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**USING FAMILIES' FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE LITERACY TO ENHANCE
FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS**

by
Kaitlyn Greenwood

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy & Sociocultural Education
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Reading Education
at
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February 29, 2020

Thesis Chair: Dr. Valarie Lee Ph.D.

Dedications

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Harry and Diane, and my brother, Brandon, whose love and support helped me achieve more than I thought possible. Thank you for always believing in me, encouraging me to shoot for the stars, and helping me reach my full potential.

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Abstract

Kaitlyn Greenwood
USING FAMILIES' FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE LITERACY TO ENHANCE
FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

2020

Dr. Valarie Lee Ph.D.
Master of Arts in Reading Education

This paper presents the initial findings from an ethnographic case study, in a small South Jersey town. Using a socio-cultural framework and drawing from Moll and Gonzalez's funds of knowledge study, the specific aim of the study was to investigate literacy practices students bring to the classroom, families' views of home to school connection, educators' impression of the family school partnership, and the role of student's funds of knowledge in the classroom. Three second grade families participated in home visits which involved in-depth interviews detailing family literacies including culture, traditions, family background, early literacy practices, and value of education. To understand the school's perspective, the elementary principal and two second grade teachers were interviewed about culturally relevant pedagogy, parent-school connection, and their knowledge of the families. Results revealed missed opportunities to connect to students' funds of knowledge while teaching due to time, curriculum, and background knowledge of students. Results from home visits revealed that while daily routines differed, the participating families valued education, family time, kindness, and hard work. Parents indicated that while pleased with the school, they present examples of missed opportunities for parent involvement. Results are discussed in terms of implications for integrating families' funds of knowledge into the curriculum to allow for more inclusion and engagement.

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Chapter 1

Vignette

“The purpose of life is to contribute in some way to making things better” -Robert F. Kennedy

Introduction

I’ve always known I wanted to be a teacher. Since my first day in kindergarten, I have been a teacher in training. My younger brother, Brandon, was the best student I could have asked for. He would play along with my make-shift classroom in our basement; the mini chalkboard, handmade posters, and the “classroom” full of American Girl Dolls allowed me to practice all of the responsibilities I assumed teachers had. I would give and grade tests, assign homework, let the kids go to gym class, and even make charts for good behavior. As I advanced in my educational journey, I still paid close attention to the responsibilities of teachers. I spent my free time babysitting and even took the Preschool Child Development class in high school for all four years. I wanted to soak in as much knowledge as possible about children because I felt like teaching was my calling.

I attended Rowan University for undergrad and gained valuable knowledge through my coursework, extra curriculars, and field placements. I was blessed to have been hired in the school I did my student teaching, which allowed me to begin my career right out of college. I came into teaching very positive, but quickly learned that there was more to teaching than Pinterest activities and cute door decorations. The roles and responsibilities of a teacher I rehearsed as a child seemed to multiply in real life. Teachers wear many hats: I am now a coach, a mediator, a counselor, a nurse, a detective,

an actress, a coordinator, and so much more. While the roles and responsibilities for teachers are much more than most people can imagine, I truly value the role I play in my students' lives. They view me as a role model and I have made it my goal to allow all of my students to feel recognized, appreciated, and celebrated for their unique characteristics through my teaching practice, attitude, and instruction.

Story of the Question

“The parents just don't care!” Gathered around a circular student table, six first grade teachers share their frustrations during a PLC meeting. “They aren't going to start helping their kids and we can only do so much.” The negativity floats through the air as more people chime in about parent involvement. “Well, the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree,” another teacher announces. The frustration stems from about one third of our students being below grade level expectations. There are many students who do not do their homework, refuse to participate in class, or divert from their work due to their emotions. While various factors lead to student disengagement, the teachers make it personal by making assumptions about the parents and their children. These comments reveal only knowing parents at surface level. The teachers seem to believe that the disconnect is coming from home. I hear things about the way parents dress picking up their children, what the backpack smells like, how the children are dressed, the language used in the home, and the lack of involvement. I am wondering how people who work with children can display such small amounts of compassion when speaking about the families in town. It is observed that the students in these teachers' classes look up to their teachers, while some teachers look down on their families.

I am sitting back biting my tongue because for the first time, I have a group of parents who are all actively involved in raising their young scholars. These parents communicate with me regularly, check their child's folder every night, and ask questions about the homework. Their child reads every night and they track the progress of their success. This group of parents thank me when I call about a problem their child had in school, as opposed to blaming and questioning me. This group of parents send me pictures of family fun and sporting events, so their child can share with the class. These parents ask me for advice and strategies so they can do more with their child. These parents inspired me to learn more about family-school relationships.

After hearing all of the teacher's opinions of the parents in our district, I was determined to prove them wrong. My students worked tediously to complete their first research writing assignment about animals. They were required to use a selected non-fiction text to write about the various topics: what the animal looks like, where it lives, what it eats, what it is like as a baby, and some interesting facts. The first graders were then asked to illustrate pictures specific to each topic of their research. After about a month of work, the students were ready to share their writing masterpieces. I wanted to celebrate their achievements and give them the opportunity to showcase their hard work to their family members, so I invited the parents in for a publishing party. Every parent in my classroom sent in their RSVP and all parents except two attended. It is noted both parents responded they wanted to attend but could not miss work on that specific day.

On the day of our celebration, I prepared snacks in the shape of different animals and arranged the classroom to feel like a movie theatre. The students created clues to introduce their animals and the parents guessed what mammal they wrote about. To

display their work, the students created a video of them reading to demonstrate how technologically forward they were. The parents and students genuinely enjoyed the afternoon sharing snacks and listening to videos of the students reading their published work. The students applauded one another on their fluency, illustrations, and hard work. I sent the videos of the students reading to all parents, including the two that couldn't attend. Parents thanked me many times, saying they truly enjoyed themselves in the classroom and appreciated the keepsake of their child's completed work.

As a teacher, I was proud to see my students' faces light up with excitement over their loved ones witnessing their completed project. Because of one afternoon, I was able to connect student interests, academics, and family engagement. "Three basic levels of influence in students' academic lives include the family, the school, and the community" (Delgado-Gaitan, 2007, p. 28). This experience led me to believe that parents want to be there, they want to be included, however, they need to be given the opportunity to do so.

Statement of the Problem

Many teachers seem to assume that parents do not care or are too busy to play a role in the academic lives of their children. Those who pass judgment forget to look at the bigger picture: Maybe this parent is not coming to Back to School Night because they have more than one job. Perhaps the homework is done in crayon because they do not own a pencil sharpener. The student could be tired because they stayed up late reconnecting with a relative they haven't seen in a while or taking care of younger siblings. "Regardless of culture, educational attainment, and socioeconomic standing, all families have strengths" (Delgado-Gaitan, 2007, p. 20). No matter the circumstances, teachers need to think about how they can use the information they know about their

students to further engage them in the classroom. “Home-school relations are formed to a large extent by the premises outlined by schools and teachers. The parents (and children) try hard to comply with what is expected of them, and to maintain good relations with the school personnel” (Bergnehr, 2015, p. 172). Teachers need to take the initiative to get to know their students and their families before making assumptions and adjust their expectations to accommodate the individual student. Once the educator knows personal information about the student, they can use that to benefit their instruction. “Not only are basic cultural values and beliefs learned in the family, but also daily practices speak louder than words” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2007, p. 28). Every family has their own routine, life mottos, cultural background, and goals for their future that impact their academic and social decisions.

