five stages of deployment are: predeployment, deployment, sustainment, redeployment, and post deployment (Pincus, et al., 2007).

The Deployment Cycle PowerPoint will define each stage and will help participants understand this phenomenon, and why they may need to set goals within their own practice to reach out to a parent or student that might be struggling during this time. This will help strengthen their parent-teacher relationship if a parent is feeling stressed, or a teacher who might not be getting the performance she would like to see from a student during this stressful time.

- 10:15-10:30** **Activity 2:** Educators will write on sticky notes a positive and negative experience they have had with military families experiencing deployments. The experiences will be shared after a short break.

Resource for this activity:

Educators Guide to the Military Child during Deployments

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/homefront/homefront.pdf>

Facilitator Note:

Materials-green and pink sticky notes, chart papers, pens

10:30-10:45 15 minute break

Facilitator Notes:

1. During the break put up 2 pieces of chart paper.
2. Put a plus sign on one paper and a negative sign on the other.
3. Hang them up so it is easily accessible to the group.
4. Put the books and lesson plan templates out for activity 3.

10:45-11:00 Workshop participants will share their positive and negative experiences with the whole group.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Discuss negatives first, and then the positives.
2. After the participants share their experiences, have them add the green sticky notes to the

11:00-11:30 **Activity 3:** Educators will have an opportunity to look at children's books written to help students and families with deployments. They will be given a lesson planning template to help plan a lesson to do with their classes.

Resources:

Transitions and Deployments Lesson Plan Guide and Template

Facilitator Notes:

1. About 20-30 books and resources about children facing deployment and separations will be available for groups to rotate around to small groups.
2. Spend a few minutes pointing out if the books feature such as the different branches of service, mothers, fathers, military moves, deployments, or coping strategies.
3. The lesson plan guide and template will be available as a resource for educators to plan a lesson written to help connect children to the characters in the books.

4. **Books were selected from the following sites:**

<http://www.operationwearehere.com/ChildrenBooks.html>

<http://www.booksforbrats.net/>

<http://www.weservetoo.com/we-serve-too--books.html>

11:30-12:30 Lunch

12:30-2:30 *Workshop 3: School, Family, and Community Partnerships*

12:30-1:15 **Roundtable Discussion: “School Front vs. Homefront”**

Workshop participants will view “The Emotional Cycle of Deployments” slideshow (Devoe & Ross, 2012). We will have a group discussion in a whole group setting about how the roles of military families on the home front may help or hinder how they are able to adjust to the new school

community and the roles of educators. The participants will rotate through 5 different graphic organizers on chart papers posted on the walls or at the tables with a Main Idea written in the center. They are to write details around the Main Idea. They will get to spend 3 minutes at each chart paper. After all of the chart papers have been rotated through, participants will spend 1 minute rotating back through each chart paper to read what others have written. When assembled back into the whole group, a 3-5 minute discussion will take place about each chart papers main idea/details, led by the presenter.

Resource for this activity:

Educators Guide to the Military Child during Deployments

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/homefront/homefront.pdf>

Facilitator Notes:

1. Materials: slideshow, laptop, projector

The Emotional Cycle of Deployment slideshow

[http://www.powershow.com/view1/1c4f90-](http://www.powershow.com/view1/1c4f90-ZDc1Z/The_Emotional_Cycle_of_Deployment_powerpoint_ppt_presentation)

[ZDc1Z/The_Emotional_Cycle_of_Deployment_powerpoint_ppt_presentation](http://www.powershow.com/view1/1c4f90-ZDc1Z/The_Emotional_Cycle_of_Deployment_powerpoint_ppt_presentation)

2. Teacher Reference Guide

<http://illinoisearlylearning.org/faqs/military-families.htm>

1:15-1:45 Activity 4: National Programs for Military Families

Workshop participants will learn about programs pertaining to school and community resources available to military families in their local area and nationally.

