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The infant-toddler period is recognized as critical to children's concurrent and subsequent outcomes and success in school and life. The quality of early care and education (child care) for children at this sensitive period of development continues to be low across the nation and in North Carolina. The present study addressed North Carolina's interest in exploring opportunities for increasing the quality of infant/toddler care in the state's licensed early care and education (ECE) programs by examining partnerships between families, teachers, and programs and their potential to facilitate coordinated, responsive care.

The present study included data collection, analyses and discussion of a mixed methods design to elucidate current teacher-family partnership practices and to explore whether such practices varied by age of classroom group, auspice of the program, or family engagement-related professional development of the teacher. Further, the study aimed to identify, from the perspectives of teachers and administrators, opportunities to incorporate such practices into requirements for licensed ECE programs. Survey data were collected from a stratified random sample of 38 teachers, 34 administrators, and 105 parents from infant and toddler classrooms recently assessed for the state's QRIS. Results were compared with classroom scores on the QRIS quality measure. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 infant and 5 toddler teachers (and their administrators) who received top ratings from parents (via the survey).

Results suggest differences in parent-rated teacher practices by child age, with parents of infants indicating they are more comfortable than parents of toddlers sharing family-specific information with their child's teacher. No differences in partnership practices by program auspice or teacher professional development were found. No associations between the quality measure used in the state's QRIS and teacher or parent survey ratings of partnership practices were found. Two negative associations were found between the QRIS quality rating measure and administrator-reported policies and practices as measured by the relationship quality survey tool. Interview participants recommended requirements for professional development; requirements or QRIS credit for bidirectional communication tools such as apps; and support for teachers' additional time with parents. Further recommendations for policy, practice, and research are discussed.

EXPLORING TEACHER-FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS:

AVENUES FOR INCREASING THE QUALITY

OF CARE IN INFANT AND TODDLER

CLASSROOMS

by

Mary Lee Porterfield

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The infant-toddler period is one of rapid growth and development, and low-quality early care and education (ECE) experiences may negatively impact concurrent and subsequent developmental outcomes, particularly for children experiencing toxic stresses such as persistent poverty (Pluess & Belsky, 2009; Shonkoff, Phillips, & National Research Council, 2000). Conversely, engagement in warm, nurturing, family-centered ECE programs can support positive infant-toddler outcomes, including buffering the effects of toxic stress (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011). Despite the well-documented benefits of high-quality care for infants and toddlers, access to high-quality ECE for this age group is limited (Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011).

Infant-Toddler ECE Quality in North Carolina

Infants and toddlers (children 0 to 36 months of age) comprise 36% of children ages 0 to 5 years old in regulated early care and education settings in North Carolina (NC DCDEE, 2018a), however far fewer infants and toddlers than preschoolers access the highest quality care statewide (Russell & Martin, 2017). In 2016, a total of 66,535 children under the age of three were enrolled in regulated child care. Of these, only 45% were enrolled in 5-Star programs (NC's highest level within the Quality Rating and

Improvement System, or QRIS), compared with 59% of preschool-age children. What's more, infant and toddler classroom scores on the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2006) are substantially lower than the preschool classroom scores on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005) - an average of 4.98 compared with 5.51 for preschool classrooms. In addition to low levels of global quality as measured by the ITERS-R, this age group receives care from teachers with less education and compensation than their preschool counterparts (Russell & Martin, 2017).

Policy Context: Infant-Toddler ECE Quality Improvement

The need for access to high quality out-of-home care for infants and toddlers has prompted new federal and state policies to focus attention and work on increasing ECE quality for this age group (CCDF, 2016; NC DCDEE, 2012; CCDF Administrator personal communication, March 7, 2018). New federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF; 2016) requirements specify that states must allocate a percentage of their CCDF funds to improving quality for infants and toddlers. North Carolina has prioritized improving infant-toddler ECE quality in response to both the federal requirements and recommendations from an advisory committee convened to envision the next iteration of the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System or QRIS (NC DCDEE, 2012; CCDF Administrator personal communication, March 7, 2018).

The state has continued to invest in initiatives to improve infant-toddler ECE quality as well as initiating new infant- and toddler-focused projects (NC DCDEE, 2016). Through its Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) system, DCDEE funds an

ongoing project that provides a network of infant-toddler specialists who deliver training and targeted quality improvement technical assistance for infant-toddler teachers in all 100 counties across the state. New projects include scholarships for infant-toddler teachers to access infant-toddler focused higher education coursework; an intensive technical assistance project to improve teacher practice; and mini-grants to improve outdoor learning environments for infants and toddlers (DCDEE, 2018b).

Family Engagement Link to Quality Improvement

One area of focus for the state's infant-toddler quality improvement work, and a promising avenue for infant-toddler ECE quality improvement is family engagement (Durden, Escalante, & Blitch, 2015; NC DCDEE, 2016). Family engagement in ECE generally refers to parents' activities to extend children's learning at home; family involvement in the ECE classroom; or partnerships between families and teachers, however, it is the relationship-based family engagement practices and teacher-family partnerships that hold the most promise for improving infant-toddler ECE quality (Sosinsky et al., 2016). This partnership type of family engagement is a natural extension of the infant-toddler classroom as teachers and families routinely consult on children's daily activities and needs (Lally, 2009). Extending these daily interactions to incorporate deeper teacher-family relationships can provide the framework by which teachers discern family priorities and concerns that can then be used to inform classroom routines and interactions (Sosinsky et al., 2016). Thus, family engagement in the form of family-teacher collaboration can support seamless care across home and school contexts, which is vital to the optimal development of infants and toddlers (IOM & NRC, 2015).

Policy Context: Family Engagement

Family engagement initiatives are a new focus of state policies to meet CCDF requirements. With the recent reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), states must include in their CCDF plans provisions for family engagement (CCDF, 2016). Most (40) of the 44 QRIS currently in place include provisions for family engagement (Tout et al., 2010). These existing QRIS requirements related to family engagement focus primarily on ECE program communication with families, however nine QRIS include requirements related to ECE teachers and programs partnering with families (Tout et al., 2010).

Although NC's QRIS does include provisions for programs to develop family engagement plans (North Carolina Child Care Rules, 2018), including a new licensing rule specifying family involvement policies (North Carolina Child Care Rules, 2019), there are no requirements related to the implementation of such plans and policies. Further, little is known about the nature and strength of teacher-family partnerships among the state's ECE programs. Family engagement requirements are included in the NC Pre-Kindergarten (NC Pre-K) program, and each local NC Pre-K committee determines the nature and extent of such requirements (NC DCDEE, 2018c). Head Start performance standards also include requirements related to family partnerships and family engagement (Head Start, 2016). In sum, there are no requirements related to teacher-family partnerships in non-Head Start, non-NC Pre-K programs in North Carolina.

There is, however, momentum related to extending partnership focused family engagement requirements to child care programs. Teacher-family partnerships fit well with North Carolina's priorities as detailed by advisory committee recommendations for the next revisions to the state's QRIS (NC DCDEE, 2012). The committee recommended that the CCDF Administrator and agency focus on expanding family engagement efforts and prioritize process-oriented requirements such as relationship-building and interactions in the requirements and rewards within a new QRIS design (NC DCDEE 2012). The state aims to expand its focus on family partnerships to benefit families, teachers, and children across the system as it revises its QRIS (CCDF Administrator personal communication, March 7, 2018).

The effort to incorporate requirements and resources to support teacher-family partnerships into the QRIS is hampered by a lack of information regarding current family engagement efforts in programs. Most QRIS, including North Carolina's, rely on measures that focus on structural aspects of quality rather than important processes, such as teacher-family partnerships, that might be salient for child outcomes (Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta, & Mashburn, 2010; Cassidy, et al., 2005; Zaslow et al., 2010). Therefore, little is known nationally about how relationship-based processes are implemented in programs, and even less is known in North Carolina because there has been no effort to date to include teacher-family partnerships in the QRIS.

Need for Current Study

The present study was an opportunity for the state to connect practice with policy and build on previous investments by identifying high-quality teacher-family partnership

practices, along with needed supports to optimize family engagement in programs across the state. The present study, therefore, sought to improve the quality of infant-toddler care by strengthening teacher- and program-family partnerships, and had three objectives: 1) to document the current relationship-based family engagement practices enacted among teachers and programs serving infants and toddlers in North Carolina; 2) to explore the relation between family engagement practices and classroom quality as measured in the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS); and 3) to explicate practitioner recommendations for policies and resources to facilitate more optimal partnership focused family engagement practices among programs serving infants and toddlers.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study was guided by cultural-ecological theory (Tudge, 2008), which builds upon Bronfenbrenner's (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and Vygotsky's (1978) theories to conceptualize the impact of culture on the daily interactions between people and environment that bidirectionally impact children's learning and development. Cultural-ecological theory (CET) considers how children's daily lives, their interactions with each other and with important adults (parents, teachers) and peers, shape and are shaped by cultural beliefs and values. The meaning of these proximal processes, (daily interactions) and the value or role of such processes to a child's development, is best understood in terms of the child's culture. In other words, children's experiences and the ways they make meaning of their experiences are culturally situated and shaped. This interplay between culture and experience necessitates a special level of coordination or collaboration between the child's contexts of family and school so the teacher has a good understanding of the cultural and contextual influences on children's learning and behavior and so that caregiving interactions between home and school can be aligned. The tenets of the two underlying theories will be reviewed as they relate to cultural-ecological theory.

Building on Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory

      Overarching tenets and propositions. Cultural-ecological theory (CET: Tudge,

2008), focuses on the regularly occurring interactions of children with their peers, their

family, teachers, and the environment. CET's focus on these proximal processes as the

primary drivers of development echoes bioecological theory's (Bronfenbrenner & Morris,

2006) central organizing tenet:

> Proposition I: Especially in its early phases, but also throughout the life course,
> human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex
> reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human
> organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment. To
> be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over an extended
> period of *time*. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment
> are referred to as *proximal processes*. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 797).

      CET (Tudge, 2008) also builds on bioecological theory's second proposition

which posits that the result or outcome of such proximal processes is a joint function of

the characteristics of the people involved in the interactions, features of their

environments (proximal and distal), and changes and stability of the sociohistoric time in

which the interactions are taking place (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). CET (Tudge,

2008) extends this second proposition to contemplate the role of culture as a contextual

feature that shapes and is shaped by proximal processes interactions. It is through these

interactions that children audition different roles, construct their identities, and learn what

is expected of them to be successful members of their cultural group(s). Bioecological

theory's central propositions give rise to the theory's research model, the Process-Person-

Context-Time model or PPCT(Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), and CET's (Tudge, 2008) appropriation of and adjustments to the model are discussed next.

PPCT model. Process in the PPCT model refers to proximal processes, which are conceptualized as those regularly occurring activities in which the developing child is involved (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These proximal processes can be interactions between children; between child and materials or environment; or child and parents or other important adults. The Person term in the PPCT model refers to characteristics of the developing human that support or inhibit developmental progress, and these include force, resource, and demand characteristics. Force characteristics are those intrinsic characteristics of the developing child such as temperament and approaches to learning. A very curious child, for example, might initiate more interactions with adults, peers, and the environment than would less curious children.

In bioecological theory, resource characteristics of the developing human refer to the physical and psychological abilities that enable or limit participation in proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Children with severe illnesses or other physical limitations, for example, may not be able to participate in the same activities or interactions as other peers. CET (Tudge, 2008) adds to this category the sociocultural and material resources that influence children's access to such interactions. Children's access to various locations in which proximal processes might take place, as well as the variety of learning and development domains involved in such processes, is impacted by their sociocultural resources. As children participate in increasingly more complex interactions, the skills, abilities, and resource access they develop serve as resource

characteristics to support later growth and achievement (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Finally, demand characteristics are those outwardly visible physical features that might prompt or deter interactions. Bronfenbrenner gives the example that children considered to be attractive are given more attention than those thought to be less attractive. Together, the force, resource, and demand characteristics comprise the Person level features that exert an impact on proximal processes and thus development.

Context in the PPCT model refers to different levels (micro-, meso-, and exosystem levels) of environment which directly, indirectly, and interactively impact the developing child (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The contextual level in which the developing child exists and experiences and participates in proximal processes, is the microsystem. Typically construed as the child's home or school, it is where they spend the majority of their time on a regular basis. The mesosystem refers to the interaction of any two microsystems, such as the child's home and school. The mesosystem includes the collaboration and coordination between families and teachers that exerts an influence on the microsystem through resultant changes in attitudes or practices that then affect proximal processes in the microsystem. The exosystem refers to levels of context in which the child is not a direct participant. This level of context exerts an influence on the developing child indirectly such as through work policies that limit parents' availability to spend time with their children. The macrosystem level of context was conceptualized in earlier versions of the theory as a higher-level construct such as the larger society, subcultures, or systems that exerted an influence on the developing child through the expectations and norms they set for behavior, development, communication, and the like,

however it is omitted from the mature (i.e., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) version of the theory (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

In contrast to bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), CET conceptualizes culture as exerting influence at every level of context (Tudge, 2008). Thus, CET considers the cultural influences on norms and expectations for behavior and development in seeking to understand or evaluate the meaning of proximal processes that children experience. That is, the meaning that children make of their experiences, what they bring to and take away from interactions, influence and are influenced by culture (as well as by individual development and characteristics of the child).

Building on Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of human development considers the impact of person-level factors interacting with cultural contexts to effect development. In this theory, societal and cultural forces are viewed as exerting power to transform children's learning and development, even as they are transformed by children's learning and development. Children are product and producer of their environment. The meaning of experiences (to the child) shift with development, and the impact of experiences can only be understood as they relate to (or are understood by) the developing child.

One of the most popular tenets of the theory, the zone of proximal development, is widely misunderstood and misinterpreted (Tudge, 2008). Depending on the translation of the theory, the zone is said to be constructed either in the process wherein a more advanced individual is involved in teaching, or in the process wherein the developing child (less advanced individual) is involved in learning. However, as Tudge (2008) points

out, the more accurate translation from the Russian is a combination of both teaching and learning. Thus, the zone of proximal development should be conceptualized as a more dialectical process in which the dynamic interactions of two or more individuals unlock or promote development and understanding for both. Both are involved in teaching and in learning, and the zone makes possible advances for both (all) involved.

CET's conceptualization of the zone of proximal development (Tudge, 2008) is especially salient for cross-cultural interactions between teachers and families as well as between teachers and students. Teachers who take on the role of learner in their engagement with families open the potential to gain new understanding of family culture and context which may then be incorporated into the classroom processes in culturally relevant ways (Doucet & Tudge, 2007). In addition, teachers-as-learners communicate the value and worth of families' and students' cultures, contexts, and viewpoints, and therefore are more likely to engage families and students more deeply in the learning process. Thus, the value or role of the zone of proximal development is not limited to children's learning and development but extends in important ways to support teachers' understanding of children and families.

Cultural-Ecological Theory

Cultural-ecological theory (Tudge, 2008), builds on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) in terms of the centrality of proximal process interactions and the influence of person- and context-level characteristics on such interactions. CET (Tudge, 2008) also builds on Vygotsky's (1978) conceptualization of the teaching and learning involved in proximal process

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interactions and the potential of the zone of proximal development to better connect teachers, families, and children.

CET conceptualizes as the key drivers of development those regular interactions between developing humans and other individuals, materials, and the environment (Tudge, 2008). Extending the bioecological and socio-cultural models, CET posits that the developing individual's perceptions of proximal process interactions, the way she makes sense or meaning of them, will be a joint function of her own wants, needs, temperament, as well as of the broader sociocultural context in which the interactions take place. Children's perceptions and understanding of their experiences are shaped by proximal process interactions but also exert influence to shape the interactions in a transactional process.

As in Vygotsky's (1978) theory, the role of culture is central to the dynamic processes of development in CET (Tudge, 2008). Through the dialectic process of interactions, children come to understand what is expected of them, what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and who they are and might become as successful members of their cultural group. However, CET makes explicit its definition and conceptualization of the role of culture. In this theory (CET), culture is defined as:

> A group of people who share a set of values, beliefs, and practices; who have access to the same institutions, resources, and technologies; who have a sense of identity of themselves as constituting a group; and who attempt to communicate these values, beliefs, and practices to the following generation (Tudge, 2008, pp. 3-4).

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Individuals are expected to identify with multiple cultures. Examples of this concept include the cultures of gender, country, religion, race, local community, and the list could go on. An individual's cultural identity may be most highlighted as it comes into contact and therefore contrast with another culture. More than a one-way transmission of cultural values, CET posits bidirectional influences of and on culture via interactions across multiple levels of context. Children's learning and development are shaped by the cultures in which they develop, and children continually shape their cultures in the process. Development cannot be understood or effectively supported absent an understanding of the cultural contexts in which it is taking place.

As in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), CET conceptualizes a continual process of learning and teaching (Tudge, 2008). In this dynamic process, the developing human moves between the roles of teacher and learner within the same interaction, both in response to and in promotion of the proximal process. Because this teaching and learning is also filtered through the lens of individual (including cultural) experience, CET emphasizes the importance of fostering proximal processes and evaluating children's outcomes in terms of the individual sociocultural context in which they are taking place.Thus, CET highlights the need for early care and education (ECE) professionals to gain a deep understanding of family context and culture, to be both teacher and learner with respect to the family (and child), in order to appropriately plan for and respond to children in their learning and development (Doucet & Tudge, 2007; Tudge, 2008).

The present study centered on the mesosystem-level interactions between teacher and families that inform and transform classroom practices, and how they are and can be supported. The study conceptualized a partnership model of family engagement wherein teachers create opportunities to learn important contextual and cultural information from families and share with families information about children's activities, achievements, and needs in the classroom context. Person-level characteristics examined to understand their associations with these mesosystem interactions included teacher professional development related to family engagement, and ages of children in each classroom. Context was included in the present study in terms of ECE program structural features, as well as program auspice (for-profit and non-profit). Culture was represented in the study in terms of the family-specific knowledge that teachers seek from families and incorporate into the classroom. Thus, the present study sought to discover the interactions that yield extant family partnerships; how these vary by person-level and contextual characteristics; and how system requirements to improve coordination and collaboration across home and school might support culturally responsive interactions that build on children's experiences and interests (truly individualizing) to meet learning and development goals (Doucet & Tudge, 2007).

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The infant-toddler period (from birth to thirty-six months of age), is one of substantial and fast-paced growth and development. The foundations of brain architecture, formed in utero, provide the framework for a rapid sequence of processes that establish needed neural connections and remove unnecessary ones in a complex interaction among genes, environment, and experiences (Fox et al., 2010). The resultant pathways retained early in life form the basis for all later learning and development. Children experiencing predictable, appropriately stimulating environments in the care of responsive adults are likely to follow a higher (positive) developmental trajectory than children growing up in conditions of persistent stress and neglect (CODC, 2011). However, even children in the latter (persistent stress) condition may derive benefits from nurturing early care and education environments that buffer them from the impact of such stress (CODC, 2011; Pluess & Belsky, 2009).

In the typically developing human, a wide array of skills and abilities come online during the infant-toddler period as a result of the complex interactions between genes, environment, and experience (Fox et al., 2010). Gross motor movements progress into

walking (Adolph & Berger, 2015); babbling develops into recognizable speech (Hoff, 2015), and children mature in their abilities to interpret social cues as they construct their of self (Goodvin, Thompson, & Winer, 2015). This rapid growth and development across domains, combined with the transactional nature of the developmental process, underscores the importance of high-quality early care and education environments for this age group (Lally, 2009). The science of infant-toddler development suggests that high quality ECE for this age group is comprised of multiple components, including positive caregiving from responsive adults, adequate space, appropriately stimulating materials and environments, and low child to teacher ratios (Lally, 2009). However, the component that is most critical to the quality equation for infants and toddlers is teachers' collaborative partnerships and coordination with families, as reflected in recent recommendations from the National Institutes of Medicine (IOM & NRC, 2015) for supporting teachers' individualized, family-centered responses and thus improving care for this age group. Selected literature regarding family engagement and family partnerships in early care and education are reviewed in the following sections.

Family Engagement in Early Care and Education

Early models of family engagement in their children's ECE focused on (and used the term) parent involvement (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, & Moodie, 2009). That is, parents were encouraged to participate in certain activities that were deemed important by the program or system responsible for setting the requirements (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). The prevailing view of families-as-needy was informed by a deficit model wherein families required training or guidance to improve their parenting and their lot in

life. Expectations for parent involvement included activities such as academic-focused experiences for children in the home, as well as participation in activities at the school including volunteering in the classroom, or, in the case of Head Start, serving in a leadership capacity in the program.

The focus of these parent involvement activities was not always consistent even across programs with the same requirements (Lubeck & deVries, 2000). In an ethnographic case study, researchers found that culture and ethnicity of the school and parents made a difference in the messages parents received about how they were expected to be involved (Lubeck & deVries, 2000). Through analysis of field notes and interview transcripts, the nature of the discourse around parents and parent involvement shaped two contrasting Head Start programs' expectations and opportunities for parents. In a largely White, rural community, this discourse revealed limited expectations for parents to participate in the program in meaningful ways, and views that the decision-making should be reserved for the professionals. Meanwhile, the discourse around parent involvement in a mostly Black, urban setting revealed expectations for parent partnerships with program staff, and the program's view of its responsibility for supporting parent agency both within the program and in the broader society. The study notes, however, that, even when the focus of parent involvement was on building parent agency and parent-school partnerships, the school or program still set the condition for and therefore controlled the extent and nature of the involvement.

Another early case study emphasized the link between family involvement, teacher cultural competence, and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Early primary grade teachers ($N = 8$) participated in training and interviews, they were observed, and their teaching practices were recorded as part of a two-year study. Those teachers who connected with families from a strengths-based perspective were able to incorporate aspects of family members' skills and expertise across multiple learning domains of the classroom. Families came into the classroom to share their knowledge rather than to provide more concrete support to the teacher (such as reading to children or maintaining the classroom). Their contributions to the learning goals were expressly acknowledged and valued. These early studies seem to have been ahead of their time in terms of their conceptualization of parent or family involvement, the socially constructed nature of such involvement, and the influence of the prevailing power structure and goals (implicit or explicit) of the majority.

The development of the multi-dimensional Family Involvement Questionnaire (Fantuzzo et al., 2000) may have heralded a transition to a broader view of the family engagement construct. The Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ) was reportedly developed to acknowledge the nature of family-program and family-teacher interactions. More than a count of parent participation in the classroom, this measure conceptualized involvement in terms of three constructs: school-based involvement, home-based involvement, and home-school conferencing. The school-based dimension included family involvement within the classroom and program, as well as with other families. The home-based dimension included traditional support for academic areas as well as other joint activities that were not previously deemed important to children's success.

Home-school conferencing included communication between families and teachers or programs about how children were doing in the program.

The theorized constructs of the FIQ were statistically supported via exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses with a sample of $N = 641$ families (Fantuzzo et al., 2000). Each construct or dimension demonstrated good reliability. The Cronbach's alpha for School-based involvement and home-based involvement were both .85, and for home-school conferencing the Cronbach's alpha was .81. In addition, the study detected differences in family involvement in terms of family context. Parents with at least a high school diploma were significantly more likely to be involved in school-based activities and home-school conferencing than their less educated peers ($F_{(2,584)} = 12.31, p < .001$). Married parents were significantly more likely to be involved in activities at home and in home-school conferencing than single parents ($F_{(2,580)} = 4.55, p < .05$).

The FIQ was used in a subsequent study to investigate the impact of family involvement on child outcomes (Fantuzzo et al., 2004). In a sample of $N = 144$ Head Start families, parent-reported (through the FIQ) involvement was analyzed in relation to children's approaches to learning, behavior problems (both teacher-reported), and early literacy skills. All dimensions of family involvement were significantly and positively associated with children's receptive vocabulary and at least some aspects of children's approaches to learning, as well as negatively and significantly associated with children's behavior problems. The home-based involvement dimension featured the highest correlations across all three child outcomes, including receptive vocabulary ($r = .41, p < .0001$); competence motivation ($r = .35, p < .0001$); and conduct problems ($r =$

−.30, $p < .001$). School-based involvement had slightly less impact on behavior problems than did home-based involvement. Home-school conferencing had the least impact on behavior and approaches to learning across the three dimensions. Further analyses revealed that when all three factors were considered together, the home-based involvement construct was the only significant factor in predicting the associations of the FIQ and approaches to learning and behavior problem outcomes.

From family engagement to family partnerships. Many family engagement models privilege the involvement activities that are valued by the school or system and fail to appreciate, support, or count families' involvement activities that provide support for children's learning but fall outside of the traditional model (Halgunseth et al., 2009; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Families' rich story-telling traditions, their connections with kinship networks, and their involvement of children in cultural activities may go unnoticed in terms of their support for child learning and development outcomes (Halgunseth et al., 2009). Recent strides have been made toward reimagining the concept of family engagement to acknowledge differences in access to resources; emphasize the importance of equitable support for family engagement; and construe families and children in terms of what their diversity of experiences could contribute to the classroom experience, versus a view of families in terms of how they should be fixed (Forry et al., 2012; Halgunseth et al., 2009; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

One example of this shift is in conceptualizations of primary school-parent partnerships (Christenson, 2004), which have also had an impact in extending the ECE field's understanding and ideas about the construct (Halgunseth et al., 2009).

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Christenson (2004) particularly reimagined the roles and responsibilities of schools and teachers to facilitate strong bidirectional communication and relationships with families. Schools and teachers were encouraged to adopt a view of education and development as transactional and involving the child, teacher, family, school, and peers. Policies outlining the central role of the family and expectations for their involvement were recommended, along with realistic support for families to meet the expectations. These included recommendations for clear program-level expectations and supports for teachers' positive attitudes toward families and teacher efforts to meet families where they are and facilitate strong partnerships. Further recommendations included identifying and addressing barriers at the family- and teacher-level, such that parents lacking the agency to partner would be supported to do so, and teachers lacking the skills to partner would receive training and support to meet the expectations.