The goal of my research is to change the dialogue teachers have about student’s home lives because they value the unique structure of each family. “Cairney and Munsie directly challenged myths held by educators about parents in ways which exposed deficit thinking, class and cultural stereotypes, and privileging of teacher knowledge and judgement over knowledge that resides in parents and families” (Pushor, 2012, p. 467). By immersing myself into the homes of my students, I will be able to see first-hand how parents communicate, organize, and simply exist in daily routines. “To better understand the influence of family literacy, more research is needed on home literacy practices to maximize the literary experiences of all children and to strengthen the home and school literacy connections” (Curry, 2016, p. 69). Through understanding the families, I will gain knowledge of the students’ cultures, interests, family histories, etc., which will strengthen my instruction as a teacher. “It is common to hear educators speak

of the number or percentage of parents who attend school meetings and activities as the primary indicator of the level to which parents in their school community are engaged in their children's learning" (Pushor, 2012, p. 471). Teachers need to realize that there are various ways that parents play a role in their children's academic lives.

Statement of the Research Question

The purpose of this research is to study the significance and implementation of literacy in diverse homes to challenge assumptions of the school demographic. Specifically, this study will investigate how teachers can use funds of knowledge to enhance parent engagement. What are the funds of knowledge and literate practices students bring to the classroom? How do families view the family/school partnership? What are their views of the home to school connection? What is the role of a student's funds of knowledge in the classroom/school? How do educators view the family/school partnership? I will also be focusing on literacy values and the opinion of home to school connection. What are their values, beliefs, and literacy practices? What are their views of the home to school connection?

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter two provides a review of the literature further defining family literacy, the relationship between school and home, funds of knowledge, and the expectations of a home-school partnership. Chapter three describes the design and context of the study, including descriptions of the three participating families. Chapter four reviews and analyzes the data and research findings in the home. Chapter five assesses the school environment through classroom observations and interviews with school

personnel. Chapter six provides conclusions and implications for further family-school connection research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

“Literacy is a part of the very fabric of family life” (Taylor, 1997, p. 87).

Introduction

Children are surrounded by literacy in many facets of everyday life, yet many believe literacy instruction only takes place in schools. Educators have become increasingly aware that literacy is not a term that strictly applies to school. Learning to read and write is contributed to various interactions that arise through daily tasks. “All families, regardless of their level of formal education, are involved in literacy practices on a daily basis” (Keis, 2006, p. 16). Family members each have their own contribution to their child’s literacy development, which is why it is imperative that teachers recognize their funds of knowledge (Moll and Gonzalez, 1992). By working as a cohesive unit, homes and schools can build on a child’s schema to enhance their learning. The inclusion of parents affords them the opportunity to build parent-school relationships/partnerships; these terms will be used interchangeably throughout this manuscript. “In this non protectorate story of school, it is possible to imagine a landscape on which educators and parents are positioned, as they lay their knowledge alongside one another in the schooling and education of children to support and enhance learning outcomes and to strengthen parents, families, schools, and communities” (Pushor, 2012, p. 477).

Defining Family Literacy

Family literacy plays an active role in contributing to each child’s success in school. According to Keis (2006), “The term *family literacy* describes the role that

literacy plays in family, home, and community life” (p. 16). Keis goes on to state, “It is a continuation of an age-old practice that has existed in all cultures since the beginning of humankind and has played a critical role in passing on traditions and values” (p. 16). By understanding the ideology that family literacy has been around for centuries, we are better able to recognize the importance of incorporating family culture into the modern curriculum. Family literacy pertains to all families. Parents can engage in their children’s education regardless of socioeconomic level, family dynamic, or parental education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2007). Because there are no specific guidelines, family literacy looks different in every home. Although no single model exists, effective programs have certain fundamental premises in common: (1) commitment, (2) communication, (3) continuity, and (4) collaboration (Delgado-Gaitan, 2007, p. 29). Delgado-Gaitan’s research provides valuable characteristics of family literacy that have been found in various homes. Keis (2006) examined critical pedagogy practiced in the Libros y Familias Program, which was created as a literacy program for Spanish-speaking families. He maintains that “the concept of family literacy is especially important in working with culturally diverse populations whose forms of literacy and ‘funds of knowledge’ are often ignored by traditional schooling” (p. 17). When a family commits to their child’s education, they have open communication with the school, they are consistent with their practice, and they plan to work as a team; as a result, true progress can be seen. Referencing Epstein’s work, Pushor (2012) maintains, “Research shows that parents’ engagement in their children’s’ education positively affects students’ achievement” (p. 476). The key to family literacy and a connection to school is recognizing that the parents have valuable knowledge to share. “Acknowledging that

parents are constructors and holders of knowledge regarding their children, teaching, and learning is another piece in shifting parents' positioning on the landscape of schools, from the margins to the center, alongside teachers" (Marsh, 2010, p. 7). Once teachers understand the family, they will be able to understand the student's role in the classroom, the community, and their academic future. According to Taylor (1997) "no single, narrow definition of 'family literacy' could do justice to the richness and complexity of families or the multiple and often unrecognized local literacies, that are a part of their everyday lives" (p. 4). Taylor recognizes the naturally occurring literacy practices in the home which include each family member. Compton-Lilly (2019) believes educators must broaden their expectations of literacy, transform educational spaces, and be aware of specific familial strengths. By being receptive to families and honoring their contributions, teachers can build on naturally occurring strengths and apply each family's home literacies to their instruction.

Socio-Cultural Framework

Socio-cultural learning theory relies on social interactions and experiences, involving context and setting, to understand human thinking in conjunction with society, culture, and individuals. (Hogg, 2012; Woolfolk, 1999). The socio-cultural perspective has roots in the work of various theorists such as John Dewey (1922) who focused on human nature and conduct: "All conduct is interaction between elements of human nature and the environment, natural and social" (p. 11). Dewey's efforts to help schools adjust to a multitude of learners instead of reshaping the child inspired other theorists to research the inter-makings of each child. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) created various layers of influence relating to Russian nesting dolls considering the

influence of home/classroom, home and school life, and the child's parents' work situations. He details the effects of the three spheres that influence human development to highlight the idea of being a product of one's environment. Bronfenbrenner proposes that in order to understand a child, one must study the relationship of a family and their characteristics. Socio-Cultural theory also references the social order of learning. Au (1997) comments, "Socio-cultural research on school literacy learning attempts to explore the links among historical conditions, current social and institutional contexts, inter-psychological functioning [that which takes place between people], and intra-psychological functioning [that which takes place within the individual]" (p. 182). Au encourages individuals to not only read, but to take the information learned and apply it to social interactions. Genishi (2001) extends this conceptual framework to the work of preservice students, providing a critical lens to "to question the patterns of knowledge and social conditions that maintain unequal social divisions (e.g. class, race, gender, sexuality), with an aim of orienting individuals toward actions that will lead to social change" (p. 1197). This concept connects to Vygotsky's theory of Social Constructivism (1978), the belief that children learn through social interactions including social, cultural, historical by nature, and dialectical relationships. He strongly believed that community played a role in "making meaning." Hogg (2012) applies Vygotsky's theory to build on the conceptual framework for funds of knowledge, "Thus, understanding a household's FoK (funds of knowledge) provides insight into the Household's zone of proximal development, which can be applied to support learning at school" (p. 54).