Resources for this activity:

National Military Family Association: <http://www.militaryfamily.org/>

Military.com family sites:

<https://www.jointservicessupport.org/Default.aspx>

Military Kids Connect: <http://militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil/>

4-H Military Partnerships: <http://4-hmilitarypartnerships.org/educator-staff/index.html>

Facilitator Notes:

1. Divide group up into 3 teams.
2. Have players compete for free educational items (notebooks, pens, etc.).
3. The game will cover local area resources for the school(s).
4. The game will be modified if the military-connected population is supported by the majority of one particular branch of the armed forces (e.g., Marine Corps., Navy, Army, Air Force).

1:45-2:00 15 minute break

Facilitator Notes:

1. Check the parking lot board to see what questions educators have.
2. Meet briefly with the community representatives to see if they have handouts or need assistance with anything while engaged with the participants.

2:00-2:45

Community Representatives: Two members from the community who work closely with military families, such as a school-family liaison or military transition officer, from the local military community will present programs and resources available to educators to help support military children and families.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Introduce the speakers with a brief bio.
2. Allow time for educators to ask questions after each community representative has spoken.
3. Whatever brochures, cards, or other resources the representatives brought with them should be handed out quickly by the facilitator or put in a location where they can be readily accessible at the end of the session.

2:45-3:00**“The Wrap Up”—Teacher Journaling/Self-Reflections**

Educators will debrief by writing in their journals about the day’s activities and what may be beneficial to them in the future.

prekindergarten and K participants will be asked to share some of their thoughts.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Give the educators a few minutes to self-reflect about the session using their teacher made journals.
2. Have a few participants share their “take-aways” from today’s sessions.

Day 2: Early Childhood Education and Parental Involvement

- 1. Workshop 4: Early Childhood Educators Importance to Military Families**
- 2. Workshop 5: Parental Involvement**

Purpose:

The purpose of the 2nd day of professional development is to involve participants with activities that build capacity for working with military families. This means they need to have a thorough understanding of military family trends, the deployment cycle and its effects on parent-teacher relationships, and what community resources are available to help them assist military families.

Learning Objectives:

1. To examine the historical impact early childhood education has on child development
2. To present research-based techniques in building parent-teacher relationships with military families
3. To explain Joyce Epstein's research about school family partnerships

Outcomes:

1. Educators will be knowledgeable about school family partnership plans resulting from research of Joyce Epstein and her colleagues.

2. Educators will identify times in which they could use the research learned to form a possible Professional Learning Community for ongoing collaboration with their peers.

Day 2: Early Childhood Education; Parent-Teacher Relationships

8:30-9:00— Opening Activity: Early Childhood Experience

Educators will be asked to write in their teacher journals a rewarding experience they had with an early childhood educator or make a list of traits and qualities of an early childhood educator they admired possessed. Educators will share 1 thing they wrote with the whole group.

9:00-10:30 *Workshop 4: Early Childhood Educators Importance to Military Families*

9:00-9:30 Activity 1: Workshop participants will work in small groups and given a chart paper with a Venn Diagram on it to make a list of social and emotional needs that differentiate early childhood education, prekindergarten through third, from older children and ways they overlap each other.

Facilitator Note:

Materials—chart paper and markers

9:30-10:00 Gallery Walk: Workshop participants will post on the walls or tables their Venn Diagram, so other participants can see what their peers wrote. They may add their thoughts to other chart papers in a different color.

10:00-10:30 Video Clips: Brief video clips of early childhood educators working with children in military connected school environments will be shared.

Resource: <http://www.nuptdc.org/military-connected-students.html>

Facilitator Notes:

1. Show the video clips of early childhood educators explaining how they feel working with children.
2. After each video clip, have a brief discussion of what took place in the video.

10:30-10:40 10 minute break

Facilitator Notes:

1. During the break, place at each table 4 notecards for the next activity.
2. Make sure paper is also available for the groups to write on.

10:40-2:30 *Workshop 5: Parental Involvement*

10:40-11:30 **Activity 2: Parent-Teacher Communication Role Play**

Participants will role play 3-4 scenarios featuring a parent involved during the early childhood years, and a parent not involved with their child.

Participants will be assigned a role to play such as student, teacher, father, mother. They will work in small groups to write a brief script of their role.

