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Impact of family engagement on child outcomes in preschool

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Abstract

This review considered the impact of family engagement on child outcomes in preschool and what variables impact the success of family engagement in preschool. Many child outcomes are affected by family engagement. This particular work focuses on child outcomes related to literacy and approaches to learning. The variables of the family engagement examined include demographics, culture, family unit, and socioeconomic status. Many forms and degrees of family engagement are described with the degree of success for family engagement determined by the actual participants. Findings of the review point towards family engagement promoting positive outcomes for children enrolled in preschool despite the variables effecting the level family engagement.

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ABSTRACT

This review considered the impact of family engagement on child outcomes in preschool and what variables impact the success of family engagement in preschool. Many child outcomes are affected by family engagement. This particular work focuses on child outcomes related to literacy and approaches to learning. The variables of the family engagement examined include demographics, culture, family unit, and socio-economic status. Many forms and degrees of family engagement are described with the degree of success for family engagement determined by the actual participants. Findings of the review point towards family engagement promoting positive outcomes for children enrolled in preschool despite the variables effecting the level family engagement.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Description of the Topic

Parent engagement is the action of parents supporting their child's social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development in tandem with the efforts of the school, childcare program and community in which they are involved, to make progress in reaching positive child and family outcomes. Children, parents and programs gain when families are involved in their child's preschool learning both inside the classroom and at home. Studies indicate that nurturing, responsive, and sensitive parenting promotes social-emotional competence and academic success as stated by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2016). Father's involvement in their children's literacy learning has been found to show positive gains especially with the curiosity of print (Ortiz, 2001).

Rationale

Challenges faced by families can create barriers to participating in activities. Programs strategize to help families overcome the challenges and barriers so children experience positive outcomes. Programs proven to be successful in family engagement suggest offering a continuum of onsite opportunities for families to become involved in the preschool, especially appealing to families who may be new to the program, community or country, or may have English as a second language (Hindman, Miller, Froyen, & Skibbe, 2012). Other barriers may include parent's attitude towards education and their prior experience with social service support systems such as the Department of

Human Services. Building a relationship with the family lies solely with the program policy and staff. Staff need to commit to family relationship building in order to strengthen family engagement.

While many families are strong and resilient in the face of adversity, research points toward an important fact: the programs where children learn and develop should not ignore family wellness if they want to meaningfully engage families and fulfill their mission to prepare children for school and academic success (U.S. DHHS et al., 2016, p.3).

Family well-being means financial stability, good mental health, good physical health, secure housing, access to health care, and having access to nutritious food. Family well-being is a predictor of a child's school success and a predictor of family engagement. "Currently, more than 15 million children in the United States (21 percent of U.S. children) live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level" (RWJ Foundation, 2017, p. 5).

Purpose

This review looks at some of the ways programs offer opportunities for family engagement but the real focal point of this review is understanding the variables of family engagement and how family engagement impacts a child's learning. Studies show that quantity is not the prize, but quality is the most important. (Hindman, et. al., 2012) Meeting parents on their turf and in their comfort zone is a priority for beginning the relationship to set development goals for their child. An educator needs to understand the various ways of defining the family unit and the community culture which will lead to an

increase in an educators' ability to engage those families and support their children in development.

Statutes and policies across the country provide structure and governance to early childhood programs on family engagement. Some of these include: *The Head Start Act, The Child Care and Development Block Grant, The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.*

The Head Start Act asks families to participate in program governance, as classroom volunteers, in parent education programs, attend parent-teacher conferences and home visits, receive supports for resources to assist with family well-being needs and goals and asks programs to prioritize family members for job openings.

The Childcare and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) encourages parent and family involvement in children's development in child care settings. The grant says States must provide consumer education to parent and families on a variety of issues, including research and best practices concerning meaningful parent and family engagement.

The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program is built upon years of research showing that families participating showed improved prenatal care, parenting skills, maternal and child health, as well as promoting child health and school readiness and less evidence of child abuse and neglect. (U.S. DHHS, 2016).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) contains Part C which provides grants to states to implement a system of early intervention for children with

disabilities from birth to three years with the requirement of an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). IDEA emphasizes the fact that these young children with disabilities are best served within the family unit and the Part C services support the family to meet the developmental and learning needs of the child.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as amended by the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA)* asks states and school districts to partner with parents and families in ensuring positive outcomes for all students. School districts that receive Title I funds are mandated to have written parent involvement plans with strategies to implement purposeful parent engagement (U.S. DHHS, 2016).

Schools and programs utilizing tax dollars through the mentioned government programs will need to provide family engagement and provide it with the intent of increasing the success of child developmental and educational outcomes. This review examines the variables that effect family engagement and the effect of family engagement on child outcomes.

Terminology

Throughout this review, I am using the following definitions to support the reader in understanding:

Approaches to Learning – a domain within the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework that incorporates emotional, behavioral, and cognitive self-regulation. In this domain, children learn to successfully navigate learning experiences that are challenging, frustrating, or simply take time to accomplish (OHS, 2015).

Child Outcomes – individualized developmentally appropriate goals set for a child to assist in reaching the next step of progress in learning.

Family Engagement/Parent Involvement – is the action of the parents or primary caregivers of children enrolled in school or child care and the action of the school or child care, working to improve child education, development and health. The actions are designed to build partnerships to support family wellness and children's well-being (RWJ Foundation, 2017).

Literacy – the knowledge and skills that lay the foundation for reading and writing.

School Readiness - The Office of Head Start (OHS, 2015) defines school readiness as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.

Research Questions

Family engagement has many facets and to narrow the scope, I considered the following questions for this review.

1. What variables impact the type/degree of family engagement in preschool?

2. What impact does the degree of family engagement in preschool have on child outcomes in the domains of approaches to learning and literacy?

Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter examined the variables impacting family engagement and the impact on outcomes for young children related to literacy and approaches to learning. With this focus in mind, the first area to examine are variables which impact family engagement. Once variables are defined and narrowed, the next area will assess how the level of family engagement makes a difference on child outcomes relative to literacy and approaches to learning.

Variables of Impact on Family Engagement

There are many variables that present barriers or challenges for families to be engaged in the school or program where their child attends. The variables are large in number and often times are melded together. In the following section I will identify those variables that I feel impact parent engagement the most.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines *demographics* as a specific segment of a population having shared characteristics. For the purpose of this literature review demographics is interpreted as the location of the family. It could be in a small rural Midwestern town, an urban suburb, or a metropolitan city. The location may or may not have available health services, affordable housing, or a mental health clinic. The location may or may not have a community garden, locally sponsored family events at the park every Saturday afternoon, or a community foodbank.

In this literature review, *socio-economic status* refers to whether the family is at, below, or above the federal poverty guideline. The U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services (USDHHS) states a poverty guideline is a poverty threshold used to determine eligibility for government assistance programs. Eligibility is determined by the annual income of the family and the number of family members or household members. For example, the poverty guideline for four persons in a family/household is $24,600 in income for twelve months. The federal poverty guideline is adjusted each year by the USDHHS.

The USDHHS and the U.S. Department of Education define *family unit* as "inclusive of all adults who interact with early childhood systems in support of their child, to include biological, adoptive, and foster parents: grandparents; legal and informal guardians; and adult siblings" (p. 1). The family unit could be a single mother, a single father, a grandmother and grandfather, a lesbian couple, a gay couple, or a legal guardian. It could be a combination of any of these suggestions.