Defining Funds of Knowledge

Sociologists, Moll and Gonzalez, (1992) collaborated on an ethnographic study which focused on the household and classroom practices within a working-class Mexican community. “The primary purpose of this work is to develop innovations in teaching that draw upon the knowledge and skills found in local households” (p. 132). They coined the phrase funds of knowledge (FoK) to reference the various cultural and social backgrounds which contribute to the understanding of what makes a family unparalleled. “We use the term ‘funds of knowledge’ to refer to these historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). Funds of knowledge is further described as, “It is specific funds of knowledge pertaining to the social, economic, and productive activities of people in a local region, not ‘culture’ in its broader, anthropological sense, that we seek to incorporate strategically into classrooms” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 139). Moll and Gonzalez concentrate on what makes certain communities develop their own unique culture due to location, social status, discourse, interactions, literacy skills. Lave and Wenger (1991) expand on funds of knowledge by describing communities of practice (CoPs) such as those that operate in every subject discipline, and in diverse fields of human activity. Specific funds of knowledge are reflected in communities of practice, because of similar ways of talking, thinking, interacting, reading, and writing. Funds of knowledge attends to the characteristics of the household, but also the community. “We are particularly interested in how families develop social networks that interconnect them with their social environments (most importantly with other households), and how these social relationships facilitate the

development and exchange of resources, including knowledge, skills, and labor, that enhance the household's ability to survive or thrive" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133). Through established relationships and trust, families are more willing to display reciprocity. As Velez-Ibanez (1998) has observed, reciprocity represents an 'attempt to establish a social relationship on an enduring basis. Whether symmetrical or asymmetrical, the exchange expresses and symbolizes human social interdependence" (p. 142). Velez-Ibanez maintains that exchanging information for mutual benefit of the student is important for home-school relationships. Weiss (1998) builds on the importance of establishing a family-school connection: "Substantial research points to the potential benefit of family involvement in education on children's development and academic performance" (p.2)

Moll and Gonzalez shared this research in hopes that educators would understand the importance of knowing students on a personal level and applying that information to classroom instruction. Taylor (1983) comments that literacy histories inform the school how to develop curriculum to build on the knowledge that the families already have. "Undoubtedly, each child brings a new dimension to the transmission of literacy style and values within the family" (p. 23). In order to create engaging, impactful lessons, teachers need to connect students' lives to daily instruction to build on students' schema. Teachers must be willing to take the extra step to see their students as individuals in order to improve their teaching. "This points to something else all of us teachers participating in the original funds of knowledge project had in common—the desire to improve our teaching practice and a willingness to step out of our comfort zones to achieve that end" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 8). As teachers step out of their comfort zone, to explore the

funds of knowledge of their students, they will allow the family-school relationship to flourish.

Expectations of Family-School Relationships

There is no specific model for what home and school relationships should look like; however, they can be treated no differently than a relationship with family or friends. “The relationships in our personal and professional lives that are rich and meaningful to us are relationships in which there is a sense of mutuality and reciprocity in a multitude of ways- we both talk and listen, give and receive, teach and learn, lead and follow” (Marsh, 2010, p. 12). While it is recommended to treat home-school relationships as a personal relationship, it takes a lot of work to make it work for both parties involved. “Crafting and sustaining these partnerships, however, involves much rethinking of traditional relationships and effective response to factors that have frustrated past efforts of schools to gain partners” (Heath, 1994, p. 296). When teachers and parents/guardians work as a cohesive unit, they are able to accomplish so much more. “Parent engagement enables us to acknowledge the part that parents play in their child’s educational landscape, as well as attending to the part they play in their child’s schooling on the landscape” (Marsh, 2010, p. 9). Unfortunately, not all educators push to have the communication and reciprocity that it takes to enhance the relationship with home and school; some teachers limit their interactions with parents to back to school night, parent-teacher conferences, and through email or other forms of communication. “General characteristics of the home-school relation includes yearly parent meetings, one to two home-school conferences each term, a couple of parent council meeting every year, school letters, phone calls and additional home-school conferences regarding children

with learning difficulties or children who have behaved inappropriately” (Bergnehr, 2015, p. 173). The relation between home and school is traditionally kept as business only. The teacher shares what they see in the classroom and what the child can do at home to improve. “With parent involvement, the focus is placed on what parents can do to help the school realize its intended outcomes for children, not on what the parents’ hopes, dreams, or intentions for their children may be or on what the school can do to help parents realize their personal or family agendas” (Pushor, 2012, p. 467). Educators need to make time to hear what the parents want for their child.

While many view the school designated meeting times valuable, informal meetings prove to be less pressured and equally beneficial. In a study to understand family-school connections, Weiss engaged in ethnographic studies involving teachers, school personnel, students, and caretakers. “Teachers reported engaging in informal meetings at the beginning or end of the school day at least monthly with about half (52%) of the study families, and at least weekly with about a third (37%) of the families” (Weiss, 1998, p.7). While these meetings are completely teacher dependent, it allows them to speak to parents about pressing matters, so they can best adapt to changes in the classroom. “The frequency of informal communications between families and teachers suggests that it is a phenomenon worth exploring further to identify important dimensions that might improve child outcomes” (Weiss, 1998, p. 7). Without the feeling of a formal meeting, parents are more willing to share. Teachers will present information that is true and appropriate for parents. “The work also suggests that families and schools must learn to talk openly about the multiple contexts of children’s lives, including their experiences of race and racism, if they are to understand and increase children’s opportunities for

success” (Weiss, 1998, p. 10). Weiss’s study identified the schools’ attempts to address behavior problems as well as the complexity wrapped around race, racism, informal communication between the home and school. Teachers must ask themselves what they hope to get out of those limited interactions with parents. Are they able to learn about the families? Do they have a conversation with the parents or just share their one-sided opinion of the school system? How can they take these relationships to the next level and why is it important to do so?

Many schools view parental involvement in terms of room parents, volunteering to sell snacks at sporting events, who attends school events and concerts, etc., however it is so much more than that. “When educators engage parents in schools, they ensure that there are reciprocal benefits for parents and families through their engagement, both within and outside of the boundaries of the school’s agenda” (Marsh, 2010, p. 9). Parents should feel as though they are on the educational journey with their child. “Effective schools design parent involvement activities that provide various levels of involvement” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2007, p. 28). Giving parents the ability and freedom to elaborate on their child’s strengths, upbringing, and hopes and dreams, the parents feel a sense of power. When parents feel as though they are a part of something, it is easier for them to trust in the school system. “Teachers and staff members are no longer strangers expecting parents’ trust but are invested individuals who are positioned to earn that trust” (Marsh, 2010, p.13). When the relationship between home and school is strong, it is understood that they are working together for the common good of the child. Wolfendale (1992) analyzed the increase of parental involvement in education and their overall contribution to school processes. Her book, *Empowering Parents and Teachers:*

Working for Children, provides several key principles: rights [parents; fundamental right to be a participant in some educational decision making], equality [parents as partners], reciprocity [that all involved gain from their interconnections on behalf of children], and empowerment [parents, too, should learn and grow from their encounters with the school and with educators] (p. 2-3). By integrating rights, equality, reciprocity, and empowerment into daily actions of educators, the parents begin to understand that the teachers are going beyond their job requirements.

Reciprocity between parents and teachers builds the parent-school relationship to ultimately benefit the children. “When educators see their teacher knowledge and expertise as a complement to parent knowledge and as support in the parents’ lifelong work to realize their hopes and dreams for and with their children, it is then that the structure of schooling shifts to one of relationships, shared authority, and mutually determined and mutually beneficial outcomes” (Pushor, 2012, p. 472). The teacher, school, and parents begin to become a team. “When educators engage parents in schools, they ensure that there are reciprocal benefits for parents and families through their engagement, both within and outside of the boundaries of the school’s agenda” (Marsh, 2010, p. 9). The teacher is able to help the student succeed due to the relationship they have built with the parents which far exceeds the expectations of learning objectives and standards.

