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Teachers' Perspectives of their Engagement of Fathers in Early Childhood Classrooms

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Despite positive effects of parent engagement on children's school success, prior research into parent engagement has relied almost exclusively on interactions by mothers and has not included fathers. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of preschool teachers regarding their engagement with fathers of children in their classrooms. The conceptual framework was Epstein's 6 types of parental involvement. Three research questions, regarding teachers' perspectives of father engagement, teachers' reported efforts to increase the engagement of fathers, and the barriers teachers describe in increasing fathers' engagement, form the basis of this study. This was a qualitative study using the interviews of 9 lead preschool teachers with at least 3 years' experience, who work with children 2 to 5 years old. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following open coding of interview transcripts. Five themes emerged including the teachers' comfort level, communication preferences, limiting center perspectives, limiting teacher perspectives, and fathers' disengagement. Findings indicated that teachers felt uncomfortable with fathers and preferred to communicate with mothers, and father engagement was hampered by limiting assumptions by the center and by teachers, and by fathers' perceived lack of interest. This study presents implications for positive social change by suggesting that individual teachers can increase parent engagement by being more inclusive of fathers, including becoming more comfortable engaging fathers, communicating with fathers directly, and being open to fathers' engagement in a variety of ways. When fathers feel welcome in childcare settings, children benefit because both parents are working on the child's behalf.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my support system, the group of individuals that helped me get to this point. My father, my mother, my teacher, and my church family. There were several days where I wanted to walk away, but these people keep me motivated, and I am forever thankful.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the teachers that participated in my study. I would like to thank the teachers who work in the field of early childhood daily. I would like to encourage the teachers to consistently welcome and motivate fathers. I would like to encourage the fathers to become more involved in their children's early academics.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study is focused on lead teachers' perspectives of the engagement of fathers in early childhood classrooms in independently funded preschools. Little evidence was available on the perspectives of childcare and preschool teachers regarding the role of fathers in children's preschool experience. Instead, literature focused on teachers' engagement with mothers or with parents in general, but not specifically with fathers, despite other evidence that fathers' engagement with children in the preschool years contributes positively to children's development (Ferreira et al., 2016; Lau, 2016). By gaining a better understanding of teachers' perspectives on father engagement and their efforts in facilitating father engagement, results of my study may lead to positive social change. In this chapter, I will present the background and conceptual framework of this study, a statement of the study's guiding problem and purpose, and a brief description of the nature of the study and the research questions.

Background

Until recently, the role of fathers in the child's preschool experience was overlooked, as evidenced through the lack of literature to support fathers' role. Only a 1998 brief by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provided data on the number of fathers compared to mothers who can be said to be involved in their children's education, as evidenced by their attendance at school events (NCES, 1998). NCES (1998) reported statistics only for public education in kindergarten through high school and aggregated data across all grade levels. It found that in two-parent households, fathers are half as likely to be highly involved than are mothers (NCES, 1998). NCES said nothing

about the reasons for this difference or if fathers felt less welcomed by teachers than mothers did, and it did not address preschool engagement at all. Although authors of many studies (e.g. Gokturk & Dinckal, 2018; Hossain, Martin-Cuellar, & Lee, 2015; Kim & Chin, 2016; Miller, Robinson, Valentine, & Fish, 2016) seem to have assumed that fathers are less engaged in their children's education than are mothers, no study except the NCES brief has provided any evidence to support this assumption. The lack of information about preschool teachers' engagement of fathers represents a gap in the literature that I addressed in this study.

Kim (2018) found that research on parent engagement in the United States often excludes fathers. Panter-Brick et al. (2014) claimed that teachers' engagement of fathers is consistently ignored as an element of parent-teacher collaboration. Baker (2018) noted that the mother-only basis for current knowledge about parent engagement has limited practitioners' ability to fully understand the role of parents in children's educational success. This study closes the gap in the literature by exploring lead teacher perspectives of their interactions with fathers and addressed the gap in practice evident from the parent engagement literature regarding inclusion of fathers.

Problem Statement

The lack of information about lead teachers' engagement of fathers in independently funded preschool classrooms is the problem that was the focus of the study. When fathers are involved early in their children's schooling, this engagement provides long-term social and academic benefits (Bellamy, Thullen, & Hans, 2015; Croft, Schmader & Block, 2015). Fagan, Iglesias, and Kaufman (2016) found that when a father

is present in the preschool environment during the early childhood years, his child's language, vocabulary, conversational skills, and competence in various skills increase. Barker, Iles, and Ramchandani (2017) found that increased paternal sensitivity to children's needs and development is associated with reduced child psychopathology and decreased adverse outcomes. Bellamy et al. (2015) stated that when fathers become involved with their children during early childhood, they are more likely to stay involved with their children as they grow older. Therefore, preschool teachers may find benefits in encouraging engagement of children's fathers in the classroom, because the outcome for the child might be improvement in various developmental domains.

Despite the advantages of father engagement during the preschool years, Kohl and Seay (2015) asserted that fathers traditionally have been neglected in parent engagement research. Brown, Vesely, and Dallman, (2016) found that disregard for fathers in the parent engagement literature suggests an associated gap in practice surrounding teachers' engagement of fathers in children's education. Lau (2016) stated there is a need for a study of teacher engagement with fathers, to determine the amount and quality of interactions provided to fathers by preschool teachers. Therefore, the lack of information about lead teachers' perspectives on engagement of fathers in independently funded preschool classrooms is the problem that was the focus of the study.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative interview-based study was to determine the perspectives of lead teachers with regards to their engagement of fathers of children enrolled in their classrooms in independently funded preschools. Many studies (Baker,

2018; Bellamy et al., 2015; Fagan et al., 2016) have demonstrated the importance of father engagement in children's care, yet there is a need for greater understanding of lead preschool teachers' perspectives regarding father engagement in children's education. Therefore, I interviewed preschool teachers concerning engagement of fathers and their efforts and barriers to encouraging fathers' engagement. I followed a constructivist paradigm (see Kivunja, & Kuyini, 2017), in which meaning is created in real-life contexts and through the lived experiences of participants, as reported in their own words.

Research Questions

Three questions guided this study:

1. What are the perspectives of lead preschool teachers in an independently funded preschool regarding engagement with fathers in their children's education?
2. What efforts do lead preschool teachers report to increase the engagement of fathers in an independently funded preschool?
3. What barriers do lead preschool teachers report to increase the engagement of fathers in an independently funded preschool?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based upon Epstein's six types of parental engagement, which she termed parental involvement (see Epstein et al., 2002). According to Epstein et al. (2002), teacher encouragement of parental engagement includes focus on helping families establish home environments conducive to children's learning, attention to effective two-way communication channels between the school and

the home, and improving the recruitment, training, and scheduling of parent volunteers. When considering parent engagement, Epstein et al. (2002) believed that teachers need to show good communication skills and invite volunteers to become involved in their children's preschool environment. According to Epstein, these six steps will assist teachers in better creating a partnership with parents (including fathers) so that the child can reap all of the benefits from learning in the school environment as well as the home environment.

The work of Epstein (2002) contributed to the framework for my study in that it described teacher-parent interactions intended to develop parent engagement. Epstein's work related to the study's qualitative approach, in that it placed responsibility for parent engagement upon teachers, so that teachers' perspectives regarding father engagement form the central element in encouraging this engagement. According to Creswell (2012), the focus of a qualitative approach lies in an inductive investigative style, grounded in discovering individual meaning reflective of a complex situation. Following Epstein, the perspective of teachers was the appropriate place to launch an inductive investigation of father engagement in preschool education. To that end, the framework provided by Epstein's work is reflected in the research questions of this study, regarding teachers' perspectives of the supports and barriers they have experienced in fulfilling the responsibility Epstein placed on them to engage children's parents.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to determine the perspectives of lead teachers with regards to their engagement of fathers of children enrolled in their

classrooms in independently funded preschools. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), a qualitative design with interviews is especially appropriate when the purpose of a study is to develop an in-depth understanding of experiences and perspectives from many individual participants. Because my purpose was to explore with teachers their perspectives regarding engagement of fathers, this was accomplished through open-ended conversations that happen in an interview (see Saldana, 2016). Saldana (2016) asserted that although a survey can be administered to more people than people can be interviewed, a survey does not permit an in-depth exploration of a problem, such as was the aim of this study. Levitt et al. (2018) confirmed that qualitative research methods rely on data drawn from fewer sources than quantitative, but they are rich in detail and reflect the context of each source. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggested that interviews may constitute the only data collection method in a qualitative study when data saturation is reached through use of many interviewees, representing the possibility of multiple experiences, and with adequate time in each interview to probe for detail and encourage reflection by participants.

In this study, nine preschool teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A). According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), between six and 12 participants is enough for interview-based studies. I included teachers who work for independently funded preschools and I sought teachers from as many different preschools or childcare centers as possible, ideally three teachers from each of three different facilities. Although female teachers greatly outnumber male teachers in preschool settings (Besnard & Letarte, 2017), purposeful sampling was applied to include

as many male teachers as possible, up to half of the total participants, if male teachers volunteered to participate. This step ensured male participation if any male teachers volunteered and helped me understand the perspectives of teachers of both sexes regarding engagement of fathers; however, no male teachers volunteered to participate in this study. I transcribed the interviews and then analyzed the data using thematic analysis following open coding, as described by Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Saldana (2016). After each interview was transcribed, I emailed transcriptions to the participants and ask them to review the transcriptions for accuracy. This form of member checking is advocated by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) and by Ravitch and Carl (2016).

Definitions

Engagement: For the purpose of this study, engagement was used in reference to all manner of participation by a mother or a father in their child's preschool experience (Edwards & Kutaka, 2015), including whole-center scheduled events, such as classroom open houses and parent teacher conferences, single-classroom scheduled opportunities, such as field trips and special skill demonstrations, and informal opportunities, such as talking with teachers before and after school and making decisions about changes in care.

Father: A male representation of the primary caregiver who is functionally and socially engaged in a child's life (Ancell, Bruns, & Chitiyo, 2018). This definition includes men who are not a child's biological father but who fulfill the role of a father in the child's life.

Independently funded preschool: A facility for children aged birth through age five, providing education and custodial care, and receiving funding for operations from

tuition or donations, but not from government sources or tax revenue (Whitebook, McLean, & Austin, 2016).

Involvement: For the purpose of this study, involvement refers to attention to children at home, particularly regarding attention from fathers. This is to distinguish interactions on behalf of children at home from those at school. Epstein (see 2002) used involvement in reference to attention to children at school, so the limitations placed on this term in this study are important to note. In this study, attention to children at school is termed "engagement" (see above).