Another part of this wave of reimagining the family engagement construct was a literature review (Halgunseth et al, 2009) that synthesized a new definition of family engagement based on previous work of multiple scholars. The new definition included an emphasis on strong bidirectional communication and partnerships between families and schools. Families were supported as decision-makers about learning and development goals for their children. This view of families-as-experts retained a focus on children's school-readiness outcomes but incorporated an asset-focused approach to the family unit as well as explicit coordination to include aspects of family context and culture in the classroom experience. The model included support to improve families'

extension of learning at home, however the goal was approached in a more collaborative frame than in earlier models.

A recurring theme that emerged from the more recent models of family engagement was the primacy of the family-teacher relationship (Forry et al., 2012). Strong relationship quality supports the equal partnerships advocated by Christenson (2004). Teacher-family relationships also foster the deep knowledge of families and appreciation of their diverse strengths advocated by Souto-Manning & Swick (2006). The bi-directional communication and family decision-making recommended by Halgunseth and colleagues (2009) also has at its base strong family-teacher relationships. Integrating concepts of family-program partnerships from such fields as ECE, early intervention, social work, K-12 education, and health care, Forry and colleagues (2012) proposed a framework for conceptualizing the multiple factors of the program- and teacher-family partnership. Importantly, this framework advanced the concept of the transactional nature of the construct by positing the likely individual nature of the development of the partnership. That is, some parents will likely become more engaged when they have a positive, comfortable relationship with the teacher, yet for other parents, building relationships might be achieved as they are more engaged and interacting with the teacher. In other words, family engagement could be a pathway to or evidence of the teacher-family relationship.

Additionally, the work of Forry and colleagues (2012), including work groups focused on the goal of exploring, refining, and aligning family engagement work across systems, served as the basis for new measures designed to capture the factors identified

as key to strong family partnerships. The Family Provider-Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ) family of measures (Kim, Forry, & Guzman, 2015) is the result. The FPTRQ includes surveys for families, teachers, program administrators, and family service providers. Factors addressed are teacher/provider knowledge (of families), practices (interacting or communicating with families), and attitudes (toward families). A fourth factor, environment, is included in the administrator survey and relates to program features that might support (or hinder) strong family-teacher/provider relationships and family engagement.

From early need or deficit-based conceptualizations of parent involvement the ECE field has evolved to view family engagement as a transactional process (Forry et al., 2012) that is foundational to ECE quality (Halgunseth et al., 2009), school readiness, and child and family outcomes (Virmani, Wiese, & Mangione, 2016). Parents are cast as decision makers and partners in their children's education, and teachers are cast as learners, gleaning from families important cultural and contextual information that can be infused into the classroom (with teachers as experts in development and pedagogy) to support children's positive identity development and an equity-focused pedagogical approach (Durden, Escalante, & Blitch, 2015). This updated view of family engagement, coupled with increasing ECE system interest in the topic (i.e., inclusion of family engagement requirements in the latest federal and state child care requirements; CCDF, 2016; North Carolina Child Care Rules, 2019), has the potential to transform ECE practices and children's experiences for the better. Challenges and opportunities related

to integrating such a family partnership model into ECE classrooms and programs is the topic of the next section.

Integrating Family Partnerships in ECE Classrooms

Implementation of this new, family-focused, family-friendly, asset-based view of family engagement in the ECE classroom may appear challenging in the current policy climate and among disparate system partners. Additionally, the reality that practice change absent program requirements is rarely sustainable cannot be overlooked (Tarrant & Huerta, 2015). However, the literature in this area suggests some promising classroom and program practices that support this modern vision of family engagement. Following is a review of this evidence. First, practitioner and parent views on the centrality of family partnerships and engagement to ECE quality will be presented. Then selected literature on teacher characteristics related to family engagement and family partnerships will be presented, and the section will conclude with a review of select literature on program characteristics that support teacher partnerships with families.

Practitioner and parent perspectives on ECE quality. A number of qualitative studies have been conducted to gain teachers', administrators', and parents' views on the quality of infant-toddler ECE. An English study (Elfer, 2007) which involved case studies of $N = 6$ ECE programs serving children under three years of age investigated the relation between structural program supports and the quality of teacher-child interactions. Interviews with administrators and teachers, as well as direct observations in classrooms, suggested a tension between individually responsive (to babies and families) practices, group care needs, and regulations. At times of stress, teachers turned to (their

perceptions) of what was required rather than responsive pedagogy. For example, in an apparent response to the stress of caregiving for a group of children, one teacher focused her attention on a single child (meeting attachment requirements) and failed to respond to the other children in her group. Administrators noted that the emotional side of working with children and with parents, both for themselves and for teachers, is an overlooked area of tension and stress. The energy that this work requires and the toll it can take on mental health is rarely acknowledged. The study concluded that supports should be put in place to help administrators and staff acknowledge the anxiety produced by the work and collaborate on ways to address it.

Another English study (Elfer & Page, 2015) with $N = 8$ administrators of formal ECE programs serving infants (under 12 months of age), sought to understand their views as the key decision-makers in terms of policy and practice implementation in formal infant care. Managers emphasized the importance of teacher-family partnerships to address or manage infant stress between the home and nursery. The complexity of this relationship dynamic (between teachers, the program, and parents) was the source of considerable stress. So too, the oversight of staff with varying levels of expertise at one end and unease at the other end was stressful. Managers reported staff anxiety caused by competing demands from children, parents, and regulations. In programs where managers were more comfortable with this challenge, they established a culture of acknowledging the stressors as they arose. These programs appeared to benefit from this type of leadership in terms of better overall program climate and reduced long-term stress for staff. The researchers concluded that additional work in the field was needed to

understand the challenges and opportunities in infant care from the perspectives of staff, families, and the children themselves. So too, an emphasis was placed on the need for a system-level consensus on the goal of formal care for this age group, whether sensitive, responsive caregiving or more of a focus on developmental outcomes, suggesting that perhaps England makes a sharp distinction between the caring and the educating sides of ECE.

In order to elucidate the nature of parent-teacher relationships in infant-toddler classrooms, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of $N = 10$ teachers and parents ($N = 8$) of children in their classrooms (Lang, Tolbert, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Bonomi, 2016). Each participant was asked to describe the parent-teacher relationship, and follow-up or probing questions elicited viewpoints on specific topics. Findings suggested that this group of parent-teacher dyads experienced strong and positive connections in their relationships with each other. Teachers and parents intentionally shared information with each other about the focal child. For teachers the goal, at least in part, was to build trusting relationships with the parents. The goal for parents was to promote better understanding of and responsiveness to their children. Parents and teachers endorsed the need for strong home-school partnerships in order to support a coordinated approach to children's care and education. Some differences in child-rearing expectations, chiefly around children's readiness for self-feeding and potty-training, were reported. Overall the study provided evidence that successful parent-teacher partnerships are possible and desired by both parties, and that teachers may need support to

appropriately acknowledge and address differences in priorities or approaches to children's care and education as they arise.

Family partnerships in infant-toddler classrooms. While the opportunities for parents of infants and toddlers to engage with their children's ECE program and teacher may appear to be limited due to parents' lack of time, the very nature of infant toddler ECE care can facilitate strong teacher-family partnerships (Ahnert & Lamb, 2003; Lally, 2009; Mangione, Kriener-Althen, & Marcella, 2016). That is, the infant-toddler period of development, which necessitates reliance on parents and other caregivers to meet basic needs, also requires daily or at least regular coordination and information sharing between caregivers (parents and teachers in the case of ECE). The foundational nature of this partnership has been highlighted in associations of parent-teacher partnerships with more structural aspects of relationship-based infant-toddler programs (Mangione et al., 2016). Relationship-based caregiving, which is already implemented in many high-quality infant-toddler ECE settings, attends to the primacy of these partnerships by supporting the quality of relationships between teachers, parents, and children (Sosinsky et al., 2016). In this process, teachers elicit from families information about their children's care routines, cultural practices, and priorities for their infants and toddlers. ECE teachers thereby have an avenue to learn from and share with families important information about developmental milestones and about their child's development in particular. Perhaps the implementation of a partnership model of family engagement would benefit from the approach to communication and collaboration that is fundamental to high quality infant and toddler ECE settings.

Taken together, these studies highlight both the complexity of family engagement and family partnerships and the central role that these practices play in ECE quality. Thus, these studies suggest a direction for research to improve the highly relational and culturally situated enterprise of ECE for infants and toddlers (Lally, 2009; Sosinsky et al., 2016; IOM & NRC, 2015; Elfer, 2007; Elfer & Page, 2015; Lang et al., 2016). In particular, this literature points to the need for greater understanding in the area of teacher-family relationships that pave the way for information sharing and coordination across the contexts of home and school (IOM & NRC, 2015; Sosinsky et al 2016). Teacher and program characteristics that support high quality ECE for infants and toddlers, and family partnerships in particular, will be reviewed next.

Teacher characteristics associated with family engagement. *Relationship between teacher education and ECE quality in general.* In a study of $N = 71$ lead teachers in Early Head Start classrooms serving toddlers (Castle, et al., 2016), teachers' field of degree had a direct impact on the observed quality of their interactions with children. Teachers with degrees in early childhood education were more likely to provide more emotional support and instructional support than those with degrees in other fields ($\beta = -.578, p < .05$ and $\beta = -.534, p < .05$, respectively). Additionally, for these teachers with early childhood-specific degrees, having positive and flexible temperamental characteristics contributed to their responsive and supportive interactions with children (betas and *p*-values not listed). Teachers' years of experience were not associated with quality interactions, and for teachers with less experience, the accumulation of depressive symptoms was associated with lower levels of emotional

support and instructional support for children ($\beta = .062, p < .05$ and $\beta = .080, p < .05$, respectively). Teacher education specific to child development made a difference for these children, but it should be noted that the overwhelming majority of teachers in the study (92%) had completed a bachelor's degree. It is possible that programs with access to specialized funding streams for this age group are able to prioritize teacher education (and the attendant higher compensation) more than regular child care or other programs without such funding access.

A study of teachers in $N = 90$ infant classrooms in Portugal (Barros et al., 2016) sought to identify the structural features of programs associated with high quality classrooms and interactions in order to inform policy and supports for teachers. Teachers were observed over two mornings and the results (from three different quality measures) were compiled via factor analysis. The resulting two-factor model included relationships and use of space and materials. In rooms with degreed (in ECE) teachers, more frequent and sensitive interactions were observed ($\beta = .28, SE = .10, p < .005$), as were better use of space and materials ($\beta = .35, SE = .10, p < .004$). Importantly for the context of this study, many of the degreed teachers were assigned to more than one infant-toddler room. However, the benefits of their part-time presence accrued across classrooms, suggesting the possible benefit of degreed teachers modeling professional behavior for their less trained colleagues. In addition, more sensitive caregiving was observed in smaller rural settings ($\beta = .28, SE = .10 \, p < .007$). Study authors suggested that in areas of lower population density, it is likely that teachers and families already knew each other and thus the basis for the caregiving relationship was in place before the child was

in care. Additionally, it is possible that such locations provided a better quality of life (less stress) which would impact on teachers' psychological resources to provide higher quality care. In either case, characteristics and practices of the teachers were central to the question of quality.

  Relationship between teacher characteristics and family engagement. A large qualitative study (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, & Beegle, 2005) sought to identify the teacher (or other ECE professionals') characteristics needed for collaborative partnerships with families, from the point of view of parents. Built on the belief in the fundamental necessity of parent-professional partnerships to positive child outcomes, a total of 34 focus groups with $N = 134$ parents, and separate interviews with $N = 32$ non-English speaking parents, were conducted. Participants were asked to consider examples from their own experiences of partnerships that met their expectations along with the teacher characteristics that supported the success of the partnership. Six indicators of desirable professional characteristics emerged. First, families valued teachers'/ professionals' positive, respectful communication with them about their children. Communication was also closely linked to trust. Parents valued teachers/ professionals who demonstrated their trustworthiness through consistent and proactive communication. Professionals'/ teachers' commitment, demonstrated through responsive interactions and a willingness to be flexible, also emerged as important to parents. Support for equal participation in the partnership (equality) was also valued, as were professionals' demonstrated skills in working collaboratively with families. Finally, evidence of respect for the family and child emerged as highly valued by participants, including suspending

judgment and bias in interactions and decision-making. These teacher/ professional

practices or characteristics, emerging as they did from families' experiences of successful

partnerships, point to opportunities to better support teacher practices in the ECE context.

With an aim of elucidating the teacher characteristics related to teacher-parent and

teacher-child relationship quality, a sample of $N = 152$ preschool teachers (from 67

randomly selected programs), was surveyed (Chung, Marvin, & Churchill, 2005).

Teacher education, particularly degree completion in ECE or child development, was

significantly correlated with parent-teacher relationship quality ($r = .19$, $p < .01$).

Teacher efficacy was a stronger predictor of parent-teacher relationship quality ($r = .28$, $p < .01$). Finally, underscoring the critical importance of the parent-teacher relationship

was the finding that parent-teacher relationship quality was the strongest predictor of the

teacher-child relationship ($r = .41$, $p = .000$). Taken together, these findings align with

recent calls for a focus on increasing teacher education and further professionalizing the

ECE workforce as a necessary step in increasing the quality of ECE experiences for

children and families (IOM & NRC, 2015).

A secondary data analysis of FACES 2006 data provided additional insight into

teacher characteristics associated with parent involvement (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). In

a nationally representative sample of $N = 1,020$ three-year-old children and their primary

caregivers (mostly moms), teacher training or professional development in parent

involvement was significantly and positively associated with parent involvement in the

program ($\beta = .10, p < .05$).

Relationship between teacher characteristics and engaging diverse families.

Turning to the teacher characteristics needed to enact culturally responsive family engagement practices, one study of $N = 22$ preschool teachers sought to support teachers' knowledge of family culture and context such that this information could be embedded into the math curriculum and assessment for their four-year-old students (Graue, Whyte, & Delaney, 2014). Teachers received professional development in partnering with diverse families, along with instruction on key math concepts and developmentally appropriate practices. Teachers were supported to conduct ethnographic case studies (multiple home visits with one focal child/family per teacher) in order to gain the background information necessary to inform lesson and activity planning and flexible, responsive implementation of those plans in the classroom context. For some teachers, this Funds of Knowledge approach (e.g., building on family knowledge, traditions, and experiences), challenged their familiar roles as experts in the classroom, and as such proved to be difficult and uncomfortable to implement. Other teachers were able to respond more flexibly with the information they gleaned from this type of family engagement to support the dynamic interactions in the classroom. This study highlights the fact that teachers need a cooperative approach to leadership and deep knowledge of families in order to implement culturally responsive and culturally informed classroom practices.

Even in a well-resourced ECE program dedicated to culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), teachers experienced varying levels of success in incorporating families' cultures and contexts into classroom practices (Durden et al., 2015). This ethnographic study

focused on the practices and experiences of $N = 51$ teachers (ranging from master teachers to student intern teachers) working in a university lab preschool setting. Teachers were observed in their classrooms, interviewed, and surveyed about their experiences implementing the CRP approach. Although program expectations for the CRP approach were clear and the environment afforded exploration of diversity, multiple teachers expressed low efficacy to engage with the topic. In their classrooms, teachers and students missed opportunities to engage with the many and varied materials representing the diversity of the students in the classroom and program. Teachers with the most exposure to other cultures were the most successful at meeting CRP goals. They consistently displayed a focus on individualizing their support for the culturally relevant learning and development of each child in the classroom. These teachers, high in agency, built partnerships with families and worked with families to determine what aspects of culture to incorporate in their classroom and pedagogy, as well as how to incorporate them. In some cases, these partnerships resulted in parents sharing information or resources with children in the classroom. In other cases, the partnerships opened a collaboration with community resources to enhance children's knowledge and understanding of another culture. These family-teacher partnerships also included advice that teachers could use to guide their own practices. Although not universal across the program despite its focus on child-centered CRP, teachers who expressed commitment to CRP also displayed the greatest willingness to learn from children and families as well as flexibility in their classroom practices.

A study of preservice teachers' partnerships with families to inform pedagogy highlighted the importance of teachers' knowledge of families and revealed the teacher-family partnership as a potential path to develop cultural competence of teachers (Kidd, Sánchez, & Thorp, 2005). Pre-service intern teachers ($N = 17$) selected a focal family from their internship site and spent time getting to know the family and their stories, history, and hopes and dreams for their children. Teachers then designed instruction based on what they learned. Throughout the process, teachers were supported via coursework and debriefing with their college instructors regarding challenges, observations, and unexpected issues arising from the process of partnership-building with culturally- and linguistically-diverse families. Teacher reflections at the conclusion of the program suggested that the experience increased the value they placed on children's use of home language in the classroom. Teachers also reported increased awareness of the implicit messages children received in the classroom about the value of their culture, language, and experience. Finally, teachers reported that the experience helped them to see each child's or family's culture and context in terms of what it could add to the classroom experience for the whole class.

Program characteristics associated with family engagement. *Association of program type with ECE quality.* A number of studies suggest associations between program type and general quality ECE quality indicators. A secondary data analysis of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development examined differences in ECE quality by program sector, that is, nonprofit versus for-profit (Sosinsky, Lord, & Zigler, 2007). Overall quality was

found to be higher in the nonprofit sector. Specifically, nonprofit programs featured higher wages, more positive caregiving, lower turnover, and lower ratios for teachers of some age groups. Teachers of six- and 24-month old children in nonprofit programs enjoyed better salaries than their counterparts in for-profit programs ($F_{1,62} = 6.84, p <$ $.05, d = .57$; and $F_{1,62} = 5.48, p < .05, d = .45$, respectively). Classrooms serving 24-month old children in nonprofit programs featured more positive teacher caregiving ($F_{1,69} = 13.48, p < .001, d = .87$); lower teacher turnover ($F_{1,80} = 5.12, p < .05, d = .55$); and lower child/ staff ratios ($F_{1,69} = 6.81, p < .05, d = .50$) than did such classrooms in for-profit programs. The authors suggested that measures used in the study and their lack of distinction among other quality practices, could have masked additional differences across age groups and program types.

Another secondary data analysis of state-level administrative data sought to understand program features associated with differences in quality in infant and toddler ECE classrooms (King et al., 2016). Results suggested differences by teacher education level, child age, and program type. Teachers with higher levels of education were stronger in their language and interactions, items related to safety and organization, and interactions with communications with parents (betas and *p*-values not listed). Toddler classrooms were higher on appropriate materials and activities ($\beta = .512, p = .000$), whereas infant rooms scored higher on safety-related items ($\beta = .662, p = .000$) as well as language and interactions ($\beta = .343, p = .000$). Finally, nonprofit programs outperformed their for-profit counterparts in terms of provisions for safety and

organization ($\beta = .155, p = .028$), as well as support for staff and communications with parents ($\beta = .283, p = .000$).

Association of program characteristics with family engagement. Less is known about other program characteristics that may be associated with family engagement practices. For example, a secondary data analysis of FACES 2006 data (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016) found no association between overall program quality and levels of family engagement in a nationally representative sample of $N = 1,020$ three-year-old children and their parents. These programs served families with known barriers to participating at their ECE sites, including lack of access to transportation and lack of child care. Surprisingly, program efforts to address parents' barriers to involvement, by providing transportation to the site, child care, and refreshments or meals during the event, were associated with less parent involvement ($\beta = -.08, p < .05$).

Taken together, these studies highlight the potential of teacher-family partnerships to revolutionize the learning and development opportunities for all children in the early childhood classroom. They underscore the importance of supporting teachers to build relationships with families, to see family partnerships as an essential component of their work, and to use family-specific knowledge to plan curriculum and instruction. In this way, family engagement becomes transformed from the earlier views of the construct as an avenue to address family deficiencies to a vital resource to inform the materials, environment, and practices in the early childhood classroom. Of course, such a consequential shift cannot be sustained on a large scale without policy support (Tarrant &

Huerta, 2015), and the topic of barriers and opportunities to implementing this new view of family engagement is the topic of the next section.

Family Partnerships: Barriers and Opportunities

This new view of ECE family engagement has, at its heart, strong partnerships between families, teachers, and ECE programs. Barriers to such partnerships present from an array of contextual levels including home, school, neighborhood, and policy contexts. However, an exploration of these barriers, along with promising practices across these contextual levels, may point to opportunities for implementing this vision. A review of selected literature addressing barriers and opportunities follows.

Barriers and opportunities: families. A study of $N = 68$ mothers of children in Head Start sought to identify the barriers to engagement from the perspectives of mothers and Head Start staff (Lamb-Parker et al., 2001). Through surveys, the study asked about the barriers that participants perceived; examined whether the accumulation of perceived barriers reduced staff-reported maternal involvement; and considered which perceived barriers were related to staff-reported maternal involvement. The mothers' most often reported barrier was that of schedule conflict, followed closely by the presence of another toddler or infant in the home for whom care would need to be arranged in order to facilitate parent involvement in the program. Other barriers included work or school conflict and lack of energy or interest in participating. The accumulation of barriers perceived and reported by mothers was significantly and negatively associated with staff-reported maternal involvement ($F(2,65) = 5.59, p < .01$). As perceived barriers increased, actual involvement decreased. Actual barriers associated with staff-rated

involvement were schedule ($\chi^2_{68} = 6.82, p < .033$); a baby in the home ($\chi^2_{68} =$

$6.36, p < .04$); and moving ($\chi^2_{68} = 7.96, p < .02$). Two perceived barriers were

associated with increased involvement, and they were a lack of utilities at some point

during the Head Start year ($\chi^2_{68} = 6.39, p < .04$), and shyness ($\chi^2_{68} = 8.20, p < .02$).

Although this study focused on a more traditional view of parent involvement,

implementing a new vision of family engagement requires interaction between teachers

and families, so it is important to consider the barriers that must be addressed to support

such interactions.

A study of $N = 154$ mostly African American parents of children in Head Start

sought to understand the impact of various levels of context on parent involvement in the

program (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). Specifically, the study investigated the

associations of parent- and teacher-reported involvement activities with objective

documentation of such involvement; the relation of parent/family and neighborhood

characteristics to parent involvement; and the relative influence of each contextual factor

to each of three dimensions of parent involvement. Three dimensions of parent

involvement were modeled: parent-teacher relationships, home-based involvement, and

school-based involvement. Of the three, only the first two dimensions accounted for

significant amounts of variance in overall involvement. In terms of parent-teacher

relationships, negative parent perceptions of their neighborhood context were associated

with lower teacher-rated relationship quality ($F(6, 140) = 2.72, p < .02$). Additionally,

home-based involvement was positively associated with parent characteristics of

educational achievement and feelings of efficacy ($F(6,147) = 2.67, p < .05$). The study

concluded that the parent-teacher relationship was reliant on parent interactions with teachers in the school context or setting rather than in families' homes, which underscores the need to attend to barriers that prevent families from interacting with teachers in the school setting.

Using a person-oriented approach, a study of parents of Head Start children, ($N = $ 201 across four centers), constructed profiles of parents according to their psychological resources, involvement in their children's education at home and school, and participation in a parenting class intervention (Mendez, Carpenter, LaForett, & Cohen, 2009). Six profiles emerged, with the resilient/highly active group displaying the most involvement and adaptivity. In terms of participation in the workshop, increased barriers resulted in lower participation for the distressed/active group ($\beta = -.86, SE_\beta = -.37, t(185) = -2.12, p < .05$) and the resilient/highly active group ($\beta = -1.96, SE_\beta = -.50, t(185) = -4.42, p < .05$). Profile membership was significantly associated with home-based involvement ($F(4,183) = 5.14, p < .05$), and parent-school involvement ($F(4,183) = 3.97, p < .05$). Similar to previous work on the topic, the most strongly endorsed barrier among participants was that of work schedule conflicting with involvement opportunities. Importantly for future engagement across seemingly homogenous populations, this study points to the highly individualized nature of parents' involvement and engagement in their children's ECE program, suggesting an attendant need for highly individualized engagement approaches on the part of teachers, programs, and systems.

An evaluation of a parenting intervention program designed for use in Head Start (Mendez, 2010) revealed similar barriers to involvement as reported in prior research in the area. Among a sample of $N = 288$ mostly African American families, work schedules, transportation, night classes, and the need for child care were most often cited as barriers to attending the program. Although there were high levels of parent satisfaction with the intervention program, which was delivered by the preschoolers' teachers, engagement in the intervention was low. Importantly, and in echoes of previous work (i.e., Waanders et al., 2007), teacher-parent interactions in the intervention led to better teacher-parent relationships. Teachers rated as higher in quality their relationships with parents who participated more frequently in the intervention ($r = .31$, $p < .0001$). Higher relationship quality translated to the child-level in terms of better literacy and math skills including WJ-R Letter-Word Identification ($r = .14$, $p < .05$), and WJ-R Applied Math Problems ($r = .17$, $p < .05$). This apparent child-level benefit of coordination across the parent- and school-levels provides support and direction for future work to leverage family partnerships to achieve similar child outcome advances.

Barriers and opportunities: ECE teachers and programs. In a smaller focus-group study, child care providers ($N = 14$) were asked to discuss the ways they engaged parents, the barriers they perceived to parent engagement, and the ways they wished to improve their parent engagement practices (Barnes, Guin, Allen, & Jolly, 2016). Results indicated that providers used a variety of methods to engage parents in the daily life of the classroom and program. Information was shared in person, in writing and through a variety of electronic methods including electronic mail, texting, social media platforms,

websites, and blogs. Providers expressed a commitment to tailor communication styles to the needs of the parents in their programs, however, they also expressed frustration with parents who did not seem to have the time to be involved in their children's education. The study concludes that providers (ECE teachers and administrators) may need cultural competence training to increase their awareness and understanding relative to the challenges that different families may face and how to view families from a strengths-based perspective. Additionally, support and training in how to connect with hard-to-reach parents was recommended, including support for developing policies and procedures responsive to a range of family schedules, cultures, and contexts.