The Iowa Department of Human Rights defines *culture* as "the values, beliefs, linguistics, customs, practices, expression, and patterns of thinking and styles of communication that shape our behaviors, expectations and reactions" (p. 1). Culture is the most faceted of these variables. For many families, it is their way of life and is interwoven into any and all decisions that are made by the family. Culture can have the most direct and critical impact on the engagement of a family in the child's learning development. Having said this, let's take a closer look what research has provided on each of these variables with respect of impact on family engagement.

Demographics

Keys (2015) research was a cross-sectional study comparing urban and rural parents and their perceived level of family engagement while their children were enrolled in Head Start. There were 419 urban and rural parents surveyed from the Midwest for the study and the study had one independent variable, community location. The independent variable had two categories; rural and urban families whose children attended Head Start. A t test was used in analysis due to having one independent variable, divided into categories, one quantitative dependent variable (parents' perceived level of family engagement), and each participant can only be tested once. One survey was provided to each family at a single point in time to measure perceived levels of family engagement. There were 24 items that measured family engagement behaviors and beliefs using a five-point Likert scale. Of the 419 surveys provided, 338 surveys were used to test the impact of demographics as follows, "urban Head Start families will exhibit higher levels of perceived family engagement by scoring themselves higher overall on the parental involvement survey" (Keys, 2015, p. 71). This fueled more questions regarding outcomes from this research. For example, did urban families score higher on the parent involvement survey than their rural counterparts (Keys, 2015). Using the Parent and School Survey (PASS) instrument, an "overall difference in rural and urban Head Start parents' perception of their level of family engagement was found" (Keys, 2015, p.69). The differences regarding the level of family engagement were attributed to the parental characteristics of employment of parents, marital status, education level, income level, race and ethnicity, positive social supports and attitudes of supports. Keys also noted the specific type of community (demographic) in which the family resides impacts these

parental characteristics. Keys concluded that future studies on family involvement should focus on the outcomes with other populations, citing specifically rural and urban samples.

Nitecki (2015) researched a different demographic scenario focusing on a private Montessori preschool in a community which was a small suburb on the fringe of a large metropolitan area. There were few job opportunities unless one was willing to endure a 70 mile commute one way to a large northeastern city. The private preschool enrolled students from all over the county whose population was 57,000 in the 2010 U. S. Census. The unemployment rate hovered between 8.8 – 10.4% according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2013 which was by county, one of the highest rates in the state. Despite these challenges, the Montessori based private preschool was successful in building meaningful and respectful relationships with all families (Nitecki, 2015). Over eight months, data was collected by Nitecki conducting interviews with the three teachers and 18 parents of the children enrolled at the private preschool. The focus of the parent interviews was the parents' perceptions of their experiences at the preschool, specifically their role as partners in their child's education. Classroom observation occurred 48 times, including drop-off and pick-up interactions, 12 family events, meetings outside of school hours, and two meetings at the public school. Observations were documented and all data collection and analysis was personally conducted by Nitecki. The qualitative data was systematically coded and analyzed to find similar themes from all three sources: institutional documentation, interviews, and observations. Open coding was used to identify three main themes: "nurturing multidimensional relationships, creating a welcoming school environment, and enhancing parents' cognitions about school"

(Nitecki, 2015, p. 203). Once these themes were identified, axial coding was used to investigate the connections between the evidence and these three themes. The case study revealed three concepts on how the private preschool built sturdy school-family partnerships:

> 1) Multidimensional relationships occurred across all six components of Epstein's (2001) framework for school-family-community partnerships
>
> 2) Creating a welcoming environment was essential to the development of the relationships
>
> 3) Enhancing parent's cognitions about preschool education and their role in the child's learning resulted in the buy-in necessary for true partnership (p. 203).

Nitecki noted in the research that this example of school-family partnership favorably impacted the participation of parents due to the fact that the demographic was a small preschool program which encouraged supportive relationships.

Mendez (2010) studied 288 predominantly African American families from a small southern city to investigate the barriers of engagement for parents of preschool children. For this study, The Companion Curriculum (TCC) was developed which sought to enhance children's school readiness by increasing parent involvement in education and strengthening the parent-teacher relationship. TCC consisted of the following four key elements.

> First, staff training is provided regarding TCCs educational themes and strategies for promoting family involvement. Second, Family Corners are introduced as an environmental enhancement that provides a culturally relevant and visible area for

adult-child interaction with TCC materials in the classroom. Family Corners also

display pictures and materials from children's home learning environments to

reinforce families' involvement in learning. Third, educational activities for

families promote playful adult-child interaction and extend learning activities

outside of the school and into the home setting. Fourth, staff members illustrate

learning activities for family members and promote home-school relations by

conducting monthly workshops called the Parent Excellence Series (p. 27).

A quasi-experimental design compared three cohorts of families receiving TCC with

families recruited from comparison centers receiving standard preschool services over a

two-year period. The three cohorts of families were recruited from four Head Start

programs serving African American communities in a southern city region. Almost 40%

of the sample served as the control group, and 61% served as the intervention group. The

parents were offered participation at the time of their orientation to Head Start and a

standardized interview was conducted by a trained graduate student either in person or

via telephone after consent. A multimodal approach evaluated the program by assessing

parent satisfaction, parent participation, home-school connection and the relation between

parent involvement and child outcomes. Data was collected two times, once in the

second month of enrollment and again in the last month of the school year. Children

were also assessed two times in the year. A total of nine Parental Excellence workshops

were conducted for each intervention cohort. Due to the demographic location of this

group of families, few community-based interventions existed to increase the educational

involvement of families while their children were in preschool. In this study, parental

perceptions of neighborhood social disorder and economic stress (demographics)

negatively affected the parental involvement of African American mothers which was measured by their attendance at the TCC workshops and the amount of time they reported spending on TCC workshop activities with their child at home. Parents reported high levels of satisfaction and favorable ratings for the curriculum materials, Parent Excellence workshops, and the information handouts used in the program, however, as the year progressed attendance dropped significantly. Moreover, the survey of existing barriers revealed that the demands of work, education, and job training are significant impediments to families' ability to take advantage of other supports offered through parent support programs (Mendez, 2010).

Demographics are influential in family engagement participation. However, it is certainly not the only influential variable. Another variable that impacts family engagement is the family's socio-economic status (SES).

Socio-economic status

Assessing parent characteristics due to low socio-economic status (SES) which might negatively affect parent engagement is necessary to assist in determining how to build relationships with families in programs that serve this population. Fantuzzo et al (2013) examined Head Start parents in New York and Pennsylvania targeting 40 classrooms through examining the relation between the Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ) short form and maintaining the psychometric properties of the original scale. The short form stands to offer a more cost-efficient measure of family involvement in early childhood education as well as providing information to evaluate home involvement multiple times during a school year, since a short form reduces the time demands of assessment. "The research utilized two samples containing data from

families in two large, urban areas to develop and validate the FIQ short form" (Fantuzzo et al., 2013, p. 736). All of the families participating in this study met the requirement for being at or below the line of poverty for the size of the family with regards to the Federal government poverty guidelines. If the FIQ short form proved credible, the information learned from the FIQ short form would then be used by teachers and programs to facilitate more supportive relationships and networking of resources to promote family self-sufficiency and positive child outcomes. The participants in the study consisted of parents and primary caregivers of 590 children whose ages ranged from three to five years old. The participants were randomly selected from over 400 classrooms in a large urban school district in Pennsylvania. Of those chosen, 86% participated and they were predominantly mothers. The data was collected in March of the school year by trained graduate and undergraduate student assessors using the FIQ short form. The study showed parents who were unemployed (low SES) were more involved in the home-school conferencing activities and school-based activities than parents who were employed. This finding underscores a missed opportunity for early childhood programs to engage employed parents in conferencing and school-based activities. African American families were found to be less involved in school-based activities than other ethnic groups. This finding agrees with other research that shows a general pattern of low school involvement among African American parents in inner-city settings that has been associated with limited outreach and resources within the community. This study was limited to urban, preschool Head Start children and future research should examine different types of preschool programs across ethnic and socioeconomic groups (Fantuzzo, et al., 2013).