Lead teacher: The teacher who is responsible for all aspects of a preschool classroom, including curriculum, behavior management, observation and assessment of children's progress, and engagement of parents. This role is distinguished from the assistant teacher position, which carries less authority and agency regarding instructional and outreach processes (Whitebook et al., 2016).

Assumptions

I assumed that the teachers provided truthful and accurate answers to the interview questions based on their personal experiences. I assumed that most of the families of children in these teachers' classrooms included fathers. According to The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018), in 2016 65% of American children under the age of 18 lived in two-parent households, not including those who lived in households with not-married parents. These two assumptions were necessary because the accuracy of teachers' depictions of their family engagement experiences contributed to the reliability

and validity of the results, and because teachers' opportunity to engage fathers and to report on their engagement depended on fathers' presence in children's families.

Scope and Delimitations

The specific aspects I addressed in this study were the perspectives of preschool teachers regarding their engagement of children's fathers in their classrooms and how these teachers communicate with fathers in ways that might encourage or discourage their engagement. This specific focus was chosen because evidence suggested that fathers may not feel welcomed and invited into the classroom, and they are not engaged to the same degree as are mothers. Lin and Magnuson (2018) found that some teachers do not interact with fathers because they assume the father may not be supportive of their child's growth and development due to lack of education or understanding. My study was delimited to perspectives of nine preschool teachers employed in independently funded childcare centers in the Southwestern United States. The study did not include teacher assistants because they are not responsible for formal engagement of parents, such as by conducting parent-teacher conferences. I excluded teachers in childcare centers that were publicly funded, such as in Head Start or school district-supported programs, since these centers may have uniform criteria for family engagement that might have influenced teachers' responses. Results from this study are most likely to be transferable to similar teachers in similar childcare centers but may be informative in wider contexts as well.

Limitations

The data in this study are limited to the responses of preschool teachers working in a single geographic region of the United States; this limitation was necessary to

conduct in-person interviews with participants. In addition, only teachers who were employed in the lead role in their classrooms were invited to participate, since these teachers are charged with developing engagement with parents. The small sample size of nine teachers created another limitation but was necessary to provide in-depth conversations with each teacher about their engagement with fathers, and to create the thick, rich evidence that is typical of qualitative research. By delimiting the participants to teachers working in independently funded preschools, a further limitation was introduced, but this restriction permitted me to focus on teachers whose engagement practices are free from the regulations inherent in tax-supported organizations.

Qualitative design presents inherent limitations because it is essentially subjective (Leung, 2015). The perspectives offered by participants in this study reflect their personal opinions and experiences, which limits transferability to other individuals in different contexts than those included in this study. In addition, the analysis of qualitative data is limited by the point of view of the researcher, and so reflects not what is necessarily true but what is perceived to be true through the eyes of this one individual (Leung, 2015). Qualitative design represents a construction of knowledge from the lived experiences of participants, including the researcher, and so is open to new knowledge that may not be fully anticipated prior to the time of the study (Creswell, 2012). This ability to uncover new ideas from the perspectives of participants is what makes qualitative research a valuable adjunct to other, more empirical methods (Leung, 2015).

Therefore, I recognized that during interviews and in analysis of data, it was important to maintain objectivity and not allow my personal experiences to affect my

research. One strategy I used to maintain dependability and transferability was maintaining a reflective journal throughout the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation, to assist me in separating my own thoughts and opinions from the perspectives expressed by participants. The keeping of a reflective journal is supported by Ravitch and Carl (2016). Another strategy I employed was asking the same questions of every participant, following the advice of Kallio, Pietila, Johnson, and Kangasniemi (2016). In addition, I provided each participant with a transcript of our conversation, so they could confirm that my record of their answers was accurate. Due to these limitations, the transferability of this study's results may be limited.

Significance

The findings from this study may provide a deeper understanding of lead teachers' perspectives about their engagement with fathers in independently funded preschool classrooms. This, in turn, may inform future efforts to improve these teachers' engagement with fathers. Improved engagement of teachers with fathers may be beneficial to children and the fathers themselves (Fabricius & Suh, 2017). Milkie and Denny (2014) found that when fathers became involved in their child's preschool classroom, they not only enjoyed their experiences with their children, but also felt a strong sense of fulfillment. The children may benefit, because children whose fathers are involved have higher levels of social emotional skills, greater cognitive skills, and have fewer behavioral concerns than children whose fathers are not engaged with them during the preschool years (Bellamy et al. 2015). This study may contribute to positive social change by advancing understanding of lead teachers' perspectives on fathers'

engagement in independently funded preschools and how better to facilitate it, thus promoting improved coordination and continuity between home and school.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the problem and purpose of exploring lead teachers' perspectives of their engagement of fathers in independently funded preschool classrooms. I discussed the background of the study, stating specifically the gap in the literature. I presented the research questions and the conceptual framework which comprises Epstein's parent engagement model. I presented the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that may affect this study, and the possible significance my study may have as a contribution to the literature. In Chapter 2, I will more closely review the literature to better understand engagement of fathers in their children's preschool education, and the role of lead teachers in supporting fathers' engagement.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The lack of information about preschool teachers' engagement of fathers compared to mothers is the problem that was the focus of the study. Ferreira et al. (2016) indicated that there is a positive link between the quality of relationships between early caregivers and children's prosocial behavior. Ancell et al. (2018) found that the quality of both father- and teacher-child relationships have a direct association with children's prosocial behavior. According to Ancell et al. a father's engagement in a child's development contributes to positive outcomes, including higher intelligence quotient (IQ) and advanced linguistic and cognitive capacities. However, the literature offers no research in fathers' engagement in their preschool children's education or in preschool teachers' engagement of fathers, although researchers express the need for more information about father engagement. In this chapter, I will present literature search strategies related to key variables and concepts and I will expand on my previous description of the conceptual framework. I will then present a review of the current literature relevant to this study.

Literature Search Strategy

As a guide to obtaining the literature needed for this study, I used the Walden library. I used Zotero as an organizational tool to help me stay focused. Within the Walden Library I used the Thoreau Search Engine. The iterative process included the use of the following search terms: *teachers' perceptions, engagement of fathers and mothers in early childhood, engagement of parents,* and *gender differences in parenting in early childhood*. I found much research focused on father engagement in children's care and in

parent engagement in children's education, but there is a gap in literature as it relates more specifically to father engagement in children's education. Most authors seem to use *parent* to mean mother, since parent participants in recent research are almost always limited to mothers. A weakness for my study was that I found no studies that addressed father engagement in the preschool or noted that any fathers were included at all among parent participants. Many studies (Baker, 2018; Bellamy et al., 2015; Fagan et al., 2016) addressed father engagement in the care of young children, but this research always examined fathers' interactions with children at home, not in the preschool or childcare center. Also, I found no studies that examined teachers' perspectives of father engagement specifically and separately from their perspectives of mother engagement or engagement of parents in general. My search also included terms related to the conceptual framework of this study, including *parent engagement*, *parent involvement*, and *gender differences in parent involvement*.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the work of Epstein (2018) on parental engagement in children's education, which Epstein termed parental involvement. Epstein suggested that adult contributions to a child's school success are not centered on just the teacher or just the parent but constitute a combination of the teacher and the parent working together for the greater success of the child. Epstein listed six steps important for teachers that can be used to create an effective communication with parents: (a) teachers must be willing to visit the child's home, (b) teachers need constant communication with parents, (c) teachers must invite parents to volunteer at

school, (d) teachers need to provide parents with ideas for what they can do at home, (e) teachers need to involve parents in policies and decision making, and (f) teachers should make parents aware of community organizations in which their children might want to be involved. Epstein saw the teacher's role as a guide for parents in supporting their children and Epstein directed teachers to take seriously this role in addition to their role as instructors of children.

Epstein (2018) wrote that most of the responsibility for involvement (or engagement) falls upon the teacher, but that parents are asked to assist the child in making the connection between home and school. According to Epstein, parents should use all the available resources in supporting their children and should allow the teacher to visit them at home to gain a better perspective of the child in the home environment. Epstein and Dauber (1991) believed that if encouraging parent engagement is part of a teacher's everyday teaching practice, parents may increase their interactions not only at school but also with children at home. According to Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001), teachers must communicate to the parents regarding the child's progress in school, the importance of parents' support, and the importance of connectedness between home and school.

Two aspects of Epstein's work presented challenges for my study. First, when Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001) wrote about parents, they always used the term *parents*. Epstein and Van Voorhis never indicated if they imagined their work specifically directed towards fathers or mothers or both. Interpretation of the word parent was left to the discretion of the individual teacher. This is like the approach of previous studies on what

was described as parent engagement (e.g. Ballard, Wieling, & Forgatch, 2018; Baroody, Ferretti, & Larsen, 2018; Cebolla-Boado, Radl, & Salazar, 2017), but in which the participating parents were almost exclusively mothers. Second, Epstein's work was intended for use by public school teachers of elementary school through high school, so that references to a school's parent-teacher organization (PTO) and homework support were included as suggestions for parent engagement (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 1991); however, these parent engagement activities are not germane to the preschool setting. The results of this study may inform Epstein's work by adding to it the elements of father engagement and preschool setting.

The work of Epstein and Van Voorhis (1991) grounded my study by providing descriptions of ways that teachers may encourage engagement of parents; it guided me in determining if these methods are used by teachers in encouraging engagement of fathers. The research questions are aligned because, although Epstein did not differentiate between fathers and mothers in describing actions teachers might take with parents, this study's guiding questions were informed by the framework and may in turn inform it. Within the next few sections I will address the absence of fathers in the literature on parent engagement, and family gender roles from the past to the present, which may have contributed to this absence. Finally, I will introduce barriers that may incline teachers to respond to fathers differently than they do to mothers, and how this might have implications for children's success.

Gender in the Parent Engagement Literature

Men are underrepresented in the research literature regarding parental engagement in preschool classrooms. Studies on parental engagement in U. S. preschools, published since 2016, expressly named mothers as participants in three studies (Berchick, 2016; Kim, Wee, & Kim, 2018; Taylor, 2016). One study, Ancell et al. (2018) expressly named fathers as participants and included only fathers in the participant pool. Eleven studies that purported to examine parent engagement, without designating either mothers or fathers, selected only mothers as participants, instead of including both fathers and mothers (see Ballard et al., 2018; Baroody et al., 2018; Cebolla-Boado et al., 2017; Goldberg, Black, Manley, & Frost, 2017; Manigo & Allison, 2018; McWayne, Foster, & Melzi, 2018; Metin Aslan, 2018; Reynolds et al., 2017; Serrano-Villar, Huang, Calzada, & Calzada, 2017; Silin & Bank Street College of Education, 2018; Thomson & Carlson, 2017). This means that of 15 studies on parent engagement in U.S. preschools published in the 3 years prior to my research, only one included the fathers as participants.