Another challenge, elucidated by an Australian study of ECE provider-teacher relationships, is that of provider feelings of agency (Rouse, 2012). This case study of early childhood educators ($N = 6$) considered the teacher-parent relationship in terms of the Australian ECE focus on the state-mandated Family Centered Practice (FCP). FCP is an approach in which parent empowerment and inclusion in decision-making is a central focus. The study examined the nature of teacher-parent relationships, the match of the relationships to the goals of FCP, and the issue of empowerment. Participants reported that their own experiences helped them to connect with and sympathize with some parents. With other parents, particularly those who viewed the teachers as merely babysitters, teachers reported feeling undermined and experiencing reduced feelings of empowerment. ECE professionals who were struggling to maintain their identity as empowered, professional educators found themselves ill-equipped to meet the FCP goal of empowering other parents. Although a small-scale study in another country, the

findings point to recommendations that could support teachers' work in a new family engagement paradigm in the U.S. In particular, the study recommends that teacher efficacy be supported, which may be accomplished by providing a platform for both teachers and families to share their expertise. Teacher expertise in child development could thus be highlighted while at the same time honoring parents' expertise relative to their children. Consequently, ECE teachers and parents could both be recognized and empowered as experts within their respective contexts.

Other challenges to a family partnership model of family engagement include lack of aligned definitions of and commitment to the approach across systems (Kidd et al., 2005). For instance, some preschool programs operating in public school settings might be less open and committed to engaging families in authentic ways. Perceived limitations deriving from the requirements of the program or funding stream might cause school personnel to construe family partnerships as an unnecessary indulgence. In ECE (rather than public school) systems, similar struggles persist (Elfer 2007; Tarrant & Huerta, 2015). When responsive practices and regulatory requirements are at odds with each other, ECE teachers are more likely to follow the rules at times of stress (Elfer 2007). Regulations have also been found to supplant teachers' views of developmentally appropriate practices in high stakes environments (Tarrant & Huerta, 2015). Even well-trained and compensated professionals (in the health care field), were found to need specific training and support in building collaborative relationships with diverse families (Craft-Rosenberg, Kelley, & Schnoll, 2006). Another consideration is that teacher-parent partnership building takes time depending on the skills, interests, and contexts of both

parties (Rouse, 2012). A view of the teacher-parent partnership as foundational to high quality ECE may be a good argument for better teacher-child ratios and the resultant lower number of parents with whom an ECE teacher would need to build strong partnerships. Finally, weaving such process-elements of ECE quality into a high-stakes system requires careful planning for measurement, monitoring, and support (Tarrant & Huerta, 2015). The FPTRQ is a promising tool to evaluate provider-family partnerships, but it has yet to be validated and nationally normed, and its performance in a high-stakes accountability system is unknown (Kim et al., 2015).

Gap in the Literature and Rationale for Current Study

As described above, research has documented that the observed quality of infant-toddler ECE is lower than that for preschool age children, both nationally and in North Carolina (Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011; Russell & Martin, 2017). The literature also suggests that teacher-family partnerships may be a particularly salient feature of high-quality infant and toddler programs (Lally, 2009; Shonkoff, Phillips, & National Research Council, 2000; Sosinsky et al., 2016). There is a need, particularly in North Carolina, to better understand the nature and extent of teacher-family partnership processes that are being enacted. The state has a wealth of data on the quality of child care classrooms (NCRLAP, 2018), but virtually no data on what programs and teachers do to facilitate partnerships with families, or the quality of teacher-family partnerships. The need to document extant practices is critical to efforts to promote effective teacher-family partnerships.

Furthermore, little is known about how aspects of classroom quality such as family engagement might be improved for this age group (Howard, 2015). The evidence-base lacks data on how aspects of process quality such as teacher-family partnerships can be supported or translated into requirements in the ECE system. The present study addressed these gaps by providing information about the quality of teacher-family partnerships currently enacted in infant and toddler classrooms; how these partnerships relate to the quality of their classrooms as currently measured in the QRIS; and recommendations for how family partnerships might be more effectively supported and eventually incorporated into rules or regulations in the ECE system.

CHAPTER IV

THE CURRENT STUDY

Approach

A mixed-methods, community-based dissertation research study was conducted to address the objectives outlined above. Survey data were collected from administrators, teachers, and families in 38 classrooms serving infants and toddlers to explore "teacher-family partnerships". Teacher-family partnerships are defined herein as the reciprocal, strength-based relationships and collaborations that teachers and administrators initiate and enact with families to support continuity between home and classroom for children, and to address families' priorities and goals related to their children's learning and development (Virmani, Wiese, & Mangione, 2016).

In addition to providing descriptive data, teachers' and families' reported teacher-family partnerships were compared with respective ITERS-R classroom scores to test the relation between the quality of teacher-family partnerships and the overall observed quality of the classrooms. Qualitative interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators to gain insight on the opportunities and barriers to optimal family engagement, as well as recommendations for policies and resources that could facilitate teacher-family partnerships.

Objectives

The present study addressed the need for data on teacher-family partnerships and infant-toddler classroom quality through an exploratory examination of family engagement practices in infant-toddler ECE classrooms. Specifically, the study provided policy-relevant data regarding:

- The nature and extent of teacher-family partnerships currently enacted in infant and toddler ECE classrooms and programs, as reported by teachers, administrators and families.

- Associations of the indicators of classroom quality as measured by the current QRIS instrument with current teacher-family partnerships to further elucidate opportunities to build on the current QRIS to embed such partnerships into requirements.

- Teacher and administrator recommendations for policy and professional development supports to improve family engagement practices, and partnerships in particular.

- Teacher and administrator appraisals of opportunities to incorporate extant family engagement practices into the ECE system through QRIS.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present descriptive study yielded data to address the research questions described below. Based on the exploratory nature of the study, the primary purpose was to describe behaviors and attributes related to teacher-family partnerships, with a secondary purpose to examine the relations between variables. Therefore, the hypotheses presented were grounded in the literature but were a tentative framework for describing the results that might be found through the study.

RQ 1: What is the nature of teacher-family partnerships in licensed infant-toddler classrooms in North Carolina?

RQ 1a: To what extent do infant and toddler teachers report professional practices (i.e., knowledge, practices and attitudes) associated with teacher-family partnerships, and does this vary by age of the children being served, program auspice, or teacher education/ professional development?

RQ 1b: To what extent do families of infants and toddlers report that their child's teacher demonstrates professional practices (i.e., knowledge, practices and attitudes) associated with teacher-family partnerships, and do these vary by age of the child or program auspice?

RQ 2: What environmental features within programs and classrooms suggest opportunities for incorporating teacher-family partnership requirements into North Carolina's QRIS?

RQ 2a: What program-level policies and supports are in place to support teacher-family partnerships?

RQ 2b: How do teachers' partnership practices in infant-toddler classrooms relate to their scores on the measure of quality used in the QRIS?

RQ 2c: How do program-level policies and supports for teacher-family partnerships relate to classroom quality scores on the measure currently used in the QRIS?

RQ 3: What opportunities do infant-toddler teachers and program administrators see for strengthening teacher-family partnerships?

RQ 3a: What teacher-family partnership practices are reported by infant and toddler teachers who are highly rated by parents in their classrooms?

RQ 3b: What policies and supports are needed at the program level to strengthen partnerships between infant-toddler teachers and families?

RQ 3c: What policies and supports, including requirements, are needed at the system level to strengthen partnerships between infant-toddler teachers and families?

Hypotheses. As noted above, the exploratory nature of the research questions did not support specific hypotheses on all research questions. For example, data on the current practices and supports needed or recommended by teachers and administrators to strengthen family partnerships may be used to inform program and policy decisions to incentivize and support such family partnerships but did not suggest related hypotheses (**RQ3a, RQ3b, RQ3c**). However, evidence from the literature base on family partnerships was used to extrapolate hypotheses for the balance of the research questions. It was hypothesized that teachers with professional development on the topic, working in infant classrooms in non-profit programs would report higher levels of professional practices related to family partnerships (**RQ1a**), and their families would also report higher levels of such practices (**RQ1b**). It was further hypothesized that reported family partnership practices (**RQ2b**) and related administrative supports (**RQ2a**) would be positively associated with levels of observed classroom quality (**RQ2c**).

CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY

Mixed-Methods Design

The study employed a mixed-methods design to discover the relationship-based teacher-family partnerships currently enacted in the state's infant-toddler ECE classrooms, how these related to classroom quality, and how they might be augmented through policy and professional development. The mixed methods design was particularly well suited to address the research questions given the dearth of information currently available on this topic. Secondly, the complexity of the subject of inquiry was ideally suited to this design. The multifaceted, highly interactive nature of teacher-family partnerships presented a complex phenomenon that could best be understood through a mixed method design. Finally, mixed methods designs are uniquely well suited to policy development within educational settings, combining a quantitative approach to explore important characteristics of the educational system with qualitative data to promote understanding of the lived experiences of persons engaged in the educational process (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015).

More specifically, the present study employed a convergence mixed-methods design, with a quantitative and qualitative component (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015). This research design, (depicted in Figure 1), afforded the opportunity to study

multiple dimensions of the research problem, yielding data that promote a deeper understanding of the problem or phenomena. For the present study the quantitative component of the research design provided data regarding self-reported teacher-family partnerships and how the quality of such partnerships related to overall program quality, while the qualitative component provided a deeper understanding regarding how the practices are implemented, what supports could facilitate stronger teacher-family partnerships, and how the state of North Carolina might, through policies and resources, further support such partnerships among child care programs serving infants and toddlers.

Study Population and Sample

The population for the present study included program administrators, teachers and family members from child care classrooms serving infants and toddlers in the state of North Carolina. More specifically, the administrators were the persons on record as the center director with responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the program; the teachers included in the study were either lead or assistant teachers from classrooms serving children between the age of 0 to 30 months, and the family members were the primary guardian/caregiver of a child enrolled in the teacher's class. In the following section, the sample for both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study is described. The sample included a relatively small number of programs and participants, but this was deemed appropriate to answer the research questions posed in the study given the descriptive nature of the questions and corresponding types of analyses that were conducted.

Sample for the quantitative component. The sample of classrooms (and their corresponding administrators, teachers and family members) were drawn from center-based ECE programs that had recently undergone a program assessment for the NC QRIS including ITERS-R assessment of infant and toddler classrooms. Data from the ITERS-R assessments were provided through the state CCDF administrator in collaboration with the project conducting the assessments. The initial sample included 269 unique classroom assessments. One classroom had participated in the pilot of the present study and was therefore eliminated from the sampling frame, yielding a total of 268 classrooms. The sample was then divided by child age group according to the majority of the children in the classroom at the time of the assessment. Classrooms with a simple majority of children under the age of 12 months were classified as Infant classrooms. Classrooms with a simple majority of children ages 12 months and up were classified as Toddler classrooms. Two classrooms were evenly split between infants and toddlers and were classified as Infant classrooms due to the smaller number of available infant classrooms. This process yielded 194 toddler and 74 infant classrooms. Eight classrooms in the toddler sample and seven classrooms in the infant sample appeared twice due to having two separate assessments each: an initial QRIS assessment and then a separate reassessment to attempt to earn higher ratings. Only the initial assessment for each of these reassessed classrooms was retained, yielding a total of 186 classrooms in the Toddler sample, and 67 classrooms in the Infant sample. Classrooms were then designated as for profit or non-profit. Classrooms designated in the administrative data set as for profit (whether private for profit or corporate), were designated as for profit.

Any classroom identified in the administrative data set as non-profit, public (as in one public school system that licenses an early childhood program that serves toddlers), or state (as in the case of lab schools connected with institutes of higher education), was designated as non-profit. In the Toddler sample of 186 classrooms, 147 were designated as for profit, and 39 were designated as non-profit. In the Infant sample of 67 classrooms, a total of 54 were designated as for profit and 13 were designated as non-profit.

Classrooms' ITERS-R assessment ID numbers were entered into one of two tables, one table of infant classrooms and one table of toddler classrooms. A random number generator was used to assign a random number to each classroom. Classrooms were then sorted from low to high on the randomly assigned number. In order to reflect the current distribution of program auspice (NCRLAP, 2018), the first 15 for-profit and the first five non-profit classrooms were initially drawn from each respective table, yielding a total of 40 classrooms selected for the study (20 Infant and 20 Toddler classrooms). When recruitment first began, if an administrator declined to participate the next case designated with the same auspice was drawn from the respective list of toddler or infant classrooms. However, ultimately recruitment proceeded without respect to program auspice designation in order to reach the target sample.

The program administrator, and through that program administrator, one teacher in the ITERS-R assessed classroom and four families from each participating teacher's classroom, were recruited to complete the Family Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ; Kim, Forray, & Guzman, 2015) survey. All 67 programs in the Infant sample were recruited, first via email and then via follow up telephone calls. Administrators

representing a total of 32 infant classrooms consented (47% consent rate), with

completed study materials returned representing $N = 23$ infant classrooms (72% return

rate). Administrators representing 56 toddler classrooms were recruited, with 24

consenting (43% consent rate), and completed study materials returned representing $N =$

15 toddler classrooms (63% return rate). Four administrators had two participating

classrooms each, bringing the total of participating administrators to $N = 34$. A total of N

$= 109$ parent surveys were returned, however four were excluded. These four cases were

determined ineligible due to the reported age of the child whose teacher they had rated

(i.e., the child's age suggested that the parent could not be rating the participating

teacher). This brought the total of participating parents to $N = 105$. Three classrooms had

no parent participants and were thus excluded from analyses of FPTRQ parent data.

Average parent participation among those with parent data that were retained, resulted in

an average of 3.08 parent participants per program. Demographic data for administrators

(Table 1), teachers (Table 2), and parents (Table 3), are presented below.

Table 1. Administrator Demographics, Quantitative Portion

Total Administrators	34
Administrators by Age Group of Participating Classroom(s)	
Infant Classroom - Only	20 (59%)
Toddler Classroom – Only	10 (29%)
One Infant & One Toddler Classroom	3 (9%)
Two Toddler Classrooms	1 (3%)
For Profit Program Auspice	65%
Non Profit Program Auspice	35%
Ethnicity	
Hispanic	3%
Non-Hispanic	97%
Race	
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	6%
Black/ African American	36%
White/ European American	58%
Primary Language	
English	97%
Other - Croatian	3%
Education	
Two-Year Degree	18%
Four-Year Degree	65%
Undergrad Degree ECE/ Related	89%
Graduate Degree	24%
Grad Degree ECE/ Related	88%
Time in Position/Program	
Less than 1 year	9%
1-4 years	46%
5-10 years	30%
More than 10 years	15%
Time in ECE Field	
1-4 years	12%
5-10 years	15%
More than 10 years	73%

Table 2. Teacher Demographics, Quantitative Portion

Total Teachers	38
Infant Teachers	23 (61%)
Toddler Teachers	15 (39%)
Ethnicity	
Hispanic	3%
Non-Hispanic	97%
Race	
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	8%
Black/ African American	42%
White/ European American	53%
CDA	61%
Education	
Less than High School	3%
High School Diploma/ GED	8%
Some college, no degree	42%
Two-Year Degree	26%
Four-Year Degree	13%
Graduate Degree	8%
Degree ECE/ Related	82%
Time in Position/Program	
Less than 1 year	11%
1-4 years	47%
5-10 years	21%
More than 10 years	21%
Time in ECE Field	
Less than 1 year	0%
1-4 years	29%
5-10 years	21%
More than 10 years	50%

Table 3. Parent Demographics, Quantitative Portion

Total Parents	105
Infant Parents	64
Toddler Parents	41
Ethnicity	
Hispanic	2%
Non-Hispanic	98%
Race	
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	2%
Black/ African American	37%
White/ European American	61%
Filipino	1%
Other Asian	1%
Samoan	1%
Education	
Less than High School	1%
High School Diploma/ GED	12%
Some college, no degree	33%
Two-Year Degree	14%
Four-Year Degree	28%
Graduate Degree	12%
Income	
Less than $25,000	23%
$25,000 to $34,999	20%
$35,000 to $44,999	5%
$45,000 to $54,999	1%
$55,000 to $74,999	16%
More than $75,000	35%

Sample for the qualitative component. The qualitative sample was comprised of

$n = 5$ infant teachers, $n = 5$ toddler teachers, and $n = 9$ administrators. Parent survey

results were analyzed to determine the sampling frame for the qualitative component.

Factor scores for the Knowledge subscale of the FPTRQ were computed for each parent

participant at three time points during data collection (see the "Measures" section for a

description of the subscales). Each classroom's score on the Knowledge subscale was

computed by taking the mean of parents' scores on the Knowledge subscale. Classrooms

were then ordered by their Knowledge score from highest to lowest at the time of

selection, and the five top scoring infant teachers and the five top scoring toddler teachers

(and their administrators) were recruited to participate in interviews. One infant and one

toddler teacher were from the same program, thus the total administrator participants was

$n = 9$, while the total teacher participants was $n = 10$. Each interview participant was

assigned a pseudonym using a random name generator. Table 4 below provides

demographic profiles of the interview participants (including pseudonyms). Ethnicity is

omitted due to lack of variation: no participants identified as either Hispanic or Latino.

Table 4. Qualitative Interview Participants' Demographics

Pseudonym	Role	Education	Race	Time in Field	Program Auspice
Amber	Administrator	4yr: ECE	White/ European American	> 10 years	Non-profit
Jeannette	Infant Teacher	4 yr: Unspecified	White/ European American	> 10 years	
Audrey	Administrator	2 yr: ECE	White/ European American	1-4 years	Non-profit
Mamie	Infant Teacher	Some college	White/ European American	1-4 years	
Minnie	Administrator	2 yr: ECE	White/ European American	> 10 years	For profit
Frances	Infant Teacher	2 yr: ECE	White/ European American	> 10 years	
Dolores	Administrator	2 yr: ECE	White/ European American	> 10 years	Non-profit
Eunice	Infant Teacher	2 yr: ECE	Black/ African American	5-10 years	
Ola	Administrator	4 yr: ECE	Black/ African American	> 10 years	Non-profit
Brenda	Infant Teacher	4 yr: ECE	Black/ African American	1-4 years	
Tanya	Toddler Teacher	4 yr: Other	Black/ African American	< 1 year	
Charlene	Administrator	4 yr: Education	White/ European American	> 10 years	For profit
Erma	Toddler Teacher	Some College	White/ European American	5-10 years	
Lindsay	Administrator	4 yr: ECE	Black/ African American	> 10 years	Non-profit
Arlene	Toddler Teacher	4 yr: ECE	Black/ African American	1-4 years	
Carole	Administrator	Grad: ECE	White/ European American	5-10 years	For profit
Annette	Toddler Teacher	2 yr: ECE	White/ European American	5-10 years	
Melinda	Administrator	Grad: ECE	White/ European American	> 10 years	Non-profit
Naomi	Toddler Teacher	2 yr: ECE	White/ European American	1-4 years	

Notes: Teachers' names are indented beneath their program administrators' names. 2 yr = Two year degree. 4 yr = Four year degree. Grad = Graduate degree. ECE = Early Childhood Education.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in phases, beginning with a pilot study. The second phase of the study was selection and recruitment of the sample, and data collection for the quantitative component of the study. Phase 3 of the data collection was comprised of interviews with the subsample of teachers and their administrators.

Pilot study data collection. Three partner program administrators identified through prior studies as enacting high-quality teacher-family partnerships participated in the pilot study. One purpose of the pilot study was to test the procedures for surveying teachers and administrators. The program administrators recommended up to two infant-toddler teachers each ($N = 6$ teachers) to participate in the pilot. All written correspondence and instructions for the study were delivered via US Mail or by hand to the three partner program administrators, along with paper versions of the survey measure. The packet included a short questionnaire for the administrator and teachers to provide their feedback for improving the data collection process, along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which to return completed materials. Program administrators received follow-up electronic mail at one-week intervals to check on the progress of data completion. Each administrator received a $20 gift card and each teacher received a $10 gift card for participating in the survey component. Results from the pilot indicated that the data collection process for the surveys was easily understood by participants, and no recommendations for improvements or changes were made.

Following receipt of the completed surveys, in-person interviews with administrators and teachers were scheduled, and the interview protocol was piloted. One

administrator and one teacher from each of the three programs completed the interview and, immediately following the interview was asked to evaluate the content of the interview protocol. Each interview participant received a $25 gift card for their participation following the conclusion of the interview. Although participants were interested in the focus of the study and content of the interview, they did not make any suggestions for improvements to the interview protocol. Accordingly, the pilot interview protocols were used for the qualitative portion of the main study.

Main study data collection. *Quantitative component data collection.* Two types of quantitative data were used in the study: FPTRQ surveys from administrators, teachers and family members, and ITERS-R data collected through North Carolina's QRIS. Procedures for data collection are described below.

Survey data. Procedures for selecting the stratified random sample are described above in the section titled, "Sample for the Quantitative Component". Selected programs were contacted initially via an email that introduced and provided details about the study and included an invitation to participate. The initial recruitment e-mail was followed by a second email and then a telephone call to explain the study and invite the program administrator to agree, on behalf of her program, to participate. As administrators consented, the researcher confirmed that the teacher whose classroom was assessed with the ITERS-R during the recent QRIS evaluation were still employed and still teaching in the same classroom. If none of the teachers who were present at the recent ITERS-R assessment were still employed in the same classroom, those programs were deemed ineligible and recruitment proceeded to the next available program/classroom. However,

in two cases, the teacher identified to participate was not the teacher completing the survey, thus the sample for the FPTRQ teacher survey is two more than the sample for the ITERS-R classroom data.

Immediately following the recruitment phone call, program administrators were sent a packet that included a study description and consent forms for all participants; the FPTRQ administrator survey, teacher surveys, and surveys for the parents; as well as survey envelopes and a postage-paid return envelope. The administrator was responsible for distributing and collecting the teacher and parent FPTRQ surveys for her site. Administrators were asked to give the FPTRQ teacher surveys and consent forms to the participating teachers in a security-lined envelope such that teachers could seal the envelope containing their responses before returning it to their administrator. Similarly, administrators were asked to distribute parent surveys and consent forms to parents of the second, fourth, sixth and eighth child on the participating teacher's class roster. Parent study materials were distributed in security-lined envelopes to keep participant responses confidential and to allow parents to opt out (i.e., return blank surveys) without the knowledge of the administrator. Four family surveys were distributed per classroom in an effort to successfully collect three completed surveys. Family members and teachers returned their sealed envelopes to the administrator, who returned all study materials in a postage-paid envelope. Weekly telephone calls and/or electronic mail messages were sent to participating program administrators encourage completion and return of surveys.

Administrators, teachers and family members who returned the surveys received incentives for their participation. The majority of administrators received gift cards in the

amount of $30 each and the majority of teachers received gift cards in the amount of $10 each for their participation. However, to boost participation toward the end of the recruitment period, incentives were increased to $50 each for administrators and $30 each for teachers. The administrators with two classroom teachers participating in the study received separate gift card incentives for each classroom/teacher. Two additional programs received an extra set of incentives for completing and sending a second set of study materials after the first set was lost in the mail. Children's books were provided as incentives for participating parents. Electronic gift cards were sent via email to participants, and children's books were shipped directly to administrators at their program site for distribution to parents.

ITERS-R data. ITERS-R data collected between July 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019 was requested from the CCDF Administrator, and permission to use their ITERS-R scores as secondary data was also requested from the participating programs and granted via their informed consent forms. ITERS-R assessments are conducted by highly trained assessors with the North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project, (NCRLP) under contract with the state CCDF administrator. Assessors complete initial training and must meet reliability requirements before conducting official observations. Once certified reliable, assessors are recertified at regular intervals to maintain 85% reliability. ITERS-R assessments consist of 3-4 hours of direct observations per classroom, followed by teacher interview to collect demographic and other information not observed. Data managers from the NCRLAP provided a dataset that included the following data from the ITERS-R assessment of participating teachers' classrooms: total, subscale, and item

scores, as well as additional data collected on the ages and number of children in the classroom at the time of the assessment, demographic information on the teachers, and program and administrator names and contact information.

Qualitative component data collection. Following the sampling procedure described above in the "Sample for the Qualitative Component" section, teachers (and their administrators) selected for the qualitative component of the study were contacted via e-mail and invited to participate in individual interviews. Appointments were scheduled at the convenience of the administrator and teacher, and the researcher visited the program to conduct both interviews on the same day.

Interviews were conducted in person at the program site. Most administrator and several teacher interviews were conducted in the administrator's office. Some teacher interviews were conducted in staff break rooms or in spare classrooms. Interviews lasted from 15 minutes to just over an hour. With permission, the interviews were audio recorded and the researcher also took limited notes during the interview. Following the interview, the researcher reviewed the notes and added observations from the interview, acknowledging potential sources of bias throughout the interview process by journaling thoughts and perceptions regarding participants' perspectives (Maxwell, 2005). The majority of interview participants each received a $50 electronic gift card via email for their participation, however the first few received such gift cards in the amount of $25 each. Similar to the incentive increase for the quantitative portion of the study, incentives for interview participation were increased to boost recruitment.

Protection of Human Subjects

The present study was submitted to UNCG's Institutional Review Board and approved. Human subjects' protections were honored at each step of the research project, and appropriate steps to protect the confidentiality of the data were taken, such as separating identifying information from data, using pseudonyms for interviews analyses, and securely storing electronic and hard copy data.