Childhood anxiety can be a by-product of low SES and poor parent involvement (Mian, Esenhower, & Carter, 2015). Mian, Esenhower, and Carter conducted a feasibility study investigating the effect of an enhanced recruitment strategy to maximize parent engagement, as well as factors related to attendance in a single session focused on anxiety prevention. The offer to participate in this study went to parents of children who were between the age of 11 and 71 months old, who were participating in one of three Women, Infants and Children (WIC) programs located in community health centers serving low-income, mostly ethnic minority families in neighborhoods with high rates of community violence in Boston, MA. Bi-lingual research assistants invited parents in WIC offices and received consent. Phase 1 data was collected with a secure, online survey program with a touch screen tablet computer or paper survey at the WIC offices. All participants completed a survey that assessed anxiety risk according to trauma exposure, child anxiety, or parent anxiety. Parents were compensated $10 for participating. In phase 2, parents were invited to a parent workshop focused on child anxiety prevention. Parents were randomized into two recruitment strategies: enhanced recruitment and recruitment-as-usual. Enhanced recruitment consisted of a flyer, RSVP card, a signed letter from the WIC director, a contact by phone and a hand-written note encouraging attendance to the workshop. Recruitment-as-usual included the same flyer and RSVP card. The enhanced recruitment and recruitment-as-usual were found to have no significant differences across the conditions. The study found that those parents who planned to attend the workshops were employed part-time or employed full-time. Parent employment suggests a more stable or predictable schedule, as well as more resources at their disposal. The study showed the parents' employment status was tied to their regard

of importance of parent engagement and learning about how to avoid childhood anxiety for their children. Bivariate correlations indicated that child anxiety was positively associated with parent anxiety and lower levels of income were associated with higher child anxiety symptoms (Mian, Esenhower, & Carter, 2015). This finding indicates the importance of school and teacher understanding of how economics impact a child's feeling of safety and security, which the child may represent through higher anxiety behaviors. Family economic stressors are important to understand when working with families so schools can provide information regarding availability of services within the community.

Mendez (2010) examined depression which can be another by-product of low SES in families. "Parental depression was assessed with a shortened version of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale, which consisted of 12 indicators of depressive symptoms including mood, sleep and eating, and energy level over the past week" (Mendez, 2010, p.29). In assessing this SES characteristic that might negatively affect parent involvement, the study measured responses on a 4-point Likert scale, where 0 = hardly or never and 3 = most or all of the time. The results showed those parents with a low socio-economic status scored higher with more depressive symptoms existing and low in participating in family engagement activities at the school. The study also showed those parents with a low socio-economic status and higher depressive symptoms did not engage in activities with their children at home such as reading with or to their child and participating in interactive play (Mendez, 2010).

Sime and Sheridan (2014) conducted a study in an area with high levels of social and economic deprivation in Scotland, which "aimed to investigate the nature and

effectiveness of the services in place to support poor families, found parents' engagement in activities is key to their child's well-being and to their child's learning foundation" (p. 331). Sime and Sheridan conducted their study in the top 20% of the most deprived area in the country of Scotland using parent focus groups and interviews to gather data. The study was qualitative in design and included in-depth semi-structured interviews with 19 service managers and practitioners, six focus groups with parents and six activity groups with children. Face to face interviews were completed with the service managers and practitioners. The parent focus groups consisted of themes for discussion which included: perceptions of home-school link initiative(s) that parent was involved in, expectations and benefits of engagement for them and the child, participation in decision-making processes at EECC/school level, issues concerning transition and suggestions for future activities that would benefit parents in the area. The activity groups were planned and carried out for the children and their parents to attend. Gift vouchers and a set of books were given to parents who participated. An inductive analysis approach to analyze the data clearly showed a benefit to children's outcomes when parents supported their child's learning and fostered positive attitudes towards achievement even though the families suffered from poverty.

> While all parents recognized the value of education for their children's social
> mobility and opportunities and were keen to engage in activities, they remained
> aware of the limited resources they could draw upon, mainly in terms of their
> restricted academic competencies, specialist knowledge and qualifications. The
> desire to help their children overcome their families' economic circumstances was

also hampered by the absence of strong social and kinship networks that they could draw upon (p. 327).

Parents were very well aware of the positive outcomes that could happen if they were more engaged in their child's education, but their low SES, lack of knowledge, and not having a consistent social and familial network to lean on created barriers to parental engagement. The study concluded that preschools must consider a more positive discourse of parental engagement in relation to low SES families.

This discussion on the socio-economic status leads to describing the influence of the family unit on family engagement. The family unit can be a determining factor to the family's socio-economic status. A family unit with one wage earner or two has a direct impact on the socio-economic status of the family.

Family Unit

Baker, Wise, Kelley and Skiba (2016) conducted a research study identifying barriers while looking at creating solutions to family engagement. The research analyzed 20 focus groups across six schools to gain parent and staff perspectives on identifying the barriers or limitations to families attending school events. The researchers sought to identify what could be done differently to increase family involvement. The intent of the focus groups was to elicit information and conversation from participants about a variety of subjects, including the school's implementation of system-based disciplinary reform, communication, parent involvement, and overall satisfaction with the school. Just as it is important for the members of family to form a unit, the findings identified the importance of students' feelings of belonging in school and parents' sense of belonging is important

to their involvement as well. The participants noted how school actions and attitudes send a clear message that parents are or are not welcome in school. This welcoming had a bearing on the level of comfort parents felt in coming to the school. The family unit may be one that carries stigma (one parent unit, same-sex couple, culturally diverse, or grandparent) which has an effect on the comfort level of the family unit and the school's attitude. Poor communication was noted by the families and the school as a barrier. Families stated that communication came at the last minute or was inconsistent from the school and the school stated they couldn't always get in contact with the parents. A definite communication hurdle for the families and the school was a language barrier. The inability to communicate due to a language barrier had a direct impact on whether the family unit was comfortable in engaging in activities. The study showed proactive, welcoming, and consistent communication with the family unit from the school provided better child outcomes and more frequent parent engagement (Baker, et al., 2016).

Another study completed by Backhouse and Graham (2013) viewed 27 grandmothers and seven grandfathers who were involved in full-time caregiving role of their grandchildren examined the nature and extent of change, loss, and grief. Data was collected through in-depth interviews so grandparent's views and experiences could be gathered in person by researchers who understood the sensitive nature of the circumstances. Two questions were the focus of the interviews: 1) Can you tell me how the grandchildren came into your care? 2) Can you tell me about your experiences of raising your grandchildren? The in-depth interviews revealed many reasons for the fact that this family unit had come together, such as parental drug and alcohol abuse, child neglect, parent mental illness, incarceration and apathy. The experiences that affected

this family unit were grief as a result of ongoing tension and conflict with children's parents, loss of traditional grandparent role, sadness due to the impact of their circumstances on other family members, social isolation, and lack of recognition by support services. These findings have an impact on family unit engagement with school and community due to barriers of grief, social isolation, and service barriers. (Backhouse & graham, 2013).