Epstein (2002) confirmed this tendency to use the generic term parents, but to engage only mothers as participants, in research on parent engagement in school settings. Epstein wrote, “there are many fewer studies of the effects of fathers’ engagement vs. mothers’ engagement in preschools and at all grade levels” (Personal communication, November 19, 2018). The fact that mothers represented parents in the research literature, and that fathers are ignored or excluded, demonstrates an underlying gap in the literature. In numerous studies, father engagement referred to father’s involvement in child rearing

at home (see Kim & Hill, 2015; Nix, Bierman, Motamedi, Heinrichs, & Gill, 2018; Rispoli, Hawley, & Clinton, 2018; Saracho, 2017; Vandermaas-Peeler, Westerberg, Fleishman, Sands, & Mischka, 2018; Xu, Farver, & Krieg, 2017), and rarely addressed father engagement in preschool settings (only Ancell et al., 2018, as noted above). Father engagement is also absent in literature on parent engagement in elementary school (Ballard et al., 2018; Baroody et al., 2018; Goldberg et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2018) and middle and high school settings (Reynolds et al., 2017). Because the tendency to overlook fathers as educational partners is clear in the research literature, I will next explore gender roles in American families as an antecedent to this trend.

Family Gender Roles in the American Past

Watson and Amgott-Kwan (1984) described the traditional family as the social unit which intersects two generations and in which the child recognizes that they have two different parents. According to Popenoe (1993), in the 1960s society expected women to be full time homemakers and mothers, while their husbands were expected to be the breadwinners for the family. Poponoe reported that in 1960, 88% of children lived with their parents, and only 9% lived in single parent homes. The family was generally considered to be the union of two natural parents who procreated and were expected to stay together forever (Popenoe, 1993).

Traditionally, marriage was understood as a social obligation designed for economic security and procreation (Popenoe, 1993). Amato (2014) noted that in the 1960s many adults married before they were 20 years old. For many young adults, early launch of marriage and family life were mechanisms by which to find a place where they

belonged (MacNaull, 2015). Divorce was associated with weaker emotional ties between parents and children, especially between children and fathers (Amato, 2014). Therefore, not many marriages ended in divorce.

In 1960, only 19% of married women were working in the labor force, whereas 87% of men were (Popenoe, 1993). In homes where the father was absent, the lack of his income coupled with the mother's reduced employability created the need for the family to rely on public assistance to support the children (Moffitt, 2015). Andringa, Nieuwenhuis, and Van Gerven (2015) discovered that there was a negative association between having young children at home and women working outside the home. In the traditional family, the mother's primary job was to provide care for the home and the children, and the father's role was to support the family financially. Therefore, in the 1960s there was a very clear definition as to what the traditional family was supposed to look like and the specific duties of the father versus the mother.

Family Gender Roles in the American Present

Over the past 50 years, the role of the woman has been modified significantly. In the late 1950s, the average married woman had three or four children (Popenoe, 1993). By 1990, the average married woman only had one or two children (Popenoe, 1993). While women in the 1980s often had their first child by the age of 22, in 2013 the average age for a woman to have a first child was 26 years old (Bichell, 2016). In 1983, several women were asked, "what is the most enjoyable aspect of being a woman?" The most heard answer was "raising a family" (Popenoe, 1993, p. 530). Recently, mothers were asked to describe how they felt being in a working role affected their relationship to

others in the family. They answered that it was empowering, and that they felt a "sense of pride in their ability to transmit their progressive and egalitarian values and beliefs to their children" (Rushing & Sparks, 2017, p. 1262). Women today assume a traditional homemaker role after their first child is born only if they leave the workforce at the birth of that child (Zhou, 2017). This shift toward egalitarian perspectives on family gender roles has changed the role of mothers but also the role of fathers.

In the United States and other economically developed nations, more women in recent years have assumed a breadwinner role, so there has been a shift towards dual income families (Rushing & Sparks, 2017). This shift has results in significant changes to parents' roles at home and an increased adoption by men of roles beyond their traditional responsibilities (Rushing & Sparks, 2017). For example, the increasing number of mothers working full-time outside the home has allowed more fathers to stay home as primary caregivers. When fathers who stay home with small children were first counted by the census in 2003, their numbers totaled 98,000 (Yogman, Garfield, & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2016). By 2007, the population of stay-at-home fathers grew to 159,000, and to 189,000 by 2012. Today, fathers are 3.4% of all stay-at-home parents, and, of these, 32% are married to women who work outside the home full-time (Yogman et al., 2016). According to Chelsey and Flood (2017), patterns of domestic work, as known as "female typed work," today are based less on traditional gender roles and more on which parent works the greater number of hours outside the home or is available when the domestic work needs to be done. Whereas in the American past family gender roles where very clearly identified as to which duties

belonged to which parent, in today's society both parents are more collaborative on who makes money, who stays at home with the children. and who does what domestic upkeep of the home.

According to Macon, Tamis-LeMonda, Cabrera, and McFadden (2017), fathers are more engaged now in their children's lives than fathers were in an earlier era in four ways: caregiving, support for children's cognitive and literacy development, support for children's social development, and by engaging children in play activities. McGill (2014) noted that fathers today are involved in the home as well as in the workplace, so that fathers are more involved with their children's lives than they once were and view their parenting role as being an equal partner with their spouse. Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegard (2015) found that these changes in traditional family gender roles have been more consistent regarding men's involvement with their children than regarding their participation in routine household chores, so that these two-family roles should be studied separately. According to Rushing and Sparks (2017), when present-day fathers take on a more nurturing role, they feel "manlier by providing for their families beyond financial support," "have a sense of pride," and are "happy to shape new masculinity norms" (p. 1263). However, according to Chelsey and Flood (2017), mothers still are more engaged in childcare than are fathers.

In 1988, most Americans agreed that it takes two paychecks to support a family (Popenoe, 1993), and by 1990, 57% of American women were in the workforce (Popenoe, 1993). According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2017), 75% of women worked full time in 2016 and most of the remaining 25% worked part time. In earlier

times, men were the breadwinner and women were the homemaker, but today, in many families, men and women share equal responsibility for both financial support and childcare (Chelsey & Flood, 2017). Modern gender role expectations in families may be reflected in early childhood teacher perspectives on fathers' engagement or may be superseded by traditional family gender roles. Teachers' engagement perspectives for fathers may be reflected in gender roles within the profession itself.

Gender Roles in Early Childhood Education

As American men were deployed in World War II, women went to work. During the summer of 1941, the Children's Bureau convened a conference on Day Care of Children of Working Mothers to confront the shortage of affordable childcare that left increasing numbers of children either unsupervised or relegated to substandard care arrangements, a problem that was expected to worsen as the demand for wartime labor grew (Herbst, 2017). According to Herbst (2017), "stories of children locked in cars adjacent to factories, chained to temporary trailer homes, and left in movie theaters quickly filled newspapers and eventually became the subject of Congressional hearings" (p. 528), and triggered the passage of the Lantham Act, providing full day childcare for children of women working in the war effort. The Committee on Standards and Services for Day Care submitted detailed standards, which the Bureau published in 1942 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018a). However, when World War II ended, so did the Lantham Act and the childcare centers created under its auspices were closed (Michel, 2012). Cahan (1989) noted that at the time a Children's Bureau study was conducted in 1958, 94% of preschool children in the United States were cared for in a

home setting (their own or someone else's) while their mothers worked. One percent of children were left unsupervised and just 4% attended a day care center or nursery school. According to Cahan (1989), the post-war period was marked by a return to traditional family gender roles, in which the father worked outside the home and the mother remained at home to take care of their children. Full-time childcare in the United States prior to the creation of Head Start in 1968 was virtually unknown (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018b), and part-time nursery school education prior to the 1970s enrolled primarily children of stay-at-home mothers who could afford the luxury of a few child-free mornings each week (Cahan, 1989).

Due to fact that the care and nurturing of children was traditionally a female role in the American family, group care was abandoned quickly once men returned from the war (Herbst, 2017). The field of early childhood education followed this traditional role allocation, so that early childhood work was dominated by women in the 1940s and 1950s (Cahan, 1989), and continues to be a female-dominated field today (Jaegar & Jacques, 2017). According to Whitebrook et al. (2016), the American early childhood workforce of over two million caregivers in centers, family childcare facilities, and tax-supported preschools is "almost exclusively female," regardless of setting or professional role (p. 6). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) indicated that 94% of persons employed in "child day care services" are women.

The lack of men in the early childhood profession contributes to a perception that the few men who are employed in the field are anomalous. For example, Bullough (2015) reported that males are sometimes assumed by some parents and teachers to be

homosexual. Tufan (2018) found that female teachers expressed fear of child sexual molestation perpetrated by male preschool teachers. Research conducted in Sweden (Heikkilä & Hellman, 2017), Turkey (Erden, Ozgun, & Ciftci, 2011), and the U.K. (Mistrya & Sood, 2014) all reported that men who choose to work in early childhood do so in defiance of gender norms, face social and occupational marginalization, and are subjected to stereotyping and bias. The conventional gender disparity in the early childhood profession and in attitudes towards caregiving in general, may incline early childhood teachers to be less aware of the role of fathers and less consistent in their efforts to engage fathers, compared to their efforts to engage mothers.

Parent Roles in Early Education

According to Minke, Sheridan, Moorman Kim, Ryoo, and Koziol (2014) parent engagement has an influential role in children's academic success. The stronger the engagement between parents and teachers, the stronger the academic success of the child (Miller et al., 2016). For example, Minke et al. (2014) found that positive parent-teacher relationships are predictive of positive academics, social and behavior outcomes, and enhanced social-emotional functions. McDowall, Taumoepeau, and Schaughency (2017) noted the value teachers ascribe to parent engagement in the classroom, because when the parents are involved it positively influences children's academic success. Also, McDowall found that teachers realized that part of their duty is to engage parents. Gokturk and Dinckal (2018) stated that teachers can aid the child by engaging the parents.