Measures

Quantitative measures. *Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality Survey (FPTRQ).* In order to discover the nature and level of partnerships between infant-toddler teachers and families of the children in their ECE classrooms, the Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ; Kim, Forray, & Guzman, 2015) measures was administered. Three versions were used: the Administrator Survey; the Teacher Survey; and the Parent survey (see Appendix A for web links to all surveys). The Teacher and Parent FPTRQ measures share six subscales (Family-specific Knowledge, Collaboration, Responsiveness, Communication, Commitment, and Respect). An additional subscale unique to the Teacher measure is Openness to Change. Two additional subscales that are unique to the Parent measure are Family-Focused Concern and Understanding Context. All subscales on the Teacher and Parent measures are organized into three constructs of knowledge, practices, and attitudes. The Administrator survey includes questions which address environmental features that promote positive teacher-family relationships such as communication systems, peer-to-peer parent activities, and information about resources for parents. The Administrator

survey is a checklist (rather than a rating scale) of these items and can provide summary

information about the numbers of policies and other supports that administrators enact.

Finally, the teacher measure includes questions to collect demographic data from

participants, such as their education level and ethnicity. Both the administrator and

teacher measures were adapted slightly to clarify wording based on suggestions of the

CCDF Administrator. These adapted versions were successfully piloted with no further

suggestions for revisions and thus used for the main study.

The FPTRQ was the ideal tool for this study because its constructs are salient to

capture the relationship-based practices currently enacted by infant-toddler teachers. In

addition, it was developed for and field tested with licensed child care providers,

including a sample from North Carolina (Kim et al., 2015); and its quick (10 minute)

paper-and-pen format made it a low burden for participants. The NC CCDF

Administrator reviewed the FPTRQ measures and agreed that they were well suited for

the present study, as well as the populations being studied.

The FPTRQ was developed with guidance and support from the Office of

Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), with careful attention to the constructs as

well as the practicality of the measure. The development process included a review of

the literature on family and provider/teacher relationships, consultation with experts and

practitioners, and extensive field testing. Results from the field tests indicated

Cronbach's alphas of the teacher subscale scores in the acceptable to good range (Kline,

2000), with the lowest subscale (Commitment) at an acceptable $\alpha = 0.63$ and the

highest, Family Specific Knowledge subscale, considered to be in the good range at $\alpha =$

0.90 (Kim et al., 2015). Similarly, results from the field tests of the parent subscale

scores range from an acceptable $\alpha = 0.83$ to an excellent $\alpha = 0.97$ (Kim et al., 2015).

Demographic data. Administrators and teachers also completed demographic

surveys. Administrator demographic surveys (see Appendix C) collected information

about participant sex, race, ethnicity, education, and length of time in the field and in that

particular program. Teacher demographic surveys (see Appendix D) collected

information about participant sex, languages spoken, length of time in the field, in that

particular program, and with the current group of children. The teacher demographic

survey also included a question about professional development related to family

engagement, including formal coursework, technical assistance or coaching, evaluation,

and feedback on family engagement practices.

Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS-R). A widely used

measure of global quality in infant-toddler classrooms, the ITERS-R (Harms, Cryer, &

Clifford, 2006) is comprised of 39 items organized within the following subscales: space

and furnishings, personal care routines, listening and talking, activities, interaction,

program structure, and parents and staff. Trained assessors conduct classroom

observations and score indicators (within each subscale) from a low of 1 (inadequate) to a

high of 7 (excellent). Subscale scores are derived from averaging the indicator scores

within each subscale. The authors report internal consistency of the overall scale as $\alpha =$

0.93, or excellent, although subscales range from a low of $\alpha = 0.47$ (Space and

Furnishings subscale) to a high of $\alpha = 0.80$ (Interactions subscale: Frank Porter Graham

Child Development Institute, n.d.)

Recent research into the structure of the ITERS-R suggested that an alternate four-factor model provided a more accurate portrait of classroom scores than did the measure's subscales (Hestenes, Cassidy, Hegde, & Lower, 2007), and the factor model was used in the present study. Because the focal state no longer collects data on the indicators comprising the fourth factor (Parents/ Staff), the present study used three of the suggested four factors: Materials and Activities; Safety and Organization; and Language and Interactions (see Table 5 below for factors and indicators). Study authors reported the Materials and Activities factor demonstrated acceptable internal consistencies ranging from $\alpha = 0.40$ for music and movement to $\alpha = 0.79$ for dramatic play (Hestenes et al., 2007). It was comprised of indicators such as the physical furnishings in the space, materials to support different types of activities, and free play. The Safety and Organization factor internal consistency scores similarly ranged from $\alpha = 0.43$ for furniture for routine care to $\alpha = 0.73$ for room arrangement. Safety and organization included indicators for physical items such as furniture and room arrangement as well as processes such as diapering and health and safety practices. The Language and Interactions factor included four indicators related to children's understanding and use language, peer interaction, and discipline, and it featured internal consistencies of $\alpha = 0.60$ for discipline to $\alpha = 0.68$ for helping children use language.

Table 5. ITERS-R Factors Used in Analyses

Materials/ Activities Factor	Safety/ Organization Factor	Language/ Interactions Factor
3. Provision for relaxation & comfort	2. Furniture for routine care, play, & learning	12. Helping children understand language
14. Using books	4. Room arrangement	13. Helping children use language
15. Fine motor	9. Diapering/ toileting	26. Peer interaction
16. Active physical play	10. Health practices	28. Discipline
18. Music/ movement	11. Safety practices	
20. Dramatic play	25. Supervision of play & learning	
22. Nature/ science	29. Schedule	
24. Promoting acceptance of diversity		
30. Free play		

(Hestenes, Cassidy, Hegde, & Lower, 2007)

Qualitative measures. *Interview protocols*. A total of two semi-structured interview protocols were used to collect data for the qualitative portion of the study. One interview protocol was used with administrators (see Appendix E) and a second with teachers (see Appendix F). The interview protocols for the pilot study were developed in conjunction with the CCDF Administrator and provided structure to the semi-structured interview process. The protocols were designed to elucidate the ways in which teachers gain and use knowledge about and from families; factors that facilitate and hinder their relationships with families; the ways administrators support teacher-family relationships; and program-level and professional development supports that help teachers strengthen their knowledge of and relationships with families. The interview protocols asked program administrators and teachers to describe their current and preferred family engagement (including relationship-building) philosophies and practices. Questions characterizing the protocols included *"What methods do you use to get to know new families," "How do you use the information you learn from families," "What supports would help you to strengthen your relationships with families," and "What types of requirements might be helpful to promote stronger teacher-family partnerships across the state?"* Feedback collected during the pilot process did not suggest a need for revisions, so the piloted protocols were used in the main study.

Data Analysis

The descriptive study was exploratory in nature. Therefore, the quantitative data analyses were descriptive analyses and two-group comparisons. The qualitative analyses yielded rich descriptions of current ways programs and teachers promote teacher-family

partnerships, and field-based recommendations for how North Carolina's child care system can better support teacher-family partnerships. Each component of data analysis for the present study is described below.

Data preparation. The first step in the quantitative data analysis process was to prepare the data for analyses. FPTRQ survey data were entered into the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 25 (SPSS), according to the scoring guidelines in the FPTRQ user manual (Kim et al., 2015). ITERS-R data were imported into SPSS along with demographic data collected with the ITERS-R. Frequencies, means, and ranges were examined for evidence of data entry errors. In cases where a potential error was noted, the hard copy was used to verify data that had been entered. As a final step in the data verification process, the faculty mentor reviewed a random sample of 25% of the hard-copy data in each sample (i.e., administrators, teachers, and parents) against the electronic databases. Two errors were identified and corrected.

Preliminary data analyses also evaluated the extent to which there were missing data. Beginning with the teacher FPTRQ data set, in cases where a participant appeared to have skipped one question out of several within a question group, the mean for that individual on the specific question group was entered for the one missed question. In sections with options for "yes" or "no" answers only, where participants marked some answers "yes" and left others blank, it was assumed that they intended to indicate "no" for the unmarked items in that section (and vice versa for those marked only "no"). If participants marked some answers "yes" and some "no" and skipped others in the same section, the blank items were treated as missing data and not included in analyses. A total

of three teacher participants who had not participated in the ITERS-R assessment for their classroom returned completed FPTRQ surveys. These three teachers were excluded from the ITERS-R analyses. Thus, the sample for the ITERS-R analyses was $N = 36$ classrooms (teachers). For the teachers' FPTRQ data, the sample sizes by subscale were: Knowledge subscale $N = 37$; Practices subscale $N = 36$; Attitudes subscale, $N = 38$.

Similar rules for missing data were applied to FPTRQ surveys from parents. In addition, parent FPTRQ surveys were further examined for inconsistencies in terms of reverse coded items and eligibility to participate based on children's age groups. The parent survey included several reverse coded items, and four participants appeared to have overlooked the reversal. That is, they rated their child's teacher highly on all other questions. Thus, a decision was made to correct the apparent errors on those records and preserve the high ratings throughout. An additional four parent cases were excluded due to their apparent ineligibility for the study. These four parents, (from three different programs) reported their child's age as five years or older, meaning they could not have been served in the participating infant or toddler classroom. At the conclusion of screening for the parent data set, a total of $N = 105$ participants was retained.

FPTRQ data from administrators was examined for missing data with the same approach described above in terms of unmarked items in yes/no sections. For the FPTRQ portion of the study, the total of participating administrators was considered to be the number of unique participants, or $N = 34$. For analyses comparing administrators' FPRTQ scores with classroom ITERS-R scores, initial FPTRQ scores from the four administrators with two participating classrooms were entered for both classrooms.

However, because two other participating administrators had no corresponding ITERS-R classroom scores, the total for the ITERS-R comparison was $N = 36$.

The final data preparation procedure was to examine the ITERS-R data set, and the teacher and parent FPTRQ data sets for normality before proceeding with correlational or ANOVA analyses. Because the administrator data set was a checklist rather than a rating scale, the tests for normality were deemed unnecessary. In addition to descriptive statistics on each data set (by factor), histograms were produced such that normality of the data distribution could be visually examined. The teacher FPTRQ data appeared to be normally distributed, and the ITERS-R data appeared to be approximately normally distributed. The parent FPTRQ data appeared to be negatively skewed on each subscale. Log transformations were deemed inappropriate for the level of analyses being conducted, however it is important to note that skewed data may contribute to a Type 1 error in parametric statistical analyses (Howell, 2013), thus statistically significant results should be interpreted cautiously.

Analyses. Data analyses was organized and guided by the research questions that were the corpus of the study. The data analyses conducted for each research question are described below.

RQ 1: What is the nature of teacher-family partnerships in licensed infant-toddler classrooms in North Carolina?

RQ 1a: To what extent do infant and toddler teachers report professional practices (i.e., knowledge, practices and attitudes) associated with teacher-family partnerships, and

does this vary by age of the children being served, program auspice, or teacher professional development?

RQ 1a Analysis. Infant-toddler teachers' FPTRQ survey results were analyzed by computing the means, standard deviations, and ranges for each subscale to provide descriptive data on teachers' knowledge, practices and attitudes. Teacher response means for each subscale were also analyzed to test for differences associated with the age of the children being served (infants or toddlers), the program auspice (for-profit or non-profit), and teacher professional development (family engagement-related professional development in the past 12 months or not). Three analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted for each of the subscales, one to compare infant teachers' responses with toddler teachers' responses; the second to compare teachers' responses from for-profit programs with responses from teachers working in non-profit programs; and the third to compare teachers with recent family engagement-related professional development to those without.

RQ 1b: To what extent do families of infants and toddlers report that their child's teacher demonstrates professional practices (i.e., knowledge, practices and attitudes) associated with teacher-family partnerships, and do these vary by age of the child or program auspice?

RQ 1b Analysis: First, family responses on the FPTRQ were analyzed by computing the means, standard deviations, and ranges for each subscale to provide descriptive data on families' perceptions of their teachers' knowledge, practices and attitudes toward teacher-family partnerships. Family response means for each subscale

were also analyzed by the age of the child (infant or toddler) and by program auspice (for profit or non-profit). Two ANOVAs were conducted for each of the subscales, one to compare responses of families with infants to responses from families who have toddlers, and the second to compare families' responses based on the auspice of their child's program (for profit programs compared with non-profit programs). Holm-Bonferroni (Holm, 1979) corrections for multiple comparisons were applied to significant results.

RQ 2: What environmental features within programs and classrooms suggest opportunities for incorporating teacher-family partnership requirements into North Carolina's QRIS?

RQ 2a: What program-level policies and supports are in place to support teacher-family partnerships?

RQ 2a Analysis: Administrator responses to the Director FPTRQ were analyzed to examine program-level policies and resources available to support teacher-family partnerships. Descriptive analyses including frequencies of various strategies reported and totals for different types of supports were calculated to determine which types of policies and supports were most commonly reported by administrators. Means, standard deviations, and ranges were calculated for the variables that were sum totals of the number of options selected by administrators.

RQ 2b: How do teachers' teacher-family partnership professional practices in infant-toddler classrooms relate to their scores on the measure of quality used in the QRIS?

RQ 2b Analysis: To analyze the relation between teachers' professional practices related to teacher-family partnerships (FPTRQ results) and the quality of their classroom environment, teachers' scores on the FPTRQ were compared with the score their classroom received on the ITERS-R. Correlations were computed to analyze the associations between FPTRQ subscale (knowledge, practices and attitudes) scores and ITERS-R total scores and factor scores (Hestenes, Cassidy, Hegde, & Lower, 2007) . Correlational analyses were conducted to examine associations between the parent FPTRQ scores and the classroom's ITERS-R scores.

RQ 2c: How do program-level policies and supports for teacher-family partnerships relate to classroom quality scores on the measure currently used in the QRIS?

RQ 2c Analysis: To analyze the relation between program-level policies and supports and the quality of infant-toddler classroom environments, administrators' scores on the FPTRQ were compared with the score classrooms in their program received on the ITERS-R (total score and factor scores). Correlations were computed to examine the relation between the number of reported resources and policies reported on the Directors' FPTRQ measure and the ITERS-R scores.

Analyses for the quantitative portion of the study also included application of the Holm-Bonferroni (Holm, 1979) correction to significant results in order to correct for family-wise error rates resulting from multiple comparisons. The following equation was used for the Holm-Bonferroni correction was used:

$$HB = \frac{Target\ \alpha\ of\ .05}{(n-rank+1)},$$ and the result was compared against

the calculated p value resulting from the related analysis. Where *HB* was greater than the

p value resulting from the analysis, the result was considered to be significant such that

the null hypothesis could be rejected.

RQ 3: What opportunities do infant-toddler teachers and program administrators

see for strengthening teacher-family partnerships?

RQ 3a: What teacher-family partnership practices are reported by infant and

toddler teachers who are highly rated by parents in their classrooms?

RQ 3b: What policies and supports are needed at the program level to strengthen

partnerships between infant-toddler teachers and families?

RQ 3c: What policies and supports, including requirements, are needed at the

system level to strengthen partnerships between infant-toddler teachers and families?

RQ 3 Analysis: Semi-structured interviews with program administrators and

infant-toddler teachers elicited their opinions about what program- and system-level

policies and supports, including requirements, might facilitate teacher-family

partnerships. The data sources for the qualitative analyses included transcripts of audio

recordings from the interviews and reflective notes recorded by the researcher

immediately following each interview to capture impressions of the session and major

themes that emerged. These self-reflections and notes were compared to the interview

transcripts and used in the analyses to help prevent personal biases from distorting the

participants' experiences and perspectives.

As a first step in the analysis process, the transcript for each interview was summarized by creating summary paragraphs for each interview to help organize the data and serve as a reminder of the interview's main points (Creswell, 2007). The summary was shared with the participant to member-check the researcher's record and interpretation of the interview. Participants were given approximately five business days to review and provide feedback, and they were informed that if they did not provide corrections by the deadline, their assent would be assumed. A total of five participants provided feedback affirming the researcher's interpretation of the interview. No changes or corrections were suggested.

The next step in the analysis process was to evaluate the collective group of interviews, using the constant comparative method (Glaser 1965, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each transcript was evaluated for themes that emerged from the data. The themes were then compared within individual interview transcripts and across interviews until no new themes emerge. Following the constant comparative methodology, themes were defined and grouped into categories according to how they related to each other. During this qualitative analytic process, a "peer debriefing" process was used (Creswell, 2007). The faculty mentor reviewed the transcripts and themes and provided feedback including additional themes and alternate groupings of categories. Several meetings were held to review feedback, and changes were incorporated at several time points until final agreement on the coding framework (i.e., themes and categories) was reached.

In the final step of the data analysis and interpretation process, the researcher again asked for feedback from participants. In a second member checking process, final

themes and categories were shared with participants for response and reaction. Again, participants were given approximately one week to provide comments or corrections, with assent assumed in the absence of reply. Four participants provided feedback in this final member checking process, and one of those provided feedback about a point she felt was missing, which was then woven into the final coding framework. The coding framework was then reviewed a final time in relation to the interview transcripts to ensure that no participant or idea was being systematically overlooked. This review suggested that comments and ideas emerging from each interview were evenly represented across themes and categories. To conclude this portion of the analysis, themes and categories were shared with the CCDF Administrator in person to ensure agreement on interpretation, and no changes were suggested at that time.

CHAPTER VI

RESULTS

Quantitative Component

RQ1. The aim for RQ1 was to examine the nature of extant teacher-family partnership practices in licensed infant-toddler classrooms in North Carolina using the Family Provider-Teacher Relationship Questionnaire (FPTRQ: Kim, Forray, & Guzman, 2015), both from the point of view of teachers in those classrooms, and also, separately, from the point of view of parents with children in those classrooms. Further, this RQ1 aimed to investigate whether these practices (as measured by the FPTRQ subscales of Knowledge, Practices, and Attitudes) varied by the age of the children in the classroom (infant or toddler), by program auspice (non-profit or for profit), and by teachers' professional development (PD) in the area of family engagement (any family engagement-related PD or none). Results from the three subscales of the teacher FPTRQ surveys will be presented first, followed by results from the three subscales of the parent FPTRQ surveys.

RQ 1a: Teacher-reported partnership practices. Descriptive data on teachers' responses by FPTRQ subscale are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' FPTRQ Subscale Scores

Subscale	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Max Possible
Knowledge	37	34.16	7.05	17	45	48
Practices	36	74.58	7.31	56	88	92
Attitudes	38	54.95	5.69	44	64	64

Across all three subscales, ANOVAs suggested no mean differences associated with the age of the children in the classroom (infant or toddler); program auspice (non-profit or for profit); or teachers' professional development (PD) in the area of family engagement (any family engagement-related PD or none). Group means are displayed in Table 7 and ANOVA results are displayed in Table 8 below.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' FPTRQ Subscale Scores by Predictor

	KNOWLEDGE			PRACTICES			ATTITUDES		
Predictor	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Infants	22	34.64	6.72	21	75.25	8.32	23	55.52	6.10
Toddlers	15	33.47	7.70	15	73.67	5.77	15	54.07	5.07
Non-Profit	15	35.87	7.01	15	77.13	6.16	15	56.27	4.82
For Profit	22	33.80	7.00	21	72.76	7.66	23	54.09	6.14
FE PD	20	34.15	7.20	20	73.90	8.53	21	54.81	5.58
No PD	17	34.18	7.10	16	75.44	5.60	17	55.12	5.99

Note: FE PD = Any family engagement-related professional development in the past 12 months. No PD = No family engagement-related professional development in the past 12 months.

Table 8. Teacher FPTRQ Subscale Scores Compared by Predictor

FPTRQ Subscale	Predictor	Sum of Squares	F	p	Partial η^2
Knowledge	Prog Auspice	73.29	1.49	.230	.041
	Class Age	12.20	0.24	.627	.007
	Teacher PD	.006	.000	.991	.000
Practices	Prog Auspice	167.21	3.33	.077	.089
	Class Age	21.61	.397	.533	.012
	Teacher PD	21.01	.386	.539	.011
Attitudes	Prog Auspice	41.14	1.345	.254	.036
	Class Age	19.22	.587	.449	.016
	Teacher PD	.89	.027	.871	.001

Notes: Degrees of freedom = 1. Prog Auspice = Program Auspice (non-profit or for profit). Class Age is the age of the majority of the children in the classroom at the time of the ITERS-R assessment (under 12 months = infants, 12 or more months = toddler). Teacher PD is the teachers' professional development related to family engagement (any family engagement-related PD counts as YES, otherwise marked as NONE).

RQ 1b: Parent-Reported Partnership Practices. Turning to parents' views of teachers' partnership practices in infant and toddler classrooms, descriptive data on parent FPTRQ survey results are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics for Parents' FPTRQ Subscale Scores

Subscale	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Max Possible
Knowledge	105	52.71	6.80	36	60	60
Practices	103	109.89	15.74	54	132	132
Attitudes	105	61.59	4.58	36	65	72

The first set of analyses on the parent FPTRQ responses examined each subscale by the age of children in the classroom (infant or toddler) and suggested significantly higher parent ratings of infant teachers (on average), as compared with parent ratings of toddler teachers (on average), on the Knowledge subscale after applying the Holm-

Bonferroni correction for family wise error rates (Holm 1979). See Table 10 below for descriptive statistics on each parent subscale by program auspice and child age, and Table 11 below for complete results of the parent ANOVAs. Parents of infants reported greater comfort sharing family-specific Knowledge with their teachers than parents of toddlers ($F_{(1,103)} = 8.05$, $p < .05$). Recall that the parent scores on the FPTRQ Knowledge subscale appeared to be negatively skewed, so significant results should be interpreted with caution.

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics for Parents' FPTRQ Subscale Scores by Predictor

	KNOWLEDGE			PRACTICES			ATTITUDES		
Factor	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Infants	64	54.17	6.80	36	60	14.50	64	62.47	3.12
Toddlers	42	109.89	15.74	54	132	16.69	41	60.22	6.00
Non-Profit	43	54.58	5.73	43	112.33	14.41	43	62.70	3.13
For Profit	62	51.42	7.20	60	108.15	16.52	62	60.82	5.25

The second set of analyses examined parent responses on the FPTRQ by program auspice (non-profit or for profit). After applying the Holm-Bonferroni (Holm, 1979) correction, none of these analyses yielded statistically significant results. That is, there were no differences in parent reported teacher Knowledge, Attitudes, or Practices among parents using non-profit or for profit ECE for their children.

Table 11. Parent FPTRQ Subscale Scores Compared by Predictor

FPTRQ Subscale	Predictor	Sum of Squares	F	HB Critical p	p	Partial η^2
Knowledge	Class Age	348.22	8.051	.008	.005*	.072
	Prog Auspice	253.86	5.747	.01	.018	.053
Practices	Class Age	1278.35	5.386	.008	.022	.051
	Prog Auspice	436.73	1.778	.01	.185	.017
Attitudes	Class Age	19.22	6.331	.008	.013	.058
	Prog Auspice	89.272	4.391	.01	.039	.041

*Notes: Degrees of freedom = 1. Prog Auspice = Program Auspice (non-profit or for profit). Class Age is the age of the majority of the children in the classroom at the time of the ITERS-R assessment (under 12 months = infants, 12 or more months = toddler). HB Critical p = Holm-Bonferroni critical p at α = .05. * indicates p < .05 after applying Holm-Bonferroni correction.*

RQ2. The aim of RQ2 was to examine program- and classroom-level supports for teacher-family partnership practices that might suggest opportunities for incorporating such practices into the QRIS. Specifically, RQ2 examined the number and kinds of practices in place in the areas of program policies, communications, and other supports for teacher-family partnerships; how teachers' classroom practices as measured by the ITERS-R relate to their partnership practices as measured by the FPTRQ; and how program-level supports for such partnership practices relate to teachers' classroom practices per the ITERS-R. Results from administrators' FPRTQ-reported practices will be presented first, followed by results from comparison of teachers' FPTRQ-reported practices and their ITERS-R scores, and finally results from comparison of administrators' practices and teachers' ITERS-R scores.

RQ2a: Administrators' support for teacher-family partnerships. The administrator FPTRQ consists of checklists of policies and other supports that may or

may not be in place at the program level, and these checklists comprise three subscales: Environment and Policy Checklist; Communication Systems; and Information About Resources. See Table 12 below for descriptive statistics of Administrators' FPTRQ subscale scores.

Table 12. Descriptive Statistics for Administrators' FPTRQ Subscale Scores

Subscale	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Max Possible
Environment & Policy Checklist	32	13.00	2.08	7	17	17
Communication Systems	34	7.68	1.30	4	9	9
Information About Resources	33	7.15	3.84	1	15	15

The frequencies of Administrator FPTRQ items were also computed and the resulting frequencies of supports and policies by subscale are presented in Tables 13, 14 and 15 below. In the Environment and Policy Checklist subscale (Table 13), all programs ($N = 34$) reported allowing parents to visit at any time, providing opportunities for parents to participate by bringing materials, and providing parenting information via newsletters. The highest-reported communication method (Communication Systems subscale, Table 14) was in-person discussions ($N = 34$) followed by bulletin boards ($N = 33$), and telephone ($N = 32$). Programs reported providing less Information About Resources (third subscale, Table 15) overall, with information about child care subsidies the highest reported ($N = 31$) followed by information about developmental screenings ($N = 26$) and information about health screenings ($N = 25$).

Table 13. Administrator Reported Environment and Policy Checklist Items

Item Description	Frequency
14. Parents can visit the care setting anytime during care hours	34
15b. Bringing materials such as arts and crafts	34
23c. Newsletters	34
23b. Bulletin boards	33
15a. Volunteering in program/ care activities	32
15d. Observing their own children in the care setting	32
20. Written information and materials provided to families are at the appropriate literacy level	32
21. The program provides opportunities for family events	32
22. There are opportunities for parents to get together	28
19. Written information and materials provided to families are in all languages spoken by families	28
23e. Pamphlets	26
17. The program has suggestion boxes or surveys for family members to give feedback about the program	21
16. Parents are invited to shape the planning of the program	19
18. The program offers special activities *just* for fathers or other male members of the family	18
15c. Participating in a parent committee	16
23d. Resource library with books and/ or videos	12
23a. Parenting workshops/ classes	9

Notes: *15. There are a variety of opportunities for parent involvement, including…*
23. The program provides parenting information through….