Each group will have 5 minutes to share their scenario. A brief discussion about how the parent was involved or not involved will take place.

Educators will have the opportunity to share how parent involvement looks like in their own classrooms. This activity will lead into our Roundtable Discussion after lunch.

Facilitator Note:

Materials: notecards that show who will play parents and who will be designated a child will be passed out. Participants will be instructed to behave like the cue on the card.

11:30-12:30 Lunch

Facilitator Note: Make sure all materials for the next session are ready.

12:30-1:15 Roundtable Discussion: “Parent Teacher Relationships: Myths and Truths”-Workshop participants will have a candid discussion in a whole group setting about truths vs. myths of parent-teacher relationships using statements taken from research and statics gathered on this topic. The participants will be broken up into 4 different stations.

Station 1: Station one will have pictures of children in different settings. Each educator will write one word under each picture to indicate how the educator feels about it. One picture will show a student sitting at his desk in a corner, and another picture will show pictures of a child sitting at his desk in class raising his hand to answer a question with a smile on his face will be displayed.

Station 2: The second station will feature pictures of adults with children in different settings displayed. Each educator will write a one word description about each picture.

Station 3: This station will feature pictures of educators with children in the classroom setting. Repeat the process from stations 1 and 2.

Station 4: will have educators with parents in school settings (i.e. parent-teacher conference, school events, and field trips). The participants will rotate through the stations, and then a discussion will take place about how the pictures are all connected to parent-teacher relationships, and what are some myths and realities about the relationships.

1:15-1:45 Activity 3: Strategies for sustaining parent-teaching relationships in military-connected schools. Participants will share their experiences of what they do to sustain parent-teacher relationships with military families and see what the experts have to say.

Resource: Military Families Learning Network

<http://blogs.extension.org/militaryfamilies/family-development/>

Facilitator Notes:

1. Materials: website, laptop, projector
2. Share the website with participants and have a discussion.

1:45-2:00 15 minute break

Facilitator Notes:

1. Check the parking lot to see what questions teachers have.
2. Ensure there are enough “Epstein Files” packets for the next session.

2:00-2:45 **The Epstein Files:** Research-based articles will be shared, which will lead into the research completed by Joyce Epstein and her colleagues after the break. Educators will receive a packet of resources from Joyce Epstein's many supplemental materials from her books about parent involvement and parent-teacher relationships that can be used immediately to implement in teaching practices.

Resource: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/Research/researchpubs.htm>

Facilitator Notes:

1. Educators will receive a packet of resources from Joyce Epstein's research materials about parent involvement and parent-teacher relationships that can be used immediately to implement in teaching practices.
2. Have a person from each group come get enough packets for their tablemates.
3. Have educators look through the packet and highlight the school, family, and community partnership research, tips, and action plans discussed in the articles.
4. Share the website located at Johns Hopkins University of other research Joyce Epstein has completed to give educators a broader view of how this research has been developed over the years to strengthen

school, family, and community relationships and parent-teacher relationships.

5. Have educators write in their teacher journal a few statements they feel can relate to or agree with from the research articles, and share out their thoughts.

2:45-3:00 “The Wrap Up”: Teacher Journaling/Self-Reflections

Educators will debrief by writing in their journals about the day’s activities and what may be beneficial to them in the future. 1st and 2nd grade participants will be asked to share their thoughts.

Facilitator Note:

Teachers are to reflect and write about what they learned today, or need to know more about.

Day 3: Resiliency in Military-connected Communities

- 1. Workshop 6: Resiliency in Military Families**
- 2. Workshop 7: Resiliency in Educators**

Purpose:

The purpose of the third day of professional development is to involve participants with resiliency training for working with military families. Educators working with children need to be aware of the delicate balance military families need to endure frequent transitions and lengthy separations. Compassion is key in working with military families.