Many methods by which teachers may encourage parent engagement are available in the modern era. Parent- teacher conferences are a traditional way to create a visible partnership to ensure that there is consistency between the home to school environment (Walker & Legg, 2018). Teachers are often able to offer specific strategies that aid the parents in helping the child at home with academic tasks (Ahtola et al., 2016). In addition to face-to-face conferences, teachers and parents can use various methods to ensure that there is a constant level of communication, such as emailing (Dubis & Bernadowski, 2015) or texting (Snell, Hindman, & Wasik (2018). Snell, Hindman, and Wasik (2018) stated that members of the Millennial generation, defined by Dimock (2018) as persons born between 1981 and 1996, which is to say parents ages 22 to 37 in 2018, prefer texting instead of phone calls and email. Texting is viewed by both teachers and families as increasingly practical as a means of communication, in that it allows teachers to text families privately and securely (Snell et al., 2018). Text messages can also be automatically translated to accommodate non-English speaking family members. Also, digital apps, such as HiMama ("HiMama Enters U.S. Market," 2014), are used to connect teachers and parents in real time (Can, 2016; Pacheco, Eaddie, & Plassard, 2018). In many early childhood centers teachers keep portfolios of the children's work to better communicate with parents about how their child has progressed during the year (Knauf, 2017). Can (2016) described daily notebooks compiled for each child and sent home at the end of the day, for parents to read during the evening and make a written response to send back. Can (2016) suggested that such a notebook could also be offered online, much like the HiMama cell phone app.

According to Correria and Marques-Pinto (2016), as the child becomes more mature, it is critical for the parents and the teachers to create a partnership in which the child sees their parent and teacher working together. Teacher-parent relationships can be built using the tools described above and by following the strategies suggested by Epstein (2018) for involving parents. Epstein's six strategies of visiting parents at home, maintaining continuous communication with parents, inviting parents to volunteer at school, providing parents with ideas for what they can do at home, involving parents in policies and decision-making, and making parents aware of community opportunities for their child may be offered to fathers less often than they are to mothers.

Father Engagement in Early Education

The research literature includes little on the topic of father engagement in children's education. As Tully et al. (2017) noted, few fathers are included in interventions focused on children's well-being. What information is available about engagement of fathers in preschool settings is largely inferential. For example, Ranji and Salganicoff (2015) reported that mothers are 10 times more likely to skip work for a sick child than are fathers, and that when a child becomes sick at preschool, the school is more likely to reach the mother than the father. Also, Ranji and Salganicoff found that mothers are more likely to take their child to the doctor compared to the father. Finally, Ranji and Salganicoff (2104) reported that it was usually the mother, not the father, who tried to find the cause and solution for the child's sickness so that the child can safely return to school. In a study of influences on what families eat, Fielding-Singh (2017) found that fathers are not only overlooked, but also are assumed not to care in a proactive way about

the child eating habits or are assumed to have ideas about food that are detrimental to the child. Glynn and Dale (2015) found that mothers are more likely to attend school events than are fathers, which may be both the cause and the effect of educators' perspectives regarding father engagement. The mother may be viewed by early childhood teachers as the default parent, because mothers are more likely to attend events at their child's school than is a child's father, and to create a connection and partnership with the teachers (Baker, 2018).

For example, Ferreira et al. (2016) studied children's level of academic success as an outcome of the engagement of parents in their education, yet their results only described the importance of the engagement of mothers. Ferreira et al. (2016) acknowledged that there is a lack of studies that focus on fathers, even as their own study added to this imbalance. Baker (2018) studied the effect of preschool engagement by non-resident fathers on their child's school achievement. Although, Baker's results indicated that mothers are more involved in their child's academic environment than are fathers, Baker did find that when fathers are present the child attains higher levels in reading and math. Pancsofar, Petroff, and Lewis (2017) indicated that elementary school teachers of children with special needs have tried to make their classrooms more father-friendly, by using technology that it is more engaging for fathers than current teacher-communication tools and by explaining to the fathers the importance of their role in the child's educational life. More generally, Jeynes (2015), in a meta-analysis of 66 studies, found a statistically significant positive effect on student achievement when fathers are engaged in their children's lives, but not necessarily in their education. Similar findings

on the positive effects of father presence in preschool children's lives were found by Eslava, Deaño, Alfonso, Conde, and García-Señorán (2015) and by Varghese and Wachen (2015), but without clear reference to fathers' engagement in educational settings.

Panter-Brisk et al. (2014) indicated seven barriers to engaging the fathers, including social institutional, professional, and operational factors, and considerations of content, resources, and policies. First, Panter-Brisk et al. found that men tend to believe engagement in the child's school is not what fathers do and that the educational establishment believes this also. In addition, Panter-Brisk et al. found that many fathers focus on career concerns more exclusively than do working mothers, so that engagement in the child's school is something they do not make time to do. Panter-Brisk et al. cite traditional and structural elements of childcare practice, such as instructional content, parent resources, and enter policies, that make engagement in a child's education more welcoming to mothers than to fathers. At the same time, Panter-Brisk et al. found that traditional values of motherhood and fatherhood are compatible with men's engagement in their children's lives and education, values that are foundational to the early childhood profession. Like mothers, fathers have multiple avenues by which they affect the well-being of their children and families, both positively and negatively; fathers' actions and opinions matter (Panter-Brisk et al., 2014). The central question of my study addresses exactly that: the perspectives regarding father engagement that preschool teachers bring to their efforts towards parent engagement.

Summary

The information I presented in this chapter included a review of the literature, my literature search strategy, and the conceptual framework for this study. The literature included gender roles from the American past and American present, gender roles in early childhood education, parent roles in early childhood education, and father engagement in early childhood education. I concluded from this review that although the social role of child caregiver, once exclusively female, has adapted in recent years to include men and fathers, attention to fathers as caregivers for children enrolled in preschool is lacking. Research has largely overlooked the quality of father engagement, even while it has established that fathers' attention can positively affect the academic level of the child and promote children's social and emotional development in classroom settings. In this study I attempted to fill this gap in literature and practice by exploring teachers' perspectives about father engagement in the classroom. In Chapter 3, I will introduce the research design, methodology and data analysis plan for my study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to determine the perspectives of preschool teachers with regards to their engagement of fathers in their classrooms. Little research on parent engagement has included fathers in the participant pool or has investigated teachers' support for fathers' engagement. In this chapter, I will present the research design and rationale, and the methodology of the study. The methodology will include the instrumentation, data analysis plan, ethical procedures, and trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

Three questions guided this study:

1. What are the perspectives of lead preschool teachers in an independently funded preschool regarding engagement with fathers in their children's education?
2. What efforts do lead preschool teachers report to increase the engagement of fathers in an independently funded preschool?
3. What barriers do lead preschool teachers report to increase the engagement of fathers in an independently funded preschool?

This was a basic qualitative study, using interviews of teachers. A qualitative design was chosen because my purpose is to explore with teachers their perspectives regarding engagement of fathers, and this can best be accomplished through open-ended conversations that happen in an interview (see Saldana, 2016). Although a questionnaire could have been administered to more people than I could interview, a questionnaire would not permit the in-depth exploration of the problem that was the aim of this study (see Saldana, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained that qualitative research

methods are used to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon through lived experiences that provide straightforward and detailed information about participants' interactions with opportunities and challenges in everyday life. This method was more appropriate than quantitative methods for my study because interviews captured how and why teachers feel the way that they do about engaging fathers in their classrooms. Collecting numerical data would not have allowed me to gain the actual perspectives of the teachers. An interview let me learn of the lived experiences of each person. Therefore, a qualitative research method based on participant interviews was the most appropriate method to determine the perspectives of teachers.

Role of the Researcher

My role in this study was that of an observer, in that I conducted the interviews and analyzed the resulting data from a position removed from the phenomenon under study. I was not a participant in this study, since I am not a classroom teacher and do not have direct engagement with parents of children enrolled in preschool. However, I was an insider, as described by Dwyer and Buckle (2009), because I am a member of the early childhood profession and could relate to the experiences of preschool teachers. My insider status provided me with legitimacy and acceptance from the perspective of interview participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), even though my work is different from the work of classroom teachers.

Currently, I am a director of education at a child development center, and it is part of my job description to include parents in the center. This means that I have a professional interest in the topic of this study and preconceived ideas about parent

engagement, both of which influenced my conduct as researcher. Therefore, I maintained a reflective journal about my thoughts and was attentive to how they influenced my actions and analysis, as recommended by Ravitch and Carl (2016). I did not use my own center as one of my locations and did not use participants who were now or ever were a professional colleague, a subordinate, or personal acquaintance.

Methodology

In this section, I will describe various aspects of my methodology in conducting this study. I will present the process by which participants were invited to contribute to this study, and the tools I used to collect the data. I will also describe how I analyzed the data.

Participant Selection

The population that was used for my study were early childhood lead teachers who worked in an independently-funded childcare center. Lead teachers are responsible for parent engagement in their classrooms, and independently-funded childcare centers are largely unaffected by rules for parent engagement established for tax-supported facilities, including Head Start, which might affect teacher interactions with parents. I conducted research from three different independently-funded childcare centers, from those listed among licensed centers identified by the local childcare referral agency and located no more than 10 miles from my home. There are 10 centers that in my area that match these criteria. Identification of the pool of eligible centers based on these criteria constituted a purposive selection strategy. I visited each of the 10 eligible centers and spoke with the director about my study and requested permission to invite lead teachers

working at the center to participate in the study. If the center director was unavailable or was absent, I left a flier (Appendix A) that explained the study and included a request for a reply. I selected the first three centers whose directors contacted me with agreement. The order in which I visited each center was determined by random selection, whereby I chose each center name from folded slips of paper. This process ensured that the choice of centers and teachers invited to participate was unbiased.

After I identified the participating centers, I invited lead teachers of children ages two to five who worked at each of these centers to participate in my study. Lead teachers have responsibility for communicating with parents and for creating positive teacher-parent interactions, so lead teachers provided me with information needed about interactions with fathers. I selected participants from those lead teachers who taught children ages two to five and excluded those who worked with infants. I placed this criterion on participant selection since mothers of infants, especially nursing mothers, may be more active in their children's care than are fathers, so that greater opportunity for engagement expected from fathers of older preschool children than from fathers of infants. I selected lead teachers with at least 3 years' experience in that role, because that allowed the teachers to speak from a broader range of experience of engaging fathers than a shorter term of experience might have provided.

