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PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A COMPARATIVE, MIXED METHODS STUDY OF WHITE AND ETHNIC-RACIAL MINORITY PARENTS

by

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A DISSERTATION

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PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A COMPARATIVE, MIXED METHODS STUDY OF WHITE AND ETHNIC-RACIAL MINORITY PARENTS

Kimberly A. Blitch, Ph.D.
University of Nebraska, 2017

Adviser: Michelle Rupiper

This explanatory sequential mixed methods study compared parents’ and teachers’ perceptions and experiences regarding (a) parent-teacher relationships and (b) parent-teacher communication according to parents’ ethnicities and races. Non-matched, quantitative data about parent-teacher relationships were collected from parents (White and ethnic-racial minority) and teachers (those reporting on their relationships with either White or ethnic-racial minority parents) at two early childhood programs \( N = 72 \).

Twenty-four participants were observed during morning and afternoon transitions (child drop-off and pick-up). Thirteen participants were then interviewed, as well as each early childhood program director. Analyses of co/variance were used to analyze the quantitative data. Qualitative data were analyzed using a three-level coding approach and domain and discourse analyses. \( Relationships \) White and ethnic-racial minority parents had relationships with teachers that were similar in perceived quality. Teachers also had similar quality relationships. Respect was essential to parents’ and teachers’ positive relationship experiences, though parents and teachers conceptualized respect differently. Teachers reported negative relationship experiences with ethnic-racial minority parents. \( Communication \) Teachers’ perceptions of communication were similar, but ethnic-racial minority parents’ perceptions were significantly higher than White parents’ perceptions.
Communication experiences among parents and teachers encompassed conversation about children’s daily activities, which changed with children’s ages. Ethnic-racial minority parents had conversations with teachers that were shorter than those of White parents and characterized by teachers’ use of nonverbal behaviors and communicative adaptations due to language barriers that teachers experienced when communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse parents. (Integration of relationships and communication) Parents’ and teachers’ feelings of trust distinguished “good” and “excellent” relationships. Parents and teachers also conceptualized trust differently, such that parents’ trust encompassed care for and about children whereas teachers’ trust entailed confidence in their credibility. Teachers reported difficulty in gaining trust among parents with non-U.S. cultural orientations and those who were male or older. Findings suggest that teachers (a) experience relationship and communication challenges when working with ethnically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse parents and (b) need additional guidance and skill development to effectively communicate and partner with ethnic-racial minority parents. Findings are applicable to early childhood education professionals including program directors, teachers, and teacher educators.
DEDICATION

For F.P., Jane, & Raymond.

I know that I am truly blessed because God gave me the three of you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Listen to the MUSTN'TS, child,

Listen to the DON'TS

Listen to the SHOULDN'TS

The IMPOSSIBLES, the WONT'S

Listen to the NEVER HAVES

Then listen close to me-

Anything can happen, child,

ANYTHING can be.¹

This is my Everest. It’s my summit that I’ve wanted to reach for over ten years now. I’ve had more people in my life tell me that I couldn’t, wouldn’t, or shouldn’t get my Ph.D. than those who told me that I can and will. Thank you to the people who encouraged me along the way and shared their insight and expertise with me so that I could reach my summit: To Carolyn Boles and Dr. C. Thresa Yancey, my undergraduate mentors, for taking a chance on me in the very early days of my pursuit of a doctorate.

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¹ “Listen to the Mustn'ts” is from Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shel Silverstein (1974). The author of this dissertation does not hold the copyright to this material.
heart. Thank you for respecting me and investing in my personal and professional development. I appreciate all the times you encouraged and reminded me that this was possible. To these exemplary women, thank you for sharing in my journey and sharing parts of yourselves so that I could grow. Most of all, thank you for silencing my “mustn’ts.”

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Thank you also to all of you who participated in this study. I appreciate you candidly sharing your experiences with me so that I could learn from you. Thank you to the program directors who found my study to be worthy of their time and valuable to the missions of their early childhood programs.

I once asked my mother (who is all-knowing and wise), how I can thank all of you for doing all that you’ve done. I told her that “thank you” just didn’t convey or capture the magnitude of your work and contribution, especially over these many years.
She told me, more or less, that hopefully I’ve said enough “thank yous” along the way. To all of you, I hope I have done that.

Most of all, thank you to my mother, sister, and nephew. You have always supported me and my ambitions, when the rest of the world did not. We sacrificed and grew together. This accomplishment is our accomplishment. This Everest is ours—something that we climbed together.

Finally, my Lord and Savior is my well of strength, never ending or failing. None of these wonderful things would have happened had it not been for His divine grace and love. I weep when I think about how He used His greatness to bless me and my family, though we are the smallest of insignificant things. I am thankful that He allowed me to bend but not break and for keeping my hands busy but my heart still. “Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love” (Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi).
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“If we want children to thrive in child care settings, then it makes sense to intentionally build positive relationships with the adults who play the largest roles in the children’s daily lives: their parents. Good communication is essential for building those relationships, but good communication doesn’t just happen. As child care professionals, we must be reflective and intentional about achieving effective parent-provider relationships through good communication.”

(eXtension, 2015, n.p.)

Overview

This chapter introduces the context of this study which explored parent-teacher relationships (PTRs) and parent-teacher communication (PTC) in early childhood (birth to five years) with intentional comparison of White and ethnic-racial minority parents. First, parent engagement is defined. Next, the importance of parent engagement is discussed followed by the importance of communication and standards of practice related to PTC. Then, problems concerning PTRs and communication among ethnic-racial minority parents are discussed. Following a discussion of these problems, the purpose, scope, delimitations, methodological approach, and theoretical underpinning of this study are described. A discussion of the study’s research aims, questions, and utility end the chapter.
Parent Engagement Defined

Parent engagement practices directly connect parents to teachers as well as to their children’s schooling and learning experiences. It refers to “an ongoing process of active participation, communication, and collaboration between parents, schools, and teachers. The goal of parent engagement is to ensure child achievement and success” (Georgia Department of Education, 2015, n.p.). Though termed a variety of ways, parents and teachers partner together during these interactions (e.g., conferences and meetings, classroom participation, and daily communications). They engage in important conversations, information-sharing, and developmental monitoring of children through a process of communicating (verbally and written) and sharing information (National Parent Teacher Association, 2009).

Parent Engagement and Children’s Outcomes

Parent’s engagement in children’s educational and learning experiences is critical to their success in academic performance, school attendance, and social-emotional skill development (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Other research has identified that parent engagement benefits children in language, self-help, social, motor, adaptive, and basic school skills (Caspe, Lopez, & Wolos, 2007) as well as pre-literacy skills (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008), teacher-child relationships, and child attitudes about schooling (Dearing, Kreider, & Weiss, 2008). Further, parents who maintain direct and regular contact with teachers have children who demonstrate positive engagement with peers, adults, and learning (Caspe et al., 2007; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). Moreover, parent engagement is particularly crucial for children who are

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2 Partnerships, collaboration, family engagement, and parental involvement are used interchangeably. “Parent engagement” is used in this dissertation.
ethnic-racial minorities in terms of academic achievement and social outcomes (Jeynes, 2005; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010), especially African American and Latino children (Jeynes, 2003, 2005; Powell et al., 2010).

Though these relationships between parent engagement and child outcomes can be modulated by individual child characteristics like academic skills and gender (Hill & Craft, 2003; Jeynes, 2005), they communicate the importance of parent engagement and are nonetheless compelling. Given the importance of parents’ engagement in children’s educational and learning experiences, many dimensions of parent engagement have been woven into standards of developmentally appropriate practice (Snow, 2015) and endorsed by a variety of schooling and learning entities (e.g., The National Dropout Prevention Center/Network and The National Association for the Education of Young Children), particularly since the passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015).

**The Importance of Communication**

According to Sheridan and Moorman Kim (2015), parents and teachers engage with each other in three main ways—behaviorally, cognitively, and relationally. Behavioral engagement entails behaviors like hosting and attending parent-teacher conferences. Cognitive engagement encompasses parents’ and teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about school and schooling. Relational engagement entails building quality relationships between parents and teachers. Though less prioritized than the other engagement dimensions, relational engagement is critical to how parents involve themselves in their child’s learning and educational experiences (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015). It is also thought to be the most effective way of engaging parents and
developing partnerships between parents and teachers since it emphasizes PTC and quality of PTRs (Sheridan, Moorman Kim, Coutts, Sjuts, Holmes, Ransom, & Garbacz, 2012). Currently, early childhood programs and teachers are expected to engage and involve parents in their children’s educational and learning experiences in ways that are reciprocal, egalitarian, and respectful (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015).

Furthermore, PTRs and communication are viewed as the key to creating and maintaining effective partnerships between parents and teachers. PTC is therefore an integral component of engagement approaches, strategies, and practices (Wong & Hughes, 2006), and it is a critical factor in PTRs (Swick, 2003). In fact, many argue that it is the factor in these relationships as relationships are constituted within communication (Swick, 2003). Today, early childhood programs emphasize the relational dimensions of parent engagement.

**Standards of Practice**

Current standards and guidelines from governing early childhood entities stipulate that parents should be engaged in egalitarian relationships with teachers through communication that is respectful, honest, and open (Sheridan et al., 2012). Furthermore, communication should be between families and early childhood programs (two-way communication) rather than from programs and teachers to families (one-way communication) (Gestwicki, 2015). Several entities establish guidelines for PTRs through PTC and two-way communication. Most pertinent to early childhood, however, are principles from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2015) regarding effective parent engagement:
inviting families to participate in decision-making and goal setting for their child (Principle 1); engage in two-way communication (Principle 2); engage families in ways that are truly reciprocal (Principle 3); provide learning activities for the home and in the community (Principle 4); invite families to participate in program-level decisions and wider advocacy efforts (Principle 5); and implement a comprehensive program-level system of family engagement (Principle 6) (n.p.).

Additionally, Head Start, another early childhood education entity, outlines standards of practice regarding parent engagement. Its Relationship-Based Competencies (RBCs) (2012) stipulate that professionals should address nine elements of respectful and responsive relationships with families and children. Among them are efforts to promote reciprocal and respectful relationships with families (Competency 1) that respond appropriately to families’ cultural capital (Competency 2) while connecting families with peers and the community (Competency 5).

More specifically, two-way communications are particularly recommended as they elicit communication from parents and give them explicit opportunities to communicate and connect with teachers, thereby connecting to children’s educational and learning experiences. These communications emphasize and encourage a dialogue between parents and teachers (Graham-Clay, 2005). Typically, modes of two-way communication include in-person conversations, conversations over email, phone calls, home-school notebooks, classroom visits, and parent-teacher conferences (University of Illinois Extension, 2014).³

³ Two-way communications are distinct from one-way communications in that one-way communications encompass communication in one direction, typically from programs or teachers to parents (e.g., newsletters and other mass notifications). Since they do not elicit responses from parents, they are discouraged in favor of two-way communications.
Additionally, personal modes of two-way communication, such as face-to-face (FTF) communication, best encourage rapport between parents and teachers and allow for more information-sharing (Thompson, 2008). FTF communication is also more effective in establishing a positive PTR than other modes of communication (Gestwicki, 2015; University of Illinois Extension, 2014) because it reduces the “social distance” between parents and teachers and places them as equals to one another (Joshi, Eberly, & Konzal, 2005, p. 14). Additionally, FTF communication during transition periods (i.e., child drop-off and pick-up) are the most common ways that parents communicate with teachers and engage in children’s educational and learning experiences (Gestwicki, 2015). Thus, FTF communication is the best mode of two-way communication.

However, early childhood programs observe and implement parent engagement recommendations and guidelines differently. Many programs are not NAEYC accredited and do not adhere to NAEYC Program Standards which include an explicit focus on relationships with families and parents based on mutual trust and respect (Program Standard 7; NAEYC, n.d.). Further, some early childhood programs are not recognized as part of states’ K-12 public education systems and subsequently are not required to adhere to federal standards of parent engagement, such as provisions articulated by NCLB (Department of Education [DOE], 2004) that require “regular, two-way, and meaningful communication” between schools, teachers, and parents (p. 3).

In addition, some early childhood settings are exempt from observing state or federal regulations concerning parent engagement, such as half-day programs and those operated through religious institutions (NAEYC, 1998; North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education [DCDEE], 2015). Moreover, overarching guidelines
and recommendations such as NAEYC standards or Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) standards for parent engagement are interpreted and implemented differently across states and individual early childhood programs (Barrueco, Smith, & Stephens, 2015; NAEYC, 1998). Thus, there is overwhelming variability in what standards early childhood programs observe and how they implement guiding principles of effective parent engagement, particularly among ethnic-racial minority parents.

**The Problem at Hand**

Despite this variability, there is consensus among early childhood entities and scholars regarding the role of communication in parent engagement practices (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015). However, there is growing evidence to suggest that early childhood programs have difficulty implementing successful strategies and approaches for communicating with ethnically and racially diverse parents (Haines, Summers, Turnbull, & Rutherford Turnbull, 2015). Though standards and guidelines clearly explicate that parents should be engaged in relationships with teachers as equals and through two-way communication, research overwhelmingly shows that ethnic-racial minority parents have disparate experiences in PTRs and communication as compared to White parents.

For example, ethnic-racial minority parents tend to have poor relationships and interpersonal interactions with teachers (Huang & Mason, 2008), and many parents experience disrespectful or hostile PTRs (Murray, Finigan-Carr, Jones, Copeland-Linder, Haynie, & Cheng, 2014). Ethnic-racial minority parents often have less supportive relationships with teachers as compared to White parents (Hughes & Kwok, 2007), and ethnic-racial minority parents frequently experience social exclusion (Huang & Mason,
Consequently, many ethnic-racial minority parents remain disconnected from their child’s learning and educational experiences (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009) and tend to be less involved in their children’s educational and learning experiences than White parents (Iruka, Durden, & Kennel, 2015; Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009).

These parents’ experiences are concerning since ethnically and racially diverse children comprise a growing majority of enrollment in early childhood programs. Children who are ethnically and racially diverse represent a large portion of current early childhood enrollment (the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015a), particularly African American and Asian children (Musu-Gillette, Robinson, McFarland, KewalRamani, Zhang, & Wilkinson-Flicker, 2016). Data show that 32% of Hispanic, 39% of Black, and 20% of Asian three- to five-year-olds were enrolled in preschool programs in 2014 (NCES, 2015b). Further, children of immigrants in early childhood programs has doubled since 1990 (Fortuny, Hernandez, & Chaundry, 2010) and account for one-fourth of all American children (Child Trends, 2014a). Moreover, pre-kindergarten enrollment is projected to become populated by more diverse children than White children by 2022 (Hussar & Bailey, 2013).

Thus, parents of many ethnic and racial groups are steadily entering early childhood programs, yet they tend to have lower quality interactions and relationships with teachers compared to White parents. It is therefore critical to explore these parents’ relationships and communications with their children’s teachers so that (a) early childhood programs better meet standards of inclusive family engagement and (b) to
encourage ethnic-racial minority children’s learning outcomes in a variety of developmental domains.

**Purpose**

This purpose of this study was to learn about parent-teacher relationships and parent-teacher communication in early childhood, comparing parents’ and teachers’ perceptions and experiences regarding relationships and communication according to parents’ ethnicities and races.

**Scope and Delimitations**

While early childhood is widely recognized as the years spanning from birth to age eight (NAEYC, 2009), this study delimited its focus to examine relationships and communication of parents and teachers of children from birth to age five, prior to enrolling in kindergarten and entering formal schooling because there are few studies that examine these processes within these years (LaForett & Mendez, 2010; Smith, Robbins, Stagman, & Mathur, 2013).

This study also focused explicitly on the relational dimension of parent engagement (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015)—PTRs and PTC. While the other dimensions of engagement (i.e., behavioral and cognitive) are important for children’s holistic development (Halgunseth, Peterson, Stark, & Moodie, 2009), they were not examined in the current study. Further, while parent engagement encompasses connections and collaboration between families, schools, and communities (Pope Edwards & Kutaka, 2015), parent engagement in learning contexts (schools and educational programs) is regarded as the most valuable type of engagement (Kim, 2009). Therefore, this study specifically examined parent-teacher processes. This study also
deliberately took both parents’ and teachers’ perspectives and experiences into account to (a) capture parents’ perspectives, which have not been fully represented in the literature (Sheridan et al., 2012), and (b) render a more complete understanding of parent-teacher interpersonal dynamics by understanding parents’ and teachers’ points of view.

**Defining of terms.** “Parent engagement” is used throughout this dissertation. However, this term is conceptually similar to other interchangeable terms such as parent-teacher partnerships, collaboration, and family-school engagement. In this study, “parent” refers to parents of young children (birth to five years), and “White parent” refers to parents who self-identify as White. “Ethnic-racial minority parent” refers to parents who are Asian American, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, or Other. Finally, “teacher” refers to the child’s teacher (primary caregiver) in the early childhood program. These individuals are referred to as “teachers” rather than “childcare providers” or other similar terms because these individuals provide not only care for children, but teach them in profound ways (Whitebook & Darrah, 2013).

**Methodological Approach**

A mixed methods approach was used to capitalize on the benefits of quantitative and qualitative approaches while also simultaneously compensating for the shortcomings in each approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Moreover, this approach was used as an exclusively quantitative or qualitative approach would provide an incomplete understanding of PTRs and communication (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). That is, a

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4 Partnership, engagement, and involvement are terms most often used, with involvement being the oldest (Pope Edwards & Kutaka, 2015), and parental engagement, family engagement, and parental involvement are used interchangeably (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012).

5 These ethnic-racial categories have been informed by definitions of minority groups by The Centers for Disease Control (CDC, 2014).
quantitative approach would capture information about parents’ and teachers’ perceptions as well as differences in those perceptions, but would neglect their experiences from their own points of view. Similarly, a qualitative approach would summarize parents’ and teachers’ experiences, but would not be statistically supported or applicable to other parent or teacher populations. A mixed methods approach was therefore used to collect different but complementary data that construct a deep understanding of PTRs and communication when considered in relation to one another.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study adopted the position that relationships are constituted in communication (Swick, 2003). It also focused exclusively on the relational aspects of parent engagement (i.e., interpersonal relationships and communication) as these aspects are key in building positive connections between parents and teachers (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015). Therefore, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT; Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987) was used to guide the scope and methodological approach of this study. CAT can be applied to almost any situation in which communication occurs and it prioritizes communicative processes within relational processes. Therefore, it is useful in understanding PTC and how communication impacts these relationships overall.

CAT’s four main assumptions (West & Turner, 2014) were key in this study. First, CAT suggests that language and behaviors during conversation communicate social identity, social status, and group membership. Ethnic-racial minority parents frequently represent sociohistorical experiences and epistemological orientations that differ from White parents and White teachers (Lasky, 2000; Lawson, 2003). As such, these
differences may communicatively manifest in interpersonal interactions and conversation with their children’s teachers and subsequently impact the PTR.

Second, conversations between individuals have speech and behavioral similarities and dissimilarities. Typically, individuals who share commonalities (e.g., beliefs, personalities, behaviors) tend to also have conversational similarities. Likewise, those who have differences tend to have conversational dissimilarities. Since ethnic-racial minority parents may have more demographic, sociocultural, and sociohistorical differences from teachers than White parents (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002), it is possible that their communication would also have such dissimilarities.

Furthermore, CAT suggests that individuals communicatively converge or diverge with one another in conversation to emphasize similarities or differences, respectively. Communicative convergence entails adaptations that reduce social differences whereas communicative divergence encompasses the accentuation of verbal and nonverbal differences to emphasize dissimilarity between speakers and conversation partners. Individuals can converge or diverge in several ways including speech registers, prosody, pauses, and nonverbal communication, such as smiling and use of emblems and gestures (Dragojevic, Gasiorek, & Giles, 2014; Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). For example, individuals may model another’s speech and behaviors to seem similar or pleasing to that conversation partner. By aligning one’s speech and behaviors to another’s in conversation, similarities between the two become evidenced and emphasized. Therefore, these features of communication warrant examination in understanding parents’ and teachers’ communication with one another.
Third, CAT proposes that social conventions and cultural norms dictate how individuals accommodate to one another through communicative convergence or divergence. These conventions and norms also determine how their communicative speech, behaviors, and adaptations are perceived to be appropriate or inappropriate. It is possible that ethnic-racial minority parents may communicate in ways that reflect differing social customs and conventions (Han & Thomas, 2010).

Fourth, CAT suggests that the ways in which conversational speech and behaviors are perceived influence one’s evaluation of the conversation. That is, how communicative messages are understood and interpreted impact how conversations are evaluated. Further, how communicators perceive their conversational partners’ behavior will affect future encounters; positively rated conversations will lead to further communication whereas negative appraisals reduce the likelihood of future communication and conversation. It is therefore possible that ethnic-racial minority parents’ communicative behaviors may be misinterpreted or deemed as inappropriate by teachers. Correspondingly, teachers may evaluate communication with ethnic-racial minority parents differently than they do communication with White parents. Consequently, PTRs may differ between White and ethnic-racial minority parents due in part to these communicative differences.

In sum, CAT presents tremendous usefulness in this study. First, it suggests that social differences manifest in communication. Since relationships are constituted in communication (Swick, 2003), communication in PTRs may reveal important differences between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents. Examination of PTC is therefore warranted as communication is key to how parents and teachers share
information and develop interpersonal connections. Moreover, since communication is implicit, use of this theory in guiding the scope and methodological approach of this study will help to isolate the features of PTC.

**Research Aims and Questions**

This study had three research aims: (1) to learn about parents’ and teachers’ relationships and to identify differences in perceptions and experiences according to ethnicity and race; (2) to learn about parents’ and teachers’ communication perceptions and experiences and if they vary by ethnicity/race; and (3) to elaborate on quantitative results about PTRs using qualitative findings about PTC. The primary research questions (RQ) are provided below:
Aim 1: To learn about parents’ and teachers’ relationships and to identify differences in perceptions and experiences according to ethnicity and race.

1. What are parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about PTRs?
   - How do parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about PTRs compare between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?
     1a. What are the relationships between demographic variables and perceived PTR quality?
     1b. Do perceptions about the PTR differ for participant groups after controlling for demographic variables (potential covariates)?

2. What are parents’ and teachers’ experiences in PTRs?
   - How do parents’ and teachers’ experiences in PTRs compare between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?

Aim 2: To learn about parents’ and teachers’ communication and identify differences in perceptions and experiences according to ethnicity/race.

3. What are parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about their communication (PTC)?
   - How do parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about their communication (PTC) compare between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?

4. What are parents’ and teachers’ communication experiences (PTC)?
   - How do parents’ and teachers’ experiences compare between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?

Aim 3: To elaborate on quantitative findings (information about PTRs) that emerge using qualitative findings (information about PTC).

5. Which PTC experiences characterize the relationship patterns that emerge?
   - How do PTC characterizations compare between PTRs of White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?
Utility

Results of this study inform what is known about (a) how White and ethnic-racial minority parents as well as teachers perceive relationships and communication, (b) what these parents and teachers experience in relationships and communication, and (c) how their perceptions and experiences compare according to parents’ ethnicities/races. Findings benefit early childhood professionals such as program directors and teachers, especially those who work with ethnically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse parents. Researchers who study early childhood education (e.g., intercultural parent involvement, constructing and implementing inclusive standards of practice, and professional workforce development) may also find results and findings useful as well as teacher educators. Several disciplines and other areas of research may also benefit from this study, including teacher learning and teacher education professionals and researchers (K-12) in addition to communication studies researchers, particularly those who examine the negotiation of social identities in language or whose scholarly work encompasses intergroup communication and communication in educational settings.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

PTRs are established in communication (Swick, 2003), but simply communicating with parents is not sufficient for building positive and effective relationships between parents and teachers. Instead, communication between parents and teachers should be characterized by respectful, honest, and open dialogue (Sheridan et al., 2012). However, relationships and communication between ethnic-racial minority parents and teachers are frequently poor and ineffective across socioeconomic status (SES), ethnicity, and parent and child enrollment characteristics (Kim, 2009).

In this chapter, literature is presented that characterizes ethnic-racial minority parents’ disparate experiences in PTRs and communication. First, parents’ and teachers’ conflicting sociocultural and sociohistorical orientations are discussed. Then, parents’ experiences with disrespect are discussed, followed by distrust, a lack of mutual understanding, and frequent and substantive communication. A summary and a description of knowledge gaps addressed by the study end the chapter.

Conflicting Sociocultural and Sociohistorical Orientations of Parents and Teachers

Parents want to be treated as teachers’ equals (Graham-Clay, 2005), and regulatory entities as well as scholars contend that teachers should, above all, value parents’ authority and wisdom as children’s first teachers (Graham-Clay, 2005; The Urban Child Institute, 2011). True parent-teacher partnerships require teachers to view parents as having expertise about their own children and families that should be consulted and integrated into teaching and guiding children (Gestwicki, 2015). However, teachers
often doubt the efficacy of ethnic-racial minority parents in this capacity (Kim, 2009) as well as their roles in contributing to children’s education and educational experiences (Baum & McMurray-Schwartz, 2004).

Lasky (2000) suggests that this is due in part to a model of “schooling” that positions teachers as experts who are more knowledgeable about meeting children’s developmental and learning needs than parents. Despite a growing emphasis on reciprocity and egalitarianism between parents and teachers, this model is prevalent as well as predominant (Lasky, 2000) and occurs implicitly as well as explicitly (e.g., how parent engagement practices are structured through policies and rules as well as implicit conversational processes). Furthermore, although contemporary models of parent engagement better address egalitarianism between parents and teachers than traditional approaches of the past, they are nonetheless built from a foundation that observed a strict division between parents and teachers and do not fully unite parents and teachers in egalitarian ways (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015).

According to Lawson (2003), parents’ and teachers’ beliefs and expectations for children’s education and learning experiences stem from sociocultural and sociohistorical orientations, and these orientations frequently contradict one another (Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, & Eggers-Piérola, 1995; Wilson, 2014). Since parents’ and teachers’ beliefs, values, and expectations are informed by different sources of knowledge (Wilson, 2014), some teachers are less receptive to parents’ points of view, especially when they are different from their own (Sturm, 1997). For example, parental ethnotheories inform parents’ expectations for children’s behavior and development. In particular, these ethnotheories influence how parents feed their children or perform self-care tasks for
them, among other developmental tasks and milestones (Harkness & Super, 1992/2014). These parenting practices, though culturally bound and relevant, often conflict with policies of early childhood programs and teachers’ practices designed to promote children’s independence and growth in various domains of child development (Isik-Ercan, 2017).

Lee and Bowen (2006) suggest that ethnically and racially diverse parents experience cultural disadvantage in this way and others. That is, minority parents’ cultural capital—culturally-related assets like language, styles of speech, and ways of life—is not as easily or readily recognized as Whites parents’ cultural capital by teachers. Subsequently, many parents’ beliefs, values, expectations, and behaviors are interpreted to deficient rather than different (Gestwicki, 2015; Harry, 2008; Iruka et al., 2015; Lightfoot, 2004). Many scholars also contend that a “minority myth,” which perpetuates notions that some parents are ignorant, unresponsive, and do not care about their child’s education or learning (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978, 2003), is pervasive today. Though parents view themselves as crucial in the learning process (Martin, 2015), many teachers have misconceptions about diverse families and parents. For example, many parents have been labeled as unsupportive of education, poorly educated, and uncaring (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006) as a result of these deficient views of ethnic-racial minority parents.

Furthermore, these differing sociocultural and sociohistorical orientations not only conflict with one another but are also sources of contention as they can produce interpersonal conflict between parents and teachers. Many times, it is difficult for teachers to reconcile these differences and ultimately conflicts occur instead of
compromise (Isik-Ercan, 2017). For example, many parents and teachers experience conflict over rules and policies, curriculum, and developmental goals (Wilson, 2014). However, beliefs and values regarding these issues are embedded in cultural notions of health, well-being, respect, and power (Wilson, 2014). Frequently, these issues are sources of contention between parents and teachers as a result of differing beliefs, values, and expectations. Moreover, teachers tend to expect conflict to occur more frequently with ethnically and racially diverse parents than White parents because of differing beliefs and expectations (Baum & McMurray-Schwartz, 2004).

These conflicts can complicate communication between parents and teachers (Lasater, 2016), thereby increasing the likelihood that future communication will stall or even cease (West & Turner, 2014). Resolving these conflicts through collaborative problem-solving between parents and teachers can be difficult due to the model of “schooling” that favors teachers’ ways of thinking and acting over parents’ (Lasky, 2000). Conflict resolution can also be difficult due to teachers’ lack of interpersonal and intercultural skills training (Pope Edwards & Kutaka, 2015). As a result, conflicts can derail PTC and interpersonal dynamics and never completely regain a positive and collaborative atmosphere (Joshi et al., 2005).

Differing Expectations

Additionally, parents and teachers often have differing expectations regarding their participation in early childhood programs (e.g., hosting and attending family events or parent meetings in the early childhood program), the scope and depth of their PTRs, and the styles of their PTC (Cardona, Jain, & Canfield-Davis, 2012). Frequently, these expectations for relationships, interactions, and communication with one another are
incompatible (Holloway et al., 1995), and incompatible or unmet expectations can be detrimental to parents’ and teachers’ relationships (Carlisle, Stanley, & Kemple, 2005; Harry, 2008).