A research study done in Ireland by Daly, MacNeela, & Sarma (2015) looked at the effect of one parent coming out and how it impacted the children in the family unit(s). Fifteen individuals (at least 18 years of age) participated in this study. Interviews were conducted using grounded theory techniques. Interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes and were semi-structured and focused on when and how participants became aware their mother or father was LGBT and separating. It documented reactions to the change, changes in family relationship, supportive sources (or lack of), experiences of disclosing the parental changes to others, and reflection on sexual orientation in general (Daly, et al., 2015). The results from this study were very similar to those of a nuclear family going through a divorce, including contextual factors and feelings of loss, with the addition of the stigma of a parent coming out.

The last variable included in this review of impacts on family engagement is culture. Culture is the broadest and is interwoven into all the other variables of demographics, socio-economic status, and family unit.

Culture

Chen, Pisani Whilte and Soroui (2012) examined the parents' race/ethnicity, nativity, and poverty status and the engagement in reading to their children. The study identified parents' races or ethnicities and then examined the time spent reading to their children or using interactive reading techniques. Data was broken apart by analyzing the different frequencies of time spent reading to their child or using interactive reading techniques. This was compared to parents' household income, nativity, and prose literacy skills. Data for this study were drawn from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL). Over a 10-month period, using interviews and literary assessment, White, Black, and Hispanic parents were observed teaching the alphabet, pointing out words, rhyming and singing with their children. One finding from this research was Black parents were significantly less likely to read to their children than White parents (Chen, et al., 2012). Another finding was Hispanic parents were less likely than White parents to report frequently reading to their children. Black parents are more likely than White parents to report frequently teaching the alphabet and pointing out words to their children. One fact to note is that families differ considerably in their desire to create a literacy rich environment in their home due to culture. Even though the families in the study had a limited household income, the home environment with a cultural influence was print rich. The print the child was exposed to by the parents, varied by the culture of the family. The interaction with this functional text provided valuable literacy knowledge based on the family's culture. (Chen, et al., 2012). The family's culture impacts the family engagement with the child at home and as the child transitions to other education venues.

McWayne, Melzi, Schick, Kennedy and Mundt (2013) state the fastest growing population in our country includes Latino children. The Latino population in the U.S. is disproportionately likely to be low-income and to live in our nation's urban centers, where poverty is concentrated and social problems associated with poverty are more prevalent. With all of these challenges, family engagement in children's education is an important factor in success. The researchers examined the family engagement behaviors used to support Latino children's educational experiences (McWayne, et al., 2013). Participants were recruited from 14 Head Start centers across three boroughs of New York City serving a high proportion of Latino children and families (i.e., at least 65%). Two researchers conducted a total of 17 focus groups in Spanish and English. "A total of 27 concepts emerged from the focus group data which were grouped into two domains: the developmental skills parents sought to develop in their children, and the responsibilities and behaviors that parents mentioned as necessary to develop those skills" (McWayne, et al., 2013 p. 597). The parents viewed developmental skills in their children as school readiness skills, such as reading, writing, and sharing. The parents viewed their responsibilities and behaviors as talking to the teacher, volunteering at the program, attending events that take place or relate to the school setting, meeting their children's basic needs, developing parenting skills and learning English. These responsibilities included family engagement. The term *educación* in Spanish has a dual focus. On one hand, it refers to socio-emotional and behavioral skills that are fostered by parents, including training in responsibility, morality, and interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, it also includes cognitive and linguistic skills developed through schooling. The programs included in the study were not completely versed in the

understanding of the dual focus of *educación* in Latino families, which created challenges. The study found the more challenges facing the family the more barriers there were to family engagement.

> The relationship between parental challenges and lower levels of engagement overall is real. Parents who were recent immigrants, spoke Spanish, had less education, and had more adults and children living with them in the home reported lower levels of involvement (p. 604).

In this study, cultural norms and values were perceived to be barriers to the level of parent engagement.

In another study with two of the same researches, McWayne and Melzi, the hypothesis was that there would be a positive relation between caregiving support and parental engagement. Four hundred sixty-three Head Start primary caregivers were recruited from large urban Head Start programs in New York City and Boston. Five Boston sites with 90% or more Latino children and four New York sites with 65% or more Latino children participated in the study. A Parental Engagement of Families from Latino Backgrounds (PFEL) questionnaire and a demographic questionnaire were distributed to caregivers at the centers in the spring and summer months. Bilingual researchers were available to answer queries and to read items and mark responses for participants who were not able to complete the questionnaires independently. The aim of the study was to ascertain relations between culture-specific family engagement behaviors and family characteristics within a broad sample. Through parental self-report on these questionnaires, it was learned that "reciprocal dialogue between parents and educational staff can help programs consider how they might adapt to culture-specific

methods, leading to higher congruence between home and school settings" (McWayne & Melzi, 2015, p. 264). With these findings in mind, it is necessary for programs to focus on the element of culture when beginning to form relationships to prepare for family engagement with enrolled families.

Where Family Engagement Takes Place

Family engagement can take place in a variety of areas and contexts. For the purposes of this literature review, I have narrowed this into three areas: school, home, and community. In determining what has an impact on family engagement, it is important to look where family engagement begins. In other words, is school initiating the family engagement concept, or the community, or did it start with the family at home? First we will discuss family engagement at school.

Engagement in school

The term school, as referred to here could be universal Pre-K, Head Start, private preschool, or public kindergarten. All can be very different in concept, but the common denominator is that it is an institution of learning away from the home.

Hindman, Miller, Froyen and Skibbe, (2012) conducted a study using a cohort of 2003 Family and Community Experiences Study (FACES) datasets of children, families, and educators which looked at the nature and frequency of family involvement in children's learning at home, in the community, and at school. Data was collected through interviews with parents in the spring and fall of the year, while data on center outreach goals and invitations were collected from interviews with center directors in the fall of the school year.

Family involvement in school can be accomplished in many ways including; volunteering in the classroom or other areas of the school such as the office or library, participating in decision-making committees such as PTA or Parent Council, serving as liaisons between other families and the school and serving in communications such as parent-teacher conferences or home visits to share information between the family and teachers (p. 655).

The study showed in the spring only, parents reported the frequency with which they engaged in 12 school involvement practices, such as volunteering and observing in classrooms, attending social events or parent-teacher conferences, and participating in policy or fundraising groups. A parental report of frequency was not gathered in the fall due to the fact of the program beginning and no opportunity to be involved was available. The results over the year concluded that some parents increased their participation but not all. The study further revealed that the family factors of ethnicity and culture were the strongest predictors of involvement.

Black (2014) conducted a study investigating the "Authentic Parent Voice" in referring to parent engagement with the school program. This research involved interviewing 15 parents from three licensed preschool settings serving children ages three to five years old. The researcher also interviewed the center directors of those preschools in a quest to answer "what are schools doing to incorporate parent voice and how might parent voices be better included" (Black, 2014, p. 32). The findings indicated, that with regard to incorporating the parent voice from the parent's perspective, parent views, ideas, and opinions, it was a gradual developmental process that happened over time through multiple experiences. While seeking to better include the parent voice, the

findings indicated programs the parents and children attended, were not only open to suggested improvements recommended by the parents, but designed to share leadership. in some areas, and, thus, allowed the parents to exercise initiative and leadership in areas such as helping organize school activities, including cultural celebrations, holiday events, and school beautification days (Black, 2014). Black goes on to say that partnerships between families and schools/teachers/providers are essential, highlighting the important fundamentals and shared elements involved in supporting authentic parent involvement, family engagement, and ultimately children's development, learning, and school success.

The next environment to discuss for family engagement is the home. The home can take on different forms, not only the place where the family resides. There are various locations for a home, they may be a single-family dwelling in rural America, an apartment in the projects of a city, or a car. Whatever the place, the family's engagement in the child's quest for education begins in this location.

