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IN THIS ISSUE

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EDITORIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The *IALS Journal* is published once a year and addresses key issues facing today's laboratory and university affiliated schools. Articles offer perspectives on educational trends and include topics such as the history and future of lab schools, innovations in curricula and programs, lab school administration, and teacher education. The journal includes articles grounded in evidence-based classroom practices, action research, and theoretically based quantitative and qualitative scholarship.

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Featured Articles:

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

We are proud to present the thirteenth volume of the *International Association of Laboratory Schools Journal*, a space devoted to scholarship, research, and innovation in laboratory schools around the world. In this volume, our contributing authors explore a palette of topics that highlight the efforts put forth by our Member Schools towards enhancing teaching practices and improving student learning. The articles included here attest to the lessons that educators have learned in the wake of the pandemic and provide an outlook into the future of teaching, learning, and research in a laboratory school setting.

In "Obligations, Obstacles, and Opportunities: Conducting Research as a Laboratory School Teacher," Frasier et al. examine the hurdles that laboratory school teachers must surmount in order to fulfill their contractual obligation to conduct research as part of their duties. Although laboratory school teachers feel compelled to partake in their host university's mission to innovate through research and scholarship, they are often limited by the demands and responsibilities that arise from teaching at the K-12 level. In spite of these challenges, the authors present solutions at the institutional level to alleviate these issues and promote and facilitate research among laboratory school staff members.

Swart et al. set out to investigate the experiences shared by children and their families as they shift from a play-based early childhood center to a more formal school setting. In their article "Exiting the Playroom: Strengths, Struggles and Supports in the Transition to Formal Schooling," the authors interview a group of parents and alumni who discuss the strengths, struggles, and supports that characterized their transition from preschool to formal schooling. Moreover, their study reflects on the implications for practice that emerge from their interviewee's insights and sheds light on the ways in which our laboratory schools can facilitate such an important transition in our students' development.

Sharon Carnahan and Diane Terorde Doyle explore how teachers, administrators, and staff members at the Hume House Child Development & Student Research Center navigated the uncertainty of teaching at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in "Reflections on a Preschool in Quarantine." Through innovation, research, and collaboration, teachers managed to transform their physical classroom into virtual spaces where preschoolers continued to interact, learn, and develop at a distance. The takeaways that emerge from their experiences at Hume House are invaluable to all educators alike and emphasize the importance of familial support and affective connections among teachers, families, and students to cope with the uncertainty and the challenges imposed by distance learning.

In "Making Meaning of Parents' Stories," Michelle Semple-McBean and Lidon Lashley from the University of Guyana Early Childhood Centre of Excellence (UG-ECCE), report on the results of a survey that was conducted among parents regarding the quality of services provided to the student population at UG-ECCE. Their study highlights the importance of strengthening the relation between school and home in order to gauge the effectiveness of their pedagogical practices and to make the necessary changes to cater to the needs and expectations of stakeholders and the school community at large.

The success of a laboratory school and its mission to model best teaching practices depends on effective communication among all of its components, including the university to which it is affiliated. Nonetheless, when such a lab school is located off-campus and is integrated within a larger independent public school district, there are several communication challenges that the school must conquer to achieve its goals. In the study "The Learning Curve: Leaping into the K-12 Space for a University," García-Alvarado et al. discuss and reflect on some of these struggles by interviewing teachers and administrators at the Winston Intermediate School of Excellence Scholars (WISE), located in the west side of San Antonio and affiliated with Texas A&M University-San Antonio (A&M-SA). The authors delve into the complexity of day-to-day communication in this context and its impact on the school's partnership with the university. As part of their reflection, the authors propose that, in the midst of this complexity, "everyone is capable of taking on challenges and pushing beyond their comfort zone" in order to fulfill their school's mission.

A teacher's role in most laboratory school settings goes well beyond their teaching duties. In recent decades, educators have been asked to assume leadership roles in order to mitigate the demands placed on school administrators. As teacher leaders, educators undertake many of the responsibilities related to curriculum development and teacher support. In "Perspectives on Teacher Leadership in Cross-Cultural Settings: Case Studies from Teacher Leaders in Multi-Age Schools," Cozza et al. bring the importance of teacher leaders to the fore and punctuate the significance of cultivating collaboration among peers as a means to optimize the teaching and learning process.

We are privileged to have such a distinguished group of colleagues share their work in this volume of the *IALS Journal*.

We hope that their contributions inspire teachers, researchers, and administrators around the world to strive for excellence in their future endeavors and motivate other authors to submit their research and writing for publication in future editions.

Roberto E. Olmeda Rosario, PhD
2022-2023 Editor

Obligations, Obstacles, and Opportunities:
Conducting Research as a Laboratory School Teacher

Amanda S. Frasier, Heidi Campbell, Lisa Reis, and Holley Ziglar
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Scholars have documented that when John Dewey formed an experimental university-based school in Chicago in 1896, he intended that research be a component of laboratory schools (Camp-Mayhew et al., 1936; Durst, 2010). However, the realities of teaching and the bureaucratic structures of higher education present obstacles to engaging in meaningful empirical work. Additionally, the majority of laboratory schools have converted from their original form as public, university-based institutions of innovative teaching and research to private, tuition-based institutions or to public facilities attended primarily by the children of university faculty (Whitman, 2020). However, there are examples of laboratory schools that still engage in research activities (e.g. Cutler, 2012; Weih & Ensworth, 2006; Wilcox-Herzog & McLaren, 2006) and all contemporary laboratory schools still list research among their missions and purposes, though the level and definition of research differs across institutions (Jozwiak & Vera, 2016).

In this piece, faculty from East Tennessee State University's (ETSU) K-12 public laboratory school, University School, reflect on our experiences attempting to engage in research while serving dually as K-12 practitioners and university faculty. Faculty at this laboratory school are tenure-track members of the university and are contractually obligated to engage in scholarship, though their teaching and service obligations mirror those of other non-laboratory public school teachers. This systematic, reflective program evaluation will evaluate the structures and policies in place at our institution to address the question: What are the obligations, obstacles, and opportunities presented when engaging in research as University School faculty at ETSU?

First, we will provide an overview of the context of University School, including the school's relationship with ETSU and the local district (Washington County) in which it is nested, ETSU's status as a research institution, research as reflected in the philosophy and purpose statement of the school, and the contractual research obligations and tenure requirements of faculty teaching at the school. Then, we will review recent obstacles from the past two years (2020-2022) that faculty have encountered when conducting or attempting to conduct research as University School faculty. Next, we will discuss new initiatives and changes that are ongoing at the school, college, and university level to better expedite research

at our laboratory school. Finally, we will offer lessons learned from this analysis to better improve the practitioner-researcher relationship in laboratory schools.

Specifically, this analysis highlights a need for facilitating research both within the school, which will allow teachers to participate in individual and collaborative projects, as well as within the university, which will allow higher education faculty access to the laboratory school as a research site. Other promising avenues for increasing research at laboratory schools, such as partnerships between schools and with external stakeholders, are explored. Possible school and university-level policy responses are proposed. Finally, next steps for potential empirical work are outlined.

Approach

The authors engaged in a systematic reflection. An empirical strategy was not utilized for the analysis, though the paper was written to inform future empirical work on creating opportunities for research at University School. The section on *obligations* was written primarily by reviewing documents that outline faculty research requirements, including the laboratory school's philosophy and purpose statement (Appendix A) and tenure requirements (Appendices B and C). The *obstacles* section was created iteratively by first brainstorming a list informed by our personal experiences as well as from previous conversations with other faculty, including those from the University School Task Force. We then worked to explain the obstacles we had identified, often consolidating terms as we saw commonalities both across and between ideas. Similarly, we created a list of initiatives that the authors felt presented *opportunities* for facilitating future research.

Positionality

The four authors in this piece have all worked as instructors at University School. Our experiences and backgrounds influenced our individual perspectives of the obligations, obstacles, and opportunities for research at the laboratory school. Additionally, the institution has moved forward with the creation of a University School Task Force to work

toward facilitating future research opportunities at the lab school. All of the authors are members of this task force. All laboratory school-based members of the task force were invited to participate in this paper. Because empirical data was not collected from all faculty, this piece should not be viewed as a completely inclusive representation of perspectives at University School; however, the authors' diverse backgrounds and experiences allowed for multiple perspectives to be included.

Amanda Slaten Frasier taught high school social studies at University School for two years (2020-2022). She previously had a seven-year tenure in higher education, first as a research fellow and then as teacher education faculty at an R1 institution. Before that, she taught high school English at public schools in Virginia and North Carolina (2007-2012). As faculty at University School, Dr. Frasier secured internal grant funding to complete pre-existing empirical work and engage in new analyses of a pre-existing data set. This work conducted while a laboratory school teacher resulted in single-authored peer-reviewed publications. She transitioned back to a higher education role at East Tennessee State University this year.

Heidi Campbell began her career in education in 2006 and served as a high school social studies instructor at University School from 2012 to 2020. As part of the tenure process at University School, Dr. Campbell was a member of many leadership committees and conducted research aimed at increasing student engagement and content acquisition. During this time, Dr. Campbell presented at state and national conferences with a focus on deepening student content knowledge and analysis of historical events through regular use of primary sources and simulations. In 2020, Dr. Campbell transitioned into school administration and is currently the Testing and Curriculum Coordinator at University School. Her current role includes curriculum review, instructional support, and data analysis.

Lisa Reis has been teaching at the middle school level since 2010. Since beginning her career at University School in 2016, she has served in different roles. She has taught math in grades 6-8 and sixth grade science. She has coached various middle school extracurricular activities including Science Fair, Mathletes, Cross Country, and Heart and Sole. In addition to teaching responsibilities, she has presented on the subjects of math and science locally and nationally, and has collaborated with other faculty on grant-funded projects. Currently, she is teaching seventh and eighth grade math and serving as adjunct for undergraduate teacher-preparation track STEM courses at the university.

Holley Ziglar began teaching in 1995 at the preschool and elementary levels in public and private schools in Tennessee, Kentucky, and North Carolina. She started at University School in 2011 as a graduate assistant and moved into her current role as RTI (Response to Intervention) interventionist in 2012. The role of 504 Coordinator was added to her job description in 2017. She has presented numerous professional workshops at the local, state, and regional levels since 2002. Her focus is on increasing achievement for all students, which includes finding and providing the best intervention strategies and programs. She currently leads monthly RTI-focused data team meetings with teachers, provides guidance for struggling learners, and oversees the state-mandated universal screening process.

Context of the Case

University School operates as a public K-12 laboratory school on the campus of East Tennessee State University. According to the Carnegie Classification, ETSU is classified as an R2 institution with high research activity (American Council on Education, 2021). The University houses nine separate colleges, including Clemmer College (where ETSU's Education programs are housed) plus an academic library. As an R2 institute, the university has infrastructure in place to support research initiatives including an Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP), Institutional Review Board (IRB), and internal funding initiatives. While the faculty of University School are employees of ETSU, the students are considered part of Washington County Schools, a local public school district.

A recent qualitative review of laboratory schools indicated that around 70% of contemporary university-affiliated laboratory schools operate within the College of Education (Jozwiak & Vera, 2016). As with the majority of laboratory schools, University School operates as a department within the Clemmer College, which is ETSU's College of Education. As such, the Director of the school serves at the college level in the same role as a department chair. Offering a small school environment, the school is structured with one class per grade level from kindergarten through fourth grade. A second class is added at the fifth grade level and remains as such throughout the middle school years. Enrollment numbers continue to expand at the high school level, with a potential class size average of 80-85 students per grade. Total K-12 enrollment for the 2022-2023 school year consists of 597 students.

Admission to University School is granted through a lottery system in which interested families complete an application process. When determining the number of available spaces per grade, leveled priority is given to students who fall into one of the following categories: have a parent or guardian serving as a full-time faculty member at University School, siblings of currently enrolled students, residents of Washington County, and students residing in areas beyond Washington County. After the application deadline, a random drawing is conducted and selected students are invited to interview with school administrators. As a public school of choice, applicants are

screened based on prior academic performance, disciplinary records, and previous attendance rates, though in recent years the school is trending towards accepting students it would have previously turned away.

For the purposes of clarity in this paper, the term "laboratory school" will refer to University School, "college" will refer to Clemmer College (which serves as the College of Education) and "university" will refer to East Tennessee State University (ETSU).

Obligations to Engage in Research

The laboratory school is driven by a philosophy and purpose that is twofold. The primary function of the school is to provide for the academic, social, and emotional growth of students in grades K-12 while integrating a college preparatory curriculum. In addition to the focus on K-12 education, the laboratory school's connections with the college are intended to allow for educator preparation opportunities on the campus of the university. Through collaboration between K-12 and higher education faculty, prospective teachers have opportunities to complete various stages of their student teaching residency requirements under the mentorship of highly skilled laboratory school faculty. Additionally, one component specifically stated in the "Philosophy and Purpose" statement of the school is that the laboratory school should function as a research laboratory for new ideas (Appendix A).

In order to carry out the "Philosophy and Purpose" of the laboratory school, there is an expectation for faculty to be open and willing to implement innovative classroom strategies to support areas such as instruction, intervention, and classroom management. K-12 faculty at the laboratory school are contractually required to conduct research and collaborative projects integrating new ideas and programs that advance the field of education. As such, the tenure process for the laboratory school faculty is unique compared to that of other public school educators in Tennessee. Over the course of 5 years, laboratory school tenure-track faculty must meet many of the same criteria required of higher education faculty. Tenure is based on an individual's accomplishments in the categories of Teaching Effectiveness (85%), Service to the School, University, and Community at Large (10%), and Scholarship including Research and Creative Endeavors (5%) (Appendix B). In order to meet the scholarship requirement for tenure, faculty are required to present or publish at the regional, state, or national level. In addition to publications and/or presentations, faculty may provide evidence of participating in research conducted within the laboratory school or the college that enhances the field of education or leads to publications and presentations (Appendix C).

Including the director and assistant director, the laboratory school currently has 24 tenured faculty and 11 tenure-track faculty. Additional temporary faculty are hired each year and are not subject to tenure requirements. All tenured and tenure-track faculty are required to complete a yearly Faculty Activity Report (FAR) indicating current course load, research, and service. There is an expectation that faculty engage in research activities and pursue presentation or publication opportunities on a yearly basis. Research activities may be ongoing and take place over the span of multiple years. While all tenured faculty are required to engage in research or presentation activities, tenure-track faculty often feel increased pressure to seek out these activities as they build their tenure portfolios. FARs are submitted to the Director of the laboratory school and the Dean of the college, with feedback provided to faculty members on their progress toward tenure or fulfillment of expectations.

Program Analysis

Obstacles to Conducting Research

Laboratory school faculty encounter many obstacles that interfere with collaboration on research with college faculty. The K-12 and higher education faculties are separated in various ways: the laboratory school and its affiliated college are housed in different buildings, have conflicting work schedules and commitments, and may not fully understand the expectations for either K-12 or Higher Education. These separations have created barriers to collaboration between the college and its laboratory school.

Physical and Temporal Separation. The physical distance between the laboratory school and its affiliated college is one obstacle to collaboration. The laboratory school is physically separated a half-mile away from the college building. This makes it inconvenient for both faculties to meet regularly. Any communication between the college and laboratory school occurs via email or through Zoom meetings, whereas faculty in the main college building can simply walk across the hall to partner with colleagues.

Additionally, the day-to-day work schedules between higher education and K-12 faculty differ in many ways and inadvertently create conflict. Laboratory school teachers have one hour of planning time, which may or may not be in one full block of time. The rest of the day is actively spent with students, leaving no time to discuss research or meet with higher education faculty. This is very different from the teaching schedule of higher education faculty, which is created to allow time for research. Even higher education faculty with high instructional loads (three courses for assistant professors or four courses for instructors) have time in the work day where they are not actively required to be with students.

As in other K-12 settings, teachers at the laboratory school

wear many hats. The small school structure and the wide range of grades accommodated further complicate faculty obligations as teachers are frequently asked to perform extra duties in addition to their regular teaching load. In addition to the school-day workload, time after school is also limited for K-12 faculty because of sports and extracurricular demands, as well as faculty meetings and professional development opportunities. There are quite a number of school-level meetings that are held each week. For instance, RTI² meetings are required by the state to be held every 4.5 weeks (see Tennessee Department of Education, n.d., for more information on this program). These meetings must include administration, teachers, and other related personnel, which can be difficult to schedule due to the time obligations of everyone in the building. Due to limited planning time during the day, most of these meetings are held after school. Because the laboratory school is a small school covering the entire span of K-12 grades, many of the same teachers are invited to multiple meetings, further increasing time commitments. Additionally, after-school clubs and activities requiring a faculty sponsor, subject-specific and whole faculty meetings, and building-level Professional Learning Communities all add to the increased time obligations of laboratory school teachers. All of these time constraints on the laboratory school faculty make it difficult to arrange a set time to meet regularly with higher education faculty.

The yearly work schedules are also another obstacle. The laboratory school follows a year-round calendar with three to four week intercession breaks between quarters. This calendar allows for an earlier start to the school year compared to both the university and neighboring K-12 school districts. The laboratory school is the only school in the local area that adopted this calendar format, and even though the laboratory school is considered part of the Washington County School system, the calendars do not align. As such, some collaborative efforts involving higher education faculty are scheduled when laboratory teachers are on intercession, which leads to their absence and further disconnects the two faculties. Therefore, operating on a school calendar that does not align with either the university or local district in which the laboratory school is housed further complicates efforts for faculty scholarship.

Misalignment between K-2 and Higher Education. As an R2 university, the university offers internal grant opportunities which would allow laboratory school faculty to engage in projects independent of other higher education faculty. However, these opportunities can be difficult for the laboratory school faculty to access as these university-wide internal funding mechanisms, with few exceptions, do not allow release time or extra compensation. Other tenure-track higher education positions have time allowances for faculty to engage in research, but due to grant guidelines meant to encourage

university faculty to seek out extramural funding, laboratory school faculty members cannot use these funds to pay for substitute teacher coverage or to compensate for work done outside of contractual time, such as during summer break.

Additionally, some of the structures of grant administration also make it difficult for the laboratory school faculty who may earn a research grant to utilize the funds. While some smaller internal grant opportunities are paid directly to the school and can be managed by the school accountant, larger grants often require indexing at the level of the college. External grants require the same university level processing higher education faculty are expected to go through, a process which would be unfamiliar to most K-12 teachers who often lack that experience. Laboratory school faculty can utilize the institutional support the college puts into place for grants, but they receive no training or information on topics such as grant indexing, making purchases, or writing contracts unless they request this information directly. Additionally, informational meetings on these services are usually held at times when K-12 faculty are either teaching or on contracted leave. Other departments in the college have these supports in place as well as close physical proximity to support personnel who are housed in the same building as their departments.

Finally, using the laboratory as a site of research can pose difficulty to faculty who want to conduct anonymized studies. First, as the only laboratory school in the region, the unique structure of the school makes it easily identifiable even if broad descriptors are used. Secondly, policy requires that all university employees are paid using extra compensation mechanisms. This means that a laboratory school employee's participation in a study is reported to their employer via payroll if they are to receive any compensation for their participation. This could present a challenge to confidentiality when asking laboratory school teachers to participate in research that is compensated. Additionally, it may dissuade university scholars from using the laboratory school as a study site for compensated research because the method of compensation will be different than other study sites. For instance, this could be problematic if a university researcher wanted to conduct a study across all of Washington County schools, as potential study subjects at the laboratory school may be excluded and thus impact sampling.

Recent Changes Creating New Opportunities

A recent step in better integrating laboratory school faculty into research at the college level is the inclusion of a representative on the college's Internal Research Advisory Committee (IRAC). A representative from the laboratory school was first included on IRAC in fall 2021. While having a representative on the committee is a good first step in raising

the concerns and needs of laboratory school faculty, it should be noted that the misaligned schedules between the K-12 school and higher education are still an issue. Throughout the 2021-2022 year, the committee often met when the representative was obligated to teach, meaning the laboratory school could not be represented at the meeting. Other times, meetings were scheduled during the laboratory school's breaks, forcing the representative to choose between attending the meeting outside her working schedule or not at all. This problem is persisting into the 2022-2023 academic year.

Despite the obstacle with scheduling, inclusion in the IRAC committee is important because it allows for facilitation between K-12 faculty and research funding. As described in the previous section, many of the internal funding mechanisms do not allow for teacher release time or extra compensation. However, there are two college-wide initiatives that can be utilized by laboratory school teachers and both are administered by IRAC. First, the IRAC committee offers competitive unique funding requests which can be used for substitute coverage to allow teachers to engage in scholarship activity. This funding mechanism was utilized by one of this paper's authors in 2021 to complete revisions on a paper that had been accepted by a peer reviewed journal. Additionally, the IRAC committee oversees a competitive Summer Research Assignment program which awards extra compensation for faculty who engage in scholarly activities outside of contracted time. This award goes up to $5000 and was utilized by a laboratory school faculty member for the first time in 2022.

Additionally, there is a funding opportunity that is exclusive to the faculty at the laboratory school. In 2018, University School alumnus, A. Richard Wilson, created an endowment fund specifically to provide additional funding for faculty professional development and creative classroom projects. The selection committee is composed of one administrator and six faculty representatives from all grades and disciplines. Members serve for a three-year term. Tenured and tenure-track faculty members are encouraged each year to apply for the stipend. Teachers may submit an application to cover workshop or conference expenses or to provide materials needed for a specific classroom project. Unlike other internal funding mechanisms, this award does allow for the release of a few days for teachers to attend an event or conduct work.