Conceptualizing parent engagement is related to ethnicity, social class, educational attainment, and language among ethnically and racially diverse parents (Cardona et al., 2012), and these social position characteristics tend to differ from those of teachers. For example, most early childhood care providers and teachers are White (63% and 78%, respectively) (Saluja et al., 2002). Most teachers also have a graduate education (NCES, 2013a) and are middle-class (NCES, 2013b), whereas many parents of children in early childhood programs have completed only high school and are searching for employment (Child Trends, 2014b).

Moreover, ethnically and racially diverse parents are not monolithic, and expectations for one’s involvement and interaction(s) vary across ethnic-racial groups (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010). For example, many African American parents view schooling to be a function of practical preparation (Doucet, 2008) whereas Chinese American parents focus on systematic teaching of their children at home, and White parents volunteer at school (Huntsinger & Jose, 2009). Differences in parents’ expectations regarding their involvement in their children’s educational and learning experiences therefore manifest differently. As a result, interpersonal dynamics between ethnic-racial minority parents and teachers may be different as a result of these expectations. Yet, many approaches to interacting and communicating with parents

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6 Social position refers to the position ascribed to an individual within a social hierarchy. Factors influencing this social stratification can include, but is not limited to, gender, age, ethnicity, and education (Lindemann, 2007).
follow a one-size-fits-all model (Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003) that tend to be
determined by early childhood programs, with little integration of parents’ varying
expectations or needs (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015).

Moreover, these differing expectations for one’s involvement and interpersonal
dynamics are often informed by individual funds of knowledge (González, Moll, &
Amanti, 2005) and shape expectations regarding adherence to rules, punctuality, and
initiation and responses to communication, among others (Gestwicki, 2015). When
parents’ behaviors do not fit within the predominant engagement, relationship, and
communication models of early childhood programs and teachers, teachers make
judgments about their behaviors, often interpreting their actions in relation to their own
experiences and knowledge (Graue & Brown, 2003), the model of “schooling” (Lasky,
2000), and “minority myth” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978) that persist. For example,
teachers often minimize families’ differences, expect families to conform to the
expectations of schools and educational programs, and infer parents’ lack of involvement
in classroom functions or communication with teachers to mean a disvalue of education
and learning (Colombo, 2005). Thus, these expectations are influenced by sociocultural
and sociohistorical orientations and can be misinterpreted by teachers if he or she lacks
the contextual or cultural knowledge relevant to understanding parents’ expectations for
involvement, interactions, and communication (Gestwicki, 2015).

Experiences of Disrespect

**Verbal.** Ethnic-racial minority parents frequently have disparate experiences
because of unintentional disrespect in their relationships, interactions, and
communication(s) with teachers. Parents want to be treated with respect (Gestwicki,
2015; Graham-Clay, 2005), and Graham-Clay (2005) suggests that communication between parents and teachers should involve respect, understanding, and empathy. However, many teachers are unaware that disrespect, rejection, and judgment can be unintentionally communicated (Wilson, 2014). For example, teachers are to welcome and greet parents by name (Gonzalez-Mena, 2014). Parents want to belong (Gestwicki, 2015), and welcoming and greeting parents help create a collaborative and inclusive atmosphere to which parents feel connected. Greeting parents by name also improves PTC and the PTR thereafter, but many teachers do not engage in this practice (Ingvarsson & Hanley, 2006). As a result, this can unintentionally communicate a lack of acknowledgment and disrespect to parents.

Furthermore, teachers must initiate communication with parents, as the responsibility to do so rests with the teacher, rather than the parent (Gestwicki, 2015). Many teachers, however, feel hesitant of ethnically and racially diverse parents or fear that their attempts to communicate with these parents will be rejected, and they consequently initiate less (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005). Many teachers are also cautious to begin conversations with parents, thinking that conversations with parents will be time-consuming and interfere with their teaching and classroom responsibilities (Gestwicki, 2015). Subsequently, they control the discussion to be less open and less parent-directed (Sturm, 1997).

Additionally, discursive tools help to convey respect and inclusion to parents, such as expressing an understanding of what parents’ think and feel as well as valuing how parents’ feel (McNaughton et al., 2008). Teachers can also convey feelings of care to parents and reflect parents’ affects when conversing to demonstrate and encourage
respect and inclusion (Graham-Clay, 2005). In previous research, these strategies have been effective in interpersonal interactions and they also meet parents’ expectations of being treated as teachers’ equals and with respect (Graham-Clay, 2005). Teachers can also show respect for parents by avoiding judgmental (e.g. blaming), controlling (e.g., advising), and overly intellectual conversation and communication as well as communication that includes joking and sarcasm (Wilson, 2014).

However, many ethnically and racially diverse parents experience disrespect in their interactions with teachers (Murray et al., 2014) because teachers are frequently unfamiliar with these discursive tools (Pope Edwards & Kutaka, 2015). For example, teachers may unintentionally communicate stereotypes and microaggressions (Kurylo & Robles, 2015). As a result, ethnically and racially diverse parents sometimes perceive and experience discrimination related to their ethnic and racial identities via culturally insensitive jokes and sarcasm (Bernhard et al., 1998) that have been unintentionally construed as appropriate.

**Nonverbal.** Teachers’ nonverbal communication and behaviors can be unintentionally culturally insensitive or assaultive to parents as well (Wilson, 2014). According to Swick, “nonverbal communication is the most powerful form of communication” (2003, p. 278) as it can convey care and respect, or lack thereof, to parents. In most cases, verbal messages account for a very small portion of the communication that occurs. Instead, nonverbal signals are more important than verbal messages in communication, particularly facial expressions and voice tone (Gestwicki,

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7 “Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007, p. 271).
For example, facial expressions communicate a variety of interpersonal information to other people, and they affect behavior, including whether individuals should be approached or avoided, and the types of judgments and conclusions that should be made (Tracy, Randles, & Steckler, 2015).

Moreover, when nonverbal and verbal signals do not match, listeners will rely on nonverbal cues (i.e., body language, facial expressions, and gestures) to determine the meaning of a message. When messages are unclear, listeners form their responses to messages based upon their perceptions of the speaker, rather than the message content. This is important because individuals are most likely to default to his or her perceptions of the other party to process and understand messages, which could be problematic in PTC if parents or teachers perceive the other negatively. However, many teachers are unfamiliar with these interpersonal dimensions of communication and have had few opportunities to practice the use of positive nonverbal behaviors and language (Pope Edwards & Kutaka, 2015).

Furthermore, these nonverbal channels of communication are culturally constructed and socially mediated. For example, social conventions of Western culture suggest that eye contact communicates interest and attentiveness (Gestwicki, 2015), and eye contact can influence attitudes and perceptions of persuasiveness, regulate interpersonal dynamics, communicate emotions, define power and status, and impact how individuals are perceived (Wilson, 2014). Conversely, social conventions of other cultures dictate different standards for eye contact (e.g., looking down to signal respect among Japanese, Puerto Rican, Mexican American, and African American individuals). Latino Americans tend to engage in longer eye contact during conversations than
Europeans and African Americans, and African American listeners gaze less at speakers than do White listeners (Kostelnik, Soderman, Whiren, & Rupiper, 2018). Further, eye contact is not a social convention in many Asian cultures, and use of Westernized views of eye contact can make parents who identify with this ethnic and cultural group uncomfortable, or convey messages to them that are rude or disrespectful (Wilson, 2014). Similarly, parents’ lack of eye contact can communicate disinterest, avoidance, or disrespect to teachers if they are not familiar with these cultural variations in nonverbal channels of communication.

Additionally, teachers should also use nonverbal communications such as body language carefully as they can convey physical impressions of dis/interest and can open and close channels of communication. Teachers should avoid bodily orientations and positions that place distance between he or she and the parent (Gestwicki, 2015). For example, body position and orientation can communicate that someone is cooperative, such as standing side-by-side, while some bodily actions can also block communication between parents and teachers (e.g., fidgeting, leaning, and looking off or away) (Wilson, 2014). The SOLER framework of interpersonal skills is frequently recommended, and it involves (S) a square posture, (O) an open position, (L) leaning towards the other, (E) eye contact, and (R) a relaxed position (Egan, 1990; Graham-Clay, 2005). Teachers should also use emblems—gestures and bodily actions that convey a verbal meaning—carefully as their meanings vary by culture (Hartman, 2004).

Gestwicki (2015) suggests that, in addition to being familiar with the various channels of communication, teachers also need to be socially adept. That is, teachers read parents’ behaviors to determine how they likely feel about what is being said (e.g., if
conversation partners understand what is said, are uncomfortable, etc.). This involves being able to correctly interpret parents’ behaviors, a skill that many teachers have yet to master (Pope Edwards & Kutaka, 2015). This also involves self-monitoring skills in which teachers closely observe parents’ behaviors and reactions and subsequently change one’s own behavior. However, many teachers are less knowledgeable about the usage of these nonverbal channels of communication and many interpersonal dimensions of communicating are unpracticed by teachers (Pope Edwards & Kutaka, 2015).

**Teachers’ intercultural skills.** Furthermore, many teachers are additionally unskilled at engaging and communicating with ethnically and racially diverse parents specifically (Pope Edwards & Kutaka, 2015) due to underdeveloped intercultural skills. Many teachers enter teaching positions with little intercultural skills training as many teacher preparation programs include minimal exposure to or training pertaining to ethnically and racially diverse groups, through perhaps only one or two multicultural education classes over the course of an entire bachelor’s level degree program (Menchaca, 1996). These classes tend to be child-focused and, while this is important to the goals and purposes of teacher education programs, teacher candidates commonly enter the job market with few cultural competence and intercultural skills oriented to collaborating with parents who are ethnically, racially, culturally, linguistically, or socioeconomically diverse from them (Kang & Hyatt, 2010).

Moreover, it is recommended that teachers demonstrate an appreciation for diversity in interactions with parents and work towards cultural competence to better understand parents (Gonzalez-Mena, 2014). This entails five primary dimensions: “acknowledging cultural differences; understanding one’s own culture; engaging in self-
assessment; acquiring cultural knowledge and skills; and viewing behavior within a cultural context” (Gestwicki, 2015, p. 383). This last dimension is particularly difficult for teachers. Because many teachers’ have limited proficiency with regard to intercultural skills, ethnic-racial minority parents’ behaviors are often misinterpreted to mean dismissal or disvalue of teachers’ efforts or the importance of parent engagement (Huss-Keeler, 1997). However, many early childhood programs do not require or provide cultural competence training for their staff, and implementing skills training can be difficult for programs, staff, and teachers (NAEYC, 2012). As a result, many ethnic-racial minority parents have disparate experiences in their relationships and communication with teachers due to teachers’ underdeveloped intercultural skills.

**Distrust**

Trust is also an important part of positive and effective PTRs and communication. According to Swick (2003), “trust-building is essential to having authentic, meaningful, and growth-promoting communication” (p. 275), and trust can be enhanced by improving PTC and quality of parent-teacher interactions (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Swick (2003) identified four communicative behaviors that are key in developing trust with parents: (1) approachability in that an individual feels comfortable and secure with the other person; (2) sensitivity that communicates positivity and support; (3) flexibility; and (4) dependability. In particular, dependability is thought to be the foundation to building trust between parents and teachers (Swick, 2003). Acceptance, support, and enthusiasm communicate and build trust between parents and teachers (Gestwicki, 2015), as well as openness to feedback, understanding and empathy, and reciprocated trust (Graham-Clay, 2005).
However, parents’ and teachers’ views of and experiences with trust tend to differ. For example, teachers’ care for their profession, parents, and students are important elements in parents’ trust in teachers, while parents’ competence and integrity are important elements in teachers’ trust in parents (Chang, 2013). Furthermore, teachers’ sense of trust in parents tends to be lower than parents’ trust in teachers, and parents’ sense of trust in teachers tends to decrease with children’s age (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

Moreover, ethnic-racial minority parents also have difficulty developing trust with teachers (Brewster & Railsback, 2017). Extant research has identified that race is an important determinant of an individual’s feelings of trust (Smith, 2010). That is, individuals who are ethnic-racial minorities tend to have less trust in others than White individuals, largely due to experiences with interpersonal and institutional discrimination. Moreover, individuals tend to have more trust in others who are similar to them or who they perceive to be a part of their group membership. When individuals are perceived to be different, individuals have less trust in them, expect them to be less fair, and cooperate less with them.

However, though parents and teachers feel that communication is the primary way to enhance trust in their PTRs (Adams & Christenson, 2000), the ways in which trust is construed and constructed among ethnic-racial minority parents remains unknown. It is possible that trust, like many other constructs (e.g., respect), is culturally constructed or informed and could be miscommunicated or misinterpreted between parents and teachers.
A Lack of Mutual Understanding

Ethnic-racial minority parents also have disparate experiences with teachers as a result of miscommunication and a lack of mutual understanding. Communication is thought to be even more important in intercultural PTRs and communication (Joshi et al., 2005). Yet, parents who are culturally and linguistically different from teachers are more likely to experience miscommunication with teachers than White parents (Ozturk, 2013; Tang, 2015). Culturally and linguistically diverse parents and teachers frequently face language barriers (e.g., grammar, syntax, dialect, or accent) that complicate mutual understanding (Joshi et al., 2005; Turney & Kao, 2009).

The primary purpose of communicating with parents is to understand the parent (i.e., correctly interpreting messages) and to also be understood by the parent. When either of these two purposes fails, miscommunication occurs. To prevent miscommunication, scholars recommend that idioms, jargon, and otherwise nondescript or ambiguous expressions should be avoided (Gestwicki, 2015; Wilson, 2014). However, teachers often speak to parents in ways that are not easily understood by parents, using language that is specific to developmental domains and educational terms that parents do not readily know (Joshi et al., 2005).

Moreover, discursive strategies oriented to achieving mutual understand are often not taught to teachers or used within education contexts (McNaughton, Hamlin, McCarthy, Head-Reeves, & Schreiner, 2008). For example, teachers are encouraged to use clarification statements and paraphrase reflections that clarify parents’ perspectives (Graham-Clay, 2005) and tell the parent that he or she is understood. Individuation, which entails recognizing identities through communication, is also recommended
Active listening strategies are also recommended to ensure understanding. Specifically, these active listening dimensions are: (1) listening, empathizing, and communicating respect; (2) asking open-ended questions and taking notes; (3) focusing on the issues; and (4) finding the first step toward developing a solution (LAFF strategy).

In previous research, these strategies have been found to improve parents’ perceptions of effective communication (McNaughton et al., 2008). However, these strategies oriented to mutual understanding are used more frequently in other communicative contexts like nursing (McNaughton et al., 2008), and they are seldom used in educational contexts. Consequently, many of these communicative strategies are not taught to teachers or practiced during their education and training.

Furthermore, Caspe and colleagues (2007) identified six effective strategies for interethnic and interracial interactions. Among them are recommendations to (1) accommodate parents who acquired English as a second language either through written components of communication or translation, (2) communicate with all families despite less visibility at school, and (3) encourage parents’ ideas and feedback. However, these strategies may not fully compensate or overcome language barriers that culturally and linguistically diverse parents and teachers frequently face. Moreover, these strategies may not be explicitly taught to teachers, and they may also not be used in high-stress or frustrating situations.

**Frequent and Substantive Communication**

In addition, ethnic-racial minority parents have disparate experiences with regard to frequent and substantive communication with teachers. Although frequent communication is needed to encourage ongoing communication and relationships
between parents and teachers (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015), teachers tend to interact less with ethnic-racial minority parents than White parents (Bernhard et al., 1998). Furthermore, research has also found that parents and teachers informally observe a division of responsibility regarding communicating to and with one another (Zarate, 2007). Parents tend to connect with teachers when there is a need, such as a child’s poor academic performance. Teachers do this as well, such as when a child displays challenging behaviors. Though teachers may reciprocate parents’ needs to meet or communicate, communication between parents and teachers is often need-based and sporadic (Zarate, 2007).

There are also challenges to communicating frequently. Parents and teachers have different accessibility during daily conversations. Whereas teachers are more accessible for conversations during morning transitions, parents are more available in the afternoon (Gestwicki, 2015). In addition, parents frequently experience barriers to in-person communication including a lack of time and perceptions that teachers are hard to talk to or are intimidating (The Parent Academy, 2012), with lack of time being the most common barrier (Joshi et al., 2005). While some teachers prefer FTF communication over other forms of communication as it allows them to negotiate shared meanings with parents (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000), some teachers prefer written, electronic communication for its convenience (Barnes, Guin, Allen, & Jolly, 2016; Joshi et al., 2005) and typically communicate with parents less (Thompson, 2008).

Moreover, parents and teachers may have poor communications with one another despite communicating frequently. Transition periods during the day (i.e., child drop-off and pick-up) are the most popular periods of PTC (Gestwicki, 2015). However,
conversations between parents and teachers are typically brief (Gestwicki, 2015), having a median length of 12 seconds (Endsley & Minish, 1991). Further, PTC tends to primarily encompass greetings and discussion of routine matters, like a child’s daily activities (Endsley & Minish, 1991), and parents and teachers seldom discuss children’s development or developmental needs during these brief exchanges (Endsley & Minish, 1991). Additionally, these conversations consist of mostly social niceties and lack substance (Gestwicki, 2015).

Thus, these most common methods of PTC may provide limited opportunities to have meaningful conversation (Gonzalez-Mena, 2014). Though parents and teachers may communicate frequently, their communications may not be as substantive as needed in order to build quality PTRs and communication partnerships.

Summary

The summarized research highlights inconsistencies between the missions of prevailing parent engagement standards through communication and relationships and the actual experiences of ethnically and racially diverse parents. While there are challenges in all PTRs and communication across ethnicity and race, ethnic-racial minority parents have experiences that White parents do not experience (Joshi et al., 2005; Soutullo, Smith-Bonahue, Sanders-Smith, & Navia, 2016) regarding disrespect and mutual understanding, among others. Furthermore, much of ethnic-racial minority parents’ disparate experiences can be attributed to (a) views of “schooling” that devalue these parents’ insights and critical role in shaping their children’s’ development and (b) a lack of cultural competence and intercultural skills among teachers.
Though these experiences persist, there is little known about why they endure in contemporary times amidst egalitarian models of parent engagement (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015), greater ethnic and racial diversity than ever before (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016), and an increased focus on high quality, developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood settings since the passing of NCLB (DOE, 2004). Research is therefore needed in order illuminate PTRs and communication in relation to parents’ ethnicities and races.

Gaps in the Literature

Though previous studies have their merits and contribute to what is known about PTRs and communication, additional study of these processes through comprehensive and rigorous methods is needed. First, there have been no contemporary studies (i.e., Endsley & Minish, 1991) on PTC that capture patterns, trends, and differences in what parents and teachers talk about as well as how things are discussed. This study examined these processes across parents’ ethnicities and races.

Second, the majority of studies on parent engagement, PTRs, and PTC have also been exclusively quantitative in design (i.e., correlational) (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). While these methods are useful, they do little to fully leverage the voices of parents, and qualitative or mixed methods inquiries could be very informative to this body of literature. This study therefore used mixed methods to develop a deep understanding of PTRs and communication using multiple sources of data from parents, teachers, and program directors.

Third, Hispanic/Latino, Asian American, and mixed-race parents are underrepresented in the literature (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), yet they account for a
growing proportion of enrollment in early childhood programs. It is important to examine these parents’ experiences with teachers with regard to relationships and communication. This study added to this knowledge gap by examining PTRs and communication among ethnic-racial minority parents who identified as Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, and “Other.”

Fourth, early childhood is often siloed into kindergarten to third grade. Research on parent engagement has been most commonly examined in the early elementary years (Smith et al., 2013) and there are few studies of parent engagement in preschool (LaForett & Mendez, 2010). However, how parents are engaged in relationships and communication with teachers during the years prior to kindergarten is important to children’s outcomes and development (Powell et al., 2010). A benefit of this study is that it examined the years prior to formal schooling and included data from parents and teachers from infancy to age five.

Fifth, most of the studies on parent engagement have focused on behavioral or cognitive dimensions rather than the relational lens (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015). This is an important area to study since it is the most effective means of building partnerships and relationships between parents and teachers (Sheridan et al., 2012). Further, though some studies have examined the relational dimensions of parent engagement (relationships and communication), there have been no studies that comprehensively examine PTRs and communication together despite that relationships are created and maintained through communication (Swick, 2003). This study addressed this need by examining communication holistically and within the context of PTRs.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Overview

This chapter presents the mixed methods used in this study. First, the design of the study and the research sites are described. Then, recruitment, sampling, and data collection procedures are discussed. A discussion of the study’s approach to data analysis concludes the chapter.

Study Design

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) to investigate PTRs and PTC of White and ethnic-racial minority parents. This design was used to develop a full understanding of PTRs and communication that would have been underrepresented using a singular approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Scores on a quantitative instrument about PTRs were collected first and then elaborated and extended by qualitative data (interview transcripts and observational field notes). There were two points of interface between the two types of data. First, quantitative results informed which participants were selected for the qualitative portion of the study. Second, the two types of data were merged during analysis and integrated during interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The two types of data were given equal emphasis and priority.

Research Sites

Two sites were used in order to have an adequate sample for quantitative analyses and to have rich qualitative data. These sites were comparable in terms of (a) child enrollment (i.e., ages of children served), (b) parent population characteristics such as ethnic and
racial groups represented by parents, and (c) parent engagement practices and strategies (i.e., observation of NAEYC standards and guidelines).

**Small Steps.** Site 1 is referred to as Small Steps. This program is a quality early childhood care facility that is affiliated with *Midwest Kingston Midland University* (KMU). It serves both the KMU community and non-university public and accepts children who are six months to five years of age. There are four classrooms at Small Steps and the program observes NAEYC standards and guidelines, though it is not currently NAEYC accredited. This program employs over 150 teachers, including full-time staff, part-time staff, and those available as substitutes. There are 21 full-time teachers staffed. White parents comprise 76% of the parent population at Small Steps \((n = 130)\) and ethnic-racial parents comprise 24\% \((n = 41)\), with Asian parents representing most of ethnic-racial parents. Most teachers are White. Specific information regarding the ethnicities and races of the parent population at Small Steps is provided below:

Table 3.1

*Parent Population Demographics at Small Steps*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Number of Parents</th>
<th>Percent of Parents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>76.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>(N = 171)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Tot Spot.** Site 2 is referred to as *Tot Spot* and is a laboratory school that has a three-tier focus: providing quality care and education experiences for children and families; teacher preparation experiences; and a site for innovative research. Enrolled children are 18 months to five years in two classrooms. It is a quality center that is KMU-affiliated and NAEYC accredited. This program has approximately 16 teachers. White parents comprise 47% of the parent population at *Tot Spot* ($n = 15$) and ethnic-racial minority parents comprise 53% ($n = 17$), with Asian parents representing most of ethnic-racial minority parents. Most teachers are White. Specific information regarding the ethnicities and races of the parent population at *Tot Spot* is provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Number of Parents</th>
<th>Percent of Parents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$N = 32$</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recruitment

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as well as the two research sites. All procedures were compliant with IRB regulations as well as research requirements at each site. Parents and teachers were recruited from the two quality early childhood programs and comprised one sample \((N = 72)\). All participants were required to be at least 19 years of age. White parents were required to self-identify as White and ethnic-racial minority parents were required to self-identify as an ethnic or racial minority in the United States. Teachers were required to be the child’s primary caregiver in the early childhood setting, whether a staff member or practicum student.

First, all parents and teachers were sent an email that introduced the researcher and the study. The purpose of this email was to (a) directly inform participants of the study and (b) authenticate an invitation to participate in a survey that was subsequently delivered via email (i.e., a preventative measure in light of phishing and spam emails) (see Appendix A: Introductory Email).

Second, parents and teachers were aggregated into a master list. From this list, parents were grouped by ethnicity and race into two categories, White and ethnic-racial minorities. Since all teachers worked directly with both White and ethnic-racial minority parents, they were randomly assigned to the two teacher groups, those reporting on relationships with White parents and those reporting on relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents. Those who had dual roles were excluded (e.g., parent and teacher in the same early childhood program). One parent from a parenting dyad was randomly selected.
Third, each participant was then assigned a number and the number was randomly selected to participate using Research Randomizer (Urbaniak & Plous, 1997). Then, those selected received an email to participate in a survey about PTRs that was distributed through SurveyMonkey (see Appendix B: Invitation to Complete Survey). Invitations to complete surveys were sent to approximately 30 potential participants at a time. However, this sampling strategy changed from randomized to non-probabilistic in order to acquire as many responses as possible due to an initial low response rate. Once this sampling strategy changed, invitations were sent to potential participants until the list of parents and teachers was exhausted. However, all other recruitment criteria were observed (e.g., recruiting one parent from a dyad). In total, 235 invitations were sent and there were 72 survey responses (a response rate of 31% approximately).

Sample

Quantitative. There were four independent groups of participants in this study ($N = 72$; $N_{parents} = 41$; $N_{teachers} = 31$): White parents ($n = 25$); ethnic-racial minority parents ($n = 16$); teachers reporting on their relationships with White parents ($n = 14$); and teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents ($n = 17$). Since there was little variation in minority ethnicities and races at the two early childhood programs, parent participants who were ethnic-racial minorities were aggregated into one group. While data were collected from both parents and teachers, their scores were not matched or dyadic in nature. Data were collected from each group across all data sources.

Qualitative. Approximately one-third of the sample was selected for qualitative procedures in which 24 parents and teachers were closely observed (33% of the original sample) and 13 were interviewed (18% of the original sample). Scores from the initial
quantitative instrument about PTRs determined which participants were selected for the qualitative portion of the study. These participants were selected as they (a) consented to be interviewed, (b) reported daily FTF communication, and (c) had high or moderate quality PTRs as indicated by their responses to a global rating statement about relationship quality (Vickers & Minke, 1995).

The purpose of introducing the first selection criterion was to ensure that participants chosen for interviews had been observed. That is, if a participant indicated that he or she was unwilling to be interviewed, there would be a disconnect between observational and interview data. Thus, this criterion was used to ensure continuity between observations and one-on-one interviews. In addition, daily FTF communication was used as a criterion in order to have observations and points of view that represented regular and consistent interpersonal connections, interactions, and communication between parents and teachers. Had participants had little to no daily interaction and communication with parents or teachers, qualitative data would reflect different kinds of experiences and communication patterns would have been nearly impossible to detect and describe. Finally, the third criterion was used in order to have relationships of varying quality represented in the qualitative data. While it was intended that participants would represent high, moderate, and low quality PTRs, participants reported high and moderate quality relationships. Furthermore, there was little variation in participants’ total and subscale scores on the instrument (see Table 4.6). Therefore, responses to a global rating statement (Vickers & Minke, 1995) were used to identify PTRs that were high or moderate quality (see Appendix C: Survey) and subsequently identify the parents and teachers for the qualitative portion of the study.
**Data Collection**

Both quantitative and qualitative were collected. Parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about relationships and communication were quantitatively assessed, and participants’ experiences in relationships and communication were explored qualitatively. Quantitative data illuminated perceptions about PTRs (RQ1) and communication (RQ3). Specifically, information about how White parents viewed their relationships with teachers was gained in addition to how ethnic-racial minority parents viewed their relationships with teachers. Similarly, information about teachers’ perceptions about their relationships with White and ethnic-racial minority parents was gathered. Qualitative data provided information regarding PTR experiences (RQ2) as well as communication experiences (RQ4). Qualitative data was also used to characterize the quantitative relationship patterns that emerged (RQ5).

**Data sources.** There were three data sources total: (1) The Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale (PTRS) (Vickers & Minke, 1995); (2) observational field notes; and (3) interview transcripts. For each data source, data was collected from each of the four participant groups. Data collection spanned 16 weeks (August-December 2016). Each data source informed the three research aims in this study.

**Quantitative data.** Parents and teachers received an invitation to participate in a survey via email. This survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. In order, this survey contained: informed consent information; demographics information; and questions from an instrument about PTRs (PTRS). This survey was delivered through SurveyMonkey, a web-based survey platform. First, participants reviewed informed consent information and indicated consent through an electronic signature. Then,
participants completed demographic information. Finally, participants responded to PTRS items. These procedures are described below (see Appendix C: Survey).

**Demographics.** Participants provided demographic information regarding: ethnicity/race; age; gender; length of the PTR; frequency of FTF PTC; most common mode of PTC; and a global rating of the PTR.

**PTRS.** The PTRS measures the quality of the PTR in terms of interpersonal connection and quality of PTC (Moorman Kim, Minke, Sheridan, Koziol, Ryoo, & Rispoli, 2012) (see Appendix C: Survey). Available in both parent and teacher versions, it is comprised of two subscales (*Joining* and *Communication to Other*) and 24 total questions that use a Likert response scale (1 = *Almost Never*; 5 = *Almost Always*). The PTRS is a reliable instrument that has been widely used (Moorman Kim, Minke, Sheridan, Koziol, Ryoo, & Rispoli, 2012). Vickers and Minke (1995) reported Cronbach’s coefficient alphas of: .93 and .95 for parent and teacher total scores, respectively; .98 for the *Joining* subscale (both parents and teachers); and .85 for teachers and .86 for parents on the *Communication to Other* subscale. Higher scores on the PTRS indicate that respondents feel (a) positively about their relationship with the other person and that (b) communication between the two is effective.