Table 14. Administrator Reported Communication System Items

Item Description	Frequency
7. Which of the following methods are used to communicate with families?	
7i. In-person discussions	34
7d. Bulletin Boards	33
7b. Newsletter	32
7g. Telephone	32
7h. Parent-teacher conference	29
7f. Text message	28
7c. Calendar	27
7e. Email	24
7a. Website	22

Table 15. Administrator Reported Information About Resources Items

Item Description	Frequency
8d. Child care subsidy or vouchers	31
9b. Developmental assessments	26
9a. Health screening (medical, dental, vision, hearing, or speech)	25
8b. Food pantries	18
9e. Social services such as housing assistance, food stamps, financial aid, or medical care	18
8f. Adult education, GED classes, ESL classes, or continuing education	16
9c. Psychological counseling services for children	16
8a. Employment or job training	13
8e. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	13
8g. Housing assistance	10
8j. Domestic violence programs	10
8k. Substance abuse programs	10
8h. Energy or fuel assistance	7
9d. Psychological counseling services for parents	5
8i. Immigration or legal services	4

Notes: 8. Since September, has your program given any family information about the following…. 9. Since September, has your program provided referrals to the following services…

RQ2b: Associations of partnership practices and ITERS-R scores. In order to investigate the possible associations between partnership practices in the classroom and environmental features of observed quality as measured by the QRIS quality measure, two sets of analyses were conducted. The first compared teachers' reported partnership practices as measured by the FPTRQ and their classroom's total and factor scores on the ITERS-R. The second compared parent-reported teacher practices (FPTRQ) with related classroom total and factor scores on the ITERS-R. Descriptive statistics for classroom scores on the ITERS-R are provided in Table 16 below.

Table 16. Descriptive Statistics for ITERS-R Classroom Total and Factor Scores

Factor	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Max Possible
Total	36	4.63	.74	2.88	5.70	7
Materials/Activities	36	4.84	1.45	2.11	6.67	7
Safety/ Organization	36	3.91	.745	2.29	5.29	7
Language/ Interactions	36	4.68	1.00	3.00	7.00	7

For the first set of analyses, bivariate correlations were run comparing teachers'
self-reported FPTRQ Knowledge, Practices, and Attitudes scores with their ITERS-R
total score as well as ITERS-R factor scores on Materials/ Activities, Safety/
Organization, and Language/ Interactions. There were no significant associations
between any of the FPTRQ subscales for teachers and their ITERS-R total or factor
scores. See Table 17 below for complete results from the correlational analyses of
ITERS-R scores and teacher FPTRQ scores.

Table 17. Correlations of ITERS-R and Teacher FPTRQ Scores

	Teacher-Rated Knowledge	Teacher-Rated Practices	Teacher-Rated Attitudes
ITERS-R Total	-.220	-.052	-.147
ITERS-R Materials/ Activities	-.057	-.053	.063
ITERS-R Safety/ Organization	-.251	-.008	-.149
ITERS-R Language/ Interactions	-.330	-.143	-.125

For the second set of analyses, bivariate correlations were run comparing parent-reported teacher practices on the FPTRQ Knowledge, Practices, and Attitudes scores with their ITERS-R total scores as well as ITERS-R factor scores on Materials/ Activities, Safety/ Organization, and Language/ Interactions (see Table 18 for complete results). There were no significant associations between any of the FPTRQ subscales for parent-reported teacher practice and ITERS total and factor scores. Thus, program environmental features did not appear related to teachers' partnership practices as reported by teachers or as reported by parents.

Table 18. Correlations of ITERS-R and Parent FPTRQ Scores

	Parent-Rated Knowledge	Parent-Rated Practices	Parent Rated Attitudes
ITERS-R Total	-.105	.061	-.038
ITERS-R Materials/ Activities	-.127	.064	-.004
ITERS-R Safety/ Organization	.277	.191	-.016
ITERS-R Language/ Interactions	-.100	.248	-.022

RQ2c: Associations of program supports for partnership practices and ITERS-R scores. To examine possible associations of administrator-reported program practices supportive of teacher-family partnerships with classrooms' ITERS-R scores, bivariate correlations were run comparing administrator FPTRQ scores (by subscale) with classroom ITERS-R total and factor scores (see Table 19 for complete results). Results suggested two significant and negative associations. First, there was a moderate negative correlation between ITERS-R Safety and Organization and FPTRQ Communication

Systems ($r_{(34)}$ = -.376, p < .05). Second, there was a moderate negative correlation between ITERS-R Language and Interactions and FPTRQ Environment and Policy Checklist ($r_{(32)}$ = -.339, p = .05).

Table 19. Correlations of ITERS-R and Administrator FPTRQ Scores

	FPTRQ Environment/ Policy Checklist	FPTRQ Communication Systems	FPTRQ Information About Resources
ITERS-R Total	-.148	-.050	-.074
ITERS-R Materials/ Activities	.116	.123	.095
ITERS-R Safety/ Organization	-.150	-.376*	-.138
ITERS-R Language/ Interactions	-.339*	-.054	-.241

*Notes: * indicates p < .05*

Overview of findings: quantitative component. Although the quantitative component suggested some differences in parent perceptions of partnership practices by age of child (infant or toddler), the balance of the analyses yielded few statistically significant results. There were no associations between parent ratings of teachers on the FPTRQ and classroom scores on the ITERS-R total or factor scores. There were no differences in teacher-reported partnership practices by age of classroom, program auspice, or experience with family engagement professional development. Further, there were no associations between teacher FPTRQ scores and classroom ITERS-R scores. The two significant findings on the program side were the moderate, negative associations between ITERS-R Language and Interactions and FPTRQ Environment and Policy Checklist; and ITERS-R Safety and Organization and FPTRQ Communication Systems.

The qualitative results are presented next, followed by a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative findings.

Qualitative Component

   Approach to the qualitative component. The qualitative portion of the study was designed to elicit, from infant-toddler teachers and administrators, ideas for strengthening partnership practices. Thus, highly rated teachers and their administrators were asked about their current partnership practices (RQ3a), as well as how such practices were supported and could be strengthened at the program level (RQ3b) and at the system level such as via the QRIS (RQ3c). Although the primary focus of the qualitative portion of the study was on partnership practices in infant and toddler classrooms, there was some discussion of partnerships in older classrooms. For example as program administrators described the partnership practices enacted in their program, they frequently described the differences in such practices among different age groups. Thus, some comments related to preschool age groups in addition to or comparison with infant and toddler classrooms. The findings from the qualitative component are presented below.

   Introduction to the qualitative coding. As noted above, the qualitative interview data were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser 1965, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that involved first examining and coding each individual interview transcript, and second, examining across transcripts to compare and refine codes. The resulting framework is organized into four interrelated themes. The first three relate directly to the interview protocol or questions that participants were asked. They are: 1.

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Current Practices related to teacher-family partnerships, 2. Supports for those practices, and 3. participant Recommendations for further strengthening such practices and incorporating them into the state's ECE system. From participant responses to questions about their practices, supports, and recommendations around partnering with families, there emerged a fourth theme that incorporated their ideas about the Nature of teacher- and program-family partnerships. Each of the four themes (Current Practices, Supports, Recommendations, and Nature) is presented below, including selected participant quotes. This portion of the study was not designed to return counts of endorsements for each idea, but, as in qualitative research generally, to explore the similarities and differences in how participants approach, enact, and make meaning of their family relationships and partnerships (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, due to the fact that ideas from one interview informed questions at subsequent interviews, not all topics were discussed with all participants and thus a reporting of majority agreement on such items is not possible. However, where ideas emerged across all or most participants, such similarities are noted. A table displaying each theme and its related categories is provided as themes are presented.

Current practices theme (RQ 3a). Participants in the interview component of the study were passionate about partnering with families and enthusiastically described a wide array of partnership practices they enact in their work with families and children. The first theme of Current Practices includes participants' reported activities to build relationships and partner with the families of the children in their classrooms. Participant

comments in the Current Practices theme are organized into four categories: Enrollment

Practices; Unstructured Day-to-Day Partnership Practices; Structured Partnership

Practices; and Use of Family-Specific Information (See Table 20 below).

Table 20. Current Practices Theme

Category	Categorical Definition
Enrollment Process	Enrollment and application forms New family tours, parent/family orientation Home Visits Paperwork & information shared from previous teacher
Unstructured Day-to-Day Partnership Practices	Greeting (parent and child) at drop-off and pick-up Communicating with families via multiple formats (i.e., newsletters, email, text messages, etc.) Sharing children's activities via photos and artwork sent home and/or posted in the classroom Encouraging families to take advantage of open-door policies and spend time in the classroom
Structured Partnership Practices	Lesson plans communicate links to NC FELD Portfolios Teacher-family conferences
Use of Family-Specific Information	Family photos are displayed in the classroom and referred to throughout the day Family books are created and used with children Caregiving routines and interactions are informed by family-specific knowledge and information

Enrollment process. When asked how they get to know families, many teachers

and administrators described their efforts to connect with families on a personal level and

to build trusting relationships wherein families felt supported and comfortable sharing

family-specific information and asking questions or bringing up concerns. Of course

teachers also seek information to guide basic caregiving, but the emphasis, especially for

teachers of infants, was on relationship-building that would provide supportive assurance

to families and put them at ease with their children's care setting. For families of infants and newly enrolled children of all ages, this process begins with enrollment through various formal and informal strategies.

Most administrators described their use of enrollment or application forms to obtain basic caregiving information about children as well as more specific information about family culture and context. One administrator noted that they "really look at the family dynamics and family structure and determine how we're going to interact with the child, period" (Melinda) and so their enrollment forms seek more specific information about who is living in the child's home and who is in their daily life. The level of information asked on enrollment forms varied among programs, from basic levels of information to more specifics about family structure that could be used to guide interactions and provide insight into behaviors in the classroom.

One teacher reported that she focuses on "getting to know them [families] on a personal level without the paperwork they provide. That way they can get a sense that we really do care, that we want to get to know them and their child" (Erma). This statement characterized many teachers' comments on enrollment processes and referred to tours and/or orientation sessions wherein new families could meet and ask questions of teachers and administrators. Beyond sharing basic information about the classroom and program, teachers and administrators emphasized using the tour or entry time as an opportunity to gain understanding of families' values, and to identify common interests in order to build relationships.

Several toddler teachers noted that they first learned about families through paperwork and other information that was passed to them from the child's infant teacher. Although toddler teachers also mentioned the importance of getting to know families in person, the enrollment paperwork and information from infant teachers seemed an important (and typical) first step. As one toddler teacher noted, "If it's a parent that's moving up from another class, we'll just talk to the previous teacher and see how that parent is and what they want" (Annette).

The two Head Start programs described their use of the required home visit at the start of the school year as an ideal strategy to get to know and build relationships with each child in the context of their family. During the home visit, teachers learn who is in the child's daily life, and they focus on building trust with the family and learning how the child's experiences at home might impact their experiences at school. They also collect data on children's learning and development. One program emphasized empowering families to share that information with teachers: "We also have assessment tools, and it's pretty much what is your child doing at that point. And it's the parents that are filling it out" (Lindsay). Teachers are allowed to and do personalize their approach to obtaining the required information, in order to get to know families and children beyond the basic information needed for routine caregiving. Other administrators mentioned some use of home visiting strategies with their pre-K classrooms, however, the Head Start participants were the only ones reporting the use of home visits for infants and toddlers.

Unstructured partnership practices. Participants' commitment to relationship-building and partnering with families was also evident in less-structured, day-to-day practices that teachers use "to build a friendship between me and the parents," (Tanya). All participants mentioned greeting and sharing information with families at drop-off and pick-up, a practice which is rewarded in the state's QRIS quality measure. This time is used to exchange basic information about children's caregiving, activities, and achievements, but many teacher comments underscored the value of this time and these exchanges to the process of bonding with parents/ families. One infant teacher emphasized the importance of focusing on parents' well-being in particular, "because some parents don't [otherwise] get a chance to express how their day was" (Frances). Teachers emphasized the value of these strategies to supporting families' comfort and sense of belonging and to supporting information sharing to inform teacher-child interactions.

Teachers and administrators also prioritized two-way communications between parents and teachers/administrators as they reported the numerous communication methods used to connect and partner with families. As one administrator noted, "We need to know how they [parents] want to connect with us" (Dolores). Participants emphasized their commitment to finding and using the communication methods that best met their families' needs. These included hand-written notes and messages, electronic text messages, emails, telephone calls, interactive websites, and apps. Those participants using apps for two-way communication with parents noted that this approach was "great for parents" because it allowed them the control to get information when it was

convenient for them (Erma). In addition to sharing the required basic caregiving information, teachers also shared information about children's activities, interests, and milestones via photos and artwork posted (and discussed) in the classroom and sent home with children.

Finally, participants emphasized their active encouragement of parent involvement in the classroom as a way to increase parents' sense of comfort with the arrangement (especially for new parents), and to give them opportunities to experience activities with their children. All programs reported having open-door policies (which are required by licensing rules), but these administrators and teachers worked to encourage families to take advantage of those policies and spend time in their children's classroom as much as possible: "We're very open to any kind of parent participation in that classroom because we want parents to feel comfortable leaving their infant" (Amber). In addition to reassuring parents about their children's comfort and safety, participants highlighted the value of parents having opportunities to experience their children's learning and development, because "they do miss a lot when they're at work and don't get to see this" (Jeannette). Thus, parent participation in the classroom was seen as important to strengthening the bond between teachers and parents as well as between parents and children.

Structured partnership practices. In addition to attending to the relational aspects of family partnerships, participants reported partnering with families to share professional knowledge of child development and support families to partner in planning for children's progress. Teachers and administrators reported communicating to parents the

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linkages of children's activities to learning and development domains through lesson or activity plans. Licensing regulations specify that all lesson and activity plans show a link to the North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development (NC FELD: North Carolina Foundations Task Force, 2013), but these administrators and teachers make an effort to point out these connections to parents. As one administrator noted, "I encourage all my parents, that's part of the orientation process, I encourage them to look at the activity plan, and I explain…what the goals mean" (Amber). These lesson or activity plans are posted in the classroom each week, and teachers point out the connections between activities and development on a regular basis. Many teachers and administrators also reported the use of portfolios: "We have a portfolio [on each child] that we share with them [parents]," to show children's developmental progress (Naomi). Participants also mentioned offering teacher-family conferences to share information with families about children's progress and interests at school; to learn about children's progress and interests at home; and to invite and support parents to collaborate on plans for next steps:

> We can tell mom and dad and family and say, 'Hey, they're [the child] really interested in doing this,' or 'they've really, really liked this, so maybe you could try to tie some of these things in at home,' and they do the same thing for us (Lindsey).

Using family-specific information. When asked how they use family-specific information in the classroom, all participants reported using information from families to support seamless caregiving between home and school. Many participants stopped there and needed additional prompts to share how they incorporated information about

children's families into classroom interactions. However, when asked whether they incorporated, for example, family photos or information about siblings or pets into the classroom, participants eagerly described the practices they used to support children's sense of belonging in the classroom and their connections with their families and their peers. Without such prompting, one administrator described how her infant and toddler teachers incorporated families into their daily interactions with children:

> They ask families to bring in photographs and then they put it throughout the classroom, and so it kind of leads to daily interactions with the babies. So they [the children] could see the pictures, and then they [the teachers] talk about it. (Ola)

Nearly every program reported using family photos in the classroom, displayed on a family wall or as part of family collages, a practice which is rewarded in the QRIS quality measure. Some teachers post their own family collages as well. Teachers point out and reference children's family photos throughout the day. Teacher also comment to children about their peers' families and weave family-specific information into other activities. As one teacher noted, "if we're reading a book with pets, we ask the kids 'do you have a dog at home? What's your dog's name?'" (Naomi). Teachers also create books for children featuring their family photographs and/or photographs reflecting aspects of their family's cultural heritage or practices and use these with children throughout the day.

Participants also reported tailoring their interactions and instruction to each child's family context or situation. As one administrator commented, "I preach to them all the time, you're not going to make the child fit the center. We're going to make the

center fit them" (Melinda). This sentiment was echoed across the interviews, with participants emphasizing the importance of their knowledge of children's experiences at home to inform teachers' practices at school. As one administrator commented,

> the children are not going to be set with the same obstacles here as they would at home. Some of them live in families that it's just mom and child and that's it. You go home and you don't have seven other kids that you're trying to share toys with, or when you cry, you get picked up right away (Audrey).

Thus partnering with families to understand children's experiences at home and plan for success in the classroom was seen as vital.

Supports for current practices theme (RQ3b). Participants viewed partnering with families as so fundamental to their work, so second nature to them, that they had to pause and reflect for some time when asked what supports enabled their success in this area. Upon reflection, they identified a wide array of person-level resources and program- or system-level resources that strengthened their partnership work. Thus, the second theme, Supports, incorporates participant-identified personal characteristics and experiences, as well as requirements, policies, communication tools, and training that supported their success in partnering with families. The nine categories in the Supports theme are: Requirements and Policies; Program Expectations and Philosophy; Continuous Quality Improvement Approach; Technology Use; Staffing; Approach to Relationship Challenges; Informal and Formal Teacher Training and Feedback; Teacher Characteristics; and Family Characteristics, (see Table 21 below for additional details). Each category is described below.

Requirements and policies. Program or system requirements and policies seemed to play an important role in supporting or possibly incentivizing partnership practices. Teachers reported "we have policies" (Eunice) about communicating with families and "that's in the staff handbook, [about] open communication at all times" (Annette). Most participants seemed to have written policies in place related to teacher-family communication, and many included this information in both staff and family handbooks or policy manuals.

Table 21. Supports Theme

Category	Categorical Definitions
Requirements & Policies	Head Start's home visit & family engagement policies/ requirements; state's new family involvement requirement New family application/ enrollment forms & requirements Program communication & collaboration policies
Program Expectations & Philosophy	Programs expectations about teacher/family interactions Programs value kindness & select staff accordingly Program philosophy emphasizes team approach Program philosophies value open communication/ trust building; emphasize coordination between home & school; view parents as first teachers
Continuous Quality Improvement	Intentional changes, improvements by administrator Data collection: family surveys & teacher observation Data-informed improvements
Technology Use	Communicating via app or other technology platform Caution about teacher phone use while supervising
Staffing	Additional staff at drop-off and pick-up Multiple teaching staff in some classrooms Additional staff collaborate, coach teachers
Addressing Teacher-Family Relationship Challenges	Administrators are part of resolving challenges Teachers collaborate with colleagues to ID solutions Programs policies address conflicts & some use outside resources for resolution ideas
Teacher Training, Coaching, Feedback, & Evaluation	Teacher coaching, mentoring, modeling in the classroom and formal evaluation Training & professional development on required family partnership processes; on communicating with families; on child development; & on cultural diversity
Teacher Characteristics	Importance of being "people person" and feeling agentic in bonding with parents Experience, persistence, & intuition support relationship-building Teachers' sense of duty to communicate, build trust & a sense of belonging for families
Family Characteristics	Families share more personal information due to the prevalence of social media Parents with shared characteristics of the teacher (such as age) are more willing partners

Administrators noted system requirements as supports. Several administrators noted that their policies align or soon will be aligned with a new family involvement requirement in the state child care licensing rules (North Carolina Child Care Rules, 2019). The new rule specifies that programs must include family involvement in their policies, including offering teacher-family conferences; identifying opportunities for family involvement; and stating the process for families to communicate questions or file grievances. One administrator noted that:

> The Division recently implemented a new rule that everybody has to have it [family participation policy]. We did not actually have to make any revisions to our [family participation] policy because it was already following [the new requirement] (Melinda).

One administrator commented on the influence of requirements at the federal level. She noted: "Our home visits are through our program standards which is through the Office of Head Start" (Ola). Head Start program standards also require programs to demonstrate their regular partnering with families throughout the year. One Head Start administrator noted that family involvement is included in every aspect of their work, including in their lesson plans, "every week…they have to figure out something to pull those families in to do something, whether it be read a book, send a pictures,…just anything to get those parents involved" (Lindsay).

Administrators and teachers reported other structural supports for the kind of family information-sharing described in the Current Practices theme above. These are the required forms and processes that facilitate communication, such as family application or enrollment paperwork and orientation processes. Application and enrollment forms ask

families to share information about themselves (parenting practices, beliefs, family

structure) and about their children (interests, abilities, fears). Some programs include a

cultural information survey form for new families or ask about it during a required

family orientation process. One administrator noted:

> We have some time during the orientation process to kind of ask questions and get
> more feedback so that we know, okay, well this child, even though we are a
> Christian based childcare center, this child does not celebrate Christmas. So we're
> going to either incorporate what they do celebrate or find a way to make the
> family feel more comfortable (Amber).

Program expectations and philosophy. Administrators seemed to have

expectations for teacher-family partnerships even if they lacked written policies about

partnerships, and teachers seemed to be aware of those expectations. "It's just a 'please

communicate with them,' and they [the teachers] do. I don't have any problem with

them" (Audrey). This program had policies specifying teacher-family communication

about basic caregiving, but unwritten expectations for teachers to share additional updates

with families throughout the day or week. Teachers routinely reported that their

awareness of such program expectations supported their collaborations with families: "I

felt like I just knew I had to [communicate/ connect with families], and I just did. And as

I did it, it got easier" (Naomi). Many teachers appeared to go beyond what was required

in the program quality measure used in the state's QRIS, the ITERS-R (Harms, Cryer, &

Clifford, 2006), and one teacher noted particularly that she felt there was an unwritten

expectation that they would go beyond what that measure specified in partnering with

families: "I just feel like it's an unwritten rule. Yes, it's definitely encouraged and in ITERS[-R], they want us to greet and stuff, but I feel like we go beyond that" (Naomi).

Participants also reported program philosophies that seemed to guide teacher-family partnership practices. Several participants emphasized a philosophy that values kindness, and one administrator noted that she intentionally selects staff who will collaborate well in their program. Although it can be difficult to find, she will "try to look for the right people that'll fit," and in the interview she lets candidates know, "we are a Christian environment. That's big, you know. We want to be loving" (Audrey).

Program philosophies that value collaboration and teamwork were also noted across the sample as supporting teachers in their partnership practices with families. Teachers and administrators expect and rely on collaboration among staff. As one teacher noted, she gets ideas and advice from her director or assistant director, "and then I have other team players here that, you know, we bump ideas off each other all the time" (Jeannette). She went on to note that she seeks out new ideas from new staff and shares with them what works for her.

Another administrator noted that she discusses with teachers her philosophy about the importance of teacher-family partnerships and that has made a difference in teacher buy-in: "We've kind of talked about why it's important that parents have that bond with you, that you have a bond with the child and you need to have a bond with the parent as well….[and] they understand and see why it's important" (Amber). Participants in Head Start programs referred to their motto of parents as first teachers and the impact that philosophy has on their partnerships with parents:

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> We really push that everything we do is to get them [parents] ready for public schools, because we want them to be empowered to advocate for their child and let them know that you ultimately make the decision for your child (Ola).

Together, these program expectations and philosophies provided incentive and support for teachers' partnership practices with the families they served.

Continuous quality improvement approach. Administrators in this highly rated (by families) group seem to always have an eye out for improvements that can be made or ways that teacher or program practices can be strengthened. Several administrators had made changes as they took over the administrative role:

> I've tried to really upstep since becoming a director, like really changed some stuff…I've always had this vision,…so I've tried to implement a lot and take away old stuff that I think some people were used to (Minnie).

This administrator focused on building positive, supportive connections among teachers and families when she took over, and she included this in formal teacher evaluations in terms of assessing teachers' positive interactions with families and peers. Another administrator changed policies and practices to focus on families (rather than just parents) in response to their growing population of children in foster care:

> When I started here, I took the word 'parent' out. We don't use that word… Not everybody has a mother, or maybe they have two mothers…You will never see 'parent-teacher conferences.' You will see 'family conferences' (Melinda).

Participants also reported multiple strategies to intentionally collect data to inform quality improvement efforts. Many administrators reported conducting surveys with families on a regular basis in order to give parents a voice and a method to register their

satisfaction and provide suggestions for future planning and improvements. There were also less-formal data collection strategies such as informal observation in classrooms: "I and my assistant are in the classroom as much as we can be" (Amber). Administrators were intentionally spending time in classrooms and in the hallways as families were arriving and departing and giving feedback on what they observed.

Administrators also modify their strategies and practices to better connect with families. "If we have families that we don't see mom and dad that much and someone else is picking up, then we have to use other means of communication like telephone calls and things like that" (Ola). Communication strategies in many programs were reportedly adjusted to meet family needs and convenience. Others reported program-wide training on partnering or communicating with families, based on what had been observed throughout the year. Overall, these administrators seemed to look for and act on opportunities for improvement on a daily basis and through both formal and informal mechanisms.

Technology use. "We got this thing we just implemented, which is the app, and that's, that's, they [parents] love it….We got that line of communication throughout the day where we normally didn't have it" (Eunice). Teachers and administrators expressed enthusiasm for the technology that supports their partnerships with families. Six out of the nine participating administrators reported that they used apps that are specialized for ECE (or for education generally). Apps such as Bright Wheel, Class Tag, and Remind 101 were mentioned. Administrators create (and in some cases purchase) an account for their center and set up accounts for each teacher. Parents are invited to set up their (free)

profiles as they enroll their children. Parents and teachers then can send and receive

individual and group messages (i.e., messages for the whole class) via the app. This

allows users to manage how notifications come through (i.e., audible alert or none,

visible alert on their mobile device or none). These apps also allow bidirectional

communication without parents and teachers having to share their personal contact

information. An additional two administrators noted that they use other technology such

as emails, text messages, and FaceBook Messenger for bidirectional communication.