Objectives:

1. To examine resiliency in military children and adults
2. To describe characteristics of resilient educators
3. To present strategies to become a resilient educator for the benefit of military children

Outcomes:

1. Educators will have knowledge of resiliency characteristics of military families
2. Educators will have online resources to access for references

Day 3: Resiliency in Military-connected Communities**8:30-9:00 Opening Activity: Resiliency Art**

Participants will be given an 8x11 piece of white art paper and instructed to design a picture of what they believe resiliency looks like. Crayons, watercolor sets, paper, and drawing pictures will be provided.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Tell the purpose of today's activities.
2. State this activity is about expressing what resiliency means to you.

9:00-11:30 *Workshop 6: Resiliency in Military Families***9:00-9:15**

Participants will share their artwork with the group. The presenter will share how having flexibility to work with children is what our profession is about. Sometimes, it is important to set aside what we have planned to attend to the emotional needs of students instead of forcing a planned learning agenda. This is a part of being resilient, and it is especially important to possess this quality while working with military children and families, especially during deployments. In doing so, it can strengthen the personal relationships we forge with families.

9:15-9:30

Video Clips—Video presentations describing how resiliency training has been an influence in helping military families deal with deployments.

Facilitator Note:

Materials-projector, laptop

9:30-10:30 Activity 1: “Resiliency Scavenger Hunt”

In grade level groups, workshop participants will be given a resiliency scavenger hunt worksheet. Working in grade levels, they are to use the computer lab or computers in their classrooms to use the internet to locate information about resiliency using clues given to them on the worksheet.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Materials-computers, scavenger hunt exercise paper
2. In grade level groups, workshop participants will be given a resiliency scavenger hunt activity sheet. Working in small teams of 3-4, they are to use the computer lab or laptops to use the internet to locate information about resiliency using clues given to them on the activity sheet.
 - a. List 2 definitions of resiliency.
 - b. Name 3 programs that are specifically geared towards teaching military families about resiliency.
 - c. What is a Military Family Life Counselor (MFLC)? List 2 services they provide to children that are beneficial to a school community.
 - d. What is the FOCUS Project? What does the abbreviation FOCUS stand for?

- e. For more information about military family resilience: Look up the free ebook “Promoting Psychological Resilience in the US Military” at rand.org
- f. Find the resource “Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers” at the apa.org site. List 3 things parents and educators can do to promote resiliency in children.
- g. Visit the site: military.com and look up the article “Resiliency during Deployment”. List 2 internal factors and 2 external factors that can enhance resiliency in families.

10:30-10:50 20 minute break

Facilitator Note: Check parking lot board to see what questions educators have.

10:50-11:30 Scavenger Hunt Results: Groups will share their Scavenger Hunt results and have discussions about the information they found in a whole group setting. Answers to the Scavenger Hunt will be revealed as results are shared from the groups.

11:30-12:30 Lunch

12:30-2:00 *Workshop 7: Resiliency in Educators*

12:30-1:15 **Activity 2: Roundtable Discussion “Characteristics of a Resilient Educator”**

The purpose of this workshop is for participants to examine resiliency qualities in educators. Participants will view the Resiliency PowerPoint which includes research statements and points to ponder about resiliency. Participants will write a group acrostic poems using the word RESILIENT. One acrostic poem will represent traits and qualities a resilient educator should have, while the other one will consist of words *not* consistent of a resilient educator. This will allow for educators to compare and contrast what is considered effective when working with military children and families. Participants will work in small groups to come up with the poems. They will share their poems with the group, and then post it on the wall.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Materials: Resiliency in Educators PowerPoint, 8x11 white paper, markers
2. Workshop participants will write an acrostic poem using the word RESILIENT, a haiku poem, a rhyming poem or artwork to convey their thoughts on the qualities a resilient educator will need to work with military children.

3. Colleagues will share their work with the whole group.

1:15-1:45 Resources for working with military families using Resiliency

Training

Participants will receive a resource booklet they can use in the classroom to support using resiliency effectively while working with students.

Resource booklet: “Supporting Students from Military Families”

<http://www.tcpress.com/militaryfamilies.html>

1:45-2:00 15 minute break

Facilitator Note: Check parking lot to see what questions teachers have

2:00-2:40 Jeopardy—Categories will include all of the information discussed from the 3 day professional development to gauge understanding of the workshops.