Potential Hindrances of Family-School Partnership

May it be past experience, language barriers, or limited education, there are various factors that contribute to parents shying away from being a part of the school community. Often times teachers view themselves as the all-knowing, without hearing

information from a parent perspective. “Educators are positioned as holders of knowledge: of curriculum and programming; of school policies, procedures, and practices; of appropriate expectations. Parents are positioned as recipients of this knowledge, which implies they are unknowing, or less knowing, than educators” (Marsh, 2010, p. 6). It needs to be recognized that learning does not only happen in a classroom environment. Although experiences differ, learning is for everyone despite language, culture, and financial upbringing. “Children’s learning is largely accomplished through out-of-school activities (e.g. sports, music lessons, literacy training, homework, etc.), but this learning is facilitated or hindered by the social economic and material resources of the family” (Bergnehr, 2015, p. 173). Many factors impede the relationship of home and school, such as miscommunication, language barriers, low expectations, and socio-economic status. “During my teacher training, I was led to believe that low-income and minority students were more likely to experience failure in school because their home experiences had not provided them with the prerequisite skills for school success in the same way as the home experiences of middle- and upper-class students” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 7). Stereotypes often mislead educators in their practice, because of what they have heard, not what they have experienced. “Yet some groups, like the families in our program, have often been denied an equal opportunity to learn more simply because they are socially, educationally, or economically disadvantaged” (Keis, 2006, p. 16). This exemplifies deficit theory, which views students who differ from the norm, to be deficient. Paris (2012) acknowledges Jensen’s 1969 research, which “is an infamous example of deficit theory with the view that the home cultures and communities of poor students of color were bankrupt of any language and cultural practices of value in

school and society” (p. 93). The marginalized societies have a lot to offer due to their experiences and culture. “Looking at literacy through the narrow lens of the traditional educational establishment fails to recognize and honor the enormous wealth of knowledge that abounds within most culturally different families” (Keis, 2006, p.17).

With America becoming a more diverse nation, the number of English Language Learners in schools has increased over the years. Unfortunately, not everyone recognizes the true value bilingual students bring to the classroom. “Language and cultural practices that differ from the school’s, parents’ and children’ identity development, familial roles and structural differences in families are devalued and negated and resources of the community are underutilized” (Kroeger and Lash, 2011, p. 270). Other than neglecting culture, the school often omits the feelings of ELL parents. Miscommunication becomes apparent due to language barriers and the school disregarding the needs of individual families. “The report card was very difficult to read; the language used was technical, and the print was small” (Weiss, 1998, p. 4). Bergnehr (2015) clarifies, “School may have negative connotations for some parents, the newsletter appeared to attract mostly mothers, and non-English-speaking parents may be excluded from the information gleaned by reading the letters” (p. 173). If communication from the school is difficult to understand, the school is not doing their part to assist parents in playing an active role in their child’s education. “This finding suggests some level of disconnection between schools and parents of students with learning difficulties, which could be due to numerous factors such as misunderstanding, alienation, or insufficient communication” (Weiss, 1998, p. 5). Schools need to support families of all backgrounds. There are numerous families in the community who fear school because of their own experience.

“The majority of parents in our program have had very limited formal education in their home country. The literacy process can be a daunting encounter for them, and low self-esteem is an obstacle for many to overcome” (Keis, 2006, p. 14). Parents who were not fond of school need the relationship to help them support their child’s academic journey. In order to connect the home and school, ELL families must be recognized and featured in the school. “If we are to provide a truly meaningful and relevant education, we must recognize the talents and knowledge that exist in these families and make them an integral part of our curriculum” (Keis, 2006, p. 19). The value that each family brings into the classroom needs to be celebrated, not silenced.

Teachers also play a large role interfering with the home and school relationship. “Educators, as holders of expert knowledge of teaching and learning, enter a community, claim the ground which is labeled ‘school,’ and design and enact policies, procedures, programs, schedules, and routines for the children of the community” (Pushor, 2012, p. 464). For some it becomes a power struggle; it is their turf, so they want to be the ones making the rules. “In fact, the learning that takes place in the home and the community may even be undermined by the efforts of the school to make families ‘literate’ by its standards” (Keis, 2006, p. 17). Teachers need to be aware of how students can bring their own knowledge to the school through their experiences at home and in the community. “They speak to us about how children are often not viewed in the broader context of family and how educator’s attention to parents is often focused on their involvement in the mechanics of schooling rather than in their engagement of teaching and learning” (Marsh, 2010, p. 14). Teachers may stick to the script because of their lack of background and training on various home lives. “These research findings

suggest that these teachers lack the requisite background knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively teach children from socio-linguistically diverse backgrounds due to their limited cultural knowledge and exposure to issues of diversity” (Lin & Bates, 2010, p.179). With such limited resources from the school, it can be a challenge for some educators to understand how to relate to people who have different upbringings. In some cases, the school also limits the opportunities teachers have with parents. “The time allotted to supervisory teachers for communication and collaboration with parents is scarce, which causes teachers to prioritize families with children who risk school failure at the expense of general activities for the parent group” (Bergnehr, 2015, p. 173). For teachers who are not as familiar with the importance of building relationships with parents, they shy away from reaching out on their own terms. “It is the teachers who are vulnerable in the context of home-school relations, risking criticism from the parents” (Bergnehr, 2015, p. 177). Teachers also fear the idea of communication leads to confrontation, so sometimes it is easier to abstain, which punishes parents who seek a strong relationship with the school.

Because many parents enjoy being an active member of the school community, it then becomes the school’s responsibility to create worthwhile opportunities for the parents to feel a part of the school community. Pushor (2012) recounts her experience as a parent, “The activities I was asked to be involved in were valuable activities with good intentions, I continued to feel peripheral in relation to the life and purpose of the school. So often, in my experience as a parent, I felt like just another ‘warm body’” (p. 466). What most parents seek in the school community is a voice and a reason to be involved. “Parent involvement programs are presented as programs that ‘tend to be

directed by the school and attempt to involve parents in school activities and/or teach parents specific skills and strategies for teaching and reinforcing school tasks at home” (Pushor, 2012, p. 466). Schools need to remember that parents have a lot of valuable knowledge to offer. In a study of mixed method approaches to family-school communication, Weiss (1998) presented quantitative data to suggest that schools neglect to involve parents in important school developments. Parents are equally aware of strengths and weaknesses of their children, so giving them the opportunity to be a part of the school would give them a purpose to stay involved.

Once educators make the effort to include parents, they will have the opportunity to learn pertinent information about their students. This information will advance the teacher's attempts to individualize and highlight student's cultures and backgrounds. Spindler and Spindler (1983) express social justice issues and deficit theory, “the intense brutality of a system that does not really seem to ‘see’ children” (p. 75). The question becomes, how can educators individualize children in a whole group setting? When teachers begin to recognize culture, socio-economic status, dialect, and language, they are able to start teaching with culturally relevant pedagogy. In order to be culturally relevant, the educator needs to obtain knowledge about the diverse families in the classroom. One way to do so is to visit the home.

Benefits of Home Visits

By visiting the household, the teacher steps away from the school environment to learn what goes on inside the homes of the students. “The typical teacher-student relationship seems ‘thin’ and ‘single-stranded’ as the teacher ‘knows’ the students only from their performance within rather limited classroom contexts” (Moll & Gonzalez,