The PTRS was administered to parents and teachers to understand their perceptions about their PTRs (**RQ1**). More specifically, PTRS scores revealed how well parents and teachers connected as well as communicated with one another (**RQ3**). Parents completed the PTRS about their children’s teachers and

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8 Reliability coefficients were derived from a sample drawn from elementary schools.
teachers completed the PTRS about parents that they selected and referenced. Survey responses were not matched or dyadic.

**Qualitative data.** In addition to the quantitative methods described above, qualitative methods were used in this study to learn about parents’ and teachers’ experiences in relationships (RQ2) and communication (RQ4). Twenty-four participants were closely observed and 13 were interviewed. Additionally, the program director at each research site was interviewed. These methods are described below.

**Naturalistic observations.** From the sample of 72 parents and teachers, six participants from each participant group were selected for observations of parent-teacher interactions and PTC (N = 24). Observations occurred in classrooms during morning and afternoon transitions (i.e., child drop-off in the morning and child pick-up in the afternoon). Observations averaged two hours in length. Each selected participant was observed twice. There were a total of 33 observations conducted as some participants were in the same classroom. One family event was also observed.

Observations focused on collecting relational, interpersonal, and communication information from the 24 parents and teachers selected (i.e., how White parent participants interacted with their child’s teacher and how teachers interacted with either White or ethnic-racial minority parents). Observations were as unobtrusive as possible. Interactions and PTC were described using jottings.

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9 Teachers were prompted to think of a parent (whose child they were the primary caregiver of) who was either White or an ethnic-racial minority. Teachers were then prompted to reference that specific relationship as they completed the survey. Parents that teachers mentally referenced when completing the survey were chosen by the participants and not disclosed to the researcher (see Appendix C: Survey, Footnote 24).
(Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011), noting specific talk and nonverbal behaviors 
(see Appendix D: Observation Protocol). Asides and commentaries were also 
noted. Jottings were expanded into field notes after every observation. Observations also informed interviews with participants.

**One-on-one interviews.** From the 24 participants observed, 13 were 
selected to engage in one-on-one interviews. Each participant was interviewed 
once, and this produced 13 interviews total. The program director at each research 
site was also interviewed. Interviews were informed by patterns observed and 
identified during observations. Interviews were conducted throughout the course 
of data collection and averaged approximately 30 minutes in length.

During interviews, participants were asked to reflect on how they rated 
aspects of their PTR. For example, one PTRS item asks respondents to rate their 
agreement with the statement, “I don’t like the way this [parent/teacher] talks to 
me.” Participants were also asked to describe the behaviors that exemplified their 
responses. They were asked about their PTRs, interactions, communication 
experiences, and perceptions about PTC. For example, parent participants were 
asked to reflect on when and how teachers have displayed dis/respect, care, and 
interest to them, and teacher participants were asked to reflect on how they 
displayed these constructs to parents (see Appendix E: Interview Protocol). 
Interviews helped to address all research questions in an integrative way. 
Interview responses also informed subsequent observations of parent-teacher 
interactions and PTC. Each program director was interviewed once (see Appendix 
F: Program Directors’ Interview Protocol).
Compensation

Each participant received a $10 electronic gift card to Amazon for completing a survey and a $20 gift card to a local bookstore for completing an interview.\textsuperscript{10} Program directors did not receive compensation.

Data Analysis

Quantitative. Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 24 (IBM Corporation, 2016). Relationships were not matched. There were no patterns of missing data and missing data were managed using default functions in SPSS. Following the approach used by the authors of the PTRS (Vickers & Minke, 1995), parent and teacher data were analyzed separately.

First, descriptive statistics were used to aggregate and describe demographic data. Second, PTRS mean scores were calculated using descriptive statistics. Subscale scores were also calculated. Third, separate principal component analyses (PCA) were conducted to confirm that the scores followed the intended structure established by the authors (Vickers & Minke, 1995). This procedure was important to conduct prior to comparing means as this procedure validated the use of scale scores and any inferences that were made from subsequent analyses. It was also used as a descriptive tool to better understand trends in how parents and teachers responded on the instrument. Fourth, a series of binary correlations were used to identify relationships between potential covariates and PTRS mean scores. Finally, separate analyses of co/variance were used to analyze the data (i.e., Welch’s ANOVA, ANOVA, and ANCOVA). Additional research questions and hypotheses are provided below.

\textsuperscript{10} Participant compensation was funded solely by the researcher and author of this dissertation.
Aim 1: To learn about parents’ and teachers’ relationships (PTRs) and to identify differences in perceptions and experiences according to ethnicity and race.

1. What are parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about PTRs?
   - How do parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about PTRs compare between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?

1a. What are the relationships between demographic variables and perceived PTR quality?

   \[ H_1: \text{Length of relationship will be positively associated with perceived quality of PTRs among parent participant groups.} \]

   \[ H_2: \text{However, length of relationship will be negatively associated with Perceived quality PTRs among teacher participant groups.} \]

   \[ H_3: \text{More frequent FTF communication will be related to higher-quality PTRs among all participant groups.} \]

   \[ H_4: \text{Of all modes of PTC, FTF PTC will be related to higher-quality PTRs among all participant groups.} \]

   \[ H_5: \text{Global rating statement scores (about PTRs) will be positively related to perceived PTR quality among all participant groups.} \]

1b. Do perceptions about the PTR differ for participant groups after controlling for demographic variables (potential covariates)?

   \[ H_6: \text{White parents will report higher-quality relationships with teachers than ethnic-racial minority parents.} \]

   \[ H_7: \text{Teachers’ reports of relationships with White parents will be higher than teachers’ reports of relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents.} \]

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11 Informed by Swartz and Easterbrooks (2014)

12 Informed by Swartz and Easterbrooks (2014)

13 Email; FTF; communication logs or similar correspondence; newsletters or similar correspondence

14 Length of parent-teacher relationship, frequency of FTF PTC, most common mode of PTC, and a global rating of parent-teacher relationship quality
2. What are parents’ and teachers’ experiences in PTRs?
   - How do parents’ and teachers’ experiences in PTRs compare between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?

Aim 2: To learn about parents’ and teachers’ communication (PTC) and identify differences in perceptions and experiences according to ethnicity/race.

3. What are parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about their communication (PTC)?
   - How do parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about their communication (PTC) compare between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?

4. What are parents’ and teachers’ communication experiences (PTC)?
   - How do parents’ and teachers’ communication experiences compare between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?

Aim 3: To elaborate on quantitative findings (information about PTRs) that emerge using qualitative findings (information about PTC).

5. Which PTC experiences characterize the relationship patterns that emerge?
   - How do PTC characterizations compare between PTRs of White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?
**Qualitative.** Field notes were typed and interviews were transcribed verbatim. MAXQDA Standard (MAXQDA, 1995) was used to manage the text data. Three levels of analysis were used to analyze transcripts and field notes. In this study, coding centered around capturing two concepts: *what* was being communicated between parents and teachers; and *how* these things were communicated.

First, each set of field notes and transcripts were read in their entirety prior to coding in order to gain familiarity with the data. Initial impressions and thoughts were memoed (in-process memo). Then, text data were reviewed according to the first level of coding, which consisted of *a priori* codes that had a specified structure about *what* and *how*. These *a priori* codes reflected concepts from the literature as well as the observation and interview protocols. Examples of these codes included “respect-verbal,” “greeting-routine verbal exchange,” and “health information-verbal communicative adaptation/private conversation.” Meaning units ranged from a few words to whole paragraphs in length.

Then, a second level of coding was conducted to take into account any codes that emerged from the data (open coding). These codes were different than the pre-specified codes, described the meaning unit in more detail regarding *what or how*, and were inductive in nature. Meaning units were then reviewed and re-coded if necessary in order to properly describe the underlying relationship and communication constructs within the data. Analytic memos were then written after the second level of coding in order to document emerging codes and how they contributed to an overall coding scheme.

Finally, the third level of coding used focused coding so that codes became more refined and grouped in relation to an emerging pattern, theme, or thematic concept. Analytic memos were also written after this level of coding. This process helped to: (1)
locate key constructs or behaviors in the data and then follow its occurrence across data
sources, (2) inform subsequent data collection as data analysis was recursive in nature,
and (3) identify patterns (or inconsistencies between patterns) and layers of meaning in
terms of what and how. A segment from Aaron, a White parent, demonstrates this
categorical development:

My wife and I will joke a little bit, like you see on everyone’s sheet like, “What
did he [son] enjoy today?” and it’s all the same. Like, wait a second, they
[children] can’t all have enjoyed the art with the trucks. So, I’ve stopped relying
on that at all and just asking.

At the first level of coding, this meaning unit was coded as “daily activities-written
communication” in order to describe what was communicated (the child’s daily
activities) and how it was communicated (through written communication). At the second
level of coding, the code was elaborated to better describe the underlying meaning of the
meaning unit. It was therefore coded as “daily activities-written
communication/particular interests” in order to capture that the content of the written
communication focused on what the child had enjoyed in particular during his daily
activities. This second-level code was then revised to “child interests” after reviewing the
codes to better capture that the interests communicated were specific to the child. The
code also changed to reflect that the way in which this information was communicated
was inaccurate. Then, this meaning unit was coded as “daily activities-written
communication/child interests, inaccurate/preference for FTF” during the third level of
coding in relation to the emerging pattern that written communication was inaccurate and
generalized and that face-to-face, verbal communication was preferred in order to obtain
more accurate information. Additional examples are included in Appendix G: Categorical Development Sample.

In addition, in-process, analytic, and integrative memos were used to locate patterns and develop interconnections between interview transcripts and observational field notes. For example, a set of field notes were reviewed several times. Then, an in-process memo was written to document preliminary patterns, trends, or questions that emerged from the set of observational field notes (with regard to what and how). This in-process memo then informed the open coding of those field notes. Once open coded, an analytic memo was written that documented emerging analysis patterns, such as prevalent codes and their underlying concepts or themes. Then, the set of field notes were focused coded and an analytic memo was written. This informed subsequent observations, the analysis of those observations, and so on. Finally, integrative memos located and developed connections between interview transcripts and observational field notes, thereby integrating patterns and themes. Memos and coding were continually reviewed and revised so that data analysis informed data collection, codes merged between data sources, and code categories collapsed to result in themes and findings. Analyses occurred throughout the study as data sources informed one another and contributed to the overall findings.

Moreover, this study’s theoretical orientation was incorporated into qualitative data analysis. Observational field notes and transcripts were analyzed using domain analysis. This analysis tool was used to identify specific phrases in talk and the functions of these phrases, such as forms of greetings or ways to relationally connect with one another. Phrases of talk were the unit of domain analysis rather than individual, specific words. Domain analysis techniques followed Spradley’s (1979) approach in identifying the
semantic relationships of conversational phrases. This involved a six-step procedure: (1) selecting semantic relationships (e.g., exemplification, attributive, strict inclusion, or means-end); (2) creating a worksheet that detailed the structure of the domain or overall category (e.g., cover term, included terms, and boundary); (3) selecting statements (verbatim talk); (4) identifying pertinent cover terms that defined the semantic relationship; (5) forming structural questions; and (6) listing hypothesized domains (see Appendix H). This helped to understand the functions of phrases in PTC as well as to generate interview questions and probes.

Furthermore, discourse analysis was used to understand how things were communicated. Gee’s Relationships Building Tool (2014) was used to understand how relationships were constructed and maintained between parents and teachers in their language. This involved examining parents’ and teachers’ personal pronoun use (e.g., “we” or “she”) in addition to their use of ratification and repetition techniques (Tannen, 2007). Together, these tools helped to isolate the communicative features of parents’ and teachers’ talk.

**Trustworthiness.** Several methods were used to maintain trustworthiness in this study. First, interviews reached saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2012) in that no new concepts appeared in the data. Second, the researcher journaled and memoed (reflective memos) after each observation and interview. While these products were not included as data sources, they were helpful in maintaining objectivity (e.g., capturing positive and negative aspects of interactions as well as parents’ and teachers’ points of view equally). Third, data were triangulated among parents, teachers, and program directors. Fourth, one-third of each data source (11 sets of field
notes and four transcripts) was shared with a peer coder/debriefer on two occasions to confirm emerging patterns, themes, and findings, and coding agreement was 91% and 93% for each occasion. Codes that were not in agreement were discussed and resolved during the second occasion. Fifth, member-checking was conducted with two parents, all teachers at Small Steps (in a group setting), and one program director. Member-checking was also conducted throughout the study.

Mixed methods. Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed so that qualitative findings elaborated and expounded on quantitative findings. In other words, mixed methods analysis examined the PTC experiences that characterized the relationship patterns that emerged. Qualitative data were analyzed within the context of how participants responded to the global rating statement about their PTRs. That is, qualitative data oriented to communication experiences were analyzed in relation to “good” and “excellent” PTRs. The same analysis tools (described above) were used.
CHAPTER FOUR

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Overview

This chapter presents the quantitative results from the analysis of the parent and teacher relationship surveys. These results were used to address the first aim of this study—to learn about parents’ and teachers’ relationships and to identify differences in perceptions according to ethnicity and race (RQ1). Results also informed the second research aim which was to learn about parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about their communication (RQ3). Specifically, descriptive analyses, dimensionality analyses, Pearson correlations, and analyses of co/variance were conducted. Unless otherwise specified, results pertain to parent and teacher groups respectively.

Quantitative Sample Demographics

There were 67 females (93.1%) and five males (6.9%) in this study. Participants were most frequently between 30 and 39 years of age (n = 37; 51.4%), followed by 19-29 years (n = 30; 41.7%), and 40-49 years (n = 5; 6.9%). Teachers tended to be younger than parents. There were more White participants (n = 53; 73.6%) than those who identified as “Other” (n = 8; 11.1%), Asian American (n = 7; 9.7%), or Hispanic or Latino (n = 4; 5.6%). PTRs were relatively new relationships, with relationships averaging less than one year in length most frequently (56.9%). Daily communication was most frequent of all communication modes (61.1%). Most participants rated their relationships as “good” (n = 40; 55.6%), followed by “excellent” (n = 25; 34.7%), “OK” (n = 5; 6.9%), and “poor” (n = 1; 1.4%). Demographic information separated by parents and teachers is summarized in Table 4.1.
Table 4.1

*Summarized Parent and Teacher Demographic Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 41$</td>
<td>$n = 31$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-29</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
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<td>30-39</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity/Race</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of PTR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than one year, but less than two years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years or more</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Face-to-Face Communication Frequency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every two weeks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical Mode of Communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication logs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global Rating Statement</strong>&lt;sup&gt;15&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>15</sup>“Overall, I would rate my relationship with this parent/teacher as”
Structure

Internal consistency. In this sample, Cronbach’s alphas were as follows: .72 and .91 for parent and teacher total scores, respectively; .70 and .90 for parent and teacher Joining scores, respectively; and .74 and .83 for Communication to Other scores, respectively.\textsuperscript{16} The coefficient alphas for this sample were acceptable.

Dimensionality. Two principal component analyses (PCA) were conducted (parents and teachers) to confirm that the scores followed the intended structure determined by the instrument authors (Vickers & Minke, 1995). Two criteria factors were specified in accordance with the two-factor solution identified by the instrument authors. Direct oblimin (oblique) rotation with Kaiser normalization for each PCA was specified. Items pertaining to Joining (1-19) are oriented to affiliation, support, dependability, availability, and shared expectations and beliefs in the PTR, thereby encouraging a sense of interpersonal connection and joining between parents and teachers. Items pertaining to Communication to Other (20-24) encompass communication to the parent or teacher and are oriented to the sharing of information and emotions in the PTR.

Parents. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy for parent data was sufficient (.60). Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant for parents, $\chi^2 (276) = 602.02$, $p = .00$. Rotation converged in seven iterations and the component correlation was .09. The two extracted components accounted for 46.88\% of the variance.

\textsuperscript{16} Vickers and Minke (1995) reported Cronbach’s coefficient alphas of: .93 and .95 for parent and teacher total scores, respectively; .98 for the Joining subscale (both parents and teachers); and .85 for teachers and .86 for parents on the Communication to Other subscale.
The PCA demonstrated that, for parents, one item did not load onto the component to which it pertained according to instrument specifications. This item was “I ask this teacher for suggestions” (Item 24). This item should have loaded onto Communication to Other, but was more strongly associated with Joining (.45), suggesting that asking for suggestions is more oriented to interpersonal connection than communication.

In addition, three items did not show appreciable loading to either component. Those items were “We are sensitive to each other’s feelings” (Item 7), “When there is a behavior problem, I have to solve it without help from this teacher” (Item 11) and “This teacher tells me when s/he is pleased” (Item 18). Item 7 should have loaded onto the Joining subscale, but demonstrated similar associations to both Joining (.15) and Communication to Other (.18), suggesting that sensitivity to one another’s feelings may be oriented to feelings of affiliation and support as well as communication in this sample.

Item 11 loaded onto Joining at .40 and Communication to Other at -.43, rather than robustly loading onto Joining. Similar loadings of this item to both components suggests that, in this context, parent-teacher collaboration when solving problems may be related to interpersonal connection as well as communication. Similarly, Item 18 loaded onto Joining at .45 and Communication to Other at .42. Vickers and Minke (1995) specified that this item encompasses communication from the other and that communication from the other contributes to a sense of joining. This item should have therefore loaded onto Joining more appreciably than Communication to Other.

Though the loading is in the expected direction, it may also suggest that this aspect of
communication from the other may be meaningful for communication rather than interpersonal connection. All other items loaded properly among parents. Pattern matrices, which present standardized coefficients, are presented in Table 4.2.

**Teachers.** The KMO index for teachers’ data was low (.51).\(^{17}\) However, the PCA was continued in order to illuminate the dimensionality of items among the teachers in this sample. This is a limitation and will be discussed later in the Discussion chapter. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant for teachers, \(\chi^2 (276) = 475.19, p = .00\). Rotation converged in 10 iterations and the component correlation was .26. The two extracted components accounted for 46.85% of the variance.

The PCA for teachers revealed four items that loaded onto *Communication to Other* rather than *Joining*. These items were: “We trust each other” (Item 1; .49); “I respect this parent” (Item 5; .58); “This parent respects me” (Item 6; .66); and “This parent tells me when s/he is pleased” (Item 18; .55). The strong primary loadings of these items to *Joining* suggest that they are more oriented to interpersonal connection rather than communication.

In addition, one item did not load appreciably to either component—“We cooperate with each other” (Item 3). This item loaded onto *Joining* at .42 and onto *Communication to Other* at .44, suggesting that cooperation may be oriented to communication rather than interpersonal connection. All *Communication to Other* items loaded properly among teachers (see Table 4.2).

\(^{17}\) A value of .6 is a suggested minimum for this measure of sampling adequacy.
Table 4.2  
*Item Loadings onto Joining and Communication to Other Components*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joining</td>
<td>Communication to Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>We trust each other.*</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It is difficult for us to work together.</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>We cooperate with each other.*</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Communication is difficult between us.</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I respect this parent/teacher.*</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>This parent/teacher respects me.*</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>We are sensitive to each other’s feelings.*</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>We have different views of right and wrong.</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>When there is a problem with (this) child, this parent/teacher is all talk and no action.</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>This parent/teacher keeps his/her promises to me.</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>When there is a behavior problem, I</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
have to solve it without help from this parent/teacher.

12 When things aren’t going well, it takes too long to work them out.

13 We understand each other.

14 We see (this) child differently.

15 We agree about who should do what regarding (this) child.

16 I expect more from this parent/teacher than I get.

17 We have similar expectations of (this) child.

18 This parent/teacher tells me when s/he is pleased.*

19 I don’t like the way this parent/teacher talks to me.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMMUNICATION TO OTHER**

20 I tell this parent/teacher when I am pleased.

21 I tell this parent/teacher when I am concerned.*

22 I tell this parent/teacher when I am worried.
<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>I ask this parent/teacher’s opinion about (this) child’s progress.</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>I ask this parent/teacher for suggestions.*</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Coefficients are standardized. Primary loadings onto components that were not specified by the instrument authors are denoted through shading and bolding. Underlined coefficients denote the component to which the item was more strongly associated. Loadings that were not appreciable are italicized.

The author of this dissertation does not own the copyright to the PTRS items included in this survey. Please contact Kathy Minke for permission to use this instrument or its subscale items (minke@udel.edu).
Individual Participant Group Correlations

A series of Pearson Product Moment Correlations were used to describe the relationships between demographic variables and perceived PTR quality (RQ1a). Correlations are summarized in Table 4.3.

It was hypothesized that length of relationship would be positively associated with perceived quality of PTRs among parents (H1) and negatively associated with perceived quality among teachers (H2). However, there was no significant relationship between length of PTR and relationship quality (PTRS total scores) among parents or teachers (p > .05).

It was also hypothesized that frequency of FTF communication would be related to higher-quality PTRs among all participant groups (H3). This hypothesis was partially supported as there was no significant association between frequency of FTF communication and perceived quality of PTRs, except for ethnic-racial minority parents and teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents. Communicating daily was related to higher-quality relationships among ethnic-racial minority parents, $r(12) = .55, p = .04$. Communicating weekly was related to lower-quality relationships among ethnic-racial minority parents, $r(12) = -.55, p = .04$. Teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents had lower-quality relationships when they communicated every two weeks, $r(12) = -.56, p = .04$.

Furthermore, it was expected that, of all modes of communication, FTF communication would be related to higher-quality relationships among all participant groups (H4). However, this hypothesis was only partially supported. FTF communication was related to higher-quality PTRs among teachers reporting on their relationships with
White parents, $r(9) = .81, p = .00$ as well as those reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents, $r(11) = .55, p = .05$.

Finally, it was hypothesized that Global Rating Statement (GRS) scores about PTRs would be positively related to perceived PTR quality (PTRS total scores) among all participant groups ($H_5$). This hypothesis was partially supported. GRS scores were related to higher-quality PTRs among all participant groups, except White parents: ethnic-racial minority parents, $r(11) = .63, p = .02$; teachers reporting on relationships ethnic-minority parents, $r(11) = .80, p = .00$; and teachers reporting on relationships with White parents, $r(9) = .66, p = .03$. 
Table 4.3

Correlations between Demographic Variables and PTRS Total Scores among Individual Participant Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White Parents</th>
<th>Ethnic-Racial Minority Parents</th>
<th>Teachers--White Parents</th>
<th>Teachers--Ethnic-Racial Minority Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of PTR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than one year, but less than two years</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years or more</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequency of face-to-face communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.55</td>
<td>-.42</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every two weeks</td>
<td>-.40</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>-.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical mode of communication</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication logs</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global Rating Statement</strong></td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* All correlations are binary except for the Global Rating Statement. Significant correlations are bolded.


Comparison of Means: Parents and Teachers

PTRS mean scores. PTRS total and subscale scores were calculated using
descriptive statistics. Parents were higher than teachers in all scores. Among parents,
PTRS scores were as follows: Total Score, $M = 110.21$, $SD = 6.03$; Joining, $M = 89.15$, $SD = 5.06$; and Communication to Other, $M = 20.67$, $SD = 3.23$. Among teachers, PTRS scores were as follows: Total Score, $M = 101.68$, $SD = 11.56$; Joining, $M = 81.69$, $SD = 9.40$; and Communication to Other, $M = 18.50$, $SD = 3.89$. These values are summarized in Table 4.4 below.

Parents’ and teachers’ scores were also categorized into high, moderate, and low quality groups for descriptive purposes. Typically, parents’ and teachers’ scores were high in total score, Joining subscale scores, and Communication to Other subscale scores. These group categories are summarized by parents and teachers in Table 4.5 and provided for individual participant groups in Table 4.6.
Table 4.4

*Score Means, Standard Deviations, and Alphas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td>(SD)</td>
<td>(\alpha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL SCORE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic-racial minority parents</td>
<td>110.64</td>
<td>7.61</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White parents</td>
<td>109.89</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>101.68</td>
<td>11.56</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents</td>
<td>99.86</td>
<td>13.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with White parents</td>
<td>104.00</td>
<td>8.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JOINING SUBSCALE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>89.15</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic-racial minority parents</td>
<td>88.00</td>
<td>6.52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White parents</td>
<td>89.95</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>81.69</td>
<td>9.40</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents</td>
<td>79.79</td>
<td>10.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with White parents</td>
<td>83.92</td>
<td>8.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNICATION TO OTHER SUBSCALE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>20.67</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic-racial minority parents</td>
<td>22.53</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White parents</td>
<td>19.50</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>18.50</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents</td>
<td>18.35</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with White parents</td>
<td>18.69</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. 5

*High, Moderate, and Low Score Group Categories of Parents and Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Score</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Range</td>
<td>96-120</td>
<td>74-120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (89-120)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (57-88)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (24-56)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Joining Subscale Score** |         |          |
| Sample Range             | 75-95   | 59-95    |
| High (65-95)             | 34      | 24       |
| Moderate (35-64)         | 0       | 2        |
| Low (5-34)               | 0       | 0        |

| **Communication to Other Subscale Score** |         |          |
| Sample Range             | 11-25   | 6-25     |
| High (19-25)             | 30      | 17       |
| Moderate (12-18)         | 8       | 11       |
| Low (5-11)               | 1       | 2        |

*Note.* The included categories are descriptive only.
Table 4.6

*High, Moderate, and Low Score Group Categories of Individual Participant Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White Parents</th>
<th>Ethnic-Racial Minority Parents</th>
<th>Teachers--White Parents</th>
<th>Teachers--Ethnic-Racial Minority Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>n</em> = 25</td>
<td><em>n</em> = 16</td>
<td><em>n</em> = 14</td>
<td><em>n</em> = 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Score</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Range</td>
<td>102-117</td>
<td>96-120</td>
<td>82-115</td>
<td>74-120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (89-120)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (57-88)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (24-56)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joining Subscale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Range</td>
<td>80-95</td>
<td>75-95</td>
<td>62-94</td>
<td>59-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (65-95)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (35-64)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (5-34)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication to Other Subscale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Range</td>
<td>11-25</td>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>11-22</td>
<td>6-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (19-25)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (12-18)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (5-11)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The included categories are descriptive only.
Comparison of means. Separate analyses of parents’ and teachers’ intact\textsuperscript{18} scores were performed to determine if perceptions about the PTR differed for participant groups after controlling for potentially confounding demographic variables (RQ\textsubscript{1b}).\textsuperscript{19}

Parents. Pearson Product Moment Correlations were performed to identify any demographic variables that co-varied with PTRS total scores. No covariates were identified. Levene’s Test of Homogeneity of Variances (Levene, 1960) revealed that the data violated the assumption of homogeneity of variances, $F(1, 31) = 4.41$, $p = .04$. Given that the variances were unequal, more robust tests of mean comparisons were conducted on parents’ PTRS total scores. Specifically, Welch’s adjusted $F$-ratio indicated that there was no difference in PTR quality between White and ethnic-racial minority parents, $F(1, 20.32) = .105$, $p = .75$. Contrary to the hypothesis (H\textsubscript{6}), White parents ($M = 109.89$, $SD = 4.75$) did not report higher-quality relationships with teachers than ethnic-racial minority parents ($M = 110.64$, $SD = 7.61$).

Joining subscale scores between White and ethnic-racial minority parents were compared. GRS was identified as a covariate, $r(32) = .53$, $p = .00$, and was therefore included in an ANCOVA. The variances were homogenous ($p > .05$). Results showed that GRS was related to Joining subscale scores, $F(1, 30) = 7.82$, $p = .01$. However, there was no significant difference between White parents ($M = 89.50$, $SD = 3.61$) and ethnic-racial minority parents ($M = 88.00$, $SD = 6.52$) with regard to their Joining subscale scores when GRS was statistically controlled.

\textsuperscript{18} Though the PCA demonstrated that some instrument items did not appreciably load onto either Joining or Communication to Other, no items were dropped for the comparison of group means. This decision was informed by the strength of the sample’s alphas and the widespread use of the measure in other research.

\textsuperscript{19} Length of parent-teacher relationship, frequency of FTF PTC, most common mode of PTC, and a global rating of parent-teacher relationship quality
Communication to Other subscale scores between White and ethnic-racial minority parents were also compared. No covariates were identified. Levene’s Test of Homogeneity of Variances indicated that the variances were homogenous, \( F(1, 37) = 3.83, p = .06 \). An ANOVA demonstrated that ethnic-racial minority parents \((M = 22.53, SD = 1.77)\) had significantly higher Communication to Other scores than White parents \((M = 19.50, SD = 3.41)\), \( F(1, 37) = 10.08, p = .00 \) (informing Research Aim 2 and RQ3).

**Teachers.** Pearson Product Moment Correlations were performed to identify any demographic variables that co-varied with PTRS total scores. Communication frequency and mode of communication were identified as covariates. Specifically, daily communication \((r(23) = .44, p = .03)\) and communicating every two weeks \((r(23) = -.50, p = .01)\) were related to teachers’ total scores. FTF communication was also related to total scores, \( r(22) = .63, p = 00 \). No other covariates were identified \((p > .05)\).