As interest in conducting independent research has increased among laboratory school faculty; conversations have been initiated across the university to change and clarify procedures to facilitate research for laboratory school faculty. This has included the documenting of challenges with the compensation mechanisms and policies and issuing a request to the Vice Provost of Research to revise and clarify current policies. By utilizing indirect funds from the college's existing external grants,

centralized grant accounting support staff have been established in the college and pathways for laboratory school teachers to utilize these resources have been created. Additionally, the college's Associate Dean of Research has initiated outreach to the laboratory school, including recording videos explaining the IRAC funding available to laboratory school faculty. Continuation of conversations with personnel from across the university will be integral to future improvement efforts.

There are two other fledgling actions that show promise in facilitating scholarship at the laboratory school. The first is the creation of a college-wide task force. The University School Task Force was assembled in the final months of the 2021-2022 school year and is led jointly by two faculty members respectively from University School and the Department of Educational Foundations and Special Education. The task force currently is split evenly between K-12 and higher education faculty from five of the six departments in the college. As such, the task force consists of members from the laboratory school (7), the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (2), the Department of Educational Foundations and Special Education (2), the Department of Early Childhood Education (1), the Department of Counseling (1), and the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis (1). Additionally, starting with the 2021-2022 school year, the laboratory school established a physical presence in the main college building with four high school classrooms currently located on the lowest level. While the impacts of these changes have not yet been determined, there is the potential that both could facilitate scholarship for the laboratory school in the future.

Implications and Conclusion

Our analysis of the current policies in place in this case revealed the following obstacles to research at the laboratory school: separation of the laboratory school and higher education faculty in terms of both space and time, inaccessible or cumbersome funding and support mechanisms, and differences in policy when using the laboratory school as a research site versus other K-12 institutions. In contrast, the following helped facilitate research at the school: funding mechanisms that allowed extra compensation or time release to laboratory school teachers and the representation of laboratory school interests on a college-wide research committee. Additionally, new initiatives offered promise to further research at the laboratory school including raising awareness at the university level of policies that hinder scholarly productivity at the laboratory school, placing laboratory classrooms in the same building as the college, and the formation of a task force to facilitate improving relations between the laboratory school and its host college.

Overall, more work is needed to understand how the unique contexts and policies of laboratory schools housed in universities may help or hinder scholarly productivity. The problems present in the case of the laboratory school examined here are not unique, and the role of the work of K-12 teachers and research in laboratory school has been similarly described elsewhere (e.g. Van Til, 2022). Additionally, research conducted in laboratory schools has been declining and those schools that still value research in their missions and policies must grapple with the tensions that arise when K-12 faculty are expected to engage in research (Jozwiak & Vera, 2022). If administrators decide that they want to require scholarship to occur at their individual laboratory schools, then policies must alleviate and not exacerbate the inevitable tension that will arise when laboratory school faculty must engage in scholarship, but not otherwise be granted the time or mechanisms necessary to do so.

Laboratory schools that wish to include research as a focus of the school, such as the one in this analysis, must ensure that policies and structures facilitate research in two ways. The first is to create a working system that allows laboratory school teachers to engage in independent and collaborative research. This is particularly important in the case of the school examined here, where K-12 faculty have contractual obligations to engage in scholarly activity. Secondly, the system should allow and encourage higher education faculty to have access to utilizing the school as a study site. As such, laboratory school faculty may be able to meet their research obligations by participating in research directed by or otherwise collaborating with higher education personnel.

There are a few possible policy responses laboratory schools and affiliated universities could undertake. For instance, universities could explore ways to create release time and/or compensation for faculty engaging in research. University administration could facilitate and encourage research initiated by higher education faculty by building connections through meet and greets, assuring that K-12 faculty are able to attend meetings and events with higher education faculty, and incentivizing work between laboratory schools and higher education faculty. Additionally, laboratory schools should also consider the ways in which they can engage in collaboration outside of the university. For instance, Ramos (2022) outlines the promise in creating a *community of practice* across laboratory schools to investigate school responses and experiences during the COVID pandemic. Other laboratory schools have partnered with external corporations and foundations to conduct research (Jozwiak & Vera, 2022). Moving beyond the university to seek external partnerships could be a next step for facilitating research in the case described in this paper.

Overall, this analysis highlights the need for additional work on examining the role of research in contemporary laboratory schools. Others have examined the following issues in laboratory schools: 1) whether research is part of the school's stated mission; 2) whether K-12 and/or higher education faculty engage in scholarship at the laboratory schools; 3) what type of research is emerging from laboratory schools; and 4) whether research conducted at laboratory school originates with K-12 faculty, higher education faculty, or elsewhere. A next step is to examine how policies and procedures in place at laboratory schools and the colleges and universities in which they are housed help or hinder research in laboratory schools. If research is to remain an important component of laboratory schools, then analysis of school-level and university-level policies could help reveal the best ways to facilitate that goal. Importantly, the efficacy of programs meant to improve research at laboratory schools should be evaluated in order to improve research across laboratory schools as a whole.

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Appendix A: University School Philosophy and Purpose

University School of East Tennessee State University serves a dual function.
1. The primary function is to provide a rich college preparatory curriculum that promotes the continuous academic, social, and emotional growth of each child in grades K-12.
2. The secondary function of the school is to help Clemmer College at East Tennessee State University achieve its mission of preparing professional educators by:
    • Providing university students with opportunities to observe innovative instructional practices;
    • Providing university students opportunities to work with and teach K-12 pupils under the direction of skilled mentor teachers;
    • Serving as a research laboratory for the advancement of programs and new ideas in the field of education;
    • Serving in a leadership role for the educational community.

University School and the Clemmer College faculty and administration believe that the two broad functions described above are complementary. When teachers, professors, administrators, and students work collaboratively in the interests of educational excellence, all stakeholders benefit.

Excerpt from "Student Handbook." (July 17, 2022).
    University School, East Tennessee State University, retrieved from Student Handbook (etsu.edu)

Appendix B: The Tenure Criteria for University School

Over the probationary period tenure track faculty should be aware that performance criteria are based upon the following category divisions:

        TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS: 85%
        SERVICE TO THE SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY, AND COMMUNITY AT LARGE: 10%
        SCHOLARSHIP INCLUDING RESEARCH AND CREATIVE ENDEAVORS: 5%

Excerpt from: "Departmental Criteria for the Clarification of the Tenure Process." April 2016.
    University School, East Tennessee State University. Page 2.

Appendix C: Scholarship Requirements for University School Faculty

SCHOLARSHIP INCLUDING RESEARCH AND OTHER CREATIVE ENDEAVORS
It should be noted that emphasis is placed on research and creative activities that result in publication and presentation at the regional, state or national level.
    Over a six year period, suggested scholarship artifacts leading to tenure include the following but are not limited to:
1. Faculty candidates must present or publish at the regional, state, or national level. Suggested artifacts include:
    • Publications in journals (peer reviewed articles items receive greater consideration)
    • Regional, state, and/or national presentations
    • Performances, art shows, concerts or other similar demonstrations of creative work in area of expertise
2. Candidates may provide evidence of research. It may be research within University School, the College of Education, or University at large. It may include:
    • Ongoing classroom or departmental assessments of data and methods that are used for research based departmental decisions
    • Action research projects appropriate for publication and presentation
    • Other
3. Candidates may submit artifacts that reflect creative involvement of students in performances, exhibitions, competitions that are juried and invited by recognized groups and organizations within the discipline. This may include coaching in extracurricular activities such as athletic events, mock trial, and poetry competitions.
    • Events

- Tournaments
- Exhibitions
- Performances
- Competitions
- Other
4. Candidates may present evidence of grant writing and procurement of grant funds for one's discipline.
    - Grants awarded
    - Grants submitted

Excerpt from: "Departmental Criteria for the Clarification of the Tenure Process." April 2016.
    University School, East Tennessee State University. Page 5.

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Exiting the Playroom:
Strengths, Struggles and Supports in the Transition to Formal Schooling

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Given a recent shift towards academically focused kindergarten settings, the present study sought to investigate strengths, struggles, and supports observed when children transitioned from a play-based, emergent curriculum into formal school settings that are typically more didactic in nature. Interviews and surveys were conducted to gather parent and former students' perceptions of the transition. Results indicate children left the program with strengths in social skills, creative thinking, and problem solving that helped them succeed in the transition and beyond. Struggles included increased academic expectations and changes in the amount of time children were expected to spend doing seatwork. This study has implications for practitioners and families looking to better support children as they navigate the transition to formal education.

Keywords: transition, kindergarten, play, social and emotional development

Research has established links between high quality early childhood education and children's academic and social success in the early grades and beyond (Bauchmuller et al., 2014). In fact, the first three years of life are critically important for healthy brain development and approaches to learning. Children who receive high quality early childhood education are less likely to commit crimes, more likely to graduate from high school, and become gainfully employed as adults (Campbell et al., 2012).

In a high quality early childhood program, teachers interact warmly with children and provide engaging learning experiences that support each child's individual learning needs (Mashburn et al., 2008). Effective early childhood educators use responsive language in their interactions with children, create a language-rich environment, and facilitate learning through play. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) emphasizes development of the whole child and encourages programs to establish reciprocal and responsive relationships with families.

While extensive research has documented the importance of this approach for young children's development, kindergarten and primary grades classrooms in the United States have changed radically in the last twenty years. Children spend a great deal of time being taught and tested in literacy and math, and spend little time learning through play (Miller & Almon, 2009). Research has found many kindergartners spend nearly three hours per day on reading and math instruction and test preparation and less than half an hour each day on free play (Miller & Almond, 2009).

New academic standards and increased pressure to perform well on standardized tests, have meant an increasing number of American teachers rely on scripted curriculum to ensure all students meet grade level expectations (Levitt, 2017). Many of these curricula violate developmentally appropriate practice and lead to an over-reliance on paper and pencil tasks (Miller & Almond, 2009). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and other legislation have led to an increased emphasis on teacher accountability and effectiveness, leaning on standardized testing to determine rewards and punishments (Levitt, 2017). The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) attempts to quantify what students are learning into discrete skills and universal standards (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In response, the culture of "teaching to the test" emerged (Levitt, 2017).

Given these changes, young children and families experience some discontinuity during the transition from high quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood programs to the primary grades. A smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten is essential to a child's social adjustment and future academic success. When children transition from preschool to elementary school, they adjust to new settings and situations such as new rules, expectations, a new way of learning, new social relationships with teachers and students, and a new environment (Atchinson & Pompelia, 2018). Research has found a strong relationship between children's cognitive and social competence before kindergarten and academic success later in their life. However, research has shown there to be a persistent gap in the transition from preschool to kindergarten (Dunlop et al., 2007). If the school system is not able to sustain and build on the learning from high-quality preschool programs, the gains children made during their early childhood years may not translate into long-term academic success (Atchinson & Pompelia, 2018).

Research has clearly documented a positive transition from kindergarten to first grade is essential for children's ongoing

engagement and satisfaction with school. In fact, Schulting et al. (2005) found the number of school-level transition practices in place was associated with an increase in achievement by the end of kindergarten. This effect was greater for students from low income backgrounds. One of the most effective transition practices was having the child and family visit the new school ahead of time (Schulting et al., 2005). Another study found staggered entry into kindergarten to be an effective transition practice. Schools that used staggered entry were associated with higher child outcomes on reading assessments (Little, 2017).

As discussed, a majority of the research on the transition to school focuses on transition practices and/or key child characteristics influencing children's readiness. Little research has focused more specifically on how children transition out of a play-based, child centered early childhood classroom into formal schooling. The purpose of the present study is to better understand how young children fare in the transition from a program using a play-based, emergent curriculum to a formal school setting that is typically more didactic in nature. The researchers wonder what strengths children bring to their new settings and what challenges they and their families experience as they adjust to changes in schedule, curricula, social milieu and teacher expectations.

Theoretical Framework

The transition to formal education can be viewed through an ecological framework, given development proceeds as a complex process that is influenced by a variety of contextual factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). For this study, researchers specifically investigated the strengths, struggles, and supports observed when children transitioned from a play-based, emergent curriculum into formal school settings. To explore and better understand these complex influences, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory was utilized. Bronfennbrenner's theory posits children's development is a function of ongoing, bidirectional interactions between characteristics of the child and his/her surrounding environment and how these change over time. Development is both directly and indirectly influenced by people and systems organized across four hierarchical levels. The microsystem includes children's relationships with significant others, like parents, caregivers, and teachers. The mesosystem involves interrelations between two or more settings in which the child participates, for example, the relationship between a child's parents and their kindergarten teacher. Exosystem level influences include the formal and informal social structures influencing the child, which do not themselves contain the child. An example would be the family-leave policy at the parent/caregiver's place of employment and how well that enables the parent/caregiver's

ability to support the child's transition to school. Finally, the macrosystem involves analysis of the larger cultural attitudes, values and beliefs, and/or other broader social issues or policies influencing the child's learning and development. The general shift towards more academically rigorous early childhood education in American schools resulting from federal legislation is an example of a macro-level influence on child development.

This theoretical framework focuses on experiences, interactions, and relationships and how those influence development. With respect to the current study, researchers were looking at children's microsystems and mesosystems. The influences in a child's microsystem can be directly related to their strengths, struggles, and supports during their transition into formal schooling. Moreover, the relationships that exist in the child's mesosystem (i.e., parent and teacher) also influence their experiences during this important transition. Due to the complex nature of these influences, the researchers deemed qualitative research to be the appropriate and effective approach for this study. More specifically, the use of an open-ended survey and interview were used to learn about child and parent experiences during their transition into formal schooling.

Methodology

Participants

The current study was conducted in two phases. The first phase focused on a convenience sample, consisting of a small group of parents and their children who were first semester freshmen attending college where they had also attended the university affiliated early childhood development center. Of the six possible adult student participants, only two adult female alumni participated in the in-person interviews yielding a 33% response rate. However, five of the six mothers participated in the study yielding an 83% response rate. Four mothers participated in the in-person interviews, while one mother participated by phone.

The second phase focused on parents of children who had previously attended the early childhood development center. The population from which we sampled included 50 families whose children had attended the center previously and moved on to a formal school setting within the last three years. At the time these parents completed the survey, their children would have been in first, second, or third grade at a public or private elementary school in the local area. Families were sent the original cover letter/consent and survey via email. Of the 50 families invited to participate, 17 completed the survey, with 30% minority representation, yielding a 34% response rate.

Setting

The early childhood development center of focus in this study is located in the southeastern United States. The program has provided high quality care and education for children ages 2 through 5 for over 40 years. It holds strong to the belief in children as "life-long, enthusiastic, and self-directed learners." They are deeply committed to the use of play as a means for learning and serve as a model for "best practices" across the geographic region.

The center is state licensed, nationally accredited by the National Association of Young Children (NAEYC), and certified as a Nature Explore outdoor classroom program. It also acts as a demonstration program which provides college students, families, and members of the greater community with the opportunity to see and experience excellence in practice. Their three-part mission is to provide a demonstration preschool for research, observation and practicum purposes; quality care and early education for children ages 2 through 5 from the university and neighboring community; and an active model of child advocacy in the community. The curriculum is contextualized to the local neighborhood, campus, and community. The program strives to reflect the college's diversity goals. The 2019-2020 child population included 49 enrolled children, with 29% minority representation, 46.90% male, 53.06% female, and 6% children with special needs. Staff includes four master teachers with master's degrees in early childhood education, five full-time graduate assistants, and 20-25 undergraduate students that serve as teacher assistants. In 2019-2020, 5.2% of the staff were minority and 2.6 % were male. The curriculum approach focuses on an emergent and long-term project-based approach to content. Through intentional planning, balancing, and documenting child-initiated and teacher directed activities and assessments, master teachers develop weekly lesson plans using both NAEYC and state learning standards, as well as the children's interests to guide their decision making.

Data Collection

This was a qualitative research study incorporating an open-ended survey and interview conducted in two phases during the 2019-2020 school year. Use of qualitative methods enabled in-depth exploration of the study topic and provided "thick description" of individual participants' experiences during the transition to formal schooling. Qualitative methodology allowed us to provide greater detail, better illustrate the context and emotion, and enabled us to explore the network of social relationships and influences operating at multiple levels (Denzin, 1989).

Interview. The interview consisted of 12 open-ended questions for the students and 15 questions for the parents. Each interview was recorded and transcribed and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. The interviews began with participants describing their early memories of the center. Later questions asked more specifically about the transition to formal schooling and what it was like for them. Participants were explicitly asked to reflect on how their (or their child's) time at the center influenced their later learning and development.

Interviews were conducted in Phase I with two adult center alumni and five mothers of adult alumni. We chose to interview this group to get a better understanding of their educational journeys beyond the center. The interview enabled deepring probing into contextual influences on the students' transition between schools and its impact on their later development.

Survey. In Phase 2, all parents of more recent center graduates (within the last 3 years) were invited to participate in the study. Each was sent an email that included an original cover letter describing the study, the consent form, and a web-based survey link. Three email reminders were sent. The survey was built and housed in Qualtrics. The researchers created the survey to include 27 open-ended questions. Beginning questions collected age and grade level. Then parents were asked to describe how their child fared in the transition to formal school and whether the center had provided appropriate support during the transition. Parents were explicitly asked how/why they chose the child's new school and whether their experiences at the center influenced that decision. This was followed by more specific questions asking parents to report on how their child fared academically and socially and emotionally in the new setting.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed by a graduate assistant and the data were analyzed qualitatively using the constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This involved multiple readings of the data, followed by determination of categories. Subsequent readings of the data involved sorting materials into each category and looking for patterns. This originally resulted in the identification of three categories (strengths, struggles, and supports), with five to six items in each. Further reading and reflection on the categories led to some refining which ultimately resulted in four overarching categories: strengths, struggles, classroom supports, and transition supports. Within each category, researchers tallied the number of times a parent mentioned a particular child, teacher or school characteristic (for example, curiosity or social skills) to determine patterns and identified direct quotes to support each.

Findings

Transition Practices

In the survey, parents mentioned a variety of transition practices used by the center to support children during the transition to formal schooling. Parents reported the center director often provided individualized support and information regarding school choice. Teachers actively prepped their students for the transition into their new school setting. Following graduation, some participants stated they stayed connected by visiting the program to talk and interact with teachers and staff. For some families, the ease of transition was more apparent when there were similarities among the early childhood development center and their child's new school. Another survey participant stated:

> There are a lot of things similar. I worried I would feel like she was doing worksheets all day but that isn't the case. I feel like she is being taught the steps to learn how to read, and we are being handed age-appropriate books to help her learn to read. I have really benefited from the tools I am being given.

Participant responses indicated several peer and family relationships with classmates were maintained. One survey participant stated:

> We do still keep in touch especially if they had a sibling because there were a couple of girls that also had siblings the same age. So we will do birthdays and/or playdates to get together every once in a while. When we come back for school events, she catches up quickly with former friends and they play well together during the event.

Others appreciated the sense of belonging that came from raising young children together. One interviewee reflected on her experience:

> I had no idea what I was doing, so having these other parents to help with all of this … was really a sense of belonging that I had never had…I am 100% convinced that this is the best thing that happens as far as working at the college. I mean for my kids and for me.

Supports

Parents discussed several instances when the child-led, play-based early childhood center provided support to their child. Specifically, teachers created a supportive learning environment in which they gave each child time to develop and explore. As stated by one parent, the center was "always sooo welcoming." One parent interviewee described the teachers as:

> So nice and if I had any questions about the kids, they knew the answer. If I had any concerns or told them anything, I knew they would look out for them and they would check in on them if they needed to.

Teachers provided individualized instruction based on interest and need. One interviewee reported teachers:

> Met the children where they were. So, you didn't want to sit down? Stand up while we write the story. You don't want to color in blue? Color in green. It was just an environment where the kids were allowed to express themselves and be themselves and still find education within their position…what they brought to the table. To me that was kind of the last time in my kids' lives.

The center utilizes a play-based emergent curriculum, which is evident as one interviewee stated, "if we had an idea, they would make it happen." One former student interviewed reflected on his fascination with dinosaurs and described how the center supported this interest. He described how the teachers could:

> Apply this to like reading or here's how you can apply your interest to the arts or here is how you can apply it to a career that you're interested in. In that way, I had never been, no one had ever told me that's annoying or stop thinking about this and focus on what you're supposed to do. Even from {the center} onward, it's always been like follow your interests, here's how you can apply it to whatever you do…Because of {the center} I never felt uncomfortable following my interests and being really passionate about whatever I'm into.

One parent stated teachers were "listening to children, honoring children's choices and setting up safe and developmentally appropriate risk taking" experiences. Moreover, the center employs highly qualified, responsive teachers who strive to build strong relationships with their

students and families. One parent of an alumnus who was interviewed stated, "the teachers just become who they need to be for your child." Another shared, "my kid felt loved and appreciated for who they are." One of the former students said the center "showed me. I can be multifaceted and I can be a non-flat person while still really loving something. And that I can still make friends and have people like me, without compromising any part of myself." Parents also mentioned teacher quality as one of the reasons they chose the center. One interviewee stated "having real people with master's degrees who know a lot about childhood development as a resource was amazing." Another mother we interviewed commented:

> My biggest take away from {the center} is just that I felt like my kids felt loved. I felt like they felt, maybe more so than ever in their education, appreciated for who they were. You know, I feel like {the center} just, they were great to laugh at the kids but laugh with them not at them. So, just embrace them and love them for who they were.

Strengths

Parents listed a number of strengths children brought with them as they transitioned from a child-led, play-based early childhood center to a more traditional school setting. At the top of their list, survey respondents spoke of children's social skills and empathy, and many attributed this directly to their children's experience at the center. Several described their children as kind to others and compassionate. Others described their children as more "socially aware" than peers and as "taking the lead" in play groups. One survey respondent mentioned her child was described by her new teacher as someone who "always sticks up for the underdog." When pressed, most parents attributed their children's social skills to the extended time for play afforded to children at the center.