Engagement at home

As stated earlier, the parent is the child's first and most important educator. Hindman, Miller, Froyen and Skibbe (2012) studied family involvement at home. Home involvement was measured using a scale developed and widely implemented by the National Household Education Survey (NHES) and the Head Start Quality Research Centers. In the fall and spring of the child's school year, parents rated 12 items such as reading books with children; telling stories; playing games; teaching about letters, words, numbers; singing songs; and involving children in everyday tasks such as errands and chores; from 0 (rarely) to 2 (3 or more times per week). Possible scores ranged from 0 to 24, yielding information about the amount of parent involvement in these home-based

activities each week. Among these, no one item dominated the scale in the fall or spring. Overall, there were significant increases from fall to spring in the frequency of reading books with children, teaching about numbers and letters, counting, playing games, and involving children in errands and chores. There were no items for which the average involvement decreased. However, for many families the level of involvement could be further increased. Book reading, conversation, identifying letters and sounds, math games, cooking and opportunities for social and emotional development all support the child's success in learning and life. Parenting style and communication about school at home, creates an overall environment of involvement which fosters achievement for the child (Hindman, et al., 2012).

Chen et al. (2012) mentioned earlier examines home and its locale for family engagement. The parent participants in this study were approximately 80% foreign born and did not learn English as their primary language. The study questioned the bivariate relationships between parents' demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds and their engagement in reading to their children during three interactive reading activities (Chen, et al., 2012). This study utilized data from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) to answer questions about family engagement at home. The data analyses revealed that parents of different racial and ethnic groups engage in home literacy activities to varying degrees. Hispanic parents were less likely than White parents to report frequently reading to their children however, the frequency of this engagement was partially due to primary language of the Hispanic parents not being English (Chen, et al., 2012). Their level of engagement with their child in educational activities was impacted by the home environment.

No matter where the home is located, it is located within some sort of community. The community can be a resource for many families including a resource to support family engagement.

Engagement in community

The environment from which family engagement begins may very well be a predictor of the degree of family engagement. If the family engages in many community opportunities for engagement, it can be a predictor of a higher level of family engagement (Hindman, et al., 2012). The most widely studied community involvement activities are visiting the library, which offers access to novel materials and expert guidance, and attending museums, which provides a context for rich conversations about new information. In Hindman's study, the researcher sought to answer what the nature and frequency of family involvement is in children's learning in the community. As mentioned earlier, the datasets from a 2003 cohort of prior research with Family and Community Experiences Survey (FACES) was used along with interviews with parents on family involvement at home and in the community in fall and spring of the school year. In-school involvement data was collected in the spring interviews only. The participants were recruited from families enrolled in Head Start across the country and then stratified into 30 groups with approximately equal enrollments using key demographic variables. The majority of the interviews were conducted with biological mothers who reported primary responsibility for their child's care. The researchers found that families included in the study engaged in at least five different community activities per month on average and the frequency increased from fall to spring (Hindman, et al., 2012). Not one community-based activity dominated the findings. The most common

activities in the fall were visiting a park or playground with their child and in the spring the least popular activities remained the same as the fall: visiting museums or concerts. One commonality between community-based activities was cost. If the community activity cost money for the engagement of the family, it tended to be on the low end of frequency.

Douglass (2011) researched community engagement and the social and emotional aspect of engagement for families. This study included four early childhood education programs, two with high quality family partnership practices and two with low quality family partnership practices selected from over 60 programs participating in Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education (SF) initiative. This study used a structured multiple case study methodology, which provided rich and contextually situated data from multiple sources that could be used to make sense of complex organizational dynamics (Douglass, 2011). Even though this research included four early childhood education programs, it is possible to consider these findings relative to other community based organizations that engage families.

> The study set out to test the theory of a "relational bureaucratic" model that would incorporate two key factors thought to support partnerships and caring in the formal organizational context: 1) leaders who model a balance of power and expertise within the organization and 2) a climate that supports, values, and rewards caring and responsive relationships in the organization (p. 3).

Interviews, observations, and document reviews provided the information for the study. The author conducted semi-structured, individual interviews with a total of 60 program staff members, completed 20 hours of observation at each of the four programs and read

program documents pertaining to organizational and management practices and policies from each program. Before discussing the results of the study, a deeper understanding of relational bureaucracy and conventional bureaucracy is necessary. Although bureaucracy tends to have a negative quality of red tape, relational bureaucracy is seen in organizations as supporting a healthy work environment that functions efficiently and equitably and by contributing to systems of accountability. The use of reflective supervision, creativity, and mutual respect is encouraged. In conventional bureaucracy, family's pursuit of engagement experiences barriers caused by the organization exhibiting a discouraging non-caring attitude and using feelings or individual circumstances to guide decisions and actions. Conventional bureaucracy also positions the professional as the expert with power over the parent (Douglass, 2011).

In the study, the two programs with high quality family partnerships exhibited the qualities of relational bureaucracy, one program with low quality family partnerships exhibited the qualities of conventional bureaucracy and the final program with low quality partnerships matched the quality of power dimensions in conventional bureaucracy but did not match either relationship dimension of the two bureaucracies. These results suggest that positive supervisory-staff relationships in community organizations set the tone for positive staff-family relationships and vice-versa (Douglass, 2011).

Degree of Family Engagement

The degree to which a family engages maybe contingent upon availability due to work hours, other children's commitments, or the level of comfort the school or program has created to welcome families.

Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba (2016) conducted a study to examine what are the barriers or limitations to families attending school events and what can be done differently to increase family involvement. Families and staff in six schools in a Midwestern state were invited to participate in focus groups. The six schools were singled out due to their implementation of positive behavior interventions and supports and willingness to integrate culturally responsive practices in their implementation of positive behavior interventions. Each focus group consisted of 10 – 12 participants, with the focus group convening prior to or during an onsite school event. For each focus group there was a designated data collection team made up of a research associate, one project associate, and with one or two graduate research assistants. The focus group protocol consisted of 12 questions divided into five areas: family participation in their children's school and education, school expectations and behavior, communication, disciplinary procedures, and overall satisfaction. A total of 50 parents across the six schools were engaged in facilitated discussions about their school. The findings showed at times a two parent household may split the duties and only one can attend a family engagement activity. If the attending parent enjoys the activity and returns home to talk about it with the other parent, the likelihood of both attending the next planned activity rises. The parents also expressed a critical need for good communication because it provides information and assists in the ability of either parent to help the child. The level of comfort and whether they felt welcome or not in school was also a determining factor for parent's engagement (Baker et al, (2016).

A more in-depth look at what supports a high degree of family engagement can be more significant than when and where the activities are offered. Nitecki (2015) examined

a shift in thinking from parent involvement to school-family partnerships. The case study focused on a preschool with a high level of quality family involvement and wanted to find out how this preschool program built integrated school-family partnerships. Using an inductive participatory action research approach, the author collected eight months' worth of data including background information, three teacher interviews, 18 parent interviews, and 48 classroom observations. The qualitative data was systematically coded and analyzed to find similar themes from all three sources which included: the multidimensional nature of relationships, creating a welcoming school environment, and enhancing parents' cognitions about school. All data collection and analysis were done by the primary investigator to assure consistency and trustworthiness. This case study found building relationships, beyond the typical superficial parent-teacher relationship focused on the child's performance, leads to a purposeful and intentional partnership for the success of the child's learning (Nitecki, 2015). Nitecki also found enhancing parent's cognitions about preschool education and their role in the child's learning resulted in the buy-in necessary for a true partnership.

