This study sought to illuminate the process of partnering between early childhood
teachers and families. Specific emphasis was placed on how individual perceptions of
roles impacted communications. Additionally the study sought to illuminate how teachers
and families in early childhood settings defined meaningful participation of families. To
support this examination a conceptual framework was presented illustrating the social
process of partnership.

This model of the partnership process was illustrated in the study through
interviews, observations and a review of documents in five separate cases. Each case
consisted of one preschool teacher and families of children in their classroom.
Participants were asked to articulate the roles that they perceived each party should play
in parent/teacher partnerships. Teachers and families were also asked to provide their
definitions of meaningful participation in interviews. These perceptions were examined
in the context of interviews as well as observations and a review of documents. The
relationship between reported expectations and observed parent and teacher interactions
was examined.

Findings in the study indicate that individual perceptions of roles become similar
as repeated communications drove the process of partnership. Additionally,
communications between families and the teacher in early childhood classrooms emerge
as a reflection of agreement in roles. Finally individual perceptions of meaningful

participation of families differed within each case and across the cases and thus emerged

as a factor independent of the process of partnership.

ROLE PERCEPTIONS AND COMMUNICATION IN PARTNERSHIPS

BETWEEN PRESCHOOL TEACHERS AND FAMILIES

by

Susan Connelly

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Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

This document is dedicated to my family. To my husband David, who has supported and believed in me throughout the entire process and my two girls Caroline and Claire, who have helped me to better understand the perspective of families. Also, to my mother for her unrelenting assistance with taking care of my children while I immersed myself in writing . . . and writing . . . and writing. And finally, to my dad, who motivated me to achieve great things and was my biggest financial supporter of an on-going educational process.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In recent years, research related to partnerships between families and teachers in early childhood education has abounded (Bemak & Cornely, 2002; Doherty & Carroll, 2002; Marshall & Mirenda, 2002; Osher & Osher, 2002). Although a value of these partnerships has been historically documented, the promotion and maintenance of these types of relationships between teachers and families can sometimes become a challenge. This challenge may largely be attributed to the simple fact that these partnerships begin by assignment rather than choice. As such they represent a unique type of relationship between involved parties who may often be very different. In fact, families and early childhood teachers are often placed in a position to work collaboratively with one another despite their differing values, customs, beliefs, and perceptions of roles in partnership. Despite these differences, effective partnering between teachers and families in early childhood education can still be realized. The first step for teachers in the development and maintenance of these successful parent-teacher partnerships is the awareness that the level of success in these relationships depends heavily on a complex system of factors. This understanding will guide early childhood teachers in visualizing the complex process of partnering and thus monitoring their own interactions with a variety of families.

The Process of Partnering

Due to the complex nature of partnerships between teachers and families in early

childhood programs, a need has emerged to illustrate the multiple factors that can impact

this dynamic process. In one such effort, a theoretical framework was proposed by Carol

Keyes (2002). This framework illustrates the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of

partnering between parents and teachers, by incorporating the ideas found in

Bronfenbrenner's ecology theory, Getzels' social system theory, Katz and Hoover-

Dempsey's work on the role of parents, and Epstein's typology of parental involvement

(Keyes, 2002). This framework is presented in a diagram that demonstrates how the

process of partnering actually involves the ecological perspectives of the teacher and

family, as well as the social system of the partnership itself. As such, each of these

theories emerge as primary contributions to an overall picture of the partnership process.

In an effort to more clearly illustrate this process, a brief description follows of how these

theories are reflected in the partnership process.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory

According to the Ecological Systems Perspective each person exists inside of an

ecological environment which is comprised of a set of nested systems. At the center of

this model is the microsystem or the developing person. The microsystem refers to the

interactions that occur between the person and their immediate environment and is nested

inside a larger system called the mesosystem. In this model the mesosystem refers to the

interactions that occur between the person's primary environments such as school and

home. This system is again inside of a larger system referred to as the exosystem or the

settings that might impact the person's interactions, although they are not primary environments. The final and largest systems containing all the other systems nested inside are the macrosystem nested inside of the chronosystem. The macrosystem consists of laws, customs and cultures that may impact the developing person but again in a less direct fashion (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). The chronosystem refers to the era of time in which one exists and the impact of that position in time on a person's individual life.

These systems become important in developing a better understanding of the individual uniqueness each person brings to a partnership between teachers and families. In a partnership both the teacher and parent should be considered as differing individual systems. As such, each person comes to a partnership with their own unique ecology, or set of values, beliefs and expectations that are largely determined by their own macrosystems, and exosystems.

These differing individual ecologies are referred to in the bioecological model as person characteristics. These person characteristics emerge as influential factors that determine the direction of future development of the individual. The most influential of these characteristics are the personal dispositions, resources and demand characteristics. According to this model, these characteristics will serve as a tool in driving personal development while also becoming a reflection of development. Thus, the person characteristics of the subjects in this study will be reflected in interactions between the teachers and the families. According to this perspective, person characteristics are a reflection of past interactions between the unique developing person and their individual ecologies (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In addition, the collaborative interactions

between the teachers and families in the present study will serve to impact the development of each partner.

These collaborative interactions between teachers and families represent what the bioecological model refers to as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Proximal processes are repetitive interactions between the developing person and their environment that occur over time and are the mechanisms that produce human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). According to this theory, proximal processes are reciprocal in nature and thus create influence in both directions. As such, the teachers and the families in this study become a reflection of proximal processes as they engage in repetitive interactions with one another that will serve to impact the development of both. In sum, the repeated daily interactions between families and teachers emerge as proximal processes.

The Social System Perspective

As the bio-ecological model contributes to a better understanding of the impact of repetitive interactions or proximal processes, the social system perspective presented by Getzels helps to more clearly identify the role of these interactions between individuals in a partnership. This view of partnerships also helps to demonstrate how individual behaviors are a result of the interactions that occur between the role expectations of an institution and the individual's personality traits.

According to this view the partnership would thus become the social system (Getzels, 1978). In this system both the teacher and the family would come into a partnership with differing ideas about the roles each should play in a partnership. These

perceptions of roles will serve to support the development of individual expectations of a partnership. As these perceptions and expectations interact with each person's unique character traits they will produce behaviors in each person that are a reflection of this process.

Types of Parent Involvement

Another primary theoretical perspective revealed in partnerships between early childhood teachers and families is Epstein's typology of parent involvement (Epstein, 1995). In 1995, Joyce Epstein presented a typology identifying differing levels of parent involvement. These six types of participation included parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2001). This categorization of participation of families is relevant in the context of this study in that it presents a clear description of differing types of family contributions in a partnership.

Keyes Conceptual Framework

These theoretical perspectives help to illustrate various aspects within a partnership between early childhood teachers and families. As such they emerge as contributions to the conceptual framework presented by Keyes (2002). This framework presents the various theories in a model that demonstrates the complexity of the partnership process. Through this model we can see that the success of a partnership is ultimately determined by several factors. The first of these factors being the degree of match between a teacher's and families' cultural background and values (Keyes, 2002). In addition this model portrays how societal forces at work on the family and school may

also determine how well a teacher and family will collaborate (Keyes, 2002). Keyes framework also illustrates how the strength of a partnership can be affected by how both teachers and parents view their roles in the child's education. This view can ultimately determine the type of communication that will occur between a teacher and family and thus influence the other participant in either a positive or negative way (Keyes, 2002). Finally this framework illustrates how types of parent participation in their child's education are a result of these communications between teachers and families.

Thus, Keyes' proposed framework provides a detailed illustration of the intricacies of developing and maintaining partnerships with families. Keyes suggests that the value of this framework is established as teachers are better able to visualize the complexity of these relationships with families and thus monitor their own responses to situations (Keyes, 2002). Examining partnerships between teachers and families through this lens enables the conceptualization of the intricacies involved in successful partnering. While teachers in early childhood classrooms may feel they are following all the strategies recommended in establishing reciprocal relationships, they may still experience challenges in partnering (Keyes, 2002). These obstacles and barriers can be frustrating for teachers inexperienced in working collaboratively with families. For this reason it becomes essential that all early childhood teachers develop a basic understanding of the multiple and interacting factors that can impact partnerships with families. A teacher who is aware of the multi-dimensional aspects of partnering will likely be more sensitive and respectful in their interactions with families. Additionally, a teacher will be better equipped to support the process of establishing and maintaining a reciprocal relationship

with a family if he/she understands that families often have differing perceptions of roles and expectations based upon their prior experiences.

Purpose of the Study

In order to support teachers in their partnership efforts with families, more research needs to be done related to the specific characteristics and consequences of family-centered practices (Dunst, 2002). Specifically, more knowledge is needed related to how teacher and family perceptions of roles in supporting partnerships may impact their participation in partnerships (King et al., 2003). This need for research will guide the following study.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

A primary goal of this study was to examine the relationship between teacher and family perceptions of their roles in partnership and their communications. As demonstrated in Keyes framework, these factors emerge as elements impacting the outcomes in partnerships between early childhood teachers and families (Keyes, 2002). According to her framework, individual perceptions of roles and communication are primary components of a relationship that can cause differences in interactions and thus differing types of partnerships. Because of the complexity of this framework, the current study sought to present these aspects of the relationship in a more simplified model. This model was an adaptation of Keyes framework and presented a particular emphasis on the social process involved in partnering. More specifically, this adapted framework was created to illustrate the relationship between individual perceived roles and communications. As such the framework combines elements from differing theoretical

perspectives to create a more simplified diagram demonstrating the process of partnering. This adapted framework is presented in Figure 1. In this model, the arrows representative of prior experiences as well as the two adjacent circles representing each individual are a reflection of the theoretical influence of Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Other arrows in this diagram representing individual perceptions of role, expectations and personal attributes are a reflection of Getzels Social System Perspective (Getzels, 1978). Borrowing from Keyes' framework, theoretical contributions of various theories are combined to create an illustration of how these particular factors are reflected in a partnership. This simplified framework is presented to guide the following study.
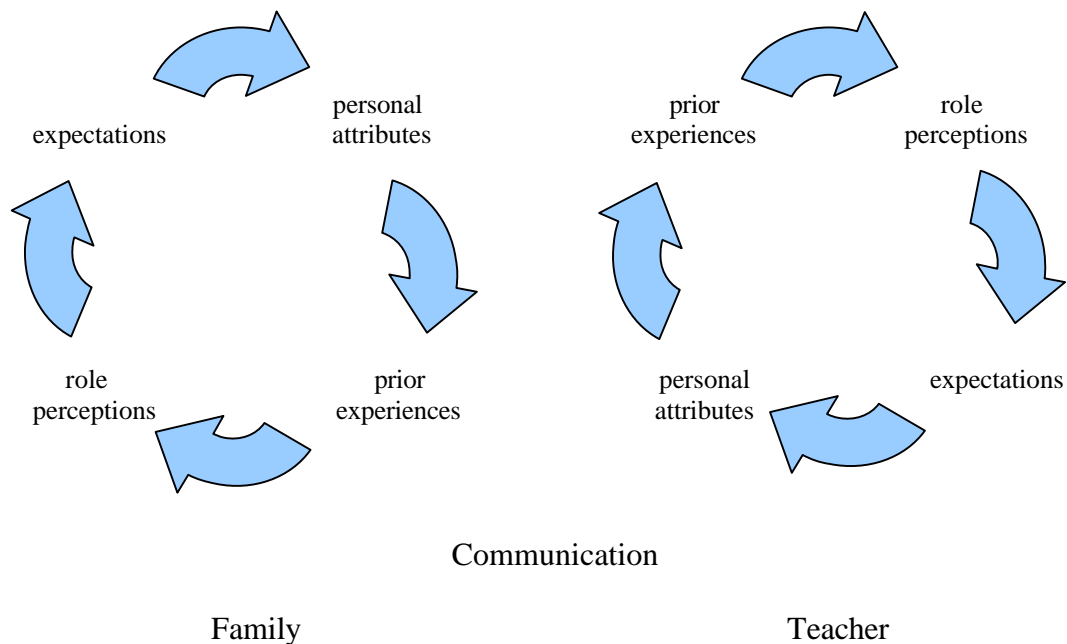
Figure 1. *Process of Repeated Interactions in Family and Teacher Partnerships*

This framework (presented in Figure 1) illustrates the cyclical process that occurs when families and teachers come to partnerships with individual perceptions of roles in a partnership. These perceptions of roles have been determined largely by their own prior experiences or proximal processes, both recent and in past relationships occurring within their unique chronosystems. As such, a person's prior experiences or proximal processes differ as a reflection of differing ecologies and person characteristics (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

In the presented model, individual perceptions of roles guide personal expectations of the partnership. These expectations are presented in the model as factors that will then interact with each person's personal attributes to impact communications. The model demonstrates how repeated opportunities for communication between families and teachers will drive the partnership process. In this framework, the repeated communications lead to continual revision of individual perceptions of roles played by both members of the partnership. The model demonstrates how these revised perceptions will cause a revision of expectations which will be reflected in communications between the involved parties. This revision becomes an ongoing process as continued opportunities for communication occur.

Thus, the model demonstrates how individuals involved in partnerships continually revise their perceptions of role and expectations as well as their approach to communications as additional interactions occur between the partners. This cycle presented in the proposed framework is representative of the process of partnering. This

process represents an ongoing cycle as the continued interactions between partners will become prior experiences and also impact a person's approach to future partnerships.

As Keyes suggests, a better understanding of the relationships between the individual facets within this complex interactive process can help to provide a clearer understanding of how to support reciprocal relationships between families and teachers in early childhood settings. As such, this study sought to illuminate how these specific factors impacted communication between early childhood teachers and families in five cases. Additionally the study sought to illuminate how teachers and families in early childhood settings defined meaningful participation of families.

The partnership process was illustrated specifically in the current study by questioning teachers and families about the roles they expected to play in parent/teacher partnerships and then observing their interactions. Teachers and families were also asked to provide their definitions of meaningful participation in interviews. These perceptions were examined in the context of observations as well. The relationship between these reported expectations and observed parent and teacher interactions was then examined.

Findings in the study indicate that individual perceptions of roles become similar as repeated communications drive the process of partnership. Additionally, communications between families and the teacher in early childhood classrooms emerge as a reflection of this agreement in roles. Finally individual perceptions of meaningful participation of families differed within each case and across the cases and thus emerged as a factor independent of the process of partnership.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Early childhood educators in the United States have been working to promote the development of collaborative relationships between early childhood programs and families for more than four decades (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). These efforts are based on research indicating that partnerships between families and early childhood programs promote optimal child development and academic performance (Dunst & Wolery, 1997). In addition to research, the *No Child Left behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) has also changed the interactions between schools and families. Prior to this legislation, the participation of families was largely determined by the policies of local school districts, and teacher initiative. As a result of NCLB, this is no longer the case. This legislation now mandates that families should collaboratively plan and implement programs in a variety of areas including curriculum, decision making and evaluation of the district. As a result of this legislation and research outlining positive outcomes, many programs for young children in the U. S. are now requiring the involvement of families in the educational process (Saracho & Spodek, 2003).

The following chapter outlines the development of the concept of family-centered philosophy in the literature related to early childhood education and early childhood special education. A discussion of similarities in definitions of family centered practices across the disciplines of early childhood and early childhood special education follows.

The historical progression of terminology in literature related to partnerships between service providers and families is also examined.

Historical Context

Early Childhood Education

Families have been recognized as a fundamental social institution throughout history. In early childhood education, the family is believed to be the 'first teacher,' or the environment in which children are socialized, and develop values and morals reflecting their culture. Because of the important role families play in children's growth and development, the importance of collaboration between families and professionals has been a goal of service providers for many years (Powell, 1989; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). A review follows outlining the emergence of the focus on the family in early childhood education. The historical impact of professional organizations and national educational initiatives is described. A detailed account is presented of the significant contributions made by the National Organization of Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recently in promoting reciprocal relationships with families. A final review of the recent empirical focus on partnerships with families in early childhood education follows.

The beginnings of parent-teacher partnerships can be traced back to the late 1800's and the inception of several women's organizations (Diffily, 2004). During this time, organizations such as the American Association of University Women AAUW, the Congress of Parents and Teachers, also called the PTA, the Child Study Association of America, and the National Association for Colored Women, all began to initiate the study

of children in their educational programs. Soon following these studies, the federal government led a movement to educate families in the early twentieth century. Evidence of this movement was the first White House Conference on the Care of Dependant Children held in 1909. Following this conference, 2,000 county home demonstration agents were funded with the objective of educating parents on best practices in child rearing.

This movement to educate families continued through the twentieth century. During the 1920's family membership in organizations such as the PTA continued to grow at an astounding rate. Even during the economic depression of the 1930's, the federal government continued to devote efforts to provide parent education. During this time the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) provided funding for unemployed teachers to organize nursery schools for young children and to work with the families of those children. The federal government's interest in parent education continued into the 1940's. At this time many families were preoccupied with the war effort. To provide opportunities for women to help work in industry positions left open by men at war, both government entities and corporations began to provide child care.

The federal government's role in parent education continued into the 1960's. This role was especially evident in programs established to fight the "war on poverty." One such program, Head Start, was established during this time to provide education to preschool children from low-income homes. In addition to children considered at risk due to poverty, Head Start legislation mandated that 10% of all children served by this program should be young children with disabilities. This national initiative strongly

emphasized the importance of parents in the education of young children. This focus was revealed through the presence of parent involvement as one of the four primary components of all Head Start programs. Head Start defined the involvement of parents to include participation in four major activities including: (a) decision making about program policy; (b) participation in classrooms; (c) parent activities; and (d) working with their own children. Their rationale for parent involvement was stated as follows: "If Head Start children are to reach their fullest potential, there must be an opportunity for Head Start parents to influence the character of programs affecting the development of their children" (Head Start Policy Manual, 1984, p. 1). The commitment of the Head Start initiative to families was further indicated through its emphasis on comprehensive services including family health, nutrition, and social services (Hamilton, Roach, & Riley, 2003). These comprehensive services reflected a focus on the overall well being of the family.

As a national initiative, *Head Start* had a vast impact on early childhood education. The educational program served as a model for other early childhood initiatives with strong parent involvement components (Hamilton et al., 2003). As these programs emerged, empirical evidence revealed that early childhood education settings with parental components were resulting in higher levels of success for children later in schools (Diffily, 2004). In response to this research, parent education, parent participation and parent involvement were promoted by a wide variety of professional organizations and national agencies. These included the NAEYC, The Association for Childhood Education, The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), the International Reading

Association (IRA), the National Association of State Boards of Education, and The

United States Department of Education (Diffily, 2004). These organizations continue to

advocate for the value of families in their child's education.

One of these organizations in particular, NAEYC, has become a leader in

advocacy for partnerships between teachers and families of young children. This

professional organization, representing 125,000 members, is the largest organization of

professional educators for young children. One of their primary efforts in advocacy for

effective practices in early childhood programs is the development and publication of

position statements that empirically support and propose indicators of excellence and

quality in early childhood education. One such position statement, commonly identified

as the most comprehensive position statement presented by this organization is,

Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (Bredekamp &

Copple, 1997). In 1997, a revised edition of this document was published. This position

statement presented five basic guidelines to use in making decisions about

developmentally appropriate practice. The fifth of these basic guidelines, "establishing

reciprocal relationships with families" represents this organization's continued focus on

partnering with families as a primary goal of effective practices (Bredekamp & Copple,

1997).

In addition to presenting parent/teacher relationships as a guideline for decisions

about developmentally appropriate practice, the position statement further demonstrates

the importance of this relationship by outlining strategies an early childhood educator

should use to establish and maintain collaborative relationships with families. These

strategies are listed in Part I of *Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early*

Childhood Programs (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997):

A. Reciprocal relationships between teachers and families require mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility, and negotiation of conflicts toward achievement of shared goals.
B. Early childhood teachers work in collaborative partnerships with families, establishing and maintaining regular, and frequent two-way communication with children's parents.
C. Parents are welcome in the program and participate in decisions about their children's care and education. Parents observe and participate and serve in decision-making roles in the program.
D. Teachers acknowledge parents' choices and goals for their children and respond with sensitivity and respect to parents' preferences and concerns without abdicating professional responsibility to children.
E. Teachers and parents share their knowledge of the child and understanding of the children's development and learning as part of day to day communication and planned conferences. Teachers support families in ways that maximally promote family decision making capabilities and competence.
F. To ensure more accurate and complete information, the program involves families in assessing and planning for individual children.
G. The program links families in assessing and planning for individual children
H. Teachers, parents, programs, social service and health agencies, and consultants who may have educational responsibility for the child at different times should with family participation, share developmental information about children as they pass form one level to another. (p. 22)

These eight guidelines for early childhood programs, proposed by NAEYC, specifically

outline appropriate strategies to support collaborative relationships with families. By

establishing these standards defining reciprocal relationships with families of young

children, this position statement represents NAEYC's commitment to advocating for

collaborative partnerships between families and teachers.

Another reflection of this organization's focus on families is the rate at which

articles appear in their practitioner journal, *Young Children* (Diffily, 2004). In 2006,

sixteen articles were published in this journal with references to partnerships with families (www.naeyc.org, 1/28/07). This rate of publication of articles, written primarily for early childhood teachers, again reflects the overall focus of NAEYC to promote active family participation in early childhood programs. Another indication of their advocacy for participation of families in early childhood education is the NAEYC accreditation initiative for early childhood programs (Hamilton et al., 2003). Beginning in 1984, this accreditation process set a standard for pursuing excellence in quality of early childhood education. This process again demonstrates the commitment of this organization to family participation in their standards for national accreditation. The published guidelines for this process state that early childhood programs must prove that teachers and families are working in partnership and that families feel welcomed and supported as both contributors and observers of the program (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In the most recent accreditation guidelines articulated by NAEYC (September 1, 2006), partnerships are presented as one of the four primary components of the conceptual framework. This primary focus on families can be seen in the focus on families in two of the ten program standards. The first of these standards, entitled, *Relationships*, outlines that one of the primary indicators of this standard is the support of positive relationships between teachers and families (NAEYC website). Additionally a seventh standard in the accreditation process focuses solely on families and encourages early childhood programs to know their families well, to share information between families and teachers, and to support them in being advocates for their children. This primary focus on

relationships with families in the accreditation process demonstrates the commitment of NAEYC to encourage programs to partner with families.

Thus, the commitment to families of this leading professional organization is clearly illustrated in first, the guidelines they have developed to promote "Developmentally Appropriate Practice," again in their publication rate of resources to inform teachers how best to promote collaborative relationships with families, and lastly, through their published standards for national accreditation of early childhood programs. As a result, NAEYC has served as a leader in promoting the development of reciprocal relationships between families and teachers.

Empirical studies. In addition to the promotion of partnerships by professional organizations, family participation continues to be a practice supported in peer reviewed publications of early childhood education. Many empirical studies have focused on the outcomes for children when their families are involved (Clements, Reynolds, & Edmund, 2004; Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). In addition to the empirical studies related to child outcomes, further dialogue relating to partnering with families in early childhood education rhetoric reflects a continued value of collaborative relationships between teachers and families (Garcia, 2004; Huber, 2003; Lahman & Park, 2004; Muscott, 2002; Saracho & Spodek, 2003).

A primary reflection of the field's promotion of partnerships between teachers and families is revealed in the empirical focus on educational outcomes of children whose families are involved in their early childhood education. In one such study, the outcomes of 1,539 minority youth in Chicago were studied longitudinally to examine the

influence of individual and preschool site factors on child competence outcomes including both academic and social outcomes in early and later school aged settings (Clements et al., 2004). Results of this examination indicated that site-level parent participation was a significant predictor of early and later school outcomes such as kindergarten word analysis, eighth grade reading achievement and high school completion (Clements et al., 2004). In addition to the link between parent participation and later school success, a similar study reveals that positive child outcomes in preschool are also predicted by parent involvement (Fantuzzo et al., 2004). In this study 144 urban Head Start children were included in an investigation of the relationships between differing dimensions of family involvement and end of the year preschool outcomes for children. Explored outcomes in this study included approaches to learning, conduct and receptive language skills. Results indicated that families' involvement with their child at home was the strongest predictor of child outcomes including a child's motivation to learn, their attention, their persistence in a task, their receptive vocabulary. This involvement of the family at home was also found to support significantly lower levels of classroom behavioral problems (Fantuzzo et al., 2004). These examples of empirical studies related to child outcomes represent a body of research that provides a rationale supporting the value of family participation in preschool settings.

In addition to studies investigating outcomes, other rhetoric is also demonstrating a current focus on families and partnerships in early childhood education. For example, in a recent examination of trends in early childhood curriculum, the development of school-family-community partnerships was indicated as a primary aspect of quality practice in

early childhood settings (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Further dialogue related to building relationships with families (Huber, 2003) and listening to "voices of families" (Muscott, 2002) in early childhood rhetoric also suggests an empirical focus on partnerships with families. Additionally, the repeated presentation of strategies early childhood teachers can use to collaborate with families continues to reflect the focus on reciprocal relationships with families (Garcia, 2004; Huber, 2003; Lahman & Park, 2004; Muscott, 2002).

Thus, the value of partnerships between early childhood teachers and families of young children has grown over the past century in early childhood education. The impact of professional organizations and national initiatives has guided the course in the development of a primary focus in early childhood programs to develop and maintain reciprocal relationships with families. This trend is reflected by the current empirical focus on child outcomes resulting from these relationships as well as the continuing dialogue relaying strategies to support the establishment and maintenance of collaborative partnerships with families in early education. As a result of these efforts many early childhood professionals are now considering the child within the context of the family, and most importantly working to establish collaborative partnerships between themselves and families.

Special Education

In addition to the efforts to strive for reciprocal relationships between teachers and families in early childhood education, the field of special education has become a leader in the movement of advocacy for these partnerships. The importance of effective

partnerships between families and professionals in educational settings often is most

significant if a child has a disability. In these instances, the involvement, advice and

knowledge families share about their child is crucial to the success of programs targeting

child development (O'Brien, 1997). A review of the history of involving families in

planning and implementing education for children with disabilities reveals an evolving

process that has emerged over the past fifty years.

Legislation. The process began in the late 1940's when parents began to join

parent organizations and prominent citizens of the United States began to advocate for

better education of individuals with special needs (Cook, Tessier, & Klein, 2000). At this

point in history, after World War II, the United States felt responsible for providing

assistance to wounded citizens. People such as Pearl Buck, Roy Rogers, and Dale Evans,

as well as the Kennedy family were advocating for better educational opportunities for

individuals with special needs. During this historic time parent groups joined professional

groups in capitalizing on the historic Supreme Court decision presented in *Brown v.*

*Board of Education of Topeka (*1954). Although this legislation was primarily a racial

integration initiative, it lead to the inspiration for other advocacy groups to begin to push

for educational changes for the rights of children with special needs (Cook et al., 2000).

Parents of children with disabilities became advocates and were instrumental in the

enactment of legislation which focused attention on both children with disabilities as well

as the rights and needs of their families.

It was during this time that parent support groups and other advocacy groups such

as ARC, the Association for Retarded Citizens was formed. (The advocacy group ARC is

now the national organization of and for people with mental retardation and related

disabilities and their families.) These groups advocated for legislation that would create

significant change in educational opportunities offered to individuals with disabilities.

Despite their efforts, little change occurred until 1968 when Congress devoted monies to

encourage the development of model programs for children with disabilities birth through

age eight. This legislation, P.L. 90-538 was enacted to establish the Handicapped

Children's Early Education Program (HCEEP), also referred to as the First Chance

program. All projects funded by this legislation were required to involve families in their

activities and to provide information on the project to professionals and the general

public. The two primary purposes of these projects were to provide models of high

quality services for young children with disabilities, and to provide information about

these services that would encourage replication (Cook et al., 2000). They had far reaching

implications as the 140 projects yielded almost 2,000 replications of the models. As these

projects modeled home-based services that viewed the parents as the primary teachers,

they initiated parent orientation in special education.

Shortly after the First Chance program was initiated, more legislation followed

that mandated the participation of parents. Public Law 94-142, the Education of All

Handicapped Children's Act of 1975, mandated free and appropriate education for all

children of school age. Although this law did not require states to offer services to young

children with disabilities, it did provide financial incentives to encourage states to offer

services for children with disabilities who were as young as three years of age (Cook et

al., 2000). Additionally, this law required parents and professionals to collaborate in the

development of a plan (Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)) to outline educational

goals for their child.

Empirical studies. With legislation mandating that families should be

collaboratively involved in the development of IEPs, partnerships between educators and

families of children with special needs has also become a focus of empirical study

(Ditrano & Silverstein, 2006; Span, Kohler & Soenksen, 2003; Summers, Hoffman,

Marquis, Turnbull, & Poston, 2005). These studies often focus on strategies that can be

used to improve these partnerships. One such recent study, (Ditrano & Silverstein, 2006),

is a qualitative account of how families of children receiving specialized education

services in the schools described their experiences. This participatory action research

design enlisted the help of families to create and implement a model plan for family and

school relationships. Throughout this study, focus group meetings provided the

opportunity for nine culturally and ethnically diverse families to share their stories of

experiencing feelings of stress and powerlessness. Interestingly however, participants

reported feelings of empowerment upon completion of the project. This study revealed

the positive impact that can result from providing families with opportunities to voice

their concerns and make suggestions for improvement (Ditrano & Silverstein, 2006).

In a similar study published in 2005, families of children with disabilities were

asked to rate their satisfaction of partnerships between themselves and educational

professionals serving children of differing ages (Summers et al., 2005). In this study 147

participants responded to the *Family-Professional Partnerships Scale* revealing a

significant difference in level of parental satisfaction with partnerships. Survey results in

this study indicated that families of infants and toddlers with special needs were most

satisfied with their relationships with educators yet satisfaction with these partnerships

decreased for families of children aged six to twelve (Summers et al., 2005). This study

substantiates earlier findings that families are concerned about their involvement in the

education of their school-aged children with special needs. This family concern is again

reflected in another study by Span et al. in 2003 surveying 45 families of children in

specialized education services. This research revealed an increase in family

dissatisfaction with partnerships as the age of the child increased. In this study parents

described limited involvement in the development of IEPs and their perception that

school personnel were not addressing their child's needs of highest priority.