Next, parents described their children's love of learning as a real strength in the transition. This may be connected to the center's commitment to use of an emergent curriculum, given one alumnus who was interviewed described feeling as though "whatever we wanted to learn....they made it happen." Children's capacity for problem solving and creative thinking were also mentioned as strengths by many of the surveyed parents. An interviewee who had three children who had all attended the center described all three of them as "independent thinkers who solve their own problems." Another interviewee noted her child "took a creative spark with her that was fostered" at the center and felt the center staff "helped bring her imagination out." Another explained how valuable

this was for her child "given {creativity} is under-nurtured in many elementary schools."

Other strengths identified by survey respondents included children's perseverance, intrinsic motivation, and curiosity. Many attributed these to "extended time for exploration" provided by the center. One former student we interviewed stated:

> I'd like to think I have a pretty positive attitude and I can usually find... even if it's something I don't particularly enjoy...I can find one thing, you know, that will make me somewhat like it. And, I can get through and get the work done and have some kind of interest, if not a lot of interest. I think that has really helped me out in being a pretty good student.

Finally, several parents we surveyed mentioned their children began school above expectations academically, particularly in reading, and one parent attributed her child's advanced number sense to her time at the center. Another survey respondent described being nervous early on that her child was not reading in kindergarten but said the center teachers kept encouraging her to "back off" and let her child "develop reading skills naturally because that would lead to better reading skills eventually." She went on to say, "they were of course right, and she can read complicated and long words she's never seen and figure out their meaning quickly."

Struggles

Parents also listed a number of struggles children experienced as they transitioned from a child-led, play-based early childhood center to a formal school setting. As previously discussed, while several reported children began formal schooling above academic expectations, many others expressed concerns their children were entering classrooms "below expectations academically" and worried it would be "really hard for them to catch up." When probed further, some interviewees explained their children were identified as reading "below grade level." One described her child as feeling "discouraged when he discovered classmates knew how to do things he could not." Another survey respondent stated her child "didn't know how to take tests" and described feeling "embarrassed" her child had "attended a college preschool and couldn't do that." One of the parents who was interviewed went on to say, though it was challenging, her child "caught up" academically within the first six months so she had no regrets sending her child to the center for preschool and kindergarten.

As expected, some parents reported children had trouble adjusting to differences in schedule and routines. One survey

respondent stated it was "strange for her {child} to sit at a desk all day" and another described her child as having "trouble with timed tasks and the expectation for sustained focus on tasks that are not preferred." A third parent suspected her child was exhibiting "minor behavior problems" in the new setting "probably out of boredom." One of the alumni interviewed described thinking his new school was "weird" and "got the first feeling of wow, school can be boring. Like, yeah, we are learning about stuff that I do not care about."

Finally, several parents reflected on the sense of community provided at the center and found formal school much less inviting for families. Many survey respondents mentioned missing the social connections fostered between parents of children in the same class and described a lack of connection between parents of children in the same class in formal school settings.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the strengths, struggles, and supports experienced by children and families in the transition from a child-led, play-based early childhood center to a more traditional school setting. Bronfenbrenner (1979) recognized the value of context, time, and relationships on children's development. Use of a qualitative research design enabled exploration of the multiple factors influencing children's development during the transition to formal schooling.

Results indicated children entered their new classrooms with strong social skills, a love of learning, and increased capacity for problem solving and creative thinking. Many parents afforded these strengths to the center's focus on project work, extended time for play, and teacher and classroom quality. These results are consistent with the previous literature on the value of emergent curriculum for honoring children's curiosity and empowering them as capable (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). The results are also consistent with previous research on the importance of play for the development of children's cognitive functioning (Wentzel, 2009), social and emotional learning, and later success in kindergarten and beyond. Eggum-Wilkins et al. (2014) found the more time children played in Head Start, the higher teachers rated their social competence in kindergarten.

Results also indicated some children struggled in the transition to formal schooling, especially when there was a mismatch between expectations of the center and new school. This is consistent with previous research by Vitiello et al. (2022) who found differences between preschool and kindergarten program quality and amount of time spent in teacher-structured activities impacted children's performance and success in the transition to kindergarten. In the present study, some parents

also felt their new schools did not provide the same sense of community and family engagement fostered at the center. This was echoed by teachers interviewed in a study by Yamauchi (2020) who noted families often felt "cut off" once their children reached elementary school.

Limitations

While the current study provided important information regarding parents' beliefs about their child's transition into formal schooling, there are several limitations concerning the results. First, the sample size was noticeably small and homogenous due to the size of the center, which was compounded by low response rates. Moreover, the researchers utilized a nonexperimental exploratory design which consisted primarily of parent report data. Future studies should make use of child outcome data and perhaps incorporate the teachers' perspectives as well.

Implications for Practice

Despite these limitations, the results suggest several practical implications. Schools might serve families better by taking an individualized approach to supporting children in the transition (Sands & Meadan, 2022). For example, they could host a final conference with the family, center teacher(s), and director to discuss the child's individual strengths and needs and how those align with school options. Preschools might also host family events for center graduates in the first months of the next school year to see how things are going and help families reconnect.

Little et al. (2016) surveyed over 1,400 kindergarten teachers and found the most commonly used transition practices include sending information home about kindergarten, using child/parent visits prior to the start of the kindergarten year, and hosting a parent orientation. Additional research has shown more intensive approaches to introducing children to their new setting can also be beneficial. Merideth et al. (2022) described a 3-week program used by one district that incorporated half day sessions for children that mirrored the kindergarten schedule and routines. Parents attended two sessions per week that provided an overview of the kindergarten curriculum, and parents were encouraged to eat breakfast at school with their children each morning to ease them into the day. Parents appreciated having an opportunity to meet school staff early during the summer and familiarize themselves with the layout and routines of their schools. They also appreciated connecting with other children and families who were new to the school (Merideth et al., 2022).

Preschool teachers could work with students in the classroom to help them understand what they might expect

from their new school using project based learning and play. For example, Lee and Goh (2012) described a "lunchroom study" conducted by one pre-kindergarten class that helped students understand expectations in the larger school cafeteria they would find at their new school. Students visited a cafeteria, took notes on the processes, role and equipment involved, and then set up their own cafeteria in the classroom so they could each rehearse what to do through their play.

The center of focus in this study strongly believes in the power of play and teachers work hard to intentionally plan experiences that encourage higher level thinking. Teachers also actively and authentically facilitate social and emotional learning as children learn to work and play cooperatively. Teachers coach children through disagreements, help them initiate play when needed, and model caring behaviors throughout the day. It is clear greater advocacy is needed around the use of play and emergent curriculum in early childhood education as effective ways to support children in becoming "ready" for school, even when their new settings involve more focused time on seatwork and paper and pencil tasks.

Finally, the center of focus in the current study has already used the study results to make programmatic changes, including more time for targeted, small group instruction in literacy and math. Children participate in formal reading assessments and progress reports aligned with state early learning standards are generated and shared with families. These changes were made to address parents' concerns about children's readiness in reading and provide an opportunity for greater parent and teacher dialogue focused on children's growth.

Future Research

In terms of future research, it would be useful to extend the current findings by examining child outcome data to track children's performance over time. Measuring graduates' progress in executive functioning in comparison to a control group could be especially powerful. It might also be helpful to conduct another round of surveys or a focus group with students and families graduating this year given changes to the program influenced by results of this study. Although the generalizability of the current results must be established by future research, the present study provides further support for the value of play-based, emergent curriculum in helping to prepare children for formal schooling.

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Reflections on a Preschool in Quarantine

Sharon Carnahan and Diane Terorde Doyle
With teachers: Nayeli Brown (NR), Alice Davidson (AD), Lauren Duhon (LD), Caitlin Mason Strickland (CS), Felysha Lenis (FL), Ashton Marshall AM), Michelle Gelfert MG), and Corissa Raymond (CR)
HUME HOUSE CHILD DEVELOPMENT & STUDENT RESEARCH CENTER, ROLLINS COLLEGE

In spring 2020, our college campus closed due to the pandemic of the COVID-19 virus. At first, we had no idea that the Rollins College Hume House Child Development & Student Research Center (Hume House) would close for the rest of the term, or that we would not hold our summer camp in June or July. Our team of professors, teachers, and director moved swiftly to keep providing an education for undergraduates and children. This is their story.

School Context

Hume House is a full-day laboratory preschool at Rollins College, a mid-size Liberal Arts school in Florida, USA. Our threefold mission is to (1) educate Rollins students about child development theory and practice through hands-on interdisciplinary research; (2) provide the highest quality diverse and inclusive preschool for families in the Rollins and local communities; and (3) promote community understanding of current research and best practices in early child development. The school began in the 1980s as a three-mornings per week playgroup serving 18 children in a tiny house; the program grew gradually, adding days, hours, and undergraduate opportunities until moving into a purpose-built lab school in 2017.

We serve about 40 children, ages 2-5, 60% of whom are from faculty, staff, and student or alumni families, while 40% are families from our area. As our campus is diverse, children typically represent five or more first languages. Each classroom is mixed age (family grouping model), with about 13 children, aged 2-5, in the same classroom, and two teachers. For 30 years, we have included children with disabilities as about 10% of those enrolled, most often children with Down syndrome, genetic disorders, or speech and language delays. We welcome therapists who provide their services in the natural classroom environment. We are a close-knit, interactive community with frequent collaborations between teachers, undergraduates, families, and professors.

As a laboratory of the Department of Psychology, we have a faculty Executive Director and a professional Director, and provide nearly 1500 hours of undergraduate observation, internships, and laboratory experiences each year. We host research or student

activities with faculty in Psychology, Education, English, Modern Languages, Physics, Applied Behavior Analysis & Clinical Studies, and Art History. COVID closure affected both early education and care and all those academic relationships. Each of our classrooms has a wrap-around one way window with sound delivered from ceiling speakers. This has given our school an open reputation, with deep connections between children, families, and staff. We worked to maintain this warmth and community during the pandemic.

Research Problem and Questions

In March 2020, our campus and lab school closed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This posed immediate problems to our faculty, staff, students, children, and families. We asked three questions:

1. How will professors and staff provide educational support to preschoolers and undergraduates?

2. What are the actions, thoughts, and feelings of the professionals as they accomplish this task?

3. When we finally reopen, what will we learn from the experience?

Methodology

Our research method was an examination of artifacts produced by administrators and teachers (the authors) during and after the pandemic. In May-June 2020, administrative staff kept task lists and meeting minutes as we addressed the pandemic. In June 2020, administrators, faculty and teachers (N=10) wrote purposeful narratives of their activities during the March through June COVID quarantine, including counts of online activities, emotional responses, and evaluations of new "pivot" programs. We are reporting on the lived experiences of our teachers, taken directly from those immediate narratives, a phenomenological approach (Lune & Berg, 2017). Teachers first discussed their experiences in a large group on several

occasions, and then typed their own narratives, which were then analyzed for recurrent themes and shared perspectives. In 2022, four of these teachers attended a focus group discussion of their teaching-related memories of the pandemic. This conversation was then transcribed and reviewed for specific themes, adding detail and long-term perspective to the stories told in the immediate narratives.

Literature Review

During the pandemic, childcare was a "frontline" organization, encouraged to stay open and provided with federal funds and support. While some centers remained continually open, many others like ours closed temporarily, and experimented with virtual learning and other support for families, attempting to find developmentally appropriate ways to interact with young children and families on a virtual platform (Ford et al., 2021). In their survey of over 500 teachers, Ford et al. noted challenges to online early education, including providing engaging content, identifying the real needs of children and families, and quickly training teachers on the use of platforms such as WebEx, Zoom, or Teams. While online education is growing in popularity in elementary and high school, it is seldom seen in the 0-5 population, as working families have a need for childcare and education outside the home. Even in childcare settings, caregivers seldom use computers in instruction. Thus, the pivot to online learning was an instance of rapid organizational change in the face of a culture-wide set of obstacles.

Good teachers connect emotionally to their pupils. Particularly among children whose first out-of-home care experience is at age 2, preschool teachers become a part of the child's co-constructed attachment network, which can include any adult in the child's microsystem. As Verschueren and Koomen (2020) contend, "the teacher can be regarded as an ad hoc attachment figure with a safe haven and secure base function" (p. 215). When the pandemic began, millions of children experienced an immediate disruption, not only to their access to classroom learning, but from the safe havens of their classrooms and the secure bases of their teachers. We explored how these attachment relationships could be supported during online learning.

Kurt Lewin proposed a model of change, or *managed organizational learning*, which has often been applied to educational organizations (Schein, 1996). Lewin's original three-phase model of organizational change is adequate to describe our response to COVID school closure, and the ways our organization changed in the short and long term.

1. **Phase 1: Unfreeze**, where people or events shake up the organization's equilibrium state;

2. **Phase 2: Change**, while facilitating the flow of information, maintaining clear leadership and priorities, and motivating workers through an iterative process; and

3. **Phase 3: Refreeze**, or consolidate, sustaining positive changes, ensuring support from leadership, and training new employees according to the gains in crisis times.

Findings

We organized our findings chronologically, in narrative form, in the order of Lewin's model (Schein, 1996).

Phase 1: Immediate Responses/Unfreeze

When we learned that the college would close, the Executive Director intervened immediately to be sure that Hume House staff were included in the college policy of paying staff salaries for online work. At first, we did not think about providing continued services to the children in our care. It seemed impossible, and so we drew up a series of at-home tasks for staff members that were work-related and independent of family contact, like grant writing, survey research, professional development seminars, and typing up child observations. This initial response period lasted several days. We were shocked at the closure and sad about this enforced separation. Teachers expressed worries that our families were under tremendous stress. At our first planning meeting, two staff members who were immunocompromised were absent, and we shifted to 100% WebEx meetings. Our campus closed just before Spring Break, so we had a week to design the rest of spring term. Teachers shared the strong emotions felt during that time:

> It was so scary. Honestly, we did not know what COVID was. It was this big scary unknown thing that was causing severe damage to people. Our little friends were transmitting it, we thought, and our preschool was a runny nose center! We had to close. (FL)

Teachers also feared for their own health and that of their families. Those early days were roiling with uncertainty. Teachers did not know what exactly their role would be; at first, they spent days bleaching toys, sorting materials, and scrubbing rooms while brainstorming ideas and relaxing in the flexibility of work without children present. Thinking about online teaching led to worry and self-doubt:

> Hume House is a special place. We are all just a big family here. I felt panicked when we went online. We

are a very emotional group. We feel a lot, connect a lot. We're very hands-on. How was that going to work online? Caring on the computer? I had no idea. I knew it COULD be done because of Mister Rogers and Sesame Street. I know you can emote through the screen. But I didn't know if I could. (NB)

By the time our team met a second time during Spring Break via WebEx, we were clear that we should try an online version of preschool, as best we could. The team was excited to try this but unsure about how. We divided assignments and "left" for a few hours to work and brainstorm. By the end of 2 days, the team had figured out how to expand use of the online Child Observation Record software, set up a YouTube channel, and found unexpected team strengths. We learned WebEx, and by the end of Spring Break, we had set up a workable weekly schedule for our online preschool. Action brought relief from uncertainty.

Why online preschool? We were concerned about children and families missing the social, emotional, and cognitive benefits of preschool. In a survey of over 500 parents, Egan et al. (2021) asked parents a series of questions about their child's behavior during lockdown and the effect on their learning. Findings showed that children missed their friends, playing with other children, and the routines and structures of school. Parents reported negative effects of isolation, including increased tantrums, anxiety, clinginess, and other social upsets. We suspected these results would occur, and wanted to support children and families through the pandemic.

Our school fosters warm, open relationships between staff and with children. During early childhood, children are still developing their ability to form attachment relationships with people outside the family. In teaching online, we wanted to continue the children's education, offer emotional support to families, and maintain a secure relationship with the children. Finally, we needed to support our own families financially, and our institution promised full employment for all engaged in workplace relevant activity through June 2020.

Phase 2: Change

We continued to function as an educational unit during the quarantine period, with added responsibilities more than taking up our time. Upon return from Spring Break, we began the uncertain process of building and fostering relationships without in-person contact. The Director tried to model calm professionalism with teachers, but the loss of shared space and opportunities for collaboration in person made it "feel like the work was disconnected from its goal and purpose of supporting young children's growth and development" (DTD). Teachers remember how we missed the warm connections we shared with

children and parents when school was in person. Even as we participated in weekly online meetings with parents, children, and teachers, we all felt the isolation of the moment; we questioned whether online experiences were positively affecting the children, and whether we were actually doing our job.

Research has found that teachers questioned how they see "themselves as capable of being able to accomplish tasks and adapt to situations related to learning (Botor et al., 2018) during the pandemic. We powered through by participating in weekly webinars with the Early Learning Coalition, the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), and other Director's organizations, which were incredibly important and demonstrated to us that everyone felt the same way. Each in their place and role, we were all struggling to support each other through daily changes and updates from a myriad of sources including Centers for Disease Control, World Health Organization, and local and state officials.

As we experienced these new interactions, we learned that we could find sources for our parents and children that could become useful in the future. For the Director, the work of the regular yearly tasks continued in the face of the pandemic changes. Not knowing when and if we could reopen school was weighing heavily on these tasks of planning and enrolling new families for the coming year, and updating health and sanitizing policies for our hoped-for return to school in August.

Experimenting with Early Education Online

The first weeks of online teaching were times of tests and tryouts, as teachers used approaches that did not always work, or worked only for some children. Teachers LD and NB noted that they began with their whole class in attendance each day on WebEx. NB said:

In preparation for the WebEx meetings, we made several "folder games" and activities to play with the children. The games went well, at first, but it quickly became clear that these meetings were and should be an opportunity for the children to run the show, using WebEx as an opportunity to let the child give us information about their world. Many child observations can come from a WebEx session...we tried to do interactive games like on *Blue's Clues* or *Daniel Tiger* where you showed a game and asked questions, had them point or name. It was just, "Okay, can you point to where the little rabbit is and where he lives?" Children were wandering off the screen, getting up...they could only see the game, not our faces, and they lost interest quickly.

Teachers then began to meet with children 1:1 while scheduling large groups for storytelling and book reading. These 1:1 sessions were personal and intimate:

> The children wanted to share their space with the teachers, so we went to asynchronous lesson plans and 1:1 appointments with children. It was like a home visit online. One of the children showed us her room, then all the Mom's makeup, taking a long time to touch and describe every item. (LD)

Teachers were learning to connect with children online.

Several teachers noted that, once a child was engaged on the screen, the parent would step away to go back to their own work and leave the room. Many parents were working at home at that time. In some cases, the teachers almost became caregivers through the screen! However, the tools they used to discipline or redirect behavior did not work through the camera, leaving teachers trying to catch a child's attention or get a parent to come back to the lesson unsuccessfully.

As online sessions evolved into these 1:1 sessions punctuated by larger class discussions, teachers developed asynchronous integrated lesson plans with video links, emailed to parents to follow at home. These included learning objectives, teacher-videotaped activities (math, literacy, social skills, and science), links to songs, videotaped stories read by teachers, and other bits. Immediately, we noticed from the count of downloads and parent comments that these were welcomed and used. In all, over 90 of these lesson plans were developed. In some cases, children wanted to watch one lesson repeatedly, and parents reported that children found comfort in seeing their teacher lead their favorite songs and read a story to them.

In order to further soften the separation and support the teacher-child attachment relationships, teachers used some direct contact methods. They dropped off weekly activity care packages at the children' s homes and sent handwritten letters and cards. Teachers MG and FL created avatars of themselves, printed and laminated them, and sent them to each home. Parents reported that children took their "teachers" with them everywhere, "showing" the teachers their yards, pets, and bedrooms. Some families sent letters back – with photos of children interacting with their avatars. Teachers LD and NB developed a Show and Share and a Pajama Day WebEx Party, then dropped off a "Miss and Love You!" yard sign, a bag of slime, seeds to create a sandwich bag greenhouse, a super spinner template, and book ideas. AM wrote:

> We sent packages and a "Flat Teacher" activity via mail and made in person home deliveries: an Earth Day rock to decorate along with the child's family picture from school and the children's "Crazy Hair" plants they planted while at Hume House.

The connections were heartfelt and real.

Meanwhile, in weekly team meetings, teachers noted high levels of technological stress. Teacher NB noted, "Our teaching is not based on worksheets and little activities. How could we teach the roots of a project based and Reggio Emilia approach online? Can we do it?" Teacher FL, the YouTube coordinator, noted the stress of publishing teacher videos created in real-time for that week's lessons. Other teachers with children at home offered a sympathetic look at what our working parents were experiencing without childcare.

Family Support

Several teachers noted that a parent's priority at first was how to structure a child and adult workday at home. Not every day can be Saturday! Unaccustomed to being home with their children, parents first asked for daily schedules including learning time, snacks, reading, nap, and outdoor play. They found that life without a schedule is chaotic and difficult, and teachers coached many parents on managing their child's day at home. These conversations were warm and supportive. As teacher AM wrote:

> My most valuable take away from this closure period has been the irreplaceable value of human connection and interaction. Our biggest goal...has been to be a resource and source of comfort and support for our children and families. It has been so important to us to maintain daily contact.

While many resources exist online for preschool aged children, our families craved the familiar voices of their teachers and staff. Research has documented that the "fundamental element" of promoting children's social and emotional development is a need to listen to children's experiences (Erskine et al., 2013; Urbina-Gracia, 2020). One staff member (FL) administered our new YouTube channel. Gradually, by listening to the children's comments and watching their behavior, including their video choices and comments, she learned what types of videos engaged and comforted the children. As the weeks went on, each teacher and administrator contributed read-aloud stories, lessons, and songs to use in teacher-led sessions or asynchronously by families. Teachers worked together as a team to film and share weekly videos to the CDC SharePoint. In total, Teacher FL, YouTube site manager, uploaded 109 videos to the Hume House YouTube Channel, adding the appropriate titles, organizing videos to their individual classroom's playlist, and creating custom thumbnails to provide a clean look to the overall

channel page. This channel remains open to the public and is an ongoing resource to our team and families.