An ANCOVA was performed with regard to teachers’ PTRS total scores. The group variables of the aforementioned covariates were included in the analysis. Levene’s Test of Homogeneity of Variances indicated that the variances were homogenous, \( F(1, 22) = .52, p = .48 \). Communication frequency was related to total scores, \( F(1, 20) = 6.72, p = .02 \), as was communication mode, \( F(1, 20) = 16.88, p = .00 \). There was no significant difference between teachers’ total scores, however. Contrary to the hypothesis (H7), teachers’ reports of relationships with White parents \((M = 104.00, SD = 8.97)\) were not higher than teachers’ reports of relationships with
ethnic-racial minority parents ($M = 99.23, SD = 13.62$) when these covariates were statistically controlled, $F(1, 20) = .32, p = .58$.

Moreover, teachers’ *Joining* subscale scores were analyzed. Daily communication and communicating every two weeks were related to teachers’ *Joining* scores, $r(24) = .42, p = .03$ and $r(24) = -.49, p = .01$, respectively. FTF communication also demonstrated a relationship with these scores, $r(23) = .68, p = \cdot00$. The group variables of these covariates were included in an ANCOVA (i.e., communication frequency and communication mode). The variances were homogenous, $F(1, 23) = .77, p = .39$. Communication frequency was related to *Joining* scores, $F(1, 21) = 5.83, p = .03$ as well as communication mode, $F(1, 21) = 19.82, p = .00$. However, when these variables were statistically controlled, there was no significant different in teachers’ *Joining* subscale scores, $F(1, 21) = 1.18, p = .29$.

Teachers reporting on relationships with White parents ($M = 83.92, SD = 8.21$) were not statistically different from those reporting on relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents ($M = 79.31, SD = 10.46$) with regard to interpersonal connection, affiliation, and joining.

Finally, teachers’ *Communication to Other* subscale scores were compared. Age was identified as a covariate. Specifically, teachers’ age of 19-29 years was related to higher communication subscale scores, $r(28) = .49, p = .01$. Teachers’ age of 30-39 years was also related to lower scores, $r(28) = -.61, p = .00$. The group variable for these covariates (i.e., age) was entered into an ANCOVA. Variances were homogenous, $F(1, 28) = .63, p = .44$. Age was not related to *Communication to Other* subscale scores in the ANCOVA, $F(1, 27) = 3.23, p = .07$. There was no statistically
significant difference in scores between teachers reporting on their relationships with White parents ($M = 18.69, SD = 3.25$) or ethnic-racial minority parents ($M = 18.35, SD = 4.42$), $F(1, 27) = .03, p = .86$.

For descriptive purposes, parents’ and teachers’ responses to the GRS were analyzed separately. For parents, variances were homogenous, $F(1, 39) = .45, p = .51$. There were no statistically significant differences between ethnic-racial minority parents’ responses ($M = 4.38, SD = .81$) and White parents’ responses ($M = 4.32, SD = .63$) in how they rated the overall quality of their PTRs, $F(1, 39) = .06, p = .81$.

Variances were also homogenous among teachers, $F(1, 28) = .05, p = .82$. Teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents ($M = 4.00, SD = .63$) were not statistically different from teachers reporting on their relationships with White parents ($M = 4.39, SD = .47$) with regard to overall relationship quality, $F(1, 28) = 1.93, p = .18$.

**Summary**

In sum, the quantitative results measured participants’ perceptions about their PTRs and communication. Results informed the first research aim in this study which was to learn about parents’ and teachers’ relationships and to identify differences in their perceptions according to ethnicity and race. Overall, parents and teachers in this sample typically had relationships that were less than one year in length, and most reported that their PTRs were “good” in overall perceived quality. Though parents reported daily FTF communication with teachers, teachers reported weekly FTF communication most often. FTF communication was the most common mode of communication among both parents and teachers.
In addition, results indicated that daily FTF communication was related to higher-quality relationships among ethnic-racial minority parents. However, communicating weekly or every two weeks was related to lower-quality relationships among ethnic-racial minority parents and teachers reporting on their relationships with these parents, respectively. These patterns were not seen within White parents or teachers reporting on their relationships with White parents, however.

Though frequency of FTF communication was important in ethnic-racial minority parents’ relationships with teachers, the FTF mode of communication was related to higher-quality PTRs only among teachers. FTF communication was important to teachers’ relationships with parents regardless of parents’ ethnicity/race. Taken together, these results suggest that daily communication is key for ethnic-racial minority parents and teachers working with these parents, though the specific mode of communication may be less important for parents as it is for teachers.

Moreover, parents tended to have higher scores than teachers in all dimensions of the PTRS (total scores, Joining subscale scores, and Communication to Other scores). Further, parents’ relationships with teachers did not differ except in communication subscale scores, which were significantly higher for ethnic-racial minority parents than White parents. Teachers did not differ in their PTRs, irrespective of having reported on their relationships with White or ethnic-racial minority parents. Thus, these results also informed the second research aim in this study which was to learn about parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about their communication.

Finally, examination of the dimensionality of the instrument items revealed that the instrument is applicable for the parents in this sample as demonstrated by the indices
of sampling adequacy and sphericity. Yet, it may not be relevant or valid for the teachers in this sample as sampling adequacy was very low. Since these indices determine if the data can or cannot be summarized into the factors established by the instrument authors, inferences about teachers’ relationships with parents derived from the instrument may be misinformed. As such, comparisons of teachers’ score means should therefore be interpreted with caution. Nonetheless, examination of the dimensionality revealed key areas that were then examined more deeply using qualitative methods, helping to address the third research aim in this study—to elaborate on quantitative findings that emerged using qualitative findings.
CHAPTER FIVE

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: RESEARCH AIM ONE

Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative analyses of naturalistic observations and one-on-one interviews. Qualitative findings helped to illuminate parents’ and teachers’ experiences in relationships (Research Aim One). This chapter begins with a discussion on the sample’s demographic characteristics and then proceeds with a discussion on the findings that emerged from the data in regard to RQ2. The chapter ends with a summary of findings. All participants are referred to by their pseudonyms.

Qualitative Sample Demographics

There were 12 parents and 12 teachers in the qualitative sample ($N = 24$). Most teachers were between 19-29 years of age whereas parents were between the ages of 30-39 (41.7%) and 40-49 (8.3%). There were 22 females in the sample in addition to two males. There were 17 White participants (70.8%), three Asian American participants (12.5%), one Hispanic or Latino participant, and three participants who identified as “Other” (12.5%). Typically, the length of PTRs was less than one year, and all participants reported daily FTF communication. Demographic information separated by parents and teachers is summarized in Table 5.1 below and information concerning interview participants is provided in Table 5.2.
Table 5.1

**Summarized Parent and Teacher Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 12$</td>
<td>$n = 12$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>19-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
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<td>40-49</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of PTR</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than one year</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than one year, but less than two years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two years or more</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every two weeks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global Rating Statement</strong>(^{20})</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{20}\)“Overall, I would rate my relationship with this parent/teacher as”
Table 5.2

Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic-Racial Minority Parents</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Global Rating Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>n</em> = 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divya</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heng</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| White Parents                   |        |                      |                         |
| *n* = 4                         |        |                      |                         |
| Lisa                            | Female | White                | Good                    |
| Aaron                           | Male   | White                | Good                    |
| Emma                            | Female | White                | Excellent               |
| Yesfir                          | Female | White                | Excellent               |

Teachers Reporting on Relationships with Ethnic-Racial Minority Parents

| *n* = 2                         |        |                      |                         |
| Jody                            | Female | Other                | Good                    |
| Charlotte                       | Female | White                | Excellent               |

Teachers Reporting on Relationships with White Parents

| *n* = 3                         |        |                      |                         |
| Claire                          | Female | White                | Good                    |
| Lily                            | Female | White                | Good                    |
| Julia                           | Female | White                | Excellent               |

Program Directors

|                             |        |                      |                         |
| Adira                        | Female | White                | --                      |
| Toni                         | Female | White                | --                      |

*Note.* The size of the quantitative sample was *N* = 72. Thirty-three percent of the sample (*n* = 24) was then chosen observations. Of those selected for observations, 13 were interviewed (54% of those observed and 18% of the total quantitative sample size of *N* = 72). The program director at each early childhood program was also interviewed.
RQ2 investigated parents’ and teachers’ experiences in their PTRs, and two findings emerged regarding relationship experiences. They were: *synchronous parenting and teaching approaches through information-sharing and coordination*; and *respect*. Additionally, individual group patterns regarding these findings are discussed to address the sub-question for RQ2 which examined how parents’ and teachers’ experiences in their relationships compared according to parent ethnicity/race. These findings are discussed below. A summary of these findings concludes this chapter.

**Synchronous Parenting and Teaching Approaches through Information-Sharing and Coordination**

Parents’ and teachers’ primary goal was to meet children’s needs and enrich their learning and development. Parents and teachers felt that synchronous home and school experiences were the most effective and productive way to teach children and enhance their development. For example, Sabrina, an ethnic-racial minority parent, said:

> Being consistent with what you’re [parents and teachers] trying to teach them [children] helps, and when you have a united front with your teachers, then I think it does help teach the kids quicker than trying to get them to learn two separate ways.

Emma, a White parent, shared similar sentiments when asked to discuss on the connections between home and her daughter’s early childhood program. She reflected:

> She [daughter] is completely potty trained, even at nights now. It was just very seamless, and it felt like that because of the consistency from what the school [early childhood program] was doing in comparison to what we [husband and self] were doing, too.
Synchronous home and school experiences therefore required parents and teachers to be “on the same page” as one another with regard to children’s development, needs, and, in particular, the practices and strategies that were effective in meeting children’s needs.

**Information-sharing.** Synchronizing parenting and teaching approaches first involved information-sharing between parents and teachers. Specifically, communicating children’s behaviors and needs at home and also in the learning environment was central to information-sharing. For instance, Emma, discussed the kinds of information that she talked about with her daughter’s teacher. She said, “Some developmental stuff. If we had any visitors to the house, if anything special is going on. Like, we’re going to celebrate a birthday, or things like that.” Sabrina also discussed the nature of the information shared between her and her child’s teacher. She shared, “It [conversation] will be about how the night was. You can tell them [teachers], ‘It was an off-night, something was weird, they [child] may be kind of tired and cranky.’”

Information-sharing between parents and teachers was typically proactive such that information about children’s day-to-day behaviors was shared. As such, parents and teachers related to one another through children, and PTRs revolved around children’s developmental needs, milestones, and progress (e.g., potty training, specific skill development, behavioral expectations, and re-directing aggressive or challenging behaviors).
Parents and teachers generally experienced congruity between parenting and teaching approaches and, subsequently, positive experiences in their relationships with one another. For example, Sofía, an ethnic-racial minority parent said:

I think we really are on the same page in terms of discipline and expectations, and that helps a lot [with our relationship]. And, maybe if a parent had different ideas about what ever discipline or what the kids should be doing, then maybe you would hear a very different story. But, we are very much in line with their values and what they are teaching the kids and the way they discipline.

However, synchronization of guidance approaches required information-sharing and coordination. In other words, parents and teachers had to coordinate their parenting and teaching approaches with one another in order for them to be synchronous.

**Coordination.** Parents’ and teachers’ coordination of guidance approaches encompassed meeting children’s developmental needs. For example, Sabrina, an ethnic-racial minority parent said, “They’ll [teachers] share things about what we’re always working on, like trying to get [son] to eat more vegetables.” Coordination was typically prompted by children’s challenging behaviors, however, particularly with regard to social competence (e.g., self-regulation, cooperation, and physical aggression). Consequently, coordination was reactive, rather than proactive like information-sharing. For instance, Lily, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, discussed a situation that exemplified coordination in order to synchronize parenting and teaching guidance approaches. Her reflection discusses that the coordination between her and the parent was triggered by the child’s challenging behavior and therefore reactive, rather than proactive, in nature:
He’s [child] acting out and we [co-teacher and self] try something. So, I would ask, “Does he do it [challenging behavior] at home?” And, “What do you do at home when he bangs his head on the wall? Do you say “Oh, ouch, that hurts?” Because that’s what we [co-teacher and self] say. And Usually, she [parent] says “Oh, ow did that hurt?” And, just making sure that our [parent and teachers] language is the same and that how we handle it is the same.

In addition, Sofía, an ethnic-racial minority parent, discussed how she and her son’s teacher coordinated guidance strategies with one another. She said:

He [son] has been acting out. We’ve been talking a lot about what we [parent couple and teachers] can do both on our end and their end and telling them what we’re doing at home, “Do you have any other suggestions?” So, I think it’s a relationship that goes both ways because they see one aspect of [child] and we see a slightly different aspect of him [child], so just being very open and trying to, whatever we do at home complements what they are doing at school and kind of using the same language and the same rules, “Right, we don’t hit,” we don’t do all these things so we’re on the same page and he’s not getting conflicted messages from the teachers and from us.

However, coordination was teacher-directed. That is, teachers expected parents to converge to their way of doing things to their own, thereby synchronizing their approaches to those of the teacher. Though teachers cited having taken parents’ requests and suggestions into consideration, teachers more often consulted parents rather than having included them as equal partners in united goal-setting or collaborative decision-making. While teachers consulted parents on how to address children’s needs, behaviors,
and challenges through bi-directional information-sharing, they ultimately wanted parents
to conform their approaches and strategies to theirs as their perspective was, in their
estimation, grounded in developmentally appropriate practice while also considering the
overall function of the classroom.

Therefore, teachers placated parents while ultimately steering the decision-
making toward their point of view. In this process, teachers were particularly careful not
to offend parents while persuading them to agree to their way of thinking. For example,
Julia, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, shared:

So, kind of explaining like, taking their [parents’] suggestion and saying you’ll try
it—and not in a condescending way either because that does nothing for you or
them—and then just kind of also explain your reasoning as to why you were
doing it the other way. Or, why you thought that was, not better because that
would be condescending, but just like explain your reasoning as to why you were
doing that thing in the first place and why it’s good for the child.

Thus, for teachers, being on the “same page” actually meant being on “my page.”

Although parents and teachers mutually engaged in information-sharing, coordination
was teacher-led and directed, rather than a collaborative decision-making effort. This
was due in large to parents’ and teachers’ differing notions of respect.

Differing Notions of Respect

Parents. Parents’ identities as parents were more important than their identities as
people. That is, it was more important for teachers to respect their choices and decisions
as parents rather than as people. Parents felt that their parenting styles, approaches, and
strategies were informally evaluated by teachers through judgments, opinions, and
evaluations of and about children’s behaviors. Aaron, a White parent, spoke to this. He reflected, “It’s like a comparison. Do they [teachers] respect me more as a parent than that one [parent] because I did X and they did Y? I’m sure, because she [teacher] sees very different parenting styles.”

Parents’ conceptualizations of respect from teachers was oriented to discussion about their child, his or her behaviors, and their parenting approaches and techniques that was free from judgment and evaluation. For example, when asked about how teachers demonstrate respect to her, Sabrina, an ethnic-racial minority parent, shared:

I think this comes back to having some of those difficult conversations with some of the teachers with the hitting and the biting, that they [teachers] approach it in a very respectful way…it’s not a judging and it’s not that, you know, that they [teachers] were disappointed or anything.

Similarly, Divya, an ethnic-racial minority parent, reflected:

I never feel that they [teachers], even when he [son] has hit some kids, or he had been rowdy with other kids, being older. These group of four, five boys being boys is real difficult with little kids around. And, never, even if they are telling me what [son] did and how he did it [behavior], it never feels like my son is bad. It never feels like that.

Thus, parents felt that their children’s behavior were perceived to be reflective of their parenting and guidance approaches, and they wanted their parenting decisions, approaches, and strategies to be affirmed and respected. This sense of respect of and for parents’ identities as parents was crucial to the process of information-sharing. In order to have a complete and accurate rendering of children’s development and needs, parents
needed to be able to share information that was honest, and being able to share information freely was critical to sharing honest information. For instance, Emma, a White parent, shared:

> The other thing I think that I appreciate is, I’ve had positive experiences with this, is open communication in terms of non-judgmental. And I felt good about that. So, for example, one night [daughter] had a really bad cold. And I was just open with them [teachers] and said, “She struggled last night and I brought her to bed with us.” And nobody said anything about that, at least in front of me. It didn’t feel like they were judging me. Like, “Oh no, you did this or whatever.” But I think that’s a key component too, feeling like I can tell them honestly what’s going on at home.

Parents wanted their parenting and guidance approaches to be affirmed and validated. Non-judgmental and non-evaluative discussion about children conveyed respect to parents. Parents felt disrespected when their parenting was judged or evaluated. This deterred information-sharing and ultimately the synchronization of parenting and teaching approaches because parents were less likely share information with teachers. In addition, parents felt that their relationships with teachers were most successful when teachers affirmed their parenting by respecting their decisions, approaches, and strategies.

Moreover, parents needed to feel that their ways of guiding and directing children’s behavior and development were consulted in coordinating parenting and teaching approaches. This involved teachers acknowledging parents’ insight about their child and seeking their input about children’s development, needs, and behaviors in order to coordinate parenting and teaching approaches. To parents, teachers’ seeking of
parents’ insight and information was important for successful PTRs. For instance, Lisa, a White parent, said:

Respect is saying, “Okay,” [to what parents say] and asking for our [husband and self] input. And, asking how she’s [daughter] doing, asking what we see, trying to not just have a one-way communication, but having it a two-way communication. I think there’s a respect in terms of parenting.

As such, parents needed to be kept in the proverbial loop, for their input to be sought, and their insight to be valued. For example, Aaron, a White parent, reflected on how his insight was honored and integrated into how teachers understood and met his son’s needs. He shared:

I feel like when she [teacher] asks me a question about how things are going or what is going well, or not going well with things, that she is really listening to what I’m saying. So, I feel like she really is, wants, she respects that I have, I’ve had an experience or experiences with him [son] that I can convey, and that it’s a true, true to the experience and not me making up something about what’s going on.

Similarly, a statement from Sofía further demonstrates this finding. She reflected:

I think we [teachers and self] have good relationships and they’ve been very respectful of our [husband and self] opinion. They always seem very open, very respectful. I really haven’t noticed any, we never had any communication issues.

When teachers included parents’ insight when identifying and coordinating practices and strategies to implement for their child, parents felt respected. Thus, respect
was key for positive relationship experiences among parents. However, teachers’ notions of respect differed from parents’, and this related to how parents and teachers coordinated with one another in addressing and meeting children’s needs.

**Teachers.** For teachers, conceptualizations of respect from parents were oriented to (a) role deference and (b) parents’ compliance with center-level policies as well as teacher-specified expectations and requests. First, teachers viewed parents’ respect for them as having a clear understanding of their expertise in child development and early childhood education and deferring to their judgments and evaluations of children’s behaviors and developmental needs. For instance, Charlotte, a teacher reporting on her relationship with an ethnic-racial minority parent, discussed these aspects of respect. She said, “They [parents] know that, overall, they like realize my role I guess is how I would explain it. They let me do the things I need to do with their daughter, for her to be successful.”

Thus, teachers’ viewed respect as having a lead or deciding role in determining the practices and strategies that were most effective in directing and developing children’s skills. For instance, Jody reflected on disrespect in her relationship with a parent—a situation in which she felt that her judgment of a child’s behavior was dismissed by a parent. She shared:

We’ve had one kiddo really struggling with following directions, and I know our kiddos are only one [year old], but they are more than able to follow a simple direction. And, we [co-teacher and self] were having issues with this one kiddo just, you know, we’d be like, “[Child], let’s go to the bathroom and change your diaper.” And, so normally they would put down, most kiddos put down their toy
and walked to the bathroom, and he would just go limp, lay on the floor, kick, scream. We’d try to walk him over and he wouldn’t walk and, just, it was happening daily and any kind of transition we had, this was the reaction we were getting. So, after a week or so, we approached mom—I approached mom at a pick-up time and I was like, “Yeah, this is what’s happening,” and she laughs. And so, you know I, that is to me, that was just being very disrespectful and I told her, I was like, “Actually, you know, this really isn’t, you know. We don’t find this very funny and we really want him to be successful and he’s gonna be transitioning into the two-year-old classroom in a few weeks, and we’d like to see him able to do these simple requests before moving him up there into a whole new classroom and expectations are even higher for him” …I mean she’s told us before too like that, “He’s one,” and “He’s just one,” and “that’s how he’s gonna be.”

It is evident in Jody’s quote that she felt that her evaluation of the situation was dismissed by the parent. Thereby, Jody felt disrespected by the parent when she did not agree that her son’s behavior was concerning for his age and the developmental requirements of his current and upcoming classrooms. The parent inadvertently challenged Jody’s view that she had additional insights as a child development expert. Thus, this difference in opinion as to what was developmentally appropriate was construed as disrespect by Jody.

Second, teachers were concerned with their classrooms running smoothly for the benefit of the class as a whole. For example, Jody said, “For our classroom to run smoothly and efficiently, we need to have those things [expectations and routines] in place.” Teachers therefore viewed respect from parents as acknowledging their expertise.
and then subsequently conforming their behaviors and parenting approaches to the expectations, routines, and procedures practiced in or best suited for the classroom overall. Jody, a teacher reporting on her relationship with an ethnic-racial minority parent, reflected on how parents’ non-conformity with classroom procedures communicated disrespect for her time and the goals of the classroom overall. She said:

I would go back to the respect thing and just having parents understand these kiddos are on a schedule and when you bring them in at nine and they want breakfast, and you know that we stop serving breakfast at 8:30, that’s not being respectful of our time. Obviously, we’re not gonna let your kiddo not eat breakfast, but you’re throwing our whole schedule off and things like that. Just being respectful of our time, and what we do, and of our classroom, and the structure. Because kiddos this age need that consistency and that reinforcement—that schedule. And when parents don’t respect that, it’s not good for anybody. It’s not good for them. It’s not good for the kiddos. It’s not good for us.

Moreover, teachers construed respect as parents’ compliance with classroom practices as well as teacher-determined expectations and guidance suggestions regarding children’s development that, in their estimation, were grounded in developmentally appropriate practice. Specifically, teachers felt that their judgments and evaluations of children’s behaviors and developmental needs were developmentally appropriate and for the benefit and betterment of the children in their care. Claire, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, spoke to this. She reflected:
I think if I’m giving, if I were to give parent advice, or if they were to ask me a question about their child, really tuning in to what I’m telling them and listening to my suggestions or listening to what I’m saying—to recognize that I know what I’m doing, and to put what I’m saying into action.

Jody, a teacher reporting on her relationship with an ethnic-racial minority parent, also discussed compliance with her expectations and suggestions that were informed, in her estimation, in practices that were developmentally appropriate and reflective of child development. She said:

I think just building rapport with just open communication, letting them [parents] know how their son is doing in our room and asking them how he’s doing at home, what things we…Because at first, you know he was a really sad little guy in our room for the first six weeks or so, I would say. It was, it was tears almost all day long and, you know, we just wanted them to know how his days were going here and things that maybe at home they could do that we were doing here as far as on…Like, he didn’t have any kind of fine motor coordination as far as feeding himself because they were feeding him at home, and here we give him utensils and you can tell like they’re doing that at home now as well. And, just, you know, things like that. Napping was kind of a hard transition for him too, just lying on his mat and getting patted. He would kind of fight us on the naps as well but that seems to, that’s so much better too. Just an all-around different kiddo than when he started.

It is evident that Jody expected the parents’ practices (e.g., self-care and sleep hygiene) to converge with the practices and expectations she recommended. Once there were
behavioral changes in the boy’s behavior, Jody realized that the parents had integrated her expectations into their parenting practices and had therefore felt that respect was conveyed through actionable behaviors.

Moreover, in an effort to encourage understanding of and compliance with expectations, teachers were diligent to communicate and establish expectations early on in the “school year.” For instance, Julia, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, shared, “Before they [children] start in the classroom we have, me and my co-teachers sit down with the parents and have a meeting with them and go over our room and our expectations.” Establishing these expectations set the tone for compliance with center-level policies and teacher-specified expectations and requests, thereby establishing a precedent for role deference among parents.

**Individual Group Patterns**

Parents reported having positive experiences in their relationships with teachers. Parents, both White and ethnic-racial minority, felt that they had been respected because their children and parenting practices hadn’t been judged and their insight about their child had been valued. Moreover, White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents deferred to teachers similarly. Parents readily and eagerly sought out teachers’ leadership in constructing and shaping their child’s learning and development. Parents did this because they did not have all the answers as to what to do to meet their children’s needs, particularly for challenging behaviors. For instance, Aaron reflected, “I guess as your child is developing, your kind of, your point of reference is constantly changing. So, you constantly don’t, you don’t really know where you are, I guess. It’s all relativism.”
As such, parents deferred to teachers’ ways of guiding children’s behavior, learning, and development. For example, Divya, an ethnic-racial minority parent said, “Teachers influence kids more than parents do at little ages.” She also said, “They [teachers] are the experts on the kids.” Aaron also said, “They [teachers] tell us what he [son] is capable of doing, and we can then kind of go from there.” Moreover, Sofia shared:

We [husband and self] like also getting tips from them like what they do with kids for discipline and the type of words they use so it’s, yeah. The main part is that we don’t feel like we’re experts, so we really want their [teachers’] feedback and their advice and their opinion. Of course, we know [child] and we won’t just take their word for granted, but I think we both have the same objective and they have more experience with different kids and different behaviors, so it’s more like we see them as the experts and we’re just the parents. They are the professionals.

However, teachers had negative relationship experiences with regard to respect, particularly with compliance among ethnic-racial minority parents. Teachers felt that some parents were less willing or able to conform or comply with policies and expectations because of parents’ cultures. Many teachers cited strained relationships and negative experiences with ethnic-racial minority parents and international parents. For example, Jody also reflected on the challenges of relationships with parents. She said:

Culturally, they [parents] might have different beliefs or do things a little bit differently, but I don’t really feel like that affects us that much. For me, it would definitely be just more the language and just having them even understand, you know, say [child] gets sent home with a fever. And, for them to understand
our illness policy and that he can’t come back within that twenty-four hours. We
have had parents who didn’t quite understand that part of it, and so their kiddo
was back bright-and-early the next morning and we kind of had to more, more
elaborate because it’s all written out, but it’s not to say like they understand even
reading it or hearing it.

While Jody didn’t attribute the challenges of the relationship to the parents’ cultural
backgrounds, it is evident that the parents’ non-compliance with policies and expectations
as a result of their cultural assets (e.g., language) were challenging for Jody.

Summary

As mentioned previously, parents wanted to participate in coordinating the
practices and strategies used to meet the needs of their children. This was essential to
parents feeling respected. However, teachers felt that they were developmental experts in
children’s lives, and this shaped how they coordinated with parents in determining and
synchronizing the practices and strategies that were most effective in encouraging
children’s positive behaviors and development overall.

Additionally, respect was essential in having positive or negative relationship
experiences among parents and teachers. For parents, this involved teachers’ affirming
their parenting styles and including them in coordinating guidance approaches. For
teachers, respect involved parents deferring to their judgments and opinions and
complying with policies and expectations of their classroom and the early childhood
program overall. Further, respect and disrespect were conveyed to teachers
communicatively (e.g., laughing at children’s behaviors) as well as behaviorally (e.g.,
arriving “on time” and adopting similar practices to those that teachers suggested or
endorsed). Conversely, parents’ views of respect were communicative in nature (e.g., non-judgmental discussion about children and communicating information).

Finally, parents’ and teachers’ notions of respect conflicted one another. This wasn’t problematic for parents because they felt that had been respected. However, this caused problems for teachers with regard to the coordination of parenting and teaching approaches because teachers wanted parents to be on “their page,” but teachers felt that some parents were non-compliant. This occurred most frequently with parents who were ethnic-racial minorities and international parents. Thus, parents had more positive experiences in their relationships whereas teachers had more negative ones.
CHAPTER SIX

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: RESEARCH AIM TWO

Overview

The second research aim in this study was specifically oriented to parents’ and teachers’ experiences in communication. With regard to RQ4, there were three findings that emerged from field notes and transcripts. They were: lack of guidance; three phases in the communicative episode; and barriers and challenges to communication. These findings are discussed below, followed by a discussion of individual group patterns regarding these findings. A summary of findings concludes this chapter.

Lack of Guidance

Both early childhood programs had an overarching philosophy of practice that guided how parents and teachers communicated with one another in their early childhood programs. *Small Steps* encouraged a “continuation of home,” and *Tot Spot* encouraged teaching through relationships with both families and children. Adira, the program director at *Tot Spot* discussed the program’s philosophy:

Our philosophy is demonstrating and illustrating to pre-service teachers how education is based in the context of relationships. And, so, specifically in the early childhood setting, we, as model teachers, are showing them that building relationships with children, with families, with materials, curriculum, is really the key foundation to success for children, children’s learning and outcomes, success for you as a teacher and also in building that connection with families.

Program directors set the tone for PTRs and, in particular, PTC through these philosophies. Adira reflected on her instrumental role in establishing these precedents.
She said, “As director, I need to lead that [philosophy of practice] also.” Toni, the program director at Small Steps, shared similar sentiments. She discussed how her role was instrumental in encouraging specific practices and strategies for interacting and communicating with parents. She said, “I would say I set the tone for my staff.”

Thus, program directors felt that they were key in modeling effective practices and strategies for interacting and communicating with families and parents. Subsequently, directors’ expectations, rules, and guidelines for parent-teacher interactions and communication reflected their own strategies and preferences. For instance, Adira discussed her expectations for teachers in Tot Spot. She reflected:

First and foremost, it’s in person so that they [teachers] gain confidence and experience of greeting parents, greeting children, and building that relationship through conversation—one-on-one conversation. So, first of all, greeting them. But, then, second of all, sharing information about the child’s day—positive and negative. So, that is really a clear expectation.