The above studies are representative of a current focus of research relating to

parent perceptions and satisfaction with partnerships between school and home in special

education. These empirical studies are a reflection of the reality that has been brought

about by educational legislation. As families and teachers work to collaborate in

establishing educational goals for school-aged children with special needs, research

continues to indicate that partnerships between professionals and families of young

children with disabilities may provide a model in how best to build partnerships.

Early Childhood Special Education

As historical legislation mandated partnerships between educators and families of

school-aged children with disabilities, it has also called for collaboration between

families of young children with disabilities and early intervention professionals.

Following the legislative changes mentioned above, further legislation was passed in

1986, PL 99-457, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments which presented a plan for coordinated, multidisciplinary, comprehensive services for infants and toddlers as well as children aged three to five. This law revealed a strong emphasis on partnership with families as it called for collaboration beyond the development of educational plans as in school-aged settings. This legislation called for a *focus* on the family in the delivery of early intervention services. This family focus was highlighted by the introduction of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). An IFSP incorporated the consideration of the needs of the whole family, as opposed to a focus only on the needs of the child. In 1991 this legislation was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which eliminated the option for states and mandated that services for children with disabilities age three to five, and their families be provided. Again in 1997, more amendments to IDEA were added. These changes in the legislation protected and enhanced the fundamental rights of families of children with disabilities of all ages. According to this legislation, parents should have more opportunities to be involved in placement decisions of their young children. In addition, this law emphasizes the responsibilities of parents and professionals to work together to provide effective development and implementation of the IEP or IFSP. Thus, according to legislative mandates, all families of children with disabilities must be encouraged to be active participants in the teams who are making important educational decisions about their child. These important legislative mandates have lead to a unique service delivery approach in early childhood special education that calls for the support of families as well

as young children. These innovative practices have created a need for research defining

effective strategies to support families of young children with special needs.

   Empirical studies. Although teachers of young children with special needs are

now faced with the responsibility of initiating and supporting parent participation, they

are also faced with the challenge of recognizing families' rights to be involved at

whatever level is comfortable for them (O'Brien, 1997). As a result, interpersonal skills

necessary for supporting successful partnerships between teachers and families have

become a current empirical focus.

   Some of this work has emphasized the value of training teachers to work

collaboratively with families (Murray & Mandell, 2004; Frankel, 2004). This focus is

based on the notion that providing teachers with educational experiences related to

family-centered practices will support their future collaborative practices. One such study

indicated that students participating in a family-centered-infused program reported a

change in their own attitudes and beliefs about working with families from diverse

groups which assisted in their confidence in utilizing family-centered practices in their

jobs (Murray & Mandell, 2004). While some studies are suggesting strategies to improve

partnerships between special educators and families of young children, others focus on

barriers preventing these partnerships. One such barrier indicated is in-service training of

current early childhood special education professionals. Current research suggests that

teachers in these settings often do not have the time, resources, or training to promote

parent teacher partnerships in inclusive settings (Frankel, 2004).

A final emphasis frequently emerging in dialogue related to partnerships between families and teachers in early childhood special education is the perspective of the families (Fernandez, 2003; Gallagher, Rhodes, & Darling, 2004). One such study surveyed 135 families of children who were assessed as a result of the efforts of a Child Find Program in an urban school district in Florida. In this survey families and professionals were asked to rate the importance of quality indicators in family centered practices. Results from this study indicated that professionals' ratings of ideal family involvement were inconsistent with their current practices according to parental perspectives (Fernandez, 2003). This study represents the disparity that can occur between the view of professionals and the families' perspectives of their actual level of participation.

Although the perspective of the family has proven to be valuable in determining the level of collaboration, it has also proven useful in evaluating the families' level of expertise in navigating intervention service. In another study focusing on the perspective of families, qualitative focus group data were collected over six months documenting the changing perceived roles of families regarding their roles in early intervention (Gallagher et al., 2004). This particular study examined the impact felt by parents serving as parent educators in the Part C system. Results indicated that the families serving in this capacity reported increasing levels of professionalism and responsibility as they became more experienced in this role. This study has implications that involving parents as advocates for families in the Part C system, serves as a means to empower families as they develop

advocacy skills. Additionally this study demonstrates the value of providing early intervention professionals with the parent perspective.

Thus, legislative mandates proposing support of families of young children with special needs have created changes in practices in early childhood special education. Practices reflecting the proposed focus on the family have dramatically increased the need for research related to strategies to support these relationships with families. ECSE professionals must now contemplate the needs of the whole family and how those needs affect the desired outcomes for the child. As a result, a need for studies examining how best to prepare these professionals to support and understand the perspective of families, has emerged.

Across Early Childhood Disciplines

Thus, the practice of building partnerships with families and the professional vision of the child within the context of the family are ideas shared in specific disciplines across educational literature. As a result, academic discourse relating to early childhood education, special education and early childhood special education all share a common focus on partnerships with families. This shared focus has emerged as federal legislation has initiated changes in practice across these individual disciplines. This gradual change in practices across educational disciplines is reflected in empirical investigation and academic discourse. In literature describing these practices across early educational environments, this approach is most often referred to as family-centered practice.

Definitions of Family-Centered Practices

In addition to the fields of ECE and ECSE, professionals across human service disciplines are experiencing a paradigm shift in the delivery of services for children and their families. Within several fields, including social work, pediatrics, early childhood education, and early childhood special education this philosophical shift in practice is represented by the move away from a child-centered perspective, to what is commonly referred to as a family-centered perspective. Although the terminology is the same, the way that this philosophy is interpreted differs across settings (Allen & Petr, 1998). These interpretations are illustrated in a review of research related to family participation in early childhood special education and early childhood education. Similarities and differences in how these educational fields define the concept of family-centered practices are examined. These educational interpretations of the construct are additionally compared to the definitions used across other human service disciplines. Finally, a cross disciplinary definition of the construct is presented.

Early Childhood Special Education

Within the field of early childhood special education many programs are struggling to replace the professionally driven approach of the past with family-centered models that emphasize collaboration with parents (Dunst, 2002). This struggle in implementation may be largely due to the fact that the term *family-centered* implies a concept which is very broad and thus hard to evaluate and open to individual interpretation (McWilliam, Snyder, Harbin, Porter, & Munn, 2000). Although difficult to define, family centered practices can broadly be described as:

beliefs and practices that are respectful to families; individualized and responsive in nature, informative and supportive of family choice, reflective of collaboration and partnerships, and represented by supports and resources provided to families to encourage positive outcomes for children, parents and families. (Dunst, 2002, p. 139)

This definition of family centered practices implies both relational and participatory components (Dunst, 2002). The relational aspect of family-centered practices includes clinical skills (such as active listening, compassion, empathy and respect) and professional beliefs and attitudes towards families (Dunst, 2002). Likewise, the participatory component is denoted by practices that are individualized, responsive to family concerns and flexible (Dunst, 2002). According to this view, the participatory component of family centered practices requires that families are actively involved in decisions and choices (Dunst, 2002). According to Dunst and Trivette (1996), these components illustrate the multi-faceted nature of family-centered practices in ECSE.

The multi-faceted nature of family-centered practices is further supported in another description by Zhang and Bennett (2003). In this review, family-centered practices are defined as support principles that encourage professionals to recognize strengths of families and to support them in defining their own needs, while helping them to find available resources to meet their needs. This definition further describes the need for professionals to encourage families to become active participants in the delivery of services (Zhang & Bennett, 2003). Despite the multi-faceted nature of family-centered practices in early childhood special education, a review of literature on this topic reveals a construct that can be broadly described as the use of sensitive and respectful

interactions, and practices to enhance abilities as well as the confidence of the caregivers (McWilliam et al., 2000).

Early Childhood Education

The term *family-centered* is also very commonly used in rhetoric related to the care and education of young children (Hamilton et al., 2003; McBride, 1999; Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Current literature related to families in early childhood education has focused   on a variety of topics including parent education (Gadsden & Ray, 2003; Gestwicki, 2000; Vig & Kaminer, 2003), the empowerment of families (Vig & Kaminer, 2003), and overcoming challenges of family participation through the elimination of communication barriers (Lundgren & Morrison, 2003; Riojas-Cortez, Flores, & Clark, 2003; Swick, 2003; Ward & Franquiz, 2004). In much of this research, a primary focus is placed on strategies to educate families (Gadsden & Ray, 2003; Vig & Kaminer, 2003; Gestwicki, 2000). Topics include familiarizing fathers with strategies to provide literacy opportunities for their young children (Gadsden & Ray, 2003); demonstrating strategies for parents to interact with their infants, (Vig & Kaminer, 2003); and providing parents with a basic understanding of indicators of early learning (Arizona Early Childhood Educational Standards, 2003). These are all examples of research in early childhood that promotes the education of families. Thus, within the field of early childhood education, the practice of parent training, a strategy used to support parents in the task of child rearing, is a common indicator of family participation (Couchener & Chrisman, 2004).

Another focus of current rhetoric related to family centered practices in early childhood education is family culture. Much investigation in this literature is related to

promoting a respect of family culture and language by displaying items that reflect this

diversity in early childhood environments (Lundgren & Morrison, 2003; Riojas-Cortez et

al., 2003; Swick, 2003; Ward & Franquiz, 2004). Studies refer to "funds of knowledge"

and the benefits of involving families who are culturally and linguistically diverse in

early childhood educational environments (Lundgren & Morrison, 2003; Riojas-Cortez et

al., 2003). This study of relational skills demonstrated in the promotion of family-

centered practices reveals a similarity in philosophy across the fields of early childhood

education and early childhood special education. Early childhood special education

literature also examines professional strategies to support positive relationships with

families who are culturally and linguistically diverse (Couchener & Chrisman, 2004).

In addition to a common focus on strategies to support family centered practices,

the attention to communication between families and teachers emerges as another similar

research area in early childhood and early childhood special education. All relationships

between teachers and families require communication and thus these interactions are

possible opportunities to promote family centered practices. As a result, several studies

outline creative strategies to communicate with families and emphasize the value of this

communication (Gennarelli, 2004; Kalata, 1998; Riojas-Cortez et al., 2003). As

professionals develop effective communication with families, improved partnerships with

families are facilitated (Couchener & Chrisman, 2004). The similarities in focus across

the disciplines of early childhood and early childhood special education reflect a common

goal to support the development of successful partnerships between families and early

childhood service providers. This goal of supporting collaborative relationships with

families is also evident in literature related to family centered practices in other social service disciplines.

Other Disciplines

In addition to educational settings, family-centered practices are also a focus of many other human service disciplines. The fields of mental health, social work, and health care all focus on the family in their delivery of services. The discrepancy however, lies in their varied definitions of the concept. In many pediatric health care environments the concept of family-centeredness has been defined as practices that reflect the regard of parents as primary contributors to the well-being of their children. According to this definition, families should thus become key players in the decision-making process related to the healthcare of their children (Paliadelis, Cruickshank, Wainohu, Winskill, & Stevens, 2005). In mental health care as well, professionals regard an individual's mental health issues within the context of the patient's family (Osher & Osher, 2002). In addition to this view, many mental health care practitioners are working to provide services that are defined as family driven (Osher & Osher, 2002). In this context, family driven practices refer to the delivery of services in which goals are established in partnerships with families (Osher & Osher, 2002). Finally, the field of social work has a family-centered focus rooted in its origin. Dating back to the late 19th century the profession of social work has acknowledged the sanctity of the family and supported efforts to maintain family units (Allen & Petr, 1998). Thus, the construct of family-centered practice emerges in the literature as having similar implications across differing professions.

With these similar interpretations, professionals across disciplines are now striving to achieve a level of service considered ideal with regard to families (Osher & Osher, 2002). However, as professionals struggle to apply family centered practices to their daily applications and create positive change, issues have begun to arise related to implementation. These implementation struggles are commonly revealed in literature relating to collaboration and partnership with families.

<div align="center">**Collaboration and Partnership**</div>

As research continues to advocate for family-centered practices across disciplines, a topic of considerable depth has been how to achieve these partnerships (Osher & Osher, 2002). Discussions of collaboration and partnering are quite common in human services rhetoric in terms of how to support family centered practices and ensure relationships that are demonstrated by equal power sharing. In these relationships, roles played by family members and professionals have changed to a large degree, and support for building effective partnerships is on the forefront of empirical investigation (Bridge, 2001). Family centered relationships between families and professionals are now represented in situations in which families are encouraged to make choices, and engage in collaborative decision-making with professionals (Dunst, 2002). Thus, a brief review of the emergence of the terminology related to the implementation of family centered practices follows.

Collaboration

In the early 1990's a familiar construct, collaboration, began to surface more frequently in professional literature relating to a variety of child service systems (Osher & Osher, 2002). The term collaboration has become a type of catchphrase in modern

educational literature (Friend & Cook, 2003). This focus on collaboration was initiated in

prior rhetoric related to family empowerment. Earlier studies presented collaboration as

the primary strategy employed to empower families (Dunst, Trivette, & Johanson, 1994;

Thompson, Lobb, Elling, & Herman, 1997).

Throughout the last several years, operational definitions of collaboration have

emerged in several studies including those in Social Work (Doherty & Carroll, 2002),

Education (Taylor & Adelman, 2000) Special Education (Marshall & Mirenda, 2002),

and Early Intervention (Dinnebeil & Hale, 1999). As described by Doherty and Carroll

(2002), collaboration is a model of professional partnership that began to emerge in the

last third of the twentieth century and represents an attempt by family professionals to

move away from traditional professionally-driven relationships, and move towards

interactions in which families are active participants in the services they receive. In this

account collaboration is described as the first step in a gradual change of the role of the

family. Similarly, Osher and Osher (2002) describe collaboration as a positive change in

service delivery models. Although more recent definitions of collaboration seem to focus

on interactions between families and professionals, earlier educational rhetoric related to

collaboration referred to the practice of teams of professionals working together in

"multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary ways" (Taylor & Adelman,

2000). As a rule, however, collaboration in education has come to imply exchange of

information between families and professionals (Raffael & Linda, 1999).

Power Sharing

An interesting trend emerges, however, in the review of collaboration literature in both special education and education. In both fields, collaboration is viewed as more than just working with families; it is qualified as working in equal partnerships with families (Marshall & Mirenda, 2002). This is revealed in one such study relating to the use of positive behavior support in the home. In this study, the authors suggest that the operational definition of collaboration for these participants was working together, "in a partnership of equals," towards a common goal (Marshall & Mirenda, 2002). This phenomenon of power sharing is further presented in another account by Dinnebeil and Hale (1999). They suggest that a relationship can be described as *collaborative* when parents are viewed as the primary decision-makers for their children and are valued as equal partners in service delivery. Thus, often the term collaboration in education has come to indicate relationships that are represented by equal contributions of families and professionals.

Although collaboration is a commonly used term in educational dialogue, few clear definitions have been proposed (Friend & Cook, 2003). In an effort to clarify the meaning of collaboration, Friend and Cook (2003) suggest a technical definition that reveals the intricacies of the concept as they define interpersonal collaboration as "a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 5). In this definition, collaboration is described as interactions that reflect equal power and the establishment of cooperatively agreed upon goals. In essence, this style of interaction is very similar to the

types of behaviors suggested to promote empowerment in families. Empowerment in families is achieved through relationships in which families are respected as equals and encouraged to share in decision making (Dunst, 2002). In fact, as increasing numbers of programs have moved away from the professionally driven parent education programs of the past, they have moved to models of parent collaboration, which emphasize empowerment of families (Bruckman & Blanton, 2003). Thus, the term collaboration has come to represent a progression in the dialogue describing ways to support families in the education process.

Partnerships

As collaboration has become a focus of research related to strategies to support family centered practices, the concept of partnership has emerged as well. In a review of recent discussions of collaboration (Osher & Osher, 2002; Bemak & Cornely, 2002; Doherty & Carroll, 2002; Marshall & Mirenda, 2002), *partnerships* have been described as the goal for human service professionals. Most researchers agree that the majority of child service agencies and schools have begun to collaborate with families in many ways (Osher & Osher, 2002). However, in their collaboration efforts families are still primarily being expected to support the school or agency objectives (Osher & Osher, 2002). In fact, it is quite rare that the intent of these collaborations is helping families to achieve their own goals (Osher & Osher, 2002). Although professionals often seek the advice, input, recommendations and feedback from families, it is still infrequent that families are equal in decision-making about which recommendations to implement and those to reject

(Dunst, 2002; Osher & Osher, 2002). As a result of this research to practice gap, a continued focus on strategies to support the goal of equal partnerships ensues.

This tendency in literature describing partnership as the ideal interaction style with families can be seen across disciplines. In social work literature the notion of collaboration is now being regarded as primarily professionally led, while other partnership models of interaction, are described as community-led and directed (Doherty & Carroll, 2002). Similarly, in educational discourse, Bemark and Cornely (2002) suggest the building of partnerships commences with restructuring and role changes of professionals to accommodate families in participation that is equal, reciprocal, meaningful, and empowering rather than restrictive as in traditional superficial family participation efforts. Marshall and Mirenda (2002) further present ideas related to the development of new roles in special education. In this theoretical review, the idea is presented that partnerships can be achieved when parents and professionals accept new roles and expectations to work cooperatively and establish mutual trust and respect.

As a more current definition of partnerships has emerged with power sharing implications, it is interesting to note that the concepts of collaboration and partnership were once regarded as synonyms in earlier literature of early intervention. In one such study, collaborative relationships are described as partnerships between professionals and families denoted by the notions that parents are both the partners in service delivery and key decision makers for their children (Dinnebeil & Hale, 1999). Thus, it is apparent that concepts related to equal power sharing began to emerge early in the field of early

intervention as other fields were still establishing the value of collaborative relationships as the ideal.

Professional Strategies Supporting Partnership

As the growing number of discussions about partnership flourishes in educational research, strategies to promote partnership with families are suggested (Garwick, Jennings, & Theisen, 2002; Keyes, 2002; Montgomery, 2001; Thorp, 1997; Winton, 2000; Zhang & Bennett, 2003). However, differing strategies are recommended across the fields of early childhood education and early childhood special education which is indicative of slightly different priorities of professionals across fields.

Early Childhood Special Education Strategies

The subject of partnerships presents itself quite frequently in early intervention literature. The focus of this discourse emerged early as descriptions of effective practices in the development of equal partnerships were presented (Dunst et al., 1994). This historical research focused on strategies to support the development of equal roles and suggested that professionals must first understand and recognize tenets of effective practices with families to fully understand their roles in providing supportive partnerships. Additionally this research proposed the notion that families were empowered to become full partners in the process in which these practices were being utilized (Dunst et al., 1994).

Strategies to support partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Additional partnership research in ECSE centers on considerations for families of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Keyes, 2002; Garwick et al., 2002; Zhang

& Bennett, 2003). In particular, it focused on strategies to encourage partnerships with all families including those from diverse backgrounds. Past accounts suggested that professionals should explore their own cultural values and experiences, learn from families about their cultural beliefs and attitudes, carefully evaluate their classroom setting and curriculum strategies for cultural bias, and finally, investigate all possible opportunities for families to be involved (Thorp, 1997). These strategies were later affirmed by Montgomery in 2001 as she provided suggestions for teachers to create classroom environments which were "culturally responsive." Consideration of cultural diversity of families was again presented by Keyes in 2002, as she described the match between teachers and parents' culture and values as one of the primary factors affecting partnerships. Thus strategies for professionals to partner with families who are culturally and linguistically diverse, represents an ongoing focus of research in ECSE.

This focus on becoming culturally competent continues in research related to partnerships with families in early childhood special education. In a more recent discussion of strategies to develop partnerships with families who are culturally diverse, Zhang and Bennett (2003) suggested several considerations for professionals. They suggested that professionals must make initial contacts with families that are sensitive and responsive, allowing time for the development of a trusting relationship. They then describe the importance of preparing families for IFSP or IEP meetings in a way that allows families the opportunity to become equal partners in the process. They further suggest that professionals consider and respect the families' views of a child's disability, accept the families' definitions of who should be involved in the process, educate

families on their rights to be key decision-makers and finally, to be sensitive in timing

issues by being careful not to rush those families who need time to consider all options

(Zhang & Bennett, 2003). The authors suggest that using these strategies will enable

professionals to develop partnerships with families from a variety of cultural

backgrounds.

Early Childhood Education Strategies

The strategies used to partner with families revealed in early childhood literature

are similar in jargon, yet inherently different in practice. The partnership efforts promoted

in much of the literature related to early childhood environments today are often still

comprised of parent education and parent-involvement (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). While

ECSE practices promote families as primary decision-makers and leaders in the

education of their children, ECE practices are often related to providing families with

education to support the development of their children (Hamilton et al., 2003). In this

field, the perceived role of early childhood educators in partnerships with families is to

communicate with families about child development, and to provide strategies to support

a child's learning at home (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). These differing approaches to

partnership with families can be summarized by saying that ECSE providers are trying to

provide support and plans geared towards meeting the needs of *the family*, while many

ECE providers are still trying to train the family to support the development of the child.

These early childhood partnerships with families are reflected by families who are still

being professionally directed to make the choices related to the education of their young

children.

The differences in practice in ECE and ECSE may be a product of two primary factors. These factors include the possible influence of empirical contributions related to home, school and community relationships in ECE, and the differences in pre-service training for professionals in the differing fields. Epstein's (1995) "School/Family/ Community Partnerships" model is reflected in ongoing practices in ECE. This model proposes that effective relationships with families are marked by six practices for educators. These include (a)educators helping families to create home environments that promote children's learning; (b) educators communicating with families concerning school programs and child progress; (c) educators encouraging families to volunteer to help with school activities; (d) educators who assist parents with facilitating learning activities at home; (e) educators who encourage involvement in decision making and (f) a program that combines community services and resources to support school programs (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). An analysis of the wording used in these practices presented for educators reveals a heavy focus on the role of the teacher in facilitating the partnership. While these suggested strategies do reflect an approach to involving families, they do not present strategies to support equal and collaborative partnerships. This fundamental difference across the fields is revealed in the differing choice of wording in rhetoric. While ECE literature strives to support the involvement of families, ECSE literature presents ideas related to the development of equal partnerships marked by equal contributions of professionals and families. Another possible explanation for differences in practice may be the lack of training many educators in early childhood environments have related to partnering with families (Hamilton et al., 2003). While these strategies are

often a focus in ECSE pre-service programs, many ECE programs still focus on
curriculum and techniques (Hamilton et al., 2003).

Although differences in interpretations of the goals of partnership are revealed in
early childhood classrooms, advocacy efforts in ECE are promoting the establishment of
relationships that reflect equal power sharing (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). As
mentioned earlier, the revised position statement on Developmentally Appropriate
Practice published by NAEYC in 1997 proposes that an essential practice in creating
these environments is "establishing reciprocal relationships with families" (p. 22). The
strategies that this document suggests are slightly different from the model proposed by
Epstein (1995). To achieve a reciprocal relationship, the position statement encourages
professionals to share responsibility, participate in *two-way communication*; acknowledge
parents' choices and goals for their children; participate in mutual knowledge "sharing"
with families; and involve families in planning and assessment (p. 22). These
recommended strategies reflect true family contributions to their child's education.

In addition to the practices advocated in NAEYC's position statement, recent
empirical work represents a gradual move towards practices which are more family-
centered (Huber, 2003; Lahman & Park, 2004; Muscott, 2002). In one case study for
example, each child had an assigned advocate teacher responsible for all developmental
observations and primary communication with families of that child. The advocate
teachers were able to gather detailed observation data as they were assigned to only a few
children. This detailed observation data as well as the repeated communications with
families of their assigned children supported teachers in building closer relationships with

families (Huber, 2003). In the second year of using this approach teachers reported that the strategy was very effective in strengthening relationships between families and teachers (Huber, 2003). This study revealed an interesting new research focus on strategies early childhood teachers could use to support relationship building between parents and teachers.

In another study published in 2004, Lahman and Park presented the differing perspectives of teachers and families of preschoolers who were culturally and linguistically diverse. Interestingly in this study teachers and families alike were both reported to be concerned about parental participation in the classroom. Their concerns were of a differing nature however. Families in this study described feelings of inadequacy in helping in the classroom due to language barriers while teachers voiced their fears of how to be culturally sensitive and still communicate clearly (Lahman & Park, 2004). Thus, this qualitative investigation also focused on uncovering particular aspects of relationship building in partnerships.

In a final example of the current focus on relationships between teachers and families in early childhood environments, home visits were attempted (Meyer & Mann, 2006). In this study 26 early elementary teachers were surveyed at the beginning and the end of the school year after doing home visits at both times. Results from this study revealed that teachers perceived the home visit as a tool for establishing more positive relationships with families and children. The teachers in this study further suggested that these visits lead to improved communication with families, better understanding of the child and better understanding of how the child's home life impacts school performance.

Again this study emerges as evidence that the discipline of early childhood education is beginning to examine strategies to support effective partnerships.

These studies provide examples of programs that are moving beyond family involvement more typical in ECE and striving to establish strong bonds with families and build interactive partnerships with families. This shift in practice represents a more ecological view (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) of the child rather than the child-focused approaches evident in early childhood classrooms in the past.

The Process of Partnering

As partnerships between families and teachers represent an ongoing goal in early childhood education, some researchers are searching for ideas that will outline specific aspects impacting the development of these reciprocal relationships (Garcia, 2004; Huber, 2003; Keyes, 2002; Moseman, 2003). Factors such as teacher knowledge of individual characteristics (Huber, 2003) teacher self-efficacy (Garcia, 2004) and teacher beliefs about family competence (Moseman, 2003) are all suggested elements that impact outcomes in partnerships with families. In addition to teacher characteristics, family attributes have also been noted as factors that affect partnership development (Gbadamosi & Huey-Ling, 2003; Lahman & Park, 2004). Finally, the characteristics of partnerships themselves are also emerging in current discourse related to reciprocal relationships between families and teachers (Landsverk, 2003; Muscott, 2002). These differing areas of focus represent the complexity in examining a process such as partnering between families and teachers. In essence, multiple factors are targeted in supporting the development of reciprocal relationships.

Teacher characteristics, an obvious factor affecting the successful establishment of partnerships between families and teachers, continue to be a focus of current research. Certain teacher characteristics are noted to either support or prevent the development of reciprocal relationships with families. As mentioned earlier, in one such account, Huber (2003) suggests that the development of partnerships with families can be supported through "advocate teachers." These teachers are noted for their concentrated focus on individual children and families. Through careful observation of an identified group of children, advocate teachers demonstrate a concentrated focus fostering the development of personal relationships through frequent and detailed communication with a small number of families (Huber, 2003). These teachers who focus on developing relationships with a smaller number of families and children are supporting partnerships with families.

In addition to teachers who advocate for children, teachers who demonstrate high self- efficacy beliefs in supporting reciprocal relationships are also more likely to promote family participation (Garcia, 2004). Garcia reports that high teacher self-efficacy beliefs are significantly predictive of active participation from families. This study suggested that the development of these necessary self-efficacy beliefs could be facilitated through experiences in pre-service teacher preparation. Thus, teachers with experiences in developing partnerships with families are most likely to exhibit self-efficacy beliefs and confidence in their abilities to support partnerships. This teacher confidence supports the development of reciprocal relationships with families.

As teacher characteristics and strategies emerge in literature focusing on supporting the development of reciprocal relationships, differing teacher characteristics

are also presented as a deterrent to partnerships. In one such article, Moseman (2003) suggests that teachers who reflect a belief that families are incompetent are *preventing* the development of reciprocal relationships. According to this review, many teachers are reported to have a lack of faith in family competence to contribute knowledge in a partnership. This limited view of the value of contributions provided by families inhibits teachers' abilities to initiate reciprocal relationships (Moseman, 2003).

In addition to characteristics of teachers, family attributes have also been noted to affect the process of partnering. Lahman and Park (2004), for instance, suggest that families with diverse cultural backgrounds may have differing perspectives from those of teachers and that these differences in perspective impact the development of partnerships. Additionally, Gbadamosi and Huey-Ling (2003) suggest that varying parent interests can determine a family's willingness to participate and work in partnerships in early childhood settings.

While a certain focus on teacher and family characteristics is evident, other research identifies characteristics of effective parent/teacher partnerships (Landsverk, 2003; Muscott, 2002). In one such account, Landsverk (2003) suggests that the presence of shared goals is critical in supporting the development of reciprocal relationships. According to this research, teachers and families develop a partnership through their shared focus on individual child goals. On the other hand, Muscott (2002) suggests that effective partnerships are marked by professionals who recognize family needs and engage in active listening with families. These characteristics of partnerships are a

reflection of the reciprocal relationship considered ideal in early childhood settings

(Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Thus, rhetoric in early childhood education continues to reflect the multi-faceted

nature of the process of partnering through diverse research targeting specific factors that

can impact the development of reciprocal relationships. Teacher characteristics, family

characteristics and relationship characteristics may determine the outcome of

partnerships. As researchers continue to identify factors supporting the development of

parent/teacher partnerships, the complexity of the process of building reciprocal

relationships emerges.

Despite the complexity of the process of establishing and maintaining these

collaborative partnerships with families, early childhood teachers must continue to strive

to make these connections. Empirical studies across educational disciplines have

continued to propose strategies for supporting these relationships as well as child

outcome data validating partnerships with families. Terms such as collaboration and

partnering have been well defined as professionals across social systems environments

are working towards achieving family centered practices. These practices are generally

defined as individualized, respectful, collaborative and supportive partnerships with

families to ensure positive outcomes for both children and their families. Thus, early

childhood teachers and families working together in these types of reciprocal

relationships have become a reflection of decades of advocacy efforts of professional

organizations, historical legislation, and empirical investigation.

Given the abundance of research advocating family participation in early childhood education and the continual focus on supporting the development of reciprocal relationships, the overall purpose of this study is to examine the social process of partnering between early childhood teachers and families. Specifically this study sought to illuminate how individuals in partnerships perceived the differing roles of teachers and families. Further, the impact of these perceptions on communications was explored. Finally, the study sought to illuminate how teachers and families in early childhood settings defined meaningful participation of families.