We also created a set of publications for families and students. Called *News You Can Use from Hume House*, these newsletters provided some of the information families were missing from direct contact with us, and included projects from undergraduate students. As teacher CMS writes, "The newsletter focused on a new, relevant topic each week. This included information on regulating emotions at home, fostering healthy sibling relationships, promoting independent play, developmental milestones and activities for language and literacy, math, and creative arts."

We are long-term users of the High Scope Child Observation Record (Epstein & Hohmann, 2012) as a tool for authentic assessment completed by teachers. We continued to use the COR for observations, but also expanded to use the Story Boards function, a system for creating a comic strip type presentation with pictures and captions based on a lesson. We seldom used the Story Boards feature before the pandemic, which inspired us to make use of existing tools to augment the experiences of children and families during quarantine. As MG notes, "We have created many Story Boards that helped to curate our lessons and make them more user friendly for families" (Appendix A).

Keeping Up with Regulations

Keeping up with COVID regulations was a major theme of daily life during closure and reopening; coordinating written policies fell to the Director. With CARES Act funding approval and financing, we were able, like many other centers, to update protocols, policies, and equipment in response to new cleaning recommendations, safety protocols and staffing needs. In concert with teacher CR, a graduate student in Public Health, and an on-campus wellness professional and Nurse Practitioner, DTD drafted updates to nutrition policy, attendance policy, and cleaning routines that would become our pathway to return in person in August for the new school year. CR contributed to this effort by compiling a document to inform a Cleaning and Disinfecting Policy that we put in place at Hume House moving forward. This research informed disinfecting practices that best reduce COVID-19 and other disease transmission and assist with aligning our practices with the guidelines currently recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NAEYC, and Caring for Our Children.

Teaching Undergraduate Lab School Students

As the quarantine continued, we were responsible for the laboratory portion of the education of two undergraduate classes (Developmental Psychology and Senior Seminar in Human Development), both of which had planned interactions with our lab school children that had to be replaced with online versions. Trained undergraduate students completed portions of the High Scope Child Observation Record based on classroom videos taken before the pandemic and by parents at home with 18 "target children." These undergraduates also conducted virtual home visits and interviews with each family, completing a 20+-page child case study paper for each child. In separate studies, two groups of Senior Seminar students surveyed parents and teachers about their stresses and coping mechanisms during the pandemic, presenting results at a community forum and to participants. Overall, the surveys indicated that parents reported high levels of stress related to schedules, parenting, and working from home; an increase in the screen time they were allowing; and that parents having the highest levels of stress were more likely to report engaging in corporal punishment during the pandemic. Teachers reported stressors related to job security, teaching in masks, and planning more online contact with parents, but their biggest stressor was worry about the health of themselves and their family members.

The Drive-by Goodbye

We all felt that the end of this pandemic online term deserved a special sendoff, where teachers could share gifts and students could see each other and us. How could we do this safely? A group of teachers planned a drive-by goodbye. We designed a route where families could drive through our campus and see their teachers and share a few moments of joy and reconnection. It was a way to celebrate our bravery through the closure time and our relationship connections despite the pandemic. Teachers and staff dressed in college garb and arrayed themselves on the sidewalk of a campus avenue, with red wagons full of gifts and children's art. One by one, cars full of families (children, siblings, parents, and often grandparents) drove by, screaming their teachers' names, waving signs, in cars decorated with balloons and streamers. As each car paused, children would lean out and excitedly fill their teacher in on events at home (e.g., my baby sister came! I got Legos! See my Band-Aid?). There were tears shed and a million pictures taken. We realized then that virtual preschool, with all its innovations and technology, was just not what children or teachers wanted or needed for the future.

Phase 3: Refreeze and Reopening

Hume House re-opened in fall 2020 to about 25% reduced attendance, as many parents still kept their children at home for health concerns. We employed full health and safety precautions as the campus operated in face-to-face, online,

and hybrid modes of instruction. We continually updated to reflect the availability of vaccines and changing mandates in our state. Teachers were encouraged to obtain vaccinations to mitigate the spread of COVID as the school year progressed. We used full mask-wearing protocols and noontime electrostatic disinfecting, had undergraduates observe from behind one-way mirrors instead of in the classrooms, and asked parents to drop off and pick up students outside. We suspended all in-person parent contact and workshops. We closed several times that year due to the COVID illness of a staff member or child, and did not reach full capacity again until spring of 2021 as parents chose to keep their children home until then.

On reopening, we changed our daily routines because of new DCF-mandated group size limits in the classrooms and elimination of classroom mixing during the day. For example, we replaced our age-segregated small group time with whole class instruction, setting aside class time to give more scaffolded literacy and numeracy instruction to the 4–5-year-olds, and brought groups to the playground one room at a time. We had children dropped off outside with a temperature check and increased the amount of email contact with parents. Families who returned, especially college faculty and staff, expressed their gratitude that we had reopened and complied with rules without exception. Teachers were so relieved to be back in person with children as we all felt the enormous developmental need for social and emotional interaction. Our primary focus was establishing daily routines and resuming instruction.

Some centers closed or had reduced attendance during the pandemic, negatively affecting teacher employment levels, and our center saw a teacher turnover rate of 42% between March 2020 and August 2021. Hiring new teachers was a challenge during the pandemic, as many highly qualified teachers were not re-entering the workforce. The early childhood field experienced staffing changes and a nationwide crisis, as teachers migrated away from childcare due to fear of infections from COVID as well as the sentiment that it was difficult to work for such low pay in the face of a pandemic. Economic reports have documented that "workers whom we observe employed in child care in the fourth quarter of 2019 were nearly 10 percent less likely to remain employed in the occupation when we observe them a year later" (Boesch et al., 2021).

Analysis and Discussion in the Laboratory School Context

During the 4 months of online teaching and the summer and fall that followed, we saw positive changes, ensured support from leadership, and trained new employees according to the gains in crisis times. In positive changes, we have become fully aware of our "organizational resume." This concept, borrowed from career development literature, highlights the combined resume that we would write if all members of the organization listed their skills. We found deep capacities amongst team members, including expertise in leadership, public policy, knowledge of public health practices, newsletter research and writing, and YouTube and social media creation. We continue to marvel at, and invest in, the skills of our team. When we reopened, our college administration lauded our service to the community in providing early care and education when many local centers remained closed. The administration also praised the Director's health and wellness committee for the up-to-date protocols developed in response to state guidelines.

Our Hume House mission is purposefully aligned with our college's emphasis on teaching, research and service, and we found this mission to be our true north in tough times (Carnahan, 2019; Carnahan & Doyle, 2012). In mission-driven activities, we provided hands-on undergraduate educational experiences while online through use of video, parent interviews, and survey research. Through our mixed modality education, we continued to work with children. Finally, by publishing fact-filled newsletters, we spread the understanding of research and best practices.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Sufficient time has passed since reopening for us to see lasting effects of closure and its aftermath. First, we retain an acute awareness of infectious diseases and the steps we must take to keep children and staff safe. We are more vigilant in notifying parents of child illnesses, and parents are more aware of the need to keep a sick child at home. Secondly, online meeting has become a frequent tool for parent teacher conferences, and it enabled us as administrators to participate in county, state, and international training and leadership positions, such as membership in the Early Learning Coalition's Pandemic Task Force, the Global Livingston Institute (Uganda) Early Education Committee, and a year as an IALS interim board member, with ease. Third, during the pandemic, staff members attended dozens of webinars, professional development courses, and completed recommended books about trauma, diversity, equity and inclusion, our professional development topics for that time. The impact of trauma on teachers and children's mental health took a front seat in our training and our focus on improving our program. In addition, our entire teaching team is now well versed in the online COR, and we plan to become a demonstration site. Finally, our YouTube and social media materials clarify our mission and teaching methods and are now instrumental in training newly hired instructors. We would not wish a pandemic on anyone, but good has followed this tragedy.

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Appendix A:

Table 1. Summary of Teacher Themes during Pandemic Isolation

Theme	Representative Quotation
Fear and Uncertainty	Scary. Honestly, we did not know what Covid was. This big scary unknown thing was causing severe damage to people. Our little friends were transmitting it and preschool was runny nose centers.
Teaching Process	Did not Work: We had file folder games. We tried to do interactive games like on *Blue's Clues* or *Daniel Tiger* where you showed a game and asked questions, had them point or name. It was just ...."Okay, can you point to where the little rabbit and where he lives?" Children were off the screen, getting up...they could only see the game, not our faces.
	Worked: Asynchronous Lesson Plans and 1:1. Mom and Dad, they loved it, you can read a story, do an activity, and follow along with Miss Lauren for an hour. Children acted like they had their teachers with them. And everyone on the team went over and above what we knew of him or her.
Family Warmth and Responsiveness	Some families more interested in the connection than others did; some were always there... No families skipped the whole thing. Every family connected and responded.

Appendix B: Storyboards on WebEx

Sharing children's daily routines

Group WebEx meeting
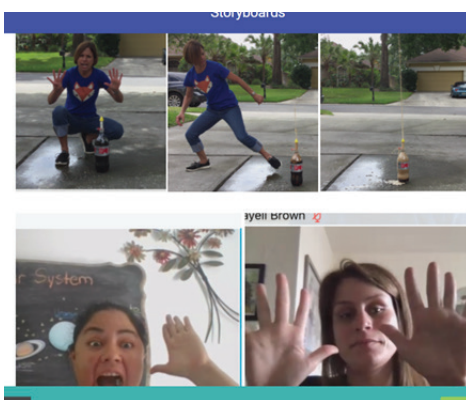
Science experiments

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Making Meaning of Parents' Stories: Interpreting Quality at the University of Guyana Early Childhood Centre of Excellence

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This study reports on a survey that was conducted to gain insights into parents' experiences with the quality of services offered at the University of Guyana Early Childhood Centre of Excellence (UG-ECCE), during the first six months of operations. Before expanding enrolment from 50% capacity, it was necessary to provide a reflective space for parents to share their experiences. Those invited to participate were parents of all (64) children enrolled during the first six months of operations. The classrooms are described as lower classrooms (Infant, Preschool 1, Preschool 2) and upper classrooms (Nursery 1, Nursery 2, Multi Grade). Fifty-one parents from all classrooms participated. Their views were elicited using open-ended questionnaires. The data generated was analysed using a thematic approach. The findings indicated that all parents were satisfied with most, if not all, aspects of services offered, and suggested that the needs of their children were adequately met. Concerns about undesirable areas were also framed by parents to express their interpretation of poor quality. The findings of this report could assist the UG-ECCE or other newly established early childhood settings to better manage, grow, and improve on services.

Keywords: Guyanese; home-school partnership; inclusive early childhood settings; parent satisfaction; quality indicator

Introduction

Brief Background of UG-ECCE

On 5 September 2022 the UG-ECCE commenced operations. The UG-ECCE is a childcare, teaching, and research facility which offers a developmentally appropriate learning environment for children of students and staff of the University of Guyana and from the surrounding communities. The main aim of UG-ECCE is to provide exemplary pedagogical practice and opportunities for research about the impact of early care, education and development, including special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Operations began under a four-phased system: (a) September 2022 to January 2023 operations at 50% capacity of 120 children; (b) September 2022 to June 2023 professional development for teachers; (c) February 2023 to July 2023 operations at 75% capacity; (d) September 2023 to July 2024 operations at 100% capacity. UG-ECCE has two units. Unit One focuses on Early Care, Education and Development. Unit Two focuses on Research, Curriculum Design, Teacher Training, and Professional Development. The establishment of Unit Two is in progress. This report focuses on the operations of the first phase of Unit One. Before expanding enrollment, it was necessary to provide a reflective space for stakeholders to share their experiences about the services offered over the first six months of operations. This article reports on the experiences of parents.

The Children

The UG-ECCE was built to accommodate approximately 120 children. Fifty percent of the children are of staff and students at the University of Guyana. The remaining fifty percent are vulnerable children, drawn from the surrounding underprivileged communities and villages where there is an absence of such whole-day facilities, or parents are not able to afford early care and development services. In other words, UG-ECCE services the university community, and the poor and vulnerable in the surrounding communities, who may not otherwise be exposed to quality care and early stimulation.

The UG-ECCE provides spaces for six groups of children: Infant, Preschool 1, Preschool 2, Nursery 1, Nursery 2, and Multi Grade. Children are enrolled in these groups once they reach the following ages at the start of the September academic year: Infant (3 months), Preschool 1 (1 year, 3 months), Preschool 2 (2 years, 3 months), Nursery 1 (3 years, 3 months), Nursery 2 (4 years, 3 months), and Multi Grade (3 years, 3 months to eight years). Multi Grade offers afternoon care service for children who attend other schools. During the first six months of operations 64 children were enrolled (35 males and 29 females). Of these 64 children, 19 are identified as having special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) including: exceptional intelligence and giftedness, autism spectrum disorders, speech impairment, learning disabilities or challenges, emotional behaviour disorder, dyslexia, and other developmental delays. The children comprised Amerindians,

East Indians, Africans, and Mixed Races, which reflected the diversity of children in the community and country at large.

Daily operations

Daily operations begin at 7:30 a.m. and end at 5:30 p.m. There is a projection for extended care between 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. for children of the University of Guyana students and staff who study or teach in the evening. In an effort to facilitate learners (age 3 to 8 years) attending other schools in the surrounding communities that end at 12:00 p.m., the Multi Grade class offers after-school care, protection, and early stimulation activities from 12:00 p.m to 5:30 p.m.

Curriculum and Learning Environment

The curriculum caters for all children regardless of diversities, abilities, background, culture, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and impairments. The UG-ECCE aims to be the space that Booths and Ainscow (2011), Lashley (2021, 2022), Levitt (2017), Loreman (2009, 2014), Oliver (2013), and Shakespeare (2014) describe as an environment that evolves to meet the changing needs of children through placing emphasis on their neurodiversities as an enabling rather than disabling factor. In essence, the underpinning principles of the curriculum embrace the theory that learning is social and the basis of constructivism, which considers that individuals gain knowledge by constructing reality through experiences (Yoon, Joung, & Kim, 2012).

The Caribbean Child Development Centre's (CCDC) *Learning Outcomes for Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the Caribbean* (2010), and the Ministry of Education's *Nursery Curriculum* (2022) guide the activities of UG-ECCE. The experiences of children are geared towards meeting the six learning outcomes set out by the CCDC (2010): wellness (healthy, strong, well-adjusted); resilience (coping skills, self-protection); effective communication (verbal, non-verbal, receptive, creative); respect for self, others and the environment (acceptable behavior, relationships); valuing culture (own, others, local, national, international); and intellectual empowerment (critical thinker, independent learner). These outcomes are supported daily in an integrated approach, from the moment the children arrive through to dismissal.

Children start their day with free play time, where they choose activities such as sand and water play, table-top activities, art centre projects, reading materials, blocks, puzzles, shop, dress-up, toys, construction materials, musical instruments, and so forth. Teachers may use this time, if opportunities permit, to question children about their activities to stretch their minds and help children think critically and creatively. For the babies and younger children, teachers engage in daily conversations and encourage children to respond to their voice, touch, action; follow children's lead to observe the things they are interested in; talk with children about what they are doing, so they link words to actions; draw children's attention to things in the environment; and talk with children about what they do (e.g., their scribbles, attempts to reach for toys).

Group meetings are also an important element of the daily schedule. Here opportunities are provided to teachers and children to share ideas and learn through introduction/reinforcement of new concepts and projects for follow-up in small groups and individual activities. This time also offers opportunities for children to use songs, rhymes, and stories to reinforce their sense of individual well-being and belonging. The activities explored during group meetings usually serve as the foundation of "lesson time" for specific skill building, concept learning, and project development. Children explore and investigate mathematical, language, sciences, civic issues, social studies, technological, and other emerging related areas in smaller groups or individually.

Other important sessions include outdoor play, exploration, book time, television and computer time, and celebrations. Outdoor exploration and play allow children to engage in gross motor activities to help develop mastery in body control. Exploring and wandering the outdoors is celebrated when they build something from available (tires, blocks) and natural (logs, rocks, twigs) materials. The discussions during book, television, and computer time provide a space for children to think about the morals, actions, and messages of the stories and events and provide diverse ways of reinforcing many concepts taught in other sessions. Celebration time is enjoyed and shared by both the home and the UG-ECCE. In addition to festivities in celebration of Guyana's diverse culture, children and teachers reflect on learnings of the day.

Given that the UG-ECCE is situated within the larger university campus, field trips, nature walks, and learning activities outside the centre are common. Visits are made to places such as to the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry's Farm, Creative Arts and Drama Divisions in the Faculty of Education and Humanities, and other spaces around the campus that facilitate discovery and encourage lots of inquiry and discussions. Specialist projects and activities are also led by students and staff of the various Academic Faculties and Units. For example, activities that are science related receive instructional support from the Faculties of Earth and Environmental Sciences, and Natural Sciences.

The final set of experiences surround meals and rest. At UG-ECCE, emphasis is placed on healthy eating and exploring culturally and religiously associated foods. Rest and quiet times are offered throughout the day in the form of sleeping, resting, and solitary play on individual sleeping cots in spaces where

there is an absence of sounds, or spaces where soothing music is played to help children rest and relax.

Through the promotion of these experiences, the learning outcomes set out by the CCDC (2010) are achieved. How well parents perceive the achievement of these outcomes are explored in this paper.

Parents' Opinion Matters

Minimum Service Standard No. 12 of the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) Regional Guidelines (2008) recommends: "Consultation with parents on their views as to the support the setting should be providing..." (p. 65). UG-ECCE upholds CARICOM's (2008) recommendation along with the principle of parent partnership put forward by the Government of Guyana in Goals No. 8 and 9 of The Guyana Nursery Education Programme (2010): "...establish genuine two-way communication between the home and the school; emphasise teamwork among teachers... parents...". Gillian Pugh and Erica De'Ath, early years home-school activists, explain the process as, "A working relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect, and the willingness to negotiate. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making, and accountability" (Pugh & De'Ath, 1989, p. 68).

These standards, principles and definitions acknowledge that children grow up in a web of institutions —family, neighbourhood, school (Epstein, 2001). Therefore, strides to uphold and raise standards in early care, education, and development for young children will be better achieved if there are good connections in all parts, for what happens in one part affects the others (Davies, 1988). In 2004, the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project, a major longitudinal European study of a national sample of over 3,000 children, confirmed the importance of parents' participation. EPPE showed that the most effective ECD settings were those that shared information between parents and staff and involved parents in decision making about children's learning (Sylva et al., 2004). Internationally, regionally, and in Guyana, studies continue to show the importance of offering parents a platform for recognition of their contributions, opinions, and perspectives (see Kaiser et al., 2022; Leo-Rhynie et al., 2009; Meier & Lemmer, 2019). Such platforms allow service providers to address quality matters specific to parents and, by extension, to other ECD stakeholders.

Characteristics of quality in early childhood

The concept of "quality" in early childhood remains complex, constructed and value-laden (Albon, 2011; Dahlberg,

Moss & Pence, 2013; McLean et al., 2022). For the ECD sector in the Caribbean, some boundaries for regional interpretation are set through specific characteristics or indicators identified by CARICOM (2008) and CCDC (2010). The indicators of quality for the Caribbean include, inter alia, programme participation, teacher engagement, management and administration, parent/family partnership, and health and safety. The indicators of quality put forward by CARICOM (2008) and CCDC (2010) are not limited to the Caribbean Regions; they are consistent with international expectations. Examples from Canada, Norway and systematic reviews can be found in Employment and Social Development Canada (2019), Kaiser et al. (2022), and McLean et al. (2022).

As mentioned in the section about the curriculum, and further referenced throughout the text, the indicators set out by CARICOM (2008) and CCDC (2010) steer the services provided. In Guyana, studies have shown how meeting these indicators of quality correlates with positive changes in the developmental trajectories of young children, including those with SEND (see Semple-McBean & Lashley, 2021; Semple-McBean & Rodrigues, 2018). When indicators of quality are adequately met, children's overall developmental possibilities become obvious, enriching all areas of growth —social, physical, intellectual, creative, emotional, and spiritual (SPICES).

The learning and development environments at UG-ECCE are considered appropriate for early shaping of children's SPICES. While remaining culturally relevant, UG-ECCE has structured its operations in keeping with regional and international good practices that have been shown to positively impact children's outcomes. One distinguishing feature is collaborations with the different Academic Programmes and Units at the University of Guyana to offer diverse, robust, and meaningful experiences to uphold these indicators of quality. Research has confirmed that specialist support is an important indicator of quality for parents: "I liked that my child would experience a wide array of experiences from pre-service teachers to content specialists to master teachers all in a single classroom" (Seipel, 2019, p.15). Ultimately, achieving these indicators, could, as Burns (2021, p. 60) puts it, "help children to hone the skills needed to become ideal CARICOM citizens who are capable of living productive lives that benefit them personally, benefit their families as well as their local, regional, and international community."

Research Question

The question addressed was: *How do parents perceive the quality of service offered by UG-ECCE?*

Methodological Considerations

Approach

This research was conducted using the ontological, epistemological, and methodological principles of the Interpretivist Paradigm. Interpretivist researchers are concerned with the meanings and experiences of human beings. The central tenet of the interpretivist paradigm is that people are constantly involved in interpreting their ever-changing world (Harrison et al., 2017). A descriptive parent survey is one platform/approach which allows the parents to share meanings and experiences. The parent survey acted as a tool for (a) empowering parents to contribute to improvements of their children's learning experiences, (b) providing a reflective space for the entire family, and (c) informing future planning and highlighting areas requiring development to assist UG-ECCE in its stride to uphold and raise standards in early childhood, and (d) gathering data for the study. The researchers are aware that the stories of parents are related to their embodied positions and realities in discourses which make them subjectively positioned (Clarke, 2005). The method of story-sharing through the parent survey is considered appropriate for gaining understanding of parents' interpretation of quality because it allows parents to share their realities from their embodied positions in ECD discourses.