This aligned with the practices and strategies that she used with parents day-to-day. She said:

It’s knowing people and calling them by name, and that’s a challenge because we do have a diverse population. So, that’s really been a big strategy of mine—learning how to pronounce names, learning how to greet them. Them, meaning students, children, and parents, by using first names. So, that’s really been a key strategy of how, I as a director, have made that connection and relationship.
Further, Toni also discussed her expectations for teachers at *Small Steps*. She said:

I don’t necessarily have any firm rules or expectations. One of my expectations with communication is that there is that follow-up for checking for understanding. That, you know, if you have a rough conversation, or you’re having a conversation where you’re leaving it feeling, “Gah, I dunno,” “I don’t know how that went, I don’t know how the parent felt,” especially in touchy subjects like behavior or, you know, delays, things like that. That’s where I always encourage them [teachers] to just send that follow-up email and checking understanding—see if they’re [parents] on the same page with you [teacher].

Similar to Adira’s expectations, Toni’s expectations were related to the practices and strategies she used every day, primarily to ensure understanding. She said:

We don’t want anyone leaving the verbal communication saying,” I don’t think so, or I don’t know,” “That didn’t feel good to me,” that type of thing. Always check for understanding. But, that’s a style that I have in leadership, and I think that’s kind of trickled down to my staff.

When discussing the rules and expectations for interactions and communications with parents, teachers most often cited the need to “touch base every day.” For instance, Charlotte, a teacher reporting on her relationship with an ethnic-racial minority parent, said, “In the head teaching guidelines I think it says, like, touch base every day. But, other than that, I don’t think so. Not that I can think of.” Claire added:

I don’t know. I just feel like it’s kind of, you know, in school they tell you, “Don’t say these things,” or “Don’t say negative things,” “Always try to make the positive sandwich.” And I feel like that’s it. And it’s not necessarily like, “Here’s
the rule for talking to parents.” There’s no right or wrong way to do it. It’s just, I don’t know. It’s something that you have to practice. I don’t think there’s any rule.

Julia also talked about the few rules and expectations regarding how to interact and communicate with parents. She said:

There really aren’t many [rules and expectations]. Like, you know, we’re supposed to touch base with them [parents] as they come in and leave, whether we’re here in the morning or afternoon, and that’s it. I mean we’re supposed to be professional and…that’s it.

While there were expectations for when to communicate with parents (e.g., touching base daily), expectations regarding how to communicate with parents were non-specific. Thus, there was a lack of guidance informing PTC specifically. As such, there was tremendous variability in how teachers interpreted the expectations that had been informally passed down to them. Claire, a teacher in the same program as Charlotte, also discussed the expectation to “touch base every day,” yet interpreted it more loosely than “every day.” She said, “I mean I feel like checking in every day might be overkill. I kind of like to check in every couple days, you know, at least once a week for sure. But, not more than that.” Thus, there was an overwhelming disconnect between the expectations for practice that directors wanted to pass down to their teachers and the actual practice of teachers.

This was due in part to how teachers learned the practices and strategies they used when interacting and communicating with parents. Teachers frequently cited having learned parent-teacher practices informally and indirectly from previous coursework, life
experiences (e.g., being a parent), social learning (i.e., observation of other teachers), and practice as the primary ways in which they learned how to talk to and conduct themselves with parents. Social learning (i.e., observation) was the primary learning method, whereas explicit instruction in the early childhood program (i.e., rules and policies) was never named. For instance, when asked about how she learned the practices and strategies she used to communicate with parents, Claire shared:

I usually just try to figure it out on my own and make the best of the situation that I’m in. I think it first started in coursework. They kind of gave me a [general overview], but I think the most experience came from me being a parent. Just as a parent knowing, as a parent I would want my child’s teacher to know what happened or know what’s going on in my child’s life, so I think that would help them. So, I think the most experience came from being a parent.

Julia also shared how she learned the practices and strategies that she used when interacting and communicating with parents. In Julia’s statement below, it is evident that she had little support and training with regard to parent-teacher interactions and communication. Instead, Julia learned practices and strategies from her co-teacher when she first began teaching. She said:
From the, my co-teacher before, when I started. I started because someone was fired, so I was kind of thrown into it because I was still a student then for like the first two months, and then I got hired on full-time. I actually really struggled with the communication aspect with parents at first because, typically, when someone new starts they shadow the current teacher for like the first week, they work the same shift. I didn’t get that, and I just started immediately and I still was just a student too, so it was like *sink or swim*.

Thus, teachers felt that they received little structure and guidance regarding how to specifically communicate with parents and which, if any, rules and policies to follow. This lack of guidance specifically informing PTC translated to parent-teacher practices that were teacher-determined rather than program-determined. That is, teachers determined the best ways to interact and communicate with parents, and their practices and strategies were typically not informed by policies and guidelines rooted in best practices. Since teachers learned practices through observation of other teachers, there were distinct patterns in parents’ and teachers’ communication experiences.

**Three Phases in the Communicative Episode**

PTC was primarily oriented to information-sharing, and three phases of talk were identified the communicative episode during which information about children was shared. Specifically, these three phases of talk were *welcoming and greeting*, *conversation about the child’s night or day*, and *taking leave/exiting*. Teachers tended to lead these phases, and the longest phase was *conversation about the child’s night or day*. These phases of the communicative episode are discussed below.
**Welcoming and greeting.** Parents and teachers both agreed that teacher-child relationships were priority over PTRs. Lily, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, said, “Kids come first.” This was seen with regard to how parents and teachers communicated with one another. In nearly every instance of PTC during morning transitions, teachers acknowledged, welcomed, and greeted children first. An excerpt from field notes that captures this pattern in welcoming and greeting (in a classroom serving children 12-24 months old) is provided below:

A White father enters the classroom. His sleeping child, a little boy with platinum blonde hair, is sprawled over his shoulder and chest, his arms and legs dangling at the father’s sides. The boy is sleeping soundly, unaware and unfazed by the hustle and bustle. The teacher greets the child, though it is obvious that he is sleeping; his sleeping face is tilted toward the teacher with one side of it smushed so that his lips pucker out. The teacher says, “Morning, (Child)!” She smiles and is animated. The boy’s father walks over to her and says, “Good morning,” with a slight smile on his face. The teacher asks, “Is he out?” Her brows furrow as she asks him this question, and the father nods. The teacher tells him where to put the boy, saying, “You can lay him down over there [on a mat near dramatic play].”

Another excerpt in a preschool classroom (three-and-a-half to five years) is provided below:

It’s right at 8:30. Children are dispersed in the room, working quietly during free play. There are three children playing with puzzles, three working with crayons, and three at the breakfast table with Julia (teacher). Divya and her son arrive. Divya opens the door as her son ducks under her arm and through the door. Julia
looks over from where she’s sitting and smiles. Julia greets the boy, “Morning, (Child).” The boy smiles and Divya starts signing in the boy on the attendance log. Julia gets up and begins to walk over to them.

Further, there were very few instances of using parents’ first names during the welcoming and greeting phase of the communicative episode, during both morning and afternoon transitions. An excerpt from an afternoon pick-up is provided below greeting (in a classroom serving children 12-24 months old):

A White mother arrives. Lily calls a little boy’s attention to the woman’s arrival. She prompts him excitedly, “(Child), look who’s here!” The mom dances and smiles; she’s so excited to see her son. She says to him, “Hi! Hi, precious!” The teacher watches as the mother bends down and picks up her son, whose arms are outstretched to her. Lily cues the boy, “(Child), what did we do today?” The mother asks the teacher, “He had a good day?” The teacher says, “Yeah, just got done makin’ pumpkins.” The mother swings the boy onto her hip, and they begin to talk about the boy’s day.

**Conversation about the child’s day or night.** Conversation between parents and teachers was focused on what children had done during the night preceding drop-off, or during the day before pick-up. PTC consisted primarily of information-sharing that was preparatory and proactive in nature. That is, conversation between parents and teachers centered on information that would be helpful in understanding children’s needs in the early childhood program or at home. Parents provided such information during morning transitions (drop-off) and teachers provided information during afternoon transitions (pick-up).
Typically, parents told information about children’s evenings and mornings once teachers asked for it. That is, parents rarely entered the classroom and immediately offered information about children (e.g., how he or she slept the night before, etc.). Teachers explicitly asked parents questions regarding children, and this opened conversation between parents and teachers. Lily, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent said, “So, that’s the main opener, I would say. So, like how his day went, when he was last changed, things that we saw—like working on his behavior and his listening.” Additionally, Sofía, an ethnic-racial minority parent discussed how information-sharing was initiated by teachers. She shared:

In the morning, they [teachers] always ask how their [child] evening and morning has been, and if there’s anything going on in the kid’s life—if a parent is out of town or there’s a grandparent visiting, any changes. And, then at the end of the day, they [teachers] always give us [husband and self] the report of how they [child] did, a little bit of the activities, just if there were any problems with friends or any sort of thing like that.

An excerpt from field notes is provided below. In it, Lily (in a classroom serving children 12-24 months old) asks for information about a child’s night:

A White mother arrives with her daughter. The mother tells Lily, “Hi,” as she enters the classroom. Lily’s face lights up with excitement and she says the child’s name, “(Child)!” She then says, “Good morning! We’re gonna get ready for breakfast pretty soon.” The little girl is reluctant to transition into the classroom, holding onto her mother’s hand and resisting to move forward. Lily asks, “Did she have a good night?” She smiles at the mother. The mother
answers her with, “Yeah, great night. We’ve been going to bed early, getting up early.” Lily replies, “Good!” The mother talks to her about the costume the little girl is wearing (as Halloween is a few days away). Then, she begins to sign-in and the little girl cries a little. Her mother begins to leave, though. Lily soothes the little girl, who has her small hands covering her teary eyes. The mother tells Lily as she passes through the door, “Have a good day, (Lily).” With a smile and some animation, she says, “Thanks. You, too.”

Additionally, communication during afternoon transitions was oriented to what children had done during the day, and there were patterns in the kinds of things parents and teachers talked about according to children’s ages. PTC was particularly important for younger children. Emma, a White parent, spoke to this, saying that because her daughter was so young and therefore had limited verbal language skills, communication with her daughter’s teacher was critical in order to know what was going on with her child. She reflected, “She [young daughter] still needs the most connection with school, and I have to rely on the teachers more with her because of her age. She’s younger [one year old], and she doesn’t communicate that well.”

Birth-to-three. For younger children (infants and toddlers), conversation focused on children’s food intake, diapering and toileting frequency, and sleep duration. For two- and three year-olds, conversation between parents and teachers focused on children’s physical activities during the day (e.g., with whom he or she played, things that he or she made, etc.) and how children were progressing
toward developmental milestones (e.g., “She tried on the potty lots of times today. She’s becoming more aware of her body,” and “(Child) said ‘sidewalk’ today.”).

As seen with PTRs overall, in which parents and teachers connected through children, parents and teachers talked through children as well, primarily during toddler years because children were either pre- or non-verbal. Two examples of how parents and teachers talked through children are provided below.

An ethnic-racial minority father enters the classroom. He brings his little girl into the classroom. The teacher is on the floor, sitting near children who are playing. She says enthusiastically, “Good morning!” She then asks the little girl (12-24 months), “What do you have here? Did you have to wear a hat today?” The father answers for the little girl, saying, “We talked about it.” She then asks the little girl, “Did you have a good night?”

The father begins to talk about the little girl’s evening.

It is evident in the excerpt above that parents and teachers talked through the child in an effort to include her, though her language skills were emerging. This is also evident in the excerpt below:

A White father arrives. He sees his daughter painting at an art easel, and her teacher assisting her using hand-over-hand. He asks his daughter, “Are you painting?” The teacher smiles and answers excitedly, “Painting a lion!”…The teacher asks the little girl, “Do you paint at home?” to which her father replies, “We haven’t decided yet.” They laugh together.

When asked about talking with parents through children, Claire, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, said:
I do it [talk through the child] because I don’t want to exclude the child in the conversation. I mean, I know the parents are going to answer for them, so I think it’s just a way of including the kiddo so that they’re not just standing there like, “I can hear you talking about me, so here I am.”

Moreover, parents wanted individualized, specific information about what their child did during the day during this communicative episode. For example, Lisa, a White parent, said, “You want to know what your child is doing specifically. You want details about what’s going on.” However, most of the information shared between parents and teachers encompassed activities and behaviors that were routine and not out of the ordinary. That is, behaviors and activities that within children’s normal behavioral states, temperament and activities. Non-routine information included occasions of accident or incident reports or negative aspects about a child’s day such as disrupted naps or difficult transitions. As a result, much of information about children’s days was condensed to a sentence or two in conversation. For example, Sofía said:

When there’s nothing to talk about it’s, “He [son] did great,” and they [teachers] may tell you a few things of what they [child] did during the day, but on a day-to-day, there is not much more than a “hi” and “bye.”

Sabrina, an ethnic-racial minority parent, added, “If there’s anything that significantly took place throughout the day, they [teachers] tell me.”

Additionally, information about children’s days was not individualized to specific children. Instead, much of teachers’ speech about what children had done during the day was recurrent. That is, they told many parents the same
information repeatedly (e.g., “He had a good day. We played outside and went on a leaf hunt.”). This was evident in the kinds of statements that teachers made about children’s days. Specifically, teachers made “we” statements more often than individualized “he” or “she” statements. Sometimes, “we” statements were elaborated or extended by giving individualized information about children, such as “We had a great day. He was a good listener/good helper/good sharer.” However, generalized statements were more common than individualized ones. When asked to elaborate on the generalizations of these statements, Claire, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, said:

   It’s almost like a script. “Hey, this is how we’re telling parents how they [children] did.” I’ve never really talked to anybody what I’m going to say to parents. If it works, it works. If it doesn’t, I don’t know. It’s not that I’m collaborating with other teachers, it’s just my script.

   Parents did not perceive this generalized information about children’s days as simplified or duplicated, though. Parents focused on their individual relationships with their child’s teacher. Because the information shared with parents included their child, the information felt more personalized to them.

   **Three-to-five.** For preschool-aged children, conversation became more child-directed in which a child would be asked questions about his or her night or day and was expected to answer for himself or herself. An excerpt from field notes is provided below. In it, a preschooler is prompted by both his mother and Julia (his teacher) during a morning transition to talk about what he had done the evening prior:
It’s 7:40. There are two children here and the teachers are chatting amongst themselves. A mother arrives with her son. “Good morning!” Julia says while smiling. The mother returns the smile and greeting, saying, “Good morning.” Julia then turns her attention to the boy, “Hi, (Child).” She asks the boy, “How was basketball?” The mother then asks the child, “Did you see more friends there from the (identifier omitted) room?” They continue to talk about the boy’s stickers that he had brought and an upcoming field site visit. The mother hugs the boy and tells him, “Have a good day. Make good choices.” Julia lowers her body to be at child level. As they talk, the mother leaves the boy and the classroom.

Thus, information-sharing regarding preschool-aged children directly involved children. Moreover, because these children were older, the need for information-sharing regarding his or her behaviors and activities was less important than for children who were younger in age. Julia spoke to this, discussing how there was less to talk about with parents given the older age of children in her classroom. She said, “I feel like there’s not as much to talk about especially with this age, with preschool age, like where they’re pretty self-sufficient.”

However, when children were unable to speak for themselves, information-sharing reverted to patterns seen with parents and teachers of younger children. An excerpt from a preschool classroom (three-and-a-half to five years) is provided below. In it, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent prompts a preschooler to tell his mother about his day. Since the boy is engaged in
play, the teacher reverts to providing information about the boy’s day and using generalized statements to describe what was done:

A White teacher prompts a boy to his mother’s arrival. “(Child), look who’s here, buddy,” she says with a smile. His mother says to him, “You have new toys to play with.” The teacher says, “New, new toys. We just switched [classrooms].” The teacher goes on to talk about the boy’s day. She says, “He had a great day, worked on kindness, drew pictures for friends to make them smile, talked about cotton ball versus sandpaper words.” Then, she prompts the boy, “Who’d you draw a picture for?” “Mr. (assistant director),” he says. The boy is engrossed in solitary play with toys and trinkets in a manipulative play area. “That’s nice,” the mother says with a smile. The teacher continues to talk to the mother about what the children did during the day. She says, “We did free play—plastic marble run. We had four or five friends here.”

In addition, communication between parents and teachers was characterized by a shift in communicative style as children got older. That is, communication between parents and teachers of preschool-aged children became more open-ended and relaxed with additional use of personal referents—questions and comments that were personal and beyond the focus of the child, like family, work, and travel. An excerpt from field notes, capturing a morning transition in a preschool classroom, demonstrates the relaxed nature of PTC regarding older children:
A White boy arrives with his family in tow (mother, father, and sister). He’s excited and runs into the classroom smiling. The teacher says to him, “(Child), you brought your whole family today!” She smiles warmly at the boy. The teacher and his mother talk to one another as the father explores part of the classroom with the little boy. The teacher asked, “Did you guys have a good weekend?” They talk with one another, that either the mother or the father had pulled a muscle. The teacher, with a look of concern, asks if they might need a chiropractor. The mother downplays the incident and uses her hands to gesture “no.” Then, the mother asks, referring to the weekend, “What about you guys?” The teacher tells the mother about her family’s weekend—that they ate, watched football, and played.

As seen in this field notes’ excerpt, the conversation between the boy’s mother and his teacher was informal, relaxed, and filled with talk about each other’s personal lives. This was distinct from communication between parents and teachers of younger children. Whereas communication related to younger children was focused on the child specifically, communication related to older children was open-ended and focused on the family rather than specifically the child.

Further, written communication was used to support FTF communication in all classrooms, from infancy to preschool ages. These written communications provided information about the class overall as well as specific children. For instance, written communication was posted throughout classrooms that documented what classes had done during the day (i.e., “Today we played with
spaghetti,” “Cooking class today! We made vanilla bean bites. Yum!”). Written communication detailing what children had done during the day was also made available to parents (i.e., amount of food eaten, diapering frequency, etc.).

However, these written communications oriented to specific children were only helpful for parents of very young children, particularly infants. Parents felt that the written communication was redundant and that they would acquire the same information through a FTF, verbal exchange with their children’s teachers. Moreover, written communication wasn’t helpful for parents who had adequate face time with teachers. Sabrina, an ethnic-racial minority parent discussed this. She shared:

I don’t look at them [daily sheets documenting food intake, toileting, etc.]. I don’t find them useful only because I’m dropping off and picking up. So, usually I talk to the teacher and at drop-off I’m telling that he woke up in the middle of the night and he [son] might be kind of cranky or we went and did this last night and he went to bed an hour-and-a-half later than he normally does and slept in the car on the way here, probably gonna be cranky. I’ve already had that communication with them, so I don’t write it on the sheet. But again, that’s because I tell them when I’m in here and I also do drop-off earlier and pick-up later, so there are less kids or other parents competing for the teacher’s attention at that time. So, I do get maybe a little more face time, whereas maybe around 8, 8:15 where there are multiple parents dropping off at the same time and they don’t have
that, then I can see where the daily sheet would be helpful in capturing that.

Moreover, parents felt that written communication concerning specific children was sometimes inaccurate and that the information was generalized into aggregate statements like “a good day” or duplicated among many children. Therefore, parents felt that written communication did not convey a complete rendering of a child’s day in addition to being generally unreliable. For instance, Aaron said:

Like, I know on that sheet they [teachers] always write the exact same thing because they’re [sheets] like, “Yeah, they all enjoyed the bug cars.” I hate that. I would actually value much more if they didn’t put things on there every day, but when there was something that he [son] actually enjoyed, they wrote it on there.

Finally, PTC during afternoon transitions was marked by frequent conversation lulls and periods of silence in PTC. During these times, parents and teachers displayed joint or shared attention on children’s activities. That is, they maintained side-by-side body orientations and watched a particular child as he or she did some sort of activity, like playing or reading. These conversation lulls characterized by parents’ and teachers’ co-observation of children also marked the end of this second phase in the communicative episode—talking about the child’s day.

**Taking leave and exiting.** The third and final phase in the communicative episode involved ending conversation about the child’s night or day, taking leave, and exiting the classroom. During morning transitions, this involved getting children engaged
in their days (e.g., routine, materials, or peers) and then parents leaving without disruption or acknowledgement. For instance, Aaron said, “We [father and son] go in, we make sure we use the potty and stuff like that… I just gotta get him at the table [for breakfast] and me out of there [classroom].” When departing salutations were said, they were typically brief with minimal eye contact or acknowledgement. For example, some parents would be told while exiting, “Have a good day.” Many times, these parting phrases were inaudible to parents and unacknowledged.

During afternoon transitions, this phase in the communicative episode tended to be nonverbally led through changes in body orientations and location within the classroom. For example, parents would begin walking toward the classroom door while talking to the teacher. These nonverbal behaviors initiated that the parent and child were leaving. Similar to the welcoming and greeting phase of the communicative episode, children were also acknowledged first during taking leave and exiting. For example, the departure salutation was commonly, “Bye, (child’s name)!“ Parents acknowledged departure phrases that were child-directed through nonverbal behaviors such as smiling and then waving. Also similar to the welcoming and greeting phase, parents and teachers frequently talked through children when taking leave and exiting. Children were often prompted to “goodbye” to his or her teacher or peers (e.g., “Tell your teacher Bye,” or “Say, ‘Bye, friends.’”). This was performative in nature and, with younger children, was facilitated by parents (e.g., hand-over-hand to wave goodbye).

Finally, there were fewer greetings and departure salutations (e.g., “hello” and “goodbye”) between parents and teachers during afternoon transitions. Typically, children were cued to the arrival of their parent (e.g., “Look who’s here!”). Parents and
teachers would then begin talking about the child’s day, then parents would gradually make their way toward the classroom door and acknowledge “goodbye” through children, much like “Good morning, (Child)” seen in *welcoming and greeting*. Particularly for younger children, taking leave and exiting during afternoon transitions was marked by parents saying “thank you” to their children’s teachers as they exited.

**Barriers and Challenges in the Communicative Episode**

Parents and teachers experienced several barriers and challenges in their communication with one another. Two primary barriers and challenges were identified—short- and long-term. These barriers were identified as short- and long-term barriers and challenges depending on the kinds of consequences they produced for parents and teachers (temporary or long-term).

**Short-term barriers and challenges.** Short-term barriers and challenges included the flow of parents at morning drop-off and afternoon pick-up. Peak periods of parents’ arrival during afternoon and morning transitions brought many parents into classrooms at one time. Parents often had to wait in que to talk with their child’s teacher. Parents felt that this was a barrier as they had limited time to wait, often having to pick up other children from school (K-12), run errands, and arrive at their homes in enough time to transition their family into evening routines (e.g., family mealtimes and bath and bed times). Consequently, parents would frequently leave the classroom, rather than continuing to wait for one-on-one time with their child’s teacher. For example, Divya, an ethnic-racial minority parent, said:

If there are like three, four parents sometime and then they go one-to-one advice [with the teacher], so I don’t even wait sometimes and I just leave because I don’t
have time to just stand there and see how his day was and I just ask him [my son].

Similarly, Lisa, a White parent, said:

It does feel like it’s [pick-up] in a rush, and there are other parents there. And, if other parents are talking, I usually just don’t deal with it [communicating with the teacher] then, rather than wait. If there weren’t a line, then I might take more time to talk to the teacher. But, if other people are talking or the teacher is off doing things, I’m not as likely to do that as if they’re there and I can talk to them.

Moreover, parents were more likely to wait for teachers during morning transitions than afternoon transitions in order to ensure that their child was engaged in the classroom routine. For example, Emma said:

At drop-off, I would wait. I would wait until someone could come get my child and help them [child] to engage. At pick up, I would be less likely to wait. I would probably stick around for a little bit, and then just say, “Okay, say goodbye to your friends,” and then try to catch up with them [teacher] later. If there was something really important I would wait, but if it’s just a normal day I’d probably give a little bit and go.

However, teachers felt that afternoons were the best time to communicate with parents because afternoon conversation would primarily encompass sharing information about children’s days, thus making conversation easier and more substantive. For example, Julia, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, said, “In the afternoons, we [teachers] have more time to talk with them [parents], because they’re not as rushed and they’re not rushing off to work.”
Though these peak periods in drop-off and pick-up were challenging to parents, they were less challenging to teachers. Teachers felt that the inundation that occurred at drop-off and pick-up were part and parcel with teaching itself. Teachers often mentioned that higher teacher-child ratios were helpful in dealing with the influx of parents at drop-off, as additional teachers helped to engage children, freeing teachers’ ability to connect with parents. These kinds of supports were less available during afternoon transitions as co-teachers or other support staff were busy cleaning up the classroom. Furthermore, since afternoon transitions brought many parents to one teacher to acquire information, additional supports were less helpful to teachers.

In addition, pick-up in the outdoor classroom was particularly challenging, frequently chaotic, and difficult. Often, parents spent several minutes locating their child during their outdoor play. Noise levels were high, and parents and teachers had to speak much louder with one another to be heard. Furthermore, pick-up during outdoor time increased multi-tasking and the likelihood of distraction, making conversation more difficult and information less detailed. When picking up during outdoor time, parents frequently picked up their children and left without approaching or speaking to teachers. Given the increased distance in the outdoor classroom, parents and teachers would acknowledge each other with emblems and gestures, like head nods and waving, as their children ran to them. Thus, parents and teachers acknowledged one another, but did not speak face-to-face about a child’s day.

Furthermore, shorter PTRs were a barrier to parents’ and teachers’ communication with one another. For parents, shorter relationships with teachers translated to receiving incomplete information about their child. For instance, Aaron, a
White parent, said, “The teachers that have been working longer, I can ask them more questions about how he’s [son] doing and know that the answers are gonna be more, gonna be richer than before.”

For teachers, however, longer relationships with parents brought beneficial changes in communication. That is, early on in PTRs, communication was more focused on information concerning the child specifically (e.g., his or her development and needs). As the PTR became longer, conversation became more relaxed, laid-back, and humor-filled. Conversation also expanded from child-focused to family-focused. For example, Claire spoke to this change in PTC over time:

I think it [communication with parent] started out as child development wise. But as the semester has gone on, it’s definitely gotten to be a little bit more building that social rapport with the family. So, asking them how their weekend was, if they did anything special, what are they doing later, just random things like that. Just trying to get to know the family better, rather than just knowing the child.

However, some teachers felt that longer PTRs habituated parents and teachers to one another. As a result, their PTC became less substantive. For instance, Lily, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, reflected:

If a parent’s been there for a while, like you’ve known them for a while and you’re just kind of like, “Oh, he [child] had a really good day.” Or, just, you know the drill, like, maybe not being as intentional with those parents who have been here for a while.

**Long-term barriers and challenges.** In addition to short-term barriers and challenges, teachers experienced long-term barriers in their communication with parents.
Teachers’ most often cited barrier or challenge was negotiating language barriers when communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse parents. For instance, Julia said:

Well, number one, the hardest thing would be if there’s a language barrier. Some of them [parents], like one parent might be here for school [university], so then the other parent that’s not [in university] might not have the best English if they have no use for it really, you know they haven’t been studying it or something.

Claire also discussed the challenge of interacting and communicating with parents when parents’ native language was not Standard American English. She shared:

I mean language barriers is probably a big one [barrier and challenge]. It’s hard for me to sit there and tell a parent that something’s happened but I don’t know if they’re understanding me or not. Or, it’s kind of hard to understand the parent talking to me. Did I hear that right? Things like that.

In addition, teachers felt that face-to-face communication was the best way to overcome barriers and challenges associated with language barriers. For example, Lily said:

So, I think that’s one of the biggest issues making sure that we’re [teachers] understood. I like talking face-to-face, I think you’re able to communicate with the eyes and the hands. And understanding inflection in voice. Whereas over email, we have a couple of parents who don’t know English very well, so it’s hard for us to read their English. But, I think at the same time it’s hard for them to understand our English. So, still trying to find that, with international parents, just learning how to communicate.
However, teachers’ lack of familiarity and cultural competence with the cultures represented in their classrooms was a long-term barrier. Teachers were uncertain of the behaviors that were appropriate according to the social conventions of other non-U.S. cultures. For example, Claire reflected on the barriers and challenges she experienced in her communication with parents. She said:

On my end, not knowing about a culture. So, if I were to approach a parent who’s a different culture than me, like how are they, I mean, like some Asian families don’t like to look you in the eye or things like that. Am I making you uncomfortable looking you in the eye or should I not? That kind of barrier. And if they don’t receive that very well, then here I am back to square one trying to form that relationship with you again.

Further, Julia, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, discussed a need for additional support and guidance in regard to cultural competence. She shared:

Training, or just information on like different cultures and how they [ethnically and racially diverse parents] kind of expect school to go, because we have a ton of internationals. I taught in two different countries, so like that was very interesting to see how it’s like, and in both of those countries, whatever teachers say is law and that’s not how it is in our country either. Just kind of knowing the expectations that different cultures may expect from their teachers.