To locate participants who fulfill these criteria, I invited lead teachers from each of the three participating centers to volunteer to participate in the study by placing a flier in their personal mailbox at work. They were asked to contact me using the phone number or email address listed on the flier. Once they contacted me, I sent or called to

explain the study further and to set up a time and place for the interview. I also offered to email to each participant a copy of the consent form, so they might review it ahead of the interview, and requested their email address if this initial communication took place by phone. l accepted the first three lead teachers from each center who volunteered, resulting in a total of nine teachers to interview. This number is supported by Guest et al. (2006), who indicated that, in studies based on interviews, between six and 12 participants is enough to achieve credibility. The sampling strategy that I implemented was purposive sampling. The sample strategy was justified because the criteria that I identified allowed me to gather data on my research topic from people who were most likely to provide data on that topic.

Instrumentation

As the researcher, I served as the data collection instrument, in that I interviewed participants using a semi structured protocol. According to Kallio et al. (2016), a semi structured interview is appropriate when studying participant perspectives, especially about complex, emotionally charged, or unfamiliar concepts. Given the gap in practice surrounding engagement of fathers, a semi structured interview was appropriate for this study, since participants may have had limited experience with father engagement. I asked interview participants questions (eight main questions and 20 possible follow up questions) based on Epstein's six elements of parent engagement. The first interview question solicited teachers' general perspective on their efforts to engage fathers. The next six interview questions asked about teachers' specific inclusion of fathers in their communications, in volunteer opportunities, in addressing policies and decision making,

in encouraging fathers to work with their children at home, in offering suggestions for community resources, and in visits made to fathers at home; these questions aligned with Epstein's six elements of parent engagement. The final interview question asked about challenges teachers experienced in their efforts to engage fathers and their ideas about how to resolve these challenges. Follow up question examples are included in the interview protocol. I asked follow-up and probing questions as seemed relevant based on teachers' responses. The interview protocol is included in Appendix A.

The interview questions demonstrate content validity in that they are closely linked to the study's framework and are aligned with the research questions. Responses to Interview Question 1, which invited a teacher to describe her engagement of fathers, helped to answer RQ 1, "What are the perspectives of lead preschool teachers in an independently-funded preschool regarding engagement with fathers in their children's education?" RQ2, "What efforts do lead preschool teachers report to increase the engagement of fathers in an independently-funded preschool?" was answered by teachers' responses to Interview Questions 27, each of which asked about one of the six Epstein elements of parental engagement. Responses to interview question 8, regarding challenges teachers experience in increasing fathers' engagement, were used to answer RQ 3, "What barriers do lead preschool teachers report to increase the engagement of fathers in an independently-funded preschool?" These eight interview questions, and the follow-up questions asked to probe for more detail, provided information regarding lead teachers' perspectives of father engagement in independently-funded preschool classrooms.

Procedures of Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The recruitment of participants began by securing the permission from directors of each center to perform my study with their lead teachers who wished to participate; the process of securing director permission was described above. Next, I visited each participating center and posted fliers in the mailboxes of lead teachers of preschool-age children, explaining the study and inviting them to participate. My contact information was included on the flier and interested teachers could call, text, or email me. I followed up with teachers who indicated interest and arranged an appointment for the interview with those who agreed to participate. I also asked for or confirmed these teachers' email address so I could send an email with the informed consent form that participants could review before the interview. Participants chose to sign it and return it to me via email, or I provided them with one to sign at the interview.

The interviews were completed in a conference room in the library of the churches in which each center was located. I began each interview by securing written consent from the participant, including consent to audio tape the session with a tape recorder. I explained the interview process and gave the participant a chance to ask questions. I confirmed that they understood that the interview would run about 45 minutes. I then commenced the interview, following the protocol presented in Appendix A, but also diverging from that as necessary with follow up or probing questions to elicit complete responses. When the interview was completed, I thanked the participant for their time, and I informed them that they should receive a transcript in their email within 48 hours. I informed the participants that they should review the transcript and email me

with any corrections needed, or with confirmation of the accuracy of the transcript. As each interview was completed, I transcribed it. After reviewing the transcription for errors, as suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016), I sent the transcript to each participant, reminded them to contact me with any corrections or additions, and thanked them again for participating in my study.

Data Analysis Plan

In analyzing the data derived from teacher interviews using thematic analysis, I began by applying precoding to the data, following Ravitch and Carl (2016). The purpose of precoding is to become aware of general responses, to note any interview questions that were interpreted differently from what I intended, and to notice my own response to the interview responses and to the patterns that are emerging from the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Saldana (2016), the goal of this initial coding is to remain open to all possible theoretical directions suggested by the data. I read through the transcripts, making notes as I detected repeated ideas, and seeing what issues were raised by participants that seemed important.

Based on this precoding, I continued with coding of the data, noting similar patterns of responses within each interview and between interviews. This process of coding required multiple readings of each interview, until all relevant information had been assigned a code. I used open coding for this process, permitting codes to emerge from the data, as described by Ravich and Carl (2016). When coding was complete, I organized the coded material into categories, using axial coding, by bringing together similarly coded and related passages of data (Saldana, 2016). Once categories were

established, I examined the categories for patterns to determine the themes. Themes included teacher comfort level, teacher-parent communication, limiting center perspectives, limiting teacher perspectives, and father non-attendance. I organized these themes to answer each research question.

Analysis of interviews is open to challenge from various points, which I guarded against in my analysis process. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), I needed to be careful to use complete interview transcripts as the basis for my analysis, not truncated versions. I also needed to avoid creating themes from the interview questions or the research questions, instead of from the data, since the data might reveal unanticipated results. In addition, according to Braun and Clarke, I needed to take care to create themes that were mutually exclusive and unambiguous. Finally, my data, as analyzed, needed to be aligned to the study's problem, purpose, and framework, and needed to reflect the actual information provided by participants, and not stretched or manipulated to fit. To guard against these pitfalls, I shared my data and my data analysis with members of my committee, for their confirmation or amendment.

Trustworthiness

According to Leung (2015), qualitative research quality is determined by justification for the study at the outset, by applying rigorous procedures and using a sample that is representative of the population, by interpreting the data with rigor, and by applying reflexivity and ensuring transferability. Given that I have already described the basis for this study and processes of participant selection and instrumentation, in this section I will respond to the need to establish credibility, transferability, dependability,

and confirmability. Ravitch and Carl (2016) mentioned that the terms validity and trustworthiness are commonly used and evoke the assurance of credibility in qualitative research. Establishment of trustworthiness requires the researcher to consider the all the complexities that might present themselves within the study and to explain them in detail (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Validity refers to the extent to which the instrument being implemented assists the researcher in obtaining the information needed (Lambert, 2012), what Leung calls "appropriateness" (Leung, 2015, p. 3). More specifically, internal validity allows the researcher to draw meaningful inferences from instruments that measure what is intended, whereas, external validity, or transferability, entitles that qualitative research is bound to contextuality (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, my selection of lead teachers in independently funded preschools supported the validity of the results, since these teachers have responsibility for engaging parents and might be unencumbered in these efforts by externally mandated engagement requirements that might apply to publicly supported centers. My efforts to elicit from these teachers' descriptions of their lived experiences regarding father engagement were supported by the interview questions and were aligned with the problem, purpose, and framework of this study.

Credibility, another key aspect by which to determine the trustworthiness of a study, is similar to validity but is determined by specific methods used to confirm data after it has been gathered (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In my study, there was a two-part process of member checking implemented. In this first part, I returned the transcripts to the participants for a transcript review. In the second part, I sent the findings to the

participant for them to check the accuracy of their data. Member-checking is a way to consult the participants as a method used to validate their findings (Saldana, 2016). In addition, I ensured credibility by providing rich, thick descriptions of participants' responses in my reporting of the results and by describing discrepant cases and unexpected responses, as indicated by Ravitch and Carl (2016).

Transferability refers to evidence that the research is applicable to other contexts, which, according to Leung (2015), is not a key outcome expected of qualitative studies. Leung suggested that transferability is supported by providing clear descriptions of the population, sample, setting, and methods used in a study, so that others may themselves determine the generalizability of the findings to their own contexts. Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that the goal of qualitative research is not to reveal truths to be applied in multiple situations, but to develop descriptive conclusions that are relevant to the context of the study. In this study, I have endeavored to present clear information about the study in support of transferability to other contexts.

Dependability refers to the stability of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My study met dependability because I had a reasonable argument for collecting data, my data collection was conducted in an appropriate manner, and the problem, purpose, framework, and research questions in this study were aligned with the questions I asked in the interviews. The participants I interviewed in this study had the authority to describe information necessary to inform this research and to contribute to the literature on father engagement. Dependability was fulfilled because the study procedures for collecting data

and reporting findings were accurately described, and I drew logical conclusions based only on the study results.

Finally, confirmability relies on confidence that during the interviews and data analysis, I conducted myself without bias. This was supported by establishing credibility of the study through audio taping of each interview and inviting participants to confirm the accuracy of my transcriptions. In addition, I maintained a reflective journal during the interview and data analysis process, as described by Ravitch and Carl (2016). During the interview, self-reflection on how I have presented myself with participants, how well I listened during the interviews, and to what extent I projected openness, deliberateness, and attention, conducted as an ongoing process during and between interviews, contributed to reflexivity and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The process of self-reflection continued through the data analysis process, during which I attended to the data even when these conflicted with my expectations and personal opinions, and these considerations were included in the reflective journal I kept. All of these processes contributed to the trustworthiness of this study, as demonstrated by establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

I secured approval from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to beginning my research; my approval number is 03-20-19-0433995. I did not need to obtain permission from the directors at each research site, but signed consent was needed from each teacher participant. I emailed the consent form, using the email address secured during the initial contact with each participant, in advance of each scheduled

interview, so participants might review it. The participant could then bring the signed consent form with them to the interview or sign a consent form I provided before the interview began. Participants were informed that if at any point the participant wished to exit the study, the interview would stop, and the participant would be thanked for their time.

The information obtained from the participants will be kept confidential. Only my dissertation committee and I had access to the raw data relevant to the study. Data will be kept in a locked file drawer and in a password-protected digital file on my laptop. I will keep the data for five years following the completion of the study, as required, and then I will shred print files and erase digital documents.

Summary

In this chapter I presented the research design and methodology for my study. I explained my role and the biases I brought to this work, as well as steps I took to preserve the trustworthiness and ethical fitness of this study. I described how participants were selected and interviewed, and my data analysis plan. I described procedures I followed to protect participants. The results of this study will be presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this a basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of the lead teachers regarding their engagement with fathers of children enrolled in their classroom in independently funded preschools. In this study, the following three research questions guided the study:

1. What are the perspectives of lead teachers in an independently funded preschool regarding engagement of fathers in their child's education?
2. What efforts do lead preschool teachers report to increase the engagement of fathers in independently funded preschools?
3. What barriers do lead teachers report to increase the engagement of fathers in an independently funded preschool?