Demographics (location of the family) negatively affect the engagement of the family in more urban areas rather than more rural areas. Socio-economic status of the family has the greatest impact on the level of family engagement. The differing family units bring differing impacts to family engagement. Culture can be a misunderstood impact on family engagement. Given the variables of demographics, socio-economic status, family unit and culture with differing impacts on family engagement, the next portion of this review needs to examine the impact of family engagement on child

outcomes, specifically the child's growth in literacy and growth in approaches to learning.

Importance of Child Outcomes

Child outcomes are defined for this review as individualized developmentally appropriate goals set for a child to assist in reaching the next step of progress in learning. Conceptually, parent engagement are behaviors that connect with and support children or others in their environment in ways that are interactive, purposeful, and directed toward meaningful learning and affective outcomes.

Literacy outcomes

Moss conducted a study of 550 children and their families and hypothesized that families who have higher SES, experience more positive parent-child engagements and participate in more productive joint reading behaviors, which increases children's emergent literacy scores. The study only included cases that were fully completed over the two year time frame. Moss used Item Response Theory (IRT), a Structural Equation Model (SEM), and empirically examined the independent variables of SES, race, parent-child engagement, and joint reading behaviors in relation to the dependent variable of emergent literacy scores in preschool. The assumption of IRT is that a person's ability level for the measured concept and the assessment item itself both impact the probability of correctly responding to a test question. The early reading items answered correctly by the children were analyzed by IRT procedures. SEM is a statistical technique that is used to test and estimate causal relationships in a model. Variables are affected by other variables in this model and would have one-way arrows if a diagram depicted the

relationships. The examination of multiple pathways assisted in the identification of causal relationships that affect emergent literacy development during a child's preschool years. Moss determined SES and parent-child engagement both were significantly correlated with a child's emergent literacy score. The study showed if reading is valued in the home, then children will likely be exposed to literature in books prior to attending school. Intentionality of the reading and the actual literature used may play a part in how effective it actually is in promoting literacy for the child, but any reading is better than no reading (Moss, 2016).

Wen, Bulotsky-Shearer, Hahs-Vaughn, and Kormach (2012) conducted a secondary analysis of the Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) and studied how parent involvement and Head Start classroom quality predict children's vocabulary, literacy, and mathematics achievement across the transition from Head Start through first grade. Multilevel piecewise growth models were used to investigate the growth trajectories of Head Start children's academic skills and to estimate individual growth curves for children's academic outcomes from entry into Head Start through the end of first grade. The children were evaluated using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (3rd Edition), Woodcock-Johnson Battery and The Applied Problems subscale. All children were assessed during the beginning of their first year in Head Start, spring of their last year of Head Start, spring of kindergarten, and spring of first grade. Parent involvement was measured in FACES via primary caregiver interview in the spring of the first Head Start year and through parent report at their weekly and monthly activities using an adapted version of the National Household Education Survey. The study found "greater parent participation in preschool and kindergarten activities was associated with higher

reading achievement, lower rates of grade retention, and fewer years in special education when students reached the eighth grade" (p. 641).

Ortiz studied 26 fathers living in southern California involved in literacy practices with their young children focused on reading and writing. The fathers lived in a large metropolitan city in southern California and their average age was 35. Their annual income ranged from $10,000 to over $60,000 with an average of $35,000. Using questionnaire interviews and other unobtrusive techniques, including participant observation, document analysis, audio tape recordings, and supplemental checklists, three themes emerged in early literacy activities; curiosity of print, personal values and beliefs, and marital role functions. Reading was examined separately from writing events to determine the form of the literacy activity most often engaged in by fathers and their children. This study found that father participation in early literacy activity was often a response to their children's curiosity with text and print, reading was the preferred form of literacy activity and increased father participation was due to parents taking more of an equal responsibility for their child's welfare (Ortiz, 2001).

Kim and Byington conducted a study of a group of 375 parents in Nevada to examine the effect of a community-based family literacy program on the frequency of the parent and child's engagement in literacy activities at home. A 17 item Family Reading Survey was conducted and used to measure the frequency of literacy activities along with a pre- and post-survey to compare participants' responses. The Family Reading Survey was designed to assess family demographics and the reading and language practices (child and parent outcomes) of family participating in the community-based family literacy program. The Family Reading Survey was used to measure changes in the

frequency of family reading and home-based language and literacy activities. The study showed "parent participants indicated a higher frequency of reading with children, telling stories, and going to the library and children participants asked to be read to, looked at books by themselves, and drew pictures comparatively more often" (Kim & Byington, 2016, p. 5) when involved in a family literacy project. Approximately 60% of the participants were Hispanic which did limit the generalization of the results indicating families demonstrated statistically significant improvements in parent's and children's voluntary engagement in reading and related activities. Family literacy programs have been proven to support positive children's literacy outcomes and are directly related to family literacy in family engagement (Kim & Byington, 2016).

Approaches to Learning Outcomes

As defined earlier in this work, approaches to learning is a domain within the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework that incorporates emotional, behavioral, and cognitive self-regulation. Approaches to learning are a large part of school readiness which is defined as children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life.

Bulotsky-Shearer, Wen, Faria, Hahs-Vaughn, and Korfmacher (2012) used the FACES participants to identify profiles of early learning experiences in both home and school contexts. Parent involvement in school was measured through parent interview and parent home involvement was assessed through parental reports of weekly and monthly activities using an adapted version of the National Household Education Survey. The classroom quality was measured though Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale. Academic outcomes were directly assessed and social emotional outcomes were assessed

through teacher report. The Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale measured teacher-child relationships and interactions. Trained observers rated the overall classroom emotional climate. This study was limited by the archival nature of the FACES data and the fact that parent involvement was measured as the frequency count of parent home or school-based activities, rather than a multidimensional scale of the quality of involvement. "Children classified within profiles characterized by higher home involvement demonstrated higher academic outcomes" (p. 636). Children begin to learn the skills, knowledge, and attitudes at home which is strongly and positively associated with competence motivation, attention, persistence, and attitudes toward learning (Bulotsky-Shearer, et al., 2012).

Graue, Clements, Reynolds, and Niles (2004) conducted a longitudinal study in the city of Chicago with parents of 989 three- and four- year-old children attending twenty child-parent centers, looked at preschool curriculum, parent involvement and child outcomes. Teachers rated the extent to which the centers emphasized basic skills, small or large group activities, formal reading instruction, learning centers, field trips, and child- and teacher-directed activities using a short retrospective survey. Parent involvement was measured by rating parent participation in school by the children's teachers. The ratings were 1 = poor/not at all, up to 5 = excellent/much. The study showed "parent involvement was significantly associated with higher levels of school readiness and word analysis skills" (p.24). Parent involvement was rated higher at centers that emphasized child-initiated instruction. Teachers reported parent involvement in the child's school activities significantly predicted all outcomes progressing in the expected direction (Graue, et al., 2004).

Another deterrent to positive child outcomes is childhood anxiety rooted in the emotional context of approaches to learning. Mian, Esenhower, & Carter (2015) investigated factors related to parent engagement in a prevention-focused information session on childhood anxiety within a high-risk, diverse, urban community. The specifics to be a parent participant in the study included having a child aged 11 months to 71 months, be of poverty, ethnic minority, a Women, Infant, and Child (WIC) recipient, at least 18 years old, and be able to complete the screener in person or on line in English or Spanish. The two strategy experimental design had 256 parents participate. One strategy was enhanced recruitment (ER) for parent involvement and the other strategy was recruitment-as-usual (RAU). The parent participants were randomly chosen for the two strategies and the process ensued. The ER strategy proved to be more successful in parents planning to attend sessions. The Brief Infant-Toddler Social and Emotional Assessment (BITSEA) was used to measure social-emotional/behavioral problems and competencies in 12 - 48 month old children. This research found "children facing higher sociodemographic adversity – including lower parent education, English proficiency, and income, as well as having a foreign-born parent – had higher anxiety" (p. 66). When parent engagement was initialized and successful, the anxiety decreased. (Mian, et al. 2015).