The 5 main categories will be: Early Childhood, Military Families, Resiliency, School-Family Partnerships, and Parental Involvement. Index cards will be used to have questions ranging from 100-500 points.

2:40-2:50 “The Wrap Up”—Teacher Journaling/Self-Reflections

Teachers will write and share their journal or reflections from the past few days.

Facilitator Notes:

1. Thank participants and give contact information if they should desire to have copies of materials emailed to them or receive additional resources about military families that may become available.
2. Pass out Evaluation Form while teachers complete their final teacher journal reflection. Tell participants they do not need to include their name on the evaluation and that any comments will be helpful in planning future professional development with educators working with military-connected families.
3. Have a designated area for the forms to be placed.

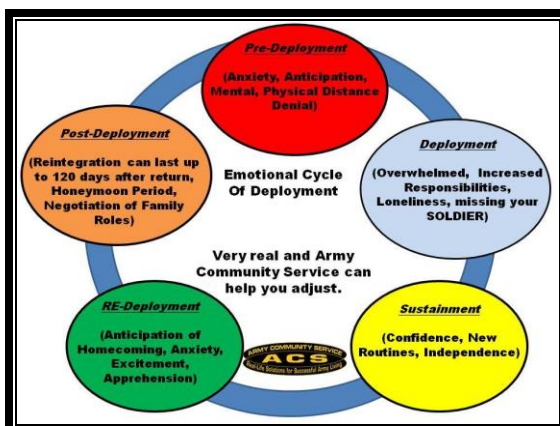
2:50-3:00 Professional Development Formative Evaluation

Deployment Cycle PowerPoint

Effects of Deployment Cycle on Military Families



- Researchers, Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler (2007) identified the stages and effects of deployment on military families. The five stages are predeployment, deployment, sustainment, redeployment, and post deployment (Pincus, et al., 2007).



Stage 1: Predeployment

During the time leading up to the actual deployment:

- Families may feel anxious in anticipation of the separation
- The deploying member has pre-deployment training to attend that could add additional separation anxiety
- The family may attend to getting wills, care plans, and financial affairs in order
- A feeling of distance may occur as the deploying member tries to detach himself emotionally from the family members being left behind
- An increase in arguments and disagreements might occur

<http://www.military.com/spouse/military-deployment/dealing-with-deployment/emotional-cycle-of-deployment-predeployment.html>

Stage 2:Deployment

During the 1st month of deployment:

- The family may experience a range of emotions such as sadness, being overwhelmed, numbness, and even relief
- Sleep difficulties may occur in some
- The normal sense of family security may decline

<http://www.military.com/spouse/military-deployment/dealing-with-deployment/emotional-cycle-of-deployment-deployment.html>

Stage 3: Sustainment

During months 2-5:

- An establishment of new family routines occur as responsibilities shift
- Family may develop a new support system
- Family members may feel a greater sense of control
- A feeling of independence and confidence may be gained in family members

<http://www.military.com/spouse/military-deployment/dealing-with-deployment/emotional-cycle-of-deployment-sustainment.html>

Stage 4: Re-deployment

During months 5-6:

- Excitement builds at the expected arrival and homecoming of the deployed member
- Some family members may feel apprehension
- Some decision-making may become difficult while preparing for the family to become reunited

<http://www.military.com/spouse/military-deployment/dealing-with-deployment/emotional-cycle-of-deployment-redeployment.html>

Stage 5: Post-deployment

- ▶ Honeymoon period
- ▶ Loss of independence
- ▶ Need for "own" space
- ▶ Renegotiating routines
- ▶ Reintegrating into Family
- ▶ Time frame: three to six months after deployment

<http://www.military.com/spouse/military-deployment/dealing-with-deployment/emotional-cycle-of-deployment-postdeployment.html>

Reintegration/Reunification

Walsh et al, 2014 stated:

- ▶ Reunification requires re-establishing connections with a child who has undergone significant developmental transitions, and who, by nature of age, may not communicate directly, may exhibit challenging behaviors, and yet is dependent on parents for meeting emotional needs (p.36).
- ▶ Extended family and community support is often more available during the deployment (p. 36).
- ▶ The transitions associated with reunification are also difficult, and families often face these private struggles without adequate support (p.36).