When discussing their communication with parents, every teacher described how her skills in interpersonal communication could be improved. For instance, Julia, said, “I personally do not think I am very good at communication, and it has not been my expertise area. I just feel uncomfortable I guess.” Though teachers recognized a need for
improvement in their communication skills, there was little concrete support to that effect. Moreover, teachers needed additional guidance regarding how to interact and communicate with parents, especially those who were culturally and linguistically diverse. Jody, a teacher reporting on her relationship with an ethnic-racial minority parent, shared, “I feel like that’s [engaging, interacting, and communicating with parents] definitely one of my stronger points, but I think there’s always room for improvement on that.”

Though teachers were frequently notified about local trainings that could enhance these and other skills (e.g., encouraging children’s positive behaviors), they weren’t often or easily accessible to teachers. Teachers frequently discussed that they would have to travel unreasonable distances for trainings and pay for all associated costs except for the registration or training fee. This deterred many teachers from participating in these events, and many teachers did not want to seek out training beyond their 16-hour yearly requirement for the state because of these expenditures of personal time and funds.

**Individual Group Patterns**

There were notable differences in parents’ and teachers’ communication experiences according to parents’ ethnicities and races. First, teachers tended to lead welcoming and greeting. That is, they initiated more often than parents. However, teachers welcomed and greeted ethnic-racial minority parents more often than White parents (particularly during morning transitions). Further, when parents did initiate welcoming and greeting, ethnic-racial minority parents tended to initiate more often than White parents. Additionally, ethnic-racial minority fathers tended to initiate welcoming and greeting more often than ethnic-racial minority mothers whereas White mothers initiated more often than White fathers.
Second, the only instances in which parents’ first names were observed being used were by staff (i.e., program directors and master teachers) and by one teacher who had reported on her relationship with a White parent (Lily). However, when parents’ first names were used, they were used when acknowledging White parents rather than ethnic-racial minority parents. In addition, many teachers did not know parents’ first names. Most often, they identified parents as “(Child)’s mom” or “(Child)’s dad” and used general identifiers like, “Hi, Mom.” Similarly, parents rarely used teachers’ first names.

Third, there were distinctive differences in the communicative episode between White and ethnic-racial minority parents. Conversations between White parents and teachers were longer in length, with White parents having more conversational turns than ethnic-racial minority parents. Conversations between White parents and their children’s teachers had more descriptions of children’s days (information-sharing) and rapport-building, such as elaboration into open-ended conversation with personal referents (e.g., football, upcoming events, and other aspects of parents’ and teachers’ personal lives).

Fourth, teachers interacting and communicating with ethnic-racial minority parents also used more verbal encouragers with these parents (e.g., “great” and “perfect”) as well as repetition (e.g., “right, right”). These strategies served to demonstrate ratification between these parents and teachers. That is, these communicative tools indicated agreement and understanding. Further, clarification-seeking language (e.g., “What?” and “Say again?”) was used more with ethnically and racially diverse parents than those who were White.

Finally, teachers interacting and communicating with ethnically and racially diverse parents used more nonverbal tools of communication such as head nodding,
talking with hands and gestures, and pointing. Teachers also demonstrated more relaxed body orientations and language when communicating with White parents such as leaning, having hands in his or her pockets, and less fidgeting with clothing, pens, lanyards or nametags. An excerpt from field notes provided below highlights these findings in an interaction between a teacher and an ethnic-racial minority parent:

An Asian mother comes outside and looks for her daughter. She places her hand above her eyes to block the sun as she scans the outdoor classroom for her little one. Her child’s teacher approaches her. She immediately tells the mother how the little girls’ nap went, “She slept the whole time.” She reviews a form with the mother, pointing out and to specific parts of it. I overhear, “phone number,” “address,” and “emergency contact.” The teacher holds her hand near her ear to slightly mimic the shape of a phone, and then points to another section of the form. While the mother looks over the form, the teacher continues to talk. The teacher fidgets with her pen as she waits for the mother to complete the form and waves her little girl to come over. She says, “We went for a short walk, too. It was such a nice day.” She smiles. The mother doesn’t say anything. The parent quickly writes on the form and hands it over to the teacher. The teacher says, “Perfect, perfect” as she takes the form. She quickly tells the woman, who is now joined by her daughter, “Have a great night, (Child). I’ll see you in the morning.” The mother smiles at the teacher, picks up her daughter, holds her close, and begins to leave the outdoor classroom.
Summary

Parents’ and teachers’ communication experiences were characterized by three phases in the communicative episode in which information was shared about the child’s night or day. The second phase of the communicative episode, *conversation about the child’s day or night*, was the longest communicative phase. Further, conversation about children’s activities and performance differed according to the ages of children. Communication related to younger children was focused on children’s needs and teachers often used generalized and aggregated statements to describe what children had done during the day. Communication related to older children was child-directed and focused on family topics and personal issues.

Furthermore, parents and teachers experienced barriers and challenges in their communication one another. Barriers and challenges for parents tended to be short-term whereas barriers and challenges for teachers were long-term. In addition, teachers’ barriers and challenges related to understanding social conventions of other cultures as well as navigating language barriers in communication. Teachers had little support and guidance in overcoming, reducing, or eliminating these barriers altogether. However, teachers felt that FTF communication was the best way to overcome barriers and challenges associated with language.

As a result, teachers reached out to parents more, spoke with ethnic-racial minority parents FTF, and used communicative adaptions and accommodations to compensate for these barriers and challenges. Conversations involving ethnic-racial minority parents were shorter than those involving White parents. Conversations were also characterized by increased used of nonverbal behaviors, and featured communicative
adapts. Conversely, conversations involving White parents were longer, more open-ended, and filled with more rapport-building strategies.
CHAPTER SEVEN

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: RESEARCH AIM THREE

Overview

This chapter presents findings oriented to the third research aim—to elaborate on quantitative results about PTRs using qualitative findings about PTC. Specifically, RQ5 identified communication experiences that characterized quantitative PTR patterns. Trust was central to parents’ and teachers’ communication and relationship experiences. For parents, trust encompassed the teacher-child relationship. For teachers, trust entailed parents’ trust in their child development knowledge and teaching abilities. Thus, these findings are termed trust and credibility.

Feelings of trust and credibility manifested within parents’ and teachers’ communication with one another, and these constructs were central in differentiating “good” and “excellent” PTRs. These two findings are discussed, followed by a discussion on how the role of these constructs in PTRs differed by individual participant groups (addressing the sub-question for RQ5). A summary of findings concludes the chapter.

Trust

Parents and teachers both agreed that the teacher-child relationship was more important than the PTR. For example, Jody, a teacher reporting on her relationship with an ethnic-racial minority parent, reflected, “My number one is the kiddos and the parents are number two for me. Admin. is more support for the parents and I’m here for the kiddos 100%.” Children were parents’ most precious possessions, and parents saw children as more significant extensions of themselves. For parents, trust in their children’s teachers was directly influenced by children’s relationships with the teachers.
Correspondingly, the quality of the teacher-child relationship impacted the quality of the PTR. In other words, parents were primarily concerned with whether teachers cared for and about their child. Lisa, a White parent, spoke to this, saying, “I think the relationship between the child and the teacher is going to be reflected back into the communication with the parent and the teacher.” Trust was therefore central to parents’ relationships with teachers, and trust was communicated to parents in two ways—demonstrating care for children as well as about children.

**Communicating care for children.** Teachers’ day-to-day interactions with children provided evidence to parents that teachers cared for their children. As such, parents were particularly watchful during morning and afternoon transitions. Often, parents would stand and watch their children from afar, watching how he or she was engaged in the classroom, with his or her teacher, or with activities or peers. Part of this watchfulness was to ensure that their child was engaged in the day’s activities, particularly during morning transitions (drop-off). Watchfulness also served to prevent any disruption of children’s engagement in activities during afternoon transitions.

However, children’s engagement with teachers specifically provided evidence to parents that their children were receiving the care that they needed. Sofía, an ethnic-racial minority parent, discussed why these observational periods were important. She said:

I will always like to observe a teacher at pick-up a little bit, but then not mix up the classroom before actually going in and intervening in how things work, just to observe how the teachers handle the kids. And, what we’ve observed of just them among the kids and… just seeing the interaction between the kids and the teachers, it works.
Various forms of written communication (i.e., documentation) shared with parents at weekly or bi-weekly intervals also provided evidence to parents about the care that their children received. Teachers were required to acquire evidence of children’s learning on a daily basis and then share those observations with parents weekly via email. In addition, teachers sent lesson plans and letters about the classroom (e.g., lesson plan and learning objectives) weekly and classroom newsletters monthly. These communications conveyed to parents that their children had enriching and constructive learning experiences that teachers prepared for and guided. Sofía, an ethnic-racial minority parent, shared:

How they put together their plans and they, cause we get every week we have the weekly plan, all the activities that they’re gonna be doing and then we also get like a little summary of what they did during the week. Once a month, we get a newsletter with other activities, so just seeing how prepared they are.

Moreover, written communication was not simply about connecting parents to their children’s learning. Instead, it documented teachers’ effort(s) and communicated to parents whether individual and focused attention was provided to their children. For example, Lisa, a White parent said, “I want to know how she’s [daughter] doing and what they’re [class as a whole] doing.” Similarly, Emma, a White parent said, “They’re [teachers] emailing us photos and pictures and situations of what she’s [daughter] experiencing at school [early childhood program]. And so, that’s what makes it feel connected for me. Like, you’re really paying attention to her.”

**Communicating care about children.** In addition, children’s attachment to his or her teacher influenced how connected parents were to teachers. It was important that
teachers communicate that they cared about children in addition to caring for children.

For example, Emma, a White parent, said:

I think it goes back to the basics. Like, every parent wants the same thing for their child. They [parents] want them [their children] to be happy and healthy and, that’s the foundation of it [PTRs and communication]. So, if you don’t meet that, then it doesn’t matter to me what you [tell me or] send me in an email. Like, the child needs to want to go to school, and when I drop her [daughter] off, I don’t worry about her the rest of the day. I feel like she’s cared for and she’s happy going there and, so, everything on top of that is extra.

If parents sensed little or no connection between the teacher and their child, they were less invested in the relationship with the teacher. Lisa, a White parent, reflected on this when asked to talk about her relationship with her daughter’s teacher and why it was “good” rather than “excellent.” She said:

She [daughter] hasn’t been particularly attached to this target teacher. I mean, she’s nice enough, but you know, sometimes she [daughter] has this real bond with the target teacher, and she hasn’t much [with the current one]. So, the communication…it’s not that I have anything against her, but the communication has just mostly been the emails that we get. It’s fun to see the pictures, but I haven’t talked as much with her target teacher. And [daughter] doesn’t even call her [teacher] her name, usually. She just says, “Hi, target teacher.” And that hasn’t been, so, you know, she’s been a lot closer to some of the other teachers in the past, so…
Parents used teachers’ communication with and about children as evidence that they cared about their children. Communication with and about children that was straightforward and pragmatic communicated very different messages to parents than communication that was warm, personal, and affectionate. Teachers often used terms of endearment when speaking to children, such as “love” and “buddy.” These terms conveyed affection for children, and this communicated to parents that teachers had caring relationships with their children. For example, statements such as “Hey, love,” “Hey, dude,” pet names, and nicknames for children were frequently observed (e.g., “Russy” rather than “Russ” or “Blainester” rather than “Blaine”).

Affectionate actions during teacher-child interactions also demonstrated teachers’ care about children. Physical exchanges like hugs, gentle squeezes, blowing kisses, and high-fives demonstrated care about and affection toward children as did comments about children’s non-developmental characteristics (e.g., their cuteness and sweetness). Lisa, a White parent, discussed teachers’ closeness with her daughter through these evidentiary behaviors. She said:

They [teachers] would talk more about what [daughter] was doing, and just talked more about [her]. They were more, they’d be more specific, but also they’d be more on the emotional side. Where they would be more giving hugs or something or more, I just felt like they had more of a connection with her, and I think that’s probably a mutual thing.

This finding also intersected with children’s age. That is, trust transitioned from care for children to about children as children aged. With younger children, parents’ trust focused on care for children as care was more directly linked to their growth and
development. As children’s developmental competencies became more advanced, parents’ trust focused on care about children. Children were more likely to have close attachment with their teachers when they were older as it was directly communicated to parents through interaction and language. For example, teachers used more terms of endearment and physical expressions of affection with older children. They also commented on non-developmental characteristics with older children than younger children.

Parents who rated their relationships as “excellent” referenced teachers’ care for and about their child more often and to a deeper degree than parents who reported “good” relationships. When parents believed that teachers truly cared for and about their child, they were more likely to experience more closeness, comfort, and communication in their relationships with teachers. This manifested to spending more time in the classroom and having longer conversations with teachers. Additionally, observations of interactions and communication between parents who had rated their relationships as “excellent” and teachers were also filled with more information-sharing and personal touches and endearments, depending on the age of children. Conversely, parents who had rated their relationships with teachers as “good” frequently demonstrated behaviors during their communication with teachers that communicated doubtfulness and skepticism (according to teachers), such as inattention and distraction during conversation (e.g., using cell phones during conversation).

**Credibility**

Credibility was important in teachers’ communication experiences and their relationships with parents overall. Teachers needed to feel that their expertise and
competence were trusted by parents. However, teachers felt that their competence and expertise was frequently doubted. For example, Jody said, “I think there are some parents who think we are glorified babysitters, for sure.” Additionally, Julia, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, reflected on how parents’ viewed her expertise and credibility due to her age. She said, “I have been told that I’m too young to know what I’m doing.” She went on to add that the relationship with the parent became strained as result of continued distrust in her abilities. Julia shared:

She’s [parent] made like comments since then, and not as mean as that, but like we took a field trip and we were walking by like where I lived freshman year. And, I was like, “I used to live here,” and she was like, “So did I, WAY before you.” And, just things like that.”

Claire, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, also echoed these sentiments. She reflected on how being a parent added to her insight as an early childhood educator and correspondingly boosted her credibility among parents. She said:

Most of the parents know that I have a child, so I think that kind of builds another, “Hey, I can trust her because she probably knows, she’s been through this, and she might know some other things that we haven’t tried yet.”

Teachers sensed when parents doubted their credibility, and this doubtfulness was communicated to teachers verbally and nonverbally. Specifically, teachers felt that certain communicative behaviors conveyed doubtfulness regarding teachers’ abilities. This included avoidance, dismissive or disinterested verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., eye rolling or looking away), inattention, distracted conversation, lack of acknowledgement in the classroom, and unfriendliness (e.g., terse conversation).
For example, Jody, a teacher reporting on her relationship with an ethnic-racial minority parent, discussed how parents’ avoidance of her, combined with their consulting another staff member, communicated doubtfulness to her. She said:

Sometimes, it was like they [parents] were avoiding [co-teacher] and I, and they would talk to the students and not approach us with different things [questions and comments]. That was kind of weird. You know, like, my co-teacher, would be like, “So, yeah, they came in and they spent five minutes talking to [staff] about this, but didn’t say a single thing to me.” And, I would get that, too.

Moreover, teachers felt that their credibility was erroneously doubted, not taking into account the reasons that parents may have doubted their abilities. For example, many teachers did not attribute parents’ skepticism or doubtfulness to their own qualities, though some clearly expressed a lack of interest or investment in teaching. This is evident in a statement from Lily, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent. She said:

I think it’s [teaching] temporary. I was really interested in, I’ve nannied before and I’ve babysat before. So, working with the children is more interesting for me. Teaching side of it, I’m not so much interested in. So, I think that this is a really good experience, like learning how to communicate with parents. Because if I do go into marriage and family counseling that’s really important. Because I need to be able to communicate with them and work with them [families]. Yeah, this is just an experience-building thing for me.

However, teachers’ level of investment was an important aspect of their credibility. Parents wanted teachers to be knowledgeable and competent as well as invested. For
example, Sabrina, an ethic-racial minority parent, said, “I need to see people wanting to be here and not having to be here.”

Furthermore, teachers’ investment in teaching was a challenge experienced by program directors. For example, Toni discussed that, for many teachers, teaching at Small Steps was a “stepping stone job.” Similarly, Adira spoke about some teachers’ lack of investment, but that it could be improved through coaching and learning. She said:

You have to be the right person to fit the bill…they’re pre-service teachers, so the quality of work isn’t always the highest. We go through a process of learning about how to communicate to families, and some [teachers] need more help than others to get to that point of professionalism.

Moreover, parents’ doubtfulness had detrimental effects on teachers’ relationships with parents. Once teachers felt that their skills and abilities were doubted, they were less motivated and inclined to connect to and communicate with parents. For example, Claire, a teacher reporting on her relationship with a White parent, said, “You’re going to be like, ‘Oh, I don’t want to talk to that parent. You [co-teacher] go do it.” Charlotte, a teacher reporting on her relationship with an ethnic-racial minority parent, shared similar sentiments. She reflected:

Some of them [the parents] [view us as credible child development experts] yes, some of them no. We [teachers] do have 90% of the answers for parents. But, some of them…don’t see that and they’ll specifically ask [staff]. Which I get. I mean, maybe they see more authority in them…[but that makes me feel] so worthless and kills my motivation [to connect with parents].
In addition, teachers who described their PTRs as “excellent” had stronger feelings that they were trusted by parents. Conversely, those who described their relationship as “good” cited problems related to parents trusting their child development expertise and teaching abilities. This was also observed during teachers’ interactions with parents. Teachers who had rated their relationships as “excellent” were more often affirmed by parents. That is, parents would often tell teachers things that demonstrated appreciation such as “thank you,” “Miss (teacher’s name) is the best, and “You guys do so much.” Parents would also affirm or reinforce the teachers’ decision making, such as addressing children’s challenging behaviors together. An excerpt from field notes captures this:

A White father arrives in the outdoor classroom. The teacher approaches him smiling. She says immediately, “(Child) had a great day, but he had a problem with riding a motorcycle. He put it in the sandbox.” She frowns as she says this. The father goes into the outdoor classroom and gets his son. He then returns to the teacher and, together, they talk to boy about how that was unacceptable behavior. He cues the boy to say, “Sorry,” to the teacher, which he does through pouted, pursed lips. The teacher says, “It’s okay,” sympathetically while she rubs his back and his father holds his hand.

**Individual Group Patterns**

Ethnic-racial minority parents and White parents had similar feelings of trust in their children’s teachers. Irrespective of parents’ ethnicities and races, “excellent” relationships were characterized by greater feelings of trust in teachers via teachers’ care for and about children. Further, these feelings of trust were present regardless of
children’s ages, though the way in which trust was conceptualized and evidenced changed as children got older.

Moreover, parents who were more trusting of teachers’ credibility had better relationships. That is, parents who rated their relationships with teachers as “good” cited issues regarding the credibility of his or her child’s teacher whereas parents who rated their relationships as “excellent” did not. While these parents felt that their children were sufficiently cared for and about, they had doubts regarding teachers’ expertise and competence. Parents were skeptical of individual teachers’ credibility and authority for a variety of reasons, such as age, lack of life experience, and not having children. Sabrina, an ethnic-racial minority parent, discussed the things that influenced what she believed about teachers’ expertise and skill level. She said:

So, with one of the sets of teachers in one of the classrooms, one of them has been here [in the early childhood program] since the center opened. And, so, the fact that she just has experiences. I think sometimes too that, you know, you can be in a classroom and you can learn, but I think having that hands-on experience is a whole other thing. And, the fact that she’s been here since day one means that she has seen her fair share of students come in-and-out. The other teacher has her own kids and I think that, too, lends to itself because I think that if you were to have somebody walk in that is brand new and only been in a classroom and doesn’t have kids, that’s where I would be a little more hesitant because they haven’t, I mean it’s completely different. I mean every kid is different and just having that experience of trial-and-error that they’ve worked with all these other kids.
To parents, characteristics that were not directly related to teachers’ education and training were related to their credibility, such as age and experience. This was important as these characteristics prevented teachers from knowing about children in general and, most importantly, their individual child. For instance, Aaron, a White parent, reflected on how teachers’ increased experience teaching in his early childhood program made them most knowledgeable about his son. He shared:

I think the ones [teachers] that are more experienced or who have been there a little bit longer are, and have been consistent, see those things [about son], those patterns [of behavior] a little bit better.

Conversely, parents who rated their relationships with teachers as “excellent” had implicit trust in teachers’ abilities. For example, Emma, a White parent, reflected, “I think we [my husband and self] have to also acknowledge that they’re [teachers] professionals and that they’re doing everything they can, and we just have to trust that they are doing what they can.”

Although parents who rated their relationships with teachers as “good” were skeptical of teachers’ abilities, all parents were confident in decisions made by the program overall (e.g., center-level decisions). Parents consistently felt that their early childhood program had hired “good people” to care for their children. For example, Sofía, an ethnic-racial minority parent, said, “They’ve been there for a while, so I trust the way the center hires people and evaluates people, and I’ve seen how when there’s problems, teachers get fired.” Thus, these issues with credibility were not so grave or egregious that they required parents’ intervention. Instead, parents felt that teachers’
expertise and competence were adequate, but that some teachers were less experienced and less knowledgeable about their particular child.

Additionally, teachers were similar in how they felt their credibility was perceived with White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents. Teachers felt that some parents had less trust in their credibility, but that it spanned across parents’ ethnicities and races. For example, Jody, a teacher reporting on her relationship with an ethnic-racial minority parent, said:

I don’t know if you can lump them all in. There’s just, whether it’s the mom, or the dad, or a professional, or student, we’ve had all kinds. And it could be their first child, it could be their second child.

However, teachers did experience difficulty with some ethnic-racial minority parents. Teachers felt that ethnic-racial minority parents had less trust in their credibility than White parents, but only if their culture observed gender roles that differed from those in the U.S. For example, Julia reflected on the parents with whom she had the most challenging relationships. She said:

Then another thing, where I don’t always have the best relationship, is sometimes, like, for example, one thing I’ve noticed is typically with Asian families, they’ll take me very, very seriously and they’ll do exactly what I say, and like I’m in charge and they follow rules, blah, blah, blah. And then, with some other cultures, like, we’ve also seen where women aren’t, like, as considered as equal as they are here. So, that can be very challenging too, when you say something and they [parents] completely disregard you.
In addition, teachers also felt that their credibility was doubted with older parents and parents who were male. Teachers felt that it was difficult for these parents to value their expertise and competence, and this caused problems in teachers’ relationships.

**Summary**

Parents’ and teachers’ relationships were distinguished between “good” and “excellent” relationships. Among parents, the quality of the teacher-child relationship impacted the quality of relationships with teachers. “Excellent” relationships were characterized by feelings of trust in teachers’ care for and about their children as well as trust in their competence and expertise (credibility). Communication between these parents and teachers was filled with warm, personal language about children and physical expressions of affection.

Conversely, “good” relationships were characterized by less trust, particularly concerns about teachers’ credibility and level of experience. Communication between these parents and teachers were characterized by parents’ behaviors that signaled doubtfulness to teachers like dismissiveness and inattention. Furthermore, teachers’ levels of investment were an important part of how parents viewed credibility. Though teachers did not attribute parents’ distrust of their abilities to their levels of investment, it was a challenge for program directors and the early childhood programs overall.

“Excellent” relationships among teachers were typified by parents’ trust in their abilities and communication that expressed gratitude and affirmed teachers’ decisions. Conversely, “good” relationships among teachers encompassed parent’s skepticism regarding their competence and expertise as well as fewer instances of gratitude and affirmation. Additionally, how parents viewed trust changed as their children aged,
similar to findings presented in preceding chapters. Teachers’ views on credibility did not change, however.

Furthermore, characterizations of “excellent” relationships were similar between White and ethnic-racial minority parents. Teachers were also similar in such characterizations, but reported more difficulty in gaining parents’ trust (regarding credibility) among parents with non-U.S. cultural orientations, older parents, and parents who were male. According to teachers, these parents had difficulty trusting their expertise and competence due to gender roles and perceived lack of experience due to age. All results and findings are summarized in Table 7.1 below.
Table 7.1

**Summarized Results and Findings**

**Aim 1: To learn about parents’ and teachers’ relationships (PTRs) and to identify differences in perceptions and experiences according to ethnicity and race.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1</th>
<th>quan</th>
<th>What are parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about PTRs?</th>
<th>Parents were higher than teachers in all scores. More parents reported high quality relationships than teachers. Teachers also reported moderate quality relationships whereas parents did not.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1a.</td>
<td>quan</td>
<td>What are the relationships between demographic variables and perceived PTR quality?</td>
<td>Discussed below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>quan</td>
<td>H1: Length of relationship will be positively associated with perceived quality of PTRs among parent participant groups.</td>
<td>There was no significant relationship between length of parent-teacher relationship and PTRS scores among parents or teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>H2: However, length of relationship will be negatively associated with perceived quality PTRs among teacher participant groups.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>quan</td>
<td>H3: More frequent FTF communication will be related to higher-quality PTRs among all participant groups.</td>
<td>Communicating daily was related to higher-quality relationships among ethnic-racial minority parents whereas communicating weekly was related to lower-quality relationships. Teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents had lower-quality relationships when they communicated every two weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>quan</td>
<td>H4: Of all modes of PTC, FTF PTC will be related to higher-quality PTRs among all participant groups.</td>
<td>FTF communication was related to higher-quality parent-teacher relationships among teachers reporting on their relationships with White parents as well as those</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
140

reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents.

**H₅:** Global rating statement scores (about PTRs) will be positively related to perceived PTR quality among all participant groups.

**GRS scores** were related to higher-quality parent-teacher relationships among all participant groups, except White parents.

**quan** How do parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about PTRs compare between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?

Ethnic-racial minority parents had slightly higher-quality relationships with teachers than White parents, although this was not statistically significant. Teachers reporting on their relationships with White parents had higher-quality relationships than those reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents. However, this difference was not statistically significant (see Table 4.4).

1b. **quan** Do perceptions about the parent-teacher relationship differ for participant groups after controlling for demographic variables (potential covariates)?

Perceptions did not differ between teachers reporting on their relationships with White parents or those reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents.

**H₆:** White parents will report higher-quality relationships with teachers than ethnic-racial minority parents.

White parents did not report higher-quality relationships with teachers than ethnic-racial minority parents. There were no differences between these groups.

**H₇:** Teachers’ reports of relationships with White parents will be higher than teachers’ reports of relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents.

Teachers’ reports of relationships with White parents were not higher than teachers’ reports of relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents. There were no differences between these groups.

**RQ2 qual** What are parents’ and teachers’ experiences in PTRs?

Respect was key in parents’ and teachers’ relationship experiences. For parents, this involved teachers’ affirming their parenting styles and
including them in coordinating guidance approaches. For teachers, respect involved parents deferring to their judgments and opinions and complying with policies and expectations of their classroom and the early childhood program overall.

**Aim 2: To learn about parents’ and teachers’ communication (PTC) and identify differences in perceptions and experiences according to ethnicity/race.**

**RQ3** quan What are parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about their communication (PTC)?

Parents had higher *Communication to Other* subscale scores than teachers, indicating more sharing of information and emotions.

**RQ4** qual What are parents’ and teachers’ communication experiences (PTC)?

There were three phases in the communicative episode between parents and teachers. *Conversation about the child’s night or day* was the longest phase. Communication about children’s activities and performance differed according to the ages of children. Communication related to younger children was focused on children’s needs and teachers often used generalized and aggregated statements to describe what children had done during the day. Communication related to older
children was child-directed and focused on family and personal issues.

Parents and teachers also experienced barriers and challenges in their communication one another. Barriers and challenges for parents tended to be short-term whereas barriers and challenges for teachers were long-term.

Qualitative (qual) How do parents’ and teachers’ experiences compare between White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?

Teachers had difficulty communicating with ethnic-racial minority parents who were also culturally and linguistically diverse in addition to understanding what appropriate communicative behaviors were according to social conventions of other cultures.

Conversations involving ethnic-racial minority parents were shorter than those involving White parents. Conversations were also characterized by increased used of nonverbal behaviors, and featured communicative adaptations. Conversely, conversations involving White parents were longer, more open-ended, and filled with more rapport-building strategies.

Aim 3: To elaborate on quantitative findings (PTRs) that emerge using qualitative findings (PTC).

RQ5 Multiple (mm) Which PTC experiences characterize the relationship patterns that emerge?

Trust and credibility distinguished “good” and “excellent” relationships among parents and teachers. Among parents’ “excellent” relationships, communication between parents and teachers was filled with warm, personal language about children and physical expressions of affection. Conversely, “good” relationships
were characterized by parents’ behaviors that signaled doubtfulness to teachers like dismissiveness and inattention. “Excellent” relationships among teachers were typified by parents’ trust in their abilities and communication that expressed gratitude and affirmed teachers’ decisions. Conversely, “good” relationships among teachers were encompassed parent’s skepticism regarding their competence and expertise as well as fewer instances of gratitude and affirmation.

How do PTC characterizations compare between PTRs of White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents?

Characterizations of “excellent” relationships were similar between White and ethnic-racial minority parents. Teachers were also similar in such characterizations, but reported more difficulty in gaining parents’ trust (regarding credibility) among parents with non-U.S. cultural orientations, older parents, and parents who were male. According to teachers, these parents had difficulty trusting their expertise and competence due to gender roles and perceived lack of experience due to age.
CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION

Overview

This chapter discusses the results and findings from the survey, naturalistic observations, and one-on-one interviews administered in this study. This chapter begins with a discussion of these findings in the context of existing research. Findings from all data sources are integrated into this discussion. Possible future directions are presented, followed by limitations of the study. A final conclusion ends the chapter.