Black (2014) used two qualitative research strategies, phenomenological case study and grounded theory to study 15 parents and three center directors from three licensed preschool settings serving three- to five-year old children. Black asked what the early care and education programs are currently doing to ensure parents are effectively involved, engaged, and heard in various ways with the possibility of comparing what

parents indicate about their experience to what Center Directors of the early care and education program indicate is occurring. The multiple case studies included in-depth interviews, a focus group, and reflection pages, provided for optional use by parent participants, Center Directors, and the researcher. The grounded theory included reviewing and using multiple stages of data (interviews, focus group, and reflection pages) collection and the organization of the data into relevant categories. The interviews and focus groups provided parents' voices, stories, and lived experiences. The reflection pages were utilized by the Center Directors in order to provide additional perspectives. Black found that parent voices might be better included when the process of including parents begins with developing the parent/teacher rapport and relationship at the beginning rather than when a problem needs to be discussed. The themes that develop from this opportunity to discuss behavioral issues provide a beginning on a pathway for parents to be partners and experts in their child's learning through family engagement (Black, 2014).

Kuo (2016) used early literacy, family involvement, access to books, expanded learning, and mentoring partnerships to examine how these elements influence preservice teachers' knowledge of and practices in family literacy. Ten teachers enrolled in a major of special education focused on increasing family literacy completed the same course assignments, including 30 hours of fieldwork at a non-profit literacy center where free 1:1 tutoring was provided to low-income students during the summer months. Kuo identified open coding categories and used emerging themes from the participants' responses to discuss the impact of the five pillars of FACE on their practices and knowledge of family theory. Kuo's study identified an increase in children's literacy

outcomes, but more importantly the participants began to think about how mentoring partnerships (family engagement) could serve the whole child academically, behaviorally, emotionally, and socially. As the participants worked at the literacy center, they strived to involve parents or guardians by offering them differentiated family support (mentoring partnerships) which they had learned from their text (Kuo, 2016).

Reviewing the questions asked in Chapter 1 the following sections will break down each question and identify answers from the literature. First, addressing the variables that impact the type or degree of family engagement in preschool. Demographics (location of the family) plays a role in the level of family engagement but has an underlying determinant of the family being located in a metropolitan or rural area. The socio-economic status of the family has the greatest impact on the level of engagement the family exhibits (Keys, 2015). The family unit is an important variable for those who are trying to engage the family, but to the family it is their norm. The variations on the family unit need to be recognized and accepted by others. Yes, the type of family unit has an impact, but there is greater impact to the outsiders looking to engage the family. Culture is similar to the family unit. The family's culture is their norm and needs to be learned and understood by those wishing to engage with the family. Creating a positive relationship as a foundation with families to increase engagement, begins with an understanding of the family's culture. As studies were read and analyzed, it became obvious that the SES of a family had the largest and most powerful impact of whether a family could muster the resources and energy to be engaged in the child's preschool program.

Focusing on family engagement occurrences and the location we review several studies to examine what the research indicated. School, home, and community offer a place for family engagement. The intentional family engagement at home will provide the strongest case for continued learning and readiness for school. Communities offer opportunities for family engagement but those opportunities may require a fee that families with low SES cannot afford. Schools are reviewing the importance of quality family engagement, how to provide these opportunities, and the impact this plays on child outcomes. The degree of family engagement is dependent on relationship building with a goal of family-teacher and school partnership. The acceptance and positive social and emotional level of the family will directly impact the degree of family engagement.

In Review of family engagement and the impact on learning outcomes, research shows family engagement supports positive outcome gains for the whole child academically, behaviorally, emotionally, and socially (Kuo, 2016). Children start their learning journey at home, perfecting skills, knowledge, and attitudes which are strongly and positively linked with competence in motivation, attention, persistence, and attitudes toward learning (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2012). The family engagement, frequent or not, has an impact on literacy outcomes and approaches to learning outcomes for the child.

Chapter III

Conclusions and Recommendations

I became aware early on in my teaching career, some twenty plus years ago, that if I was going to provide learning opportunities for a child in my preschool class, I had to understand the context of that individual child. In order for me to understand the context of the child, I needed to have an understanding of the child's family. This revelation has become broader to include not only providing individual learning opportunities but providing support for the parent-child relationship, parent-school relationship, and family-community relationship and having an understanding of those relationships. Family engagement, which encompasses all of these relationships and much more, plays an interwoven part throughout the child and family's journey for school readiness. Family engagement is broad and I only have touched on pieces of the concept in this paper. I have brought to light some evidence of the importance of family engagement and its many facets supporting positive outcomes for children and families.

In this final chapter, I will identify my thoughts and conclusions on family engagement, provide recommendations and suggest future research ideas, while relating possible educational policy and teacher practices that would support family engagement.

Variables

The variables on impact of family engagement reviewed were demographics, socio-economic status, family unit and culture. A generalization, after completing this research, was that studies seem to be focused a majority of time where there are pockets of people in hopes to increase participation in the study and not necessarily a driving

quest as part of the research. In doing so, research doesn't always present a wide-range of results for different demographic areas. As I furthered my understanding of these variables, the one that rose to have the highest level of impact was socio-economic status (SES). The SES had a direct bearing on the demographics (living location) for the family and was the step that led to other family demise such as drugs, divorce, abuse, low maternal education, and poor physical health. Interestingly, the research studied on the impact of socio-economic status all had to do with families with low socio-economic status. No research read implied that families with a middle or higher socio-economic status would have an impact on family engagement. The family's low socio-economic status has a domino effect on the family's well-being. It begs the question, is there enough money or resources to meet our needs? Words that may fill in the need might be; feed the children, clothe the children, buy medicine, put gas in the car to get to work, pay rent, get winter boots, and the list goes on. When there is not enough money, it starts to take a mental toll on the adults and children in the family, which snow balls into many dangerous scenarios such as drugs, abuse, and suicide. The family's well-being took a much higher priority than family engagement. If the family's basic needs were not being met, their concern was focused on getting those needs met rather than participating in any family engagement activity. The family's basic needs were more important overall. Interestingly, those SES families who did attempt family engagement were provided with numerous opportunities to try to deter the negative effects of SES such as low maternal education or poor physical health. Therein lies the need for strategic and thoughtful family engagement opportunities to support SES families in their quest for family well-being and self-sufficiency which are available through community, state, and federal

entities. Further study on programmatic family well-being impacts on family engagement and a review of the impact family engagement has on child outcomes would be interesting. This review might show what kinds of family engagement worked more positively with low SES families. Family engagement can be particularly important for children whose home culture differs from the largely middle-class, white, English-speaking culture of the school system, such as low-income and minority students (Smith, 2014). Barriers such as transportation costs and parent's working hours need to be considered in planning successful family engagement activities which will make attending easier for families. Personally, I am curious to see what long term impacts *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015* (ESSA) and its mandate to engage parents and families in the work of ensuring positive outcomes for all students will have on the level, degree, and type of family engagement.