5 Tips for Educators

- ▶ Hold a meeting with new students and parents to discuss your day-to-day routines and expectations.
- ▶ Invite parents to come and observe your classroom environment to ease any anxieties they may have.
- ▶ Show new students where important classroom items are located so they can adjust quickly.
- ▶ Assure a student with a deploying parent they are safe and can trust you.
- ▶ Assign new students a classroom partner or buddy to get used to their new classroom.

<http://illinoiseearlylearning.org/faqs/military-families.htm#teacherhelp>

Behaviors that indicate a student may need additional school support

- ▶ Some children adjust to deployments differently. If a child shows the following behaviors, he/she may need to see the school counselor:
- ▶ Extreme sadness or anger
- ▶ Frequently frustrated or have meltdowns
- ▶ Decrease in appetite
- ▶ Not making or maintaining friendships
- ▶ Lack of interest in playing during recess

References

- Pincus, S. H., House, R., Christenson, J., & Adler, L. E. (2007). The emotional cycle of deployment: A military family perspective. Retrieved from <http://www.hooah4health.com/deployment/familymatters/emotionalcycle.htm>
- Walsh, T. B., Dayton, C. J., Erwin, M. S., Muzik, M., Busuito, A., & Rosenblum, K. L. (2014). Fathering after military deployment: Parenting challenges and goals of fathers of young children. *Health & Social Work, 39*(1), 35-44. doi:10.1093/hsw/hlu005
- <http://illinoiseearlylearning.org/faqs/military-families.htm#teacherhelp>



Transitions and Deployments Lesson Plan Guide

Title of Book: *Write the name of the military-connected book here.*

Lesson Objective(s): *Write a brief objective of what you want the children to understand about making transition or deployments.*

New Vocabulary: *uniform, deployment, transition*

KWL Graphic Organizer: *See directions below.*

	K	W	L
Older children: 1st-3rd gr.	Ask the children to write what they know about moving frequently or having a parent leave for deployments.	Ask the children to write what they want to know about deployments. Ask the children how they feel when their mom or dad has to leave.	After reading the selected story, have the children write something new they have learned.
Younger children: PreK/K	Have pictures of men and women dressed in military uniforms from different branches of service. Ask the children if they have a mommy or daddy who has to wear this kind of clothing to work.	Ask the children how they feel when mommy or daddy has to leave for a long time for a job. Ask the children what “a long time” means to them. Answers could vary depending on their cognitive level.	After reading the selected story, have the children draw a picture of what they have learned. You may want to write a brief description under the picture so parents can know what the picture means.

Extension Activities: *Vary the activity according to your age group.*

- Write a class poem about deployments with student artwork displayed.
- Students can write a story about a time their family had to move.
- Offer in your classroom library other stories to read about children who moved to a new place, or parents who are preparing for deployment.
- Have the class create mobiles about deployments in small groups.
- Students can create a poster or collage featuring a place they have moved to.

Transitions and Deployments Lesson Plan Template

Title of Book:

Lesson Objective(s):

New Vocabulary:

KWL Graphic Organizer:


	K	W	L
Older children: 1st-3rd gr			
Younger children: PreK/K			

Extension Activities: *Vary the activity according to your age group.*

- Write a class poem about deployments with student artwork displayed.
- Students can write a story about a time their family had to move.
- Offer in your classroom library other stories to read about children who moved to a new place, or parents who are preparing for deployment.
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Resilient Educators PowerPoint

The Resilient Educator

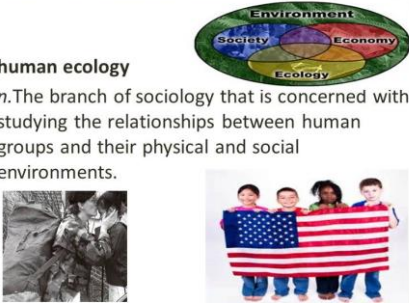


Describe what *resiliency* means to you?