Research Aim One

Research Aim One investigated parents’ and teachers’ perceptions and experiences in their relationships with one another. Specifically, this aim sought to learn about their perceptions and their experiences in their PTRs and how they varied by parents’ ethnicities/races. Perceptions were quantitatively assessed, and differences in perceptions about PTRs were expected as previous research tends to demonstrate that ethnic-racial minority parents have lower-quality relationships with their children’s teachers than White parents (Huang & Mason, 2008). Results of this study diverge with these trends, however. Ethnic-racial minority parents did not differ from White parents with regard to the overall quality of their PTRs. In fact, the direction of these differences exceeded those hypothesized in that ethnic-racial minority parents were slightly higher in their overall relationship scores than White parents, although this difference did not reach statistical significance.

This similarity in parents’ perceptions about their relationships with teachers is tentatively encouraging for practice contexts. Though differences did not reach statistical
significance, this result is relatively hopeful overall. The primary goal in early childhood education is to give meaningful and equitable experiences to all families and their children, irrespective of their social identities and social position characteristics such as ethnicity, race, and language. For example, NAEYC’s ethical code clearly states that the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of children and their family members should be respected (NAEYC, 2011/2005). Findings suggest that the missions of early childhood education are occurring and enhancing the lives of families and children, if only in this sample, and evidence to that effect is encouraging, particularly in a current era of high racial tension. However, as the ethnic-racial minority parents in this sample tended to self-identify as “Other,” Asian American, and Hispanic/Latino, additional research is needed regarding parent-teacher relationships and communication among other ethnic-racial and multiethnic-racial groups. It is possible that patterns seen in other research occur more robustly or frequently in other ethnic-racial groups.

Moreover, teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents did not differ from teachers reporting on their relationships with White parents. However, teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents had lower-quality relationships with parents overall than teachers reporting on their relationships with White parents. While these differences were not captured quantitatively (as they were not statistically significant), they were evidenced in these teachers’ relationships experiences with ethnic-racial minority parents (qualitatively). Specifically, feelings of respect impacted the kinds of experiences parents and teachers had in their relationships.
Consistent with previous research, parents in this study wanted to be treated with respect (Graham-Clay, 2005). However, parents’ conceptualizations of respect specifically encompassed (a) respect for their identities as parents through non-judgmental discussion about their child and parenting practices and (b) valuing their unique insight and knowledge about children as parents. This was true for all parents, irrespective of parents’ ethnicities, races, and cultural orientations. Furthermore, whereas previous research suggests that ethnic-racial minority parents often have perceptions of disrespectful or hostile relationships with teachers (Murray et al., 2014), ethnic-racial minority parents in this study had positive relationship experiences with teachers. They felt that they had been respected and their insight about their child had been valued, and White and ethnic-racial minority parents were also qualitatively similar in their relationship experiences.

Consistent with previous research, teachers’ conceptualization of respect entailed role deference and compliance (Barnes et al., 2016). Teachers wanted parents to recognize their expertise in child development and early childhood education, and this finding aligns with previous research indicating that teachers (a) perceive parents to be less knowledgeable about child development, curriculum, and teaching (Winder & Corter, 2016) and (b) need parents to understand and respect their knowledge about children in order to have effective PTRs (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000).

Previous research has also identified role misunderstanding as a common source of contention in PTRs (Joshi et al., 2005), particularly in interethnic or intercultural relationships. Gestwicki (2015) suggests that parents and teachers both claim the classroom and take over each other’s roles, which is especially problematic for teachers.
In this study, however, teachers were less concerned about parents appropriating their roles. While they were protective of their roles as child development experts and did not want their roles to be doubted, teachers were primarily concerned with parents’ compliance with expectations. This is consistent with other research on parent-teacher interactions and teachers’ focus on parents meeting their expectations (Lasky, 2000). It is possible, however, that parents in other settings may feel that their funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) may be better fitting for influencing or determining children’s educational and learning experiences than teachers’ sources of knowledge (Wilson, 2014) and may conflict with teachers’ roles.

Further, this discrepancy in parents’ and teachers’ relationship experiences suggests a need for skill development among teachers. First, parents in this study readily deferred to teachers as leaders of children’s education and development. However, teachers frequently experienced disrespect in their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents in relation to role deference and parents’ compliance with center-level policies (e.g., health exclusion policies) as well as teacher-determined expectations and suggestions. When parents were non-compliant or did not meet their expectations, teachers became frustrated and felt that their roles were undermined. This finding suggests that teachers need skill development with regard to (a) critical self-reflection, (b) the inclusivity of developmentally appropriate practice and potential dissonance between individualistic and collectivist perspectives (Gonzalez-Mena, 1993; Small, 2011), and (c) becoming culturally responsive early childhood educators (Chen, Nimmo, & Fraser, 2009).
Additionally, this finding regarding teachers’ notions of respect also illuminates the nature of teachers’ ideas about how to determine what is best for children. Though guiding principles of early childhood education acknowledge and honor parents as children’s first teachers (The Urban Child Institute, 2011), teachers felt that they were a primary and deciding figure in children’s learning and development. Findings in this study therefore suggest that teachers still observe a division between themselves and teachers, even in high-quality early childhood programs. This is consistent with the model of “schooling” (Lasky, 2000) that informs how teachers view and collaborate with parents and, in some cases, subtractive socialization processes of schooling and education (Valenzuela, 2010). This is problematic for meeting parents’ needs of being treated as teachers’ equals (Graham-Clay, 2005).

Second, findings highlight the nature of teachers’ ideas about what constitutes acceptable levels of mutuality in PTRs. Though contemporary approaches to parent engagement endorse reciprocal and egalitarian PTRs, teachers expected parents to adopt their points of view because they felt that they had a deeper understanding of children’s development and behaviors than parents. Consequently, they placated parents when coordinating parenting and teaching approaches in order to give children synchronous experiences. Ultimately, teachers used their “reason” to persuade parents toward their way of thinking which is a strategy used by teachers identified in other research (Lasky, 2000). Therefore, findings indicate that much work remains in preparing teachers to engage parents in truly egalitarian relationships, particularly in terms of united goal-setting and collaborative decision-making (NAEYC, n.d.).
Finally, though respectful relationships and mutual respect are endorsed by a variety of guidelines, little is known about how respect is actually construed among parents and teachers and how respect impacts teachers’ practices and parents’ experiences (Porter & Bromer, 2012). This study illuminated how respect was construed by parents and teachers and this is a noteworthy contribution of this study. It also demonstrated that parents’ and teachers’ relationship experiences specifically encompassed respectful experiences with one another. While these findings do not generalize beyond this sample, they are nonetheless noteworthy contributions of this study as they illuminate the unique role of respect in shaping parents’ and teachers’ experiences.

**Research Aim Two**

The second research aim explored parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of and experiences with communication. Whereas ethnic-racial minority parents and White parents were fairly similar in their relationship perceptions and experiences, they were distinctly different with regard to their communication perceptions and experiences. Overall, parents tended to report higher levels of communication (sharing of information and emotions) than teachers. Ethnic-racial minority parents differed from White parents in their perceptions regarding communication with teachers. More specifically, ethnic-racial minority parents had significantly higher communication scores than White parents. These results contradict previous research demonstrating that ethnic-racial minority parents have poor communication with teachers (Kim, 2009).

However, quantitative results and qualitative findings concerning ethnic-racial minority parents’ communication perceptions and experiences contradict one another.
Quantitatively, ethnic-racial minority parents reported more communication with teachers, specifically the sharing of information and emotions. However, their interactions and conversations with teachers were shorter than White parents, consistent with previous research indicating that teachers interact less with ethnic-racial minority parents (Bernhard et al., 1998).

Taken together, these findings suggest that ethnic-racial minority parents engaged in more sharing of information and emotions with their children’s teachers as indicated by their communication subscale scores, yet took less FTF time to do so. It is possible that ethnic-racial minority parents may need less conversation and interaction during the communicative episode in order to satisfactorily share information about their child. It is also plausible that these parents share information and emotions through other means of communication.

In addition, ethnic-racial minority parents may need to feel a sense of community and inclusion in addition to acceptance from others as a result of orientations to collectivist cultures that value the group over the individual (Wilson, 2014). Perhaps being acknowledged was sufficient for their needs in order to have positive, respectful experiences with teachers, although ethnic-racial minority parents talked less. They may also enact social hierarchies through communication that is formal and predictable (Wilson, 2014) and therefore shorter in length and more to the point than communication among White parents. It may be that the act of inclusion (welcoming and greeting) and information-sharing is more important to ethnic-racial minority parents than the nuances of conversation and communication, like rapport-building, humor, and personal references. Ethnic-racial minority parents may also respond well to ways that information
about their child was shared, such as generalized information conveyed through “we” statements rather than individualized “he” or “she” statements.

Further, though findings found in relation to Research Aim One determined that PTRs encompassed information-sharing and coordination between parents and teachers in an effort to provide children with synchronous home and school experiences, communication between parents and teachers primarily encompassed the sharing of information about a particular child, and little communication oriented to coordination was observed. Previous research has identified that PTC tends to encompass social exchanges, sharing of information, and discussion that leads to decision making (Endsley & Minish, 1991; Wilson, 2014), and that social exchanges tend to be the most common (Endsley & Minish, 1991; Gestwicki, 2015). In this study, however, information-sharing was the most common form of communication between parents and teachers and occurred specifically in the second phase of the communicative episode, *conversation about the child’s night or day*. Additionally, whereas previous research found that parents and teachers talk little about adult-focused or home or family topics (Endsley & Minish, 1991), this study found that parents and teachers did converse about these topics. However, these topics were primarily discussed among White parents.

Moreover, interactions and communications between White parents and teachers were characterized by more rapport-building strategies and techniques—relaxed, open-ended conversation that was filled with personal referents and talk about the family rather than children specifically. White parents had slightly higher levels of interpersonal connection with teachers (*Joining*) than ethnic-racial minority parents, though this difference did not reach statistical significance. It is plausible that PTC characterized by
rapport-building strategies and techniques promoted these feelings of interpersonal connection. This could also account for the patterns seen among teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents. That is, communication among these participants were characterized by shorter, less open-ended conversations. Teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents had lower Joining subscale scores (see Table 4.4), suggesting that these teachers had less interpersonal connection with ethnic-racial minority parents than teachers did with White parents. It is possible that an absence of rapport-building strategies accounted for these lower levels of interpersonal connection.

In addition, adult-focused or home or family topics were discussed among parents and teachers of older children and those in longer PTRs. It is possible that these individuals would have higher levels of Joining (interpersonal connection) also, and additional research is needed to investigate this. Moreover, personal modes of communication (FTF communication) are thought to best encourage rapport between parents and teachers (Thompson, 2008). Findings in this study elaborate this notion by indicating that specific communicative and discursive strategies of rapport-building may elicit greater impersonal connection rather than simply the personal mode of communication.

Characteristics of PTC also changed with children’s ages. For parents and teachers of young children, conversation focused on children’s health, well-being, performance, and daily activities. This was similar to findings of other research (Endsley & Minish, 1991; Gestwicki, 2015). However, communication shifted to be more child-directed as children aged, consistent with research that PTC tends to involve children in
three-way conversations (Endsley & Minish, 1991). This was a function of children’s abilities, and involving children in conversation encouraged children’s developing and emerging language skills. Furthermore, PTC also became characterized by more rapport-building strategies (e.g., open-ended and filled with more personal referents) among parents and teachers of older children.

Previous research has also identified that PTC is more frequent among parents and teachers of younger children than older children (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999) because younger children have more developmental needs and vulnerabilities than older children. Findings in this study therefore extend knowledge gained from previous research as key differences in PTC according to children’s ages were identified. That is, in addition to communicating more or less as a result of children’s ages, no studies to date have identified such patterns in PTC as a result of children’s ages and corresponding developmental needs. This is a noteworthy contribution of this study.

In addition, while teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents were quantitatively similar to teachers reporting on their relationships with White parents, they were qualitatively dissimilar. Specifically, the teachers were distinct in terms of the barriers and challenges to communication that they experienced, particularly language barriers with culturally and linguistically diverse parents. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that linguistic and language barriers are commonly experienced by parents and teachers (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016; Joshi et al., 2005).

However, this study identified that these barriers were experienced by teachers rather than parents. This finding indicates that, while teachers have difficulty achieving
mutual understanding in their communication with ethnic-racial minority parents, parents had little difficulty. It is possible that the parents with whom teachers have the most challenging communication experiences were not sampled in the qualitative portion of the study. It is also possible, however, that teachers need additional support in understanding parents who are culturally and linguistically diverse as parents likely have working proficiency in English, but teachers likely do not have working proficiency in parents’ first languages (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Turkish).

Further, teachers used two primary communicative adaptations to accommodate these language barriers among ethnic-racial minority parents who were culturally and linguistically diverse. First, teachers were diligent to connect FTF as they thought it was the best way to garner mutual understanding. This is consistent with previous research identifying that FTF communication helps parents and teachers to understand and develop meanings (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000). This finding also supports the quantitative result that FTF communication was related to higher-quality PTRs among teachers but not parents.

Second, teachers used a variety of nonverbal strategies in combination with verbal, FTF communication to encourage mutual understanding. For example, teachers often used head nodding and pointing in addition to verbal encouragers and repetition. While these strategies were effective for teachers, it is unknown whether these strategies helped culturally and linguistically diverse parents achieve mutual understanding because no parents cited language or linguistic barriers in this study. Additional research is needed regarding the use of these communicative adaptations and how parents perceive
them to be effective. It is possible that many ethnic-racial minority parents who are also linguistically diverse may find these adaptations to be derogatory or belittling.

Additionally, teachers’ lack of cultural competence and communication skills in general were barriers to communication. Teachers in this study felt that their communication skills could use improvement, consistent with other research that demonstrates that many teachers do not have high levels of self-confidence in their abilities to communicate with parents (Gartmeier, Gebhardt, & Dotger, 2016). Teachers also felt that specific skills oriented to interacting and communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse parents could be improved. These findings align with Pope Edwards and Kutaka’s position (2015) that many teachers have not mastered the necessary interpersonal skills to effectively interact and communicate with parents, especially ethnically and racially diverse parents. Therefore, findings suggest that teachers need support and training oriented to interpersonal and communicative skill development.

Further, there was a notable absence of defined expectations of practice in this study. There was little guidance for teachers detailing how to interact and communicate with parents. This is problematic as NAEYC recommends that early childhood programs have comprehensive, program-level systems for parent engagement (Principle 6; NAEYC, 2014). As a result, teachers learned practices from one another, interpreted loosely-defined expectations differently, and generally felt unsupported and unskilled. This is additionally problematic as NAEYC recommends that teachers receive the necessary supports to fully engage families (Principle 6; NAEYC, 2014). Kim (2009) suggests that teachers need clearly articulated expectations of practice and that
administrators are instrumental in shaping PTRs and communication as they are primarily responsible for the implementation of specific practices and strategies. Taken together, findings suggest that a lack of guidance can be detrimental to teachers’ preparation for effective parent engagement as well as their communication experiences with parents and that teachers need support. Findings also indicate that interpersonal and communicative skill development may also need to extend to include administrators and program directors and specifically include practice-based education (Amaro-Jiménez, 2016; Dotger, 2010; Kim, 2009).

**Research Aim Three**

The third research aim sought to identify parents’ and teachers’ communication experiences that characterized quantitative PTR results. This examination identified trust and credibility as central to parents’ and teachers’ relationship patterns in distinguishing “good” and “excellent” relationships. Consistent with previous research (Dunst et al., 1992), trust and credibility were central to positive PTRs. In this study, parents’ trust encompassed teachers’ care for and about their children. This finding regarding parents’ trust aligns with previous research has found that parents want teachers to care about them and their children (Chang, 2013; Swick, 2004). Parents who believed that teachers cared for and about their children experienced “excellent” relationships that had more familiarity, confidence, and communication with teachers. Conversely, parents who sensed little to no connection between the teacher and their child were less invested in the relationship with the teacher overall.

Similarly, trust in teachers’ expertise and competency (credibility) was essential for teachers to have “excellent” relationships with parents, consistent with previous
research highlighting the importance of parents’ respect for teachers’ competencies (Barnes et al., 2016). Previous research also tends to identify competency and credibility as a need and expectation of parents (Swick, 2004). Findings regarding parents’ trust were consistent with this research as well as findings from other studies which demonstrated that parents’ perceptions of teachers’ competence and credibility are influenced by perceptions of teachers’ knowledge (Dozza & Cavrini, 2012) and level of experience (Lerkkanen et al., 2013). For example, parents were often skeptical of teachers’ abilities due to a perceived lack of experience as result of teachers’ ages, lack of life experience, and not having children. However, parents’ trust in their early childhood programs overall seemed to mediate parents’ doubts in teachers’ competency and credibility. This may be useful for future studies as findings suggest that parents’ trust in teachers may be modulated by levels of trust in the program overall.

Additionally, findings regarding parents’ trust elaborate on what is known from previous research. Though trusting relationships are commonly regarded as essential in successful PTRs, there is little known about what specifically constitutes trust among parents and teachers. A contribution of this study is that findings help to identify what trust encompassed for parents and teachers. That is, parents didn’t only desire or need high-quality early childhood programs and highly knowledgeable teachers, which is a prevailing notion among other research studies (Swick, 2004). Instead, parents wanted teachers to know their child on a personal level and care about him or her. Findings therefore suggest that the quality of the teacher-child relationship was essential in gaining parents’ trust in teachers.
The ways in which trust was developed and communicated to parents differed from methods seen in other research studies. For instance, it is suggested that trust is created through positive exchanges between parents and teachers (Knopf & Swick, 2007), and that dependability is essential to feelings of trust (Swick, 2003). Wilson (2014) also suggests that acceptance, support, and enthusiasm are needed for parents to have trust in teachers. In this study, however, trust was specifically focused on how teachers cared for and about children as communicated through teacher-child interactions and communication, written communication that documented evidence of children’s learning, and communication about their children. It is possible that these other methods identified in previous research are also important to parents’ sense of trust within the context of care for and about their child, and additional research is needed to identify and describe these potential relationships.

Additionally, how distrust was communicated to teachers was also learned. Teachers construed behaviors from parents, such as avoidance and inattention, as indicative of skepticism and doubtfulness. Teachers also used parents’ affirming behaviors as evidence that they were trusted, such as expressing gratitude and validating teachers’ judgments and decisions. When teachers felt that their credibility was doubted, they were less motivated to interact and communicate with parents. Often, teachers shied away from interacting and communicating with parents that were skeptical of their abilities, consistent with previous research indicating that perceived criticism of teachers’ abilities and practices are detrimental to PTRs (Pillet-Shore, 2015).

This could possibly account for the finding in relation to Research Aim Two that conversation between ethnic-racial minority parents and teachers were shorter than
conversations between White parents and teachers. Since teachers perceived some ethnic-racial minority parents to be skeptical of their abilities, teachers may have been less likely to talk to them. However, previous research also indicates that parents who trust teachers’ abilities tend to be less involved in schools (Bauch & Goldring, 1998). It is therefore possible that, because ethnic-racial minority parents were trusting of their child’s teachers (via trust and credibility), they needed to share less information about their child and therefore interacted and communicated less.

Further, findings in this study identified that trust is needed for other relationship and communication processes to occur, particularly feelings of respect among parents and teachers, consistent with Brewster’s (2003) position that trust is integral to respect. For example, parents’ feelings of trust influenced their evaluation of teachers’ statements about their child. If trust was lacking, parents felt that statements about children were biased and therefore disrespectful. Furthermore, teachers’ respect entailed role deference and compliance, and threats to teachers’ credibility violated teachers’ feelings of respect. Previous research shows that negative judgments about parents’ practices (disrespect) undermine feelings of trust (Joshi et al., 2005) and that negative comments about children’s behaviors (disrespect) also undermine parents’ feelings of trust (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Taken together, previous and current research findings suggest that trust is instrumental for feelings of respect. Parents’ and teachers’ feelings of trust therefore had cascading effects on their communication and relationship experiences such that trust preceded feelings of respect, which were essential to having positive PTRs.

Overall, these findings are encouraging for practice contexts. While developing trust is not necessarily an “easy” task, it largely encompasses the nature of work already
being done in early childhood education. First, findings suggest that parents’ trust can be obtained across lines of ethnicity, race, culture, and linguistic diversity if teachers demonstrate their care for and about children while also communicating themselves to be credible and competent professionals. Second, a sense of trust can buffer parents’ occasionally negative experiences and communication barriers and challenges. Parents were more accepting and forgiving of minor incidents when teachers had secured their trust. While communicative and relationship hiccups will undoubtedly occur in PTRs, findings regarding trust indicate that securing parents’ trust is instrumental in handling and overcoming these incidents. Trust is perhaps the starting place when working toward building positive relationships between parents and teachers.

Third, findings indicate that trust can be established in relatively new and short PTRs (as PTRs tended to be less than a year in length) and that trust may not be as much of a time-consuming process as anticipated or expected. This is encouraging as many early childhood programs seek to create meaningful connections between parents and teachers as early as possible. Fourth, findings also indicate that teachers need additional guidance for developing trust with parents as it relates to credibility, especially how to create positive communication experiences with parents, though they may express skepticism regarding their credibility (e.g., remaining motivated to connect and talk to them). This also implicates whole early childhood programs as well, as parents may have trust in the program but individualized doubtfulness about teachers’ abilities.

However, it is possible that differentiating “good” and “excellent” relationships may an incremental distinction. Perhaps such differentiation is less meaningful than other comparisons as both “good” and “excellent” are indices of positive and satisfactory
quality. In this study, all parents invariably had sufficient levels of trust in their children’s teachers. Otherwise, they would have unenrolled their children from the early childhood programs (Gonzalez-Mena 2006; Mensing et al., 2000). It is therefore possible that trust may embody different beliefs, processes, or relationship and communication experiences in less positive or less trusting relationships. Additional research regarding parents’ conceptualizations and perceptions of trust in other samples is needed.

**Future Directions**

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods design in which quantitative data about PTRs were collected first. These data then informed qualitative data collection. While this approach helps to illuminate specific quantitative findings that emerged (that would have otherwise been uninvestigated), collecting data in tandem may illuminate other findings. Future research should therefore consider the use of other mixed methods designs, such as an embedded design in which a qualitative study is embedded within a quantitative study or use of various embedded design variants (e.g., mixed methods case studies or ethnographies) typically in the use of interventions (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

In addition, participatory action research models could also be beneficial in the study of PTRs and communication. This could help isolate and illuminate the barriers and challenges that teachers experience. Such an approach could incorporate self-evaluation (i.e., NAEYC’s Engaging Diverse Families Project Program Self-Assessment Checklist, n.d.) in developing and implementing effective PTC strategies that align with guidelines and are also practical, realistic, and easy to do. In such studies, researchers and providers could collaboratively explore (a) how to make communication between parents and
teachers more substantive or standardized (thereby providing teachers with much-needed guidance) without adding demands to teachers’ time and already taxed workload, (b) how to reduce or eliminate barriers and challenges, (c) and teachers can be best supported in resolving barriers and challenges.

Similarly, most of teachers’ barriers and challenges in relationships and communication encompassed working with ethnic-racial minority parents who were also culturally and linguistically diverse parents. Many teachers were not confident in their abilities to work with these families, and teachers also needed guidance in this area. In addition to improving PTC overall, participatory research could also focus exclusively on teachers’ self-efficacy, self-monitoring abilities, critical self-reflection, and cultural competence by incorporating aspects of the Culturally Responsive, Anti-bias Framework of Expectation, Education, Exploration, and Empowerment (CRAF-E4; Iruka, Curenton, & Eke, 2014). The tools encouraged in this model of family engagement could be very useful to teachers, especially those who have limited experience working with culturally and linguistically diverse parents.

Moreover, future inquiries should consider the integration of other theoretical orientations, designs, and analytical approaches. While the use of Communication Accommodation Theory was an asset of this work, other ecologically-based theoretical approaches could perhaps reveal differing or additional insights regarding PTRs and communication. For example, Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) may be helpful in understanding the proximal and distal factors that impact PTRs and communication (e.g., societal-level perceptions about cultural and linguistic diversity) across settings and various parent and teacher demographics. Critical Race Theory (Bell,
may also be useful in studying PTRs and communication among White parents and ethnic-racial minority parents, particularly for studying the negotiation of power and the transformation of teachers’ epistemologies (Swindler Boutte, 2002). Future research should explore these interpersonal parent-teacher processes using such an approach. Utilization of Communication Accommodation Theory in specific ways (e.g., examining convergence and divergence processes across various markers of identity) is also needed as this study incorporated this theory broadly into its methodological and analytical approaches through a propositional orientation.

In addition, not all facets of PTRs and communication were examined in this study. This study specifically examined the relational dimension of parent engagement which focuses on quality relationships between parents and teachers (e.g., through interpersonal connection and communication). However, this study found that many of the relational processes involved behavioral and cognitive aspects. For instance, this study found that PTRs centered on the synchronization of parenting and teaching approaches, and such synchronization required both information-sharing and coordination between parents and teachers. To an extent, this function of PTRs may be developed through a variety of behavioral engagement strategies employed by early childhood programs and teachers, such as parent-teacher conferences and other goal-setting or planning meetings. In this study, these kinds of behavioral engagement events set the tone for PTRs in which teachers expected parents to defer to their expertise and ways of doing things.

Further, parents’ and teachers’ beliefs concerning respect, trust, and credibility shaped their relationship and communication experiences. These beliefs constitute
aspects of cognitive engagement which focus on parents’ and teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about education and learning. Future research should therefore examine these processes holistically as they seem to be interconnected or complementary. The relationship and directionality of these aspects of engagement to overall PTR quality should also be examined. Also, other forms of communication such as email and other written documents were not analyzed. Other forms of communication should also be examined as written communication was key in parents’ sense of trust in teachers. Including these kinds of communication in future studies could render a more detailed and authentic understanding of PTRs and communication, especially when examining the interconnections between behavioral, cognitive, and relational engagement.

Future research should also examine coordination processes between parents and teachers as little coordination was seen in this study. In this study, information-sharing was proactive and coordination was reactive, most often precipitated by children’s challenging behaviors. Examining relationship and communication perceptions and experiences after coordination events (e.g., parent-teacher conferences or Individualized Education Plan [IEP] meetings) may identify other findings or additional information about how parents and teachers work together to communicatively accomplish the synchronization of parenting and teaching approaches.

In addition, future studies should examine how parents and teachers coordinate with one another across children’s developmental needs and social competencies as child factors, like special needs, can influence connections between parents and teachers (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). For instance, coordination processes may involve different experiences between parents and teachers of very socially competent children and parents
and teachers of children with pronounced social competence needs. Examining coordination processes among parents and teachers of children with special needs is also needed, particularly as children with special developmental and health needs are becoming increasingly prevalent in education contexts (NCES, 2016). This can include, but is not limited to, children with learning disabilities or developmental delays, children with health conditions or physical disabilities, as well as children with exceptionalities.

Future iterations of this and similar work should also examine PTRs and communication experiences in matched parent-teacher dyads and in other settings. First, a dyadic approach could help identify communicative experiences that elicit congruity in parents’ and teachers’ perceptions about their relationships. A dyadic approach could also provide further information about how parents and teachers effectively work together to give children enriching experiences that are synchronous. Second, PTRs and communication in home-based care settings should also be examined as many children are in non-relative, home-based care arrangements prior to entering formal schooling (K-12) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). It is plausible that notions of respect, trust, and credibility that were important in shaping parents’ and teachers’ relationship and communication experiences may be less salient or manifest differently in those settings.

Furthermore, Gestwicki (2015) suggests that PTRs and communication often occur within invisible boundaries of race, education, culture, or money. In this study, teachers cited strained relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents and international parents and issues regarding credibility with some ethnic-racial minority parents, older parents, and parents who were male. Examination of these interpersonal, relational
parent-teacher processes across other social identities (e.g., SES, education, class, gender), social position characteristics, and lines of marginalization may also be useful and reveal additional insights as PTRs and communication may vary according to other social identities (e.g., cultural and religious groups), social position characteristics, and the intersection of multiple and simultaneous identities and characteristics.

In addition, subsequent studies should examine PTRs and communication across a variety of child ages as there were pronounced differences in communication experiences (i.e., in the communicative episode as well as how trust was conceptualized) according to children’s ages. Future studies should also examine teacher-child relationships (e.g., interaction quality, attachment, culturally relevant practices) while also examining PTRs, perhaps with the use of the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS; Pianta, 2001). These potential relationships need empirical support, and additional research regarding these relationships is needed.

Finally, research is needed to determine whether the instrument is applicable to early childhood settings and parents of a variety of ethnic-racial groups. The dimensionality of the instrument was not further examined in this study as the purpose of this dissertation was not to validate the measure on this sample or to propose a new factor solution. While doing so fell beyond the scope of the study, the dimensionality of the items within this study warrant further examination regarding the usefulness of this instrument and its items on samples like the one used in this study. While the instrument was appropriate for parents, many items did not follow the intended structure. It is possible that the relationships of the items to the constructs may vary across cultures and ethnic-racial groups such that some items may have different meaning and
meaningfulness to some individuals and not others. This could account for the heterogeneity of variances observed in parents’ responses but not teachers’.