These findings will contribute to a growing body of knowledge that seeks to clearly illustrate the complex process of initiating and supporting reciprocal relationships with families. A teacher who is aware of the multi-dimensional aspects of partnering will likely be more intentional in creating opportunities for positive interactions with families.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

The primary focus of this research was to examine how both teacher and families' perceptions impact their communications. Specifically, an examination of how teachers and families perceived their role in parent/teacher partnerships and how families and teachers defined meaningful participation in a child's education guided the study. Finally, how these perceptions impacted parent/teacher communications was explored.

Design

A qualitative design was used in this study to examine both families' and teachers' perceptions of their roles in partnerships, definitions of meaningful family participation and finally their communications within each case. Due to the exploratory nature of this question, a qualitative approach was most appropriate (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative inquiry possesses five major characteristics that are effective in answering this type of question. These characteristics include: (a) the use of naturalistic inquiry, (b) the use of inductive analysis, (c) the use of a holistic perspective, (d) the use of personal contact and insight, and (e) the existence of design flexibility (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). When utilizing these five traits the researcher focuses on process rather than outcome. (Creswell, 2005). Because the question in the proposed study involves the process of parent /teacher communications, a qualitative approach is appropriate.

Additionally, a qualitative approach in this study enabled the researcher to observe interactions between teachers and families through the use of naturalistic inquiry. Through this inquiry method a researcher is able to examine daily happenings in their natural settings (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). These opportunities for observation enabled the researcher to investigate the details, specifics and interrelationships of teacher and family perceptions and their corresponding communications. This focus on how processes occur within their natural settings is common in qualitative design (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Another primary characteristic of qualitative research presented in this study was the use of inductive analysis. With this approach a researcher is able to ask open questions and examine data while generating themes (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Because the nature of the research question in this study was exploratory, inductive analysis was appropriate. The researcher sought to uncover details within the data that illustrated how the perceptions of parents and teachers, (about their role), impacted their communication.

The practice of building rapport with participants through personal contact, was another characteristic of qualitative inquiry that attributed to the current study. The process of building a rapport through personal contact is a strategy that must be employed in qualitative research as the researcher begins observations and interviews. Creswell (2005) suggests that researchers who have personal contacts with participants are able to use insight to better understand the perspective of participants. Additionally, establishing a relationship during these times encouraged participants to feel comfortable in providing their personal perspectives to the researcher (Creswell, 2005).

The use of a holistic perspective was useful in the current study. This characteristic common in qualitative design, allowed the researcher to examine the process of partnering. Because parent/teacher partnerships are a process that can be impacted by several interacting factors, a holistic perspective allowed the researcher to better understand how personal perceptions were evident in shared parent and teacher communications. In addition this approach helped to illuminate how teachers support family-centered practices through their communications. Finally, this perspective helped the researcher to illustrate how families respond to teachers' ideas about what defines a parent-teacher partnership.

Thus, these questions were best answered through the use of a qualitative design. This research approach enabled the researcher to examine the process of parent/teacher partnerships through naturalistic inquiry strategies.

Specifically, the research design utilized was a case study, or a comprehensive exploration of a process using extensive data collection (Creswell, 2005). The process studied in this instance was the communication between families and teachers who demonstrated strong beliefs in family-centered practice. Because five teacher/family triads were involved in the study, the design reflected a collective case study. This design is useful in providing additional insight into an issue as several cases are richly described and compared (Creswell, 2005).

The extensive data collection indicative of a collective case study design were reflected in the current design through the use of interviews, observations and a review of documents. This practice of comparison across differing sources of data to generate

themes is called triangulation (Creswell, 2005). Triangulation enables a researcher to ensure that a study is accurate as it draws on multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2005). In the current study, the researcher encouraged triangulation by examining data gathered in interviews, observations with field notes, and a review of documents.

The interview format used enabled the researcher to pursue an intimate examination into the differing perspectives of the teachers and families. Because the purpose of the study was to examine how teacher and family perceptions impacted shared communications, the use of interviews with families and teachers helped to illuminate their various expectations of what specific roles each should play in supporting a parent teacher partnership. Further, the interviews helped to uncover how these differing groups defined meaningful involvement.

While interviews allowed the researcher to better understand personal perspectives of participants in the study, the use of observations in this study enabled the researcher to closely examine how these perceptions were demonstrated in parent and teacher interactions. These observations illuminated how interactions between teachers and families are driven by their ideas about roles.

Finally, a review of documents better allowed the researcher to examine how these perceptions may also be demonstrated in written communication. By determining the purpose of the written communication as well as the language used in the documents, the researcher was able to further illustrate themes supported in data.

Thus, the use of a collective case study design was both effective and appropriate in answering the questions posed in the study. The multi-faceted process of

parent/teacher partnerships was examined through the use of observations, interviews, and document review. The personal contacts with participants enabled the researcher to better examine participants' perceptions of individual roles to be played in parent/ teacher partnerships.

Participants

Participants were paired triads including one teacher and at least two family members (including either mothers or fathers) from each classroom to ensure a minimum of 15 total active participants. Across each case interview participants included mothers accept in case five in which a father was interviewed. Teachers recruited to participate included preschool teachers in local private preschool settings who scored high belief scores on an initial screening survey (described later). This purposeful selection process of teachers who demonstrated a belief in family-centered philosophy created a less diverse sample. This strategy was utilized to enable the researcher to better examine individual role perceptions and corresponding patterns of communication in cases of teachers who demonstrated a belief in parent-teacher partnerships. Because the selected teachers all began with similar values it was easier to identify patterns across cases of how these role perceptions impact communications. As a result, these findings will provide useful insight to other directors and preschool teachers in providing family-centered practices. This purposeful sampling approach is commonly referred to as intensity sampling and is valuable in that it encourages the participation of individuals in which the phenomenon being studied is strongly represented (Mertens, 1998).

The purposeful sampling process was used to recruit five preschool teachers who demonstrated strong positive beliefs related to family-centered practices. Teachers in private preschool classrooms in a southeastern part of the United States were recruited for participation. These teachers were selected based upon their responses to a brief survey adapted by the researcher (see Appendix A). A total of 20 local preschool teachers were asked to complete the brief survey. Five teachers scoring the highest belief scores (with supporting behavior examples) were chosen for participation in the study. Teacher scores were averaged and teachers' screening tools reflecting the highest average scores were selected for further analysis. A review of teacher responses enabled the researcher to determine whether teacher scores were supported by examples of teacher behaviors that were reflective of reciprocal relationships with families. Thus, selection criteria for teachers included recruitment of teachers who reflected a high average family-centered belief score and provided examples from their own practice to substantiate their scores. These scores are reflected in Appendix B. The final selection of five teachers included two teachers from one early childhood center and two teachers and a teacher assistant from another center.

Purposeful sampling was again used to recruit families for this study. Two strategies were used to recruit families for participation in the proposed study. As an initial phase of data collection, all families who had children in classrooms of the participating teachers were recruited for participation in the study. This strategy ensured that the researcher could ethically have the opportunity to collect data reflecting parent/teacher interactions with several families in the classroom. A second phase of

sampling involved recruitment of two families per teacher for participation in interviews. These interview candidates were selected by asking participating teachers to suggest families for recruitment who were frequently engaged in parent/teacher partnership activities. Teachers were asked to suggest families for involvement in the study who they perceived to be active participants in the education of their child. This recruitment approach reinforced the intensity sampling strategy used to recruit the teachers in the study. In using this intensity sampling strategy, the researcher was able to portray the perceptions of a group of families who were determined to be active participants by the teachers. This strategy of recruitment enabled the analysis of the impact of individual perceived roles on communication between teachers and families. It was assumed that teacher suggested families were a reflection of those families with whom teachers comfortably communicated.

An unplanned addition to the participants was determined necessary as the study progressed. In addition to the participating teachers and families, the researcher recruited the participation of the center directors as well. As both teachers and families overwhelmingly seemed to represent ideas that were reflective of an overall center philosophy, the need for the administrative views became apparent. Thus, two further participants were added to the study and were interviewed. The final number of participants is illustrated in Figure 2.

Family Centered Practices Screening Tool for Teachers

The proposed screening survey was adapted from the Measure of Processes of Care for service providers (MPOC-SP), (King et al., 2003). The MPOC-SP is a 27-item

Center A Participants
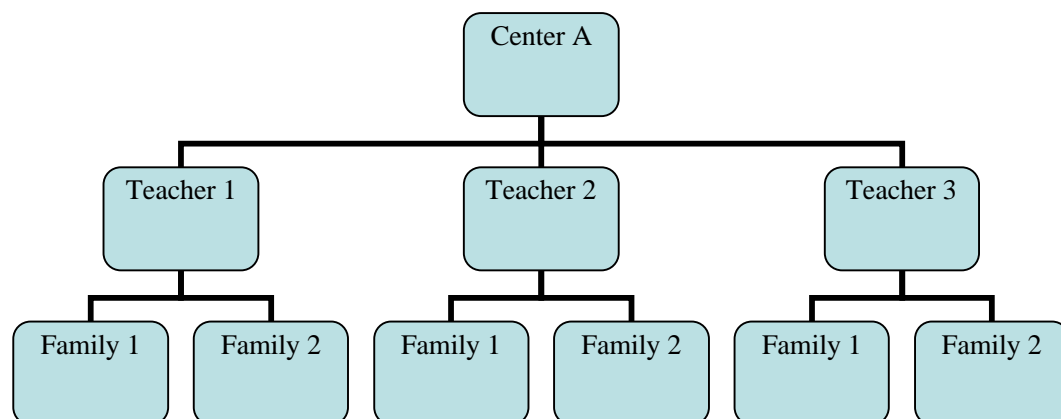
Center B Participants
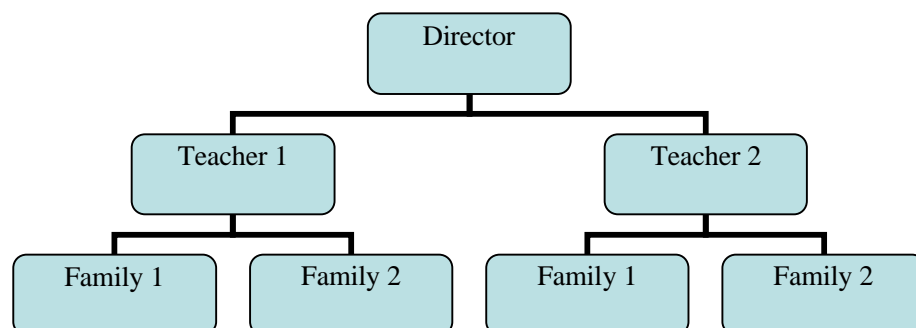
Figure 2. *Participating Subjects Displayed across Cases*

survey used to measure practitioner beliefs related to the types of service provider

behaviors that reflect some aspect of family-centered practice. In this scale, all items are

grouped into four scales based upon types of behaviors. These behavior sets include:

"Showing Interpersonal Sensitivity; Providing General Information; Communicating

Specific Information about the Child, and Treating People Respectfully." In this scale, an

overall belief score is generated by averaging all of the individual scale scores in each survey. Higher overall belief scores are representative of more positive beliefs related to family-centered philosophy.

Because the indicators in the MPOC-SP are more representative of behaviors used by professionals in early intervention services, the scale is inappropriate for use with preschool teachers. To address this issue, an adapted version of the MPOC-SP scale was used to initially screen preschool teachers in local private settings. The proposed instrument for the current study was adapted using three primary strategies. The first strategy included formatting the adapted survey using the same overall structure of the MPOC-SP. The second strategy included replacing behavior indicators in the MPOC-SP, with those that reflect the suggested strategies for teachers to support collaborative partnerships in early childhood settings. These strategies were adapted from those presented in the position statement, *Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children* (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). A final adaptation of the MPOC-SP included adding a component requiring teachers to provide an example of how they have demonstrated each individual indicator in their practice.

Because the adapted instrument was quite lengthy (twenty one indicators), a pilot test was performed to determine which questions received the most variable responses. The pilot test consisted of providing the instrument to 20 local private preschool teachers who agreed to complete the survey. Responses to each question were then analyzed and those items presenting the most variability were removed from the instrument.

In order to ensure that the instrument was valid, expert advice was sought in the final development and revision phase. After the pilot test was completed and revisions were made, a final draft screening tool was distributed to five early childhood researchers whose expertise included families. These experts were asked to examine the instrument and provide feedback. Based upon this review process, the instrument was again revised to create the final screening tool reflecting both feedback from researchers and revisions determined necessary in the pilot test.

Upon completion of the final draft, the screening tool had 15 family-centered behaviors which preschool teachers were asked to examine and score them based upon the frequency with which they used the strategies described in each indicator. Participants scored each question using the following scale: 7- to a very great extent; 6 – to a great extent; 5 – to a fairly great extent; 4 to a moderate extent; 3 – to a small extent; 2 – to a very small extent; 1 – not at all. Teachers were further asked to provide written examples of strategies they used for any items that they scored themselves higher than five. A copy of the final screening instrument is provided (see Appendix A).

This final instrument enabled the researcher to screen teachers for participation in the study. Twenty screening instruments were distributed to teachers in private preschool settings in the region with at least a four star rating. When 15 screening tools were collected from potential participating teachers, item scores were averaged and their final scores were compared across cases. Respondent averages ranged between 3.67 and 6.6. The responses of teachers whose average self-rankings ranged between five and seven were evaluated. The behavioral examples provided by teachers enabled the researcher to

effectively choose between two high scoring teachers based upon reported practices. Those teachers who had both high scores and descriptions of family-centered behaviors supporting their scores were selected for recruitment. The screening instruments of the resulting sample were then saved to be included as a further source of data documenting teacher perceptions in parent-teacher partnerships. Additionally, the examples provided by participating teachers on their initial screening enabled the researcher to enrich the teacher interviews by building on their prior responses. Appendix B provides a chart reflecting the final scores of each of the participants.

A total of 17 participants completed interviews and demographic data sheets. These participants included the teacher and two recruited families for each case. The directors in each of the centers were also recruited to participate in the interview process.

Although 17 participants were interviewed about their perceptions of roles and meaningful involvement of families, 13 families agreed to participate in center B in the observation process. Additionally, 22 families agreed to participate in the observation process as center A. The number of families participating in the observation process in each case is presented in Table 1.

Setting

Interviews were conducted in environments chosen by individual participants at times convenient for them. Settings included classrooms, homes, offices and meeting rooms at schools that were conducive to effective audio-taping of interviews. All five cases had observation data collected in various settings. These occurred inside

Table 1

Families Participating in Observation Process across Cases

Center A – Teacher 1	7 families
Center A – Teacher 2	6 families
Center A – Teacher 3	8 families
Center B – Teacher 1	6 families
Center B – Teacher 2	7 families

classrooms, outside the classroom door in a hallway or atrium, playgrounds, and other center-based environments where teachers and families met to hold meetings.

Data Collection

The data sources for the study included interviews and demographic surveys of directors, teachers and families, observations, and a review of documents. These various forms of data collection were conducted with a focus on exploring specific research questions. A crosswalk is provided in Table 2 outlining how methods were aligned with research questions.

The interview format used enabled an intimate examination of the perspective of the teachers, families and center directors. Because the purpose of the study was to examine how teachers' and families' perception of their role in a partnership impacted their communication, the use of interviews with families and teachers helped to illuminate their various perceptions of what roles teachers should play and what roles families should play in supporting a partnership. Further, the interviews helped to uncover how these differing groups define meaningful participation. Demographic

Table 2

Data Sources Aligned with Research Questions

Research Questions	Data Source #1	Data Source #2	Data Source #3	Data Source #4
RQ #1: How does personal perception of role impact communications	Teacher Interviews	Family Interviews	Document review	Observations of family/teacher interactions
RQ #2: How do families and teachers define meaningful participation	Teacher Interviews	Family Interviews		

surveys (see Appendixes C and D) presented during teacher and family interviews

provided the researcher with background information about each participant. Another

data source, the use of observations in this study enabled the researcher to examine

intricacies of behaviors during interactions between teachers and families. A total of four

individual observations were done in each case. An observation of a family meeting was

also done at each of the two centers. The observation data served to illuminate how

interactions between teachers and families may be affected by their perceptions of roles.

In addition to the interviews and observations a review of documents enabled the

researcher to examine the written communications between teachers and families. The

types of communication (one-way or two-way), the intent of the communication as well

as the language used helped to support themes found in other data sources.

Interviews

An interview format allows researchers to have more intimate contact with

participants than is possible in observation methods (Creswell, 2005). In addition,

interviews may be built around a semi-structured format allowing participants the opportunity to talk more or less about specific topics while assuring that the researcher will discuss all the planned topics (Fontanna & Frey, 2000). For these reasons, a semi-structured interview process was used with all participants.

This semi-structured format was chosen to encourage the collection of data that was detailed and rich, common to unstructured interviews, while ensuring some consistency in topics addressed across interviews. Both teacher and family interviews were aimed at gaining a perspective from the participant in a slightly directive fashion as respondents were encouraged to respond to specific prompts (Fontana & Frey, 2000). These interviews ranged from thirty minutes to approximately ninety minutes in length and were conducted in the setting and time chosen by participants.

Several strategies were used in interviewing to encourage participants to provide detailed answers with some depth. The first strategy involved the use of open-ended questions with prepared prompts. Prompts included prepared, general questions and examples the participants had provided of behaviors in the initial screening instruments during their interviews. The prompts encouraged participants to carefully consider their answers and elaborate on their responses. Additionally, efforts were made to establish a rapport with participants to help them feel more comfortable and willing to provide honest answers to interview questions. The researcher worked to establish a rapport with participants by being friendly and using non-judgmental body language. This was achieved by nodding and responding to participant responses with a neutral response such as "okay" or "I see." Finally, the researcher also used active listening strategies to

encourage participants to answer questions in great detail. To facilitate active listening

during the interviews, note-taking and audio-taping were used. By taking notes while the

participants were responding, the interviewer was able to concentrate fully on responses

and avoid interruption of participant dialogue (Siedman, 1991). This practice encouraged

participants to give more detailed responses as they were able to elaborate without

interruption. Additionally, when prompting or questions arose, the notes served to assist

the researcher in assuring that specific content has been addressed.

Questions were designed to be open-ended by suggesting a topic while allowing

the participant to answer in whatever manner they chose. Using this strategy encourages

the participant to describe their subjective experience (Siedman, 1991). Appropriate

probing questions were used to elicit more detailed responses when necessary. Some

probing questions did emerge as participants made unusual comments that needed further

explanation (Peshkin, 1993). All interview questions are represented in Table 3.

Examples of specific probing questions are also included in Table 3.

Observations

Another source of data was generated through observations of teacher/family

interactions. Certain types of research questions can often best be answered by

observation of participants (Creswell, 2005). Because the goal of this study was to

examine the impact of families' and teachers' perceptions of their roles in partnerships on

their interactions, observations were appropriate. Observations were scheduled

experiences that included times that consisted of informal interactions between families

and teachers. These informal interactions were observed at least five times for each

Table 3

Interview Questions

Question 1	*Describe the role you believe families should play in the education of their young children?* - *What should families do to contribute to their child's education?* - *Why do you feel this way?* - *What do you think gave you this impression?*
Question 2	*Describe the role that you believe teachers should play in developing partnerships with families of children in their classroom* - *What strategies should teachers use to involve families?* - *How does this role compare to the role of families?* - *Why do you feel this way?* - *What do you think gave you this impression?*
Question 3	*What types of activities do you believe reflect meaningful participation of families in early childhood educational settings?* - *Give examples from your own experience or ideas you have* - *How are these activities practical in your view* - *What do you think gave you this impression?*
Question 4	*In your view, what priority should partnering between families and teachers play in the education of young children?* - *Why do you believe this is so?* - *How did you come to feel this way?*

teacher. Because the frequent interaction times for teachers and families in early childhood settings is at pick-up or drop-off time, the researcher observed during one of these times for a total of four observation visits. A fifth observation visit was obtained at each center during a parent meeting which allowed the researcher to observe how families and teachers interacted in a planned opportunity for discussion.

Permission was sought of all families in each class before scheduled observations to allow data collection across families. As the observations occurred in typical early childhood settings, they were considered naturalistic in nature.

Observations occurred after teacher interviews to allow the researcher to find demonstrations of the ideas the participants implied in interviews. Detailed notes were taken as a strategy to record parent/teacher interactions. These notes were comprised of a running record style of observation in which observations of what was occurring during parent/teacher interactions was documented in narrative form. An observation format was used to ensure consistent data collection including specific non-verbal interactions (see Appendix E). These included body language and facial expressions of the participants as well as overall length of parent/teacher interaction time. This note taking strategy allowed the researcher to provide rich description of interactions while avoiding the inhibition effect that a video-camera may have had on participants. The researcher stood in an inconspicuous placement while still visible to participants to avoid participation in discussion between families and teachers. The participants were instructed to ignore the presence of the researcher and to engage in their normal drop off and pick up routines. Additionally, the researcher made efforts to be as inconspicuous as possible during these times. These strategies were used in an effort to be as unobtrusive as possible. In an effort to be inconspicuous the researcher was often not within direct ear shot of conversations between the teacher and family. As a result some conversations could not be recorded word for word. In an effort to record these communications most accurately, researcher

notes often included teacher or parent descriptions of what was discussed during the interactions.

Document Review

Another strategy used for data collection in this study included a collection of documents for review. This allowed the researcher to perform an analysis of written communications between families and teachers. This analysis was vital in providing data to illuminate how participants' perceptions of roles may have impacted their interactions.

The review involved the collection and analysis of all types of written correspondence between participating teachers or directors and families for the period of one month. These correspondence documents included notes, news letters and other types of informative hand outs for families.

The amount of documents provided by teachers to families varied across cases. Only one teacher provided several examples of letters sent home for families to read. The other teachers relied heavily on their daily conversations with families to communicate and as such, provided documentation that was primarily generated at the administrative level. It was determined that these documents were not a reflection of teacher attempts to communicate with families but a reflection of center directors communication efforts. These director generated communication forms were thus not included in the within case analysis of communication. Thus, many documents were analyzed in relationship to the interview responses of the directors.

A document review enabled the researcher to indirectly examine the communication between families and the teacher or directors. Upon collection, all

documents were saved and examined during data analysis. By analyzing the purpose of documents (information sharing; invitation to work in classroom; reports of daily activities; suggestions for activities at home; etc) as well as the communication format (form of news letter or form of an interactive, two-way journal) a more complete view of communication efforts was examined. This content analysis of correspondence documents helped to further illustrate participants' perceptions about roles in partnerships

Data Analysis

Organization of the Data

The data analysis began with the organization of all forms of data collected. For the purpose of review, all data from interviews were transcribed into text. As an initial step in maintaining organization of all data sources in this study, all screening tools, demographic data sheets, interview transcripts, interview notes and observation notes were filed in discrete sections of two labeled notebooks (Creswell, 2005). Each notebook was created representing the two participating centers. The notebook was divided into cases, including teacher and then corresponding families' demographic data sheets, transcribed interviews, interview notes and observation notes, and finally a copy of the documents reflecting written correspondence for the month. A separate section in each notebook also included the director interview and demographic data sheet as well as any documents that they generated. A peer-review notebook with copies of all interviews was made for a peer reviewer to use during analysis.

Content Analysis

The overall data analysis methodology used for this qualitative study is described as content analysis. This technique enables researchers to examine human behavior in an indirect way through analysis of their communications (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).This analysis involves a preliminary exploratory analysis, a coding process, and the development of theme charts. Because the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of participants' perceptions on their interactions, an indirect analysis is necessary. Although this method typically involves the review of written communication, it may also involve the analysis of any type of communication attempts. Thus, this approach also proves to be effective in creating a systematic analysis of interview and observation data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Data analysis in this study involved a content analysis of observation notes, transcribed interview data and interview notes, and a review of documents submitted for review. The purpose and content within any documents was analyzed. Data was initially reviewed within each case. This process enabled the peer reviewer and the researcher to examine the interview responses for teachers and subsequently examine the interview responses for families of children in that teacher's classroom. This process of content analysis included additionally examining corresponding observational data and correspondence documents collected within that case. This strategy of within case content analysis allowed the researcher to identify themes first within each case. Upon the completion of the content analysis within each case the researcher then was able to identify trends across cases.

Preliminary Exploratory Analysis

When all data was collected and organized a preliminary exploratory analysis of the data was initiated. This involved a preliminary exploration of transcribed interviews, observations and collected documents to first gain a general sense of the data (Creswell, 2005). This preliminary analysis was conducted by two peer reviewers and the researcher on all interview and observation data. Both peer reviewers in this study were familiar with qualitative data analysis as they had previously engaged in qualitative research. The peer reviewers involved in the analysis were each responsible for different data forms. One peer reviewer examined all interview data. The other peer reviewer examined all observation notes. While gaining familiarity with the data, the researcher and reviewer individually made notes of ideas, or concepts that emerged in the margins of the documents. At the completion of this initial phase of analysis, the researcher and peer reviewer met to discuss their initial thoughts about the data.

The preliminary analysis of documents submitted for review involved an initial read through by the researcher only. Thus, the process of exploratory analysis in this study involved reading and reviewing all forms of collected data for initial impressions.

Document Review. Documents submitted for review were initially examined to determine the overall purpose of the document by examining the information provided within the document. Further analysis included a careful examination of the language used within the document to determine the specific audience for which the document was originally created. This was done because the number of collected documents that were created by center directors for all families of children within each center was substantial.

Finally, the frequency and amount of written communication shared between teachers and families per month was examined.

Coding Process. After the first meeting between the researcher and peer reviewers to discuss initial ideas, the researcher and reviewer began a coding process. The coding consisted of the reviewer and researcher reading through all transcribed interviews and observation notes a second time. During this process brackets were used around data to indicate where certain ideas begin and end in the data. Each bracketed set of data was then given an assigned heading. These headings were representative of overall ideas found in the bracketed passage of text (Creswell, 2005). Thus, the coding encouraged a detailed search for recurring language and ideas. The overall objective of this process was to reduce large amounts of data into text segments that were used to support and generate broader themes (Creswell, 2005).

Theme Charts. After the data was coded another meeting between the researcher and peer reviewers occurred. In this meeting the peer reviewer and researcher discussed specific examples of coded themes and collaboratively decided if themes were substantiated through multiple sources. After this meeting the researcher then began to compile the separated data into discrete theme-based charts. This involved listing specific themes and supporting data as identified in the coding process. The supporting data were then grouped together to provide substantiation for theme generation. This visual separation of data into discrete parts or charts assisted with the reporting of themes (Mertens, 1998). The reviewers and researcher ultimately agreed upon all examples considered supportive of a generated theme. When disagreement existed between the

reviewer and researcher consensus was met or the data selected by either party as evidence of a theme was not included. Because the initial themes were collaboratively generated agreement on substantiation of themes was easily reached.

A final meeting between the researcher and the reviewers was held after all data was separated into discrete theme charts. Final charts were used to provide examples of themes in observations, interviews and finally, documents submitted for review. The final meeting included discussion of how interviews and observation data as well as document review data were indicative of specific themes. Further discussion in this meeting included an analysis of the implications that these themes may have in relationship to the questions of the study.

Data collected in the interview and observation process, as well as the review of documents was pivotal in the presentation of the impact of perceptions of roles on interactions. As such, all forms of data became sources for theme development related to role perceptions. Likewise, the data generated from all three strategies significantly contributed to themes related to how participants defined meaningful participation.

Trustworthiness. In qualitative research, validity and reliability can be controlled for in several ways. To ensure that findings are appropriate, meaningful and useful a researcher should incorporate strategies in the design of the study (Fraenkel, & Wallen, 2006). A thoughtful design includes methods to ensure that research findings are accurate representations of what is being presented through the data. Additionally, these methods will help a researcher to avoid presenting a biased account based upon opinions or

personal interpretations. Several design tactics can be used in the design of qualitative studies to assure that validity and reliability are enhanced.

For the purpose of this study, several strategies were used to ensure that the generated themes were appropriate, meaningful and useful. The initial effort to substantiate themes was reflected by the use of several data collection methods to ensure triangulation. By using data collected through observations, interviews and a review of documents, the themes that emerged were generated across several forms of data.

Other approaches used to strengthen the design of the current study included the use of member checks and a peer review process. The member check process involved providing copies of the transcribed interviews to all participants and providing them with time to make any corrections that they wished before analysis of the data actually began. This process helped to ensure that the interview data reviewed was representative of what the participants wished to convey. In addition to the member check process, the peer review process was also used to ensure the study was rigorous. Through this approach, the insight of another perspective is used in identifying themes across collected data forms. This helped to ensure that themes generated in analysis were substantiated by the views of two persons and thus less reflective of personal bias. Another strategy used to monitor subjectivity in the analysis was the use of an ongoing researcher journal. By keeping a journal that reflected personal reactions to interviews and observations the researcher was able to examine personal reactions to data collection experiences (Peshkin, 1993). The final strategy used to fully substantiate the developing ideas that resulted from this study involved substantial engagement. Through the process of

collecting differing forms of data from participants across several months, the researcher was able to be reasonably confident that the data were representative of the norm for each case (Mertins, 1998). This strategy is referred to as *substantial engagement* which refers to the practice of collecting several forms of data over an extended period of time to generate an authentic representation of participant perspectives and interactions. Consistency in participant responses over time helped to ensure that the generated themes were reliable (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

In addition to these design methods to help strengthen trustworthiness, other tactics were used to ensure transferability, dependability, confirmable theme generation, authenticity and emancipatory value (Mertins, 1998). These strategies further enabled the researcher to present findings that were meaningful, accurate and valuable. In an effort to clearly outline these strategies present in the study, a design audit was performed before the collection of data occurred. Table 4 outlines how these methods were demonstrated in the present study.

Table 4

Design Strategies for Validity

Trustworthiness

Substantial engagement	detailed audio-taped interviews, observations and document review to examine the perspectives of participants
Persistent Observation	scheduled observations of planned family/teacher interactions to observe behaviors consistent with family-centered philosophy; a review of correspondence documents.
Peer debriefing	peer review and discussion of transcripts and emerging themes
Progressive subjectivity	Kept journal to record researcher reactions to interviews, observations and document reviews
Member checks	summarization of what was said at the end of each interview question ; participants reviewed transcriptions and make any clarifications or corrections
Triangulation	Participants asked to share their perspectives ; observed participant interactions during communication; reviewed documents to examine written interactions; interviewed families as well as teachers.