These various technology platforms enable teachers to share updates with families and

empower families to contact teachers and programs with their own questions or concerns

and on their own timetable. Teachers liked the flexibility the app provides both to

teachers and to families:

> I feel like the parents like being able to text us any time because not very many
> teachers want to give everybody their personal phone number, but that way it goes
> straight to my phone, and I can still communicate with them (Naomi).

Additionally, apps are configured to provide administrators with records of

communication and thus data that can be used for supervision and program improvement

purposes. However, one administrator noted "I don't want my teachers texting… while

they're caring for kids" (Minnie), so families are only able to text her (the administrator)

for information and updates throughout the day.

Staffing. Administrators reported multiple staffing strategies that support teacher-

family partnership practices, including some that were intentionally implemented, and at

least one that was more of a happenstance. One administrator noted her intentional approach to ensuring that teachers have enough time with parents:

> I'm not big on making it hard for my teachers. I know that's not cost effective, but I make sure that there are enough teachers here in the morning at drop off and in the afternoon at pickup to where there's always somebody who can talk to a parent (Audrey).

Audrey indicated that it was her program's church affiliation that enabled this approach, that is, the fact that the church provided the building and some overhead, which freed up some of the budget to allow her to implement this staffing strategy.

It seems that another program benefits from a sort of accidental support in terms of at least one teacher's time with families. This teacher reported spending extended time at the program (beyond her paid hours) due to transportation issues. The teacher is therefore able to connect with families at both drop-off and pickup due to her (uncompensated) presence at the site. Without the responsibilities for supervision, this teacher is able to spend more time talking with and connecting with families and finding out how she can make them feel more supported.

Administrators and teachers noted the value of additional teaching staff in the classroom to supporting family partnerships, as well as various approaches to how those staff are designated or how their roles are identified. Several administrators reported their use of co-teachers, either in all classrooms or in selected (such as infant and toddler) classrooms. "I like to have my classrooms set up where you don't know who the lead teacher is – it's 'we're co-teachers'" (Ola). One teacher observed, "I think having someone in the room with you, that is experienced,….that really helps cause they can

kind of take the lead and then you can kind of just watch, listen, maybe get ideas from there" (Annette). Establishing a co-teaching staffing pattern was one strategy to support family partnerships. In contrast, another administrator was careful to introduce parents to the lead teacher and emphasize that she is the one with whom they should be communicating. In this case, having a designated teacher to serve as the primary contact person with the families was a staffing strategy to promote effective communication with families, although less commonly mentioned than the co-teaching staffing model.

Several participants reported their use of additional staff to provide guidance, coaching, and support to teachers in their work with families. In some cases there was an assistant director who had time to observe and provide feedback and support. In the case of the Head Start programs, teachers reported collaborating with "my colleagues, my co-teacher, as well as my family advocate" for advice and to strategize about addressing challenges with particular families (Arlene).

Addressing teacher-family relationship challenges. Teachers and administrators alike reported multiple strategies they employ to address challenges and thus improve their partnerships with families. For the most part, administrators reported that they expected to be involved or at least aware of issues as they arose, and teachers were aware of and endorsed this expectation. One teacher noted that it was better that "the director's aware of what's going on" (Frances). Her administrator reported "I always try to make sure they [teachers and families] connect" when describing her approach to resolving conflict (Minnie). Because administrators were generally spending time in classrooms throughout the day, they were aware as issues came up: "most of the issues or questions

or concerns I'm already aware of anyway, and we're already problem solving to try to figure out" solutions (Amber).

Teachers reported reaching out to their directors as well as to other staff to resolve issues with families. As one Head Start teacher noted, "First I get advice from our center director and also our family engagement specialist" (Brenda). Other teachers reported going to their co-teachers or other staff in the program for advice about how to better connect with families. One teacher asks her co-workers for ideas such as: "What do you think we can do to reach out to them? What do you think we can do to make them feel more welcome, to make them feel more warm?" (Jeannette).

Other supports to address relationship challenges or collaboration challenges with families include formal policies and external supports. Several programs have written policies in place to guide staff in the event of conflict or challenges with families. One program noted that they had a special conflict resolution policy that specified the steps to take to document and address conflicts. Another program had a process that involved the larger agency that housed them, with steps to take unresolved conflicts higher up the chain of command, even above the ECE program administrator. Finally, one program administrator reported using outside resources such as the internet for ideas about how to address certain challenges and how to word certain statements or questions.

Teacher coaching, feedback, evaluation, & training. Teacher participants reported receiving, and administrator participants reported providing or arranging for, coaching, mentoring, and modeling in the classroom to support teacher-family partnership practices. As one teacher noted, "I love it here because my center director,

she is very supportive of me when it comes to dealing with families and also children"

(Brenda). These administrators pay attention to how teachers are interacting with families

and how families seem to feel in the program: "We observe for it, like we're constantly

around with them and so we kind of observe when parents come in and out and, you

know, make sure that you greet the parents and make sure you make them feel welcome"

(Carole). They provide informal feedback to teachers and, if necessary, they provide

additional supports to help teachers succeed in connecting with families:

> If we see a teacher who lacks in that area, as far as like the partnership model, we
> pair them with another strong co-teacher and then we allow them to do that
> modeling…, and eventually the relationship starts to foster (Ola).

Administrators also provide more formal feedback on family partnership practices

through teacher evaluation. That is, administrators include in their formal teacher

evaluation process some feedback or rating of teachers' work with families based on

administrators' observations of teacher-family interactions. Administrators generally

reported that their staff performed well in this area, and that they preferred to approach

deficiencies from a supportive rather than a punitive standpoint. Both teachers and

administrators reported special training and coaching on home visits and family

conferences in programs where these activities are required.

Although some participants noted the lack of available trainings related to

teacher-family partnerships, others emphasized the value of nearly all of their ECE-

related trainings and classes in their quest to improve their collaborations with families.

One teacher pointed out that she finds something in each of her annual trainings that can

strengthen her partnerships with families. When asked if the trainings were on family partnerships, she commented that "they aren't specifically about [relationship] building, but I take pieces from each of those trainings and incorporate it into me building relationships with children and families" (Brenda). Other teachers noted that coursework and trainings on topics such as early childhood development and child temperament, as well as on more family-specific topics had helped them. Several administrators reported that they incorporate some aspect of relationship-building or communicating with families into all of their in-house professional development, and many teachers reported that local or regional trainings have helped strengthen their partnership practices as well.

Teacher characteristics. Administrators and teachers reported several supports for teacher-family partnership practices that seem to relate more to individual teacher characteristics. Many participants (administrators and teachers) noted that being a "people person" helped in building relationships with families, and they felt they had this quality or personality type. A few felt that it was vital to be a "people person" in order to succeed as a teacher in general, not just in partnering with families. Regardless of whether such qualities are innate or developed over time with experience, most participants emphasized the value of taking an enthusiastic approach to building relationships with families, as characterized by the following teacher comment: "Just opening up and giving off that warm energy and that genuineness, you definitely have to have that with working with families so they know that you care and you're not just another body in the classroom" (Arlene).

Teachers and administrators seemed committed to making families feel comfortable interacting and sharing information. It takes some families more time to warm up to the relationship but teachers' patience and persistence in finding common ground helps them to build relationships with families. One teacher noted that she tries to make parents feel as comfortable as possible and observed that "it's all about how you approach the parents" (Eunice).

Teachers also reported that their experience to date has supported their growth over time in terms of their abilities and approaches to partnership practices with families: "When I first started, I was very nervous and a little standoffish and just trying to figure out everything I could. But now, I've figured out how to build trust with parents, how to build relationships with them as I'm going along, and how to deal with certain parents and certain situations" (Brenda). Even those teachers who identified as "people persons" felt that their experience with many different families over time had contributed to this growth in their abilities to connect well with just about anyone and to support families to be comfortable sharing information and asking questions. Others added that the experience of becoming a parent themselves added to their abilities in this area: "I'm a people person anyway, but I've also been doing this a number of years and I'm a mother, so I know how I felt when I was first taking my child [to child care], and I want them to feel at ease" (Jeannette).

Family characteristics. For a few participants, characteristics of families came up in discussions of how their partnership practices are supported. One teacher noted a

recent trend in some families' openness to discussing details of their personal lives and attributed this to the prevalence of social media:

> Where back at, like, when I was growing up, everybody just like, stay to yourself. They didn't talk about your personal life,… but now, with social media being more out there… and everybody having a page,… you see what they're actually doing, and you can comment on it (Frances).

Another noted that parents who share characteristics of the teacher might be more willing partners: "The younger parents, I think they relate better to me a little better, and it's easier for them to connect with me" (Mamie).

Nature of the construct theme. As teachers and administrators discussed their experiences building partnerships with families and their recommendations for including such practices in requirements for licensed child care there emerged a portrait of the nature of these partnerships that included five categories which are described in this section (see Table 22 below).

Table 22. Nature of Partnerships Theme

Category	Categorical Definitions
The Essential Role of Communication	Programs view communication as key to good relationships & strong teacher-family bonds Programs use multiple communication platforms to meet families' needs
Goal of Family/ Child Comfort in Context of Relationship & Care Setting	Programs judge success based on families' comfort taking questions directly to teachers Administrators & teachers emphasize compassion & empathy for families & being kind Teachers try to build friendships with families yet share professional child development knowledge Teachers reassure parents that children are loved, safe

Table 22. Nature of Partnerships Theme, continued

Category	Categorical Definitions
View of Partnerships as Essential to Positive Child & Family Outcomes	Central family role acknowledged: relationship-building, bidirectional communication prioritized Home-school alignment is seen as vital to children's sense of belonging & classroom community Seeking family-specific information is seen as necessary & important rather than too nosy Partnering can help teachers help families
The Reality of Parent/Family Availability, Participation, & Attitudes	Parents work & cannot get away to participate during the day, & they are rushed at drop off & pickup Even in programs that actively support family partnerships, some families do not participate Some programs have lower parent participation in infant/toddler classroom activities & conferences than in preschool classrooms Some parents need more time &/or support to collaborate due to their history with ECE, their experience as a parent (or foster parent), or their comfort with communication platforms. Challenge of parents seeing ECE as babysitting keeps them from taking collaboration beyond basic caregiving seriously It is hard to know who is allowed to participate in the classroom with the new background check rules
The Reality of Teacher & Administrator Availability, Participation, & Attitudes	In older classrooms (i.e., more children), teachers will not have time to connect with families Teacher focus in older classrooms may be curriculum, not reflecting families instruction Some teachers feel they share enough information at drop-off and pickup, may resist conferences Some have safety concerns about home visits Implicit biases may impact teacher communication and connection with families and children

The essential role of communication. Administrators and teachers emphasized

their view that two-way communication builds relationships and the essential bond with

parents: "Over the years, I have learned, you know, how to communicate and that it does

build better relationships with parents and with kids" (Erma). Participants saw open communication with families as the key to building the trust necessary to partner with them and emphasized that they intentionally ensure "that line of communication's open at both ends, and we welcome that" (Eunice). This commitment is evident in the many modes of communication that programs employ, all in consideration of and response to family needs. As one administrator observed, "We feel it's important to have as much communication as possible, especially…when you have new moms and dads….So we have various ways that the teacher can communicate" (Amber). Teachers expect that they will be able to communicate well with families, and they regularly meet this expectation.

Goal of family/ child comfort in relationship/ ECE setting. Communication is closely linked to the goal of supporting families' comfort in the context of the teacher relationship and in the ECE setting. As one teacher remarked, "For the most part it's just really good, open communication. I mean, I get along really well with all my parents and I feel like it's the same, but I try to make it where they're comfortable, where if there's an issue, they can come to me" (Annette). Administrators echoed the idea that success "is just the parents feeling comfortable,… just them being comfortable to talk to the teachers" (Charlene). Administrators appraised success in terms of whether families were at the center to participate in classroom activities or events rather than to complain, and whether families expressed the wish that their children stay with their current teacher (and not move up to a new classroom).

Teachers (particularly infant teachers) and administrators alike expressed compassion and empathy for parents: "We're the first link with their child going out of

the home and away from them. And so a lot of making them comfortable is important to me, and I like doing that with them" (Amber, administrator of infant teacher participant). One administrator described how she stresses this point with her teachers: "It's not just about providing a service, it, this is their babies. They are trusting you to be with them,…[and] they just want to know that they're taken care of…that they're doing okay" (Audrey, administrator of infant teacher participant). An infant teacher noted that she intentionally worked to demonstrate these values in contrast to her own negative experience as a parent placing her children in an ECE setting; "And so I just really want them [parents] to be at ease. I don't want them to feel, you know, well, 'this teacher is hard to connect with'" (Jeannette, infant teacher). Another administrator noted that her "whole goal is to build positive relationships" among teachers, children, and families (Ola, administrator of both infant and toddler teacher participants).

Many teachers and administrators described their relationships and interactions with families as more friendship-based rather than being too professional. One teacher reported:

> I try to connect with them, like ask them about their life and stuff too. Because I feel like if it's more than just a professional relationship, if it's more of a friendship, then they're going to be more willing to open up with you and tell you what's going on, you know, and what they need (Naomi, toddler teacher).

She went on to note, "I pretty much talk to them about everything and like we'll talk to each other like what we're having for supper." (Naomi, toddler teacher). This friendly connection was seen as the basis for trusting relationships, and administrators supported this approach as well: "So we don't try to come off as if we're professional, but we try to,

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we try to be like home with you" (Dolores, infant teacher). One teacher cautioned that being too friendly with parents was a challenge for younger teachers who did not understand "they [teachers] can't talk to them [parents] like they talk to their peers" (Jeannette, infant teacher). Finally, this idea that teachers should be relaxed rather than professional with families was juxtaposed against the expectation that teachers would also use their professional knowledge of child development to reassure parents who had concerns about their children's progress. As one administrator remarked from her former perspective as a parent of a child in care, "it helps you as a parent to know that someone who sees this often can say it's okay" (Lindsay, administrator of toddler teacher participant).

Teachers regularly reassure parents that their children are loved in the ECE setting and demonstrate "how the teacher love the baby [so] they [parents] will feel OK, secure" (Tanya, toddler teacher). Several teachers extended this idea by noting that they treat the children as their own. One infant teacher tells parents: "These are my children while they're here. You're first, but I'm going to treat them like they're mine while they're here, and I want the best for your child" (Jeannette, infant teacher) Another teacher focused on how this approach supports children's comfort in the classroom: "You have to make them feel safe, you have to make them feel comfortable….You have to give off the energy that you love and care about them as their mom does" (Arlene, toddler teacher).

View of partnerships as essential to positive child and family outcomes. From participant reports of their partnership practices with families, there emerged a clear picture of their view that these partnerships were critical to supporting positive outcomes

for children and families. There was a strong emphasis on partnering with families to ensure seamless care between settings; "We want to give these infants as much care like they receive at home that we can, even though it's in a group care setting" (Amber). Beyond alignment of routine care, family partnerships were valued for their support of children's sense of belonging in the classroom. One teacher described referencing family photos throughout the day and how "that helps them [the children], that gives them that comfort,…because they think 'Oh, you know who I am!'" (Amber). Several noted the link between family partnerships and children's learning and development outcomes more broadly:

> Success to me is creating the bond between parents and staff…that you can see the growth within the children. And if our children are progressing and are doing, you know, doing fairly well, then, you know, I think that's one sign that things are going effectively (Carole).

There appeared to be somewhat of a tension between the idea that getting information from families was necessary and important and the idea that it might be too nosy. As one administrator reported, "I first chalked it up to being nosy, but it really does, it really helps" to know about children's lives and to be able to incorporate that into their experiences in the classroom (Audrey). Still, teachers reported a tempered approach to information-seeking in comments such as: "Did anything change overnight…? Did anything drastic happen? You don't have to tell me anything personal, but did anything change that's going to make his day go different?" (Jeannette); "We try not to get too personal" (Erma); and "I am not a busy-body" (Frances). Participants were committed to

acquiring needed information about children in their care, but they seemed to worry about being seen as crossing a line or getting too personal with families.

Finally, partnering with families was viewed as the key to discovering and helping to meet families' needs. As one teacher noted, "This is not a job. This, you do this to make a difference in a child's life, and you do this to help the whole child. And to me that includes the family" (Jeannette). Jeannette further emphasized in her feedback on the interview notes and coding scheme her commitment to discovering and meeting families' needs and the satisfaction this brought her. One administrator voiced a similar commitment (during the interview) in terms of supporting the families in her program (Minnie). Building strong, trusting bonds with families supports these teachers and administrators to "get a bigger picture of the family and what the family needs" and to ensure that parents "feel empowered to advocate for their child" as they leave the ECE setting and go to "big school" (Ola).

Reality of parent availability, participation, and attitudes. In discussing ways to increase support for teacher- and program-family partnerships, there emerged several points about how available parents are for routine communications and participation in the classroom, and how available they might be for increased participation in activities such as conferences with teachers. Most programs reported that they served working families who could not easily get away from work to participate at the center. In addition to parents' limited availability to participate in the classroom, participants were frustrated by the rushed nature of drop off and pickup: "A lot of them [parents], they're in a rush in

the morning, you know, and maybe we needed to sit and, you know, discuss something

with them that maybe we're concerned about or maybe that we're proud about" (Erma).

Other participants noted that it was challenging to involve parents of infants and

toddlers in classroom activities or program events. One administrator noted that her

teachers had implemented a variety of individualized opportunities for parents to

participate in the classrooms, but even then, participation was lower for parents of infants

than for other parents:

> We get a lot of turn down from the infant room. The twos room, they're more apt
> to come, but as a baby, they're [parents are] like 'what are we gonna do
> anyways?' But as they get older and if you tell them their child's doing
> something, you know, they tend to make time to come (Audrey).

In comparison, families of older children were reportedly more apt to participate

in activities that the program offered, including "little programs, like especially our older

kids who can do more. They have little graduations, they [parents] truly get involved. We

have a good group of parents here" (Melinda). In further exploring the question of how to

involve families in infant and toddler classrooms, one participant noted that it was a

challenge to know who was allowed to participate in the ECE classroom given the current

regulations on background checks.

Participants reported that some parents simply are not interested in partnering

with programs and teachers. "You know, some families, you have some run-of-the-mill

families who come in just like 'Oh, you know, just do your thing,' and roll on with life"

(Dolores). Even in programs such as Head Start that actively support family participation

and partnerships, some families simply do not participate: "Some parents do just drop off and pick up. They don't want any other extra involvement" (Lindsay).

Some parents seem to require additional time to become comfortable interacting with teachers: "They're coming in, might be uncomfortable coming in. You know, some of them might be a little standoffish at first 'til they get to know you" (Eunice). Other parents might need support to use the communication tool such as an app because they are not as tech savvy as other parents. Some teachers and administrators noted that they had seen an increase over the years in cases of grandparents with guardianship of their grandchildren, and of children in non-relative foster care. For these families, the reality of collaborating to support the family and child can be even more complicated but critically important to children's (and families') well-being.

Several participants noted that society's view of ECE as merely babysitting may underly parents' lack of interest in participating in infant and toddler classrooms or partnering with their children's teachers. As one teacher observed, "I feel like a bunch of parents feel that we're not teachers, that we're not educators, that we're babysitters" (Charlene). One administrator emphasized with her staff that to build partnerships with families, they should "make sure that they [parents] know that we're caring for their child, not just, we're not just here to babysit" (Carole). Others, however, saw this issue at a societal level and one that might not easily be shifted.

Reality of teacher/ administrator availability, participation, and attitudes.
Participant responses to questions about their current partnership practices and ideas for improvement also evoked comments related to the ways that teachers and administrators

think about the time it takes to partner with families, their willingness to participate in such partnerships, and their attitudes about the requirements they must meet. To begin with, numerous participants observed that partnering with families takes time: "That's one thing I like about being in the one year old room cause I tell people all the time, 'you don't have time in that two year old room for constant communication [with parents]" (Eunice) In rooms with higher ratios, (i.e., in classrooms with older children), teachers may not have time to connect as deeply with families or provide updates on children's activities as frequently.

Teachers in older classrooms might also be limited in their time to connect with parents because of their focus on curriculum implementation and/or kindergarten readiness. Questions about family partnerships in older classrooms were met with puzzled looks and comments such as "So, it looks kind of different at different age groups," (Ola), often followed by descriptions of the curriculum that was implemented in those classrooms. Family partnerships for older children were described in terms of teacher-family conferences where assessments and updates on children's progress in academic domains is shared.

In addition to these challenges to teachers' availability to connect and communicate with families, some participants mentioned the challenge of teachers' willingness to participate in additional, more formalized conferences with families. In thinking about whether her teachers would be able to implement family conferences, one administrator remarked that:

> Not all teachers, but I do have some that would have a hard time taking that extra time to sit down [in a conference with families] because they feel like, well, 'we talk to them when they drop off in the morning' or 'we talk to them in the afternoon' (Amber).

Teachers and administrators might also have safety concerns related to participating in partnership activities such as home visits. One teacher endorsed the idea of home visits, but added "I don't think I would want to go by myself…for safety" (Naomi). Her administrator noted that sending teachers in pairs to conduct home visits might not address the issue: "Even if you go in twos, one would want to think that safety would not be an issue then, but I do feel like it would probably still concern multiple teachers" (Melinda). She went on to emphasize that the larger agency in which the ECE program was housed would have some concerns for teacher safety on home visits as well.

The same administrator noted that just the process of arranging appointments for home visits could negatively impact teacher interactions with children and families. She observed that interactions about teachers' potential visits in families homes, and the ways that families welcomed or declined such invitations impacted teachers' views of families. In describing how their previous attempts to conduct home visits for the state-sponsored pre-K program, she noted that when a family declined a home visit, that

> automatically puts bugs in our human heads of 'Why?' So then you have this low key thought in your mind of 'What's going on?' And then whenever you're doing assessments, are you really assessing the child, or are you assessing what the child could potentially have going on because you don't know? (Melinda)

She concluded that consideration of teachers' potential attitudes and implicit biases related to teacher-family partnerships was necessary in order to consider how to address

such issues through professional development in order to facilitate the incorporation of such practices into requirements.

Recommendations theme (RQ3c). Participants were enthusiastic in their recommendations for strengthening family partnership practices throughout the state. Their eagerness to spread the work they consider essential to their profession and to child and family outcomes translated into seven categories within the Recommendations Theme (see Table 23 below). As mentioned above, questions about specific recommendations were not prepared in advance, but as programs reported their successful partnership strategies and ideas, these were shared with subsequent participants for feedback. Again, the point was not to return counts of participants endorsing each recommendation, but rather to fully explore the universe of possible recommendations contemplated by these teachers and administrators. Categories in this theme include: raising the profile of the profession; incorporating a communication tool such as an app; implementing some of the Head Start requirements and supports for family engagement; providing more time for teachers and families to connect; training and professional development on family partnerships; and cultural responsiveness and policies. Each category in the Recommendations Theme is presented below.

Table 23. Recommendations Theme

Category	Categorical Definitions
Raise the Profile of the Profession	A marketing campaign or other work to raise the profile of the profession, (teachers are not babysitters) The state should increase ECE funding ECE
Two-Way Communication Tool	Require/ give ECE programs credit in the QRIS for using an app for 2-way communication with families Require programs to link children's activity updates (shared with parents) to state early learning guidelines
Head Start Approach to Family Engagement	Head Start approach to family engagement Start with home visits Other structured time with teachers and families before care or the school year began
Time for Teachers to Connect with Families	Structured time for teachers to meet with families throughout the year Unstructured time with parents at drop off and pick up Additional time for teachers to meet with families
Training, Coaching, & Mentoring	Provide/ require PD on relationship-building; child-family-community; communicating with families Provide opportunities for interactive trainings where teachers share their partnership experiences Give successful teachers QRIS credit for mentoring Give QRIS credit for demonstration classrooms
Cultural Diversity & Cultural Responsiveness	Require training in working with diverse families
Written Policies	Strengthen program's work around family partnerships by requiring written policies

Raise the profile of the profession. Many participants discussed ideas related to

the dilemma that it is not until their children get to "big school," that parents are attentive

and interactive with the teacher and want to know how to help their children to succeed.

One teacher suggested a campaign to "raise awareness of everything that we do here," or

"some type of state funded program…just to get the awareness out there that this age is

important" (Erma). She further noted that state budget cuts have impacted how the field

is viewed as a profession. In other words, state investments communicate priorities. She

added that additional investments in the area of ECE could improve how the ECE field is viewed and could support children and families to access high quality ECE. In any case, numerous participants recommended that "the field was elevated and advocated" as educators rather than babysitters (Melinda).

Two-way communication tool. Participants endorsed the idea of a requirement for ECE programs to use a two-way communication tool such as an app for connecting teachers and parents. As one administrator noted, an app or other electronic communication tool could provide needed documentation for monitoring and licensing purposes (compliance visits), because "like your state consultant says, 'if you didn't write it, it didn't happen'" (Dolores). Such an app or other electronic platform could be used by teachers to provide parents and families with updates about children's activities on a regular basis. Participants also recommended a requirement that programs include in their updates for families some information about how children's activities link to the state's early learning standards. As one administrator noted, the teachers already show in their lesson or activity plans linkages to the early learning standards, so she thought "it'd be easy to do with the app" (Charlene).