1992, p.134). Some teachers only see their students for what they show in the classroom, but students are much more complex than their academic abilities. By allowing oneself to step out of the classroom, they are granting themselves the opportunity to see their students' full identities. "We have learned that it is feasible and useful to have teachers visit households for research purposes. Teachers assume the role of the learner, and in doing so, help establish a fundamentally new, more symmetrical relationship with the parents of the students" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 139). In an empirical study, Peralta-Nash (2003) allowed twenty college students to explore the discrimination of schooling in non-mainstream backgrounds by entering the homes of students. Peralta-Nash found that home visits are essential for a cross-cultural learning experience, to educate teachers on how to understand their students and families through a child's point of view (p. 119). Teachers step away from what they thought they knew about the families and begin to develop their own opinion based on experience. In their qualitative study of five households, Moll and Gonzalez (1992) found that their methods redefine the homes of students as rich sources of funds of knowledge that represent educational change. "We learned a lot during these three interviews that fractured stereotypes that we had heard others say about these households" (p. 137). Home visits allow teachers and families to build a relationship that is more than surface level. In their study of guided home visits, Lin and Bates (2010) found that educators were better able to understand families from historical and cultural perspectives: "'Home visits enable teachers to have experiences with their students and their students' families to help them better understand their students' lives and needs" (p. 180). Lin and Bates recognized that participants were able to create a comprehensive multicultural environment due to the structure of their home

visits. The authentic experience of being in the home provides teachers the opportunity to see families at face value. They are comfortable in their own home, which leads to them sharing more personal details. “By listening to their stories and by spending time with them in their homes, I came to an understanding of the embodied, tacit, experiential knowledge they hold as parents. Looking at what the parents did and said, I saw within their parent knowledge many facets of knowledge and ways of knowing” (Lyons, 1990). Home visits allow the teacher to see the natural interactions and conversations that exist within the home. Teachers can build on their preexisting knowledge of culture based on their experiences in the home to tailor their classroom instruction to fit the needs of the families. “In order to improve the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students, it is fundamental that teachers understand the relationship between pupil’s home culture and school learning” (Peralta-Nash, 2003, p. 112). The takeaway for the teacher’s experience in the home will ultimately assist them in planning their lessons specifically for the students instead of just achieving the standards. Teachers can use their experience to personalize their curriculum and build on students’ background knowledge as opposed to assuming they don’t know information. “We already had a relationship established with the students whose homes we visited, and our purpose for gathering information on these visits was, again, to improve our teaching practice” (Moll & Gonzalez, p. 8). Building on the experience of the home visit, teachers will be able to introduce culturally relevant teaching into their daily instruction.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a term that has been referenced for decades. As one of the pioneers for culturally relevant pedagogy, Gloria Ladson-Billings advocates

for underrepresented minorities, such as African Americans, to be recognized in the classroom. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), “culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria: (a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160). For students to experience academic success, teachers must attend to students’ academic needs; students need to be intrigued and feel a part of the lesson in order for their learning to be meaningful. Many children experience difficulty in school because “the school attempts to insert culture into education, instead of inserting education into the culture” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 159). Students need to cultivate cultural integrity so teachers can build on their schema to utilize in the classroom. “Beyond those individual characteristics of academic achievement and cultural competence, students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, morals, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequalities” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). Ladson-Billings’ concept of critical consciousness relates to Paulo Freire’s theory involving praxis, which encourages individuals to reflect and take action on their beliefs. “Freire brought forth the notion of ‘conscientization,’ which is ‘a process that invites learners to engage the world and others critically’” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 162). Teachers who actively practice culturally relevant teaching expect their students to engage the world and others critically. “For these teachers, knowledge is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared by the teachers and the students” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 163). While these teachers continue to

follow the state frameworks, they do not fully depend on the standards for their teaching. Culturally relevant teachers are able to utilize students' culture to stimulate learning.

Paris (2012) believed the term, culturally relevant pedagogy, needed to be updated because “the term culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people- it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p. 95). To be culturally sustaining, educators need to promote cultural competence in the classroom, school, and community. According to Delpit (1998), “As our society continues to shift, CSP must be part of a shifting culture of power.” The culture of power shifts as teachers allow students to share their experiences to build on classroom discussion. “Education must involve the interaction of students with teachers and schools, not simply the action of teachers and schools on students” (Nieto, 1992, p. 2). By giving students a voice, they feel empowered and motivated. Lisa Delpit agrees that, “The teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom. To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them” (Delpit, 1998, p. 288). Delpit details that teachers silence marginalized groups because they do not fully understand each diverse culture. When teachers view themselves as learners, they allow students to step onto the stage and present the classroom with their knowledge from their own experiences. According to Moll and Gonzalez, “by capitalizing on household and other community resources, we can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools” (Moll &

Gonzalez, 1992, p. 132). The key to impactful teaching is incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy.

Benefits of Implementing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

“The more elaborate understanding helped the teacher transform this information into a useful instructional activity” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 137). When the teacher understands the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy, they are able to incorporate it into their instruction. By doing so, they are letting their students know that they are not only seen but heard. “I hoped that teachers’ deep consideration of the influence these representations have on curriculum making and decision making in schools would instill a desire in them to interrupt the living out of these dominant narrative in schools as they discovered ways to use knowledge that resides in families co-construct educational experiences for and with children” (Pushor, 2012, p. 475). Allowing students to be proud of their culture and share it with the classroom through storytelling, literature, artifacts, and language, students become proud of their identity and build trust in the school system. “I believe the most important thing is not that our children learn English, but rather that they maintain their own culture and language, because it is truly their language and culture which gives them a sense of dignity” (Keis, 2002, p. 295). Culturally relevant teaching doesn’t change the students, it recognizes their true uniqueness and promotes inclusion. “Multicultural education promotes the core values that stem from the principles of human dignity, justice, equality, freedom, self-determination, and democracy” (Gay, 1994, p. 11). Multicultural education is for everyone and is integrated seamlessly into the curriculum to benefit both the student and teacher as learners. “The presenters pointed out that it is the teacher, not the anthropologist, who is ultimately the

bridge between the students' world, theirs and their family's funds of knowledge, and the classroom experience" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 137). The purpose of Nieto's seminal piece, *Affirming Diversity*, was to encourage teachers to work for social change beginning in their classrooms, their schools, and even the community. "It can be seen in every lesson, curriculum guide, unit, bulletin board, and letter that is sent home" (Nieto, 1991, p. 215).

Strategies to Implement Funds of Knowledge into Instruction

In order to build a bridge between home and school, teachers need specific strategies to integrate funds of knowledge and culturally relevant teaching into the curriculum. "As we turn from research to practice, we draw on our own research and the work of others to argue for the following practices that educators can use to learn with and from families: 1) listening to children and families, 2) broadening what counts as literacy, 3) engaging students and family members as co-researchers, and 4) engaging with parents and guardians to transform educational spaces through activism" (Compton-Lilly, 2019, p. 29). By listening and understanding what is important to families, teachers can construct an appropriate curriculum. In her study of families in two communities, Heath (1994) found that strong partnerships between schools and community-based organizations are necessary to ensure students feel comfortable in their learning environment. "Heath worked with teachers who applied their evolving insights for classroom literacy activities that build upon the language strengths of children from these two communities" (Compton-Lilly, 2019, p. 27). Allowing students to have the opportunity to share their strengths, they are able to express themselves and their experiences. Taylor (2002) reports a project in which a teacher directed students to

collect examples of print from their homes; during this “literacy dig” they collected hundreds of texts, including used bus tickets, fliers, notices, old report cards, and parking tickets. (p. 4). Through this project, students and teachers were able to collaborate by further exploring home literacies. Keis (2006) investigated culturally diverse families in the United States who have abundant funds of knowledge that was generally overlooked. To acknowledge underrepresented families, he purposely chose multicultural literature as a transformation tool. “Besides validating the culture and life experiences of the families attending our sessions, children’s literature also serves as a bridge for discovering, understanding, and respecting other worldviews” (p. 19). Introducing students to multicultural education allows for them to gain a sense of pride in valuing inclusion. A teacher researcher in Moll & Gonzalez’s funds of knowledge study spoke about her experience in which she learned through conversation that many of her students were international travelers and their experience led to strong knowledge in a variety of topics such as pharmacies, cattle ranches, and different countries’ cultures. “It is precisely through information of these kinds of social activities that we identify funds of knowledge that can be used in the classroom to help improve his academic development” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 137). Through conversation, debates, literature, etc, students are able to gain a better perspective on culturally relevant teaching. “The teacher, in turn, has become a ‘mediator’ providing strategic assistance that would facilitate the students’ inquiry and work” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 139). As the teacher becomes the mediator, they allow students to engage themselves in genuine learning. “The multicultural character of our nation requires that we put books into the hands of children that reflect themselves and their families in authentic and positive ways” (Keis, 2006, p.