The structure of the family unit varies widely across the country. The reasons for the actual structure may be due to many circumstances, such as divorce, death, disability, or preference. The point to take from the structure of the family unit is that any design is a family. A feeling of belonging to a family is critical to every child and family's well-being. Early childhood programs everywhere need to be able to be sensitive to the fact that there are all types of families and one type of family structure is no better than the other. Multigenerational families and grandparent lead families often are in need of help (Franklin, 1999) and a strong family engagement program will provide the needed support. It takes courage to be self-reflective and understand any bias's that may exist and address these issues. The drive to form relationships with families should be true and those relationships will support the children in reaching their potential in all areas of

development. When partnering with families, positive early childhood outcomes will emerge. The family unit impacts family engagement and needs to be part of the information learned by the teacher working with the child. Educational programs and teachers cannot silo their work with the child. Engaging the family sets the foundation for the child's positive learning outcomes and efforts to engage must be open and accepting to be successful. Topics such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) families in preschools may not be comfortable for some educators (Burt, Gelnaw, & Lesser, 2010). As a preschool teacher, learning about LGBT families in your preschool will give you knowledge and with knowledge comes confidence. More and more same-sex couples marry which gives us the opportunity to consider new research questions that can contribute to our understanding of how marriage and parental relationships affect child wellbeing (Gates, 2015) and family engagement. Confidence will support the action to participate in two-way communication with any parent concerning their child. Confidence in communication will model for other teachers and parents how to acknowledge and accept all families and their children. The research base on LGBT families is growing and more specifically the impact of engagement of LGBT families during preschool. In my opinion, educational program policies are attempting to remain general and steer clear when it comes to defining the family unit. I believe it is necessary to be all encompassing and accepting as more grandparents and extended family become parental figures for children due to circumstance and situation. The family unit carries pride and upholds the family culture. As stated earlier, culture includes race, religion, language, tradition, expression, identity and heritage. Culture impacts the family's participation in their young child's education at home and at

preschool which in turn impacts their participation in family engagement. It has been stated the parents are a child's first and most important teacher. If this is true, then education begins as soon as the child is born and continues day after day at home until the child transitions to another childcare or educational setting. The education at home tends to be directly influenced by the family's culture. Culture is rooted deep in tradition, customs, and ethnicity and can have a large impact on many variables, including the family unit. Culture is the basis for the reasons why the family interacts the way they do, why the family speaks the way they do, and why they dress the way they do. It is the reason that grandma and auntie live with the family. It is the reason the wage earner sends 50% of the weekly income to another country. Culture is the reason for celebrating or not celebrating holidays or birthdays. Culture effect parent-child learning interactions and opportunities at home, which in turn effect the child's school readiness and the level of family engagement in school. If a relationship is built the family will share their culture and what a great learning opportunity that would be for all.

Type

One conclusion I made about the type of family engagement is that the type of family engagement is as unique as the family involved. The successful program will attempt to engage as many families as possible, yet individualize for each family's engagement. The place where the engagement initiates has a bearing on the type of engagement and the promise for success. I looked at the home, school, and community as places where the engagement may take place. If parent-child engagement is strong at home before starting preschool, the possibility of family engagement at preschool is more likely (Hindman et al., 2012). In these cases, the parent understands being the child's

first and most important educator and wants that to continue during their formal education opportunities growing up. It is possible that before the child comes to preschool, the parent has taken advantage of activities within the community to support family engagement. It is also possible that some of these activities could be co-sponsored by the school and community. In any case, participation lends itself to a greater possibility of family engagement as the child grows (Hindman et al., 2012). I would offer the recommendation that schools and communities pool resources to stretch the dollar further where family engagement activities are concerned. Family engagement activities not only encourage participation and learning, but also help develop relationships between families which can provide a much needed support network when trying to raise a family. This recommendation also increases the number of opportunities of family engagement, which in turn would hopefully reach more families. There are however, some strategies presented through research which I agree with that are common threads among successful diverse family engagement programs. Those practices are:

- focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community;

- recognize, respect, and address families' needs, as well as class and cultural differences; and

- embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared, (Naughton, 2004, p. 5).

The community environment offers many opportunities outside the family home for family engagement. Some of these family engagement opportunities may include: the library, church functions, park and recreation areas, sporting events, museums and

community celebratory functions. All of these opportunities offer parents the time to engage with their children in practicing social, literacy, math, and interaction skills outside the home in the wider world. It offers the opportunity for parents to make connections with other parents and children to interact with peers. These connections may lead to supportive relationships as children grow and learn.

Degree

The degree or frequency of participation in family engagement is not always a telling factor, but the quality of the family engagement activity is a factor (Naughton, 2004) and if the families are enthusiastic about the activity, they will spread the word and attendance will increase as will the positive impact of the engagement on their child's learning (Baker et al., 2016). "Experts suggest offering a continuum of opportunities for families to become involved with the program......and many family engagement efforts require ongoing and frequent interaction, but the quality of family engagement activities can be more important than quantity" (Naughton, 2004, p. 5). Teachers know it takes time to prepare and participate in family engagement, but I would argue that it is time well spent when a child's success is apparent and there is follow through and support at home. The education environment at preschool will benefit. I would recommend that if parent engagement is not a priority at your program, maybe it should be soon. If a family is comfortable and consistent in participating in community opportunities for engagement, a sense of confidence is felt and the family will be more willing to engage with the school environment. However, if the family tries to participate in the community and is unsuccessful, a feeling of isolation may occur and the family will not be as willing to participate in the school environment. When a program initiates a family

engagement practice, the initial goal has to be to prepare a welcoming environment for the family.

Child Outcomes

Language and literacy skills established during early childhood are critical for later school success and those same language and literacy skills may be affected by the parent's lack of education, parent's low-income status, parent's health problems, and parents having English as a second language which in turn hinder the parent's engagement. Family engagement not only offers the opportunity for the family unit to participate, it also includes the interactions and provision of experiences that nurture children's education (Sheridan et al., 2011). I narrowed my view of family engagement's impact on child outcomes to literacy and approaches to learning, to make the research more manageable. There is an expanse of data that has been gathered with regards to other domains in children's learning besides literacy and approaches to learning. The point to take from this research is the fact that family engagement does not have a negative effect on any area of learning for a child, only positive. The more the family unit participates in family engagement the higher level of achievement for the child (Wen et al., 2012). Concerning literacy, future research may focus on languages other than Spanish, to determine if they have an impact on promoting literacy for a child. Currently, Spanish is the most rapidly growing second language in this country, and has been the most researched language with impact on early childhood literacy.

Children's approaches to learning begins in the home and is influenced by parent's skills, knowledge, and attitudes. These early approaches to learning play a part in the child's motivation, attention, self-regulation and persistence (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2012). Parents often seek a quick fix to behavior problems to apply to the child, however it is usually a parent action that needs to be changed for the behavior problem to disintegrate. These behavior problems are often the entity that opens the door for parent engagement. The school reaches out to the parents because the child is exhibiting negative behavior. It is not advantageous that the opportunity for parent engagement has a negative connotation. Once again, if the parent's engagement is purposeful, the child's outcomes in approaches to learning will rise. The child will experience success and school readiness. School readiness is more than knowing your address, phone number, and how to tie your shoes, school readiness is children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life (OHS, 2015). School readiness is a shared responsibility among school, programs, and families. When programs, school staff, and families are engaged as partners, they commit to working together on children's behalf. I would recommend family engagement activities to promote parents understanding of school readiness and be a part of the decision making and learning process. Family engagement should begin in early childhood and continue through K – 12th grades.

"With 32 million children in the United States living in poverty or low-income homes, it's imperative that we come together and build on what works to promote parent engagement, reduce the income-based achievement gap, and give all children the

opportunity for school readiness" (RJW Foundation, 2017 p.2). The majority of

successful students have an engaged family behind them.

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