For example, findings suggest that respect was primarily communicative for parents (i.e., non-judgmental discussion and valuing parents’ insight), while it was a combination of behavioral and communicative for teachers (i.e., role deference and compliance). These findings illuminate the nature of several PTRS items that did not load appreciably or appropriately among parents. For instance, Item 7 (“We are sensitive to each other’s feelings”) did not load appreciably onto either of the two factors.

Qualitatively, it was important for parents to feel respected. That is, they wanted their child’s behaviors and their parenting approaches to be discussed without evaluation or judgment. Thus, sensitivity to each other’s feelings may encompass parents’ feelings of respect, and respect was communicative among parents. Therefore, this item may more closely relate to communication (information-sharing and sharing of emotions) than interpersonal connection.

Similarly, Item 18 (“This teacher tells me when s/he is pleased”) did not load appreciably to either component/factor. While the instrument authors suggest that this item entails communication from the other and therefore contributes to a sense of joining or interpersonal connection between parents and teachers, this item could best encompass affirming and validating parents’ parenting approaches, which was important to parents’ feelings of respect. It is therefore plausible that this item could associate with communication as respect was a communicative process among parents.

However, potential associations of Item 11 (“When there is a behavior problem, I have to solve it without help from this teacher”) were less identifiable. This item did not
load appreciably to either *Joining* or *Communication to Other* among parents, though the
direction of its relationships to these factors suggests that it associates with
communication rather than interpersonal connection. The nature of this item entails
collaborative problem-solving which, in this study, encompassed parents and teachers
coooperating with one another to synchronize their parenting and teaching approaches.
Additional research regarding how information-sharing and coordination relate to this
item in the context of either *Joining* or *Communication to Other* is needed.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations in this study. First, findings may be more
applicable and valid if they had derived from more realistic research sites. The research
sites utilized are non-traditional early childhood programs in that they are high quality,
university-affiliated programs with higher teacher-child ratios, numerous connections to
resources, and a commitment to innovative research and child-centered practices. Given
the role of quality in parents’ engagement in children’s learning and educational
experiences (Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner, 2004), it is possible that
parents and teachers in early childhood programs of differing levels of quality may have
different perceptions and experiences from the parents and teachers in this sample. It is
also possible that results and findings seen in other research may manifest more saliently
or robustly in other early childhood programs given the uniqueness of the research sites
used and the corresponding uniqueness of the sample. Therefore, findings may not be
applicable to other early childhood programs, such as community-based settings or those
serving special populations (e.g., low-income families or families of children with special
needs), or the teachers and parents within those programs. Future research should
therefore examine these constructs in programs of a variety of quality and perhaps those that are predominantly ethnically and racially diverse. Inclusion of more traditional early childhood programs (e.g., community-based programs) as research sites may also illuminate different processes or patterns in PTRs and communication.

Second, most parents at the research sites tend to be highly educated and of high SES. Since communication can reflect identity, social status, and group membership (West & Turner, 2014), it is possible that parent-teacher relationships differ according to other social position characteristics like educational attainment, class, and SES (e.g., speech registers and communicative styles). For example, the negotiation of power, authority, and respect may be less salient or manifest differently among parents and teachers with less education or SES. It is also possible that many of the differences in parents’ perceptions and experiences seen in other research, that did not reach statistical significance in this study, may not have manifested in this study as a result of parents’ unique social position characteristics of educational attainment, profession, and SES.

Consequently, future research should examine if and how other social position characteristics influence parent-teacher relationships and communication, particularly given the intersectionality of many social identities and position characteristics. Subsequent iterations of this and similar work should consider examining parent-teacher relationships and communication using person-centered approaches (e.g., latent profile analysis) which can illustrate how characteristics co-vary with one another at the level of the individual. Doing so could enrich the literature on parent-teacher relationships and communication by identifying and describing relationship and communication profiles of parents and teachers.
It is also possible that, because the research sites were university-affiliated, the parents who agreed to participate in this study had extraordinary characteristics or experiences. According to Martin (2015), parents who place a high value on education are typically more actively involved in their children’s education. Additionally, parents who are more engaged in learning in home settings demonstrate higher levels of parent engagement in preschool settings, have more frequent communication with teachers, and perceive parent-teacher communication to be more effective (Murray, McFarland-Piazza, & Harrison, 2015). It is therefore possible that these constructs may have a positive valence in this sample than in other probability-based samples due to parents’ beliefs or experiences regarding education and learning.

Further, self-selection bias could also have created a biased sample. For example, if parents had difficulty communicating, it is possible that they did not accept the invitation to complete the relationship survey. It is also plausible that language barriers may have affected how some participants responded to the relationship survey. Moreover, it is plausible that the parents in this sample had other characteristics that could have confounded their relationship and communication scores, such as immigrant status, acculturative factors, primary spoken language, and fluency of Standard American English. It is possible that these attributes were instrumental in parents’ perceptions and experiences. Since data on these factors and characteristics were not collected, results should be interpreted cautiously.

Additionally, there was little variability in the quality of PTRs in this sample; most relationships were high or moderate quality. Issues of social desirability may be present within the results given that most parents and teachers reported relationships that
were “good” or “excellent.” Thus, it is possible that participants overreported the positive qualities and underreported the negative qualities of their PTRs. This may be more relevant for the teachers rather than the parents in this sample. For example, teachers may have felt pressured to report positively on the survey since their responses could have suggested or implied ineffective or poor teaching practices and strategies. It may also be that participants over and under reported these qualities due to perceived demand characteristics. Results derived from this sample must therefore be interpreted with caution, and conducting additional research on PTRs of varying quality is needed in order to more completely capture parents’ and teachers’ perceptions and experiences in relationships and communication.

Third, the participants in this study were primarily White, and ethnic-racial minority parents tended to self-identify as Asian American. While this is a strength, as this population is underrepresented in the literature (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), results and findings do not necessarily apply to parents with other ethnic and racial identities. It is likely that PTRs and communication manifest differently among African American or Latino parents. It is also possible that these processes manifest even more differently among disaggregated ethnic-racial groups, such as Latino sub-groups including Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Mexicans.

Fourth, there is some indication that the psychometric properties of the instrument may be based on different populations than those represented in the sample. The instrument used in this study (PTRS) was derived from an elementary school sample. Though indices of sampling adequacy, sphericity, and internal consistency found that the study was appropriate for the parents in this sample, this was not the case for the teachers
as sampling adequacy for teachers was not met. The dimensionality of teachers’ responses could also be attributed to low sample size, though the items were appropriate in terms of alpha. This small sample of teachers is a limitation as it limits the degree to which associations, relationships, and mean differences can be found and reasonably accepted. A post hoc power analysis demonstrated that data for teachers was underpowered and that considerably more responses are needed to identify differences between the two groups of teachers (i.e., approximately 52 responses) (G*Power; Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996). It is possible that other results would have emerged had sampling adequacy and power for teachers’ responses been higher.

Furthermore, it is possible that the instrument was not appropriate for the kinds of teachers as those in this sample. Other measures of parent engagement may therefore be more appropriate, such as the Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ) instrument which measures the quality of family and provider/teacher relationships in early childhood care and education and can be administered to parents, teachers, and directors (Office of Planning, Research, & Evaluation, 2015). Perhaps a differing factor solution of the instrument used would also best capture perceived quality of PTRs among the teachers in this sample. Future research should examine the psychometric properties of the instrument and its applicability and utility within early childhood and across a variety of ethnic-racial groups and early childhood caregivers.

Fifth, participant groups were not represented equally in the qualitative interviews in this study. While attempts were made to ensure equal representation, many participants declined to participate in one-on-one interviews. This resulted in an overrepresentation of parents’ relationship and communication experiences and a simultaneous
underrepresentation of teachers’ experiences. Furthermore, teachers reporting on their relationships with ethnic-racial minority parents were represented the least in the qualitative data. Member-checking with parents was also low. Though data were triangulated (i.e., observations and accounts from parents, teachers, and program directors) and other trustworthiness procedures were used, such as member-checking and peer debriefing, this is a limitation and findings should subsequently be interpreted cautiously.

Sixth, 18% of the original sample participated in all three methods of data collection. This is a notable limitation of this study as results and findings describe and represent a small portion of the original sample. Future mixed methods studies should consider sampling approaches that satisfy both quantitative and qualitative demands while also representing a majority of participants’ perceptions and experiences consistently across data sources and collection methods (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007).

Finally, parent-teacher interactions and FTF communication are ephemeral moments that are difficult to study. While every attempt was made to holistically and completely capture interactions and communication between parents and teachers, it is possible that the very nature of the methods used in this study limit the degree to which findings can reliably accepted. More specific approaches to data collection may be better able to capture these events, thereby illuminating additional or divergent findings (e.g., video-recorded morning and afternoon transitions). Future research should also incorporate methodologies that better assess individuals’ implicit attitudes given the possibility that social desirability biased survey responses.
Furthermore, communication is a rather implicit process (West & Turner, 2014). While it is a benefit to study communicative processes because implicit perceptions and differences related to social identities and social characteristics can visibly manifest, it is equally difficult to holistically capture the nature of communication. Similarly, it can be difficult to deduce meaning and significance from such an implicit process as communicating isn’t necessarily a rational process in which individuals contemplate or plan their conversational approach. Therefore, while findings are descriptive, they may underrepresent the nature of FTF communication between parents and teachers within the context of PTRs and should be interpreted prudently.

**Conclusion**

Despite the limitations in this study, findings contribute to what is known about PTRs and communication, particularly in early childhood, a time frame often overlooked in the literature (LaForett & Mendez, 2010; Smith et al., 2013). Results and findings demonstrate that interpersonal, relational dimensions of engagement are pertinent and useful for this population, despite an overwhelming focus on other aspects of parent engagement, like attendance at classroom events, volunteering in classrooms, and parents’ engagement in children’s learning in home settings (Sheridan & Moorman Kim, 2015).

Further, many of the approaches to improving PTRs and communication focus on improving parents’ skills rather than teachers’ skills (Halgunseth et al., 2009). While these approaches have their merits in some parent populations, much of the rhetoric surrounding PTRs operates under an idea that ethnically and racially diverse families are deficient in necessary qualities to have successful relationships (Iruka et al., 2015).
Results and findings of this study challenge this prevailing rhetoric and demonstrate that the ethnic-racial minority parents in this study were committed, passionate, and invested. Although ethnic-racial minority parents may connect and communicate differently than White parents, they nonetheless have similar expectations and levels of investment as White parents.

Conversely, teachers’ relationship and communication experiences were negative, and teachers need guidance and skill-based support in order to effectively communicate with ethnic-racial minority parents and parents who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Findings therefore suggest that examination of teacher processes, rather than parent processes, may be a hopeful starting place in working towards effective parent engagement. Particularly, addressing shortfalls in teachers’ epistemological orientations and skills may be more fitting than addressing perceived deficits of ethnic-racial minority parents.

Therefore, teachers need skill development in order to be prepared for the array of cultural and linguistic diversity that awaits them in increasingly heterogeneous early childhood programs. Moreover, teachers need specific preparation for partnering with ethnic-racial minority parents oriented to (a) empowering parents of their rights and roles and (b) affirming parents’ knowledge and skills without essentializing ethnically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse parents. Findings indicate that teacher professional development should begin early in teachers’ education and training. With additional skills training, teachers may be better equipped to work with all parents, especially ethnic-racial minority parents, as children’s first teachers.
References


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APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

[Dear Parents/Teachers]:

My name is Kimberly Blitch and I am a PhD Candidate in Child, Youth, and Family Studies (CYAF) at UNL. I am conducting my dissertation research in your early childhood program about parent-teacher relationships and parent-teacher communication. This research (Project ID 16316) has been approved by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board (IRB).

You may be randomly selected to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, you will take a brief survey on SurveyMonkey, an electronic survey platform. You will be asked to enter demographic information such as ethnicity/race and the length of your PTR. You will then provide information about your parent-teacher relationship. This survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. You will receive a $10 gift card to Amazon for completing the survey.

You may also be contacted again to participate in a one-on-one interview, for which you will receive a $20 gift card to a local bookstore.

To participate in this study, you must be at least 19 years of age.

In a few days, you may receive an email that contains a link to the survey in SurveyMonkey. If you choose to participate, please follow the link and its directions. Please feel free to ask questions before or during the survey by emailing or calling me at the information listed below. Contact information for the project advisor (Dr. Michelle Rupiper) is also provided. You may contact me at the contact information listed below. You may also contact the IRB at (402) 472-6965 for more information about this study (Project ID 16316).

Best regards,

Kimberly Blitch

Primary Investigator: Kimberly A. Blitch, M.S. PhD Candidate CYAF

Project Advisor: Michelle Rupiper, PhD Assistant Department Chair, CYAF Associate Professor of Practice

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21 Some information has been omitted, such as personal phone numbers and email addresses for the researcher and project advisor.
INVITATION TO COMPLETE SURVEY

Dear (Parent/Teacher),

My name is Kimberly Blitch and I am a PhD Candidate in Child, Youth, and Family Studies (CYAF) at UNL. I am conducting my dissertation research in your early childhood program about parent-teacher relationships and parent-teacher communication. This research has been approved by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board (IRB).

You have been randomly selected to complete a survey about parent-teacher relationships. In the survey, you will rate elements of your relationship with (your child’s teacher/one specific parent who is [White/an ethnic-racial minority]). The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete.

First, you will be asked to indicate your consent to complete the survey. Next, you will be asked to enter some demographic information such as your ethnicity/race and the length of your relationship with (a parent/your child’s teacher). Finally, you will be asked to rate certain aspects of your relationship with (a parent/your child’s teacher). You will electronically receive a $10 gift card to Amazon for completing the survey.

If you choose to participate, please follow the link and its directions:

(LINK)

For information regarding SurveyMonkey’s privacy for survey respondents, please visit https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/privacy-policy/#respondents.

Please feel free to ask questions before or during the survey by emailing or calling me at the information listed below. You may also contact the project’s advisor (Dr. Michelle Rupiper) at the information provided below.

You may contact me at the information listed below and you may also contact the IRB at (402) 472-6965 for more information about this study (Project ID 16316).

Sincerely,

Primary Investigator:
Kimberly A. Blitch, M.S.
PhD Candidate
CYAF

Project Advisor:
Michelle Rupiper, PhD
Assistant Department Chair, CYAF
Associate Professor of Practice
APPENDIX C

SURVEY²²,²³

Parent-Teacher Relationships and Communication in Early Childhood

(Project ID [Redacted] -A)

Welcome to the survey (Project ID [Redacted] -A). Click 'next' to begin, and thank you for participating.

INFORMED CONSENT

The purpose of this research project is to investigate PTRs and PTC in early childhood. This research has been approved by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board (IRB).

There are three components of participation in this study—a survey, observations, and an interview.

Survey
The purpose of the survey is to learn about ethnic-racial minority parents' relationships with teachers.

In the survey, you will provide your demographic information. You will then be asked to think about your child's teacher. You will respond to questions about your relationship with that teacher. All questions and corresponding responses will be about that specific relationship with the teacher.

This survey will be delivered electronically through SurveyMonkey at its highest level of security. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete.

You will electronically receive a $10 gift card to Amazon for completing the survey. For information regarding SurveyMonkey's privacy for survey respondents, please visit [Redacted].

Observations
The purpose of observations is to learn about ethnic-racial minority parents' interactions and communication with teachers.

After you complete the survey, your natural interactions with teachers may also be observed at times when

²² Some parts of this survey are omitted, such as personal phone numbers of the PI and SI. The language of the survey also changed to fit participant groups (i.e., “this teacher” or “this parent,” “my child” or “this child”).

²³ The author of this dissertation does not own the copyright to the PTRS items included in this survey. Please contact Kathy Minke for permission to use this instrument or its subscale items (minke@udel.edu).
you drop off and pick up your child. Family and parent events may also be observed. These observations will note how you and teachers interact and communicate with one another. Observations require no actions on your part. There is no compensation for observations.

**Interview**
The purpose of the interview is to learn about ethnic-racial minority parents’ experiences and perspectives about their relationships, interactions, and communication with their children’s teachers.

After you complete the survey, you may also be contacted to participate in a one-on-one interview with the Primary Investigator. In that interview, you will be asked about your responses to the survey. You will also be asked about your relationships with teachers in general, including questions about interactions and communication with them.

The interview will be last about 30 minutes, will be conducted in private, and will be scheduled (day, time, and location) at your convenience. With your permission, the Primary Investigator will audio-record the interview.

You will receive a $20 gift card to a local bookstore for completing the interview.

If you agree, we may contact you after the analysis to get your input on our results. There will be no compensation for your time or input regarding feedback about results.

**Participation Requirements**
To participate in this study, you must be at least 19 years old and self-identify as an ethnic-racial minority in the United States.

**Potential Risks**
There are no known risks that may result from participating from this research. However, there is a slight possibility that answering some questions may make you feel uncomfortable. Please remember that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with your early childhood program, the Primary Investigator and Project Advisor, the Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies, or the University of Nebraska. You may also refuse to answer any question(s) you are uncomfortable answering.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity**
We assure you that your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. You will be referred to by a pseudonym when presenting results. Results of this research may be presented at professional conventions and included in journal articles, academic articles, or brief reports.

**Questions About the Study**
Please feel free to ask questions before or during the completion of the survey by emailing or calling the Primary Investigator. If you would like additional information concerning this study after it is complete, please feel free to contact the Primary Investigator by phone or email.
If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigators or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact IRB at (402) 472-6965 (Project ID 16316).

* 1. Providing Consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By selecting "I agree" below and signing your name in the signature field, you indicate that you have read and understood the information included in this informed consent statement and are choosing to continue with the study including being contacted again for an audio-recorded interview.

☐ I agree to complete the survey as described above.

☐ I agree to be contacted via email to participate in an interview.

☐ I agree to the audio-recording of my interview responses if I am interviewed.

* 2. Provide your information below:

Name

Electronic Signature

E-mail Address

Date

Please provide your information below. You will then be asked questions that are about or relate to your child’s teacher. Please respond to these questions with your specific relationship with your child’s teacher in mind.24

1. In this relationship, I am a:
   - Parent
   - Teacher

---

24 Teachers’ surveys included the prompt: Please provide your information below. Then, think of a specific parent who is an ethnic-racial minority. You will respond to questions about your relationship with that parent. All questions and corresponding responses will be about that specific relationship with an ethnic-racial minority parent.
2. I am completing this survey about:
   - My child's teacher
   - A parent

3. My age (in years) is:
   - 19-29
   - 30-39
   - 40-49
   - Other (please specify)

4. My gender is:
   - Male
   - Female

5. My ethnicity/race is:
   - Asian American
   - Black or African American
   - Hispanic or Latino
   - White
   - Other (please specify)

6. The length of my relationship with my child's teacher is:
   - Less than one year
   - One year
   - Greater than one year, but less than two years
   - Two years or more

7. Typically, I communicate face-to-face with my child's teacher:
   - Daily
   - Weekly
   - Every two weeks
   - Monthly

8. I most often communicate with my child's teacher:
   - By email
   - Face-to-face
   - Through communication logs or similar correspondence
   - Through newsletters or similar correspondence
   - Other (please specify)
9. Overall, I would rate my relationship with my child’s teacher as:
   - Very poor
   - Poor
   - OK
   - Good
   - Excellent

The following statements concern your experiences with your child’s teacher. Please read each item and use the scale to indicate the degree to which you feel the statement is true about your experiences with the teacher.

For all questions, comment on your experiences with your child’s teacher specifically.

You may skip any question that you are uncomfortable answering.

1. **We trust each other.**
   - almost never
   - once in a while
   - sometimes
   - frequently
   - almost always

2. **It is difficult for us to work together.**
   - almost never
   - once in a while
   - sometimes
   - frequently
   - almost always

3. **I ask this teacher for suggestions.**
   - almost never
   - once in a while
   - sometimes
   - frequently
   - almost always

4. **We cooperate with each other.**
   - almost never
   - once in a while
   - sometimes
   - frequently
   - almost always

5. **Communication is difficult between us.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>almost never</th>
<th>once in a while</th>
<th>sometimes</th>
<th>frequently</th>
<th>almost always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. I tell this teacher when I am concerned.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. This teacher respects me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I tell this teacher when I am worried.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. We are sensitive to each other’s feelings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. We have different views of right and wrong.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. When there is a problem with my child, this teacher is all talk and no action.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. We understand each other.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. This teacher keeps his/her promises to me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>almost never</th>
<th>once in a while</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. When there is a behavior problem, I have to solve it without help from this teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>almost never</th>
<th>once in a while</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. When things aren’t going well, it takes too long to work them out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>almost never</th>
<th>once in a while</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. We see my child differently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>almost never</th>
<th>once in a while</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. We agree about who should do what regarding my child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>almost never</th>
<th>once in a while</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. I expect more from this teacher than I get.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>almost never</th>
<th>once in a while</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. We have similar expectations of my child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>almost never</th>
<th>once in a while</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
20. This teacher tells me when s/he is pleased.
   almost never  once in a while
   while  sometimes  frequently  almost always

21. I respect this teacher.
   almost never  once in a while
   while  sometimes  frequently  almost always

22. I don’t like the way this teacher talks to me.
   almost never  once in a while
   while  sometimes  frequently  almost always

23. I tell this teacher when I am pleased.
   almost never  once in a while
   while  sometimes  frequently  almost always

24. I ask this teacher’s opinion about my child’s progress.
   almost never  once in a while
   while  sometimes  frequently  almost always

Thank you for completing this survey. Click 'done' to submit your responses.

You will electronically receive a $10 gift card to Amazon for completing the survey.

If you have any questions, please contact the Primary Investigator at the contact information provided below.

Primary Investigator:
Kimberly A. Blitch, M.S.
PhD Candidate
CYAF
APPENDIX D

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Participant(s) observed; Time of day/transition type observed; Classroom/event observed

Description of atmosphere:
- Noise and activity level
- Number of parents/children in the classroom

Context of communication:
- Individuals involved
  - Mother/father/child/other caregiver
  - Staff member
    - Primary caregiver
    - Secondary caregiver
    - Director

Content of communication:
- Structure:
  - Initiation
  - Use of first names
  - Asking questions/giving information
    - Use of open-ended questions
  - Use of clarification statements (paraphrase reflections)
  - Use of personal referents
  - Closing
- Conversation topic(s) (child well-being, daily activities)
  - Routine exchange/simple greeting(s)
  - Ratification (“uh-huh,” “yes”)
  - Capture verbatim talk where possible
- Description of nonverbal communication:
  - Eye contact
  - Body orientation
  - Body position
  - Affect signals (smiles, laughter)
  - Emblems and gestures (waving)
  - Communicative adaptations (bending down, moving away for privacy)
  - Signals of understanding/ratification (nodding)
  - Any use of personal touch
- Tone of communication:
  - Informal/spontaneous
  - Warm/friendly/comfortable
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

You can disclose (interview) statements at your discretion, retract, and/or reformat statements. You may also refuse to answer any (interview) question you are uncomfortable answering. I’ll refer to you by pseudonym for anonymity.

Introduction:
- Tell me about your time here at (site).
- How often do you interact with (parent/teacher)?
  - Probe for examples of interactions.
- How would you describe your interactions with (parent/teacher) in general?
- How does (parent/teacher) interact with other (parents/teachers)?
- What do you and (parent/teacher) usually talk about or discuss?
- How do you feel about your interactions with (parent/teacher)?
- Has this changed during your time here?
- What is important to you, for your interactions with (parent/teacher)? Or, when you talk to/with (parent/teacher)?

PTRs:
- Tell me about your response to (PTRS item).
- What are some examples of (PTRS item)?
- What influences your rating of (PTRS item)?
- How might that be increased or decreased?
- Tell me about your relationship with (parent/teacher).
  - Probe for experiences in PTRs.
  - Repeat for each pattern that emerges or patterns that need clarification.
- NAEYC encourages X practices.
  - How do/does you/your child’s teacher implement them?
  - (For teachers) What is easy to do? What is hard to do?

Communication Experiences (Observation Patterns/Findings):
- I noticed X in my observations. How do you feel about that?
  - Probe for if and how X is typical or perhaps unusual.
- Repeat for each pattern that emerges or patterns that need clarification.

Closing:
- Think about interactions with (parent/teacher) in which you have felt a sense of openness and respect.
  - Describe the interactions.
- Think about interactions with (parent/teacher) in which you have felt a sense of uncaring, avoidance, and/or disrespect.
  - Describe the interactions.
- How could a (parent/teacher) convey to you…?
  - an openness to talking with you
  - respect
  - care
- What would you like to change about your relationship and/or communication with (parent/teacher)?
APPENDIX F

PROGRAM DIRECTORS’ INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

You can disclose (interview) statements at your discretion, retract, and/or reformat statements. You may also refuse to answer any (interview) question you are uncomfortable answering. I’ll refer to you by pseudonym for anonymity.

Introduction:
- Tell me about the parents and teachers at your early childhood program.
- Describe relationships between the parents and teachers here.
- Describe communication between the parents and teachers here.
- What are ways that parents and teachers interact and communicate?
  - Probe for effectiveness and how these methods are perceived.
  - Are these new methods? What caused the implementation or use of these methods?
  - How do parents and teachers convey openness and respect to one another?
  - Probe for the opposite of openness and respect (i.e., uncaring, avoidance, and/or disrespect).
  - Provide some examples, if possible.
- What are some strengths of the program with regard to PTRs and PTC?
  - Areas of improvement?
  - Probe for barriers or challenges faced by parents and teachers.
- What are some of your goals for the program with regard to PTRs and PTC?
  - What informs family and parent engagement practices here (e.g., NAEYC guidelines)?
  - NAEYC encourages X practice(s).
  - How do/does you/your child’s teacher implement them?
  - What is easy to do? What is hard to do?
- How do teachers learn these aspects of practice (e.g., modeling, coursework, trial-and-error)?
  - How do you think parents form their expectations for these aspects of practice?
    - What is easy to do (with regard to learning these things)
    - What is hard to do (with regard to learning these things)?

PTRs (Survey Patterns/Findings):
- Results from the survey show (X pattern). How do you feel about that? Is this accurate?
- Repeat for each pattern that emerges or patterns that need clarification.

Communication Experiences (Observation/Interview Patterns/Findings):
- I noticed X in my observations. How do you feel about that?
  - Probe for if and how X is typical or perhaps unusual.
  - Repeat for each pattern that emerges or patterns that need clarification.

Closing:
- What else should I know that would help learn about PTRs and communication?
- Do you have any other comments or feedback?
## APPENDIX G

### CATEGORICAL DEVELOPMENT SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Unit</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Relationship to Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning Unit</strong></td>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Level 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Relationship to Findings</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My wife and I will joke a little bit, like you see on everyone’s sheet like, “What did he [son] enjoy today?” and it’s all the same. Like, wait a second, they [children] can’t all have enjoyed the art with the trucks. So, I’ve stopped relying on that at all and just asking.</td>
<td>daily activities-written communication</td>
<td>daily activities-written communication/child interests</td>
<td>daily activities-written communication/child interests, inaccurate/preference for FTF</td>
<td>written communication was viewed as inaccurate and generalized (but was helpful for very young children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My interactions with the school revolve around electronic communication primarily and then the information that he [husband] brings home, the minimal information that he brings home.</td>
<td>information-sharing-written</td>
<td>information-sharing-combined electronic, verbal/indirect communication</td>
<td>Information-sharing-combined written, verbal/indirect communication/social identity-gender</td>
<td>some parents’ social identities were challenging for teachers (credibility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She’s [White parent] kind of a stand-offish type of person. She is also a teacher, but she’s at the professor level. Like, she has these expectations for us, but I want to be able to</td>
<td>developmental needs-verbal</td>
<td>developmental needs-verbal/challenging personality (parent), level of expertise</td>
<td>developmental needs-verbal/challenging personality (parent), level of expertise/role deference</td>
<td>role deference was part of how teachers viewed respect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
communicate with her on a parent level and not at a teacher level.

It’s usually in the evenings when they’re [teachers and children] outside and I come pick him [son] up. It’s too many parents and teachers are looking, and they are a little bit distracted and I get it because there are kids playing, but that’s a distraction.
## APPENDIX H

### DOMAIN ANALYSIS SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means-End/Function</th>
<th>Included Terms</th>
<th>Semantic Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cover Term</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Bye, (Child).&quot;</td>
<td><em>is a way to say goodbye/take leave</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;We’ll see you later.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Bye, (Child). See you Monday.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Structural question: Verification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Are X ways to say goodbye (or take leave)?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strict Inclusion/Attributive</strong></th>
<th>Included Terms</th>
<th>Semantic Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cover Term</strong></td>
<td>“(Child’s name)!”</td>
<td><em>is a form of cueing a child to meet his or her parent</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“(Child), guess who’s here?”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Structural question: Cover term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Can you tell me how you cue a child to meet his or her parent?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strict Inclusion/Attributive</strong></th>
<th>Included Terms</th>
<th>Semantic Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cover Term</strong></td>
<td>“How are you today?”</td>
<td><em>is a type of greeting</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Structural question: Cover term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Can you tell me types of greetings?</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>