Data Source

Parents of all children enrolled during the first six months of operations were invited to participate: Infant (n=11), Preschool 1 (n=14), Preschool 2 (n=13), Nursery 1 (n=11), Nursery 2 (n=12), and Multi Grade (n=3). Of the 64 children, parents reported on 47 of them (73%). A response rate of 48% to 68% is an acceptable norm for surveys of this nature (Holtom et al., 2022). While a high response rate is recorded, the quality value, representativeness, and appropriateness of the data were influenced by the different number of classrooms that participated. Another point to highlight is that even though the report is based on 47 children, four parents submitted separate responses. These parents identified their children's classrooms as Infant, Preschool 1, Preschool 2 and Nursery 2. Therefore, a total of 51 parents participated.

Twelve parents reported on 11 (92%) children from Nursery 2. Infant class received the second highest percentage in terms of response rate —nine parents reported on eight (73%) children. Preschool 1 followed with 11 responses for 10 (71%) children. Smaller response rate was recorded for Preschool 2, which attracted 10 responses for 9 (69%) children. Multigrade and Nursery 1 recorded the lowest percentages of response rate comparative to class size (n=2 or 67%, and n=7 or 64%).

Data Collection and Analysis Protocols

The stories shared by parents are part of a larger survey conducted by UG-ECCE. Decision to incorporate the "telling of parents' stories" within the questionnaire was influenced by the work of Meier and Lemmer (2019) about the importance of using open-ended questions to gain an indication of parent satisfaction with the quality of schooling. The questions that encouraged parents to tell their stories focused on three areas:

- Aspects of service UG-ECCE is performing well at that standout in parents' mind.
- Issues UG-ECCE need to address to improve the quality of service offered.
- Staff members that parents are comfortable, or do not feel comfortable, engaging with.

Two pathways were used to collect data: (a) Google Forms required online submission, and (b) officially stamped hand-delivered questionnaires were returned to a "drop-box" available at the foyer of UG-ECCE. To avoid misrepresentation of the data, and to ensure that the questionnaires were completed by parents of UG-ECCE, email addresses were needed to access the Google questionnaire. Parents were assured that their responses would have been treated with a high degree of confidentiality. Once verified, all email addresses were deleted. The hand-delivered version was especially important for parents with limited access to the internet or suitable electronic devices. This approach was also preferred by parents who did not wish to associate their email addresses with the submission of their questionnaires. The researchers also believed that this completely anonymous approach would have permitted the sharing of more stories about undesirable services. However, the spread of both positive and negative responses cuts across both submission platforms.

Respectively, 42 and 14 parents utilized the options of Google and drop-box questionnaires. Unfortunately, only 37 of the 42 Google submissions were analyzed. Five of the questionnaires submitted online were expunged due to the researchers' inability to verify them as belonging to parents of UG-ECCE. The data collection process spanned four weeks in February to March 2023.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) advice on thematic analysis, analytical insights began early. Given that the researchers inputted the data from the hand-delivered questionnaires onto the Google Forms, three sensitizing categories were created through the patterns, trends, commonalities, and differences observed (teacher-child ratio, variety of activities, and feedback about children's performance). The final themes were generated after each author scrutinised the data twice to eliminate any single author's epistemological predilections, misrepresentation, or

inadequate conceptualization of the themes. Where relevant, stories shared by the parents are placed as extracts to represent the themes generated. Stories that expressed similar ideas are not repeated.

The British Educational Research Association's ethical obligations (2018) were upheld throughout the research process. For example, outstanding practices and underperformance of specific teachers have been recorded, but adherence to ethical standards does not promote identification in reports of this nature. Such specificity is used for individual evaluation and to tailor remedial interventions for staff and programme development at the level of the UG-ECCE. Also, for ethical reasons, disaggregated responses by the classroom are not presented. Instead, relations are established by two attributes: lower classrooms (Infant, Preschool 1, Preschool 2) and upper classrooms (Nursery 1, Nursery 2, Multi Grade). Respectively, findings specific to the lower and upper classrooms are of importance to the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, and the Ministry of Education, the ministries with responsibilities for the two age groups. Of the 51 parents, 30 (59%) reported on lower classrooms, and 21 (41%) reported on upper classrooms. A copy of the report was shared with parents.

The Stories of Parents

What UG-ECCE is Doing Well

The parents' stories generated five categories about the services they were satisfied with: (a) Learning, developmental, and stimulation activities; (b) Warm, welcoming, and engaging interactions; (c) Professional conduct; (d) Safe adult to child ratios; (e) Maintenance, health, and safety practices. With regard to frequency in pattern of responses, the upper classrooms recorded higher counts in the first two categories. The higher response count for the lower classrooms in the remaining three categories is reflective of the number of parents in this group. As a quick reference, 30 (59%) of the parents are of the lower classrooms. The lower and upper classrooms are represented by LC and UC. The frequencies in which specific categories of stories were shared are listed below, along with samples of extracts.

a. *Learning, developmental and stimulation activities (34: LC=16; UC=18)*
LC: The social and cultural events are very inclusive and do not require mandatory contribution for participation.
UC: I like the practical manner in which the subjects are taught. I think it is brilliant that they are engaged in baking and cooking....

b. *Warm, welcoming, and engaging interactions (28: LC=13; UC=15)*
LC: Well to tell you the truth I don't know what goes on with my baby during the day, but I know she's comfortable there.
UC: The teachers, two of the four, demonstrate genuine interest in the development of my child. They always find ways to include him in classroom activities.

c. *Professional conduct (25: LC=14; UC=11)*
LC: The teachers have a pleasant demeanour ... always greet us with a smile and a warm welcoming tone.
UC: Class teachers share information about my child's learning, development, or achievements, e.g., packing up of toys, drawing, singing.

d. *Safe adult to child ratios (21: LC=12; UC=9)*
LC: Teacher ratio is great, one and one interaction is on par.
UC: Small class sizes. Multiple class aids to assist the students in need of assistance.

e. *Maintenance, health, and safety practices (16: LC=9; UC=7)*
LC: Children are provided with opportunities for active play - especially outdoors. This is especially important to me.
UC: A well-maintained environment is set up for children. It is safe, clean and child friendly.

Placing the five categories on a continuum indicates that each parent recorded stories that were associated with at least two. Twenty-seven parents shared stories that were associated with three categories. And from among this group of 27 parents, 11 shared stories that were associated with a fourth category. The story of Parent No. 23 illustrates how four categories were generated from a single parent:

(e) A very clean environment.... (d) The provisions of an adequate number of staff who are (b) sensitive and responsive to children.... (e) Children are provided with opportunities for active play — especially outdoors. This is especially important to me.... (a) There is great respect for diversity and difference, and inclusion of children with special needs. (LC)

While no parent shared stories that cut across all the categories, those shared suggest that the services offered are meeting all the parents' expectations of quality in at least two of the five categories. These stories also indicate that the

services might be sufficiently satisfying the standards set out by CARICOM (2008) for developing children's physical and intellectual capabilities, social relationships, creative skills, and emotional stability.

What UG-ECCE can do Better

Six categories are presented from the stories shared about what UG-ECCE is not doing so well, where there are areas for growth, or why parents might not be completely satisfied. Regarding the lower versus upper classrooms divide, the categories of "additional learning and developmental activities" attracted a higher proportion of stories from the upper classrooms. Also, only the upper classrooms reported on the final category. The higher response count for the lower classrooms in the other categories is reflective of the number of parents in this group. The frequencies in which specific categories of stories were shared are listed below, along with samples of extracts.

a. *Additional learning and developmental activities (9: LC=3; UC=6)*
LC: What can be improved in my opinion is, more outdoor activities for the children.... I understand children need to pay attention to their classroom activities or work, but children need some kind of outdoor activities once in a while. For example, explore the scenery, the trees, birds, play some games and learn about plants outside etc.
UC: I would like my child to learn to read, spell and write more. My child has the potential and is a fast learner. I feel that she needs more exposure to more learning materials....

b. *Inattentiveness of teachers (8: LC=5; UC=3)*
LC: There are days when the food I pack returns untouched. I am aware that as stipulated in the handbook the teachers cannot force the children to eat. However, I wonder if another attempt was made or just the first. I know some teachers ensure my child eats even if it is the first instance or another try, but other days the food returns untouched.
UC: Care should be taken when it comes to packing the child's school bag after meals. The bag is usually soiled almost every day when the child returns home.

c. *Unsatisfactory teacher-child engagement (8: LC=5; UC=3)*
LC: [...] I do feel more training for staff (understanding how to work with SEND children) is necessary....
UC: I am always concerned about my child on [X]days. He is treated improperly most [X]days because of his special needs. I have observed that on [X]days there is some degree of disregard to his welfare.... Most [X]days I do not allow him to attend school or if he does, I try to collect him as early as I can on [X]days.

d. *Unscheduled activities and closures (8: LC=5; UC= 3)*
LC: Include in the calendar planned activities for events such as valentine, Mashramani.
UC: Parents and guardians should be notified a week in advance of events such as half-day school, no-school days, and school dismissal within a timeframe shorter than the normal daily stipulated time frame.

e. *Inadequate progress report or feedback (5: LC=3; UC=2)*
LC: I wish to be informed of current content that my child is doing so that I can repeat with her at home. I shouldn't have to wait until Parent/Teachers conferences to see/hear about the same.

f. *Additional SEND support staff (1: LC=0; UC=1)*
UC: Some additional assistance should be put in place for the special needs students.

In this section, the stories highlight areas for strengthening and revisiting. These stories suggest that some aspects of services might not be meeting parents' expectations of quality. Placing the six categories on a continuum indicates that 23 of the 51 parents recorded stories that were associated with at least one undesirable area of service. The second, third and fourth categories were generated from stories of the same eight parents. The atypical case leading to the sixth category was not ignored because the same parent shared positive stories about the general adult-child-ratio. The overall findings imply that closer attention might need to be given to elements of services that are hindering standards set out by CARICOM (2008). Stories such as recommendations for promotion of an academic-focused curriculum versus the current play-based, enquiry, and constructivist approach, suggest that some parents are desirous of services outside the scope of UG-ECCE, and beyond the benchmarks identified by the Ministry of Education or set out in the Learning Outcomes for ECD in the Caribbean.

Discussing Lessons Learnt

General Reflections on the Engagement

The indicators of quality identified through the stories suggest that parents' interpretations of quality fall within the confines set out by CARICOM (2008):
• Programme participation: Learning, developmental,

and stimulation activities.

- Teacher engagement: Warm, welcoming, and engaging interactions; Professional conduct; Attentiveness of teachers; Teacher-child engagement; Progress report and feedback
- Management and administration: Professional conduct; Safe adult to child ratios; Scheduling of activities; Progress report and feedback; Staff training; Support for SEND.
- Parent/family partnership: Warm, welcoming, and engaging interactions; Progress report and feedback.
- Health and safety: Safe adult to child ratios; Health and wellbeing practices.

Parents expressed that the overall services provided by the UG-ECCE met the needs of their children inclusive of those with additional needs constituted by impairments and other diversities. It is important for teachers to know this since challenges in catering for this group of children were experienced in the initial startup of the centre. The stories have suggested that the needs of the children are sufficiently met through the diversity in pedagogical approaches embraced at the centre. Some parents recognise the specific components that contribute to their child having a meaningful learning and socialisation experience: "She [teacher parent admired the most] is optimistic and patient when executing her duties, especially when working with the child academically" (UC). Parents who could not identify specific components that contribute to their children's learning and socialisation experience expressed good quality of service this way: "Well to tell you the truth I don't know what goes on with my baby during the day, but I know she's comfortable there" (LC).

The sentiments of the parents above alluded to several pillars upon which the UG-ECCE stands. Teachers are encouraged to see the whole child and embrace their unique strengths and weaknesses. By taking this approach it is likely that every child might be happy because this allows them to feel a sense of belonging. It is noteworthy that the parents think this aspiration is being achieved. Even when parents do not fully understand the approaches, they embrace the approaches because they see the emotional, physical, and cognitive developmental progress in their children.

From the opening of the centre, a daily target was set to ensure each child's interactions with the staff and facilities are meaningful, enjoyable, and engaging. Teachers are supported to demonstrate the heights of professionalism with patience and a positive attitude and energy. Despite falling short on occasions as noted by the parents' stories, teachers independently, or with administrative support, correct the behaviour(s) upon which the short fallings are contingent. The reports of parents underpin training needs already prioritised. That is, some

teachers require additional support in terms of professional, pedagogical, and psychosocial training since this was their first experience practicing in an inclusive ECD environment. One lesson the teachers need to take away from these stories is to be open to opportunities to improve their practice. Also, teachers need to be open to constructive criticism as a tool for personal growth and development.

Many teachers received commendations from parents for going the extra mile and making the additional effort to meet their children's needs. These teachers' level of professionalism, time management, general deportment, and attitude is admired by parents. Beyond satisfying parents' expectations, this group of teachers demonstrated the hands-on approach that is enshrined in the code of the UG-ECCE. Such demonstration of patience in challenging situations, especially with the neurodiverse children with additional needs, is commendable and worthy of the recognition given by one parent: "The teacher [teacher parent admired the most] follows and reports my child good days and bad days" (UC).

Specific Areas of Reflection

Diet and Nutrition

The UG-ECCE has a flexible approach to mealtimes. Even though there is a schedule for mealtime, if children indicate that they are not ready physically or emotionally for their meal, they are not force-fed. Children are encouraged and motivated to eat with alternative mealtime arrangements implemented to ensure they do have their nutritional requirements. The teachers have also recognised that through play, children who are picky eaters consume their meals without challenges. Learning that many parents appreciated this strategy is significant in future planning around diet and nutrition at the centre.

There are parents who wish for their children to consume all packed meals. Given the centre's approach to eating, consumption of all meals is not always possible. Therefore, sensitisation sessions for parents about the centre's approach might be necessary. The stories from parents about food returning "untouched' on some days suggest that teachers and supervisors may need to be more vigilant, observant, and proactive during mealtime.

Communication and Parental Engagement

Opportunities for parents to engage with the staff on instances of celebrations, issues, occurrences, and concerns seem adequate. And the approachable, friendly, and kind mannerism of teachers seemed to have made communication even better:

The teachers have a pleasant demeanour and are approachable at all times ... always greet us with a smile and a warm welcoming tone. They usually ask questions about our child (not invasive at all) such as how he functions at home and in different situations. They offer to go, what we consider, the extra mile. They offer lots of support. (LC)

The communication avenues that are effective will be further strengthened by continued engagements that allow the staff to listen to the voices of the parents. The home could share good and culturally relevant practices, and the UG-ECCE will improve on sharing researched practices and child engagements. The interest shown by parents towards sharing stories suggests that there might be strengthening of the relationship between the home and school.

Physical Resources

The physical resources are deemed adequate. Their design and allocated amount meet the needs of the diverse group of children. Parents complimented the design and size appropriateness of the furniture used in workstations and classroom activities. The inclusive and neutral colours are celebrated by parents. Children with disabilities are more likely to miss out on school than other children because of the absence of physical resources to cater for their needs. The stories show that UG-ECCE is committed to overcome the barriers and make inclusive education accessible to all children.

Parents expressed that they are pleased with the accessibility. The UG-ECCE's building is accessible to children with physical disabilities. There is a wheelchair ramp with the correct incline to reduce any barrier accessing the building. All the corridors are wide and paved in a wheelchair/ mobility scooter friendly manner. The general infrastructure easily accommodates children of all abilities to get around the school accessing all resources including the disability-friendly washrooms. In the interest of good practice, all children must be visible, and the physical resources ensure their visibility is enhanced.

Engaging Classroom Activities

Parents recognise and appreciate the learning and socialisation approach and process their children are actively involved and engaged in. The project-based, hands-on activities were particularly celebrated by the parents who shared expressions such as: "I like the practical manner in which the subjects are taught. I think it is brilliant that they are engaged in baking and cooking..." (UC).

Activities such as baking and cooking are especially important to encourage the neurodiverse children learn through collaboration with their neurotypical peers. For example, in their cake baking activity children collaboratively discovered how to make eggs foam and why foaming is important to the cake making process. Individually, children test and strengthen their eye-hand and large motor skills required for whipping eggs and stirring of the batter. Activities of this nature have boosted children's curiosity and allowed for engaging classroom interactions.

An important observation is that without the support from the specialized academic departments and units at the university, the practical manner and active exploration the parent alluded to might not have been possible. In baking, gardening, and other scientific activities, age-appropriate language, skills, content, concepts, and materials are provided by the students and staff of the Faculties of Agriculture and Forestry, Earth and Environmental Sciences, and Natural Sciences. These collaborative and combination of approaches allow children and their teachers to be stimulated and be active agents in learning in safe, supportive, and inclusive play-based spaces. Spaces that "allowed instructors and students to *fail forward* with support and guidance" (Seipel, 2019, p.15, emphasis added).

Embracing Diversities

From the planning and implementation stage, UG-ECCE considered what it would take to be an inclusive ECD setting. Parents of children with SEND commend the efforts of teachers in making accommodations and reasonable adjustments. Such adjustments and accommodations are made possible through the disability specialist who advocates for the inclusivity of tested and proven methods by researchers such as Booths and Ainscow (2011), Lashley (2021, 2022), Levitt (2017), Loreman (2009, 2014), Oliver (2013), and Shakespeare (2014).

Observations of practice indicate that before the survey was conducted, staff were learning. It is expected that staff will continue to learn how to change attitudes, views, practices, and philosophical beliefs and become more and more inclusive. The baseline measure is to ensure that all children are pacing towards their individual goals and targets in an inclusive enabling space. With specific reference to SEND, training to improve skills of teachers is ongoing at UG-ECCE. The UG-ECCE is in an advantageous position to offer training in SEND to both teachers and parents since close collaboration exists between the department at the University of Guyana that has responsibility for training in SEND.

Since inclusion is a part of the quality service provided, I do feel more training for staff

(understanding how to work with SEND children) is necessary. Programmes that will specifically target the needs of these children, while maintaining inclusion, is needed. (LC)

Unanticipated Findings

The stories have highlighted some strengths and shortfalls of the parents themselves. Many parents are knowledgeable about the curriculum approaches endorsed by UG-ECCE and appear to be comfortable sharing information to better the services offered. Some shortfalls became apparent from suggestions for changes, additions, or recommendations already in existence at the UG-ECCE and are an active part of children's daily experiences. This suggests that some aspects of awareness and sensitisation might not have had the desired effect of exposing parents to some of the underlying principles, expectations, protocols, and processes. The team at UG-ECCE will be required to continue to raise awareness and conduct (re) sensitisation fora to further expose parents to these principles and practices.

A response rate of 73% suggests that different pathways to completing questionnaires might be an effective way for involving parents in surveys. In the absence of the hand-delivered drop-box method, it is likely that the participation by 14 parents would have been missed. The high number (37) of parents who completed the survey online suggests that they were comfortable with this approach and assured of the level of confidentiality in the processing of the data. Parents were guaranteed that once verified, all email addresses would be deleted from the questionnaires. Finally, it was anticipated that the completely anonymous drop-box responses would have attracted more of the negative stories; however, the responses were balanced across both pathways.

Conclusion

The stories of parents demonstrate the dynamic nature of forging relations between the home and school. The stories portray that even with the best will in the world, parents' expectations and interpretation of "good" quality care, education, and development will not always align with UG-ECCE's. This is not necessarily a bad thing. This is how strong parent/family-teacher/school partnerships are forged. The parents' stories comfortably fit the confinements of partnership defined by Pugh and De'Ath (1989) as relationships that share common purposes, through respectful and negotiated means.

There is strength in the parent's stories. At UG-ECCE, the national goals for early childhood in Guyana are exemplified by the stories of parents. Establishing genuine

two-way communication between the home and the school by permitting parents to tell their stories highlighted areas for strengthening and revisiting. The frequencies in which positive stories were shared outweighed undesirable services. Consistencies in stories were evident across both lower and upper classrooms, and reflective of the number of parents in each group.

While the stories suggest that some parents are desirous of services outside the scope of UG-ECCE, and beyond the benchmarks identified by the Ministry of Education or set out in the Learning Outcomes for ECD in the Caribbean, they have raised awareness of critical issues. For example, developmental programmes to explain new and future expectations are required to sustain continuous training of parents, especially in the areas of play-based pedagogy versus academic-focused learning. With regard to staff and programme development, the stories of parents will allow for tailored remedial interventions. Through teamwork, strategies to effectively address the shortcomings will be possible. Shortcomings for immediate attention include inattentiveness of teachers and unsatisfactory teacher-child engagement.

In a similar view, the respect, acknowledgements, and credits offered through the stories of parents are a source of empowerment for teachers and all staff. Some remarkable stories have been told about learning, developmental and stimulation activities; warm, welcoming, and engaging interactions; professional conduct; safe adult to child ratios; maintenance, and health and safety practices. Outstanding practices of specific teachers have been recorded. Overall, the stories shared by parents suggest that the services offered are sufficiently satisfying parents' expectation of "good" quality for developing children's physical and intellectual capabilities, social relationships, creative skills, and emotional stability. Some stories provide areas to focus on when informing stakeholders about developmentally appropriate expectations and practices for young children. Particularly, the findings of this report could serve to assist UG-ECCE (and others elsewhere that share structures that are similar or comparable) to better manage, grow, and improve on services.