15). It is imperative that students are able to have a sense of identity while reading; they should be able to see themselves in the text to build on their comprehension. Keis (2006) believes that children's literature provides the opportunity to discover, understand, and respect other worldviews while validating the culture and life experiences of the reader (p.19). To further enhance lessons about life experiences of family members, teachers can invite parents in. Moll & Gonzalez (1992) reference a boy involved in their research who was fascinated with making and selling candy. The teacher wanted to expand the boy's knowledge on the topic, so she invited a parent who had experience in the field into the classroom to present. "Notice, however, that this was not a typical parent visit to correct or sort papers; the purpose of the parent's visit was to contribute intellectually to the students' academic activity" (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 138). Encouraging students to investigate their culture through conversations, surveys, literacy digs, and presentations allows their wants and needs to be recognized. The teacher gives the students the ability to control what they are learning about and how it can impact their future.

Conclusion

By taking a socio-cultural perspective, family literacy can be viewed as a necessity for teachers to explore. It is understood that in order to understand the whole child, educators need to explore their background, culture, interests and home life. Through immersion in the home, teachers enable themselves to authentically experience the lives of their students. As students begin to develop a sense of identity, they feel empowered. Students gain a voice through culturally relevant pedagogy and further explore their funds of knowledge.

Chapter three describes the design and context of the study. It will also identify my role as the researcher and my course of action to triangulate data.

Chapter 3

Methodology

“When educators, though, attend to parent engagement off the school landscape as well, there is the possibility to create a new script of school” (Pushor, 2012, p. 471).

Research Paradigm

The framework for this study is based around qualitative methods which “offer a strong complement to numerical measures, allowing one to more comprehensively study how teaching and learning happen in dynamic classroom contexts” (Klehr, 2012, p. 123). By integrating qualitative research and ethnography, teacher research is carried out to make a difference in the school environment. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), define teacher research, as teachers further exploring an inquiry about their own teaching experience. The purpose of teacher research is to make an improvement in one's teaching methods. Their research starts by initiating an inquiry study after identifying a problem in the classroom by posing questions and gathering data on student work and observations (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). For purposes of this study, I wanted to investigate home literacies and funds of knowledge to strengthen the home-school connection. To have an authentic understanding of connecting home and school, it was imperative to witness first-hand what goes on inside of the homes of students. “Teacher-ethnographers ventured into their students’ households and communities seeking to understand the ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 3). The research methodology for this study is a qualitative ethnographic approach to collect data about the social order, setting, or situation being

investigated to create a socio-cultural interpretation of the data (Manning, 1998). Qualitative research offers a range of methodological alternatives that can fathom the array of cultural and intellectual resources available to students and teachers within these households (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992). “With immersion, the field researcher sees from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily rounds of activities, what they find meaningful, and how they do so. In this way immersion gives the field worker access to the fluidity of others’ lives and enhances his sensitivity to interaction and process” (Emerson, p. 2). By integrating oneself into the home, the researcher is naturally exposed to culture, experience, dialect, and education. Qualitative data collected include classroom observation tool, ethnographic observation collection tool, teacher researcher, journals, researchers’ field notes, written life histories scripts and photos of literacy practices. Emerson (2014) declares that the ethnographer's role is to be responsive in the field to learn how others interpret situations, assess internal states, and determine psychological motivation. (p. 33). Weiss describes ethnography as follows, “a method that immerses researchers in a cultural context, with an intensity and long-term involvement that can help build rapport between an ethnographer and his or her participants and increase ethnographers’ understanding of the meaning that participants attach to life events” (Weiss, 1998, p. 5).

My role as the researcher. Because I have an established relationship with the three participating families, I am aware of bias playing a role in my research. “Ethnographic research is particularly susceptible to researcher bias because the researcher is the primary data collection instrument” (Fusch, 2017, p. 925). After a year of teaching the participating students and staying in contact with parents through

email, social media, and Remind 101, I will need to view my data as presented. “For qualitative field research, ethnography involves learning the feelings, beliefs, and meanings of relationships between people as they interact within their culture or as they react to others in response to a changing phenomenon for the research takes place within the culture being studied (Dennis, 2010).” In an attempt to recognize and limit bias, I will audio record my experience in the home to ensure I am using the family’s direct words to highlight their feelings on certain topics. I am aware that the families and I have experienced different events in life, so it is important that I record their interpretation of their experiences from their perspective. A researcher’s cultural and experiential background will reflect biases, values, and ideologies; therefore, it becomes imperative that the interpretation represents the participants as opposed to the researcher (Bernard, 2012; Fusch, 2017).

Because of my relationship with the school, families, and teachers involved, I will attempt to assuage bias through data collection methods to triangulate data. In order to correlate people, time, and space, various forms of triangulation can be applied including investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological (Denzin 2012; Fusch, 2017). To demonstrate triangulation in my study, I will be bringing together people from different disciplines: administration, teachers, parents, and students, who have a common goal of helping children reach their full potential. According to Fusch (2017), “Methodological triangulation adds depth to the data that is collected” (p. 927). I will be using interviews from a variety of people to see if particular themes resonate. To triangulate data, I will assess interviews, observations, and artifacts to determine themes in the homes and classrooms.

Procedure for the Study

I recognize that my study would be considered a mini-ethnography due to the time in the field. The intent of mini ethnography is for a researcher to understand the cultural norms, values, and roles as pertaining to what is remembered by participants (White, 2009). Typically, the classic ethnographic study can take years to complete because the researcher must become enmeshed in the culture in order to obtain the type of data the researcher wants (Storesund & McMurray, 2009). My study took place between the months of September to December. I visited each family in the home, experienced community activities, and maintained communication through email and social media.

Before the collection of data took place, I carefully selected the participants of the study. With diversity in mind, three families from the previous school year were selected to participate. This advanced the study because an established relationship with the students and their families allowed for pre-established trust. I have my own understanding of the family dynamics from a teacher perspective and what they have shared through conversation while their child was in my class. Before I began collecting data, I reflected on my experiences of communication with these families. I looked back at emails, Remind 101 messages, and even holiday cards. I was reminded of the open communication I had encountered while these students were in my classroom. To honor the authentic approach of teacher research, I began my data collection with notes in my teacher research journal regarding my own thoughts and reflections.

I began my data collection by immersing myself in the home of three of my former students. While in the home, I looked around for signs of literacy, such as a

library of books, newspapers, magazines, and even technology that contained apps for engaging in literacy. The family interview contained questions of the parents' childhood and experiences in school, how they raised their children with morals and values in mind, as well as their view on the education system. Parents were asked of their hopes and dreams for their children. The parents were also asked about their experience with the school system, parent-teacher communication, and events hosted by the school. The interview had a list of set questions, but if the conversation took a turn toward a differing topic, the conversation continued. Also, while in the home, the student was interviewed. The student was asked about their experience in school, what they think makes a good teacher, what they wished their teacher knew about them, and what they wish they could change about the school day. The students were also asked their opinion of home-school relationships: how their parents talk about their teacher, what their parents do with their schoolwork, how their family helps with school, and if they felt their parents were invited into the school for activities. While in the home, I paid attention to interaction between family members, such as conversations and body gestures.