Transferability

Thick description	description of communication and settings in explicit detail
Multiple cases	interviews with at least five triads

Dependability

Dependability Audit	developed an interview and observation protocol outlining questions and observation prompts; performed an audit to ensure that each interview and observation had the same format and objectives

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study sought to answer two primary questions. The first question was "How do personal perceptions of roles impact communications of families and teachers in partnership?" This question was answered through the analysis of interview responses, and observation notes as well as a review of documents. The second question in this research was, "How do families and teachers define meaningful participation?" This question was answered through the analysis of data collected in interviews and a review of documents.

Analysis of the data sources in this study involved the use of coding to generate themes that were representative of recurring ideas. Themes were initially generated within each individual case and then a cross case analysis was done. As such, findings for the study are first presented individually for each of the five cases followed by themes generated in the cross case analysis. The themes that emerged for each teacher and the two families that represented each case are presented with supporting examples from the data collected in interviews, observations, and documents when appropriate. In each case, themes are presented first that relate to the initial question of how personal perceptions of roles impact communications. Additional themes are presented in each case relating how families and teachers define meaningful participation.

Following the presentation of themes generated within the individual cases are themes resulting from the analysis of data across cases. These themes represent similarities across the five cases and address the primary research questions of how perceived roles impact communications and how meaningful participation of families is defined.

Case 1

The teacher in this case, Amy, was a 35-year-old preschool teacher of 15 years. Amy taught in the four-year-old classroom at a child care cooperative setting. Her classroom had eight children ranging from four to five years in age. The classroom environment reflected an emergent curriculum approach in which children were encouraged to engage in sophisticated play schemes for long uninterrupted periods of time.

This somewhat flexible schedule was supported daily by Amy and two parent volunteers. One parent volunteer worked a four-hour shift in the morning and another worked a four-hour shift in the afternoon. Families were required to work a four-hour shift each week in their child's classroom as a requirement of the cooperative philosophy. In addition to their work in the classroom, families were also required to spend at least four hours each month participating in work on a committee. These committees included: Finance, Personnel, Events, Grounds, Fundraising, Events/Publishing, Snacks, Long range Planning, and Deep Cleaning. Thus, the families in this case were regularly involved in the planning and decision making for the cooperative as a whole, and the

daily operations within the classroom. This collaborative setting created a unique environment to examine the process of partnership.

The parents participating in interviews in this case were both moms. The first parent, or "parent one" as she is called in this case, happened to be the acting president of the parent board. The other mom, "parent two," described herself as a "stay at home mom" with no prior experiences partnering with teachers. All other families in the class consented to be observed and were included in the observation data. They are referred to in a generic sense using broad descriptions of observation data.

The director in this case, Nancy, is a mother of one son in public kindergarten who attended the co-op for preschool. She has been the director of the center for three years and is working on her degree and licensure in birth through kindergarten education. She describes the co-op with pride and acknowledges that the co-op philosophy supports a collaborative atmosphere between the families and staff.

An analysis of interview and observation data revealed the presence of four primary themes in this case. Although primary themes emerged within this case, each of these four themes is developed more specifically using subheadings within each theme. The primary themes are listed in table 5.

Interview and observation data in this case suggest that the teacher and the families consider the role of the teacher to be the leader in a partnership by initiating communications with families and by guiding participation in the classroom. Participants in this case indicated in their interviews that the teacher should take the leading role in establishing a partnership through communication and maintaining that relationship

Table 5

Emerging Themes in Case 1

Theme	Description of Theme
1	The teacher and families in this case perceived a preschool teacher's roles to include acting as a leader in initiating communication and guiding families volunteering in the classroom as well as acting as a resource and support for families
2	Participants agreed that the role of families was to be involved in the school, although their reasons for this role differed slightly.
3	Intentional, friendly, and personal communications between families and the teacher were common practice
4	Families and the teacher defined meaningful participation of families as classroom volunteering. Each of these themes will be presented and supported with evidence from the data sources

The teacher and families in this case perceived a preschool teacher's roles to include acting as a leader in initiating communication and guiding families volunteering in the classroom as well as acting as a resource and support for families.

through specific teacher practices. In addition to leading the communication efforts, the teacher's role also emerged as a leader in her interactions with the parent volunteers. This leadership was evident in the observation data of interactions between the teacher and the families who were working in her classroom as parent volunteers.

Initiator of Communication

Both families and teachers suggested in their interviews that it was the role of the teacher to initiate a partnership by making opportunities for communication between her and families. When asked how she viewed the role of a teacher in partnerships with families, Amy stated, "not all of my parents are here all the time and I offer a lot of opportunities to meet with them, schedule conferences and things like that where we can sit down and discuss things." In this statement Amy reveals her view that it is her

responsibility as a teacher to offer opportunities and schedule times to communicate with families. This view is reiterated in interviews with the families in this case. In one data source, parent one suggested that it was the role of the teacher to get families involved. When asked how the teacher could ensure this participation of families she stated, "Having conferences available. Like (Amy) right now, has a sign up sheet for conferences." Later this parent reiterated the notion that a teacher's role was to act as an initiator of communication when she suggested that families needed to be encouraged to be involved by the teacher. In this portion of her interview, she reported that teachers should initiate conversations with families sharing specific ideas and successes. "Sharing the art work with you, saying look at this, or, '(Connie) wrote her name today.' Just talking, having a dialogue." These references to teachers as the initiators of communication in partnerships reflect the overall theme that the role of the teacher is to lead by initiating communications.

Guiding Participation in Classroom Activities

This shared view of the teacher as the leader is again pronounced as the teacher in this case emerges as the leader in daily interactions with families who volunteer in the classroom. The evidence of her leadership is demonstrated in both the interactions with parent volunteers that were observed, as well as interview responses of the teacher and families.

Across several observations in this case, Amy's leadership of the parent volunteers she worked with was noted. These observations were noted in Amy's interactions with the families working as parent volunteers in the classroom. Many

examples arose during these interactions with families that reflected Amy's role as the "lead" and the parent volunteer as the "assistant." Subtle references to this perceived role of the teacher were noted such as the consistent involvement of parent volunteers in classroom maintenance. Throughout the observations, parent volunteers were frequently noted to be engaging in cleaning tasks and other classroom maintenance activities such as serving snack. In one observation the parent volunteer was observed telling Amy, "I'm going to get the laundry started and then I'll bring out the snack." On another visit a parent volunteer was observed asking Amy, "Which mop am I supposed to use in the bathroom?" and later this parent popped her head out of the classroom to ask Amy, "Can you please remind the children to flush the toilets when they are finished in the bathrooms?" Throughout these observations of parent volunteers engaged in cleaning it was noted that Amy was interacting with the children in her class. In these instances the families were performing tasks typically done by a classroom assistant not a co-teacher. This idea of families as assistants to the teacher is reiterated by a parent who refers to this role in her interview. When asked what types of participation she considered to be meaningful, this parent stated, ". . . Well, I mean, working in the classroom is the biggest one. Being that teacher assistant."

Although Amy is working in the classroom at the same time as the parent volunteers, her role as the classroom leader is evident in her observed interactions with families discussing classroom activities. In several instances observation notes revealed that the parent volunteers in her classroom asked Amy what to do next in relation to the classroom schedule. Observations of these interactions revealed parent volunteers who

asked Amy things such as "When do you want me to start the snack?" or "So, Amy . . .

Where do you want us to put this easel?" These questions from parent volunteers

reflected an implied role of leadership in daily classroom activities.

In addition to the observed interactions between Amy and the parent volunteers,

her responses to interview questions also allude to her perspective that she is the leader in

her interactions with parent volunteers. When asked about the types of activities she

considered meaningful ways for families to participate she stated:

> I think meaningful participation for our families is when the families are here and
> not just sitting around gossiping. . . . That is so hard to avoid here sometimes, just
> hanging out. You have to really be careful, you have to really kind-of steer
> parents back into things so I think just asking them to please do this with them, or
> can you do this activity? And our parents are pretty good about it . . . I mean, ya
> know?

In this response Amy reflected her own perception that the families who volunteer in the

classroom need her guidance or leadership. First she implied her role as the leader in this

example as she mentions her need to lead them to interact with the children rather than

"gossiping." She again reflects this notion that she should lead the classroom activities in

this example as she refers to her own practice of asking families to do certain tasks.

Thus the interviews with families and the teacher in this case as well as the

observations reflect the perception that the teacher's role in a partnership is to lead the

families. In this case, Amy emerges as the leader in her partnerships with families by

guiding parent's participation in classroom activities and initiating communication

efforts.

Teacher as Resource and Support

In addition to the perceived role of a preschool teacher as an initiator of

communication and guide to families volunteering in the classroom, participants in this

case also indicated that they felt an early childhood teacher should act as a resource and

support. This role was articulated in interviews with Amy and the families in this case

and was demonstrated in classroom observations.

In all three interviews with participants, the teacher's role as a resource was

noted. For example, when Amy was asked about the role of teachers in a partnership she

stated:

> I also put up articles for them to read that I think are really interesting and
> important about their child's development and really anything new that I learn
> that I think is important or interesting, I tell 'em about it or I just put up some kind
> of information for them.

Her response to this question clearly indicates that she views it as her role to provide

resources for families to facilitate their understanding of child development. This view is

mirrored in a response in an interview with parent one. In this statement the parent makes

a reference to her feelings that her own parenting skills are a result of her experiences in

the classroom with Amy:

> And again, I credit this place for my parenting skills. I mean, I really do, I think
> this, you know, I didn't know how to parent, I didn't know how to talk to them
> the way they talked to the kids here. I've learned so much about that. And see,
> that's really helpful, I don't think they advertise that's a benefit of coming here,
> but really that's a huge benefit of being here, is you watch and learn and see how
> the teachers speak to the children, you can go and be a better parent.

Parent one indicates that the teachers have acted as a resource for her in demonstrating

how to talk with young children. In an interview with parent two the mother describes

how she consults with the teacher to help with her concerns about child development:

> You don't want to change who they are, but at the same time, he cannot cry every
> time something doesn't go his way or if he falls down and gets a scrape. And the
> teachers here have more experience with 4 and 5 year olds than I do, so I asked
> them what I should do? What are you doing here with him in the classroom that I
> can do at home to kind of like modify that a bit?

This example demonstrates how parent two in this case views her child's teacher as a

resource, or an expert about child development.

These ideas are echoed in the interview with Nancy the director. She describes

how teachers are a role model for families who volunteer in the classroom in the

following response:

> I feel that the teachers are the role models . . . because of course, they're the
> educated ones and they see the importance of it, I mean, with me being in the field
> for over 12 years, I see how important it is that parents are involved. . . . Because
> the parents who come here, do want to be involved. And they want to know, they
> may not be the best parents when they first start here cause they don't know how,
> but you see them progress throughout the years because of the leadership of the
> teachers and the role the teachers and the parents play together. I think just that
> partnership between teachers and families just help parents be parents. . . . And
> you will hear . . . sometimes you can know exactly . . . like if (Amy) said
> something and then you hear a parent say it, you know that came exactly out of
> Ashley's mouth. So you see that as that role model is just very important.

In addition to these articulated views of the role of a teacher as a support and

resource, many examples of the view of a teacher as a support were evident in classroom

observations. A review of the observation notes revealed several instances in which the

teacher in this case acted as a support for families. Noted strategies such as helping to ease transition for children as parents drop off and then again assisting in getting children ready to leave as parents arrive demonstrate Amy's commitment to act as a support for families. In another observation, Amy guided a child to be more respectful to her parent in response to their tantrum directed at the parent. This child guidance approach again emerged as a family reflected their frustration with a child who demonstrated a tendency to linger when the parent was ready to leave. In this example the teacher gently urged the child to finish their activity and get their coat as she noticed the parent's frustration. In her guidance of the child she pointed out to the child that their parent was ready and waiting. This parent, who was sighing loudly as their child initiated another activity, responded by laughing and saying, "I was ready about an hour ago." This gentle guidance of a child demonstrating difficulty in transition reflected the teacher's role in this case as both resource and support. In this example she is a resource as she models a developmentally appropriate strategy in guiding the child's behavior. In addition to her role as resource for this family, Amy also reflects her role as a support for this family as she assists the parent in helping the child transition. These observed examples of the teacher's supportive role in her relationships with families are a reflection of the teacher and families' shared perception that the role of a teacher is to act as a resource and support for families.

Participants agreed that the role of families was to participate in the classroom, although their reasons for this role differed slightly

The role of families described by Amy, Nancy and parent two in this case was to be involved in the classroom to learn how to improve their parenting. This perception

emerged as slightly different as ideas presented by parent one. While she also suggested

that families be in the classroom, her rationale for that involvement was somewhat

different. Parent one felt that the value of the classroom involvement was to better

acquaint herself with the people involved in the life of her child.

These perspectives are initially indicated in the interviews. When asked to

describe the role of the family in a partnership with an early childhood teacher Amy

responded,

> . . . I think the critical thing is that they work with me in the classroom which is
> what co-op is all about. I think they really learn a lot from their child watching
> them interact with other children, but as far as any type of academics that they are
> interested in, that's not really what we do here. I encourage families to read to
> their kids at home, do a lot of environmental print stuff, and then I talk to parents
> a lot about math activities that they can do that are not sit down worksheet type
> activities, but I think that's something parents really need to do at home with their
> children. We do a lot of developmentally appropriate activities here involving
> those types of educational experiences, but for parents . . . I think it's important
> that they continue that at home, which is why it's great for them to be here,
> because then they see what we're doing and they can do that at home.

In this response Amy demonstrated her view that a family's role in a partnership

with a teacher is to use classroom volunteering opportunities to learn about

developmentally appropriate strategies that can be reinforced at home. These roles were

echoed by parent two in this case. Like Amy suggested, she felt as though she really had

learned a lot by being in the classroom. When asked how she described the role of the

family, parent two said,

> Definitely a partnership. I feel like, just from being here that I have learned so
> much about how to be a parent and how to educate my child than before (Connie)
> came here. . . . And then also I enjoy being able to be in the classroom and watch

how my child interacts with other children and just, you know, watch her development. So I guess I look at it much more than as a teacher.

Other than their role in the classroom, Amy also suggested that the role of families was to ensure that they made time to interact with their children at home. She reflected this belief in her statement,

> While I think it's important that they have a lot of experiences with them, it doesn't have to be going out and spending a lot of money, I think just playing in the yard . . . playing ball together. I think all these types of experiences just open the door for learning and I think that can happen any time. I encourage the families to cook with their children because so many opportunities are there to learn through measuring, scooping and pouring and just all those types of things, so it doesn't . . . that's what I want families to do is really have a lot of experiences with their kids.

In this response, Amy implies her perception that families should support the overall growth and development of their child by engaging in meaningful activities at home. Thus the perceived role of families for Amy and Parent two emerged as the partner in creating developmentally supportive environments for a child.

These ideas of the role of the family were reiterated by the director of Center B, Nancy. When asked how she would describe the role of the family she stated,

> I think there should be a partnership with their center or their teacher. That's the main priority that we definitely see in our center, is the partnership with their teacher and their center to help them with their education and their growth and development.

In this response the director also indicates that she considers the goal of families

participation in classrooms to be to support the "growth and development" of the child.

When asked how they would achieve these outcomes, Nancy explained,

> Spend time in the classroom, which is what we do here, which is a big part of our philosophy. Spend time in the classroom and spend time with their caregiver, their teachers, the assistants, whoever is with their children, you should spend time to see how they interact with their children as well and learn from their teachers. That's the big thing that we see when parents leave from our center is they come back and say that they learned a lot about child development and how to interact with children and how to discipline their children in different, positive way.

This response echoes the values presented by Amy and parent two. According to these

participants the overall advantage provided to families who participate in the classroom is

their own growth as the learn how to support the development of their child in

appropriate ways.

Parent one in this case reflected a somewhat different perception about family

roles. When asked how she would describe the role of families in a partnership, she

stated, "I think that families should play the majority of the role. The family and teachers

can work together but I think that families should be responsible for raising their children

. . ." In this response, parent one indicates that she views the role of the family as having

the primary responsibility. Although she describes families as having a "majority of the

role" she acknowledges that collaboration between teachers and families can still happen.

She explains her perception of how this collaboration should happen in the

following statement:

> I think that teachers and parents have got to be a partnership. So if you are choosing to put your child in either a daycare or center then you want to get into that school. If you're not involved, then you're turning over the complete job of raising your children to somebody else and I don't think that's good for children.

This statement demonstrates parent one's perception that a family has the primary responsibility for their child's education and, as such they should take the initiative to be involved in the classroom. When asked specifically how the family should be involved in their child's school, parent one responded,

> Volunteer at the school. Talk to the teachers. Go to all of the after school plays, the festivals, know what your child is doing at school and know who his friends and teachers are—who the people are that are shaping him or her.

Thus, parent one's perception of the role of the family is similar to other participants' views that families should be involved in the classroom. She does not, however, seem to share their ideas that the intrinsic value of this participation is to learn more about how to use developmentally appropriate strategies. In her responses, parent one suggests that the purpose of participation in the classroom is to know "who the people are . . ." involved with the life of their child.

Communication as Intentional and Friendly

In an effort to examine the impact of the perceived roles on communication within the case, an analysis was done of the observed interactions between the teacher and families as well as interview responses describing communication. Interactions between teachers and families in this case were observed for five days during pick up and drop-off time when families and teachers had time to talk. During these observations

several characteristics of the communications emerged. These characteristics of communication were also mentioned across interview responses.

    Intentional Communication. Observations of the teacher and differing families in this case reflected interactions that were intentional in nature. These daily communications could be described as intentional as the teacher demonstrated the effort to greet each family and initiate discussions with them about their child. In the mornings (during drop-off) these efforts were reflected in the teacher's focus on listening to families and demonstrating a value of their decisions in the supportive comments she made in response. In addition to her frequent use of the word "right" in her responses to families, it was also noted that she frequently nodded when listening and stated "okay." Amy refers to these strategies as an approach to support communication in her own interview:

> Well, I think when you're working with parents, I think they have to know that you respect every decision that they make about their child. And I think that's key. And to know that you really don't doubt them, . . . any type of parenting ability . . . , what they think. . . .

> You really have to let that family know that you do respect what they think and it's very important . . . it's the most important thing for their child. I think as a teacher, you have to be really understanding, and you really have to listen to the parent.

These listening strategies reflected in observations and referred to in her interview reveal Amy's intentional approach to supporting and promoting communication.

    The intentional nature of the daily communications in this case is also reflected in the interactions between families and the teachers in the afternoons during pick-up time.

During these times Amy was often observed talking with the families individually about the child's day. This consistent interaction between Amy and the families reflected her intentional efforts to communicate with families about the child.

Friendly and Personal Communication. In addition to the intentional nature of the communication between families and teachers in this case, an analysis of the data also revealed that communications were friendly. These communications were friendly in nature as they were consistently relaxed and positive. This could be observed in the length of time that families lingered and participated in conversations—some as long as 15 minutes as well as the body language that was observed during these interactions. Observation notes in this case often referred to the smiles of both the teacher and the parent during these interactions. Often the families and the teacher were observed laughing and joking while communicating during pick-up and drop-off times. The personal nature of their communications was also demonstrated in the teacher's reflection of an intimate knowledge of families' lives in her conversations with parents. In her questions about events that families engaged in over the weekend or that happened while the family was on vacation, Amy initiated friendly conversations with families that reflected her personal knowledge of the child within the context of the family. In one noted conversation, Amy asked the child and dad about their trip to Beaufort the week before. In response to this question the dad hung out for 15 minutes and talked about the fun their family had visiting the maritime museum and looking at all the old houses. In another observation Amy was noted to ask the dad picking his daughter up about the 'fun run' they participated in over the weekend. In response the dad laughed and described

how it took he and his daughter over an hour to walk the single mile for kids because they stopped several times to talk with other families.

Amy's personal approach to communicating with families was noted in an interview with parent two in this case. In this statement, she talks about how comfortable she feels talking to Amy about her concerns

> And I guess, you know, I view her teacher as really an extension of the family. And if we're having problems at home I feel very comfortable in talking to her and asking for suggestions. And ways to better handle whatever situation it might be.

This style of personal interaction was also noted in the conversations between the teacher and families that reflected families' concerns about the teacher's life outside of the classroom. Families would ask her about her plans for the weekend or about the status of her progress on a project she was doing for school as naturally as they would ask a friend about their lives. Parent two mentioned these types of conversations with Amy in her interview.

> I think (Amy) and I have a friendship. I think even more than just a teacher/ parent. I mean, we don't do things outside the classroom together, but we talk about things that don't relate to the classroom, that's just my personality. I guess I've always made friends easily, and knew that is an important thing to do with your child's teacher.

This statement reflects the parent's view of the communications shared between herself and the teacher in this case. She notes that the topics of the conversations she has with the teacher are more personal in nature and reflect topics beyond the immediate classroom.

This parent refers to these types of communications shared between herself and Amy as evidence of their friendship.

The director in this case, Nancy also describes the communications this way in her interview. She stated,

> . . . I think a big thing here is we do talk, cause we are a family. So we sort of talk as a family so we use that time to build relationships. I think you have to build relationships to involve the family. If you don't have a relationship with them then you can't really build on that in the classroom. So I feel like, you know, they build relationships, they talk about, you know, what they did over the weekend, they talk about you know, if something really bad happened at home, something like that, they work together to figure out how to make it work. If they're having, you know, parents going thru a divorce, you know, the teachers really work with the parents to figure out how can we help that child to make it a better situation for them.

Nancy's description of these daily communications implies that they are intentional in that they support the building of a relationship with families, that they are personal in that they talk about families lives at home and that they are supportive as they assist in collaborative problem solving.

Thus, the communications observed and reported in this case are friendly and personal as well as intentional in nature. These communications shared between the teacher and families in this case were clearly demonstrated through observations and substantiated by the interview responses of participants.

Amy and both parents agreed that assisting in the classroom was meaningful participation of families

All the participants in this case suggested that meaningful involvement of families was volunteering in the school. Amy first suggested this definition in her interview as she described the types of activities parent volunteers could do during these times.

> I want them interacting, involved and especially on the playground . . . that's the hardest place and I try to encourage parents to play ball with them, push 'em on the swing, get in the sandbox. It doesn't have to . . . for many of our activities they don't have to do some-thing big and spectacular . . .

Amy demonstrates her opinion in this response, that the meaningful participation in the classroom is really the interaction with the children. She reiterates this value as she further explains,

> . . . and another thing as far as interactions and what parents are doing with the kids. I've set up a lot of activities that I consider to be developmentally appropriate activities and sometimes the parent will get involved and it turns more into a teacher directed activity, but I think there's still some value in that moment. I don't necessarily squelch that whole thing because I think there's something about that parent being that involved, really enjoying the activity so much that they're doing their own thing. Ya know? . . . that there's still some value in that interaction that I don't want to squelch so I'm careful about stopping parents when they . . . you know, if they're drawing a picture for a kid . . . I don't, I don't do that-and that's not what I want in my classroom. But there's still that, —you see something going on between a parent and another child or their own child, and you just don't want to mess up that moment. Ya just let it go because I think that's important.

In this description of her approach to classroom volunteers, Amy suggests that what makes these opportunities meaningful is that they are special for the child and parent.

When asked about meaningful involvement of families, parent one reiterated the same ideas expressed by Amy. In the following response she alludes to her definition of meaningful participation.

> . . . I think that we forget that the little things are so important. That, going outside, and holding hands and collecting acorns with your children. (is important) What they're seeing is important. I think that it doesn't have to be, "we're getting in the car and we're taking a trip to the aquarium to learn about seahorses." We are seeing their minds grow every day through every little, all these little things I think are important. Every bit of involvement is meaningful.

This response demonstrates the agreement between Amy and parent one of how 'meaningful' participation is defined.

Parent two also commented on the value of volunteering in the classroom. When asked how she would define meaningful participation, parent two said, "Field trips where the parents drive. And you know, act as chaperones. Well, I mean, working in the classroom is the biggest one. Being that teacher assistant." In this statement parent two is reflecting her belief that 'meaningful participation' is volunteering to help with the class.

Thus, the families and the teacher in this case defined meaningful participation of families as volunteering in the classroom. Amy and parent one further suggested that the opportunities for families to interact with their children were what made this activity meaningful. These noted similarities within the case of how participants view classroom volunteering reflects a theme.

Thus, an analysis of the data in this case revealed an overall theme that the roles of the teacher in a partnership with families were to initiate and lead communication efforts and to act as a resource for families. This theme emerged in interviews and was demonstrated in observation data. While the perceived role of the teacher was quite well defined within this case the perceived role of families emerged as varied. Despite the differing perceptions about the contributions of the family in a partnership, an overall

collaborative role with teachers was implied. This collaboration was demonstrated in communications which emerged as intentional friendly and personal. This theme was reflected primarily in observation data and supported in interview data with the participants. A final theme reflected in this case was the definition of meaningful involvement of families as assisting in the classroom. Amy and the families in this case suggested that these activities were most meaningful in their interviews and reflected that value in observations of the classroom.

Case 2

The teacher in Case 2, Debbie, was a 26-year-old Caucasian woman working on a Masters degree in Elementary Education. This year was her first year teaching preschool although she had worked in camps with school-aged children before. She was energetic, friendly and very warm and nurturing in her responses to children. Despite her lack of experience in early childhood education her personality served her well in her interactions with families and young children.

Her classroom was also in Center B, or the cooperative early childcare center. As such, comments of the director, Nancy are sometimes included in the development of themes in this case.

Debbie's classroom reflected a curriculum that encouraged exploration and followed the lead of the child. Evidence of this exploration included a large tape 'sculpture' that was attached to the bathroom door. Debbie described this tape creation as a project that was initiated by a single child and then completed by several children in the

class. Her enthusiasm was contagious as she described this process with a smile on her face, a twinkle in her eye and a dimple on her cheek.

The families recruited for participation in the interview process in this case were again two moms. The first mom in this case, or 'parent one' was a young mother of a little girl with Down syndrome. This mom was also new to the cooperative philosophy and described her adjustment to the required participation in her interview. The second parent interviewed in this case was a 37-year-old early interventionist. Because of her professional position she demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the benefits of partnerships between families and teachers.

Overall Themes

In Case 2, a review of the data revealed four primary themes. A clear description of these themes and supporting data will follow. These themes are listed in table 6.

Table 6

Emerging Themes in Case 2

Theme	Description of Theme
1	Debbie and the families demonstrated a shared perception that the role of an early childhood teacher was to be a non-judgmental listener to families, a resource to families, and the initiator of family participation.
2	The role of a parent as a collaborator and role model was clearly defined by the participants in this case.
3	Collaborative communications were noted as a strategy to support partnerships between Debbie and the families.
4	Debbie and the families defined meaningful participation of families in different ways.

Teacher as Listener

In the interviews with the participants in this case the role of the teacher was defined as being a non-judgmental listener. Both families and the teacher Debbie indicated the importance of a teacher being able to talk to families about what is happening daily with their child and to listen to what families have to say without judgment. When asked what role a teacher should play in a partnership with families, parent one responded by saying, "Just being open . . . and having—being able to express what you felt (the parent) without having them (the teacher) judge you or say that that's not right." This theme again emerged in the teacher's interview when Debbie began explaining her perceptions of the role of a teacher in a partnership she explained:

> I ask them what they do at home and ask them how they reprimand them, what the punishments are. I ask them everything. I tell them "don't be afraid to tell me. I'm not staring at you in a different way . . ."

In this statement Debbie reveals her own perceptions that it is important for a teacher to listen without judgment. She further illustrates her value of the teacher as a listener as she states, "I always ask them (the parents) what are the things you want your child to know in my classroom, what do you want them to get out of it because it's not a structured curriculum at all."

This perceived role is evident in daily observations of communication between the teacher in this case and families in her class. Observed interactions between Debbie and the families in her class routinely involved families reporting events that happened at home or families explaining their priorities for the child. During these frequent

interactions between Debbie and the families, she was observed nodding and smiling.

Families in this case demonstrated an expectation that Debbie would be willing to listen

to them as they frequently approached her to talk about concerns or issues at home. In

these opportunities, Debbie was observed as listening with approving gestures for several

minutes before responding.

In one particular observation Debbie was observed laughing and smiling as the

parent explained why the child had come to school that morning in their pajamas. It was

evident that this parent felt comfortable that she would not be judged by the teacher as

she told the story and allowed the child to wear their pajamas. Another parent

demonstrated confidence that the teacher would be a listener as she carefully explained to

Debbie the behaviors she was seeing at home in her son during meal times. After this

conversation Debbie explained to me that this child was having trouble dealing with a

divorce between the child's parents. This parent was explaining to Debbie what strategies

she was using at home when her son would not eat. During this conversation Debbie was

observed saying "Okay. I see." This statement reflected her commitment to listening to

families in a nonjudgmental way.

Teacher as Resource

Interview responses of families and the teacher in this case indicated that they

expected a teacher to act as a child development expert in a partnership with families.

This perception initially arose in the teacher's interview as she stated:

> As far as me interacting with parents, a lot of the times I'll have parents who are
> first time parents . . . and they get very scared because they don't know, "How am
> I supposed to deal with my child when they are starting to whatever? How am I

supposed to deal with my child when they are starting to hit others . . . biting others, strangling others?" . . . So I work on that in my classroom and so we work on them on an individual basis. So at the end of the day, I can say to parents, 'and this is what I'm doing and you can continue doing that throughout the night.'

This approach to supporting families with their questions and concerns about child development was echoed in responses made by both families in this case. In an interview with parent two in this case, the mom suggested, "I feel very in partnership with a teacher who is telling me specifically about my child. Who is giving me ideas and sharing with me what they would like for me to do at home to support them." As she spoke of sharing ideas and strategies she revealed her expectation that a teacher would serve as a resource to families. Again, parent two referred to the teacher's role as a resource for families as she stated:

But, 9 out of 10 parents are gonna rely on that teacher to let them know what's appropriate, or let them know what they should be encouraging, cause they don't have that knowledge. They're just . . . they're mom and dad. Maybe they read some parenting magazines, and maybe they have an idealistic picture. But the teacher knows the child intimately so they have a responsibility to sort of educate that family about (child development), in a more intimate way.