What is human ecology?

- human ecology
- n. The branch of sociology that is concerned with studying the relationships between human groups and their physical and social environments.



<http://www.thefreedictionary.com>

Research states:

“Addressing the broad issue of the needs of military-connected families requires a balance between thoroughness and conciseness” (Guzman, 2014, p.9)

Positive resiliency

“Military children are both resilient and vulnerable. While frequent moves build resilience, combat deployments increase the risk for abuse, neglect, attachment problems, and inadequate coping. The risk is highest right after the service member leaves for deployment and immediately upon return” (Johnson & Ling, 2013, p.4).

How Deployed Fathers Feel

“Fathers acknowledged regret about missing an important period in their child’s development and indicated a strong desire to improve their parenting skills. They described a need for support in expressing emotions, nurturing, and managing their tempers” (Walsh, Dayton, Erwin, Muzik, Busuito, & Rosenblum, 2014, p. 35).



Did You Know...

"Children of Navy sailors have historically experienced separation much more regularly than children of Army soldiers because of the rhythms of sea duty, but children in the latter group are much more likely to have been exposed to a parent's deployment to ground combat. Children whose parents work in special operations experience very frequent deployments with little or no advance notice" (Wadsworth, 2013, p.416).

You can't control what happens when a child leaves your classroom, but you can control what happens when he is there.

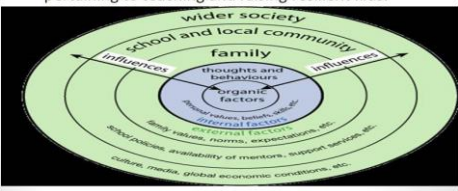

Make it the most positive, encouraging, accepting place he has ever known. Let him know that he is loved.

Only then can he be excited about learning.

ReallyGoodStuff.com

Additional Resources

- <http://www.embracethefuture.org.au/kids/index.htm>
- This site is dedicated to cultivating resilient kids.
- It has resources for teachers, parents, and children with research-based articles and information pertaining to teaching and raising resilient kids.

Remember you are good enough
 Everyone is different
 Stop comparing yourself
 Individuality rocks
 Learn something new daily
 Involve yourself in what you love doing
 Enjoy things that make you happy
 Not everyone can be 1st, 2nd, or 3rd
 Care about yourself and others
 Expect that some days won't be great

www.easypeasykids.com.au

Nathalie Brown
 Child Behaviour Consultant at Easy Peasy Kids

Additional Resources

<http://www.maggiedent.com>

- Maggie Dent is a former educator who now dedicates her time to resilience education for youths and adolescents.
- She offers online courses. One course is named “9 Things in 9 Days”, which focuses on early childhood years.

Educators of military children
should...



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- Johnson, H. L., & Ling, C. G. (2013). Caring for military children in the 21st century. *Journal Of The American Association Of Nurse Practitioners, 25*(4), 195-202. doi:10.1111/1745-7599.12003
- Wadsworth, S. M. (2013). Understanding and supporting the resilience of a new generation of combat-exposed military families and their children. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 16*(4), 415-420. doi:10.1007/s10567-013-0155-x
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Formative Professional Development Evaluation

Title of workshop: “From Home Front to School Front: Building and Sustaining Parent-Teacher Relationships in Military-Connected Schools”.

What grade do you teach? (Circle one)

PreK K 1st 2nd 3rd

If you teach a combination class, please write which grade levels here: _____

If you are not a teacher, what is your job title at your school? _____

Read each statement below, and circle the appropriate number indicating if you agree or disagree, with 4 being the highest answer possible.