Data Sources

The collection of qualitative data constructs this ethnographic research study. Major data sources included a home visit and family interview, which focused on a family history, funds of knowledge, their perspective of home-school communication, and their expectations of teachers. Another data source was an interview of the students from these households. The students were interviewed separately to get a sense of their relationship with their teacher, what they wanted their teacher to know about them, and what would help them better succeed in school. The students' teachers were also interviewed to collect data on student progress so far in second grade, the teacher's

perception of the families involved, the teacher's forms of parent communication, their perspective of home-school relationships, and the teacher's knowledge of culturally relevant teaching. "Understanding how and why these teachers are coming to a redefinition of what it means to be a professional, working alongside parents in relational ways, has the potential to inform teacher education coursework more broadly" (Pushor, 2012, p. 474). The building principal was interviewed as well to gain insight of his knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy and how it is displayed in our school. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to ensure all data was accurate. "The ethnographic work has employed in-depth interviewing with the teachers, other school personnel, parents or other primary caregivers, and children themselves, as well as participant observations in schools and classrooms, allowing ethnographers to create 'thick' descriptions of social interactions and environments and actors' perspectives" (Weiss, 1998, p. 2). In addition to the home visits and interviews, the students were also observed in the classroom setting. This was to see the interaction between student and teacher as well as the student and his or her peers. The final piece of my data was collected while observing each family in one community event. This allowed me to experience the family in different scenarios to see their interactions with others at restaurants, school events, and even sporting events.

Data Analysis

The data collected throughout the course of this study was used to draw conclusions regarding the funds of knowledge students bring to the classroom. In order to understand the role of a student's funds of knowledge in the classroom, I used various data collection tools. My experience in the home was so raw, that I decided to audio

record my experience with each family. One tool I used while in the home and reviewing the audio recording was member checking, which allowed for clarification of specific thoughts and feelings. “For qualitative researchers, member checking is a means by which researchers can validate meaning, not word choice, with participants by asking a clarifying question such as is this what you meant? in order to ensure that one does not leave gaps in understanding the phenomenon” (Carlson, 2010). This allowed me to re-experience our conversations to authentically detail my interaction with each family. I was then able to cross reference my notes from each home to look for commonalities. Themes presented themselves through conversation, body language, and overall demeanor. The information gained during the home visits provided me insight into each student’s funds of knowledge, family history, family literacies, and opinion on home-school relationships to “portray accurately the complex functions of households within their socio-historical contexts” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 132). Data from three diverse family contexts were cross analyzed to look for patterns and emerging beliefs about family literacies, life histories, and funds of knowledge, and culturally relevant teaching. I checked these themes collected in the home against data I collected in the school. I interviewed and observed both teachers to look for themes in their instruction, student interaction, and knowledge of the families involved in this research study. My teacher research journal allowed me to find trends among my reflections about the opinions of school, home literacies, and cultural relevance in the classroom. “Through spending the time reflecting during the days away from the site, the reflective journal assists the researcher to understand perspectives and interpretation of the culture” (Fusch, 2017, p.

929). I also reflected on my own personal observations of family interaction and classroom observation that could not be captured through audio recording.

Community Context

The community of Chamberston consists of one elementary school and a conjoined middle school and high school. The total student enrollment for the district was 1,432. The study sites are located in a South Jersey town with a total population of 8,676 residents. Many people who live in Chamberston are proud to be from this small town. Many generations have gone through the school system here and are now raising their families here. According to City data, the racial demographic of the township was 74% White, 14% African American, 4.4% Hispanic, 1.4% Asian, 6.4% two or more races, and .2% American Indian. The median age resident is 38.8%, while the median household income was \$65,887 in 2016. About 8.5% of families were living below the poverty line.

Chamberston is a small, quaint town. According to the borough of Chamberston, “Incorporated in 1887, the Borough of Chamberston is located in southern New Jersey. The borough has a dedicated volunteer fire company, a committed police force, and many civic organizations and Chamberston committees, as well as active volunteers. Today, the borough is a thriving community of just over 8,000 people who are proud of its history, growth, & development” (Borough of Chamberston New Jersey). Chamberston has a variety of parks: Memorial Park (home of the youth football and cheerleading, tennis courts, a basketball court, a skateboard, playground, walking trail, and a dog park), Bell Fields (used for little league), a soccer complex, Sands Memorial Park, a golf course/restaurant , and a NJ State Wildlife Management Area. There is a historic Museum which educates the community on its culture. Chamberston has a main street

with stores and restaurants including: a grocery store, several convenience stores, a locally owned pizza restaurant, an ice cream shop, a Mexican restaurant, a few liquor stores, a bank, a national coffee chain, a nail salon, a laundromat and so much more. Chamberston has a variety of community days including a Chamberston day, which is celebrated in June. Many of the residents have had generations cycle through living in Chamberston.

School Context

According to the Department of Education NJ School Performance report, in the 2017-2018 school year, 674 students were enrolled at Theodore A. Simmons Elementary. Simmons Elementary is considered a large, modern facility with a full-size auditorium, library, state of the art gymnasium, full size cafeteria, and playgrounds for Pre-K and K-5 students (NJ Department of Education. 2017). Simmons Elementary is considered a Title I school; 44.3% of students are economically disadvantaged. 1% of students are considered homeless. All students are offered free breakfast each morning to ensure they have a meal to start their school day. The data presents Simmons Elementary as a diverse school. The student population is 46.1% female and 53.9% male. 51.6% of students are White, 22.3% are Black or African American, 13.1% are Hispanic, 1.9% Asian, .3% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 10.8% are two or more races. Amongst the diverse climate, 2.7% of students are considered English Language Learners and 18.8% of students have disabilities. Home language differs between English 93.3%, Turkish 2.7%, and Hispanic 2.5%. The attendance rates are as follows: 8% with 0 days absent, 51% 1-5 absences, 32% 6-10 absences, 7% 11-15 absences, and 3% over 15 absences. (NJ Department of Education. 2017)

Teachers are encouraged to follow the district mission statement: Chamberston Public School District will collaborate with parents and the community to provide a safe, caring, and engaging learning environment where all students achieve the NJSLs along with the knowledge, skills, and experiences to succeed in a global society. At Simmons, the student to teacher ratio is 12:1 with 66 teachers employed. Of the 66 teachers, 12 live in Chamberston. The school also has 30 aides, most of which live in town. 71% of teachers have their bachelor's while 29% of teachers have their masters. The average years of experience in both public schools and in district equate to 10.7 years. 75.5% of teachers have been in the district for more than 4 years and have attained tenure. Simmons offers many professional development opportunities for teachers to ensure that they are best equipped to teach their students by following best practice. "All faculty and staff are involved in high-quality, job embedded, personalized professional development throughout the school year" (New Jersey School Performance Report).

Theodore A. Simmons Elementary follows the following mission statement, "Chamberston Public School District will collaborate with parents and the community to provide a safe, caring, and engaging learning environment where all students achieve the Common Core State Standards along with the knowledge, skills, and experiences to succeed in a global society." The school's vision statement is "Preparing students for the opportunities of today and the future." The school set up strategic goals in order to abide by the vision statement,

1. Create and adopt a long-range facility plan by June 2020. (Strategic Plan Goal 4)
2. Chamberston School district will promote the physical, social and emotional wellness of students and staff by establishing wellness activities throughout the school year. (Strategic Plan Goal 2)

3. 75% of all teachers will participate in collaboration and articulation activities. (Strategic Plan Goal 1)

To promote the growth of students and educators, the district has implemented various goals to be attained by 2021. The staff participates in a district wide wellness day which includes yoga, cardio, other fitness classes, cooking classes, jewelry making, skin care, etc. To encourage teamwork and professional growth, the superintendent has implemented a program in which you put the letter “C” (for Chamberston) in your classroom window, to invite others in to observe your teaching. Chamberston Public Schools strongly believes in learning from one another through observation and learning walks.

Simmons Elementary also believes in the wellbeing of their students. The district has a Child Connection Center which provides counseling and social emotional support for all students, including students who need behavior plans. The students are enriched with various classes such as computers, art, physical education, health, music, and library classes to be exposed to the arts. The school has adapted Pearson’s reading and math programs, ReadyGen and Envisions. For their phonics instruction, Simmons uses Wilson’s Foundations in grades K-2 and Words Their Way in Grades 3-5. The science and social studies curriculums have been developed by teachers who have gathered materials to match the NJSLA standards. Simmons is also fortunate enough to have a leveled book room which provides the teachers guided reading materials. The elementary school offers various after school programs to further promote learning and life skills. Some programs include art club, school safeties, environmental club, micro society, after school stars program run through Golden Gate. The school provides as much as they can to ensure their students continue growing academically, socially, and

emotionally. In the next section, I provide context and background information on each of the families who participated.