Later when asked how the roles of the families and teachers compared in a partnership this parent one responded, "The teacher is the expert**."**

This theme was again evident in the interview with parent one in this case as she stated, "(It is) extremely important that you know what the teacher is trying to do in the classroom and you can follow-up at home." In this response it is clear that this parent expects a teacher to act as a resource for families by establishing strategies to support child development. This participant admits earlier in her interview that:

> . . . I was a little weird about the whole system here and how she (the teacher) was handling it, but I think it's right, I think it's the thing to do and I've learned a lot from her and how we're . . . how we're doing . . .

In this statement the parent admits that she has begun to agree with the teacher and feels as though she has learned from the teacher. This statement reflects this parent's view that the role of a teacher in a partnership is to act as a resource.

This role of a teacher as a resource also clearly emerged in observations of the teacher interacting with families in this case. This teacher frequently described strategies she used with children in the class with families who had questions. This practice was particularly common with parent one, whose child had a developmental delay. This child demonstrated a language delay and as such, this teacher used many strategies to encourage her to use "her words." Many observed interactions between the teacher and parent one thus involved Debbie giving detailed examples of how she encouraged the child to use language in the class. She explained how she asked the child questions during snack time and daily interactions. She further explained to parent one how she waited for a response before acting. She was heard explaining, "I don't answer for her. I ask and I wait . . . I just listen and nod. Then we she makes an attempt—she tries—that is when I answer." This practice of explaining strategies to support development was also quite common with other families. As the teacher in this case worked on potty-training with some children and separation anxiety with others, she tactfully explained strategies she used during the day with families. In one observation she was noted saying, "yeah, I took him as soon as you got here and then before we came outside. I just take him. I don't wait for him to ask . . ."

In addition to her reference to strategies the teacher in this case also acted as a model of developmentally appropriate guidance strategies for families who volunteered in the classroom. In one observation when a dispute among the children arose, the teacher guided the children to resolve their conflict independently rather than using punishment. After modeling this approach, the parent volunteer working with her used these strategies to resolve another conflict that arose later that day. The parent was heard saying to a child, "How did that make you feel? Sad? Well, go tell (Brian)."

In addition to her description and modeling of developmentally appropriate strategies, this teacher also engaged daily in reporting child developmental progress to families. This was done through informal conversations with families at pick-up time daily. These conversations served as a way for families to learn better strategies to support development at home as well as a way for families to know how children were doing with certain developmental goals. This role of the teacher as a resource for families emerged thus in both interview data, as well as observations.

Teacher as Facilitator of a Partnership

In addition to serving as a resource, the participants in this case also indicated that they perceived the teacher to be the facilitator of a partnership. This perception was revealed in interviews with both parents in this case. Parent two clearly stated:

> I think they do need to be, they do need to take a little bit of a lead role, because you have one teacher a whole group of parents. So, I think the partnership is equal, but I do think that teacher needs to be, take an active leading role.

Later she reinforced her perception that a teacher should be the facilitator of a partnership by explaining, ". . . creating an environment where the parent or family is welcome to come and participate and stay and that's not seen as a disruption**"**

Parent one in this case reiterated the notion that the role of the teacher was to facilitate a partnership as she stated:

> I think they should be the same! I think the respect we give the teacher they should . . . the respect we have given to the teacher they should give to us. In any relationship can't be one sided like that or it won't work well.

In this statement the parent indicates that she clearly expects a teacher to support a partnership with families by responding to families with respect. This teacher role is also clearly communicated by the teacher as she states, "I mean, I'm a facilitator (of partnership) in my classroom. So I find things that both the parents want me to teach their kids, and then I think they need to continue that at home." In this statement the teacher in this case indicates that she is a facilitator of partnerships by establishing goals for children based upon parents' wishes. This comment suggests that she feels that a partnership is facilitated when teachers support family goals for their child.

Thus participants in this case demonstrated a clearly defined role for teachers in partnerships with families. In their responses they indicated that early childhood teachers should act as facilitators of partnership, a resource for families and a non-judgmental listener. These clearly defined roles supported differing roles of families in partnerships with teachers. As the perceived role of a teacher emerged in this case, the corresponding roles of the families as role models, and co-teachers also became clear.

The role of a parent as a collaborator and role model was clearly defined by the participants in this case.

As families and the teacher in this case spoke about their conceptions of the role of a family in a partnership with a teacher they often revealed the idea that the family served as a role model for their children. Parent two in this case demonstrated her views of this role when she stated:

> Yeah, but it's almost a constant role, you can't avoid the role, because you're teaching in everything that you do I think, from daily care activities to learning activities to things we do, to thing we do that they just watch that you don't even think you're teaching them.

This excerpt from the interview with this parent revealed her ideas that a family has a constant role in leading a child's development. The teacher in this case also referred to this role for families:

> As far as just being a good role model to them the parents have to realize that their kids are going to do and say what they do. So how they act with other adults and other children is how they are going (to act) to do the same things. So I try to tell them that they are going to mirror them, especially at three-years-old because they are like sponges. They're going to pick up every little thing that we do and say especially when you're not in a good mood.

In this excerpt from the teacher's interview in this case, her perceptions of the families' role of being a model of behavior are revealed. This role of the family as a model of behaviors and values is again reiterated as a parent in this case states, "and what you're children see, how that you behave with other adults and other people, I think is also part of their education." This statement reveals the parent's perception that a family's role in partnering with teachers is to act as a role model for their child.

Family as Collaborators

In this case, the perceived role of families also emerged as a collaborator in the child's education. This theme was repeatedly noted in comments participants made about the importance of continuity and following up on things children are doing at school at home. In her interview parent one stated that partnerships were important because:

> . . . (it is) extremely important that you know what the teacher is trying to do in the classroom and you can follow-up at home let her know what you're working on at home and she can follow up in the classroom and you should be a partner . . . partners with one another to make it work.

This collaboration between the parent and teacher was a theme that emerged not only across environments, but in the classroom as well. In her interview Debbie described her experiences in collaborating with families in the classroom:

> "Ok, I need you to clean up this, I need to bring So-and-so to the potty, blah, blah, blah." And when I have the parent in here, it's great. They are not only bonding with their kid, their bonding with their kid's friends. And they're able to gain the respect of the kids so that when they go to their house, they can tell them, "Ok, so I don't like that." And so it takes a community to raise a child. That's what I really do believe.

Later in her interview Debbie again refers to her collaboration with families as she explains, "They are always so helpful, I do find. I always tell my parents, if you have any ideas, please let me know, because the more ideas I get, (the better)." This role of families as collaborators is again revealed in an interview with the parent one in this case. This parent talks about her experiences in collaborating with the teacher in the program:

> . . . and then you meet once a month and have a meeting and if there's anything on your mind you can express it and everybody tries to work together for the most part . . .

The second parent in this case also described some of the feelings she had experienced in collaborating with the teacher. She relayed:

> . . . "Here's what we're gonna do," we're working on it together, it's okay that I have my moments where I'm upset about it and I'm supported at those moments, but then it's also . . . "here's what **we're** gonna do to work on this."

This comment reflects the support parent two feels in collaboration with the teacher. Later in this same interview, when asked about the importance of collaborating with a teacher she described this relationship as essential:

> Because children are learning all the time and particularly in early childhood settings, what's going on developmentally is so crucial, in terms of personality and social skills and you know, you're really at a time when things are happening so quickly that it can really make a very big difference if there are assumptions made early on.

This statement revealed the parent's value for a collaborative relationship with a teacher in early childhood classrooms. This role of the parent as a collaborator emerged frequently in both parent interviews as well as the interview with the teacher in this case.

Thus the role of a parent as a collaborator and role model was clearly defined by the participants in this case. These perceptions were clearly articulated in the interviews and later demonstrated in observations of interactions with the teacher. These findings reveal the overall agreement in this case about what roles both families and a teacher should play in a partnership.

Collaborative communications were noted as a strategy to support partnerships between Debbie and the families.

A review of the observed interactions as well as interview responses of participants between the teacher and families in this case revealed communication that was collaborative in nature. These interactions were consistently marked by contributions of both parties in the relationship. Observations in this case revealed the common practice of families sharing their ideas about curriculum and stories of home events. Although the families in this case frequently contributed their ideas, the teacher also supported them by providing them with developmental strategies and developmental updates on their child. Parent two commented on this communication in her interview as she stated, "It's okay that I have my moments where I'm upset about it and I'm supported at those moments . . ."

These collaborative contributions were demonstrated daily in casual conversations between each family and the teacher upon pick-up and drop-off. Parent one referred to this practice in her interview. In the following comment, parent one described her own collaborative communications with Debbie, ". . . if there's anything on your mind you can express it and everybody tries to work together for the most part . . ."

In addition to these conversations with families during transition times, the teacher in this case also demonstrated collaborative interactions with the parent volunteer working in her classroom daily. In these instances observation data indicated that the teacher and parent volunteer made collaborative decisions about the schedule. This was particularly clear in examples such as when the teacher asked a parent volunteer, "Should we get snack now?" or "Do we want to do the painting outside?" In addition to these

teacher initiated examples of collaborative communication, the families who worked as parent volunteers also demonstrated this collaborative style. These parent volunteers were often observed leading activities with children as well as performing daily classroom cleaning. Additionally, the teacher demonstrated this same flexibility in that she sometimes was a leader of activities while other times she engaged in the cleaning or classroom maintenance tasks. This type of collaboration between the teacher and the parent volunteers emerged as the equal distribution of the labor.

These collaborative interactions were clearly demonstrated again as the daily practice of engaging in relaxed and sometimes lengthy interactions during the pick-up and drop-off times. Because these times often happened on the playground, the teacher and the families were able to talk while the children played. These opportunities for communication appeared friendly and positive as families sometimes lingered and "hung out" for 20 or 30 minutes in the afternoons. These interactions were often marked with smiles and laughter. The families talked with the teacher as well as the other families and interacted with the children. This practice of relaxed communications seemed to establish a sense of community as families reflected intimate knowledge of the teacher's life beyond the classroom as well as close relationships with the other children and their families. Families were noted as asking the teacher about her trip to New York and asking other families about their vacations or other activities that families had participated in over the weekend. This sense of community was noted in an interview with parent one in this case:

> I think . . . when you see a parent that worked the shift before and they tell you what a great job your kid's doing or how they've come from maybe a negative behavior and are looking forward to something else . . . you're not just getting it from the teacher, you're also getting it from other parents and that's nice to have other people's opinions and know you're not just doing it by yourself; everyone seems to care . . .

This sense of community reflected in the interactions of families and the teacher in this case demonstrate the collaborative spirit of their interactions. The director, Nancy, commented on the collaborative spirit and its outcomes in her interview. She explained,

> I somewhat see us as a whole family together and not family vs. staff or family vs. teacher. Cause we come together and we for a partnership to be one big family. Which makes the children feel very safe and secure and feel that they are loved. A lot of our children feel more at home here at school than I think they probably do at home sometimes. I mean you see the kids come in, as soon as they come in they put their stuff away, they take their socks and shoes off and they go do their business. So I just feel like the partnership makes the center as a whole, a united front, a united family.

Thus, the collaborative communication between Debbie and the families in this case is demonstrated in their daily interactions. The value of this style of communication is also demonstrated in interviews with the families and Nancy. These data suggest the theme that collaborative communications are a shared goal of the families and the teacher in this case.

Debbie and the families define meaningful participation of families in different ways

When asked how they defined 'meaningful participation of families,' Debbie and both parents revealed differing ideas in their interviews. Debbie inferred her conception of volunteering in the classroom as meaningful participation of families in the following response:

> We do a lot of story breaks. It's not a structured based place at all. We don't spend more than ten minutes talking. They are all over the place. It's crazy. But I do centers and in my room, it looks like a mess—there are centers. I'll have a block area, I'll have arts, music, they can make anything they pretty much want to do, if they want to play with leaves we'll go outside and do that.

Confused by this response the researcher asked Debbie to clarify. When asked if she considered these above mentioned types of activities meaningful for families she responded by saying,

> Oh yeah, because I can't do all of that. First I have little kids who, they want to play with paints and get it in their hair and sometimes it gets a little out of control. If I have a parent there, especially if I have more than one parent with their kid, watching them paint, helping them grow, but they are also watching their friends and helping me because I have more than one adult in the classroom. And um, it's also great because I can split my kids up. Like if I have a couple who just want to play and then you have others who want to go outside and pick flowers. Okay, then that parent can go off and do that with them.

In this response Debbie conveys her perception that in class volunteering is meaningful for families because they are such a help in the classroom.

Parent one echoed this idea but also mentioned the other co-op responsibilities as meaningful for her. She stated, "at any other time you're not ever gonna be able to see your child interact with other kids in the classroom and have that opportunity . . ."

In response to this comment the researcher probed her further by asking if she felt that classroom volunteering was meaningful participation. She stated, "Um-hum and then you meet once a month and have a meeting . . ." In these comments parent one describes her ideas of meaningful participation as volunteering in the classroom and in being involved in monthly meetings. In these comments she reveals that these activities are

meaningful for families as they offer opportunities for families to watch their child

develop.

Finally another perspective of meaningful participation emerged as parent two

defined meaningful participation in her interview.

> I think if they know ahead of time what the child . . . what's coming next for the classroom, if they're gonna be doing a science unit, knowing that ahead of time. So that they can either provide the teacher with some things that she might need, or do some of those things at home. I guess my idea would be that you know, kind of, I guess Susan's music class is a good example for me. You know, she comes here once a week and we sing those songs all week long at home. So kind of having that information, being able to bring it home. Is meaningful to me in my child's education.

According to this response, parent two indicates that she defines meaningful participation

as the activities that she does to support the teacher. She gives examples like providing

materials for the class or reinforcing concepts at home. In this response, parent two

implies that her ideas of meaningful participation are not the same as the others in this

case.

Thus, the families and the teacher in this case repeatedly illustrated congruence in

their perceptions of roles played by the teacher and the families. Additionally,

collaborative communications emerged as a strategy used to support their partnerships.

Despite these similar perceptions and collaborative interactions, all the participants in this

case demonstrated somewhat slightly different definitions of meaningful participation of

families. These themes were illustrated in both interviews and observations.

Case 3

The teacher in Case 3, Shelly, was a 36-year-old African American woman. She was a preschool teacher of seventeen years with a quiet and gentle approach with both families and children. Her calm and relaxed approach with the children seemed to promote trusting relationships with both the children and the families.

Shelly's classroom reflected her value of partnerships with families as well as her traditional approach to preschool academics. Evidence of strategies to encourage families to participate was evident throughout the room. With parent information boards and a volunteer sign-up sheet as well as a "We need" tree with sticky notes listing classroom supplies that families could donate, Shelly encouraged families to participate in a variety ways.

These strategies to encourage family participation were also demonstrated by teacher created documents. These documents included newsletters, parent orientation booklets, developmental profile handouts, child information sheets and notes from families that demonstrated both one-way and two-way communication. This was the only case in the study that demonstrated the use of written communication generated by the teacher.

The evidence of curriculum throughout the room demonstrated a traditional, theme-based approach to curriculum planning with a seasonal component. Pumpkins were in a sand and water table by the door, while straw was in another. A writing center was noted to have a story that the children had dictated about their experiences at the farmers market. A calendar was noted to have little pumpkins covering all the dates that

had passed in October. The classroom demonstrated evidence of engaged children as examples of their process oriented art was displayed throughout the room.

Families recruited for participation in this case were both professional mothers. The first mom was a 37-year-old mother of two children, one in public school and her son, in this preschool class. She was an associate professor in a nursing program at a local university. The second mom in this case was a first year graduate student a local university who worked in family counseling. She also had two children and one in public school.

The director in this case, Tina, was a professional and articulate woman in her early fifties. She was a "veteran early childhood person," having been in childcare for over 20 years. In her interview however, she revealed her former professional experiences in corporate sales. Tina was also a graduate student at a local university pursuing her "Advanced Leadership Certificate." In her many conversations with the researcher during the study she shared interesting articles she was reading and demonstrated a passion for children and providing them with the highest quality care.

Overall Themes

A review of interviews, observations, and documents in this case supported the development of four emerging themes. These themes are presented in Table 7. Shelly and the families in this case shared the perception that the role of the family in a partnership with an early childhood teacher was to be aware of what was happening in the classroom and reinforce those ideas at home. In her interview, Shelly indicated several times that she perceived families to be responsible for knowing what their child is doing in school

Table 7

Emerging Themes in Case 3

Theme	Description of Theme
1	Shelly and the parents perceived the role of the family as a support for the teacher by knowing what is happening in the classroom and reinforcing those concepts at home.
2	Participants shared the perception that the role of the teacher was to facilitate a partnership through providing information, listening to families, and creating a welcoming atmosphere.
3	Consistent communications supported Shelly's knowledge of the child's life outside of the classroom and families' knowledge of the child's experiences while at school.
4	Some similar ideas and some contradictions existed about the types of activities considered 'meaningful participation' of families.

Shelly and the parents perceived the role of the family as a support for the teacher by knowing what is happening in the classroom and reinforcing those concepts at home.

and reinforcing those concepts at home. Initially when asked how she envisioned the role

of the family in a partnership she stated:

> I believe the family has a very strong role in the education of their own children. I think that goes from them choosing the right environment for their children as well as making sure that they're involved in what their child is doing in the day to day at school as well as at home.

Later she defined this role more specifically when she explained, "and just be interested

in what they're doing at school. Make a point to find out what they're doing, or what

their child might need help with." In these statements, Shelly implies that she feels it is

the responsibility of the family to know what is happening at school and to help support

that at home.

The families in this case supported this idea in their interviews as well. When asked about the role of the family, parent one in this case stated:

> I think families have the responsibility to keep open communication with the teacher and to know what's going on and to share the things that are going on in your life that will impact the children at school . . . and . . . I think we have a responsibility to do our part. We need to make sure that they are fed and have had a good nights rest and have reinforced the rules and things, . . . the assignments or whatever. So they can be prepared for school the next day. Every parent can't come in here and volunteer and every parent can't be here and read, but every parent can make sure your child has had a good nights sleep, had a good breakfast and is coming to school with a positive attitude.

In this response the parent reveals her perception that the family's role first is to know what is happening daily in a child's classroom and that they also should do primary things to ensure that a child will be ready to learn. She further clarifies her notion that the role of the family is to reinforce what is happening in the classroom later in her interview:

> but I think, too just—I think parents have a big responsibility in just being aware of what they're doing in the classroom, what they're learning about because if you don't have the chance to come in because then you still can talk about those things at home . . . reinforce 'em and at least acknowledge that you think they're important.

In this statement, the first parent more specifically defines the responsibility of the family to reinforce academic concepts at home. She further illustrates these perceptions by giving examples of how she has implemented this role in her own family setting:

> I like to know what's going on in the classroom, what their theme of the week is or what they're focusing on so at home we can add to that . . . one week they talked about feelings. So we went to the library and got a book about that and then we could do that at home and reinforce that. So he would . . . because I want them

to see that it's important at school, so it's important at home and that it's . . . what they're learning is of value.

In these statements, parent one clearly demonstrates her own perception that the role of the family in a partnership is to know what is happening at school and to reinforce those concepts at home.

The second parent interviewed in this case suggested a similar notion when asked about the role of families in partnerships with teachers. She stated, "The whole relationship . . . I've found what we do at home just has so much to do with supporting what the teachers are doing." In this response she indicates her view that a family's role is to support the teachers through reinforcement at home. She later clarifies that this reinforcement at home involves, "knowing what they're doing, being involved enough . . ." In this clarification the second parent interviewed mirrors the responses of the teacher and the first parent that the role of the family is to know what a teacher is doing with their child and reinforce those ideas at home.

This perceived role was also evident in some of the documents reviewed for this case. One document submitted was a note from a parent to Shelly. The note read, "(Shelly) —I am so sorry @not having Henry prepared for the field trip to the F. Mkt. I surely thought it was Friday-I guess I should really read more carefully! I'll try harder! (signed the parent)." This brief note to Shelly demonstrates the shared perception of this parent that it is her responsibility to know what is happening. Her comment suggesting that she should try to read more carefully further indicates that notification of the field trip was sent home. This notification was found in the "classroom news" for the month of

October. This newsletter from the teacher served as another form of data demonstrating the teacher's perception that families should know what is happening in the classroom. One particular section in this paper particularly reflected this value. It was entitled "A Peek at the Week." In this section of the letter Shelly had written, "This week we are talking about fire safety. We'll be visiting the Fire Training Center for a very cool puppet show on fire safety. We'll be making a special snack for fire safety week too." The field trip mentioned in this "peek at the week" as well as the fieldtrip to the Farmers Market and to the library for "Story Time" are mentioned in the next section of this letter entitled, "Looking Ahead" in this prominent block in the upper right of the newsletter, the dates of each of these fieldtrips is listed. In using this approach to inform families about what is happening in the classroom for the month, Shelly reflects her perceptions that families should be aware of what is happening in the classroom.

Thus, the role of the family is conceptualized in a similar fashion by the participants interviewed in this case. This perceived role is demonstrated in interview responses as well as a review of the documents submitted for this case.

Participants shared the perception that the role of the teacher was to facilitate a partnership through providing information, listening to families, and creating a welcoming atmosphere

The role of the teacher was also presented similarly in a review of the interviews and documents submitted for this case. In their interviews Shelly and the two moms indicated that they perceived the role of a teacher to be the facilitator of a partnership by informing families as well as listening to families and by creating a welcoming atmosphere.

Teacher as Informer

The teacher's role as the provider of information about the classroom curriculum was very prominent in this case. The teacher, Shelly first demonstrates this idea in her interview as she states,

> I think that in good programs teachers will be able to have some parent orientation time, so that we can talk with parents about what we will do in our classroom and find out what goals the parents have for their children.

In this statement, Shelly demonstrates her value of the process of informing families about the classroom. She later clarifies how this role is achieved as she explains, ". . . and we're able to let them know as well. You know, what our curriculum is and what the year will look like for our classrooms." This perception of the teacher's role is thus revealed in her initial description of the role of the teacher and then later reinforced by an example from her own practice.

Parent one in this case reiterated this perception of the teacher's role as she expressed her appreciation for the strategies Shelly had used to inform her of classroom happenings. She stated,

> One thing I like that both of my kids teachers do now is to give information about the week ahead and also the next week, so we can be informed, keeping us aware so we there isn't a field trip that comes up that's a surprise or a lot of times, just because we like to reinforce things at home, if I know that the next week they're going to the fire station, this weekend, we can go check-out books or whatever. So . . . I like to know that, so that I can be planning . . .

In this example the parent indicates that this notification of weekly curriculum enables her to reinforce those themes with her child. She further describes the experiences she has

had both positive and negative that have helped her to better understand the value of this communication:

> Because I've had the experience of both, teachers that have been open, that have kept me aware of my child's progress and I've had teachers that felt either bothered by communication or even intimidated by communication with parents . . . I've had both so I know that I need that communication and it's important to me . . .

In this response parent one expresses that her value of this information had developed from her own experiences with teachers. After a moment of reflection, parent one continued with her explanation that further clarified why she felt this way.

> But I also think that the teachers that are open in communicating, share the same goal with me. They share the goal of educating my child or keeping my child safe if it's in preschool, making sure that their day is more than just . . . "I'm here to make sure that your kid doesn't hurt somebody or get hurt" —it's more, "I'm here to help them grow." So I feel like they're definitely more of a partner in that we share similar goals. And you can't, you don't know if you share similar goals if you haven't talked to each other.

This excerpt from the interview with the first parent in this case demonstrates her value of communication provided by teachers and clearly portrays her perception that this communication is the teacher's role in a partnership.

The second parent interviewed in this case also suggests that communication is an important role of the teacher. In her interview, parent two suggests that frequent communication is important so that families are able to hear both the positive and negative. When asked specifically to describe the role of a teacher in a partnership with families she stated:

> You know, and this is a counselor response, just really coming from a strengths based perspective, especially with children, we had . . . our worst experience is with a teacher that we would only hear from her when something bad happened. And you know, that's difficult. But I think that's something to be aware of, kind of how you are with people.

This response demonstrates parent two's expectation that a teacher's role is to provide regular communication with families so that families are able to develop a realistic idea of what is happening in the class.

The idea that a teacher should provide positive information to families was reiterated by the teacher in this case. At one point in her interview Shelly revealed the value of this approach to informing families as she explained,

> Yes, to be able to tell parents positive, you know, at the end of the week at least, about something their child has accomplished, or something funny that they've said. And I think if you don't have a connection with them that it just makes it more difficult all around.

In this statement, Shelly demonstrates her value of positive communication with families and further suggests that it plays a primary role in facilitating partnerships with parents.

Shelly's vision of the teacher as the informer of families was clearly demonstrated in the documents she submitted for review. Upon careful examination of the 14 pages of correspondence, the primary goal of informing families was clear. The first document submitted, "A Parent Guide to Pre-K" was a four-page document outlining the curriculum, class activities, and other basic information about the class. This packet included information explaining things such as the class mascot, the "birthday backpack," the "show and tell suitcase" and an explanation of what children should bring to class.

The document also gave instructions to families who wanted to schedule a conference with the teacher. This "parent guide" emerged as a comprehensive reflection of Shelly's effort to inform families in the class about daily classroom activities that would be going on throughout the year.

In addition to this document another handout provided to all the families in this class was a developmental profile of a four-year-old and a five-year-old. This four-page hand-out clearly outlined developmental milestones across domains that were reflective of appropriate goals for each age group. The third document Shelly submitted was a one page classroom newsletter that outlined the weekly topics and other activities such as fieldtrips that would be coming up in the month. This newsletter also had reminders for families and a list of supplies that were needed for the activities in the upcoming month. These three documents totaling nine pages, represented more than half of the documents sent to families for the month of October. Upon review, the primary goal of these nine pages was to inform families of classroom events, policies and procedures. By sending these numerous forms of written information home with families, Shelly clearly reflects her perception that it is the role of an early childhood teachers to provide families with information.

Thus, all the participants in this case indicated their perception that the teacher's role was to provide families with information about the class. This perceived role emerged in the interviews with participants as well as the documents reviewed for this case.

Teacher as Listener

The importance of a teacher's role as a listener in communication was also highlighted in this case. Shelly and the parents in this case alluded to the importance of a teacher being able to listen to families as they voice their concerns and provide information about their child. The first example of this role emerged in the interview with Shelly herself. In one statement she explained the value of the parent orientation meeting as a time for her to listen to families. She defended this practice by stating, ". . . this could make our relationship better. It's easier because we know what they want and they know what to expect from us." Later in her interview, Shelly continues to demonstrate her value of listening to families as she responds to the researcher's attempt to re-state her response about families participating in curriculum, "Yes, that is what we do. That goes back to us, asking them what their goals are for their children." As Shelly further described her attempts to involve families in planning she reiterated the value of listening to families. She further explained her approach as she stated:

> I used the term interest, because I was saying that they (the families) would be interested, they're interested in how their child is doing and I'm interested, you know, in what their child already knows and what I can do to facilitate that and strengthen it and take the learning further.

Shelly's view that the role of an early childhood teacher is to listen to families' contributions is also demonstrated in some of the documents she submitted for review. Three of the six documents submitted for review represented opportunities for the families to contribute information. One of these documents was a two page questionnaire inviting the family to provide information about their child. This form also spanned

developmental domains and had questions inviting parents to outline their own goals for

their child. These questions included, "What is your greatest desire for your child this

year?" and "Please list three goals for your child this year." This document revealed

Shelly's perception that the role of the teacher was to listen to family ideas. This form

also requested information such as "Who is a special friend?" and "What are your child's

favorite toys, places, materials and activities?" Questions such as these demonstrated

Shelly's attempts to provide opportunities to demonstrate her willingness to listen to

families' contributions. This form was also mentioned by one of the parents interviewed

in this case. In describing practices the teacher should use to support partnerships parent

one referred to this document in the following response,

> . . . in preschool and school, we have started out the year with a sheet: What are
> your goals for your child and usually I ask them what their goals are, too and we
> talk about that and write 'em down and I've had very few teachers ever
> acknowledge that with me. Sometimes I wonder how much of that is formality—
> that they ask, or that they have it written down somewhere, but it doesn't actually
> play out and then this year we have teachers that said, "I notice that you wrote
> that. How—what can we do or tell me where he is right now . . ." I actually had a
> teacher the other day that asked "what are you hoping he learns this year?" and I
> said "well, I really want him, to write his name" . . . "well ok, that's something
> we're gonna be working on." And you'll see that and every once in awhile she'll
> mention to me, "By the way. He really enjoyed the writing center yesterday. I
> think he's starting to like that better." So just to know that when there's
> something that has worried me, when they're in tune with that and then they keep
> me posted.

This statement reflects the parent one's appreciation of this opportunity to be heard by the

teacher. She further indicated that she became aware of the value of this practice when

Shelly acknowledged *her goals and concerns* in daily conversations about the child's

progress.

Two other documents reviewed in this case also demonstrated the perceived role of the teacher as a listener of families' contributions. One of these documents was a volunteer form asking families how they might like to participate in the class. It stated "please check activities in which you would be interested in volunteering. Beneath these directions were the following categories: "Substitute in the room, Room Parent, Field trip chaperone/driver, Floating volunteer—Contacted on an as needed basis; and Other:" This form demonstrates Shelly's value of family contributions and also provides an opportunity for them to indicate their own ideas and preferences for ways they would like to be involved. By providing the option of "other" Shelly demonstrates her openness to their ideas.

In addition to these documents which emerge as a reflection of Shelly's perceived role of the teacher, another document provided for review is evidence that this perception is shared by families in the class. This document was the note (described earlier in the case) sent to Shelly from a parent. This note demonstrates the parent's perception that the teacher will 'listen' to her as she apologizes for not sending her child prepared for the fieldtrip.

In these documents the teacher's role as a listener in her partnerships with families are clearly demonstrated. These documents reinforce the statements made by Shelly in her interview that a teacher supports a partnership with families through listening.