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The Learning Curve: Leaping into the K-12 Space for a University

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Introduction

With over 6000 2-year and 4-year post-secondary institutions of higher education within the United States (IPEDS, 2022) and with over one hundred university affiliated laboratory schools (IALS, 2022) on university campuses, the laboratory school is considered uncommon. A university laboratory school is a school traditionally located on the university campus that enacts research, outreach/service, and teacher training. Although there are similarities amongst lab schools nationwide, a lab school not located on the university campus, one located off-campus within a district, is exceptionally rare.

Off campus laboratory schools, while very few in number, are most often laboratory schools that operate as private charter schools. An off-campus laboratory school that is fully integrated within a larger independent public school district is an anomaly. This rare laboratory school configuration is what is shared in the sections that follow. In-district laboratory schools provide unique opportunities to enact educational innovation in the very districts that most need them. In this article, we explore what we have learned through this process of establishing university laboratory schools on individual campuses within a large school district. The partnership is considered from the teacher's, administrator's, director's, and university's perspective as a way to begin the conversation about the role of universities in transforming public PK-12 education through off-campus in-district laboratory schools.

Partnership Uniqueness

In 2019, Texas A&M University-San Antonio (A&M-SA) and one local urban school district began conversations about the university becoming the operating partner of one middle school campus within the district. Edgewood Independent School District provides educational services to between 9,000–10,000 students (State of Texas, 2019). The network of schools includes 22 elementary, middle school and high school campuses. There are 636 non-unionized teaching staff in the district and the overall district rating at the time conversations began was a 'C.'

The purpose for the partnerships between Texas A&M University-San Antonio (A&M-SA) and local school districts included developing community-based laboratory schools that address the unique educational needs of the students served by the campus as a strategy for educational improvement. Each campus has unique needs that fit within the categories of innovation, turn-around or new school partnerships. In conversations with the ASPIRE network, a group of local school districts, the superintendents requested a community lab school rather than a traditional lab school or another charter. Therefore, the partnership's purpose, to create community-based laboratory schools, moved schools from being district operated public schools to in-district charter schools operated by an external partner (Texas A&M University-San Antonio) who collaborates with the district.

This model is desirable to the district because the student headcount remains within the district, and the state and federal school Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funding is drawn down by district with the revenue generated by the campus managed by the Operating Partner (OP). The district and the OP negotiate any funding that needs to go back to the district for district-related services, but all campus generated funding (ADA included) is managed by the OP. The State requirements for this type of partnership include at least one employee at the school being an employee of the Operating Partner. All others, including the teaching staff, can remain district employees.

In Texas, where this model is being enacted, there are additional state dollars for education transformation and

innovation that are granted to the operating partner to further support the work being done at the school under Texas Senate Bill 1882. The model does not require that the operating partner be a university or university affiliated institute; however, as we will show here, the university engagement is important to the innovation that can be advanced and is therefore the ideal partner. Furthermore, Texas A&M San Antonio created the Institute for School and Community Partnerships, the small nonprofit 501c3. The organization spent the first two years of operation establishing policies and processes to ensure a solid structure for operating campuses. This involved working with charter school attorneys to draft and enact personnel and organization policies. Specifically, understanding the responsibility and accountabilities of running an individual campus.

In collaboration with the district, under the operation of the university-affiliated Institute for School and Community Partnerships (IFSCP), Winston Elementary School became Winston Intermediate School of Excellence (WISE). The mission of the IFSCP, and thereby of WISE, is the transformation of the educational system to develop current and future educators who are more proficient in providing individually responsive and effective engagement with students and the community, thus changing the educational trajectory from cradle to career. By creating an educator workforce and a school community (inclusive of teachers and leaders) that is better prepared to respond to the needs and challenges of students —because the innovations are advanced in authentic public-school settings—the institute and WISE believe their work will positively affect the climate and culture on the campus and demonstrate the power of innovation to the district. The ultimate goal is to provide a learning environment that is socially, emotionally, culturally, and academically supportive of all students, regardless of their needs, to create the optimal opportunity to focus on improving academic performance and student/family quality of life.

Historically, a laboratory school was a building on a university campus that provided education to children while training teachers and conducting research on what were effective ways to educate children and train teachers. Barbour (2003) proposes that a laboratory school is well served by its ability to balance these three purposes: service or outreach, teacher training, and research. The laboratory school as enacted by A&M-SA, called a teaching and learning laboratory school, includes the intentional adaptation of each of these elements within a community-based school setting. The teaching and learning laboratory school enacted at WISE is a public school serving upper elementary students (grades 3-5). In addition, it welcomes research, service learning, internships, pre-service teacher training, and provides outreach to the community. This article discusses research through the school community's voice from multiple perspectives.

Recognizing many of the critiques that traditional laboratory schools face today, including a failure to serve diverse student populations (Bersani & Hutchins, 2003), the Texas A&M University-San Antonio has worked to enact a laboratory school model that reflects what Barbour and McBride (2018) argue is the future of university laboratory schools, a vision of a laboratory school as a concept rather than a building.

The teaching and learning laboratory school model developed by A&M-SA is not only a site for school-age children to attend and receive a free public education but also a site where university students can practice their professional skills in a real-world context. This component of the mission of laboratory schools, Teacher Training, includes pre-service teachers observing and teaching in a supportive context. However, by placing the school within an operating public school district, there exists opportunities to expand on the traditional definition to include contextualized learning programs for students across disciplines and programs, not just focusing solely on teacher education. It can include business management students shadowing an administrator or reconciling an educational report with a school staff member. It includes sociology undergraduates meeting with families to understand how the community resources are sufficient or insufficient for their family's needs and helping them to identify support agencies that can help. It includes Cyber Security majors looking at how to safely integrate two information systems (the university and the school district). In each of these contexts, the school is a site for university student professional skill development and real-world learning that cannot happen in a university classroom or by watching an online video. This practice is a powerful education tool; however, it is essential in educating students who demonstrate a strong valuing of community and family because it locates their learning within those contexts.

Adding to the transformative impact of the teaching and learning laboratory school, the research infrastructure incorporates data sharing by the school/community to the university. This research infrastructure assists university faculty in improving the quality of their teaching because they are able to take what is learned in the local community as a result of that research and make their course content more relevant to the learner and informed by current research. Finally, it makes it possible for undergraduate and graduate students to engage in opportunities for research that are often inaccessible to them. The lab school will offer a supportive research context in which education, business, and the arts can extend educational interventions or outreach programs and be certain of their impact on the population for whom they are offered.

From the outside, the teaching and learning laboratories may look like traditional public schools with school age children working and learning inside classrooms. However, the structural support to make the school a community hub for research and service learning moves the space towards becoming something much more transformative. Underneath the school's traditional appearance is a coordinated system where pre-professionals are matched to classrooms, community service agencies or staff for service or experiential learning opportunities; moreover, research is transforming the practices that will be implemented the next day and year.

The university/community partnership laboratory school that is described in this article has at its foundation a focus on educating the whole child and focusing on developing all aspects of a child's development: cognitive, social, emotional, physical, behavioral, interpersonal, cultural, and digital/technological. This approach will allow students to develop a sense of being mindful not only of their own thoughts, feelings, and emotions but also that of other students, their teachers, their family, and the larger community. All of the curricular and pedagogical choices will lead toward teaching students how to be mindful in their decision-making as well as in their communication with others. All of these will help to create well-rounded students who can build positive and rewarding relationships with others and will be able to embrace the future leaders they will become.

Winston Intermediate School of Excellence Scholars (WISE)

Winston Intermediate School (WISE) is a campus located in the west side of San Antonio. The west side is a community known for its arts and culture. Most importantly, the members of the community are proud to be part of what is known as the Chicano movement. This movement, also known as El Movimiento, advocates for social and political empowerment. The activists take on the word Chicano, which was previously a racial slur, and wear it with pride to identify not only their European background, but also their Indigenous and African roots.

In this same manner, WISE celebrates their students through their mission and vision. Winston serves and supports scholars, families, and the community to ensure success for every child, with daily communication and community building and service. The educators support this mission by SOARing to success by striving for excellence by overcoming obstacles to achieve success and reach new heights.

In congruence with the west side community, the school reflects the Latinx roots with the student body. The student population at Winston is predominately Hispanic (96%),

with families labeled as economically disadvantaged (95.4%). While this is similar to the district as a whole (94.7%), it is substantially different from the state average of 60.6%. The population of students who are English Learners (ELs) is 18.9%. The number of students identified as ELs at Winston is lower than both the district percentage of ELs (20.5%) and the state average (19.5%). The campus has a similar proportion of its students identified as Special Education (10.5%) to the district average (10.2%) and the state average (9.6%).

In order to better serve the students at WISE, the campus has been rebranded to sit amongst several schools in the STEAM zone. This zone was created with innovation in mind. The STEAM subjects are integrated in the school with an emphasis on computer coding, aeronautics, gardening, and robotics. Currently, a partnership with a local aviation company allows students to directly work with engineers through a mentorship program with a focus on projects to sustain a healthy environment. The incorporation and extension of these activities results in rich engineering projects that encourage learning of the practices and processes of STEAM.

These types of innovative practices are what the university partnership was established for, providing educational opportunities to underserved and under-resourced populations on the south side and rural communities surrounding the San Antonio Metropolitan area—the students in EISD are representative of the students the university was created to serve. The article that follows explores the impact communication lines have on the school community through various perspectives of the campus stakeholders.

How Communication Shapes Each Person's Role in the Partnership

As we serve the community, there have been various areas we have reflected upon as a cohesive team. These areas will be discussed through the perspective of a team member in the local partner school. Their voices are essential in the development and advancement of this process; thus, they tell the story from their perspective.

Leadership Theory espouses the importance of quality communication in the operation of an organization. Research studies (Watson, 1992; Darrow et al., 2013; Spinks & Wells, 1995) confirm the way communication can support or compromise organizational outputs. For traditional businesses, those outputs are the items a company produces or the profit the product generates for the shareholders. In the operation of the school, the products are the children who are educated in the school, and the shareholders are the community members who rely on the school to support their next generation of citizens.

In the section below we share a braided conversation that demonstrates how communication in this type of partnership unfolded in the first year from the perspective of the teachers, principal, and university's chief executive officer, each representing a layer of the organization. It also includes recommendations for improvement to benefit everyone involved in the partnership to reach common objectives.

Three Perspectives

Two teachers from WISE share their experience with partnership communication. We begin with the teachers because they are the bridge between the partnership and the child and their family, the constituents that the partnership most directly hopes to impact.

> It is so important to have communication on the expectations of us as teachers and what our role would be on campus. Basically, how having the university operate the school would impact the teachers. I am sure someone from the university mentioned they are not here to judge you. But anytime someone is going to see what you are doing and has their own perspective; you are on stage. That can be stressful for the teachers. Being sure to clarify what role the university has in the school and to make it known that here to support the teachers. To provide help and bring ideas to improve instruction and student outcomes.

> One of the best ways to make it less stressful and communicate that the university is there as a support system is by getting to know the university faculty early. Early communication. The university getting to know us. The idea that people will come in from university is intimidating. I think they are the smartest people in town. I only went to school to be a teacher. For me it feels like when we have to get down to the kids' level. We get down to the kids' level. We work hard to try to build rapport with them based on who they are and what they are doing. It is on a professional level but more personable. Just like we do with the kids, we (the university and the teachers) can talk to each other more so the feeling isn't so scary. Having these conversations in our space versus the university helps. Come talk to us, meet us in our space versus the university because we are comfortable in our space. So, talk in that space first.

On a daily basis the principal is engaged in the most direct communication with the teachers. So, we now turn to the principal to understand their learning on how communication has shaped the partnership. The principal's perspective is essential because the number of partners involved in the work necessitates some extra consideration and steps. These extra steps are like bumps in the road. If they are not done well, they can cause you to stumble. If they are anticipated, you can step over them and continue the important work. The principal, Mrs. Cantu, shares how she navigates those bumps:

> Having an extra partner involved in the operation of the school has created a "bump" in the communication that occurs, including with the district. It's like having to take an extra step to get everyone informed. If I'm given information from the district and the university partner isn't present, I have to remember to then share that information with the university partner. If I get information from the university partner and the district isn't present, I have to then share it with the district. Getting used to this has taken some time. I have missed sharing the communication with both entities at times and this has caused our campus to miss deadlines or miss opportunities like field trips or participation in district sponsored summer programs.

> It is the same with communication to the campus faculty. That has also been impacted by the partnership. I also have to take an extra step to keep teachers informed of everything. If there is a decision to be made that will impact the teachers, I need to ensure both the partner and the district are informed and in agreement before turning information around to teachers. As I am learning to do this, it has caused a delay in making decisions.

> One way I can help make sure this doesn't take longer is to have clarity in roles of the partner vs the district for everyone to see. For example, providing everyone with a flow chart indicating who to call on and how to go about making decisions for the campus. This arrangement of having university partners is new to the district and this has caused confusion.

In the excerpt above, the extended line of communication was not expected and thus was not accounted for in the training of the campus leadership in the extended timelines. In a case study described by Darrow et al. (2013) in the implementation

of a blended learning lab school, communication channels were developed in the planning stages. These channels provided leadership and understanding of the types of communications needed for successful implementation of blended learning. In our case, leadership changes on campus mid-process resulted in a new leader being brought into the role of principal, and developing a process for communication had to be established and developed so I could be fluid without the assumption that campus administration knew how to facilitate communication amongst the partner and the district.

Supporting the principal as she makes decisions and navigates the flow of information and information processing is the job of the Institute Chief Executive Officer. To do that, the Chief Executive Officer has to assist the principal in leading a data driven culture on the campus by coaching. The communication between the CEO and the principal can include the day-to-day flow of information; however, it also must include strategic communication that positions the partnership to endure across time and the school to achieve the goals and objectives it has adopted in serving children and families in the district.

> As Chief Executive Officer my job is to not undermine the principal's role to make decisions and lead the process. I constantly consider how do I not undermine that? How do I take a coaching stance and assist with maturing the leadership over time? Using the Arc of Learning means maturing leadership over time. Things will not be perfect the first time, or all of the time. What I do is to use middle of the year and end of the year data to help reflect on decision making. We consider why the leader is making the decisions based on these two data points and this rationale. My goal is to get them to be thinking and responding in a way that shows they consistently think in a way that demonstrates 'I have tested X and it led me to conclude Y.' If you don't grow leadership to think in this way, you spend all your time putting out fires.

The nature and effectiveness of the communication between the Chief Executive Officer and the principal has an influence if the school is constantly putting out fires or building a fire suppression system that could prevent those emergencies. Communication between the CEO and principal:

> Every campus will have emergencies come up. I believe the leaders must have a process and utilize the process to the fullest to maximize decisions. When an emergency comes up, and the fire is out, we then talk about how we got there and how we do

not end up there again. Sometimes the fires come from a leader being new in the role. This can cause them to be more reactionary than proactive. This is the core work of supporting and strengthening the school- moving from reactionary to proactive.

> When the school is operating in a proactive way, then I can fully leverage my communication with the district to make the necessary changes at the school. As the operator has initial sole and final authority of the school it operates, we can make changes to a school calendar or changes to PD for teachers (content). This is within the authority of the school operator. But when the change requires a change to the contract, contractual changes are negotiated at the district level with the staff in the innovation office, then superintendent and possibly the board. It requires a number of conversations with these folks, and if it is a board amendment there might also be a conversation with the board. This is a partnership and requires both parties to agree on changes.

As the CEO explains, when day-to-day communication on the campus is effective, thereby preventing the partnerships from being focused solely on putting out fires, the CEO can focus on communicating with the district to advance strategic partnerships that best serve the children of the district. The vignette below illustrates the cohesion of communication for the benefit of students.

Our students received experiences that otherwise they would not have received any other way, for example, attending the winter concert at the university in a big auditorium and being able to see a live concert. When we got back to school, the kids were sharing with each other about it and what they missed.

Another teacher adds:

> Yes, also if we have an idea, we have someone that can help us through resources or hard labor. Y'all can help us out even if we can't do it at the campus or district level. We don't feel like it will be an automatic "no," but always "we can look at other resources." I feel like we are moving in the right direction to increase the presence of families on campus with the family center and with different events. They are coming to decorate and beautify the campus. They are hanging up posters, making bulletin boards, decorating the upstairs doors to make it more welcoming.

Even though the communication process is stronger according to the educators, in this example, we see how challenges are navigated and how essential effective communication is in the system of partnership. The chief executive director of the university organization explains the following:

> With the COVID relief funding, the Texas Education Agency provided an option to districts regarding potential curriculum changes. These changes would provide a rapid gap closure and include a full-time instructional coach. WISE chose to have the full-time instructional coach and curricular change. As the Operating Partner we have the right to make the change happen unless it violates the contract but requires coordinated negotiation through the district because it would become the district initiative. If we made a change, what impact would it have on our approaches such as Literacy Based Design and Responsive Classroom. At the time I went to the former principal and then transitioned to the new principal to discuss the potential decision. Currently the district adopted resources for literacy would take us where we need to go with student outcomes. However, I had multiple conversations with the district's Office of Innovation and then with the Texas Education Agency. I felt like it was fifteen meetings but I'm sure it was only five. The district kept asking and making us feel as if we didn't have authority of the campus, especially to make this decision. I understand they were doing their due diligence by questioning: "Are you sure you want to do this?" We will not have any support for you on this campus if you do this. You will be the only campus doing this. Are you sure? Finally, I responded I feel like you want to dissuade our decision-making process for this campus. It feels like you don't want us to make this decision. We missed 2 deadlines because communication goes through the district even for a partner operated campus and with this question it feels like you don't want us to make this decision. Do I have that correct?

The district's response:

> I am so sorry, that is not the intent here. I just wanted to make sure you understood the consequences and impact on teachers, students, and campus.

University Executive Chief Officer:

> We understand the change and impact and are you willing to allow us to do that? This is an example of the level of negotiation between two sets of partners when the buildings, students, teachers, and administrators still belong to the district. We have total oversight, but we need to negotiate and understand the ramifications and potential consequences. In the end, we are appreciative they made us stop and really think about this decision. The modality could have been slightly different, perhaps on Zoom or face to face might have communicated the gravity of the decision. The decision would not have been different but may have eliminated various meetings.

Usually, decisions can be made at the campus level; however, since there is a partner involved, it requires all members to be in the decision-making process. Leadership theory discusses the notion of building a campus through distributive leadership. A different approach to distributive leadership is what Watson et al. (1992) describe as a management structure which emphasizes participatory management by those involved in the implementation. If the university representative was hosted or seen as part of the management team, it could alleviate the time-consuming process of delivering the message from the principal. As part of this decision team, all teachers could also be involved as they are the first line of communication with students and parents. In the restructuring process, Watson (1992) discussed the role of the administrator changing from authority figure to facilitator. A key component to the process was minimizing distractions and obstacles so that decision making teams could maintain their function. The "bottom-up approach" could prove to be successful in our case as it eliminates the "middle" person in the communication process. The responsibility of communication would already be placed by the people that need to hear the information, which are the teachers and students. However, this approach could prove useful when the campus leader can simultaneously communicate with both the partner and district in a cohesive way. Also, a key component to this proposition are the teachers. The educators must be clear about their roles on the campus and view themselves as the main leaders paving the way for this type of approach. Furthermore, leadership theory moves at the speed of trust, which in our reflection still remains to mature and strengthen communication.

Discussion

There are many elements to collaborative leadership

which include authentic, constitutive, relational, political, and distributed. Distributive leadership is only one piece of the puzzle in order to have a cohesive leadership team. Furthermore, there are components needed within distributive leadership that add to the cohesion. Coleman (2012) discussed the notion of trust as a factor in promoting school effectiveness. It is trust that deepens the relationship between partners. However, it is up to the leaders to establish the norms of trust and respect to develop such a culture (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

In our current partnership, the act of distributive leadership has evolved over time; however, we are still in the beginning stages of the continuum. The campus leadership team currently encounters difficulty with defining authority and decoding what it means to be a leader beyond the principal as well as being part of the team that holds responsibility for the campus. There in part lies the disconnect in communication since the act of leading is seen as only the principal's responsibility. As a university partner to the school, it is our responsibility to demonstrate these skills in order to move the team forward with symbiotic lines of communication.

The next step in this process is to institutionalize trust, as Coleman (2012) affirms it is fundamental to distributive leadership. Trust is the element that supports risk taking and transcends organizational boundaries amongst partners. Once trust is established as part of the culture, educators will respond to safe spaces, and students will benefit from a climate of excellence.

Final thoughts

There is no novelty in communication as a critical influence on the effectiveness of partnerships. However, the complexity in how daily communication directly impacts university-school partnerships track and influence the degree to which educational improvement occurs provides new insight. Universities are uniquely positioned to partner with local school districts and enact educational transformation. The establishment of community-based laboratory schools can harness expertise in educational leadership, curriculum, and instruction, as well as family engagement. Moreover, as a site for pre-service teacher training, these schools help future educators understand the importance of evidence-based pedagogy.

Through team reflection, learnings from this partnership have been explored and will eventually evolve into grassroots processes that will converge with all levels of leadership. In order to create change, the intertwining of various decision makers is necessary to institutionalize change. The approach focuses on the belief that everyone is capable of taking on challenges and pushing beyond their comfort zone. Through this equity-based approach, a standard of dialogue is created as opposed to a monologue.

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Perspectives on Teacher Leadership in Cross-Cultural Settings: Case Studies from Teacher Leaders in Multi-Age Schools

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The most recent decade has seen a major growth and interest in empowering teachers into leadership roles. These leadership roles are designed to provide a bridge between the overarching goals of the school and the instructional practices needed for teachers to improve student achievement. However, defining and observing a teacher leader in the classroom context has proven elusive. Even more elusive in educational research is the role of teacher leaders in a multi-age school. Multi-age school educators are charged with the task of adapting, designing, and implementing instructional agendas to a broader range of learners at one time. These schools rely on the experience and expertise of their teachers to drive the instructional designs and practices because the existing models are designed for mono-grade school agendas. Developing teacher leaders in multi-age schools would address the challenges these schools face in advancing their current instructional models and practices. This multi-case study intends to examine the impact teacher leaders have on school reforms, teacher development, and student learning. The participants in this study include teacher leaders from three schools that participated in a university-school partnership project from national and international school settings designed to implement a multi-age professional learning community and to improve educational programs for K-8 schools.