Head Start approach to family engagement. One of the Head Start administrators recommended that some of the kinds of strategies that Head Start uses to partner with families might be successful across the across the ECE system. She described the home visits that are required (twice a year per child) and the teacher-family conferences (also twice a year), as well as the specialized staff that can connect with and support families (family engagement specialists) as well as onsite program staff who can support teachers

in their work with families in the classroom. Family involvement is prioritized at the program and classroom levels, and teacher feedback, evaluation, and training address these areas. As this administrator noted, "Supporting the whole family supports, ultimately, the development of the child. So I feel like it's the perfect model" (Ola). She further suggested that it might not be possible or wise to try to implement the entire Head Start family engagement model across the ECE system at once. Rather, the strategies for implementing such an approach could evolve over time, and she noted that home visits might be a good starting point.

Many subsequent participants agreed that having dedicated time away from the center to meet with families before the start of children's attendance in the program would support their partnerships with families. Others, however, noted that they could not implement home visits because their program served too many children (not enough time to reach them all). As noted earlier, one program that had implemented home visits as part of the state sponsored pre-K program reported that their experience had been unsuccessful. Many families were not willing to have center staff visit their homes, and so the program now holds an open house at the start of the year to give teachers and families an opportunity to meet, ask questions, and share information. This administrator recommended that programs decide what might work best for them to connect teachers and families: "I think you're going to have more luck having individualized practices of how to get the information" (Melinda). She suggested that such individualization might extend across programs as well as within programs at the classroom level because "what's going to work for my infant classroom won't work for my toddlers" (Melinda).

Time for teachers and families to connect. Most teachers reported that what they most needed to support or further strengthen their partnership practices with families was more time with them (beyond an initial conference or meeting as described above). Teachers did not tend to offer insights about how this could be achieved, (i.e., through the ECE system or through some program-level support), but they were very clear about the need. In terms of unstructured time with families, one teacher suggested additional staff at drop off and pick up: "I think that maybe more time to set a time, you know, set aside or maybe more teachers allowed in the classroom, ratios lower [at drop off and pick up] that way supervision isn't an issue" (Erma). Several teachers also suggested that they needed more structured opportunities to meet with families and share updates on children's progress:

> Family visits, meeting them in their house to discuss their child's developmental progress and where they're at currently. And then as alternative if someone absolutely cannot do that, maybe meeting somewhere away from the classroom. Because sometimes whenever parents come into the classroom to talk to us, we have to watch the children, and we can't focus on the parents (Naomi).

This particular teacher worked in a program that offered family conferences twice a year, but she felt that was not frequent enough to adequately share information and plan for children's progress.

Training, coaching, & mentoring. Many participants had ideas about professional development that would support their partnerships with families. First, they advocated for training on relationship-building with families: "I think additional trainings on how to just build relationships, how to be a people person. You have to get these

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families to trust you" (Brenda). One participant recommended a class or training that addressed child, family, and community, similar to one she had taken to fulfill a degree requirement. As she noted, "I feel like it should be a requirement because you're working with the families about as much as you're working with the kid" (Naomi). Several recommended training on communicating with families, as well as coaching and mentoring on this topic for newer teachers. One teacher noted, "The parents come first, and if you don't have them, you're not going to have their children," and she recommended "some kind of communication class and having compassion for these parents" (Jeannette). Finally, participants endorsed the idea of a training that they would help to develop, to share their experiences with other teachers: an "active, involved training…, where we all get a chance to say, 'Okay, well, this works here, this works here, this is how we do it'" (Annette). One participant noted that just having a forum to discuss the fact that some ideas work and some do not would be helpful, and another recommended creating opportunities (and credit in the system) for experienced, successful teachers to mentor newer ones or provide demonstration classrooms on various topics such as partnering with families.

   Cultural diversity & cultural responsiveness. Participants noted that the kinds of relationships necessary for successful teacher-family partnerships might benefit from teacher training in working with diverse families. As noted earlier, teachers' implicit biases can impact their expectations of and interactions with families and children. A required training could address such implicit biases and strategies for interrupting such

biases in working with families. In addition, one teacher noted that programs receive

credit in the current system for showing cultural diversity in the materials and

pictures displayed in the classroom. However, she suggested that

> a little more should be implemented in the classrooms to show that you
> understand, cause you don't really see a lot. Cause if you don't have a lot of
> different cultures in your classroom, you aren't going to see that difference
> (Arlene).

She added "it's a lot that's already required, it's just the fact of making sure it's actually

done" (Arlene).

Written policies. Lastly, participants proposed their ideas for requiring written

policies related to family partnership practices. Administrators felt that programs were

more likely to enact practices supportive of teacher-family partnerships if those practices

were part of widely-shared written policies. These administrators strongly endorsed the

state's new requirement for written policies, noting that "it's better to have a plan in

place" (Charlene). Written policies communicate priorities to staff and families and then

provide documentation that can then be verified by monitors for licensing enforcement

and support.

Conclusion: qualitative component. In conclusion, the qualitative component of

the study provided important insight into current family partnership practices enacted by

successful teachers and programs serving infants and toddlers as well as potential

directions for strengthening such practices across the ECE system. Teachers were

committed to building bonds with parents; to sharing information with them about

children's caregiving and development activities; to supporting parents in participating in

the partnership; and to supporting children's comfort in the classroom by incorporating family-specific information in interactions. Although teachers' success was partially attributed to their commitment to building successful partnerships and their commitment to their own professional growth, program practices also supported teachers' and families' success in this area. Participants concluded that system-level requirements such as enhanced communication practices, dedicated meeting time with families, and professional development on family collaboration could facilitate improved partnership practices across the state. The qualitative and quantitative results will now be discussed in the following section.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

Results from the quantitative and qualitative portions of the study, taken together, provide an informative portrait of the partnership practices currently enacted in licensed infant and toddler classrooms across the state from the viewpoints of teachers, administrators, and families involved in such partnerships. The quantitative portion of the study provided insight into possible differences in partnership practices associated with child age, program auspice, and teachers' professional development. Further, the quantitative component examined associations of partnership practices with the quality measure currently used in the state's QRIS, the ITERS-R (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2006). The qualitative component further elucidated the nature of partnership practices as well as barriers and opportunities to strengthening such practices across the state. The following discussion is organized by research question. Explanations for findings will be discussed in relation to current literature in the area, as well as in relation to cultural-ecological theory. Recommendations for policy and practice will then be presented. The section will conclude with consideration of the study's strengths and limitations, followed by future directions and conclusions.

Nature of Teacher-Family Partnerships (RQ1, RQ3a)

  Teacher and parent FPTRQ. It is difficult to characterize the teacher- and family-reported partnership practices in the quantitative portion of the study overall, as the FPTRQ authors have not yet provided threshold scores for low, medium, or high scores on any of the measures. However, the present study's teacher and parent data are consistent with reported teacher and parent data from the pilot study of the FPTRQ (Kim et al., 2015). For example, the Knowledge subscale for the present sample of $N = 37$ teachers had a mean score of 34.16 with a standard deviation of 7.05, compared to a mean of 33.3 and standard deviation of 7.3 in the pilot study of $N = 224$ center-based teachers. Similar consistencies were apparent for the FPTRQ results from parents in the current and pilot studies.

  Overall in the present study, the teacher-reported FPTRQ results related to RQ1 suggested no differences in partnership practices by age of children, auspice of program, or quantity of teachers' family engagement related professional development. Thus, the theoretical associations among person-level characteristics (child age and teacher training), contextual features (program auspice), and teacher-reported partnership practices were not supported. It is possible that the present study's teacher sample ($n = 37$) lacked power to detect true differences in partnership practices on the factors that were tested and which have been shown in previous studies to be salient to variation in the kinds of constructs measured by the FPTRQ. Parent FPTRQ results, as well as the qualitative portion of the study, provide mixed evidence of partnership differences on the person-level factors tested, and those are discussed next.

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Partnership differences by child age. Parent results on the FPTRQ suggested differences in parents' views of teachers' partnership practices by child age. Parents of infants rated teachers higher than did parents of toddlers on the Knowledge subscale of the measure. That is, parents of infants were more comfortable than parents of toddlers sharing family-specific information with their child's teacher. Thus, at least one aspect of the quality of parent-teacher relationships appears to be higher in infant classrooms than in toddler classrooms. As noted earlier, however, the skewed nature of the parent data on the Knowledge subscale suggests that significant results be interpreted with caution. That is, the fact that the parent survey data on the subscale in question were not normally distributed, increases the likelihood of finding a significant result where there are none (Type 1 error: Howell, 2013).

From a cultural ecological viewpoint (Tudge, 2008), it may appear that person-level characteristics, in this case child age, impact the mesosystem-level practices (teacher-family partnerships) in these classrooms, at least from the parent perspective. However, the possible explanations for the difference on the Knowledge subscale may be more complex. As noted by teachers participating in the interview component of the study, partnering with families takes time, and teachers in infant classrooms may have more time to connect with families because there are fewer children in infant than in toddler classrooms. Thus, system-level contextual features specifying teacher-child ratios may contribute to the possible variation in parent reported family partnership quality by child age group.

Person-level characteristics (Tudge 2008) of infants may also necessitate greater collaboration within the context of this age group. That is, the nature of infant development, in terms of their reliance on caregivers, necessitates more sharing of information among caregivers, which may serve to support the mesosystem alignment of caregiving across home and school (Lally, 2009; Sosinsky et al., 2016). Perhaps in the process of greater sharing of information, parents of infants feel more deeply connected to teachers. Prior research in the area has found, however, that parents of toddlers are also highly motivated to communicate and collaborate with their child's teacher in order to support the teacher's positive and responsive interactions with their child (Lang et al., 2016). Furthermore, as noted in the interview section of the study (pages 117-119), teachers seemed to feel an imperative to provide reassurance and emotional support to parents of infants to alleviate anxiety over separating from their infants. However, some toddler teachers also expressed this view that they should provide support and reassurance to parents of toddlers.

In the same vein, and also from the qualitative component of the present study, there was mixed evidence on how teachers view the overall partnership. All teachers of infants and some teachers of toddlers seemed to focus on their relationships with parents and emphasized their partnerships with parents, while some toddler teachers focused on more limited information-sharing with parents, focusing on children's activities and progress. Teachers' attention to the relational dimension of the partnership may play out in the larger sample in terms of parents of infants (and perhaps some parents of toddlers) feeling more connected to their children's teachers. This possibility would support the

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theorized (Tudge, 2008) value of teachers engaging in a process of both teaching and learning with parents in order to build the partnership. That is, perhaps mesosystem interactions are strengthened by teachers' intentional and explicit support of parents' sense of trust and self-efficacy with respect to the partnership.

Partnership differences by program auspice. Teachers in non-profit programs and for profit programs reported similar partnership practices. After applying the Holm-Bonferroni correction (Holm, 1979), there was also no difference in parents' appraisals of their teacher-family partnerships across program types. Thus, the hypothesized and theorized differences in teachers' partnership practices arising from contextual differences in program type was not supported.

In the interview sample, participants from non-profit programs appeared to enjoy additional supports in the form of funding for overhead and/or staffing due to their association with a religious organization, a community college, or a Head Start grantee. Teachers in these programs reported supplemental staffing (i.e., additional staff at drop-off and pick-up so that teachers could connect with parents) or other supports such as specialists who provide coaching and feedback to teachers on their partnership practices. However, teachers in for profit programs also reported that they accessed program level supports for their family partnership practices. Prior research has suggested differences in various markers of program and classroom quality by program auspice (e.g., King el al., 2016; Sosinsky, Lord, & Zigler, 2007), however, the present study suggests that successful teacher-family partnerships are possible regardless of program type. This null finding may also suggest important distinctions between the constructs and practices

typically assessed by global quality measures (used in studies finding quality differences by program type) and those assessed by the FPTRQ. That is, perhaps it is easier for a variety of program types to enact the practices assessed by the FPTRQ than those assessed by other measures, and this notion is further examined in the next research question.

Relation of Classroom and Program Environment Features to Partnership Practices (RQ2, RQ3b)

RQ2 examined program-level practices and classroom environmental features (as measured by the QRIS quality measure) in relation to teacher-family partnerships in order to determine how these might suggest opportunities for including such partnerships in QRIS requirements for the state's ECE system. FPTRQ results from program administrator surveys were examined for the types and quantity of program-level policies and practices in place. Qualitative results (RQ3b) provided additional insight into structural supports for family partnerships. Teacher and family FPTRQ results were compared with ITERS-R classroom scores and no associations were found. Administrator FPTRQ results were compared with ITERS-R classroom total and factor scores, with two, somewhat surprising negative correlations. The quantitative results related to RQ2 and qualitative results related to RQ3b will be discussed below.

Program-level supports for partnership practices (RQ2a). Once again it is challenging to characterize administrator results on the FPTRQ. As noted earlier, scale authors have not defined scores for low, medium, or high performance on the administrator version of the FPTRQ. Additionally, pilot results are only available for the

Environment and Policy Checklist subscale of the administrator measure (Kim et al., 2015) . Nonetheless, present results were consistent with available results from the FPTRQ pilot ($N = 108$, $M = 13.2$, $SD = 2.6$, Range = 6-17). Results from the present study also suggest communication practices closer to the high end of the possible range ($M = 7.76$, possible maximum = 9), and information systems just below the mid-range ($M = 6.92$, possible maximum = 15).

Three items on the Environment and Policy Checklist were reportedly implemented by all participants: having an open door policy that allows parents to visit at any time; providing parents with opportunities to participate via contributing materials; and providing parenting information via newsletters. The least-endorsed items on the Environment and Policy Checklist subscale (providing parenting information through classes and through resource libraries), were implemented by 26% and 35% of participants respectively. The majority of items on this subscale (14 of 17 items) were implemented by the majority of participants.

The Communication Systems subscale featured the least variability of the three subscales, with the majority of administrators reporting their utilization of all of the strategies. Thus, the least-endorsed strategy of having a website was used by 65% of participants, and the next lowest communication system, email, was used by 71% of participants. Even those strategies that required a more systematic approach (i.e., technology based strategies rather than in-person communications), were reported to be widely used by participating administrators. This should be good news for ECE system leaders interested in implementing and sustaining family partnership practices. Recall

that interview participants (in alignment with recent research in the area and Cultural

Ecological Theory) emphasized the importance of bidirectional communication with

families, particularly communication systems that acknowledge and respond to family

needs (Halgunseth et al., 2009; Lang et al., 2016; Tudge, 2008). Without such two-way

communication, mesosystem-level interactions and the teaching and learning that are

theoretically foundational to the partnership are not possible. As one administrator in the

interview sample noted:

> You have to figure out what works for you as a center and you as an individual,
> because in the end, it is all about communication and time. How do you have the
> time to do it, and what's the most effective way to communicate with them
> [parents]? (Dolores).

Administrator responses in the Information About Resources subscale featured

the most variability, and the least endorsements overall. Of the 17 items in the subscale, a

total of 10 were endorsed by less than half of participating administrators. This result is

perhaps expected, given that other subscales focus on practices targeted to all families,

and given that the focus of a partnership model of family engagement is not primarily

about connecting families with supports, that is, a deficit model focused on addressing

need (Virmani, Wiese, & Mangione, 2016). However, in the context of learning the kinds

of family-specific information that teachers need in order to enact a partnership model,

family needs and challenges are likely to emerge, and teachers and programs should be

prepared to connect families to needed resources. Indeed, it was clear from the interview

sample that teachers and administrators feel they are serving more and more children who

have experienced various forms and levels of trauma. Recent research in the area of adverse childhood experiences suggests that just under half of children across the United States as well as in the focal state had experienced at least one such event (Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Several interview participants stressed that helping families to identify resources (as needs emerged) was an important and gratifying aspect of their family partnerships. At least one administrator in the interview sample created a self-serve resource center for families and tried to keep it stocked with information based on what she knew about families and also based on challenges that families might be facing that were unknown to program staff. Perhaps this is an area of potential growth for the ECE system as a whole. Further study is needed to assess whether incentives for ECE programs to make resource information available to families would inadvertently endorse a more deficit based approach to family partnerships. Perhaps further exploration with programs such as those who participated in the interview portion of the present study, who have been highly rated on partnership practices by their parents, could be a good starting point for understanding the balance between addressing families' needs and maintaining a funds of knowledge approach to partnerships and to classroom practices.

Interview-reported administrative supports for partnerships (RQ3b).
Consistent with Cultural Ecological Theory (Tudge, 2008), interview participants reported a wide variety of program-level (contextual) supports that were directly (and intentionally) related to mesosystem-level teacher-family partnerships. Both administrators and teachers reported attending carefully to partnerships with families. Consistent with cultural ecological theory (Tudge, 2008), and prior research in the area,

(e.g., Blue-Banning et al., 2005), interview participants emphasized the importance of bidirectional communication to empower parents to seek information as they needed it, to support trusting bonds between teachers and parents, and to coordinate support for children's learning and development. Every administrator and/or teacher in the interview portion of the study reported mechanisms for bidirectional communication between parents and teachers/ the program and emphasized the value of these communication strategies to their partnership practices.

Other structural supports noted in the interview component of the study (but missing from the administrator FPTRQ) included program expectations & requirements; teacher feedback and evaluation; staffing patterns; and administrators' continuous quality improvement approach (including with respect to partnership challenges). Program expectations for partnership practices were powerful motivators for teachers to persist in their attempts to build successful relationships with parents, and, consistent with prior research on coaching and mentoring (Zan & Donegan-ritter, 2014) and on support necessary for partnership practices in particular (Craft-Rosenberg et al., 2006), regular feedback, coaching, and even advice from administrators and coworkers helped teachers to improve their practices. This collaborative team approach seemed to be highly valued by teachers and administrators.

Another program level support for partnership practices that came to light in the interviews was administrators' continuous quality improvement approach to their work including anticipating and addressing challenges. That is, administrators reported always being on the lookout for opportunities to improve their program, from the organizational

level to the classroom level to the level of individual relationships. Administrators'

viewpoints in this area seemed to filter across the program as teachers also reported a

continuous improvement approach to their work. Administrators and teachers were

primed to respond to shifting needs, interests, and priorities on the part of families (and

children). Taken together, these policies and practices not only support teachers'

connections to families, they also anticipate and provide support for challenges as they

arise.

These findings highlighting the theorized importance of supports at the program-

level of context for partnership practices at the mesosystem (Tudge, 2008). In addition,

these findings echo and extend prior research emphasizing the value of acknowledging

and addressing the emotion work of partnering with parents and the often competing

demands of children, parents, and requirements (Elfer & Page, 2015). In other words,

preparing in advance and providing teacher supports for both positive and challenging

aspects of partnering with families strengthens teachers' capabilities in this area. Further

study is needed to identify mechanisms to document and measure such supports for

family partnerships on a program level. These program-level supports should then be

assessed in some way at a systems level in order to credit programs that are fostering

implementation of a partnership model of family engagement; to incentivize program that

are not yet supporting such work; and to inform training and technical assistance in

support of implementation of such work.

Teacher- and parent-reported partnership practices and the ITERS-R

(RQ2b). Research question 2b sought to investigate possible associations between

classroom scores on the quality measure used in the QRIS, (the ITERS-R), and teacher- as well as parent-reported partnership practices as measured by the FPTRQ. Neither set of analyses yielded significant associations, suggesting that the ITERS-R and the FPTRQ are picking up different aspects of classroom quality. This finding is perhaps unsurprising given that prior work has suggested that the ITERS-R focuses more on structural or global quality rather than processes in the infant and toddler classroom. (Thompson & La Paro, 2009). Further work is needed to determine opportunities for incorporating teacher- family partnership practices into both conceptualizations and measurement of ECE quality.

Turning to the interview portion of the study, interview participants reported two practices that are also part of what is assessed on the ITERS-R, not at the factor level but at the indicator level. First, all participants reported greeting parents and children at drop off and pick up. Many emphasized going beyond what is required in the ITERS-R to connect on a personal level and build friendships with parents at these times. Additionally, participants mentioned using family photos in their classrooms, having them on display, and weaving them into classroom interactions and instruction (another indicator on the ITERS-R). Consistent with cultural ecological theory (Tudge, 2008), teachers emphasized the value of this practice in terms of supporting children's sense of belonging and connection to their families and to each other. Other teachers reported taking and posting throughout the classroom photos of children's daily activities and using the photos to further strengthen classroom community, and to highlight for children and families what children have done throughout the day. Perhaps these links between

partnership practices and indicators in the state's quality measure suggest an opportunity to highlight and build upon current classroom practices across the state.

Administrator FPTRQ practices and the ITERS-R (RQ2c). The last section of Research Question 2 examined possible associations between administrator reported practices in the FPTRQ and classroom ITERS-R scores. Two significant negative correlations were found. As administrators reported more strategies and systems they had in place to communicate with families, their ITERS-R classroom scores were significantly lower on Safety and Organization (which includes personal care routines such as diapering as well as health and safety practices). As administrators reported more strategies in place to involve parents in the program and provide them with parenting information, classroom scores on the ITERS-R Language and Interactions factor were significantly lower. The Language and Interactions factor includes teacher support for children's language understanding and use, and peer interactions. It may be possible that, as administrators focus on program-level strategies to involve parents and communicate information to them, they are not necessarily spending time in the classroom to support teacher effectiveness on these two ITERS-R factors. However, as noted above, the administrator FPTRQ items and subscales do not seem to tap into the kinds of structural supports that are salient to teacher partnership practices. Thus, this significant result does little to illuminate the associations between the current quality measure and policies and practices that more closely support teachers in their collaborations with families.

Policies and Supports Recommended to Strengthen Partnership Practices (RQ3c)

The aim of Research Question 3 was to glean, from teachers and administrators succeeding in family partnerships, ideas for strengthening such work across the state and ECE system. Interview participants provided ideas for strengthening mesosystem-level partnership practices including recommendations for addressing partnership challenges; possible requirements that could embed such practices into the QRIS; as well as more general supports that might be implemented at a program or a system level. Recommendations emerging from the interview component of the study are discussed below.

Raise the profile of the profession. Consistent with prior research in the area (e.g., Shpancer et al., 2008), one of the challenges identified in collaborating with families on children's learning and development was that parents tend to view ECE, especially at the infant and toddler stages, as babysitting. Participants stressed the need to raise the profile of the profession (not just for infant and toddler teachers) so that parents would be eager to collaborate and meet with teachers to plan for their children's learning and development goals. Many participants noted that they already offer teacher-family conferences, and indeed this is one of the requirements in the new state regulation about family involvement (North Carolina Child Care Rules, 2019). However, participants also reported that parents of infants and toddlers rarely participate in such conferences. Would a statewide marketing or parent education effort to underscore the importance of the early years, highlight the state's investment in this age group, and emphasize the value of the

ECE teaching profession shift parents' views about participating in partnership practices such as conferences and planning with their young children's teachers? Further study in this area is needed.

Additional time to connect with parents. It is possible that parents of infants and toddlers do not feel the need for a formal conference with teachers because they exchange so much information on a daily basis. One administrator in the interview portion of the study noted that at least some of her teachers share that point of view and would have a hard time agreeing to additional meetings with parents. However, nearly every teacher in the interview sample stressed the need for additional time with parents, away from supervision responsibilities, in order to share children's progress and interests and plan for future growth. Perhaps the new state regulation will support such parent-teacher meetings and collaborations. The state should collect data on how the new rule impacts teacher-family partnership activities including conferences.

Two-way communication tool with links to NC FELD. As noted above, and consistent with prior work in the area, communication was identified as fundamental to teacher-family relationships or partnerships (Blue-Banning et al, 2005: Lang et al., 2006), and bidirectional communication was viewed as critical to empowering parents (Halgunseth et al., 2009). Interview participants therefore endorsed the idea of a QRIS requirement for programs/ teachers to use a two-way communication tool such as an app to facilitate collaboration with families. This tool would be used to provide regular updates on what and how children were doing. Teachers could also share their professional knowledge of child development through the communication platform by

linking children's activities to the North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development (NC FELD; North Carolina Foundations Task Force, 2013). This approach could be accomplished with little cost to programs, as free apps for bidirectional communication are widely available. Furthermore, teachers currently link lesson and activity plans to NC FELD, so teachers and administrators felt that linking activity updates to NC FELD would not be difficult. In terms of monitoring for such a requirement, the apps themselves provide administrators with documentation of the communication that has taken place, and this documentation could then be used for compliance monitoring purposes.

Caution may be warranted, however, in terms of requiring the use of apps for bidirectional communication. According to interview participants, some apps are designed more for communicating to parents about their child's behavior throughout the day in a commerce type system (i.e., rewarding good behavior and calling children out or taking away privileges for bad behavior). This type of behavior management is not appropriate for the early childhood period (Katz & McClellan, 1997), thus the state or system requiring use of an app would need to specify parameters for the type of app that would be acceptable and the ways it should be used for bidirectional communication. Further, as one interview participant noted, the concern of teachers' supervision of children while keeping parents and families updated would need to be addressed. Additional study of programs that have implemented such communication systems is warranted in order to understand how they manage and prioritize app-based

communications with parents, and how they balance child supervision with family communication.

One caution in terms of linking children's activities to specific domains of learning and development (either via day-to-day communication such as an app or via more formal methods such as teacher-family conferences), may be that focusing on how children's activities relate to domains of learning and development may trigger a greater focus on and pressure related to children's academic preparedness for kindergarten. Indeed, one administrator in the interview sample had experienced increased pressure related to kindergarten readiness skills when they began child assessments in their three-year-old classroom. Parents were keenly focused on whether their young children could identify letters, numbers, even sight words. Teachers might need additional training and supports that acknowledge the real pressure from parents to prepare children for "big school", and tools to reassure parents and families that play-based (and child led) learning supports children's academic outcomes in the long run. Further, teachers and administrators may need training and supports related to incorporating family-specific information into curriculum and instruction. This may be particularly salient in classrooms serving older children (older than infants and toddlers), as administrators in the interview portion of the study struggled to understand questions about how family partnerships are reflected in those spaces. They focused on curriculum implementation for preschoolers, which was viewed as separate from children's most important and influential context – their families. Further study is warranted in this area, to understand the issues of school readiness from the perspectives of families, teachers, and

administrators and to identify programs or classrooms that do weave families into instructional practices, in order to inform possible system change efforts across age groups.