The perceived importance of teachers listening to families again emerged in the interview with parent one. She clearly described the value of this practice as she defined the teacher's role in the following statement,

> I think the biggest (thing) is just to give the perception that they are open to you in communicating to you. I've had teachers—my children have had teachers that, when we walked in the room, don't even acknowledge our presence. And so—or when I've tried to talk to them about something, they wanted me to come back another time. That kind of thing never felt very open to me. So I think the biggest thing is they need to show that they're open by listening to what you have to say.

This response illustrates parent one's perception that a teacher's role is to demonstrate a willingness to listen to families.

Thus, the interviews and documents reviewed in this case demonstrate a shared perception of role of an early childhood teacher as a listener, and an informer. According to these participants, a teacher's attempts to listen to families' concerns and ideas and provide information about the classroom are valuable strategies for teachers to use in supporting partnerships.

Teacher as Welcoming

Participants in this case further characterized the role of the teacher in partnerships with families as creating a welcoming atmosphere. This perceived role was indicated in interviews with the families in this case, and in observations of the teacher.

In both parent interviews in this case the importance of this role was articulated. Parent one revealed her perception that a teacher should support a partnership by creating a welcoming atmosphere in the following statement,

> . . . just allowing parents to come in, even stating, —having an open door policy-
> 'you can come in any time and sit and observe'— . . . to know that I can go in at
> any time and sit and look and help and whatever and not feel that I'm intruding.
> To not feel that it's out of the ordinary . . .

Later, in her interview she described strategies a teacher should use to make a parent feel

welcome in her response. She explains,

> Ummmm . . . at least acknowledge that you're there. Say, 'this is what we're
> doing right now,' . . . I've done that—that I've walked in . . . I found out what
> time math was and I came in, sat down and the teacher never even looked at me,
> never said a word. It was like . . . well, maybe she doesn't want me in here, but
> she didn't kick me out so I guess that was good. The other is, I've been met at the
> door and given the *feeling* that I wasn't to come in rather than met at the door and
> said, 'hey, why don't you come in. Have a seat' . . . or, 'what are you doing?' or
> 'Can I help you?' or something . . . I was met at the door and the teacher was
> almost blocking it in some ways.

In this response parent one further describes her own negative experiences with teachers

who did not welcome her. She explains that these experiences have helped her to realize

the importance of the teacher's role as a welcoming presence.

This perceived role of the teacher as is reiterated in the interview parent two. In

her interview she describes her experiences with welcoming teachers, and those who

were not. She explained:

> With teachers I think that we have both ends of the spectrum. Where we've had
> teachers that have been so welcoming and open and then, last year, the teacher
> just said very general negative things about our son. And you know, she wasn't
> really interested in knowing our son . . . and like when we walk in the door here-
> we get the feeling that they (the teachers) are generally happy to see us and that
> opens up a world of communication.

As she described these personal experiences, both positive and negative, parent two implied her perception that it is the responsibility of the teacher to make families feel welcome. She further indicated that she has developed this impression though her prior experiences and is appreciative to feel welcomed in Shelly's class.

In addition to the interviews with these moms, observations of interactions between the teacher and families in this case reiterated this perceived role of the teacher. In the observation notes for this case, Shelly used several noted strategies to make families feel welcome. For example, during observed pick-up and drop-off times families were consistently greeted by the teacher in this case with a smile and a verbal greeting. Shelly's frequent use of parents' name as they entered the classroom or playground also implied her attempts to make families feel welcome.

In addition to her verbalized greetings Shelly also made many efforts to create a physical environment that was welcoming to families. Some noted strategies included her development of a daily routine that encouraged families to come into the classroom. Activities such as the established drop-off system in which parents entered the classroom daily to sign their child in, help them put their things away and help them to wash their hands created an opportunity for families to come into the classroom for a few minutes. After helping their child to wash their hands it was noted that families often lingered a while to check their child's folder. This file box of folders was strategically placed under a parent news board suggesting that parents were welcome inside the classroom space. Families were often noted as initiating conversations with the teacher during this time in

relation to something they noted in their child's folder or even something that they had noticed on the parent news board or elsewhere in the classroom.

In addition to these established routines, Shelly also created a schedule that accommodated her interactions with families. In one observation Shelly made an effort to explain how she supported this activity. She said, "I play around with the schedule in response to when most families arrive to allow time for families to come in and talk at their leisure." It was also noted that children were able to find activities around the room to become engaged in as they arrived. By having activities available for children as they came into the classroom in the morning, Shelly created a welcome opportunity to interact with the families.

It was also noted that pick-up times were similarly welcoming to families. In the afternoon parents who wished to interact with the teacher were free to approach her as their child was playing on the playground. By intentionally scheduling activities that were child-initiated during the times when families came to the center, Shelly established a routine that supported her interactions with families. In her intentional approach to scheduling, Shelly reflected her shared opinion that the role of the teacher was to create a welcoming atmosphere.

Consistent communications supported Shelly's knowledge of the child's life outside of the classroom and families' knowledge of the child's experiences while at school.

A review of copious observation notes in this case revealed consistent interactions between the teacher and the families. A total of 21 different conversations between Shelly and the families are recorded during these five observations. For this purpose,

conversations were defined as interactions that involved discussion beyond verbal greetings and included contributions by both the parent and Shelly.

Observation notes across all five visits described strategies used by Shelly to support this communication. Notes from one observation included a diagram demonstrating how the physical environment of the classroom was welcoming to families. Other notes revealed more subtle indications of how the atmosphere during pick –up and drop off was welcoming to families and conducive to communication between Shelly and the families. In the record of one observation it was noted that the classroom door was open during drop-off time, a time that spanned about 45 minutes. During this time the teacher was observed greeting all families individually and talking to everyone as they entered.

During observations some of the parents initiated further conversation with her regarding classroom curriculum or events that had happened at home. One observation noted that a parent noticed when the teacher had gotten the second pumpkin for the class and then asked the teacher how the fieldtrip went the day before. In another observation a parent initiated a conversation with the teacher about a walk that the family had taken over the weekend. In another instance a mother approached Shelly and had her child tell Shelly about a song they had heard on the radio. The parent asked the teacher about the song and the teacher laughed and responded that they did have a copy in the classroom and assured the parent and child that they would listen to the song again in class.

In another observation a parent brought in a preying mantis in a large jar to share with the class. She approached the teacher and explained how the child had caught it and

wanted to bring it into the class to show his friends. In another observation a parent talked with Shelly about the Halloween decorations that she and the whole family had seen. The parent described the child's delighted reaction to these decorations and the teacher smiled and stated that she would "have to check those out!" In one observation a conversation between a parent and the teacher was timed at 10 minutes. In these observations it was noted that the teacher and families engaged consistently in communications about the curriculum, classroom activities, family activities, child interests, child development and accomplishments and child illness. This teacher was observed reminding parents of classroom fieldtrips and other activities as well as listening to parents stories and concerns.

These observations revealed that communications between families and the teacher were frequent and consistent. Families consistently approached the teacher to share information or ask questions and the teacher also frequently approached the families with stories of the child's successes in the classroom, or reminders of classroom events. These frequent interactions between the teacher and families revealed the consistency of communications in this case.

Some similar ideas and some contradictions existed about the types of activities considered 'meaningful participation' of families

Shelly and parent one in this case suggested that meaningful participation of families happened in planned events that provided families the opportunity for families to meet one another. When asked specifically what types of activities she would consider meaningful, Shelly stated,

> I think, I know that we have done in the past a series of workshops for the parents and teachers to attend for example, there was one that we did about parents and teachers partnering together to present ways to be stronger in that area. I think that parent workshops at the school are a meaningful way for parents to have knowledge and also be able to mingle together, also having classroom activities, but just, I know I mentioned before the make-it, take-it gingerbread house night that we do for the Christmas holiday. You know, everyone brings in a pot luck dish or we order pizza, we have dinner together, and then each family decorates gingerbread houses together.

In this response Shelly mentions that parent workshops are a meaningful way for parents to have the opportunity to meet one another. When asked why she felt that "mingling" was meaningful for families she stated, "because, those activities make parents more comfortable talking with teachers and talking with other parents."

Opportunities for families to meet one another were also mentioned in the interview with parent two. When she was asked to give examples from her own experiences of meaningful participation she said, "I think the Thanksgiving luncheon is fun." The Thanksgiving luncheon was a school wide catered event during the day. Families were invited to come and eat a Thanksgiving Feast with their child. After a moment the researcher questioned parent two about the Thanksgiving Feast. She was asked what made this event meaningful to her. She replied, "It is a way for parents to meet each other—To sort of build a community." In this response, parent one mirrors ideas stated by Shelly in her interview. In their responses they both mentioned the value of having families meet each other.

These activities were also mentioned by the director of this center, Tina. When asked what types of activities she considered meaningful ways for families to participate

she responded with a broad range of ideas. A few of these ideas emerge in this excerpt

from Tina's response,

> . . . I think there are the activities of bridging family and home, where if you play the guitar you come in and play for the children occasionally. Or, you know if you love to cook, then you bring your pasta maker to the classroom one day and make pasta with the children. . . . On the other hand, there are those activities that bridge what we're doing here with what they're doing at home. If we send home a magazine and say, "help your child find some pictures of food to make a collage tomorrow." —you take the time to do that in the evening. I think there are those fun community building activities that you take part in like, our Thanksgiving luncheon we're gonna do tomorrow. That's . . . there's no learning activity that's gonna take place with children other than that it's a good thing to be with your friends and to be in that community atmosphere that we all enjoy each others company, with other families that we're with every day.

In addition to her ideas about families doing activities that are sent home by the teachers,

Tina also mentions the Thanksgiving feast. When asked why she thought the

Thanksgiving Feast was 'meaningful,' Tina replied, "because it is a good relationship

builder. It helps in establishing trust . . . and doing things that the parents enjoy makes a

child feel great!"

This value of socializing with the other families was not demonstrated in the

interview with parent one. However, like Tina, she did mention the value of coming into

the classroom to volunteer. She also suggested that making contributions to the classroom

was meaningful participation. When asked about the types of activities she considered

meaningful participation, parent one replied,

> I've noticed one thing that's meaningful to my kids is when we are able to provide the class with something. For example, they needed a box—a refrigerator box—and my son was so happy that "his daddy" got that box. . . . So, being able to provide them with things.

In her description of meaningful participation, parent one indicates that opportunities to

provide things for the class or make contributions to the school are meaningful to her.

After consideration, parent one continues to describe the types of activities she considers

meaningful. She explained,

> A lot of times there aren't as many opportunities to go in and help- volunteer,
> because parents are working and I think they've gotten out of even asking a lot of
> times. . . . so I don't see the opportunity to volunteer, when they're there I try to
> go in read with the kids, go on field trips . . .

In this response she further describes opportunities to volunteer as meaningful

participation. She also mentions that she does not see many classroom volunteering

opportunities. When questioned about this further she explained,

> In preschool, I don't know that I have seen as many as I felt like I have in
> school—the public school setting. That's probably because they really need you
> with all those kids . . . Sometimes it's been time constraints—having young
> children—when my daughter was in preschool I would volunteer . . . go in and do
> stuff because THAT was what you did. Since then, it doesn't seem like there are
> as many opportunities—or what they want is more of a behind the scenes thing.
> And I'm usually—if I'm volunteering, I usually want to do it with them.

In her responses to questions about meaningful participation, parent one indicates her

desire for more opportunities to volunteer in the classroom. A review of the documents

provided by Shelly revealed that these opportunities were actually available. In

examining the "Volunteer Form" sent home to families this opportunity was implied in

two different places. This form listed the option for parents who wanted to "Substitute in

the classroom," to circle the days they would be available. Additionally this form had a

space at the bottom entitled, "Other." In this space the parent could make a suggestion of

how they would like to volunteer. Thus the options in the classroom were somewhat open.

Parent one's desires to volunteer in the classroom are in contrast to a comment made by parent one. When asked what types of activities she considered meaningful participation she replied, "I guess participating in field trips and parties and even if it's just bringing something in . . . not being available to help out—but I think that can be overboard sometimes . . ." Parent two indicates in this response that she considers the field trips and parties meaningful yet she feels that volunteering in the classroom might be overwhelming to families. These differing responses illustrate the varied perspectives of people within the case regarding 'meaningful participation of families.'

Thus, the participants shared some similarities and some differences in the types of activities they considered meaningful. While parent one seemed regretful that there were not more opportunities to volunteer in the classroom, parent two suggested that these expectations were "overboard." However, both parents agreed that fieldtrips and contributions were meaningful ways for families to participate. Additionally, Shelly parent two, and the director in this case, Tina, suggested that experiences for parents to meet other families were meaningful. These social "mingling" activities were not mentioned by parent one at all. As these activities were not mentioned by parent one, volunteering in the classroom experiences were never mentioned by Shelly. These responses emerged as a reflection of differing perceptions.

Summary

In review, the teacher and the parents in this case shared the view that a teacher's role involved supporting a partnership by creating a welcoming atmosphere, listening to families, and keeping families informed. This role was clearly demonstrated in interviews, observations, and a review of documents. In addition to the shared perceptions of the role of teachers, similar ideas about the role of the families also emerged. Both Shelly as well as parent one and two suggested that families should ensure their child's success by knowing what is happening daily in their child's classroom and reinforcing those concepts at home. This perceived role of families was supported by consistent communications between Shelly and the families in this case. By supporting daily interactions with families, Shelly was able to learn more about the child's life at home and share information with families about the child's experiences at school. Despite these similarities in perceived roles and consistent interactions, Shelly and both parents in this case demonstrated some contradictory ideas about the types of activities that constituted "meaningful participation."

Case 4

The teacher in this case, Gail, is actually a 'teacher assistant' in her classroom. She is a 36-year-old African American woman with two children of her own and 14 years experience teaching preschool. Her role as a teacher assistant only became apparent in an interview with parent one in this case. In the observations in the classroom she she emerged as more of a 'co-teacher' in her classroom. She demonstrated this role as she frequently lead circle times and interacted with the children and families as they arrived.

The children considered her one of "the teachers." When asked about recruiting teachers for the study, the director in this center, Tina, also implied that teachers worked as a teaching team in each classroom. In her description of this preschool classroom, she implied that both professionals were "teachers."

Gail was kind and supportive in her interactions with the children and the families. Although she was young, she presented the image of a grandmotherly figure as she interacted with families and the children. She demonstrated a strong sense of humor and was always smiling and happy.

Her classroom was bright and well organized and reflected a traditional early childhood environment. This was reflected by the presence of centers throughout the room such as blocks and housekeeping and a sand and water table and a table with manipulative activities for children to choose. There was also a large rug area on the floor for gross motor activities and music and movement experiences—which Gail was famous for leading.

The families recruited for participation in this case were again two moms. The first mom, parent one, was a 41-year-old Caucasian woman. She was a systems analyst with an MBA and the mother of three children two of whom were in two different school settings. Parent one's daughter had moved up this year with Gail, the teacher in this case. Thus, she had developed a relationship with Gail the year before. Parent two in this case was a 24-year-old African American woman. She was a single mother with one son and was also a student in child development at a local university. In addition to her schooling she was also a preschool teacher at the lab school at the university. Thus, she had the

unusual position of knowing two perspectives: that of a preschool teacher and that of a mom.

The director in this case was Tina. She was the director for center A and thus her interview comments are used to support themes in three cases. Some of her ideas were presented in this case as well.

Overall Themes

A review of this case revealed three emerging themes. These themes are presented in the following text with supporting data. The emerging themes are listed in table 8.

Table 8

Emerging Themes in Case 4

Theme	Description of Theme
1	Participants perceived the role of the teacher as the facilitator of partnerships through supportive communication.
2	Perceptions of the role of the families ranged from involvement in the school to reinforcement of academics at home and contributing supplies.
3	Participants described meaningful participation of families as celebrations and donations to the class.

Participants perceived the role of the teacher as the facilitator of partnerships through supportive communication.

The participants in this case shared a common perception that the communications between families and teachers were an essential component in building

supportive relationships. These ideas were consistently presented in interview data with

Gail and the two parents interviewed. The parent one spoke openly about the strategies

that teachers had used that made her feel supported:

> I enjoyed, last year when Elisa was in the 3-year-old preschool class, she came early, so she was here, or maybe one other child was there early in the morning and there was the interaction directly one on one with the teacher—the teacher assistant. So I felt informed of what is gonna go on for the week, or if I forgot something, I was sure it was okay. The child was not not gonna live because I didn't send in the picture of the day, or whatever. That I had that one on one interaction, and I enjoyed that. This year the class is already full when we get in there and I miss that. I find that I question the school, and her (the teacher). She's (her daughter) having a hard time trying to adapt, because that teacher interaction is lacking. So if I had that reassurance of what was going on in the classroom that I had last year, I'd feel more comfortable.

In this response the parent illustrates the comfort that the daily interactions with Gail the

year before had brought her. She also reveals her feelings of insecurity in not having this

opportunity for daily communication with the teacher this year. In these comments about

the teacher, parent one is not referring to Gail, but the "lead teacher" in the classroom.

Her statements demonstrate how daily opportunities for conversations with teachers can

make families feel supported. Parent one further explains the impact of her daily

conversations with Gail the year before in a later statement in her interview, "I had more

time, and it wasn't necessarily just school work talk, it was, just talking . . . could have

been just gossip, but I felt a connection. . . . A relationship. Definitely." In this comment

parent one indicated that the value of her conversations with Gail was substantiated by

their support of a relationship between herself and Gail. She further suggests that

relationship made her feel more comfortable leaving her child everyday and knowing that

she would be okay. In this response parent one also implies that the lack of conversations with her teacher this year have caused both she and her daughter to have difficulties. She later describes how the lack of these conversations has made her feel isolated as she states,

> I don't feel that (a relationship)this year with this classroom because its already full and there's already too many things going on that I can't go grab their time and they give me five minutes and make me feel good. There's other things to do in the morning.

In this statement the parent alludes to her own perception that her attempts at communication with the teachers are an interruption to the other activities. These feelings of being supported by communication and unsupported in their absence are clearly communicated in her interview.

These ideas are reiterated in an interview with the teacher assistant in this case, Gail. In the following response, Gail, describes her own perceptions of the role of a teacher.

> As a teacher I think that we should . . . communication is a big thing—to be able to greet, to meet parents, acknowledge the child in the morning and in the afternoon when they leave—just letting them know about field trips.

Gail comments on the importance of regular communication with families in this response. After these initial comments presented above, she considers the question thoughtfully and then shares the following experience.

> I had an experience, well not me, but another teacher that used to teach here many years ago. A parent forgot to leave field trip money for their child and the teacher

> was like— "she can't go because her mom didn't leave money" and that was because of the communication.
>
> I would've reminded that parent that morning that the money hadn't been paid instead of just saying the child can't go. I wouldn't want that to happen to my child and I would've paid the $3 and let the parent know that afternoon that . . . "you might have forgotten, but we had a field trip today and it was $3 and I paid for her trip and you know . . . but you can pay me back anytime—there's no rush," but that's not the child's fault. We as parents get bogged down with things and people forget that . . . it's a mistake.

In this story Gail demonstrates her own insight on the value of supporting families through communication. She acknowledges that families are busy and may sometimes forget things and need reminders. This example provided by her own experience illustrates her understanding of the value of a supportive relationship with families as she suggested that she would have paid for the child to go and then just let the parents know. As she contrasted her approach to this situation to that of the teacher in the story Gail alludes to her ability to empathize with the parent in the story because of her own experiences as a parent.

> Well, she'd signed the permission slip so maybe she just forgot—we've got the permission slip here— "I'd give the $3" is what I told the other teacher. She said, "no, no, no, it's the mom's responsibility" and I understand that, I do, but sometimes it makes a difference if you have children versus somebody—another teacher not having children. I think the whole situation was treated a lot different—teachers that have children versus teachers that don't have children.

In this conclusion to her story, Gail explains that her past experiences as parent have enabled her to understand the families' perspective and recognize that they need support.

The notion that families feel supported through communications is again referenced in the interview with parent one in this case. In her interview she reveals her belief that teachers who initiate conversations with families make them feel welcomed.

> There definitely has to be some kind of communication. . . . I think the teachers should be more extroverted than when you have someone that's a little more introverted and quiet, I think that makes it harder for the parent to become involved because you feel like you might, I feel like I'm stepping into their world. I'm gonna make sure that I feel comfortable that it's okay to go into the classroom and ask questions, or just visit the classroom. . . .

In this statement the parent admits that a teacher who is more extroverted with families makes her feel more comfortable and willing to interact. This perception that a teacher's role in a partnership is to foster a relationship with families is echoed in a response in the interview with parent two in this case.

> The ones that seem they don't want to talk? What I've found that works is you tell them cute stories about what their kid did today. You know, Jamie was so cute, he walked up to me with a purple X and he said that it was a cross. And explained something about what happened in church. And you know parents always seem to want to hear about what their kids were doing and how they did something, different from what the kids are doing and conversations like that tend to get you started on the road to being involved with them.

In this response parent two refers to her own experiences as a preschool teacher and the strategies she has used to support establishing relationships with families through communications. This idea that a teacher's role involves purposeful strategies to make families feel supported is reiterated in the interview with Tina, the director in this case. When asked how she would describe the role of families in a partnership with early childhood teachers Tina responded with a detailed reply. She said,

> I think it's up to teachers to be open and communicative. I think that's the part for us that's extremely difficult as caregivers. We are very well versed in what is best practice for children. Or certainly in my center we're well versed in what's best practice for children. And we come at it with our own cultural slant, and we tend to make judgments about a person's um, level of caring for their child based on the behaviors we see and I just think that's so unfair. You know, I, there are some real cultural value differences sometimes between our own cultural values and what we are thinking is the right thing to do for children, and what those parents think is the right thing to do for children.

In this reply, Tina carefully illustrates how differing values of families and teachers often present a challenge when trying to support a partnership. She further suggests that teachers need to make an effort not to judge families but try instead to support them. When asked how teachers should provide this support for families when they have differing ideas about what is right for a child, Tina explained,

> I think the key to it being a successful environment for the child is that we can talk about that. And I wont' necessarily call you a bad parent just because you don't' have your child potty trained by two years old. Doesn't mean you're a bad, lazy parent. It means that maybe your value is that it's not all that important. Is it harmful to the child? Then let's not butt heads about it. So I think teachers have, I just think that's so difficult for those of us working in child care. We just think we know so much about what's best for that child. . . . You know I just think we have to be, I think it's up to us to be the promoters of that collaborative feeling that we want to experience for ourselves.

Tina's rich description of the teacher's role in supporting partnerships highlights the importance of communication. In her statements, "I think it's up to teachers to be open and communicative. I think that's the part for us that's extremely difficult as caregivers," she reflects her perceptions that not only is it the role of the teacher to initiate communication, but that this role is very difficult for teachers. She further refers to this difficulty as she states, "I just think that's so difficult for those of us working in child

care. We just think we know so much about what's best for that child . . ." According to

Tina, this difficulty in communicating with families is what prevents the development of

a collaborative partnership between teachers and families.

In all of these interviews, participants suggest that a teacher's role is to establish

supportive relationships with families through communication and conversations.

Although all three participants suggest that these conversations can be supported by

differing teacher strategies such as telling cute stories about a child, being extroverted or

just being empathetic to the position of families, they all demonstrate the perception that

these conversations are the mortar that cements the relationships between the teacher and

family. As these participants share their own rich experiences they illustrate the

importance of a teacher facilitating these communication opportunities to support the

establishment of supportive relationships with families.

A review of the observation data of interactions between Gail and the families in

this case revealed a parallel with the emerging theme in interviews. As the perceived role

of teachers in this case was to use communication as a strategy to establish supportive

relationships with families, the observed communications were consistently supportive in

nature. Overall, the observation notes in this case revealed interactions that were often

initiated by Gail and were friendly and supportive.

An analysis of the body language, length of interactions, facial expressions and

content of conversations indicated that the communications between Gail and the families

were friendly. In a total of twenty conversations with different parents over four

observation periods Gail was observed laughing and smiling in interactive conversations with families. These conversations ranged in length from 2-17 minutes.

Across observation notes Gail was noted to smile and greet each parent upon arrival. She often would walk over to the parent to greet them and also speak to the child. She was observed using parent's first names and in one observation greeted a parent with, "Good morning, Friend!" The observed conversations between Gail and the parents often involved her reminding them of upcoming events or telling them funny stories about their child. Throughout these observations, families seemed to linger in the classroom or on the playground to talk with Gail.

One morning's conversation between Gail and a parent was timed at 17 minutes. This conversation was initiated by a question Gail asked of the parent about a child's swollen eyes earlier that week. In response the parent explained the types of reactions he was having at home and the strategies she was using to deal with them. During this conversation, Gail was observed responding to the parent by saying, "okay, okay. I see" and "yeah" and "right." The parent then was heard saying, "Tuesday, I think . . ." and Gail responded to her with a surprised look and a smile as if they have solved the puzzle by saying, "Yeah, he was . . ." In this observed conversation the parent was supported by Gail as she explained the child's developing allergies. In her positive responses such as, "okay" and "yeah" Gail was affirming the parent's approach to handling the issue at home. She further supported this parent by collaboratively engaging in diagnosing his reaction by providing a detailed explanation of what had happened at school. Gail explained later that the child had experienced an allergic reaction to the hay in the

classroom. She explained that the child had napped on a cot beside the bails contributed

to the class. This conversation emerged as one example of Gail's approach to supporting

families through communication.

Thus, the observed communications in this case emerge as friendly, intentional

and supportive. As families brought children into the classroom in the morning, or as they

picked a child up on the playground in the afternoon they were consistently greeted by a

friendly and smiling face. These supportive communications echoed the emerging theme

across interviews in this case.

***Perceptions of the role of the families ranged from involvement in the school to
reinforcement of academics at home and contributing supplies.***

The perceptions of the role of the family in a partnership with a teacher emerged

as a reflection of two differing perspectives in this case. While Gail, Tina, and parent two

suggested that families really needed to make an effort to be involved through

interactions with the school, parent one in this case reflected a less interactive role.

Gail and parent two in this case both suggested that the role of the family was to

make an effort to be involved in the classroom by visiting and attending special events.

Gail initially revealed this perspective in her interview. When asked how she would

describe the role of the family, she said

> I believe that families should be VERY involved especially this day and age when
> they are expecting so much out of our preschool children when they enter
> kindergarten they want them to be social, they want them to know the ABCs, the
> letters, the colors, so for parents to be involved, it is very, extremely important I
> would say.

In this response, Gail demonstrates her belief that it is the families' role to ensure that they are involved to support a child's academic growth. When asked how they should be involved Gail explained,

> I think they should help out any way possible that they can. I know this day and age it takes two incomes, you know, to run a household, but by all means if there're letters sent home asking, "can you volunteer? Send in donations for activities? We are having a parent meeting . . ." these meetings are very important so that parents can get to know the teachers, the school, the environment, all of those good things are very important. I think, as far as being involved, they need to actually be there as much as they can and like I said before, I know they have to work full time, but you know you have vacation days and personal days that you can use . . .

In her explanation Gail reveals her perspective that school supported activities to involve families are important and that families should make an effort to participate in them. Similar ideas are presented in the interview with parent two. When asked how she would describe the role of the family in partnership, she described the importance of collaboration with the teachers to support reinforcement across environments. She said,

> It's an important role in the education of young children cause that's the main source of where children go, that's where they get everything from. That should be reinforced at school. I think that parents and teachers should work together to make sure their not reinforcing opposite things that you don't want the kids to learn at school. Like—we have this one little boy at school we told, "you need to stand up while you pee" and then to learn at home you sit down?! cause that's just gonna confuse a 3-year-old. I've seen it happen before, we've got one little boy now, and he's like, "well, mommy said I have to sit down," and we're like, "mommy didn't tell us that," so I don't know what to tell you, so I think that parents play an important role in that reinforcement—and there should be lots of communication between parents and teachers.

In her description of the role of families, parent two suggested that families should ensure

that they are communicating with the teachers about the things they are teaching at home.

The importance of communication with teachers again arises in the interview with Tina.

She also illustrates her perception that families are responsible for supporting

communication in her response to being questioned about the role of the family. She

stated,

> Oh my gosh! That's kind of an endless list I think. I think they should be open to communicating with the teachers that work with their children every day. This is a very hard thing for parents. I can't tell you how many times they come to my office and say, "Well, my child said this and I don't' really like that. Can you talk to the teacher?" They have that relationship with the teacher. They need to foster that relationship with the teacher as much as that teacher needs to foster the relationship with them. Relationships grow through open communication. It's not always pleasant, you don't' always get to say the things that are only nice to each other. Sometimes you have to say I really don't like this, or this is not what I want for my child, or I'm bothered by this, but you have to be willing to have that open communication. I think that's first and foremost . . .

Tina's perception that families should make an effort to communicate directly with

teachers is clearly demonstrated in this response. In these interviews with Tina, Gail, and

parent two, who is also an early childhood teacher, the perceived role of the family as

responsible for taking the initiative and being involved continually emerges.

This role of initiating communication with the teachers does not appear in the

interview with parent one. When asked how she would describe the role of the family

parent one implied that this role was less interactive. She said,

> Families need to be involved but it's, reading, the social interaction, do some creative activities with the kids so that they get a little of the environment that they would get when they get to school, without it being completely structured. I

don't think at home should be structured, but some of the involvement of everyday kind of house work can be incorporated into a learning environment for the child.

In this description, parent one implies that the role of the family involves what the parent can do at home to supplement the child's learning at school. She further verifies this notion in the following clarification,

Involved in what's happening in the classroom so that you know what they're learning at school, so you can work on it at home so that you're, if it's that letter of the day so that if I'm cooking supper and I pick up a spoon and they're doing S, I can reinforce the S, or just do some reinforcements with what the classroom is doing.

In these descriptions of the role of the family, parent one indicates that the reinforcement of things at home is the priority. Although this description does imply collaboration with teachers, it does not suggest the family's role in initiating these collaborative communications.

These slightly different perceptions of the role of the family are demonstrated in participant interviews in this case.

Gail and both parents described meaningful participation of families as celebrations and donations to the class

The participants in this case suggested that activities such as attending celebrations in the class and sending in donations to the classroom are meaningful activities for families. When asked her ideas, Gail remembered an event that had been particularly appreciated by families in her class. She tells the story below.