In this chapter, I will describe the setting of the study, my data collection and analysis processes, and the results of the study.

Setting

Ten of the participants were Caucasian females, and there was one African American female. There were no male teachers employed at either of the centers where I distributed my fliers. All the teachers who I interviewed held the role of lead teacher, or co teacher, and shared the same responsibilities for connecting with parents. They worked with children between 3 and 5 years old. No unplanned occurrences affected the interpretation of the study results.

Data Collection

I collected data from 11 participants. I interviewed everyone who contacted me for my study, and there was no one who contacted me who decided not to be involved with my study. When each teacher entered the interview room, I asked each participant whether they were lead teachers of children 3- to 5-years old and had at least three years' experience in this role. Participants confirmed their eligibility based on the selection criteria. I then explained the study to ensure they had no questions and then began the interview. Each participant was interview once and the interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each. I recorded the interviews using my laptop and using a tape recorder. I used both methods because during the very first interview the tape recorder did not record, but my laptop to ensure that I captured the entire interview. On a few occasions, I whispered to the participant to speak just a tad bit louder, and each interview was recorded. It took me 2 weeks to complete my interviews.

After I completed the first couple of interviews, I transcribed the interviews from the recordings. Originally, I listened to the recorder and wrote what I heard on paper, then later typed it. This was a lengthy process, so I typed what I heard as I listened to the recorder. The first method was more suitable for me, so I returned to scribing the interviews to ensure that I captured everything that was said. I underestimated the length of time that it would take to transcribe the data.

I emailed the transcripts to each participant after I had transcribed all the interviews, asking them to ensure that I had captured their thoughts accurately, and to ask them to change anything that needed to be altered or add anything that they would like to

include. There were three participants who asked me to amend their transcript. Participant D wanted to stress that a girl who she had said experienced separation anxiety did not react this way on days when the child and her father shared breakfast time, once a week at the center. Participant E informed me that I had misspelled a word, which I immediately corrected and thanked her for noticing. Finally, Participant C made some deletions and additions to her transcript. She talked about a program called Do Dads, and during the interview I did not understand that concept fully. In her response to the transcript, Participant C explained Do Dads as a program of Saturday workdays at the center, when fathers (and mothers) helped with various odd jobs around the school. I adjusted the transcript to reflect this change. Also, Participant C mentioned that their center's application process includes information about where the parents work. Participant C stated that in the event of child illness, she calls the parent who works the closest to the center to come and pick up the child. Participant K stated,

> On the sign-in sheet it asks who is picking up the child that day. I used that as my go to method as to who to contact for that day, because if mom is written down to pick up [and] then if the child is sick, I just go ahead and call mom earlier.

Finally, there was a part where Participant C used profanity, but asked me to remove that from the transcript.

Data Analysis

Once the transcription and participant reviews were complete, I printed each interview so I could review it line by line. The transcripts of the participants were coded

in the order in which I had I completed the interviews; I coded each one with a letter of the alphabet beginning with the letter A. I highlighted similar phrases and coded them by ~~a~~ repeated words or phrases. I then grouped these codes into categories. I discovered 16 categories. The categories included: *appropriate role for fathers, call vs. text, community connection, easy vs. difficult, email vs handwritten notes, face to face vs. website, gender roles, grandma compared to grandpa, implied/explicit rules, invitations, level of engagement, mom compared to dad, nature of volunteering, phone, trust/distrust,* and *work hours.* Then I cut the categorized words and phrases into individual strips, so I could visually arrange the data. From this, I created five themes, including *teacher comfort level, teacher-parent communication, limiting teacher perspectives, limiting center perspectives,* and *father nonattendance.* Finally, I took a photograph of my completed product to preserve the analysis at this juncture. Table 1 includes the categories and themes associated with the research questions.

Table 1
Categories and Themes Associated with Research Questions

Categories	Themes	Research question
mom compared to dad, easy vs. difficult, grandma compared to grandpa, invitations	Teacher comfort level	RQ 1
phone, call vs text, email vs handwritten notes, face to face vs website	Teacher-parent communication	RQ 2
implied/explicit rules, community connection	Limiting center perspectives	RQ 3
nature of volunteering, appropriate role for fathers, trust/distrust	Limiting teacher perspectives	RQ 3
level of engagement, work hours, gender roles	Father non-attendance	RQ 3

One of the things that captured my attention during the process of organizing the data was the diversity of perspectives and practices regarding fathers, many of which were in opposition to each other. For example, Participant D mentioned that the fathers enjoy rocking the babies at her school. She explained that they were a breastfeeding friendly environment, but they do not want to exclude the fathers, so their school invites fathers to come and rock the babies. In contrast, Participant A said that she is very protective when fathers are around, always making sure that the blinds are open, and the door can be seen through. Participant K said that they implement the Reggio Emilia approach at their school, which means that children are expected to construct their own learning without much assistance from adults. Therefore, she prefers the children to perform the task first, and if help is needed, the children will ask for her help later. She explained then that she did prevent a father from engaging with his child, and with all the children in his child's class, simply because she was trying to align her practice with the curriculum. Later, in the interview, she realized that the father only wanted to be engaged, and maybe she could have just let him come and watch or work alongside the children.

Results

In this section, I will present the results for each research question, including data to support my findings. I will also discuss any discrepant or nonconforming cases in more detail. The purpose of this qualitative interview-based study was to determine the perspectives of the lead teachers regarding their engagement with fathers of children

enrolled in their classrooms in independently funded preschools. I will present their responses as they related to each research question.

Research Question 1 Results

RQ1 asked, "What are the perspectives of lead teachers in an independently-funded preschool regarding the engagement of fathers in their child's education?" The theme that was associated with this research question described the comfort level of teachers with the parents and other caregivers involved in the child's life. The categories included the child's mother compared to father, grandma compared to grandpa, ease or difficulty in engaging with specific adults, and teachers' willingness to invite other adults into the classroom.

Nine of the 11 participants that said they feel comfortable around fathers, but then countered that assertion with a demonstration of discomfort. For example, Participant F stated,

> It is easier for me to speak to moms because I can relate to a mom as a woman. I don't really understand what goes on in the life of a father. I try to speak to them when they enter the classroom and tell them about their child's day, but they just brush me off and do not respond.

Participant A said,

> I have no problem speaking to dads and my comfort level with them is "normal," but then later she stated, "I am very protective when speaking to the dads. I make sure that the blinds are up and that you can always see through the glass on the doors, just for protection.

Participant H mentioned, “most of the time fathers are involved at the school because - think about it - it is their child’s first time in a school environment, so they ask questions and want to be involved.” However, Participant F said, “I am not comfortable with fathers in my classroom because they do not speak to me when they enter the room, only to their child,” and stated, “I do not invite the fathers because I do not know what to say, because when I do speak to them, the fathers do not speak back to me.” Through my study, I discovered that teachers who were more comfortable with fathers were more likely to communicate with a father and invite him into the classroom.

There were several teachers who said they invite fathers to help with tasks around the school because they seem to enjoy that much more than they do volunteering in the classroom. For example, Participant B said, “fathers love repair work, so they will come to build or do maintenance work at the school, but when it comes to the actual volunteer work in the classroom, they leave that to the moms.” Participant E said, “we really need fathers to come and perform projects around the school, like painting and repairing the playground. There are several fathers that have signed up to share their time with us on Saturdays to better the school.” Participant G said, “when we are working on projects at school the fathers will come and support.” Participant H added, “we consider the special skills that the fathers have. For example, there was a father who works at the local tree company that built the garden box on the playground, and the dad who is a car salesman is selling our school van for us.” Participant I said, “we use the talents, like there is a firefighter that comes to the school and allows the children to tour the fire truck.” Participant G also stated, “there is a father that is struggling with an addiction, whereas

he will not enter the classroom, he comes to the school to check on his child frequently to see how she is doing." Participant D said that they are a breastfeeding-friendly school, but she knows that the fathers cannot breastfeed the babies, so an in effort to not exclude them, fathers are invited to come and rock the babies, and three fathers come on a regular basis.

The perspectives of these lead teachers in an independently-funded preschool regarding the engagement of fathers in their child's education was that when the teachers feel comfortable enough to invite the father into the classroom, some fathers will interact with not only their child but with other children as well. Also, teachers felt it is important to discover the fathers' interests and talents and allow them to apply them either in the classroom or around the building, doing repairs or maintenance for the school. However, some teachers were uncomfortable about communicating with fathers, and seemed to distrust them. Therefore, the results for RQ1 were mixed; some teachers welcomed fathers, and some were uncomfortable with fathers around.

Research Question 2 Results

RQ2 asked, "What efforts do lead teachers report to increase the engagement of fathers in independently-funded preschools?" The theme associated with this research question included the communication methods used by both the teacher and parents. The categories included contact using the phone, preferences for calling compared to texting, email compared to handwritten notes, and face to face communication compared to communicating through the center website.

Participant H said, “I use sign-up sheets, but prefer to communicate mostly in person.” Participant E stated, “I do not feel comfortable giving the parents my contact information, so if I leave for the day without getting to see them face to face, I will leave a note to ensure that I contacted them.” Participant I admitted, “the tradition[alist] in me always calls mom first, even if dad is not busy.” Participant A said, “a dad asked me to please include him in the text messages that I send mom as he is just as concerned as she is, so that is what I have decided to do. I did not realize that mom was forwarding all of the text messages to dad.”

Communication with fathers sometimes took the form of explicit expectations of fathers or advice for them. When asked about including father in activities with their children at home, Participant I said, “Parent teacher conferences are critical for the parents to learn what they should be working with the child on at home.” Participant D, “Reading, reading, reading. Reading is important.” Participant C said, “I send books home for the dads to read with their children before bed.” According to Participant F, “spending time with their child is as simple as playing video games together, watching a movie together or cuddling on the couch and falling asleep together.” Participant H said,

> One of the dads is in the National Guard, and he had to leave for 3 weeks. When he returned, he realized that the bond with his daughter was not as strong as when he left. He asked me what he should do, and I told him to block out some time and spend it with her doing whatever she wanted to do.

Participant A said, “the most important factor is that the child sees that mom and dad know how to work together as a team at home.” Teachers used several different methods

to communicate with the parents, such as text messages, phone calls, emails and through websites; However, some teachers are more likely to communicate with mothers over the fathers.