- 1. The objectives and goals for this Professional Development met your expectations?**

Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	2	3	4

- 2. The presenter(s) were knowledgeable and professional during the workshops.**

Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	2	3	4

- 3. The activities provided me with useful information and strategies to apply when working with military families.**

Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	2	3	4

- 4. The workshops were an appropriate length.**

Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	2	3	4

- 5. I would recommend this professional development to other early childhood colleagues.**

Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	2	3	4

- 6. I would recommend this professional development to my administrators.**

Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree
1	2	3	4

Please circle the activities you enjoyed the most:

Roundtable Discussions	Video Clips	Jeopardy game
Scavenger Hunt	Peer collaboration	Poem Writing
Teacher Journaling	Book resources	Role Play
Learning research	Making artwork	PowerPoints

1. Please write two brief descriptions of how this professional development can be applied to your teaching practice:

2. Please write a brief description of the workshop(s) you feel you need more information about to see how hit applies to your teaching practice.

Questions/Comments:

Project References

- Castle, K. (2009). What do early childhood professionals do? *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, 37(3), 4-9. Retrieved from <http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/publications.php>
- Chlup, D. T., & Collins, T. E. (2010). Breaking the ice: Using ice-breakers and re-energizers with adult learners. *Adult Learning*, 21(3/4), 34-39.
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- Osofsky, J. D., & Chartrand, M. M. (2013). Military children from birth to five years. *Future of Children*, 23(2), 61-77. Retrieved from <http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/journals/>

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Educators

There are four essential questions the participants will be asked. Probing questions are reflected with a bulleted list. Probing questions will be asked depending on the response provided from the essential question.

- 1) What can you tell me about the relationship you have with parents who are in the military?
 - Can you tell me any extra measures you take when building relationships with your military parents?
 - What are some changes in the relationship that you see happen when a family is going through a deployment?
 - What are some ways you encourage parental involvement in your classroom activities?
 - Tell me a few examples of how families respond to your communication with them?
 - What experiences caused you to implement, continue, or discontinue communication techniques, such as email or texting?

- 2) What early childhood training experiences have you had to help you prepare for working with young children in military families?
 - What particular training(s) has been the most valuable to you at this point?
 - What training(s) do you think you could have benefitted from during your preservice teacher program?
 - Can you share your ideas about training(s) you feel early childhood educators and specialists can benefit from when working with military children and families?

- 3) What best practices in teaching do you use to help start and maintain relationships with military families?
 - How do you communicate your desire to build a positive relationship with parents?
 - Describe how you work with parents to set expectations in your relationship.
 - Can you tell me any particular best practice books, guides, or resources you find to be beneficial in working with young children?

- How do you elicit feedback from parents to help you identify how your relationship can be maintained with military parents?
- 4) What professional development would benefit you the most to help strengthen your relationship with military families?

Other probing questions for clarification purposes may include the following:

Can you give me an example?

Do you mind elaborating on this further?

Why do you feel this way?

Can you walk me through your experience?

Appendix C: Interview Guide (Retired Teachers)

There are four essential questions the participants will be asked. Probing questions are reflected with a bulleted list. Probing questions will be asked depending on the response provided from the essential question.

- 5) What can you tell me about the relationship you had with parents who were in the military?
 - Can you tell me any extra measures you took when building relationships with your military parents?
 - What were some changes in the relationship that you saw happen when a family was going through a deployment?
 - What were some ways you encouraged parental involvement in your classroom activities?
 - Tell me a few examples of how families responded to your communication with them?
 - What experiences caused you to implement, continue, or discontinue communication techniques, such as email or texting?

- 6) What early childhood training experiences helped you prepare for working with young children in military families?
 - What particular training(s) were the most valuable to you?
 - What training(s) did you think you could have benefitted from during your preservice teacher program?
 - Can you share your ideas about training(s) you feel early childhood educators and specialists can benefit from when working with military children and families?

- 7) What best practices in teaching did you use to help start and maintain relationships with military families?
 - How did you communicate your desire to build a positive relationship with parents?
 - Describe how you worked with parents to set expectations in your relationship.
 - Can you tell me any particular best practice books, guides, or resources you found beneficial to you when you worked with young children?

- How did you elicit feedback from parents to help you identify how your relationship could be maintained with military parents?
- 8) What professional development would have benefitted you the most to help strengthen your relationship with military families?

Other probing questions for clarification purposes may include the following:

Can you give me an example of how you did that?

Do you mind elaborating on that point further?

Why did you feel that way?

Can you walk me through the experience you had?