. . . we do special activities like Mother's Day—we do a Mother's Day luncheon, we do a Grandparent's Day . . . things like that they really appreciate—I mean we've had a couple parents to come back and say, "do you remember . . ." And one Grandpa—he came all the way from South Carolina . . . we had sent the note out like two weeks prior to Grandparent's Day and he came up for the weekend and it was like that Monday so he didn't leave until that Monday afternoon—so we were like "Wow!" you know, that makes me . . . makes the teacher feel good because this Grandparent really appreciated that. We got thank you notes about it. I mean that was really cool . . . so it's nice to know when you do things that parents really appreciated and I keep going back to that open line of communication because they let us know—they really do.

As Gail tells this story about the grandparent who came to celebrate with them in the class, she reveals her belief that special celebrations in the classroom are meaningful ways for families to participate. This theme also emerges in the interview with parent two. When asked to share her ideas about the types of activities that parents find meaningful, she said,

Um. As far as like, parties like birthdays. Especially kids this age, love celebrations, like birthday celebrations . . . but with celebrations, like with holidays like here they do parties and so like three families will get together and plan the Halloween party. And everybody will pitch in and bring what they can.

In this response, parent two demonstrates her perception that celebrations are a meaningful way for families to participate. After giving the question some consideration, parent two further explains why this type of activity in the classroom is so important for families. She explains,

If they give the parents a chance to be involved with what's going on in their child's school. To see firsthand what their child, you know what I'm saying, is interacting with every day. For some parents all they do is rush in, pick up the kid and drop the kids off. And that's it, that's all they ever see, so when we have a party and we invite the parents to our classroom, "Come. Sit down and eat with

us." You know? We'll sit down. "Sit on the floor and let the kids run around and go, 'Look at this!' This is what I do here. And you get to actually see what's going on in your child's room." And it also gives the kids a chance to show, you know, "this is my space and this is where I come every day." And, "I'm showing it to you."

Although she professes the importance of these in-class events, she further suggests that families should have options. In her description of activities, parent two in this case lists a variety of activities that will encourage families who work during the day, to participate as well. She explains,

like some families have more time to donate than others, some families have more money to donate than others and I've seen it where, some people feel really left out, or, I wouldn't say bad necessarily, I would more so say left out because they can't come because the party is on Thursday and "I'm sorry, we have to go to work on Thursday, so we can't come." . . . And one thing is like variety, like sometimes you have parties during the day, like, we have potlucks sometimes during the day. . . . Here, they've had like, they try to get parents to come in and talk about whatever the current thing is. Like when they were doing the house things, they had one of the dad's come in and talk about that. Cause I think they recently had a house built or something. And he showed parts, that they used, like, what's the pink stuff? Installation stuff. Yeah, that kinda stuff that four year olds love. They go, "Ooh!" So its' stuff like that.

In this description of meaningful activities, parent two highlights the importance of providing a variety of ways for families to participate. Her response demonstrates an understanding of family constraints that prevent them from being able to be involved.

Parent one, is one of those families. She describes her thoughts about meaningful participation from a perspective of a mom who works during the day. She talks about the gratification that she derives from sending materials in for class activities. These

activities are meaningful to her because they are so important to her daughter. Parent one

explains,

> I have taken that backseat approach, so I know that being in the classroom . . . it
> works for those parents, but *they* are there. So their participation is bringing
> meaning to my child's education. Also, I think having . . . for (Elizabeth), having
> such a hard time to adapt this year,—for her to realize that "mommy loves Ms.
> (Jennifer), mommy loves Ms. (Gail) and trusts Ms. (Jennifer)and Ms. (Gail)."
> That for me is meaningful . . . We had to buy cookies for them because the
> teachers needed cookies and if that's what it took for her to want to come to
> school and I said, "If I've got to buy you guys a present every day this week
> you're gonna get them," because she needs that to come to class and she's excited
> . . . So sending in supplies to help out. That shows support without physically
> being in the building. Now I'm gonna be one that's gonna show you support from
> outside the building. I may not be there in a participating, day to day mode, but I
> think I can build a relationship and show you support in those kinds of ways.

This explanation, provided by parent one in this case, demonstrates her appreciation of

opportunities to be involved that do not require her to be in the classroom. She describes

these activities as 'meaningful' for her because she is able to bring security and happiness

to her daughter through these classroom contributions.

These descriptions of meaningful participation within case four, suggest that

contributions to the classroom and participating in class celebrations are activities that the

participants perceive to be meaningful. In this case, the importance of providing

opportunities for working families to participate emerges an important aspect of

meaningful participation. In addition to these activities, Gail, Tina and parent one

indicated that the role of families in a partnership with preschool teachers is to

demonstrate an effort to communicate and be involved. As they perceived the families

role to communicate they further suggested that it was also an important role of the

teacher. Gail, Tina and the parents in this case clearly indicated that the teacher's role in a partnership was to establish supportive relationships with families through communication. This style of communicating with families was demonstrated in daily observations of interactions between Gail and the families in this case. As a result the concept of communication as a vehicle for establishing relationships with families emerges as an overall theme within this case.

Case 5

The teacher in this case, Theresa, was a 31-year-old African American woman. She was a student at a local community college pursuing an associate degree in early childhood education. She was a single mother with one child who had been working as a preschool teacher for 11 years.

Her classroom was very clean and well organized with a theme-based curriculum demonstrated in colorful displays both inside and outside of the classroom. The classroom was bright and airy with many windows and brightly colored nylon flags hanging on the far wall opposite the door. The classroom had traditional centers evident such as dramatic play, blocks, a bookshelf with manipulatives, a book area, and an area with a rug, a rocker and a calendar on the wall where "group time" was held. A table was located directly inside of the door on the right for families to place their child's lunch as they came inside in the mornings. Cubbies were also located near the door on the right hand wall. Classroom displays included a mix of commercially-produced, curriculum-based decorations and theme-related craft activities done by the children.

The parents recruited for participation in this case included a father and a mother, both suggested by Theresa. The first parent in this case, parent two, was a 34-year-old Caucasian mother of two children, both in preschool. She was a non-working graduate student at a local university. The second parent recruited, parent two, was a 44-year-old Caucasian man who was a reporter for a local newspaper and a father with two children. His older son was in public school and his younger son was a child in Theresa's class. The director in this case was Tina, the director in cases 3, 4, and 5 (see description in case 3).

Overall Themes

Four primary themes emerged in the analysis of data for this case. These themes will be presented with supporting data. These four themes are listed in table 9.

Table 9

Emerging Themes in Case 5

Theme	Description of Theme
1	Participants in the case inferred that families should accept primary responsibility for their child's academic outcomes and take the initiative to collaborate.
2	Participants described the primary role of the teacher was to communicate with families about child development and daily activities.
3	Environmental factors prevented conversations between Theresa and families during pick-up and drop-off times.
4	Theresa and the parents described classroom volunteering as meaningful participation.

Participants in the case inferred that families should accept primary responsibility for their child's academic outcomes and take the initiative to collaborate.

The participants in this case suggested that the role of the family in a partnership with teachers was to be the primary source of responsibility for the child's academic outcomes. The notion that families were ultimately responsible for the care and education of their child continually emerged in the interviews with both families in this case. Their responses to questions about the role of a teacher and the role of a family in a partnership were consistently related to this idea. In the interview with the first parent in this case, her perception that families were the primary teachers was clearly stated in her response.

> I think that we are- that parents are the primary teachers. And then, like the preschool daycare setting should be a supplement for that. . . . Okay, well some of the things that we do outside of the school is we've always read to our kids, so I guess literacy is very important in our house. And we just incorporate educational things throughout the day, I'm constantly telling them what I'm doing, what things are, how they work. My husband, not really quizzes them, but you know, he sits down, recently he sat down and started math with them. So he points to objects and you know, shows them, "this is four and if I take one away how many?" So we have games like that, sort of educational experiences.

In this response parent one provided examples from her family life depicting the role of the family as the primary teacher. When asked why she felt this way the parent responded by saying,

> Well one, they're my kids. I think, I chose to have children. And I'm the one that's their primary care-giver and I need to be the one. They need to learn. I need to teach them as much as I can. Because I don't know what someone else is going to teach them. Does that make sense?

In this response the parent reiterates her perception of the family as ultimately responsible for the care and education of their child and also alludes to the idea that

families will not know what a teacher plans to teach that child. She explains later in her

interview that these responsibilities are basic expectations of hers.

> Yeah, they're my responsibility. . . . I guess, not in today's terms, I'm not an older
> parent, but we waited to have children until we felt like we were prepared
> emotionally and financially. And you know, we don't take having children lightly.
> So I don't know. I guess there's an expectation that we had when we had
> children—things that we knew we were responsible for. And I want my kids to
> turn out a certain way and I think the only way they're gonna do that is if I help
> them to be that way. I lead them in the right direction. And education is part of
> that.

In these statements the parent reflects her perception that the family should take the role

of primary educator of the child and that families are ultimately responsible for a child's

outcomes.

The second parent in this case revealed similar perceptions about the role of the

family in their interview. When asked about the role of the family in a partnership with

an early childhood teacher parent two responded by saying,

> Um, a big thing that families should do today is to be in the classroom. Whenever
> we can we try to know what's going on with our son who's in Pre-kindergarten
> starting in kindergarten. And when available we go to the class so we can kinda
> carry over whatever teaching methods they have—to home. There are a lot of
> families that don't have that luxury so we try to take advantage of that. . . .

In this response the parent is indicating that a families' role is to try to know what is

happening in a child's classroom by visiting the class. His comments are an implication

of his perception that the way for him to know what is happening in the class is to visit.

After consideration, parent two added to his earlier comment. He stated, "I don't like to

hear someone say that kids that schools are failing. It sounds like they're passing the

blame onto the school system." In this statement the parent further implies his belief that

a child's success is ultimately the responsibility of the parent. He later confirms this

belief as he states, "I mean, they need to know what's going on within their schools. They

shouldn't just pass the buck off to the state, or even a private school. . . ." When asked

why he felt this way, parent two further illuminated his position. He said,

> Why do I feel that way? Because I think ultimately it's the responsibility of the parents to be the one who educates and molds their children. Teachers will probably be setting up the guidelines and they learn the proper methods of teaching young children, but as the parents you have to motivate and nurture full time.

In these responses the second parent in this case reveals a perception that parallels the

ideas presented by parent one. Both suggest that families are ultimately responsible for

educational outcomes of their children, and that it is the role of the family to know what

is happening in a child's classroom.

These ideas are more subtly suggested by the teacher in this case, Theresa. Like

parent two, Theresa suggested that the role of the family in a partnership with teachers

was to know what was happening in the classroom to reinforce those academic concepts

at home.

> In preschool? Oh, they emphasize on what we're doing- numbers and letters. We encourage parents to help them. Like, what we're doing in my classroom—we're doing the alphabet—and knowing that helps the parents, help them at home.

In her description of the role of the family, Theresa describes the families' role is to

reinforce academics *at home*. In a later response, however, she implies that the role of a

family is to initiate conversations with the teacher. She explains,

> Um . . . the teachers try to do it—form relationships with parents. But you know, you have the parents who drop off, "good morning, goodbye." They don't like, *try* to talk to the teachers. You have the parents that don't even know the teachers name!

In these comments, Theresa implies that families should take the initiative to pursue

conversations with a teacher to help establish a relationship. She further implies that an

absence of a relationship is due to the families' lack of trying. Theresa later reveals that

these perceptions are based upon her prior experiences in other early childhood settings.

> I just, saw it in the parents. Some were friendly and some wasn't. Some would just drop their child off and go on about their day. But here, I mean, parents are real friendly and nice. They wanna know what their child is doing, or what level their child is. I mean, this is the first center that I've ever been to that I actually had parent conferences. I could never get with them before.

In this statement, Theresa confides that the experience of having families who are

concerned about their child seems new to her. She also suggests that these families who

are concerned can use conferences as the primary method to have their questions

answered. This statement also suggests that her perception of the avenue for talking to

families is a formal conference. Later in her interview, when asked how the role of a

family compares with the role of a teacher in a partnership, Theresa implies that families

are ultimately responsible for participating in a partnership with early childhood teachers.

She suggests that they should be friendly and express a desire to reinforce academics at

home.

> My years in teaching I've seen, . . . llike some parents won't do or won't
> encourage it. And we have some that will. You have the parents that want their
> child to learn the letters, or wants their child to know numbers and then you have
> the ones that are like, "whatever, I don't care." I mean, I'm not saying that I have
> that now. But I have experienced some of that.

In these responses, Theresa demonstrates her perceptions that families should take the

initiative to collaborate with the teacher. She refers to her negative prior experiences in

several of her responses in which she implies that families don't care. In these comments

Theresa infers that families are responsible for establishing a partnership with an early

childhood teacher. She suggests strategies such as making efforts to talk to teachers and

demonstrating their willingness to participate by reinforcing academic concepts at home.

These ideas about families caring and making an effort to establish a partnership

are reiterated in the interview with the director in this center. She stated,

> . . . Act interested in what they've done. I know it's hard at the end of the day, and
> then reinforce that somehow as you're driving down the street. "Oh, there's a big
> building, that starts with B doesn't it?" You know, so that there's a lot of ways
> parents can reinforce what we do here and not just have the expectation that, "I'm
> sending them to you, you get them ready for school."

In this response, Tina points out the importance of families acting interested in what a

child is doing at school. She later describes how listening to teacher's ideas and following

up on them at home is also important. She explains,

> Again, that's that partnership piece of, there are things they can be doing, if they recognize that. Their child—and my teachers have conferences with parents, so that if we say, "You know. They really need some fine motor skill help." then buy them a little pair of scissors and get them some magazines and let them cut out some things out of a magazine. You know? Just simple things like that, that it's as much your responsibility for getting them ready for school as it is ours. It's a joint effort.

In this excerpt of Tina's description of the role of families she reveals her expectations that parents should make these types of efforts to demonstrate their willingness to partner with teachers. Later in her interview, she further explains how some experiences with families have frustrated her as they did not value the efforts of the center to support a partnership. She explains,

> You know sometimes simple things like just reading the newsletter we sent home, I've written things in newsletters and then I've had parents stop and ask me that question or, "What about such and such?" Well, that was just in your newsletter and you just told me you didn't read that thing. I've actually had parents say that, "Oh, I hardly ever read that." You know?! So, the implication is to us, or how that feels to us is, "So you really don't value that all that much?"

This example provided by Tina demonstrates her expectation that families make an effort to demonstrate their value of collaboration by showing an interest in communication sent home. These expectations are repeatedly demonstrated throughout her interview.

Thus, participants in this case suggested that the role of families in a partnership with early childhood teachers is to support partnerships by reinforcing academics at home and demonstrating an interest in their child's education. In repeated statements throughout the interviews with participants in this case, the theme of families as responsible for child outcomes emerged.

Participants described the primary role of the teacher was to communicate with families about child development and daily activities.

Agreement also existed in this case between the teacher and the families about the role an early childhood teacher should play in a partnership with families. In this case the Theresa and the parents revealed that they perceived the teacher's role in a partnership as the communicator of developmental goals. Theresa was the first to reveal this perception quite simply in her interview. She explained,

> The teacher should make sure she communicates with the parents every day, every morning. And when she is in the classroom with them- tell what she's doing, different activities, help to find out what level their child is at. . . . Just communication between parents and teachers.

This response clearly demonstrates Theresa's perceived role of an early childhood teacher as communicating regularly with families about what is happening in the classroom and about where a child is developmentally. She further implies in this statement that it is the role of the teacher to provide some activity suggestions for families to reinforce academics at home. When asked about the types of strategies a teacher should use to ensure that this communication is occurring, Theresa responded, "conferences—to let' em know where the child is developmentally." This statement is a reflection of Theresa's limited view of communication as something that happens during a formal conference.

This theme was reinforced by both parents in this case. Parent two suggested that the role of the teacher was to communicate with families, but indicated that the success of

the partnership was again ultimately, the responsibility of the family. When asked how he

would describe the role of an early childhood teacher he responded,

> Well I think a teacher can only go so far as to bringing a family into the class to give advice on raising and teaching their children. I think that they need to keep parents as updated as possible, "Here's what we're doing with your child. Here's what we would like for you to do at home." Just keep them informed on the lessons that are going on and how your child is reacting to those lessons or where they're having difficulty. But you can only push families so far. You can only lead a horse to water, I guess.

In this statement parent two reveals his own perception that the teacher's role of

communicating with families is difficult but necessary. In his response he suggests that

families often do not want to listen to teachers and that families may see this type of

communication as being "pushed." He further suggests in this statement that the

communication between a family and a teacher should be limited to classroom activities

and the child's academic development. When asked why he felt this way the parent

responded by stating,

> I just think that the families should never outsource any of the parental duties to other people. You should only trust so far, and should always know what's going on in your child's life. And I, I'm always (leery?) of parents who do that and I just want to know what outside influences my kids are seeing. It sounds like I'm a control freak and maybe I am, but we just like to know.

In his response parent two again indicates his perception that ensuring a child's quality

education is primarily the responsibility of the family. He also infers that families should

not put too much trust in their child's teacher to achieve best outcomes. He later

suggested that he believed the best way to really know what is happening in a classroom

is not to communicate with the teacher, but to visit the classroom.

> . . . but we just like to know what—we believe that when we are there, at the
> school, and if we can see what they're doing and bring it home it reinforces
> whatever teaching process she has going on.

In this statement the parent acknowledges the value of reinforcing the teacher's

approaches at home, but further implies that the best way to know what happens daily is

to visit the classroom and observe. Again in this statement, parent two reflects his belief

that ensuring best educational outcomes of a child is the responsibility of the parent-not

the teacher. He further suggests that families should be observing teachers to ensure these

outcomes.

In the interview with parent one in this case the role of a teacher as the

communicator with families emerges again. In her description of the role of the teacher,

parent one indicates that this communication is essential. She states,

> Okay, wow, well, the teachers that my kids have are very approachable, they're
> very, I just feel like we have a very good communication system with them. I feel
> like I can talk to them about anything, they feel like they can tell me anything.
> And I went in there kind of letting them know that I wanted them to tell me
> things, no matter if they felt it was good or bad, I wanted to know. And I went
> from being with my children 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to having them gone
> from me 6 hours a day, so that was hard. Initially I needed to still know
> everything that they did. But it opened a door, so we have very good
> communication.

In her response, parent one alludes to the idea that the initiation of communication is the

responsibility of the family. In her explanation of how she initiated communications with

her child's teachers by expressing her need to know what is happening, she infers that the daily communication had to be prompted. When asked if she initiated these communications with the teacher, she reiterated the idea that it was her responsibility to clarify her expectations of communications. She responded, "Right. And then as soon as they knew and something came up, I would tell them again, "this is what I expect from you, and this is what I will give." In this response, parent one indicates that she not only initiated the communication, but that she continued to make it obvious that she expected it to continue. Later in her interview parent two explained why she felt this way. She said,

> Um, well, the kids are there, my kids are there for . . . up to 8 hours a day some days. So, they need, I feel like my kids need to bond with the teachers so they need to trust their teachers and feel secure with them. They're the . . . my husband and I are first in my kids' life, and then second it should be teachers, because that's who they spend the second most amount of time, so.

In this response she not only confirmed the notion that communication between a family and an early childhood teacher is essential, she also reinforced the idea that she considers the teacher a secondary figure in the lives of her children.

This limited view of the role of the teacher as a communicator was consistent across participants in this case. Although participants indicated that it was the role of the teacher to communicate with families, the initiation of this communication continued to be described as the responsibility of families.

Environmental factors prevented conversations between Theresa and families during pick-up and drop-off times.

A review of observation notes in this case demonstrated a trend in communications that were limited, and brief. In an analysis of the environment many

subtle cues were observed that discouraged interactions between the families and the teacher in this case. The abundance of these cues lead to an atmosphere that could be described as uninviting.

Upon arrival for the initial observation at 12:30, the teacher in this case was asked whether the observation could begin. In response the teacher explained that no interactions could be observed until the class went outside at 12:45. She explained that parents would then pick the children up outside on the playground. As such, notes from the first observation included much description of the environment outside the door and in the atrium where the researcher was asked to wait. The door remained closed until 12:45 when the children emerged to go outside to meet their families.

While waiting the researcher noted many examples of communication posted for families outside the door. The abundance of communication to families posted outside the door sent an inherent message of, "you wait here." One sign posted on the door informed families of the "letter of the week." In addition to the letter of the week display a white board was posted to the left of the door with the curriculum and activity plans for the week. Beside this board was a sign up sheet for volunteers. The list included all holidays and had a line beside each holiday to encourage one family to volunteer for each of the holidays listed. One of the holidays did have three lines beside it indicating that three volunteers would be needed that day. Beside this volunteer sign up was a policy statement posted telling parents NOT to enter the classroom before 8:55 which was underlined and highlighted. Underneath that sign was another policy statement posting that all children MUST be picked up by 1:00 to avoid late arrival fees. While noting these

observations the researcher observed one parent who arrived to pick up their child. She was observed knocking on the door to get the attention of the teachers. It was noted that she did try to turn the knob but was unsuccessful in opening the door. In a moment the door was opened and the child was brought to the door with her coat on and her lunch box in her hand. The parent said to the child, "Tell them 'thank-you' and 'bye-bye.'" As prompted the child said, "bye" and the two left. After the parent and child left, the researcher peeked through the window beside the door to see what was happening inside. Children were getting their coats and lunch boxes and were lining up at the door. In the midst of these observations the teacher looked at the researcher and gave a one minute signal holding up her index finger to indicate that they were almost ready to come out. The researcher noted feeling as though she had been caught doing something wrong by looking in the door. After being signaled to wait for another minute the researcher waited on the bench outside the classroom (as instructed). During this time it was noted that a toddler in another classroom was quite upset and crying with his face in the window looking out. He was calling for his mother and was timed crying and screaming loudly for seven minutes during the wait in the hall. He was still crying as the children from Theresa's class emerged to go to the playground and was heard until the observation moved outside. These experiences while waiting outside the door and on the bench in the atrium could only be described as disturbing. The researcher noted questions such as "Why is Theresa's door closed during a pick-up time for families?" and "Why could the Mom not come in?" and even "Why was the toddler in the other class crying for so long? Why were the teachers not comforting him?" These questions were noted as well as the

"unsettling atmosphere," created when forced to wait outside the classroom with the signs posted telling families what they "must" and "must not" do to avoid fees. The researcher noted that this environment created an overall un-welcoming atmosphere for families.

At 12:45 the children and the teachers emerged from the classroom in a line and walked outside to the playground. As they walked out onto the playground a few families were waiting and greeted their children. The families signed their children out on the legal pad and waved at the teacher, Theresa and left with their children. It was noted at this time that other parents had not yet arrived. At approximately 12:50 cars began driving up and forming a line by the curb outside the fence of the playground. Individually families began entering the playground and looking for their child. It was noted that although families did look for the sign out sheet to sign their child out, they did not approach the teacher, nor did she approach them. The clip board with the sign out sheet was placed on landscaping timbers stacked around a tree. The pick up time was described as "confusing" as families were arriving one after another within a ten minute window of time. During this time, families parked in the pick-up line and came inside the fence, signed their child out and left. Three families were timed getting out of their car and returning to their car with the child and leaving. Times varied from 90 seconds to 2 minutes and 45 seconds. This parent helped the child take his coat off before getting fastened in his car seat.

During this observation it was noted that parents did smile at the teacher and wave but no interactive conversations were observed. It was noted "Teacher looks very busy

with children" and was observed "running after a child leaving the lower playground and running towards the upper playground" and "actively engaged assisting child with coat" or "with child helping to find item—toy?" In her interactions with the children during this time, it was noted that Theresa "appears unavailable—busy with child-monitoring." In a few minutes the drive-thru pick up line was empty and all the children had left. The observed interactions between the teacher and the families during this pick-up time were noted as "brief and non-interactive." The 8 minutes and 25 seconds in which families were on the playground was noted as a "short window of time scheduled for families to pick up their child."

Another day of observation notes during pick-up time demonstrated a similar pattern. On this day it was noted that the children went to the playground at 12:30. Children were observed playing for 19 minutes before cars began arriving and lining up in the pick up lane. At 12:54 pm, one parent was observed pulling up to the curb and rolling down her window. She called out to the teacher, "I'm here for (Cameron Smith)" Teacher two in this case opened the gate and took the child to the car for the parent. It was noted that the parent "never got out of her car." At 12:55 another mom pulled up behind this car and then jumped out of the car and ran in the gate and got her daughter while the other daughter remained strapped in her car seat in the car. This mom arrived, parked, came in the gate and got her daughter and returned to her car and left in 2 minutes and 10 seconds. During this "drive-thru style" pick-up time the teacher was noted as "diligently watching the children" to ensure that children did not walk out the gate without their parent. Theresa made a point of mentioning to the observer during this

visit that it was her "first job to keep the children safe," while parents arrived to pick-up their child at the back gate. Although Theresa provided a justifiable rationale for her preoccupation with watching the children during this time, it prevented interactions with the families.

On another observation during pick up, it was noted that three families who came inside the gate approached teacher two in this case. This occurrence was noted six times throughout the observation notes of three pick-up times. On the final observation during pick-up one parent was observed inside the gate looking around. Her child was by her side holding her hand. She looked at teacher two who was engaged in a conversation with another parent. She then looked around for Theresa. She spotted Theresa running after a ball for a child. She then looked through her son's bag and looked back at Theresa who was getting the ball out of a tree with another teacher. They were throwing one ball at the tree to knock the other ball out. The parent huffed and shook her head and then turned to leave with her child.

In addition to the distracted appearance of the teacher in this case, the practice of a "drive-thru" pick up lane created a "fast food atmosphere" on the playground. Overall the interactions noted between the Theresa and families in the case during pick-up times were limited to waves and smiles. Additionally the interactions were somewhat discouraged as the teacher appeared quite busy ensuring child safety.

Other observation notes included two drop-off times as well. These observations began at approximately 8:30 in the morning and families typically began arriving around 9:00. During the morning observations it was noted that families typically arrived within

a 20 minute window of time. During this time teacher two would lead a circle time and then children would eat a snack. By 9:20 children were putting their coats on and getting ready to go outside. At 9:30 children were going outside to the playground. Thus, as families entered children washed their hands and walked over to the circle and the parents would put items away in their cubbies and their lunches in a plastic box by the door. The teacher in this case, Theresa would smile and greet parents as the families arrived but continue to work on whatever task she was doing at that time. In several instances it was noted that she would tell parents, "Good Morning" and continue washing her hands, or she would tell the child, "Hello, *child's name*" and continue setting up the snack. In one instance when she was approached by a parent it was observed that Theresa responded with a one word response, "Okay", before she began putting away manipulatives in a cabinet.

It was noted that she left the classroom during both observations of drop-off times. The first note revealed that she was gone three minutes and then returned and continued with "classroom maintenance duties." The second morning she was out twice during drop-off time for a total of 14 minutes. During this time three families arrived and left without speaking to anyone but their child. Theresa was observed "engaging in classroom maintenance" for a total of 48 minutes during the second observation during drop-off. Classroom maintenance was defined as anything other than interactions with families and children and included tasks that sometimes took her out of the room. Again during these times Theresa was very busy.

During these times, the observed interactions were typically limited to greetings and were not face to face. Across both morning observations it was noted that Theresa smiled at parents as they came in the room and would often call out to families across the room such as "Good Morning!" or "Have a nice day!" Although the teacher in this case was pleasant in her interactions with the families, the interactions were very brief and often from a distance. The scheduled activities during this time such "group- time" and "snack" prevented families from approaching Theresa for casual conversation. In addition to the classroom schedule, Theresa's constant involvement in "classroom maintenance" prevented any lengthy interactions between her and the parents as they arrived.

Thus, interactions between the teacher and families in this case were limited by the scheduling. The scheduled times for drop-off and pick-up were short periods which created a hurried atmosphere as families arrived and left. Morning activities occurring during drop-off times served to discourage interactions between the teacher and families. In addition to the class schedule, subtle cues to families such as communication for families posted outside the door, a door that was kept closed during possible pick-up times and the teacher's busy appearance also served as deterrents to families who might otherwise initiate conversation with the teacher. These environmental cues sent families a message that conversations were inconvenient during these times.

The notes across the interactions during the pick up and drop off times consistently demonstrated families who were accustomed to being hurried in their arrival and pick-up. The pick-up line in the back of the school served as a clear illustration that

families did not plan to stay longer than a few minutes. The observed interactions

between the teacher and the families in this case were thus brief and limited.

Theresa and the parents described classroom volunteering as meaningful participation

Theresa and the parents in this case described volunteering in the classroom as

meaningful participation of families. When asked what types of activities she considered

meaningful, Theresa suggested, "You could go on field trips or come back for whatever

special activities we have, you know, when the parents come. Or, if a teacher needs

something—go pick it up for them . . . volunteer, planning things." In response to her

suggestion that families could volunteer the researcher asked what types of activities

families could do when they volunteered. She responded, "Maybe come in . . . reading a

book to the class. Just come in to just play with your children, cause they're gonna see

that the parents are a part of the community." In these responses, Theresa indicated that

she considered a variety of activities that brought families into the center meaningful

ways for families to participate.

These ideas were also revealed in the interviews with parent one and two in this

case. Parent one mentions playing an active role in the classroom and planning events as

meaningful. When asked about these activities she replied,

> Well, I guess, would that be like the volunteering? The parent-volunteering and
> just having the parents play an active role in the class, in the class activities.
> Cause it kind of empowers us to feel like we're in control of some part of their
> day, when we plan, —like the holiday parties where we control what they do if
> we're in charge of that. So, yeah.

This response reflects parent one's preference for activities that encourage the families to take an active role, either by planning or participating in in-class activities. Parent two also mentions this kind of participation as he describes leading activities in the classroom. He described the activities he found meaningful in the following response.

> Going to the class and sitting in and observing how they do their teaching. Volunteering . . . I don't know if this is true everywhere, but we're allowed to actually go and help them learn …and it helps me learn, helps me get a better perspective of where our children are in relation to other children. And it just helps me remember "here's how you can teach things," it's active teaching.