At one of the schools, teachers conducted home visits. Participant G stated, "home visits are used as a fact-finding mission to see how the members of the family interact with each other and the child." Participant I mentioned, "we are fortunate at our school because the parents are still together in most cases, because the kids are still young." Participant H said, "It is a 50/50 chance when I go to home visits. Sometimes the fathers are there, and sometimes they are not. Sometimes they ask questions and participate and other times they do not." Finally, Participant E stated, "although my school does not do the home visits, I wish that they did because I would love to see what methods the parents use to discipline their child in their environment." Teachers generally agreed that when the father is present for a home visit, they can see how the father engages over teacher concerns for their child, and teachers feel supported when they know the father will be a participant in the child's education.

In general, teachers expressed expectations for fathers' engagement with their children but imagined this happening at home, not in their classrooms. They emphasized fathers' role in maintaining a strong relationship with their children's mother, but also recognized the importance of fathers' relationship with their children.

Research Question 3 Results

Research question 3 asked, "What barriers do lead teachers report to increase the engagement of fathers in an independently funded preschool?" Three themes were

associated with this research question, including limiting center perspectives, limiting teacher perspectives, and father non-attendance. The categories included appropriate role for fathers, community connections, gender roles, implied/explicit rules, level of engagement, nature of volunteering, trust/distrust, and work hours.

The first theme applied to this research question describes center perspectives that had the effect of limiting teacher engagement of fathers. It was not possible to determine if these perspectives reflected center policies or directives for teachers, since the perspectives were described as implied or as part of the center culture. For example, Participant C said, "that if the school offered events that did not conflict with the fathers' work schedule then the fathers would be more supportive," implicating center scheduling as a limitation on father engagement.

The effect of limiting center perspectives on teachers' efforts to engage fathers was most evident regarding informing fathers of events in the wider community. Although Epstein (2002) recommended teachers encourage families to take advantage of child-focused community activities, most teachers in this study reported that they did not inform parents of community events, but only informed them of events sponsored by the church in which the school is located. Participant C stated, "I only inform my parents of the events that are occurring at the church." Participant F said, "I only pass out the fliers for church related events." Participant G mentioned, "we don't tie in with the community." Participant J said, "if they don't ask, I don't tell." Participant K admitted, "I don't tell the parents about the events within the community." All these childcare centers were housed in a church, sponsored by the church, and included in the mission of the

church. The method that I used for selecting the schools did not exclude faith-based centers, but the connection of the selected centers to faith-based organizations and the effect that may have had on participants' perspectives was unexpected. Some teachers reported making specific suggestions of events to parents that children might enjoy, like Participant E, who said, " I have recommended my parents to go to the sandbox, the public library for story time, and the beach, just simply through casual conversation." However, others were less comfortable, like Participant J, who mentioned, "the parents are more aware of the area than I am because I have only lived her in this area for a year." Some teachers simply did not think there were any events that were appropriate for young children. Participant D said, "there is something to do almost every weekend, but most are not kid friendly." Participant C agreed that she did not often recommend community activities to fathers, adding, "however, if there is something going on at the church [in which the center is housed], we always pass out fliers for church related activities."

The second theme applied to this research question about barriers to engaging fathers described limiting perspectives of the teachers. Most teachers did not engage with fathers, saying, "I have no contacts for dad in my phone, only for mom," as Participant B said. Participant C said, "I only text the moms." Participant F admitted, "it is difficult to contact the dads." Participant C said, "I only contact mom in all cases." Participant J said, "this is all new to me, relocating from another state where the fathers were not as involved as they are now, but I am willing to learn how to better communicate with the fathers."

Teachers presumed that fathers should or could fill only a limited role in the classroom. Participant G stated, “at my school in the application process there is a portion that ask the parents what talents they have, we use this method to find out how we can get the fathers more involved in the school.” Participant I said, “if I had a father in my classroom that knew how to play the guitar, I would invite him into the classroom because the children love music.” As mentioned previously, participants assumed that “fathers love repair work,” “we really need fathers [for] “painting and repairing the playground,” and that they “consider the special skills that the fathers have,” skills that are limited, apparently, to maintenance or career-related presentations. The limited perspective of many teachers regarding fathers was concluded by Participant B, who declared, “when it comes to the actual volunteer work in the classroom, they leave that to the moms.”

Teachers’ limited perspective sometimes was countered by fathers’ desire to be included. For example, Participant E said,

> there is a father that repeatedly asked to come and read a book to the class, I was trying to wait for a special event or the right time, but finally I just said come in whenever, and he read that book with so much enthusiasm and the children were well entertained. Later, the father said that he reads that book to his children at home.

Participant D said she welcomes fathers who wish to rock the babies, but Participant A said that she is very protective when fathers are around, making certain they are never alone with a child. Participant K realized only in the course of the interview that she had

prohibited a father who wanted to engage with children in the classroom, and that her assumption that he would interfere with the class was mistaken.

Teachers' limiting perspective was evident in assumptions they made about fathers and their interest in their children's learning. For example, Participant A said, "no matter how many times fathers are asked, it is the nature of the beast and they will come up with excuses as to why they can't participate." Participant K said, "I have a challenge of making parents understand that what we do on a preschool level is more than just running and playing and things being cute. I have to actually explain this more to the dads than the moms." These perceptions may be based in fact, but no teacher described a father as actually voicing this point of view, or of refusing multiple invitations to participate. In fact, they described fathers as very interested in being engaged, but meeting with resistance for their child's teacher.

The third theme applied to this research question was the notion of father non-attendance, both as something "in the nature of the beast," and as a result of fathers' need to fulfill a breadwinner role. Participant B said, "I am worried about the fathers missing time from work, so I usually don't generally invite them to several events." Participants B, C, E, F, H, and J remarked that fathers must work, and they cannot leave their jobs to come to visit their child at school. Participant B said, "most fathers would do more, but they get caught up being the breadwinner, and that it is very expensive to live in this world." Participant E said, "if fathers were allowed to adjust their work schedule, they would be more involved." Participant F suggested that "fathers need to talk to their supervisor and ask if they can make some of their child's events, because these are the

years you simply cannot get back." Participant H said, "the fathers' work schedules are usually around 7:45 to 5:30 and this is the same time as the operational hours for the school." Participant J stated, "the biggest problem that fathers have is they work a lot, because they have to work and bring home the money for their family." Results for research question three suggest that father engagement is thwarted by the limiting perspectives of the child care centers' faculty and staff that restricted teacher actions. Father engagement is further impaired by the limiting perspectives of child care teachers, who are uncomfortable around fathers and who wish to keep them outdoors or restricted to Saturdays, so they will not be near any children. Finally, fathers may have their own reasons for being unengaged, which these teachers assumed to be related to traditional gender roles, to demanding work responsibilities, or to disinterest.

Although these teachers believed that fathers are not engaged because of disinterest or work demands, they did not seem to notice the effect their own discomfort in talking with fathers might have on fathers' nonattendance, or the limited boundaries within which they found father engagement acceptable. Participant G said, "I think that stereotypically there is a belief system that the mother handles the child's education, and the fathers do not have to be involved," a view validated by Participant A, who stated, "I do find that dads will allow moms to take care of all of the educational resources. Moms have to figure it out and do all of the research, but the fathers are usually on board once that is done." However, Participant I said, "the teachers must do more to involve the fathers than they do now."

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility is achieved in part by showing that selected participants are informed about the research concerns and can be expected to be knowledgeable about the research topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In my study, I interviewed 11 lead teachers who had at least three years of professional experience, and offered rich, thick descriptions from their experiences with families and with father engagement. Triangulation was supported by selecting participants from three different childcare centers. I analyzed data by individual teacher and by center. Findings for each center were corroborated to ensure the results were credible. Accuracy of the data was confirmed through inviting participants to check their transcripts for accuracy and providing participants with a summary of their findings. In fact, three participants did ask me to amend the transcript.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents. The researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through thick description (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Thick description is explained as describing not just the behavior and experiences, but their context as well, so that the behavior and experiences become meaningful to an outsider. I have endeavored in this chapter to describe participants' responses and the context of those responses fully, so a reader might assess the transferability of these results to other situations.

Dependability

Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Dependability includes describing the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of the findings. To ensure dependability I kept careful records of my research path throughout the study. I used audio recording from my tape recorder, and my laptop, as well as field notes to be certain of capturing all the data accurately. Also, I kept a reflective journal to record my thinking as the study progressed and to limit interference in my data transcription and analysis of any personal bias.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination, but clearly derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Since each participant brings their own unique perspective to the study, confirmability considers whether their perspective can be corroborated. The findings are related to the five themes and associated to the three research questions. I contributed reflexiveness through my attentiveness, openness to receive the information and my appearance.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I presented the results from this study. I described the setting in detail, the data collection process, and my process of data analysis. Comfort level of the

teachers, teacher-parent preferred communication methods, limiting center perspectives, limiting teacher perspectives, and father non-attendance emerged as themes from the data. I presented results of the three research questions, demonstrating that most of these teachers were uncomfortable with engaging fathers than they were in engaging mothers, were limited in their efforts to engage fathers more fully, and were accepting of barriers, such as center policies regarding outside events, that constrained their engagement with fathers. Evidence of the trustworthiness of these findings was explained with regards to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. Chapter 5 will include the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications and conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative interview-based study was to determine the perspectives of lead teachers regarding their engagement of fathers of children enrolled in their classroom in independently funded preschools. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), a qualitative design with interviews is especially appropriate when the purpose of the study is to develop an in depth understanding of experiences and perspectives from mostly individual participants. This study was relevant and needed because there was little literature on teachers' perspectives of father engagement in the preschool environment.

The themes that emerged from the data in this study were presented in Chapter 4. The first theme considered the comfort level of the teacher in a father's presence. For example, Participant F said she was not comfortable with fathers in her classroom because they do not speak to her when they enter the room, but only speak to their child. The second theme was the communication method implemented from teachers to engage the fathers. Participant I admitted that tradition leads her to call a child's mother first, even if she knows the child's father is not busy. Participant A reported that a father asked her to include him in the text messages that she sends to his wife, a communication step that had not occurred to Participant A to take. The third theme described the center perspectives that limited teachers' actions or willingness to engage fathers. For example, Participant C stated specifically she only informs her parents of the events that are occurring at the church in which the school is located. The fourth theme described teachers' perspectives about fathers and factors that limit their engagement with the

fathers. One comment that illustrated this theme is from Participant B, who claimed that fathers love to perform repair work and so will do maintenance work at the school, but that fathers leave volunteering in the classroom to mothers. The fifth theme described teachers' observation that fathers simply are not engaged. Teachers attributed this to fathers' long and inflexible work hours, and to traditional gender roles.