Keywords: teacher leadership, multi-age classroom, teacher leader model, professional capital

Teacher Leader Model and Teacher Leadership Roles

For more than 20 years, research in educational reform has focused on the correlation between teacher leadership, student achievement, and school improvement (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Crowther, 2009; Lee, 2004; Muijs & Harris, 2007; Muijs et al., 2013). The early framework suggests teacher leadership facilitates principled action to achieve whole-school success. It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth, and adults; and it contributes to long-term, enhanced quality of community life (Crowther, 2009). This teacher leader framework broadens the scope of informal teacher leadership to parallel many of the traditional leadership responsibilities of administrators. It encourages collective action between teacher leaders and administrative leaders to build school capacity.

The Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium (TLEC) (2011) ushered out seven domains that measure effective teacher leadership within the *Teacher Leader Model Standards* (Appendix A). The domains include: fostering a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning; accessing and using research to improve practice and student learning; promoting professional learning for continuous improvement; facilitating improvements in instruction and student learning; promoting the use of assessments and data for school and district improvement; improving outreach and collaboration with families and community; and advocating for student learning and the profession. As the practice of teacher leadership grows in our nation's schools, so also must our understanding of how to prepare teachers for these critical leadership roles and responsibilities. The current literature is largely silent on the features, aims, and outcomes associated with different approaches to teacher leadership preparation (Carver, 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Hargreaves & Fullan (2012) stated that the professional capital vision should be applied when focusing on developing the roles of teachers, teacher teams, and teacher leaders. This vision integrates three elements of teaching with teacher leadership: human capital (the talent of teachers); social capital (the collaborative process of the teacher team); and decisional capital (allow teachers to use expertise to make appropriate decisions and judgments about learners). Lieberman & Miller (2008) supported these ideas stating that the new characteristics of teacher leaders include roles of researcher, scholar/collaborator, and mentor.

Distributed leadership agenda decentralizes the role of leader. As an outcome, according to this perspective, Gronn

(2000) states that when applying distributive leadership qualities, the role of teacher leadership takes on a fluid leader role. This type of leadership allows teacher leaders to gain a democratic and collective leadership position in school environments. This teacher leader role does not generate that everyone is a leader. However, this collective teacher leadership agenda allows multiple groups that collaborate in a school environment to participate in the cultural and instructional change process and share responsibilities (Spillane et al., 2001). Consequently, it is suggested that teacher leadership provides an important starting point in understanding and illuminating how distributed leadership applies in schools. The teacher leadership role contributes to the improvement of instructional practices when integrating distributive leadership practices.

Teacher leadership roles in schools take on many forms. Teachers who engage in sustained interaction and collaboration with colleagues about their work often function as informal teacher leaders among their peers (Hatch, White, & Faigenbaum, 2005). Within such contexts, teachers tend to value (and be influenced by) their colleagues' expertise (human capital) and strengthen their relationships and interactions (social capital) while they rely on administrators for their resources and making judgments (decisional capital) (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond, 2003).

Formerly, teacher leader roles included serving as department chairs, participating as members of curriculum teams, or just assisting the school administrator, whenever necessary (Boleman & Deal, 1991). As an outcome of a recent surge for performance accountability, school systems are considering that qualified teachers take on a nonsupervisory school-based role as teacher leaders —a strategy to improve teachers' instructional practices, take ownership for improving the school environment, and enhance student achievement for diverse student populations in schools (Stoelinga & Mangin, 2010).

Current research on teacher leadership has examined the effectiveness of teacher leaders, the extent to which this role is distributed across school faculty, and its relationship to reform schools. The findings of Scribner & Bradley-Levine (2012) indicate cultural conditions of a school influence teachers' construction of teacher leadership. Scribner & Bradley-Levine (2012) explored the meaning of teacher leadership from teachers' perspectives and highlighted teacher influence on their peers as an important factor. Hulpia, Devos, & Van Keer (2011) suggested that teacher leader decision making had significant contributions to teachers' school organizational commitment. Teacher leaders encourage a system that assists with generating cooperation among staff members, and collaborative efforts within the leadership team.

Teacher Leaders in Multi-Age Community

The development of teacher leaders has greater relevance for the advancement of multi-age schools. Multi-age teaching is defined as combining two or more age groups in one classroom that are taught together by one teacher (Little, 2001). Multi-age teaching is a child-centered approach that allows for school environments to target the individual differences of learners (Stone, 2004). Research shows that students in multi-age schools perform well in academics, as well, or better than students in mono-graded classrooms (Hoffman, 2003). Multi-age classroom students outperform students in mono-graded classes with non-cognitive skills and do well in these classes because individual strengths are emphasized (Aina, 2001). Little (2001) stated that multi-age classrooms were found across global communities; however, this type of schooling was overlooked because it was not mentioned in textbooks, teacher guides, teacher training, colleges and most importantly, connected to teaching methods for classroom use. However, this multi-age classroom approach is an economical means to educate students in populated and less populated areas (Ritland & Eighmy, 2013) and this approach encourages higher level thinking, innovative practices, and social emotional support for all learners.

Teacher leaders serve as a means of addressing the ongoing struggles with staffing, new teacher preparedness, lack of funding, resources, and the increasing demands placed on administrators in multi-age schools. It is nearly impossible for school administrators to single-handedly support every teacher in ensuring that students meet or exceed expected outcomes (Xie & Shen, 2013). Teacher leaders play a vital role in alleviating the demands placed on administration by assuming many of the responsibilities related to instructional development and teacher support. Multi-age schools can apply the parallel leadership approach to teacher leadership. This approach encourages a relatedness between teacher leaders and administrator leaders that activates and sustains the knowledge-generating capacity of schools, whereby teacher leaders and their principals engage in collective action to build school capacity (Crowther et al., 2002).

With their close connection to the classroom, teacher leaders have natural credibility with their peers (Carver, 2016). As experienced educators, they understand the rigors and demands of teaching as well as the demand for continuous improvement. The transnational aspects of multi-age classroom research address the need for professional learning communities in which teachers learn from and support one another in implementing innovative practices (Horn & Little, 2010).

Current Study

Our research intends to make visible how teacher leaders develop skills and dispositions required to be effective leaders and facilitators that move colleagues thinking and learning forward.

A teacher leader is a researcher, scholar, and coach (Liberman & Miller, 2008). Assuming these different roles allows teacher leaders to look critically at their own teaching practices and that of others to develop new knowledge. As a researcher, teacher leaders improve instruction in the classroom, and gain new knowledge through practice. The teacher leader, as a scholar, makes their work public in some way, allows others to critique their ideas, and shares their ideas for other teachers to build on in their own practice. In this role, teacher leaders feel more efficacious about teaching because it builds on expertise and credibility in the field and also influences the school program. The teacher leader as coach is at the center of re-culturing the school program. As a coach, teacher leaders influence others by collaborating and studying practice in other classrooms and encourage ongoing improvement for teaching and learning within the school (Liberman & Miller, 2008; Levenson, 2014).

Grant (2006) stipulated that some teachers were labeled "leaders in practice" because they had valuable skills and expertise that assisted school communities to move forward in their school improvement journey. These teacher leaders are best positioned to facilitate school improvement efforts through systematic reflection to strengthen instructional practice. Teacher leaders are ongoing learners who revise and improve their own teaching actions, as well as provide feedback to colleagues so that they may also continue to learn and improve teaching practices (Margolis & Doring, 2012, p. 878). If the teacher leader role is about influencing others, then we want to empower teachers to be catalysts in their leadership development. Most importantly, we need to understand how teachers can facilitate leadership development among colleagues in their school building (Nicholson, Richert, Capitelli, Bauer, & Bonetti, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks used in this study were informed by two key concepts: *Teacher Leader Model Standards* and *Professional Capital Theory*. All the concepts from these agendas greatly influenced the data analysis and allowed us to identify key characteristics of teacher leaders.

Teacher Leader Model Standards

A school may have numerous teacher leaders on staff and the teacher leader roles are based on the individual school program. Teacher leader roles range on a continuum from an informal to formal level. Taking on a collaborative distributed teacher leadership perspective, characteristics of teacher leader roles are a respected classroom teacher; a teacher who makes suggestions about professional development and school culture; a teacher who experiments with new instructional strategies and technologies; and a teacher who makes suggestions about teachers, students, the community, and school environment. On an informal level, these leaders are teacher researchers that carry out action research plans, participate in instructional rounds, and are participants that try to improve the school. On the formal level, these teacher leaders are coaches, certified teachers, workshop leaders, data team leaders, and co-teacher leaders in a school (Levenson, 2014).

Although there is no common definition for teacher leadership; the Institute for Educational Leadership (2001) provided a broad and progressive definition. It suggested that teacher leadership is not necessarily about power, but about teachers extending their influences and experiences beyond the classroom by seeking additional challenges and growth opportunities. The *Teacher Leader Model Standards* (TLEC, 2011) defined the knowledge, skills, and competencies that teachers need to practice as leadership roles. The standards focused on seven domains (see Table 1) that were coded in this study with the sub-topics —topics that describe the actions of teacher leaders. These standards highlight collaboration, the development of professional learning communities, sharing of best strategies, and reflective practice (TLEC, 2011). The *Teacher Leader Model Standards* were developed to encourage discussions among educators about the competencies required for teacher leaders. They were also intended to serve as guidelines to inform teacher leadership development programs in the preparation of future teacher leaders (TLEC, 2011). The standards can be used to guide the preparation of experienced teachers to assume leadership roles such as resource providers, instructional specialists, curriculum specialists, classroom supporters, learning facilitators, mentors, school team leaders, and data coaches (Harrison & Killion, 2007). Cosenza (2015) aimed to discover whether the *Teacher Leader Model Standards* were in alignment with the viewpoints of practicing teachers. Twenty-two teachers who were not familiar with the standards participated in semi-structured individual interviews. Cosenza (2015) investigated how teachers define the term 'teacher leadership' and then compared those findings to the seven domains. Coding and analysis of the interviews resulted in the emergence of five distinctive themes: collaboration, sharing best practices, taking actions, role modeling, and formal leadership roles. Cosenza (2015) suggested that "the majority of participants believed that teachers can be leaders either with or without the support of an administrator and that a collaborative

environment was key to both the success of the school and academic performance of the young students."

Teacher Leadership and Professional Capital Theory

A central idea in the international movements in education has been the idea that "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (OECD, 2010, p.3). It is important to investigate what teachers do in the classroom and explore the way instruction is presented to the learners. These ideas should be considered because they are central to the school improvement process. Previous research showed that teacher effectiveness was the most important element to improve student performance within a school (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). As professional development agendas for teachers have moved from staff development seminars to professional learning communities that extend outside of the schools themselves, university and school partnerships have provided greater opportunities for teachers to have more autonomy over their own professional development (Lampert, 2001). Ingvarson (2014) stated that teachers' voices influenced the priorities and the content needed for professional learning. Wenger (1998) stressed that learning was a social participatory practice that shaped what teachers do, what they practice, and how they interpret what teaching and learning is about.

Teachers that are involved in a "community of practice" share a set of problems and help to deepen knowledge and expertise to improve learning in a collective way (Wenger, 1998). Teacher leaders shape the school's teaching and learning community by encouraging conversations about how to make appropriate improvements in the teaching and instructional practices. Based on the "constructivist leadership" ideas (Lambert, 2003), teacher leadership is not a role, but a series of actions that include: building relationships, creating community, focusing on teaching and learning, and relating these components to the school culture and purpose. This process is a collective and social agenda that gives credibility to the important role of teacher leaders in schools.

The connection of teacher leadership and teacher professional learning integrates three levels: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Human capital is about the teacher's individual talent and expertise. It is important to note that opportunities to develop collective talent and collaborative professional ideas are vital for any program (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Social capital concentrates on teacher leaders as informers that develop and share knowledge and practices, and most importantly, establish, cultivate, and value informed professional development opportunities. Decisional capital allows teacher leaders to be accountable,

responsible, and trusted to make their own informed judgments on areas such as instructional practice and curriculum development. This process does not come easy to the profession.

Collaborative Inquiry

Collaborative inquiry during teacher leader team meetings is defined as an investigation of teacher and leadership practices when considering instruction to improve student learning (Teitel, 2013). This inquiry process promotes taking ownership of collective responsibility that teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators have for promoting success of all students.

There is a body of research that supports benefits when using collaborative inquiry as professional development for teachers and teacher leaders. The literature on collaborative inquiry confirms that it is a vehicle for individual teacher leader development as well as whole school change related to culture, levels of collaboration (Gilles et al., 2010), and school improvement efforts (Yendol-Hoppey et al., 2008). Collaborative inquiry is a four-phase process of determining curriculum topics, discussing and recording effective instructional practices that have been tested, reflecting on issues that may lead to new ideas, and reflecting on experiences and data collected in the classrooms. DuFour and Marzano (2011) recommended that the principal allow teacher teams and teacher leaders to control the process. It should be an informal process owned by teachers. Teams strengthen the collaborative inquiry process by providing a holistic view on the learning, instructional improvement, and data used by the school. These teacher teams provide opportunities for teachers to work together on instructional planning and make recommendations on academic interventions needed to improve student achievement.

However, if teachers and teacher leaders do not understand the inquiry process, the knowledge they develop to inform their practice can be counterproductive to changing classroom practices that lead to improved student learning. Hall (2009) found that during the first few cycles of inquiry, teachers continually thought and learned about the skills involved. This finding is important because it speaks to the importance of scaffolding aspects of the inquiry process. Poekert (2010) examined effective methods of inquiry facilitation and found that the amount of support received during the stages of inquiry determined the level of knowledge a teacher leader gains from the collaborative inquiry process.

Research Questions

The purpose of this multi-case study was to see how the teacher leader roles and actions in school communities influence the leadership, teaching, and learning processes

for diverse learners. In particular, the overarching objective of this study was to explore the teacher leaders' roles and actions in three diverse schools in urban, suburban, and global communities. The research questions that guide this study were the following:

- *Research Question 1*: What is the perspective of the teacher leader based on the teacher leader role?
- *Research Question 2*: How does the collaborative inquiry research process influence teacher leader decision making on how to improve the school environment?
- *Research Question 3*: Are the teacher leader roles and actions effective for improving the leadership, teaching, and learning process?
- *Research Question 4*: Do quality collaborative efforts with colleagues' surface?

To this end, this study was designed to focus on the "how" of supporting teacher leadership development and encouraging each teacher leader to find one's own voice. We documented meeting conversations, actions, observations, and reflections of teacher leaders. This data allowed us to consider how teacher leaders acquire important skills and pedagogical strategies that can be used to support colleagues in classrooms and school reform efforts in their buildings and districts (Margolis & Doring, 2012).

Methods

Our research used a multi-case study methodology (Yin, 2014) to examine how teacher leaders' actions influence building relationships, create a collaborative school community, and cultivate new approaches to teaching and learning.

Participants and School Background

The sample of this study included teacher leaders from three multi-age schools that participated in a university-school partnership project designed to implement a multi-age professional learning community and improve educational programs for K-8 schools. These schools include classrooms which are composed of students who are more than one year apart in age with a mix of learning abilities. One school was an urban school, whose student population is 90% Hispanic and located in a low socio-economic neighborhood in New Jersey, USA. The second school was a suburban school with a diverse school population in Stirling, New Jersey. This school had 84% white students, 8% Hispanic and 8% other students. The third school was taken from a global school environment located in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico. The last school was a laboratory school which is affiliated with a university that supports teacher

training, curriculum development, research, and professional development. College partnership professors serve as teachers at the school and work collaboratively on projects and research.

The selection of the teacher leaders at all sites was based on following criteria (Levenson, 2014; Teitel, 2013):

- Demonstrate strong content knowledge
- Apply procedural knowledge to promote dialogue, reflective analysis, collaboration, cooperation, and trust
- As scholar, make one's work public and allow others to critique ideas
- More efficacious about teaching (expertise)
- Study practices and encourage improvement and collaborative inquiry

Appendix B (Table 2) describes the teacher leader participants, the years of teaching, school location, and grade levels taught.

Participants

Participant 1- Bella holds a bachelor's degree in Elementary and Early Childhood Education. She also earned a Master's degree in Elementary Education and a Reading Specialist degree in grades K-12. Bella had fifteen years teaching at the same school. Within those fifteen years, Bella taught self-contained second grade for five years, and self-contained kindergarten for seven years. Self-contained is a term for students with disabilities who require the most restrictive classroom setting to learn to their ability. When the school transferred to the multi-age program, she taught kindergarten combined with grade one the first year, and grades one and two, the second year. For the third school year, she had a combined class of pre-K and kindergarten students.

Participant 2- Cally holds a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and English, is certified to teach grades K-8, and is experienced in teaching English Language Arts (ELA). Cally had twelve years teaching experience, eight years in the public school setting and four in the current school setting. The first and second year of teaching in the private school, Cally taught ELA and Social Studies to a class of sixth, seventh and eighth graders. In years three and four, Cally taught ELA and Science to grades 3 to 8.

Participant 3- Maura had more than 10 years of teaching experience. She taught kindergarten and first grade. Maura had previous experience teaching in a multi-age classroom in another school. She also had some experience working in a mono-graded school.

Participant 4- Rhonda was a special education teacher. She had a Master's degree in Special Education. She has been a teacher in the school for 16 years, working specifically with

kindergarten to third grade students. She has taught in Puerto Rico's public schools for seven years before working in the Puerto Rico partner school. She was working as a teacher mentor to new special education teachers.

Participant 5- Beth had a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and a Master's degree in Reading Education. She has been a reading specialist in the Puerto Rico partner school for three years and serves as a teacher mentor for other reading specialists. She previously worked in the San Juan school system for six years and in a private school for two years.

All participants were hybrid teacher leaders (Margolis & Doring, 2012). The term 'hybrid teacher leader' is defined as having a teacher leader teaching full time in addition to their leader roles in instruction. Key attributes shared by these teacher leaders are that they all work in a school/university partnership and with diverse student populations. They have engaged in professional development designed to support their understanding of the teacher leader role, professional capital characteristics, and their role as scholar/researcher, collaborator, and mentor.

Data Collection & Analysis Process

The study was designed to identify patterns that allowed the research team to be attentive to issues of validity by using multiple data sources (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), and to consider reliability by searching for patterns based on the characteristics that targeted teacher leadership.

The triangulation of data included reflective teacher leader journals, collaborative inquiry meeting notes, and artifact analysis. The purpose of triangulating the data was to gain insight into teacher leader voices and information on ways that participants experience teacher leader actions through the collaborative inquiry process. Qualitative data was analyzed using the following framework: identify themes, develop concepts, code data and refine understanding, and interpret data using *Teacher Leader Model Standards* and *Professional Capital* concepts.

Collaborative inquiry meetings were scheduled once a month during the study with university partners, school principal, coach, and teacher leaders. All stakeholders met to provide their perspectives, insights, and suggestions on the role of teacher leaders, how best to support teacher leaders, and how essential are teacher leaders to implementing effective school reforms. Teacher leaders were observed and interviewed in each collaborative inquiry meeting for approximately 90 minutes. The sessions were audio-taped and transcribed. There were three main questions discussed during the meetings.

- How have you applied the teacher leader role in the school environment?

- How has the teacher leader role evolved with your colleagues?

- Where do you see your role developing in the future?

Reflective journals from participants were gathered once a month as well. One benefit of using self-completed journals was that it gave the participants time to reflect deeply on each question (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Reflective journal questions (see Appendix C) were designed to survey participants' understanding of the multi-age program approach at their school, how the teacher leader role was exhibited in their school, and their perspective on what actions should teacher leaders perform to achieve the goals of their school's reform initiative.

Each teacher leader participant was asked to select one artifact (i.e., lesson plan, curriculum map, or teaching materials) that showed accomplishments obtained from the outcomes of the program and collaborative inquiry meetings.

Researchers in this study used *word clouds* to construct a graphic representation of participants' journals and collaborative inquiry session conversations (see Appendix G). Word clouds, also known as tag clouds, were used as diagrams to represent words, ideas, and other information (Wheeldon, 2011). The word cloud map was a valuable means to visualize data from research participants (Tattersall et al., 2007; Wheeldon & Flaubert, 2009) and to corroborate evidence collected with other data sources. Word clouds were used for reporting qualitative data in this research because they made results clear and easy to find the patterns in the data. The word clouds were generated based on the frequency of the words from data sources including journals and collaborative inquiry meeting notes. A software environment for statistical computing and graphics named R was used to generate all the word clouds in this research.

Three research team members met over the course of several weeks to discuss the themes and categories that surfaced from the data. The analytic process used by the research team included both inductive and deductive approaches (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Observational data was used, as an inductive approach, to determine the teacher leaders' actions and logical reasoning based on *Teacher Leader Model Standards* and *Professional Capital* concepts. Researchers read through descriptive data (i.e., journals and collaborative inquiry meetings), as a deductive approach, from all sites except for the Puerto Rico site. A research team at the Puerto Rico site examined their own data to expedite the data analysis process. The data was coded by the research team based on the *Teacher Leader Model Standards* and concepts of the *Professional Capital* framework: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital.