In his description of the types of volunteering that he considers 'meaningful participation' of families, parent two demonstrates his perception that being an active member of the classroom and teaching are valuable opportunities for parents to get involved.

Thus, Theresa and the parents in this case suggested that activities that encouraged active participation of families in the classroom were meaningful. These shared perceptions of Theresa and the families in this case emerged as an overall theme. Both she and the families suggested that the role of the teacher in partnerships with families was to communicate about child development and classroom activities. This somewhat limited role was a reflection of the perceptions of the participants that families had the primary responsibility for the care and education of their child. This theme permeated the interview data in this case with the families and the teacher. A review of observation data in this case revealed communications that were brief, limited, and restricted by the schedule. The suggestions that families should make an effort to initiate

communication with the teacher and reinforce academic concepts of the classroom were specific indications of a more clearly defined role of the families than that of the teacher.

Cases 1-5

Thus, a shared perceived role of the family and teacher in partnerships emerged within each case. In cases one through four the perceived role of the teacher as the facilitator of a partnership through the use of specific strategies was revealed. This perception did not emerge in case five in which the role of the teacher was visualized in a much more limited way. These perceived roles of teachers were reflected in the observations of communications within each case.

The roles of the families across all cases emerged as a reflection of the perceived role of the teacher. Although similarities existed within each case this role was not as specifically defined as that of the teacher. Again, this differed in case five in which the families' role was perceived as the primary initiator of educational outcomes for their child.

In addition to the perceived roles of individuals in a partnership, meaningful participation of families was also defined within each case. Although volunteering in the classroom was the most commonly cited example, many families highlighted the value of opportunities to be involved with their child outside of the school.

A review of how the findings within each case relate to one another follows in a cross case analysis.

Cross Case Analysis

A cross case analysis in this study revealed a few themes as well. These themes are discussed below.

Shared Perception of Individual Roles Emerged Within Each Case

A shared perception of individual roles of families and the teacher emerged across all five cases. These perceived roles were defined differently within each of the cases. The differing perceived roles of the teacher and family were often revealed in both interviews and observation data. In one case the perceived roles of the teacher were also demonstrated in a review of documents. The perceived roles and the corresponding communication themes are presented in Table 10.

As demonstrated in Table 10, the perceived role of the teacher was specifically defined and agreed upon in all cases. Although specific differences existed in how the perceived role of the teacher emerged, an overall theme existed across the five cases. In these cases the general perception of the participants was that teachers were responsible for supporting a partnership with families in some way. In cases 1-4 these teacher roles were specifically defined by expected strategies the teacher should use to facilitate the partnership with families.

The perceived roles of families in partnership showed variability across the cases This role was perceived in varying ways within the case as well in Case 4. In Cases 1-4, the role of the family was not as specifically defined as the perceived role of the teacher. In contrast to the other four cases, the perceived role of the family was more clearly defined than the role of the teacher in Case 5.

Table 10

Perceived Roles and Communication across Cases 1-5

	Role of the Teacher	Role of the Family	Communication Style
Case 1	• facilitator of partnership • classroom leader • teacher as resource and support	classroom volunteer	communication as Intentional and Friendly
Case 2	• teacher as facilitator of the partnership • teacher as non-judgmental listener • teacher as resource	role model and collaborator	communications as collaborative
Case 3	• facilitator of partnership • teacher as communicator • teacher as listener • teacher as welcoming	support for teacher; reinforcement at home	consistent communications-"bridging the gap"
Case 4	• teacher as facilitator of partnership • initiate supportive relationships through communication	involved in the schools; contributor of materials; reinforcement at home	supportive and collaborative communication
Case 5	• teacher as Communicator	responsible for child's education	limited and brief communication

A final comparison of the emerging themes across the cases revealed an overall theme in communication as a reflection of the perceived roles. Thus in Cases 1-4, communication styles existed that were a reflection of the perceived roles of the teacher. In Case 5 limited and brief communications observed were a reflection of the limited perceived role of the teacher.

Thus similarities existed in cases one through four in their detailed perceived roles of teachers as facilitators of partnership through specific strategies. This theme was not evident in case 5 in which the perceived role of the family was more specifically defined than that of the teacher. Additionally, communication emerged as a venue for teachers to

demonstrate their perceived roles, and a strategy to support partnerships with families in cases one through four.

Case 5 emerged as an unusual case in this analysis in that the observed communications between families and the teacher were brief and limited. Additionally the perceived role of the family as having the primary responsibility for the child's education reflects the perception that the teacher's role is somewhat secondary. This perception of a limited role of a teacher emerges as very different from the perceived roles of the teacher demonstrated in the other four cases.

Meaningful Participation

In a cross case analysis the concept of meaningful participation of families was defined differently by each of the participants. In Table 11 these differing perceptions are listed. Despite the individual differences, an overall theme of in-class activities as meaningful emerged. These activities described by participants included participation in the form of volunteering in the class and participating in celebrations. Families in the study frequently suggested that contributing materials to the classroom was meaningful. All five teachers in the study indicated that in-class activities were meaningful for families and did not mention contributions as a meaningful way for families to participate.

Thus, the activities defined as meaningful most frequently across the cases were in class activities. Despite this theme, the participants' ideas of meaningful demonstrated great variability. Ideas considered meaningful were often a reflection of the way families had participated in the past. Although families described specific activities as meaningful,

Table 11

Perceptions of Meaningful Participation of Families

	Teacher	Family 1	Family 2
Case 1	Assisting in classroom Interacting at home	Assisting in classroom Planning curriculum	Assisting in classroom Planning curriculum
Case 2	Assisting in classroom Leading activities	Assisting in classroom Committee work	Contributing materials
Case 3	Parent workshops Community building	Assisting in classroom Contributing materials	In class celebrations Community building
Case 4	In class celebrations	In class celebrations Contributing materials	Contributing materials Interaction at home
Case 5	In class volunteering Planning celebrations	In class volunteering Planning celebrations	In class volunteering Class observations

only one case revealed that they were asked how they would like to be involved.

Additionally, only one teacher described the types of activities that were meaningful to

families based upon the feedback she had been given. Gail, in Case 4 described activities

that were meaningful to families based upon the reactions she had heard from families.

The other teachers in cases one through four instead described activities that they

perceived good activities for families. In cases one and two the teachers both described

interacting with the children in the classroom because of the value of this for the children.

In cases three and five the teachers described the types of activities that they provided for

families as meaningful. The consideration of what families had described as meaningful

was only demonstrated by Gail.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this research was to examine the process of partnering between preschool teachers and families. Specifically the study sought answers to the two following questions:

1. How do personal perceptions of individual roles impact communications of families and teachers in partnership?

2. How do families and teachers define meaningful participation?

This knowledge was sought in response to the reported need for research that illustrated how reciprocal relationships between families and teachers in early childhood settings are established and maintained (Huber, 2003). Thus, the aim of this research was to contribute a better understanding of the relationships between specific facets involved in the complex interactive process of partnering.

Through the use of a qualitative design the researcher was able to examine the process involved in establishing and maintaining partnerships between preschool teachers and families. A critical sampling approach enabled this examination of teachers who rated themselves as frequent users of practices that supported reciprocal relationships with families. As such, this study sought to illuminate role perceptions, communications and definitions of meaningful participation of preschool teachers and families in five cases.

Findings suggest that the perceived roles of teachers and families in each case are a reflection of the impact of shared communications or what are referred to in the bioecological model as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Thus, as teachers and families in partnerships continually engage in reciprocal communication they will develop similar ideas about the roles played by each partner. Additionally, the observed interactive communications in this study further reflect the concept of proximal processes as they emerged as a reflection of the development of shared perceptions of individual roles.

Further study of these findings also revealed that the shared perceptions of the subjects in each case emerged in relationship to one another. Thus, as the notion of the teacher's role became well defined, then the role of the family emerged as the complement. These findings served to illustrate the impact of proximal processes and the relationship between individual facets of the complex process of partnering.

Other findings in this study also had interesting implications. For instance a review of the interviews across cases demonstrated an emerging theme of differing perspectives of professionals and families. In addition, the relationships defined by teachers and families across the cases were professionally directed. As such, they emerged as a reflection of *family involvement* rather than reciprocal relationships with families. Finally, the findings in case five indicated the importance of teacher self-efficacy in developing partnerships. These findings and their implications are discussed below.

Similarities in Perceived Role of the Teacher

The findings across each of the five cases served to illustrate how role perceptions are impacted by prior communications and are continually re-shaped in the process of partnering between preschool teachers and families of young children. Additionally, findings suggested that the communications within reciprocal relationships are a reflection of the perceived roles of each partner. The similarities emerging within each case of how teachers and families defined individual roles demonstrate the impact of repeated communications. Additionally, the findings in each case illustrated how these shared perceptions of roles are reflected in the communications between the partners. Thus, the findings emerged as a reflection of the proximal processes involved in partnerships (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

This process of repeated interactions in family and teacher partnerships (see Figure 1 in Chapter 1, p. 7) demonstrates how partnerships between early childhood teachers and families are driven by the repeated interactions between the partners. These interactions serve as a tool in which each partner continually revises their views as their prior experiences are expanded and revised with each communication. As recent experiences are created with each communication, both individuals will gradually shape their perceptions of roles reflecting the impact of recent interactions within the partnership. This effect was clearly demonstrated in each case in the study. In case one, for example the shared perceived role of the teacher Amy was to act as a resource for families and a leader of parent volunteers. The families and the teacher alluded to these roles in their interviews and they were again reflected in the observation data. As the

families and the teacher in this case engaged in intentional and personal communications on a daily basis, this shared role perception emerged.

Interestingly, participants in Cases 1-5 demonstrated agreement within each case of the specific roles of an early childhood teacher in a partnership. This agreement across participants reflects how the repeated communications between the partners have lead to parallels in the specific perceived roles of the teacher. These similar perceptions of the teacher's role within each of these cases suggest that the families and teachers have developed their perceptions of the role of the teacher in a partnership based upon their communications and the revision of their expectations. Thus the process illustrated reflects perceptions shaped by repeated communications.

Although similarities existed within each case regarding the perceptions of roles, across cases they were very different. Within each case the specific roles of the teacher in partnership with families differed slightly. These findings suggest that these emerging roles were defined within each case and were a reflection of the ecologies of the members within that case (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

These findings are relevant as that they serve to explain specific processes that occur as a result of repeated communication. As such, they illustrate suggestions made in prior empirical examinations of relationships between families and early childhood teachers. This qualitative work has demonstrated how better relationships emerge as a result of communication with families (Huber, 2003; Meyer & Mann, 2006). For example, one account described the value of communication during home visits as a tool for establishing more positive relationships (Meyer & Mann, 2006). The teachers in this

study further suggested that these visits lead to improved communication with families, better understanding of the child and better understanding of how the child's home life impacts school performance. These outcomes of communication were also substantiated in a study examining relationships between advocate teachers and families (Huber, 2003). In this study, advocate teachers demonstrated the development of personal relationships through frequent and detailed communications with a small number of families (Huber, 2003). Thus, the shared perceptions of roles in these cases emerge as a factor that illustrates the value of repeated communications between families and teachers

Communication as a Reflection of Perceived Roles of the Teacher

As the value of communication between families and teachers has been substantiated, the quality of these interactions becomes a focus. In the present study, a comparison of the cases revealed an overall theme of communications as a reflection of the perceived roles of the teacher. Thus, in Cases 1-5, communication styles existed that were a reflection of the perceived roles of the teacher.

In Cases 1-4, the perceived role of a teacher as the facilitator of a partnership was clearly reflected in the communications between the teacher and families. In case five, however the limited and brief communications were a reflection of the limited perceived role of the teacher. These findings are relevant in that a shared perception that the teacher has a minimal role in supporting a partnership will likely be reflected by a teacher who uses few strategies to communicate with families.

In case five this affect is clearly illustrated as the perceived role of the teacher is reflected in limited and brief communications. As the participants in this case defined the

role of the teacher in a limited way, the observed communications were limited and brief. Although the participants perceived the role of the teacher as a communicator of child development, they perceived the initiation of these communications to be the responsibility of the family. As such, communications were not observed unless they were initiated by families. Additionally, the brief communications between the families and teacher reflected the perceptions of the participants that families have the primary role of supporting the development and education of their child. As they perceived the families as the primary contributors to a child's growth and development they simultaneously overlooked the value of collaborative communications. In this case a teacher's role was not perceived as the partner, but as a secondary source of care for a child.

In this regard these findings are a reflection of Getzels' social system perspective which suggests that the behaviors of adults are the result of the interactions that occur between a person's expectations of roles and their individual personalities. Thus the interactions between the teachers and the families in each of these five cases are the result of their expectations of roles and their own personalities. However, these expectations of roles are a reflection of each person's prior interactions with others within that person's ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1978).

Role of the Family as Reflection of the Role of the Teacher

In Cases 1-4, the perceived role of the family was routinely not as well defined as the role of the teacher. In these cases the perceived family role emerged in relationship to the perceived role of the teacher. Thus, if the teacher's role was perceived as a supportive

listener, then the role of families' emerged as communicators. In Case 5 this phenomenon is again demonstrated. It could be suggested that the well defined role of the family as the primary educator in case five is a reflection of the perceived limited role of the teacher.

Professionals Perspective versus Family Perspective

Findings in this study also revealed a theme of families and early childhood professionals demonstrating differing perspectives. This trend is relevant in that it is consistent with earlier findings that suggest that families and early childhood professionals often have different views (Fernandez, 2003).

Interestingly, these differing perspectives were first demonstrated in definitions of meaningful participation. In many cases families suggested that contributions to a classroom or reinforcement of academics at home were meaningful activities. Teachers in this study however never suggested contributions to a classroom as a meaningful way for families to participate. In addition, when questioned what types of activities they considered meaningful ways for families to participate, teachers provided their own perspective of meaningful versus considering the perspective of families. Only one teacher, Gail, in Case 4, mentioned the feedback from the families as a rationale for considering it meaningful.

These differing perspectives could also be seen in the descriptions of family roles. In Case 4, for instance, the perceived role of the families ranged from volunteering in the classroom to reinforcing ideas at home. This lack of parallel perceptions could be a result of the differing ecologies of each partner (Bronfenbrenner, 1978). As the teacher, the director and parent two in this case, perceived the role of families as being involved

inside the classroom, parent two reflected a perception that her role involved

reinforcement of academics at home and contributions to the classroom. These shared

perceptions of the teacher, director and parent two in this case could be explained as a

conception of families' roles constructed within their own ecologies. Because each of

these participants (the director, the teacher and parent two) is an early childhood

professional, it is likely that they may have developed their perceptions based upon their

similar experiences within their ecologies. Thus, the perceived role of the family as a

participant in the schools is a reflection of their perspectives created in their ecologies as

early childhood professionals.

Additionally, the perception of the families' role of contributing materials shared

by the two parents in this case can be described as a reflection of the similarities in their

ecologies as they are both mothers working full-time with a child in child care. It is easy

to see that contributions to a classroom and reinforcement of concepts at home are roles

more easily performed by parents who work. At the same time, these families are not able

to regularly come into the classroom because of their careers. As a result, these differing

perceptions in case four suggest that a person's ecology impacts how they will define the

role of the family.

Unfortunately, these findings suggest that several of the early childhood

professionals in this study were unable to recognize the needs of families. According to

Muscott (2002), effective partnerships in early childhood education are marked by

professionals who recognize family needs and engage in active listening with families.

As professionals in the current study demonstrated their own ideas about 'meaningful

participation of families' without regard to the struggles faced by parents who work they are reflecting a professional perspective.

Relationships Emerged as Professionally Directed or Family Involvement

As teachers and families often demonstrated differing perspectives on meaningful participation, interestingly they shared the perspective that teachers were the experts. Families often demonstrated their perceptions that teachers were experts about child development and as such expected to be directed in how to participate. Families often mentioned their roles as the support for the goals that were established by the teacher. Additionally, teachers, directors and families expected the teacher to act as a resource for families by modeling developmentally appropriate practices and providing them with guidance about how to support child development. As a result many participants suggested that volunteering in the classroom was a meaningful way for families to participate as they were able to learn from the teacher. As such, partnerships were revealed in these cases as professionally directed.

Nonetheless, the activities involving families most frequently presented in this research are a reflection of Epstein's "School/Family/Community Partnerships" model (1995). This model proposed that effective relationships with families are marked by six practices for educators including, (a) educators helping families to create home environments that promote children's learning; (b)educators communicating with families concerning school programs and child progress; (c)educators encouraging families to volunteer to help with school activities; (d) educators who assist parents with facilitating learning activities at home; (e)educators who encourage involvement in

decision making and (f) a program that combines community services and resources to support school programs (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). These teacher strategies noted by Epstein in 1995, however, are a reflection of activities denoting *family involvement*. *Family involvement* is not *partnering*.

Partnerships in early childhood environments are often referred to as "reciprocal relationships" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). This phrase, introduced in the position statement, *Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programs* was defined as "relationships between teachers and families (that) require mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility, and negotiation of conflicts toward achievement of shared goals" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Previous empirical work has suggested that the presence of shared goals is critical in supporting the development of reciprocal relationships (Landsverk, 2003). According to this research, teachers and families develop a partnership through their shared focus on individual child goals. However the goals for children most commonly referred to in this study were those set by the teacher, not the teacher *with the families*. As such, these findings are consistent with prior studies that suggested that teachers in preschool classrooms continued to confuse the concept of partnering with families with that of family involvement (Landsverk, 2003)

Case 5—What Happened Here?

Case 5 reflected some of the most interesting findings in this study. This teacher, Theresa, was initially chosen based upon her responses on a family-centered practices screening instrument. As such her responses in both self-ratings and listed strategies reflected practices used to support reciprocal relationships.

Despite her scores on the screening tool and listed strategies, effective practices to support collaborative relationships with families were not demonstrated. In fact, several practices that were observed in this case served to deter partnerships with families. As families were only allowed small windows of time to pick-up and drop off their children, daily communication about child development was prevented. Furthermore, her scheduling of "group-time" and "snack-time" gave families the impression that they were not welcome to stay. Additionally, her obvious attempts to avoid daily communication with families were apparent as Theresa frequently left the room, or continued with 'classroom maintenance' activities. These practices were not reflective of a teacher who intended to support partnerships with families nor were they consistent with the communications observed in the other cases.

These teacher behaviors may be reflective of what Garcia referred to as "low self-efficacy beliefs" (Garcia, 2004). According to Garcia, high teacher self-efficacy beliefs are facilitated through active experiences with families in pre-service teacher preparation. Thus, teachers with experiences in developing partnerships with families are most likely to exhibit self-efficacy beliefs and confidence in their abilities to support partnerships.

Theresa was not only the least educated teacher in this study, but also the least likely to have had valuable experiences with families. Although she had been a preschool teacher for eleven years, she mentioned in her interview that her previous experiences with families had been almost non-existent. She further implied that the families that she had worked with in the past did not seem to "care" about the partnership with a preschool teacher. These negative experiences emerge as a reflection of the impact of the proximal

processes occurring in her own unique ecology (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Thus, Theresa's past experiences with families who did not "care" and lack of opportunities to practice the development of reciprocal relationships, may have contributed to her development of low self-efficacy beliefs about her own abilities to support partnerships.

In addition to the self-efficacy of the teacher, Theresa, the perceptions shared by the parents in this case that they were solely responsible for the outcomes of their children is significant. This perception of families suggests that the strategies advocated by NAEYC to promote reciprocal relationships with families are not demonstrated in this case (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The position statement of this organization, describing Developmentally Appropriate Practices, encourages professionals to share responsibility, participate in two-way communication; acknowledge parents' choices and goals for their children; participate in mutual knowledge "sharing" with families; and involve families in planning and assessment (p. 22). The shared perceptions of families in this case of their role in their children's education suggest that these recommended strategies were not common practice.

Implications

Thus, these findings first illustrate the cyclical process that is evident in partnerships between early childhood teachers and families. As these cases reveal the similarities in how roles are perceived by a teacher and families in her classroom several implications can be inferred. The first implication of these findings is that the perceived roles are a result of the shared communications between the teacher and the family. Thus, these communications emerge as proximal processes that lead to the development of

shared perceptions (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Additionally these proximal

processes or communications emerge as a reflection of development as these perceived

roles are demonstrated. This suggests that a teacher's past experiences and perceptions of

roles and expectations of a partnership will be continually revised as repetitive

communications with families occur. Thus, the teachers' perceptions of the role of the

family and their own roles in partnerships are re-defined continually as they interact with

new families (whose own ideas are reflected in the communication). As such similarities

in perceived roles emerge as a reflection of the impact of communication. The second

implication of this process of partnering is that the communications that emerge between

families and teachers are a reflection of their shared perceptions of the individual roles of

a teacher and families. This implies that a limited perception of the role of a teacher in

supporting a partnership can actually prevent the development of a reciprocal

relationship. As families and a teacher do not consider the value of a teacher's role in

supporting partnership, this support will not happen. And unfortunately as this support

does not occur, then the outcome is communications that are limited and brief. Prior

experiences with limited and brief communications between a family and a teacher will

reinforce families in feeling as they alone are responsible for the growth and development

of their child. However, research indicates that the collaborative efforts of early

childhood teachers and families will promote the best outcomes for young children

(Clements et al., 2004; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004).

A third implication of these findings is that preschools and professionals working

within them continue to visualize families as visitors and not equal, collaborative

partners. Until teachers are able to recognize families' needs and "acknowledge family choices and goals" they will be unable to promote the development of partnerships (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). As early childhood teachers are able to recognize the value of family contributions, and demonstrate the strategies put forth to support the development of reciprocal relationships with families, more collaborative partnerships will be achieved.

A fourth and final implication in this study is that well meaning preschool teachers may demonstrate an awareness of the practices necessary to support reciprocal relationships and even consider themselves family-centered, however they may still not be prepared to support these relationships. Although teachers may want to partner with families, they may not feel confident in their abilities to establish and maintain these relationships. Thus, the development of self-efficacy in supporting partnerships with families is necessary for all early childhood teachers.

For this reason, teachers in all early childhood settings need to not only be aware of the strategies that support the development of reciprocal relationships, but practice them. As demonstrated in these findings, a teacher who defines her role as the initiator of communication will make intentional efforts to communicate with families. Additionally, these opportunities for communication will reinforce the teacher and the family in the development of a more specified, shared perception of the role of the teacher and the family in a partnership. These repeated communications with families will also encourage early childhood teachers to develop comfort in collaborating with families (Miretzky, 2004).

Thus, a need emerges for pre-service and in-service preparation that supports partnering in preschool inclusive environments. Studies have long indicated that students participating in pre-service programs infusing family-centered practices gain knowledge and skills for supporting reciprocal relationships (Bruder, 2000; Espe-Sherwindt & Montz, 2002; Hibbard, 1998; Knight & Wadsworth, 1999; McBride, Hains & Whitehead, 1995; Murray & Mandell, 2004). Teacher skills emerging as outcomes in pre-service programs focusing on families are the first step in promoting supportive partnerships.

As pre-service programs begin teaching these skills a need also arises for in-service support of teachers working to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships with families. Research has suggested that helping teachers to overcome negative attitudes towards working with families eliminates the primary barrier to implementation of family-centered practice (Garcia, 2004). This implication is supported by this study as a teacher demonstrated her own negative beliefs about families "not caring" in her efforts to support communication with families. Further research has implied that teachers in early childhood settings often do not have the time, resources, or training to promote effective partnerships with families (Frankel, 2004). These findings are again supported in this study as the teacher in case five demonstrated the least knowledge of how to support a partnership with families and thus, was unable to establish reciprocal relationships with families. Without knowledge and practice in creating partnerships, or available time to establish relationships through communication with families, teachers in preschool classrooms will continue to view their role in isolation from families.

Thus, pre-service and in-service programs that would support the development of teacher self-efficacy are recommended. Specifically, these programs could support teacher self-efficacy by providing authentic experiences in developing reciprocal relationships with families. In addition to these experiences, programs that include families in co-instruction will enable teachers to develop an awareness of differing perspectives (Murray & Mandell, 2004). These experiences are essential in supporting the preparation of early childhood teachers who are able to recognize families' needs and support partnerships with families.

Limitations

The research design presented in the current study did present some limitations. As is the case in qualitative research, the possible presence of researcher bias and the limited sample size were a factor. The use of a somewhat homogeneous and limited sample size was essential due to the extensive nature of data collection from all participants in this study.

A replication of this design with a larger sample would help to validate the themes generated during the data analysis. In addition to the size of the sample, the intensity sampling strategy used to recruit families could have produce biased findings. The strategy used to recruit families involved asking participating teachers to suggest families who were active participants in the classroom. This approach did ensure a somewhat homogeneous group of parents but could have also resulted in a sample reflecting bias. Additionally, the use of purposeful sampling to recruit teachers may have resulted in findings that are representative of a unique group of teachers. Despite the

possible presence of bias from these participants, this approach to sampling was determined essential in extricating patterns in partnerships with teachers who rated themselves as 'family-centered.'

Future Directions

Future directions for research related to the development of reciprocal relationships with families in early childhood settings may include further studies of perceptions of roles using a longitudinal design. It may be interesting to examine how perceptions of teachers and families change throughout the development of their partnership. By selecting a group of families and teachers to interview in the beginning of the year and then again at the end, any change in their perceptions could be examined.

Additionally, these studies may include a more diverse population of teachers in private preschool settings as well as those funded by government programs. This sampling strategy would help to demonstrate commonalities in family and teacher perceptions across settings.

In addition to the diversity in teachers it may be interesting to target a more diverse sample of families to better illuminate differing perceptions. By initially recruiting families and having families choose to nominate teachers for participation in a study, a better understanding of families' perceptions of roles in partnership and definitions of meaningful participation may be gathered. Additionally, a more diverse sample of families may demonstrate differing perceptions of roles that are dependant upon their own person characteristics and unique ecologies (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Another possible avenue of empirical exploration is the examination of partnering with preschool teachers who have had pre-service or in-service experiences to support their development of self-efficacy in establishing reciprocal relationships. By surveying families engaged in partnerships with teachers who possess self-efficacy, the value of this construct could be measured.

Conclusion

In sum, the process of partnering between preschool teachers and families is a complex process driven by communications. Repeated communications between families and teachers seems to support the development of a shared perception of individual roles. These shared roles are often complementary and can be observed in daily interactions between parents and teachers.

Despite teacher perceptions, reciprocal relationships with families continue to be a goal that is yet to be reached. Professionally-driven practices and parent involvement style partnerships are still revealed in private preschool classrooms. As early childhood teachers struggle to establish more collaborative relationships with families the need for more pre-service and in-service programs that promote these partnerships are needed. More specifically, programs targeted at supporting the development of teacher self-efficacy in this area and sensitivity to differing family perspectives is essential!

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCHER ADAPTED SCREENING TOOL

Please assign a number which best represents the frequency with which you used the following strategies:
Please give an example of how your own practice reflects each strategy for any items scored 5, 6, or 7.

1. Accept the values of families even if I disagree with them

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

2. Treat families individually avoiding preconceived ideas

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

3. Provide interpreters or other forms of communication assistance to support communication with all families

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

4. Encourage two-way communication between families and yourself

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

5. Give families opportunities to voice their concerns

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

6. Schedule meetings to discuss child progress with families

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

7. Meet with families when convenient for them

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

8. Use daily communication to discuss a child's development with families

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

9. Consider families experts on their child

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

10. Involve families in assessment of their child

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

11. Invite families to observe daily classroom activities at any time

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

12. Invite families to participate in daily classroom activities

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

13. Develop and implement plans that include goals important to families

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

14. Promote family to family interactions to provide support

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

15. Provide resources for families who need information or other assistance

7 - to a very great extent 6 – to a great extent 5 – to a fairly great extent 4 - to a moderate extent 3 – to a small extent 2 – to a very small extent 1 – not at all.

Example of strategy:

TEACHERS' SCREENING TOOL SCORES AND AVERAGES

Teacher Codes	Screening Item Number															Respondent Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	
A1	4	4	4	5	5	6	6	3	4	4	6	5	5	2	4	4.47
A2	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5.00
A3	6	7	NA	7	7	7	4	6	4	3	7	6	2	7	7	5.40
A4	6	7	NA	7	7	7	4	6	4	3	7	6	2	7	7	5.40
A5	6	6	4	6	6	6	6	4	6	5	6	7	6	6	6	5.73
A6	6	6	4	6	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	5.80
A7	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	6	6	5	6	5	5	6	6.07
A8	6	7	7	6	7	5	6	5	6	3	6	7	6	4	6	5.80
B1	4	6	1	6	6	6	5	3	6	4	7	4	4	3	3	4.53
B2																
B3	6	6	4	7	7	5	6	3	4	3	4	3	6	1	6	4.73
B4	4	3	7	5	5	3	3	2	5	2	2	3	4	3	4	3.67
B5	7	3	7	7	7	7	7	4	5	1	3	5	4	3	6	5.07
C1	6	7	8	7	7	7	5	6	6	4	6	3	7	5	6	5.87
C2																
D1	7	7	1	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	6.60
D2	7	7	1	7	7	1	7	7	4	7	7	7	7	7	7	6.00
E1																
E2																
Item Average	5.73	5.80	3.93	6.27	6.40	5.67	5.60	4.80	5.20	4.20	5.60	5.40	5.07	4.73	5.73	

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SURVEY FOR TEACHERS

Name:	Home Address:
Home Phone:	School:
School Phone:	Age :
Licensure Area/s:	Degrees Held:
Years of teaching experience:	Years of teaching preschool:
Courses taken in parent/teacher partnerships:	

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA SURVEY FOR FAMILIES

Name:	Home Address:
Home Phone:	Age :
Marital Status	Number of Children
Occupation	Current Place of Employment
Highest level of education completed	
Prior experiences in parent/teacher partnerships:	

APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION GUIDE FOR PARENT/TEACHER INTERACTIONS

Pick up or Drop off	Observation start time
Observation end time	School:

Running Record Observation Strategies

Describe events occurring during this time. Record what is happening as well as what is being said. Use the following codes to represent specific non-verbal interaction or other noted behaviors impacting interactions:

BL – Body language

FE – Facial expressions

IT – Length of interaction time

IF – Intervening Factors (Many other families in the room; Child in distress; etc.)