Interpretation of Findings

The themes of this study indicated that teachers made little or no effort to effectively engage in communicate with fathers, for several reasons. First, teachers expressed lack of comfort in talking with fathers, reporting that they were much more comfortable talking with mothers, or even texting mothers, than they were talking or texting fathers. Second, teachers assumed that the challenges of the fathers' work responsibilities precluded them from being involved in their children's education and even from being interested in it, but did not make the same assumptions for mothers, although most mothers also worked outside the home. Third, teachers assumed that fathers' voluntary engagement in the classroom environment should or could only conform to traditionally masculine activities of building, repairing, and yard maintenance, and were bewildered when fathers expressed an interest in playing with children in the classroom or reading aloud to them. This assumption of masculine disinterest in children caused teachers to distrust fathers who did express interest; one teacher described steps she took to make certain fathers were never out of sight with a child, as if the father might assault an infant, a finding similar to that of Fielding-Singh (2017).

These findings of limited engagement of fathers are consistent with the literature, which has largely ignored men's parental engagement in education (Ballard, Wieling, & Forgatch, 2018; Baroody, Ferretti, & Larsen, 2018; Cebolla-Boado, Radl, & Salazar, 2017; Epstein & Van Voorhis. 2001). At the same time, teachers shared that fathers expressed interest in classroom engagement are consistent with the literature, which described greater father engagement today in young children's activities and development than was evident in the past (Goldscheider et al., 2015; Macon et al., 2017; Rushing & Sparks, 2017). To summarize, the results of this study are consistent with the literature, which indicated both interest in parental engagement by men, and educators' conformity to traditional gender roles.

One unexpected finding of the study was that teachers did not recommend community events to fathers or to mothers. Although Epstein (2018) suggested that one aspect of teachers' mandate to encourage parent engagement is to apprise parents of community activities they might enjoy with their children, teachers who participated in this study seemed unaware of community activities or were discouraged by their employer from informing parents of them. This finding suggests that the childcare centers from which participants were selected may form a distinct subset of childcare centers generally, or that preschool teachers in general are unaware of or rejecting of activities beyond their own work settings. The possibly insular nature of childcare centers or of preschool teachers, creating what might be resistance to influences outside the center "family," suggests a reason why fathers were treated as outsiders by the participants in this study. The rejection of community-based activities or ignorance of them may be an

indication of pervasive limitations of who or what is included in childcare practice, which may contribution to exclusion of fathers as full partners.

McDowall et al. (2017) noted the value teachers ascribe to parent engagement in the classroom because when the parents are involved it positively influences children's academic success. Also, McDowall found that teachers realized that part of their duty is to engage parents. However, findings in this study indicate that preschool teachers may conflate the term *parents* with *mothers* and exclude fathers. Despite the lack of attention these teachers offered to fathers, fathers appeared to be persistent in their efforts to be engaged. This suggests that fathers' opinions about parent engagement would be a valuable addition in a future study, and that the opinions of male preschool teachers regarding father engagement might also contribute to the understanding provided by this study's results.

Limitations of the Study

There were two specific limitations that affected the results of this study. The first limitation was that no male teachers volunteered as participants or were employed by any of the centers from which participants were selected. Male teachers might have felt more comfortable with fathers' presence in the classroom and might have been more open to engaging fathers than were the teachers in this study. Because no men participated in the interviews, the results of this study provide a limited picture of teachers' perspectives of father engagement.

The second limitation was that all the teachers who agreed to participate worked in faith-based centers, a specific subset of independently-funded childcare centers. It was

not the purpose of this study to examine faith-based centers in particular, and the participation of only teachers from faith-based centers may have affected the results of this study.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further research are grounded on the strengths and limitations of this study. I recommend that this study be replicated in independently-funded centers in the same geographic area but that are not faith-based to better understand teachers' opinions generally of fathers' engagement in preschool classrooms. It may be that all teachers hold traditional views of family gender roles. This is, in fact, apparent in the literature on parent engagement. However, a replication of this study in secular settings would help to determine the strength of the findings I gathered and may add teacher perspectives missing from the present study.

Also, I suggest that this study be replicated in centers where there are both male and female teachers. Attitudes towards father engagement may be different in centers where men are part of the staff compared to centers where no men are employed. The employment of men in childcare may also be a factor of geographic region or the funding structure of a childcare center. This could reveal additional information about the ways and locations in which fathers are included or limited in parent engagement activities.

Finally, I recommend that a study be conducted that solicits the opinions of fathers regarding engagement in preschool classrooms. Evidence gathered in this study suggested that fathers were interested, even persistent, in being involved in their children's classrooms in ways teachers did not expect. The experience of men seeking

validation of their parenting role in the context of the early childhood classroom would contribute to the literature on parent engagement.

Implications

Results of this study indicated that teachers and directors who work in faith-based centers may need direction in how to communicate with the fathers, welcome fathers, and appreciate father in whatever ways they wish to be included. Because there may be resistance to accepting fathers, given the discomfort in working with fathers this study revealed, such training might be mandatory as part of educators' annual professional development requirement for teachers and directors, which can be obtained at annual conferences offered through the state. Faith-based centers are licensed by the state and teachers must fulfill annual training hours, just as must teachers in secular centers. State regulators cannot require teachers in faith-based centers more specific training than they require of other teachers; therefore, training in father engagement only of faith-based center teachers cannot be required. Such training should be freely available to all childcare teachers to raise awareness of how teachers can effectively engage fathers in the classroom.

One methodological implication of this study concerns my method for gaining participants. In the study, only directors of faith-based centers accepted my invitation to participate with their teachers. This outcome may have affected the study results, since data were generated from teachers employed by a subset of all independently-funded childcare centers, instead of from a representative sample. For this reason, in a future study, I will be more aware of the mission and funding structure of centers at which

prospective participants work, since mission and funding may affect which teachers are hired, the center policies that guide teacher and parent interactions, and management's underlying philosophy regarding issues like gender roles.

My search of the literature revealed that fathers are ignored in parent engagement research. An opportunity exists to expand the theoretical foundation of parent engagement by explicitly including fathers and by noticing when fathers are omitted or are absent from research. If, as research has demonstrated (Baker, 2018; Panter-Brisk et al., 2014), fathers have powerful influence over children's academic success, then their absence in educators' thinking about parent engagement is puzzling and something to be remedied. Therefore, it is critical that data are gathered from teachers on how fathers are present in the classroom, and what barriers teachers experience or anticipate in helping more fathers be engaged. A large-scale survey of early childhood teachers might be a mechanism by which to launch a research effort focused on increasing teachers' attention to father engagement.

This study presents implications for positive social change. It suggests that individual teachers can increase their current level of parent engagement simply by being more inclusive of fathers. Teacher reports presented in this study indicate that fathers would welcome such inclusion efforts. When fathers feel welcome in childcare settings, the family benefits, since the burden of negotiating educational choices and developmental issues with children is more equally shared between parents when fathers are involved. Children benefit when both parents are aware of their progress and challenges and are working on the child's behalf. Teacher reports presented in this study

indicated that children truly enjoyed having fathers in the classroom. Finally, society benefits if preschool teachers are more inclusive of fathers so that fathers are more involved in their children's education. Research (Eslava et al., 2015; Jeynes, 2015; Varghese & Wachen, 2015) demonstrated the value of father engagement on children's later academic success. In addition, patterns of engagement are likely developed early, so that fathers who feel welcome and appreciated in the preschool classroom may continue to be engaged as their child moves on to kindergarten, elementary school, and beyond. The results of this study demonstrate that there is much that preschool teachers and childcare centers can do to encourage father engagement and all of those efforts may result in positive outcomes for everyone.

Conclusion

Until recently, the role of fathers in the child's preschool experience was overlooked, as evidenced through the lack of literature to support fathers' role. Despite the advantages of father engagement during the preschool years, Kohl and Seay (2015) asserted that fathers traditionally have been neglected in parent engagement research. Results of this study indicate that lack of support for father engagement is visible in preschool teachers' perspectives towards fathers, which includes the teachers' discomfort in communicating with them. However, teacher reports also indicated that despite teachers' reluctance to include fathers, at least some fathers are proactive and persistent in being part of their young child's education. Preschool teachers who increase their efforts to engage fathers in the classroom, and overcome their attitudes, may be pleasantly surprised by the response.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I am interested in your efforts to engage children's fathers in their child's education and in the classroom and center community. I'm going to ask a few questions to get us started. I'm going to tape-record our conversation, so I can send you a transcript later.

1. Tell me a little bit about your engagement of fathers in the classroom.

    Possible follow up: How do fathers generally participate in their children's education?

    Possible follow up: Tell me about a recent experience with a father you had regarding his child.

    Possible follow up: Describe for me your overall comfort level engaging with fathers and also fathers' overall comfort level engaging with you.

2. How do you communicate with fathers?

    Possible follow up: Do you communicate with all of the children's fathers or just with some of them?

    Possible follow up: What methods do you use most to communicate with fathers (e.g., in person, by text, by email)?

    Possible follow up: How do you know that fathers receive your communications?

3. How do you encourage fathers to volunteer in the classroom?

    Possible follow up: How do you encourage fathers to attend events like parent night or parent-teacher conferences?

Possible follow up: How do you encourage fathers to volunteer in your classroom or as field trip helpers?

Possible follow up: What sorts of events at the center or in your classroom do fathers attend?

4. How do you involve fathers in classroom policies and decision making?

Possible follow up: How do you talk with fathers about a problem you are having with a child?

Possible follow up: When a child becomes ill or has an accident at the center, how do you notify the father to come for the child?

Possible follow up: If you suspect a child has a developmental delay, how do you include the father in conversations about this?

5. How do you encourage fathers to work with their children at home?

Possible follow up: What information do you provide to the child's father about activities or resources that he can implement at home?

Possible follow up: How do you encourage fathers to engage in learning activities at home with their children?

6. How do you recommend to fathers' resources in the community they might enjoy with their children?

Possible follow up: How do you provide information to the child's father about activities or resources he or he and his child might seek out in the community?

Possible follow up: How do you encourage fathers to engage in community resources or activities with or for their children?

7. How do you visit with fathers in children's homes?

    Possible follow up: Describe a recent home visit.

    Possible follow up: How do you encourage fathers to visit in the classroom?

8. What challenges do you find in increasing fathers' engagement in their children's education?

    Possible follow up: What might help fathers be more engaged than they already are?

    Possible follow up: What might help you to engage fathers more than you do now?

Thanks so much. I've really enjoyed talking with you. I'll email you the transcript of this conversation soon. When you receive it, look it over and make sure I've got everything right. If you think of anything later that you want to add, you can let me know when you review the transcript.