Head Start approach to family engagement and cultural competence training. Participants in the two Head Start programs recommended that the Head Start approach to engaging with families (i.e., requiring home visits, family conferences, and parent engagement in planning), should be implemented across the state's ECE system. They recommended starting with home visits at the first of each school year, and many non-Head Start participants endorsed this recommendation. However, other interview participants expressed concerns about the idea of home visits, either because of the program size and the time it would take to get to each child's home before school started, or because of safety concerns for staff. Some participants suggested taking the home visit model and simply shifting the locale to the center. That is, they recommended having a structured time set aside at the start of the year in which teachers and families could get to know one another and exchange information needed for supporting children's learning and development.

This may be a good compromise for programs without the staffing or time to visit families in their homes. However, it also excuses those teachers and administrators who may, either from subconscious attitudes or lived experiences, characterize some families and neighborhoods as too dangerous to visit. Further, such an approach could limit participation in such pre-care meetings to those families who are able to physically get to the center at the appointed times and may exclude families who lack transportation or

flexibility in their work schedule, as well as those who wish to avoid being at the program due to their own negative experiences as students.

Taken together, the nature of relationships that support successful teacher-family partnerships, the reality of challenges on both sides, and the possibility of teachers' and administrators' implicit biases that inform their interactions and expectations of families and children, these all point to the need for another support that was recommended by interview participants: training in the area of culturally competent and responsive interactions. In order to interact with children and families from a strengths-based rather than deficit perspective, teachers and administrators must be aware of their own biases and have tools to support a funds of knowledge approach (Graue, Whyte, & Delaney, 2014). In order to acknowledge and incorporate into the classroom children's social and cultural contexts, as necessitated by a partnership model of family engagement based on cultural ecological theory (Tudge, 2008), teachers and administrators may need even more support, which leads to the next set of recommendations mentioned by teachers and administrators.

Training, coaching, and mentoring. Participants in the interview portion of the study strongly advocated training in the area of relationship-building and communicating with families. A few even suggested that such trainings be required before teachers could begin working in ECE classrooms. This recommendation reflects a cultural ecological view of the family as an essential partner in children's learning and development. It also underscores participants' views of (and extends prior research on) the nature of early childhood systems, in that requirements often drive not only classroom practices, but also

the technical assistance and training systems that support such practices (Tarrant & Huerta, 2015; Porterfield & Scott-Little, 2019). With the new DCDEE family engagement requirement in the state's ECE licensing system, it is possible that training and coaching to help programs implement the required practices will be made available. Documenting and reporting the supports that roll out in relation to the new requirement, as well as collecting data on practitioner needs relative to family partnerships more broadly could inform future planning in this area both for the training and technical assistance system and for higher education (in terms of pre-service teacher preparation).

Another aspect of recommendations in this area was to incorporate teachers' experiences into trainings more directly by creating interactive opportunities in which participants could share and discuss strategies they had tried. Opportunities to connect with other professionals in the field on particular areas of practice, including receiving QRIS credit for providing mentoring or demonstration classrooms, were enthusiastically endorsed by participants. In other words, participants felt that honoring teachers-as-professionals and supporting their expertise accordingly, could support improved classroom practices. The focal state is currently interested in pursuing the option of practitioners earning QRIS credit for mentoring (CCDF administrator personal communication, January 28, 2020), and this could be an opportunity to incorporate this recommendation into the system. In addition to incorporating mentoring into the QRIS, the state and the training and technical assistance system should investigate ways to incorporate practitioner voices into training such as co-designing trainings with expert practitioners in the topic area.

Policies to support family partnerships. Participants throughout the interview portion of the study highlighted the value of program- and state-level policies to their own or their program's partnership practices. One participant in particular noted that, without written program policies specifying such practices (including how they would be supported and evaluated), they were unlikely to be sustained. Further, program-level policies can provide documentary evidence of compliance with respect to rules or requirements. One aspect of the new family involvement requirement enacted at the state level (North Carolina Child Care Rules, 2019), is that programs must enshrine their family involvement policies in writing and share them with families and staff. Consistent with prior findings that requirements can drive practice change (Tarrant & Huerta, 2015; Porterfield & Scott-Little, 2019), this new rule may, in fact, accomplish one of the recommendations emerging from participants of the present study (require written policies). However, without specific guidelines for the required policies, ECE programs may not include information about expectations for teachers, supports available to help them succeed, and a process for evaluation of teachers' progress implementing new practices. The state should collect data on the policies that programs are implementing under the new requirement, as well as policies that might more directly support teachers in their partnership work. In other words, there may be additional opportunities to specify in rule or give credit in the QRIS for the kinds of policies that would more explicitly address teacher-family partnerships, and not just family involvement.

Further System Level Recommendations

In addition to the participant recommendations discussed above, this study points to additional opportunities to strengthen teacher-family partnership practices that may require system-level attention. These begin with the fundamental ways that quality in ECE is defined, where family partnerships fit in that definition, and how the definition might shift to include such partnerships. Considerations for redefining quality then lead to questions of how elements of quality (i.e., family partnerships) might be incentivized, measured, and rewarded.

First, the conceptualization of family partnerships in relation to current definitions of quality in ECE should be addressed. Where do families fit in system-level, state-level, and profession-level definitions of quality in ECE classrooms? The idea of family engagement is a popular one in the focal state at present, particularly given the new family engagement requirement (North Carolina Child Care Rules, 2019), however the requirement takes a more traditional approach to family engagement (i.e., getting families into the classroom). Partnership practices such as using family-specific knowledge in the early childhood classroom were not necessarily seen by all teachers and administrators in this study as relating to family engagement.

One of the great promises of a partnership model of family engagement, however, is its potential to support teachers' positive, strengths-based views of individual children and families and to increase their (teachers') cultural responsiveness in the classroom by incorporating families' funds of knowledge into interactions and instruction. Shifting views of family engagement from a focus on how parents are involved in the program to

a focus on building relationships with families and tapping into their expertise, using them as key informants to teachers' classroom interactions and instruction, should be a priority for the state's ECE system. This shift to an equity focused partnership approach may challenge widely held views of how curricular and relationship practices should be implemented. However, addressing this shift is necessary from a cultural ecological (and many may say an ethical educational) standpoint in order to advance equity and support all children to benefit from ECE experiences.

As ECE systems work to redefine quality with family partnerships at the foundation, they may be able to incentivize such practices by increasing credit that programs participating in a QRIS receive for partnership-related work. The focal state should investigate current rules and measures in relation to the various components of teacher family partnerships (i.e., teacher-family relationship building; teacher/program acquisition of family-specific knowledge; use of family-specific knowledge in the classroom; bi-directional communication between teachers/programs and families; and teacher-family collaboration in planning for children's learning and development) and look for ways to elevate (i.e., increase credit for), incentivize (through rule or requirement), and support (through professional development) such practices.

Turning to the question of measurement for partnership requirements in a QRIS or other ECE system, the current study suggested no associations between the ITERS-R and FPTRQ-measured teacher Knowledge, Practices, or Attitudes. Although two classroom practices reported by teachers in the interview portion of the study are included in the ITERS-R quality measure, (on the indicator level), these indicators do not provide

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enough data with which to assess the complexity of partnership practices. Thus, it is important for states and systems to identify and implement measurement tools that capture and assess the full scope of partnership processes in ECE classrooms. Further study is needed to examine FPTRQ-measured components of teacher-family partnerships in relation to quality measures currently in place, in order to identify potential areas of alignment and needs for enhanced measures that effectively capture partnership practices.

In sum, a realignment of ECE definitions of quality is warranted, with a focus on teacher- and program-family partnerships that inform classroom interactions and instruction. New or refocused requirements and measurement tools would be required to support implementation of such a revised vision of quality in early childhood classrooms. Focusing on strong, reciprocal relationships between teachers and families could empower families as advocates for their children and partners in their children's education, as well as providing teachers with the information necessary to enact truly individualized and developmentally and culturally appropriate practices.

Strengths and Limitations

With the recent inclusion of family engagement in federal Child Care and Development Fund requirements (CCDF, 2016) and the newly implemented family engagement requirement at the state level (North Carolina Child Care Rules, 2019), there is new focus and energy around the topic of family engagement, as well as possible areas of opportunity and need relative to meeting new requirements. Thus, this study focused on timely questions both for ECE systems and practitioners. The present study has

several features that strengthen the usefulness and reliability of its findings, as well as some limitations.

The design of the study is a strength. The convergence mixed-methods design (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015) afforded important comparisons across different aspects of ECE quality and viewpoints. The quantitative portion gave voice to families and teachers on their appraisals of teachers' partnership practices, and it gave voice to administrators in terms of program level policies and practices. The qualitative portion of the study gave further voice to teachers and administrators and provided important and rich details of their partnership practices, their commitment to such work, and their innovative recommendations for advancing such practices across the state. Taken together, the study design elevated the potential for teachers, families, and administrators to inform policy and practice. The recommendations and results emerging from this study provide the focal state and other ECE systems and stakeholders with practitioner-informed recommendations to guide decision-making and implementation related to requirements, measurement, and professional development to support a partnership model of family engagement.

The theoretical basis of the study was also a strength, in that it provided explanatory power for many of the hypothesized associations between mesosystem-level teacher-family partnership interactions and person-level characteristics, context, and culture (Tudge, 2008). The theorized variation in mesosystem-level collaboration according to the person-level characteristics of child age was partially supported at least from the parents' viewpoint. Teacher and administrator recommendations for policies and

supports to strengthen such collaboration aligned with Cultural Ecological Theory's emphasis on the teaching-learning aspect of the partnerships and the necessity of such partnerships to inform practices that are responsive to and reflective of family culture and context. Finally, participant recommendations reflected the theory in underscoring the importance of supports at multiple levels of context (i.e., program-level supports, technical assistance and training, and system-level requirements).

Although the study contributes to and extends the field's understanding of the current state and future potential of teacher-family partnerships, it also presents some limitations. First, initial recruitment was conducted from a randomized sample of classrooms that had recently been ITERS-R assessed, with potential participants recruited in order of the randomization. However, the initial recruitment rate for infant teachers was so low that recruitment was ultimately opened up to all infant teachers on the list, regardless of order in the randomization. Thus, selection bias may have been introduced to the quantitative portion of the sample.

In addition, the negatively skewed data in the parent FPTRQ data could be an artifact of the tool itself or indicative of social desirability bias on the part of the parent participants. That is, they may have rated teachers more highly than their actual appraisals of teachers' partnership practices due to the belief that more positive ratings would be viewed as more acceptable. To guard against this bias, FPTRQ parent surveys featured cover sheets which were removed upon their return. Participants were informed that their data (aside from the cover sheet) would be identified only with a unique number identifier that would not be shared outside the research team. Further, parents were

instructed to place their completed surveys in sealed, security lined envelopes before handing them to the program administrator for return to the researchers. However, the process of receiving the surveys from and having to return the completed surveys back to the program administrator may have prompted some parents to rate their teachers more highly than they would have otherwise.

Other limitations of the quantitative component include sample size and measurement issues. The sample size for the quantitative portion was small overall, but particularly so for teachers and administrators. This fact, as noted earlier, may have explained the lack of significant differences in teachers' partnership practices by child age group or program type. In terms of measurement, there appear to be limitations related to the administrator FPTRQ survey. Although the administrator version of the FPTRQ survey includes many policies and practices relating to parent involvement, program communication, and resource sharing, these constructs do not seem to align with the partnership practices assessed in the teacher and parent versions of the FPTRQ or with the practices and supports noted in the interview portion of the study. In other words, the FPTRQ administrator survey does not directly assess structural supports for teachers' partnership practices including the collaborative sharing of information, (teaching and learning) expected from a cultural ecological viewpoint. The same can be said for the ITERS-R measure in terms of its lack of focus on processes such as teacher-family partnerships. Thus, the structural features that might support teacher-family partnerships were not directly assessed in the quantitative portion of the study.

Turning to the qualitative component of the study, the interview data collection may have benefited from additional meetings with each participant, or perhaps with a smaller group of participants. Each participant was interviewed one time, and one at a time (i.e., administrators and teachers were interviewed separately). As participants shared a successful approach, or a challenge, or an idea for a recommendation, the researcher shared those ideas with successive interview participants for their feedback. Thus, participants in the earlier interviews did not weigh in on ideas that emerged in later interviews. It may have been beneficial to have returned to participants a second time to present and explore the ideas that emerged in round one. Member checking was conducted (via electronic mail) in two phases, but another round of in-person meetings could have ensured that themes emerging from this portion of the study were more fully explored and explicated.

Finally, as with all qualitative studies, the interview portion of the study can be said to have limited generalizability. However, the goal of the interviews was to reveal teachers' partnership practices and ideas for improvements in this area at the program and system levels within classrooms that were identified by parents as implementing relatively high-quality family engagement practices. The goal, then, was not to find one single unifying truth about partnership practices that could be applied across the entire population of ECE programs. Viewed in this light, the limitation related to generalizability becomes a strength related to illuminating the overarching research question from multiple viewpoints.

Future Directions for Research

The overarching aim of this study was to examine family partnerships as a mechanism for improving the quality of infant and toddler ECE. Happily, strong teacher- and program-family partnerships were found to be in place in some infant and toddler classrooms across the state. Furthermore, successful teachers and administrators provided insight into their practices, their policies and supports, and their ideas for cultivating, incentivizing, and rewarding family partnerships across the ECE system in the focal state.

Taken together, the results of the study suggest several avenues for future research in the area of teacher- and program-family partnerships in licensed ECE programs. First, additional pilot testing of the FPTRQ is warranted, both to examine relationships among other quality measures and FPTRQ constructs, but also to establish threshold scores for low, medium, and high performance on the survey tools. Additionally, options for strengthening the administrator version of the FPTRQ should be investigated. The administrator FPTRQ survey should assess policies and supports that more directly strengthen and sustain teachers' partnership practices, or alternate measures that accomplish this goal should be identified.

Future work should also include parent or family perspectives on implementing the teacher-family partnership approach that is the focus of the present study. Family experiences with partnership practices should inform implementation efforts, including work to contemplate ways to afford program-level or even classroom-level individualization of family partnership efforts. Families' concerns and ideas about

collaboration that is designed to celebrate each family in the classroom context could also point to additional research needs in this area.

On the state level, research should be conducted with respect to implementation of the new family involvement requirement (North Carolina Child Care Rules, 2019). Data on the content and focus of the program-level policies that are implemented under the requirement and the professional development that is offered in support of implementation should be collected and analyzed. Such research could inform further refinement to the rule and the systems that support compliance.

In addition, DCDEE should investigate its current QRIS and NC Pre-K program requirements, for partnership-related items. That is, both the QRIS and NC Pre-K program may feature current requirements that would support teacher-family partnership practices. Both systems may even include requirements that would pose barriers to such partnership practices. DCDEE should then consider opportunities to eliminate barriers to partnership practices, and to increase the credit that programs receive for items that support partnerships, in order to incentivize and support such practices across the state. In this same vein, DCDEE could tap into the higher education collaborative focused on teacher preparation for ECE and identify opportunities for highlighting family partnership practices within that system as well.

Finally, DCDEE should conduct research to inform the system in the feasibility of the recommendations put forward by participants in the interview portion of the present study. As the state CCDF administrator and the administrator of the state-sponsored pre-K program for at-risk four year olds, DCDEE has a great deal of administrative data.

Further, they are ideally and uniquely situated to collect additional data in order to inform additional study into the feasibility of advancing a partnership model of family engagement across programs and stakeholders in the state's ECE system. To do so could pave the way for more coordinated, collaborative, equity-focused ECE across the state; elevate the ECE profession through structured sharing of teachers' professional knowledge; support families' sense of agency as equal partners in their children's education; and improve outcomes for children, families, teachers, and programs.

Conclusion

The current study examined the state of teacher-family partnerships in licensed infant and toddler classrooms across North Carolina from the viewpoints of families, teachers, and administrators. Parents of infants were significantly more comfortable than parents of toddlers in terms of sharing family-specific information with their child's teacher. No other differences were found in teacher or parent reported partnership practices, and no associations were found between such partnership practices and program level policies and practices assessed by the FPTRQ.

Comparisons of partnership practices to the current QRIS quality measure yielded no associations with parent or teacher reported partnership practices. Two moderate and negative associations between the quality measure (the ITERS-R: Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2006) and administrator reported practices (via the FPTRQ) were found. However, because neither tool assesses administrative practices related to teacher-family partnerships, the significant correlations provided limited insight into the research question.

Finally, teacher and administrator interviews yielded rich insight into the nature of teacher-family partnerships in infant and toddler classrooms where such partnership practices were highly rated by parents. The recommendations emerging from the qualitative component may not directly generalize across all ECE teachers and programs, however interview participants were asked to consider the broader population of ECE programs when making their recommendations. Thus, the qualitative portion also provided insight into many possibilities for incorporating such partnerships into the ECE system through the QRIS. Participants emphasized the relational nature of partnering with families, the time it took to do it well, and the importance of bidirectional communication systems and other supports needed to successfully enact and sustain such partnerships. Related recommendations for policy and research were made.

The current study extends the research on teacher family partnerships and particularly the focus on that dimension of family engagement as a potential to inform truly individualized ECE experiences for children and families. It extends the literature on the process aspect of ECE including considerations for system implementation and measurement of such processes. Finally, it points to a hopeful future for the focal state's ECE system in which teachers are supported to connect powerfully in equal partnerships with families, and to learn from and with families as they seek to support children's best outcomes.

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CONVERGENCE MIXED METHODS DESIGN

Figure 1. Convergence Mixed Methods Design
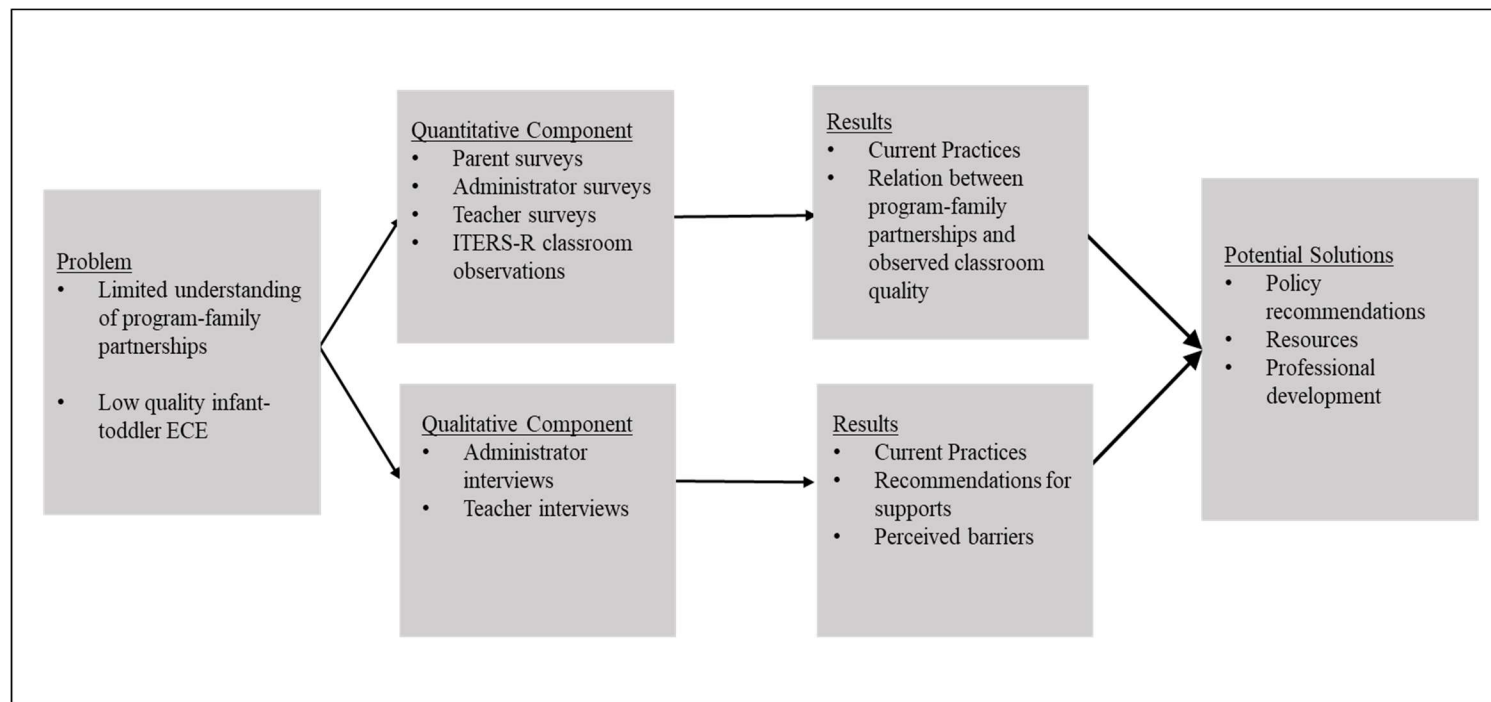
APPENDIX B

WEB LINKS TO FPTRQ SURVEY

Director FPRTQ Survey:

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/1_fptrq_director_measure.pdf

Teacher FPTRQ Survey:

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/21_fptrq_provider_teacher_measure.p

df

Parent FPTRQ Survey:

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/3_1_fptrq_parent_measure.pdf

APPENDIX C

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance

CCDBG: Child Care and Development Block Grant

CCDF: Child Care and Development Fund

CCR&R: Child Care Resource and Referral

DCDEE: Division of Child Development and Early Education

ECE: Early Childhood Education

IOM & NRC: Institutes of Medicine and National Research Council

ITERS-R: Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised

CET: Cultural Ecological Theory

FIQ: Family Involvement Questionnaire

FPTRQ: Family and Provider-Teacher Relationship Quality Measure

NCFELD: North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning & Development

NCRLAP: North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project

QRIS: Quality Rating and Improvement System

APPENDIX D

ADMINISTRATOR DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Participant ID Number: _____

Please answer all questions. This information will be used for research purposes only.

1. Sex: ☐ Male   ☐ Female   **2. Ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino:** ☐ Yes   ☐ No

3. Race:
☐ American Indian/ Alaska Native   ☐ Asian/ Pacific Islander

☐ Black/ African American   ☐ Multiracial

☐ White/ European American   ☐ Not listed: _____

4. Primary Language: ☐ English   ☐ Other: _____

5. Other Languages Spoken: _____

6. Undergraduate Degree: _____   **Area of Concentration:** _____

7. Graduate Degree: _____   **Area of Concentration:** _____

8. Length of time in current position at current program:

☐ Less than 1 year   ☐ 1-4 years   ☐ 5-10 years   ☐ More than 10 years

9. How long have you worked at this program (current role and other roles)?

☐ Less than 1 year   ☐ 1-4 years   ☐ 5-10 years   ☐ More than 10 years

10. How long have you worked in the early childhood field (paid professional positions only)?

☐ Less than 1 year   ☐ 1-4 years   ☐ 5-10 years   ☐ More than 10 years

APPENDIX E

TEACHER DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Participant ID Number: _____

Please answer all questions. This information will be used for research purposes only.

1. Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female **2. Ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino:** ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Race:

☐ American Indian/ Alaska Native   ☐ Asian/ Pacific Islander

☐ Black/ African American   ☐ Multiracial

☐ White/ European American   ☐ Not listed: _____

4. Primary Language: ☐ English   ☐ Other: _____

5. Other Languages Spoken: _____

6. Highest education level completed (please list degree & area of concentration):

_____

8. How long have you worked in this program (current & previous positions)?:

_____ years   _____ months

9. How long have you worked in your current position:

_____ years   _____ months

10. How long have you worked with these children or a majority of these children?

_____ years   _____ months

TEACHER DEMOGRAPHIC FORM, CONTINUED

11. How long have you worked in the early childhood field (paid professional positions only)?

_____ years   _____ months

12. Indicate the kinds of professional development in family engagement or family partnerships that you have participated in over the past 12 months (select all that apply):

☐ Family Engagement Training

☐ Family Engagement Technical Assistance

☐ Evaluation of Family Engagement Practices

☐ Family Engagement College Course

☐ Family Engagement Coaching

☐ Informal Feedback on Family Engagement Practices

APPENDIX F

ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. "How do teachers in your program build relationships or connect with families?"
   (Then, if needed):
      a. "How do teachers communicate with families?"
      b. "How do teachers involve families in the classroom?"
      c. "How do teachers find out what is important to families, their goals for
         children's learning and development, their values?"

2. For any of the answers in number 1 above (if needed),
      a. "Do you have written policies about these?" and
      b. "Do you include these practices in formal evaluation of teachers or
         informal feedback?" and
      c. "Do you provide professional development or other supports for teachers
         in their work to connect with families?"

3. If needed: "Now we are going to talk about how teachers use the information they
   learn from families. Do teachers incorporate family-specific information into
   curriculum and interactions?"
      a. "Could you give me some examples?"
      b. "Is this process different for different age groups?"

4. "How would you define success in terms of teacher-family relationships or
   partnerships, and how do you know how successful your program and teachers
   are in this area?"

5. "What happens if there are challenges with a teacher-family relationship or
   partnership?"

6. "Have your policies or practices about teacher-family partnerships evolved over
   time? How so?"

APPENDIX G

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How do you get to know the families in your classroom?

2. Are there specific supports, policies, or trainings that have helped you to connect with families?

3. What information do you seek from families?

4. How do you use the information you learn from families?

5. What information do you share with families?

6. What do you do when (if) you are having a difficult time connecting with or engaging a family?

7. How have your practices to partner or build relationships with families evolved over time (over this school year and over your career)?

8. What (additional) supports would help you to further strengthen your relationships with families?

9. What types of requirements might be helpful to promote stronger program-family partnerships across the state?