The validity and reliability of the data were strengthened using a variety of methods. Thick descriptive data was obtained

and analyzed from direct quotations, collaborative meeting discussions, and artifacts. The data collected increased external validity and allowed researchers to determine how the study's findings were relevant to other contexts. Initially, triangulation of data was conducted (e.g., journals, inquiry meeting discussions, and artifacts). Multiple researchers were used to connect to generalizability of the data. Then, the data analysis was shared with peer reviewers and conducted member checks to gain consensus on the understanding of the data collected. Inter-rater reliability (Lange, 2011; Hallgren, 2012) was computed for the coding from two different researchers. There were no significant disagreements in the analysis process at all sites, as researchers discussed the data sources in depth, until 95% agreement in the interpretations of the data were made.

Results

A thematic analysis of data from participants' reflective journals and collaborative inquiry meeting notes were conducted throughout the study to capture the perspectives of all the participants in the study (see Appendix D and Appendix E). Word clouds were constructed to visualize data from research participants' journals and collaborative inquiry session conversations (see Appendix G). Data was coded based on *Teacher Leader Model Standards* and the *Professional Capital* framework. Raw scores (see Appendix D) were generated by counting each standard and professional capital codes for the frequencies of actions. Then, these raw scores were changed to percentages for analysis of the data (see Appendix F).

As seen in Table 6 (Appendix F), Participants 1, 2, 3 applied elements in Domain IV most often (31.6%) in their role as teacher leaders. The word cloud in Figure 1 (Appendix G) also indicates the same finding. Words included *student, learn, differentiation, and classroom,* and these words had higher frequency in the data and were displayed in bigger font of the word cloud in Figure 1 (Appendix G). It is obvious that the participants put most of their efforts on improving instructional practices to better support student learning. Domain I (23.7%) is another area teacher leaders emphasized as an important factor in their role as teacher leaders. Domain I defined how a teacher leader supported collaborative efforts to improve teacher development. This finding is also supported by the word cloud. Words included *teacher*, *work*, and *help* and these words were classified as high frequency. Very little evidence supports Domain V (2.6%) that promotes the use of assessments to facilitate improvement, and Domain VI (8.9%) was not used by the teacher leaders often. Domain VI targets outreach and collaboration with families and the community. In relation to the Professional Capital framework, these participants' data shows that Human Capital (45%), (the talent of the teacher

leader), and Social Capital (40%), (collaborative efforts), were more relevant to their role as teacher leaders. The data on Decisional Capital (15%), (using expertise to make decisions and judgments), had little relevance in their role as teacher leaders.

In the evidence examined for Participants 4 and 5 at the Puerto Rico School, two domains were recognized as more significant: Domain I (72.7%), which refers to a culture of collaboration, and Domain IV (18.2%), which refers to the function of the teacher leader as a facilitator of students learning. A clear understanding of their role as "collaborators" was evident. These teacher leaders stated that a teacher leader should be able to examine his or her own teacher practices and learn from the teachers they help. However, as university professors, the participants were required to mentor the students that were training to be teachers and this experience had provided tools that were applied to their role as mentors with teachers at their school sites. The results from Domain IV (18.2%) supports the assertion that helping colleagues develop instructional practices and outcomes appropriate for every student is a key part of their role as teacher leaders. A teacher leader stated, "Every child learns in a different way and I help colleagues discover the unique potential in students, thus teaching for diversity." A thematic analysis of the results from all the domains of the *Teacher Leader Model Standards* and the *Professional Capital Theory* can be seen in *Table 5* (Appendix E). It is interesting to note that Participants 4 and 5 focused more on Domain I than the participants in the United States. One reason is that Participants 4 and 5 were assigned as a teacher mentor. Data of journals and meetings were used.

Another important aspect was that researchers found that teacher journal reflections were the words reflected in the *Word Map* (see Appendix G). These word map ideas showed how teacher leaders applied *Teacher Leader Model Standards* to define the knowledge, skills, and competencies teacher leaders needed to be effective. Significant words that surfaced from all five participants' word maps were the following: *work*, *learn*, *student*, *role*, *classroom* and *clarify*.

Findings

The findings through descriptive data from reflective journals, collaborative inquiry meetings, and artifacts are discussed in conjunction with the research questions posed in this study.

> *Question 1. What is the perspective of the teacher leader based on the teacher leader role?*

Researchers found through the descriptive data of journals and collaborative inquiry meeting discussions that fostering a

collaborative culture is important to help teachers to improve the teaching and learning process. Most importantly, teacher leaders emphasized sharing resources, making observations in classrooms, and modeling lessons. The most compelling issue to consider was the ideas that teachers themselves could be important leaders (Lampert, 2001). Data showed that teacher leaders' voices influenced the content and priorities for professional learning (Ingvarson, 2014):

> I perceive my role as teacher leader to include conversations with the other teachers specific to their needs in the classroom and about how I can support them. This could include providing/sharing resources, observations, or modeling. I hope to be a resource for their needs, a support for what they need. (Participant 1 Journal)

The notion that teaching and learning was a social endeavor troduced by Wenger (1998). Wenger encouraged the ideas of "community of practice" where educators organize schools as small communities and where teacher learning is the central theme. In this study, teachers joined a professional community that was led by a teacher (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). This teacher leader role surfaced at each site in the study. Teachers spoke about their practice in a way that was explicit and tacit, where teachers related to the experiences and knowledge of other teachers (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Participant 4 stated: "the curricular model and philosophy of the school is based on learning communities." Participants discussed in collaborative inquiry meetings how they viewed the teacher leader role as being a position that can lead the school community in a collective and social way. In a Collaborative Inquiry Meeting, Participant 2 stated that "Everything is about collaboration," while Participant 3 expressed that "I have the opportunity for teachers to work with me by coming to me with questions. I try to clarify for them, explain to them, and pass on the information. I am confident in the role that I have." (Participant 3 Collaborative Inquiry Meeting). Other participants made the following assertions:

> For a teacher leader or mentor, it is not enough to have the knowledge —she should have a genuine disposition to help others. (Participant 5 Collaborative Inquiry Meeting)

> I do think that my primary function as a teacher leader is to assist my colleague help students learn. (Participant 5 Collaborative Inquiry Meeting)

> As I help her, the teacher would know how to

organize her educational experiences in such a way so that it will help those children learn. (Participant 4 Collaborative Inquiry Meeting)

These teacher leaders' comments are reflective of Domain I, III and IV of the *Teacher Leader Model Standards*. They continued to consider how to foster a collaborative culture to support teachers' development (Domain 1), promote professional learning for continuous improvement (Domain III), and facilitate improvements in instruction and student learning (Domain IV). In these situations, social capital is developed by encouraging teacher teams. However, as Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggested, developing and sharing knowledge and practices is not enough for improvement. What is also important is the integration of elements of decisional capital. This is done by the way a teacher leader established, cultivated, and valued opportunities to make informed professional decisions and judgments about teaching and learning. The following conversations during the collaborative inquiry meetings were evidences of how to effectively mentor a teacher to make decisions that improved teaching and learning:

> When you mentor, you have to reflect and confront your own practice. (Participant 4 Collaborative Inquiry Meeting)

> Enrichment is mutual, I learn as I share my experience as I tell the other teacher you can do this, I can also learn from this process and the decisions I make. (Participant 5 Collaborative Inquiry Meeting)

> I am always acknowledging many wonderful things that the teachers I mentor do. I tell her that I love some of the strategies she is using with her children, and I tell her that she is doing a good job. (Participant 5 Collaborative Inquiry Meeting)

> *Question 2. How does the collaborative inquiry research process influence teacher leader decision making on how to improve the school environment?*

The role of teacher leaders in this investigation applied the theory of parallel process (Stroud, 2010). Teacher leaders created a thinking space for teachers in their schools to have conversations that encouraged working together to construct knowledge about a range of teaching strategies. Teacher leaders were asked to focus on what they were able to do and then

they were asked to share their expertise with other teachers. This process improved the teaching system in the school. The following examples were from participants' journal entries and responses at collaborative inquiry meetings that reflected ideas on how teacher leaders used their own expertise to build ideas for school improvement: "I think that the teacher leader role helps me to be a much better teacher and hopefully this process will make other teachers more effective in the classrooms. Real learning is a process" (Participant 2 Journal). Another participant stated that:

> There are no deficiencies here. I do not want to use those terms. I want to understand every child, because our school has its philosophy that every child is unique, so every child has unique abilities and a potential to learn. I try to help my colleague discover that potential in every child because in this way she will help him. (Participant 5 Collaborative Inquiry)

Question 3. Is the teacher leader role and actions effective for improving the leadership, teaching, and learning process?

Teacher leaders agreed that their role was to use their expertise to make decisions and judgments about improving the teaching and learning process. Teacher leaders were asked during inquiry meetings to think of strategies to move their agendas along. Participants 1 and 2 created workshop lessons and then integrated the *Lesson Study* (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004) process into the lessons. The *Lesson Study* process was a six-step approach designing a lesson. The process was implemented in lessons on the writing process to design lessons around skills teachers assessed from a standardized writing assessment. In another school, a teacher leader worked with teachers to create a more active learning environment.

An artifact Participant 3 submitted was a presentation of a model lesson on a writing workshop with students in grades K-1. During this lesson, other teachers could observe the teacher facilitating the lesson and the students led discussions. The participants also reflected on the effectiveness of teacher leaders in improving the leadership, teaching, and learning process in their collaborative inquiry meetings and during reflective journal entries. The following are examples of the participants' responses:

> Since lesson study is done, she gets a little bit extra work time. Team building, everybody. (Participant 1 Collaborative Inquiry)

I agree. We discussed different activities to incorporate in the lesson. (Participant Lesson Study Cycle)

I love the continuation of ongoing resources that are integrated into our school. This helps me continue to have more options to differentiate my lessons. (Participant 3 Journal) I presented writing workshop to teachers to help them understand how young authors' write story drafts and share their ideas. (Participant 3 Journal)

Question 4. Do quality collaborative efforts surface?

The *Professional Capital Theory* asserts that fostering a collaborative culture and building social capital helps to promote professional learning for continuous improvement. The following statements were taken from participants' inquiry discussions, connections to artifacts, and reflections in journals:

> Yes, I liked planning with my colleague. (Participant 1 Lesson Study Cycle)

> To me, collaboration is to get united...we become part of the process and together reflect about tasks and activities that we do. (Participant 4 Journal)

> Community of practice helps us make improvements to instruction. (Participant 5 Journal)

In addition to relating the findings back to the research questions for the study, the data was analyzed based on constructs of the *Professional Capital* framework (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) and elements of the *Teacher Leader Model Standards* to form more specific conclusions. Scholar/Researcher, Collaborator and Coach Roles (Lieberman & Miller, 2008), the principal role and distributive leadership qualities are embedded in the investigation framework.

Two domains showed greater significance in the evidence examined: Domain I referred to a culture of collaboration, and Domain IV referred to the function of the teacher leader as a facilitator of students' learning. In the collaborative sessions and journals, the teacher leaders demonstrated a clear understanding of their role as "collaborators" who reflected together with the teachers they mentored. Participants stated that a teacher leader should be able to examine his/her own teaching practices and learn from the teachers they help. In

some schools, this was best exhibited in participants' use of an inquiry research-based classroom model. Other participants cited the 'community of practice' process in assisting them in understanding how to look for areas of improvement and discussed with other teachers the road for improvement. The shared collaborative model helped all the participants share ideas with colleagues and assisted the teaching staff in becoming part of the decision-making process in the school. In all schools, the participants' perceptions of the teacher leader role were positive, but most agreed the role brought on new challenges. A challenge these teacher leaders faced was making time for their own commitments to their classroom while supporting other teachers in other classes. Paperwork and planning were two responsibilities that seemed to pose the greatest challenge to keeping realistic timetables for the teacher leaders.

The findings from this study revealed some gaps in the understanding of the teacher leader role. In reference to the *Teacher Leader Model Standards*, Domain II, III, V, VI, VII were standards not always addressed. As teacher leaders continued to develop a better understanding of their roles in schools, the following are suggested areas of focus that could help to further the development of teacher leaders:

- How do teacher leaders assess and use data to make improvements?
- Work with colleagues and visit classrooms
- The role of teacher leaders in fostering community and family engagement.
- How do teacher leaders advocate for student learning on community, local and state levels?

Summary of Findings

Educating teachers about how to improve instructional practices to increase students' performance is a challenging process. This study found that teacher leaders were leading and learning. They revised and improved their own teaching constantly. Teacher leaders provided support and appropriate feedback to other teachers. They made public their thinking about the teaching process and modeled why teachers should reflect on their classroom practice daily. Under this framework, everyone was accountable for making the school a successful community for learners.

The collaborative inquiry meetings in this study emphasized the importance of teacher leaders promoting collective responsibility for the success of all students. Teitel (2013) suggested this process encourages each teacher leader to take ownership of the process. It serves as a form of embedded professional development and assists with building a school culture and environment through collaboration, which

ultimately leads to the improvement of teaching and learning as noted in previous studies (Gilles et al., 2010; Yendol-Hoppey et al., 2008). Researchers in this study found that teacher leaders controlled the inquiry meetings by creating ongoing conversations about the efforts they made. One teacher leader commented during a meeting that "I was excited to participate in the monthly meeting because I had a platform to discuss the successes and challenges that I had during the weeks prior to the inquiry meeting." Hall (2009) and Poekert (2010) stated that scaffolding aspects of the inquiry process are important, and the support received through these events often determine the level of knowledge of a teacher leader.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) asserted that principals should create support and trust for teacher leaders as they make decisions. During inquiry meetings, all principals in the study gave time for teacher leaders to collaborate with teachers in their classroom settings. Also, these principals encouraged teamwork. One school conducted a *Lesson Study*. The teacher leader worked with a teacher to improve a lesson and then, the teacher leader or the teacher implemented the lesson. This process integrated one-on-one interaction, planning time, and teacher meetings. In all the schools teacher leaders were encouraged to move from classroom to classroom, team teach, and generate team conversations when working with teachers. These ideas relate to the *Professional Capital* framework — teachers influence the performance of students. Teacher leaders in these schools helped teachers learn and improve in the classroom.

Similarly, Lambert (2003) noted (teacher) leadership is a series of actions based on the concepts of constructivist leadership. During this study, the teacher leaders continued to build teacher relationships in schools, helped to create a quality school community, and continued to focus on how to improve the teaching and learning. The researchers in this investigation found exactly what Ingvarson (2014) stated —teacher leader voices influence the priorities and the content that is needed for professional learning and development. For example, the study showed that learning, when integrating teacher leaders in schools, became a social participatory practice that shaped what all teacher leaders in each school do, what they practice, and how they interpret what teaching and learning are about. In each school of the study, these elements were found in different ways. For example, all elements of the teacher leader's actions in each school showed elements of human capital. The teacher leaders had different areas of expertise, but they were competent at making informed decisions, developing, and sharing knowledge and best practices. All teacher leaders showed some form of decisional capital, which helped them to make informed decisions effectively.

Conclusion and Limitations

Teacher leaders need time to work with teachers, collaborate on lessons, share ideas with other teachers, and take risks to improve practices. Teacher leaders' actions in all schools should emulate the *Teacher Leader Model Standards* integrated with elements of *Professional Capital*. Their actions should foster a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning, use research to improve practice, promote professional learning, facilitate improvements in instruction, promote the use of assessments and data for school improvement, improve outreach with families, and advocate for student learning. Each school setting struggled to keep these practices integrated in everyday activities.

To conclude, the teacher leaders in this study are what Grant (2006) labeled "leaders in practice." These teacher leaders have appropriate skills and expertise that encourage a school improvement journey. The expertise and talent of teachers, support of teacher teams, and the use of teacher leaders to make decisions and judgments about learners should drive all school programs.

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Appendix A:

Table 1: The Teacher Leader Model Standards

Domain I—Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning	
DIA	Utilizes group processes to help colleagues1 work collaboratively
DIB	Models effective skills
DIC	Employs facilitation skills
DID	Creates an inclusive culture
DIE	Uses knowledge and understanding of different backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, and languages
Domain II—Accessing and Using Research to Improve Practice and Student Learning	
DIIA	Assists colleagues in accessing and using research
DIIB	Facilitates the analysis of student learning data
DIIC	Supports colleagues in collaborating with the higher education institutions and other organizations
DIID	Teaches and supports colleagues to collect, analyze, and communicate data
Domain III—Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement	
DIIIA	Collaborates to plan professional learning
DIIIB	Responds to the diverse learning needs of colleagues
DIIIC	Facilitates professional learning
DIIID	Uses technologies to promote collaborative and differentiated professional learning
DIIIE	Collects, analyzes, and disseminates data related to the quality of professional learning
DIIIF	Advocates for job—embedded professional learning
DIIIG	Provides constructive feedback to colleagues
DIIIH	Uses information about emerging education, economic, and social trends in professional learning
Domain IV—Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning	
DIVA	Uses data to identify opportunities to improve curriculum, instruction, assessment, school organization, and school culture
DIVB	Engages in reflective dialog with colleagues
DIVC	Supports colleagues' individual and collective reflection and professional growth
DIVD	Serves as a team leader
DIVE	Uses knowledge of technologies to guide colleagues
DIVF	Promotes instructional strategies to ensure that individual student learning needs remain the central focus of instruction
Domain V—Promoting the Use of Assessments and Data for School and District Improvement	
DVA	Increases the capacity of colleagues
DVB	Uses data to improve educational practice and student learning
DVC	Creates a climate of trust and critical reflection
DVD	Works with colleagues to use assessment and data findings
Domain VI—Improving Outreach and Collaboration with Families and Community	
DVIA	Promotes effective interactions among colleagues, families, and the larger community
DVIB	Models and teaches effective communication and collaboration skills with families and other stakeholders
DVIC	Facilitates colleagues' self---examination of their own understandings of community culture and diversity
DVID	Develops a shared understanding
DVIE	Addresses the diverse educational needs of families and the community
Domain VII—Advocating for Student Learning and the Profession	
DVIIA	Shares information with colleagues within and/or beyond the district
DVIIB	Uses research to advocate for teaching and learning processes
DVIIC	Selects opportunities to advocate for the rights and/or needs of students
DVIID	Advocates for access to professional resources
DVIIE	Represents and advocates for the profession in contexts outside of the classroom

Appendix B

Table 2: Teacher Leader Participants

#	pseudonyms	Experience as Educator	School Location	Grade Levels
1	Bella	› 10 years	Urban - US	Pre-K - K
2	Cally	› 10 years	Urban - US	6-8
3	Maura	› 10 years	Suburban - US	K-1
4	Rhonda	› 10 years	Urban - Puerto Rico	teacher leader (SPEC)
5	Beth	› 10 years	Urban - Puerto Rico	teacher leader (Reg. ED)
*names of participants are pseudonym				

Appendix C:

Table 3: Reflective Journal Questions

No.	Question
Q1	Describe and show evidence of the success you have in the classroom.
Q2	What are some challenges you have in the classroom?
Q3	How can the multi-age classroom (MAC) school team assist you?
Q4	How do you perceive your role as a teacher leader (think of your expertise, coaching ideas and the multi-age program)?
Q5	Brainstorm a list of teaching approaches in which you have some expertise.
Q6	Reflect on your strengths as a teacher. Include the evidence and the impact on your learners.
Q7	What do you think are areas of challenge or opportunities?
Q8	What did you think are the areas of strength displayed by the teachers you observed in your school?
Q9	How will you continue to learn to be able to support teachers in making learning, practice and change integrate in your school?

Appendix D:

Table 4: Thematic Analysis Results for Each Participant

Themes	Participants				
	1	2	3	4	5
Domain I: Collaborative Culture	9	8	3	3	4
Domain II: Using Research	2	1	0	0	0
Domain III: Professional Learning	2	3	0	1	0
Domain IV: Instruction and Student Learning	8	12	3	0	6
Domain V: Assessment and Data	0	1	1	0	0
Domain VI: Families and Community	0	0	2	0	0
Domain VII: Educational Policy	0	3	0	0	0
Human Capital: Talent	14	15	5	1	4
Social Capital: Group	12	12	3	2	5
Decision Capital: Judgment	4	5	0	0	0

Appendix E:

Table 5: Thematic Analysis Results for All Five Participants

Themes	Frequency
Teacher Leader Standards	
Domain IV: Instruction and Student Learning	29
Domain I: Collaborative Culture	27
Domain III: Professional Learning	6
Domain II: Using Research	3
Domain VII: Educational Policy	3
Domain V: Assessment and Data	2
Domain VI: Families and Community	2
Professional Capital	
Human Capital: Talent	39
Social Capital: Group	34
Decision Capital: Judgment	9

Appendix F:

Table 6: Total Raw Scores and Percentage of teacher leader Standards and Professional Capital Framework

Standard/Framework	United States Schools (Raw Score) Percentage %	Puerto Rico Elementary School (Raw Score) Percentage %
Domain I	(18) 23.7 %	(8) 72.7%
Domain II	(11) 14.5 %	-------------
Domain III	(11) 14.5 %	(1) 9.1%
Domain IV	(24) 31.6 %	(2) 18.2%
Domain V	(2) 2.6 %	_____
Domain VI	(3) 8.9 %	_____
Domain VII	(7) 9.2 %	_____
Human Capital (talent of teacher)	(27) 45 %	(11) 54%
Social Capital (collaboration)	(24) 40 %	(10) 47.6%
Decisional Capital (judgments)	(9) 15 %	(0) 0%

Appendix G:

Figure 1: The word map generated from the data of ALL five participants

Author Biographies

Dr. Barbara Cozza is a full professor of Educational Leadership at St. John's University, USA, and national and international educational consultant. Dr. Cozza is a leader in the field of leadership and transforming education systems in basic education and higher education programs. Cozza presents at numerous conferences, teaches leadership and research courses, and provides professional development and presents seminars and webinars. She has directed a multi-age program for children ages 5 through 9 years in the past and was a Laboratory School Board member. She authors numerous books and articles on national and international agendas. Two books were published on the topic of multi-age programs. One article was published on multi-age programs in developing and developed countries.

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INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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