Family Context

The Washington Family. The Washington family consists of Mom, Dad, TJ, Kayla, and Kyle. Mrs. Washington dedicates a lot of her time to her work; she works at a candy distributing company. Mr. Washington works three jobs, one being a juvenile mentor and the other a nurse's aide at a psychiatric hospital. Mr. and Mrs. Washington met in college at Rowan University; Mrs. Washington knew from the first time she laid eyes on Mr. Washington in the cafeteria, that he was the one. They then decided they wanted to settle down in Chamberston with a lovely home with a front porch. Their family grew shortly after. TJ is 22 years old and is living in California to live out his dream of acting. He recently had a role as an alien in a Captain Marvel movie. Kayla is 14 years old and attends Chamberston Middle School. She devotes her free time practicing, training, and competing in track and field. She hopes to one day make it to the Olympics. Kyle is 8 years old in second grade at Theodore A. Simmons Elementary. Kyle loves playing flag football and running track and field. Family, education, and sports are very important to the Washington family.

The Russo Family. Mom, Mia, Sophia, and Mom's fiancé, Bob live in the Russo home. Mrs. Russo is a Special Education teacher for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students and was inspired to become a teacher because her father was a teacher. Mrs. Russo's parents live a block away and play a large role in the Russo's lives. Cameron is 16 years old and attends Chamberston High School. Cameron likes to hang out with her friends, go bowling, and play on her phone. Sophia is 7 years old. She loves animals,

reading, writing notes to others, and sharing witty stories. Sophia first met the Russo's when she was three and officially became a Russo last year when she was adopted. As an alumna of Chamberston Public Schools, Mrs. Russo fully supports education. School plays a big role in the Russo's lives considering they have two generations of teachers, and Sophia hopes to one day become a teacher.

The Gallagher Family. The Gallagher family includes Mom, Dad, Ryan, and Emily. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher both attended Chamberston schools and were high school sweethearts. They married when they were 25 after celebrating 10 years of being together. Mrs. Gallagher is a financial aid counselor at a local college and Mr. Gallagher is a hydraulic pump mechanic. Ryan is 7 years old and loves Pokémon, Super Mario, and learning new things. He loves making his family proud and they try to instill good morals into Ryan. Emily is 18 months and comes across very shy but is very personable towards people she is familiar with. The Gallagher's believe in creating happiness and spending quality time together.

Conclusion

Chapter four of this thesis details home visits, community engagement, family interviews, and student interviews. It recounts the experience in the home and recurring themes of the families involved.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis of the Home

“All of the households we visited possess similar values and funds of knowledge that can be tapped for use in the classrooms” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 137).

Introduction

Chapter four reflects on various experiences of collecting data about the families and their funds of knowledge. I was fortunate enough to enter the homes of all three families as well as to be included in community activities. While I was at home, I was observing family interaction, home environment, language, etc. I paid attention to their refrigerator to give me a sense of their home literacies. It was important for me to have a conversation about their family histories, educational beliefs, and what makes their family special to them. I was even able to speak with the students independently to get a sense of what was important to them. By spending time with the families and second grade students, I was able to understand the importance of funds of knowledge in education.

The Washington Family Home Visit

On my drive to the Washington home, I received a message to come in the backdoor, immediately making me feel like family. Kyle’s family lives on a main road with heavy traffic, so I decided to park on a side street. On my walk from the car, I wondered where Kyle stood to catch the bus. When I got to their home, I took my shoes off and left them outside. As I entered through the backdoor, I was immediately in their kitchen. I was bombarded by the smell of homemade chocolate chip cookies. Mrs. Washington immediately hugged me and asked me to sit at the dark wooden kitchen table

with her, which was in their dining room. I walked across the hardwood floor and sat down in a comfortable chair. She shared that I had chosen the seat that Kyle does his homework in while the TV is off waiting for Kayla to check his work. Sitting at the table, I looked around the room noticing a curio stand holding family pictures, wine glasses, candles, and a few books. Right next to the curio stand was a doorway leading to Kyle and Kayla's bedrooms as well as a bathroom which was under construction. There was a mirror in the room reflecting light making the space appear larger than it was. We began catching up, while Kyle hid in his room. He was very shy at first, which was different from my classroom experience with Kyle. I was so used to him asking me a million questions at once and constantly moving around the classroom, that I was taken back by his reserved personality. Mrs. Washington called him out immediately for acting shy and that he should come say hello to me. I could tell that Kyle didn't know how to act because his teacher was in his house. As Kyle timidly approached from his first-floor bedroom, Mrs. Washington apologized that Mr. Washington was late coming home from grocery shopping after work. Mrs. Washington and I have communicated quite often since Kyle was promoted to second grade; she would ask me how my new class was and how I was progressing studying for my comprehensive exam, while I would ask her how Kyle was making out with a new teacher and with his sports. As I was in their home, I couldn't help but think about the inspiring email Mrs. Washington once sent me,

I always say, the early challenges in life prepare you for much bigger things. That goes with heartache, multi-tasking, working out.... Anything that hurts you inside now or pushes you makes you a stronger woman. I tell my daughter women are like trees.... sounds crazy, but when a tree gets cut down, it has life circles for each year it has lived. The tree carries these circles with them making the tree stronger each year. I've seen you with Kyle, you make him such a better person. I wish he could be with you all of his years. Therefore, I know you will do well on your exam.

Sitting at the kitchen table with her felt like catching up with an old friend. She was genuinely interested in my life and wanted to know every accomplishment, struggle, and everything in between. She knows how to make people feel welcome. I asked her how the kids were doing, and she responded,

They are different than most. Kyle is extremely smart and remembers things after the first time he sees them. He loves with his whole heart and doesn't hold back when he feels something. Kayla, the oldest, is the opposite and very quiet. She likes to stay home and doesn't really ask to go out. Trustworthy.

While we were talking, Kayla came out of her room to say hello and sat on a couch in the family room, which was closely connected to the dining room. The family room had a large entertainment stand holding a large speaker and house phone. Mounted above it was a large flat screen TV. When the Washington's have time off from sports, this is where they spend their time relaxing together as a family. Kayla and Kyle would join in the conversation by sharing that Kayla has been extremely successful in track and field lately, while Kyle was still as passionate as ever about football. He kept pulling up football videos, including a glory days video of his dad when he played for Rowan University. This sparked Mrs. Washington and I to start comparing notes over our fun experiences at Rowan. As we were bonding over our memories of countless hours spent in the school cafeteria, Mr. Washington walked in, just as friendly as his wife.

I could see Mr. Washington through the open window space allowing me to see into the kitchen from the dining table. The Washington's looked so natural all in a central gathering space; it was evident they spend a lot of time together in their home. As he unpacked the groceries, he was joking around with Kyle and Kayla about a local YouTuber that they like who just got into trouble with the police. One thing I noticed

about the Washington family is that they do not hide much from their kids because they believe in always telling the truth and exposing them to the realistic side of life. They explain things happening on the news, phrases the kids hear in school, and anything else the kids might have questions about. Mr. Washington stood in the kitchen while he cooked dinner and asked the kids how their day was. While the family was talking, Kyle kept coming over to his mom for a hug or a butterfly kiss. As the family detailed family memories, Kyle would chime in about information he remembered me sharing with him. He surprised his family and myself by remembering my birthday, stories about my brother, and even hilarious moments that happened in the classroom last year. The Washington's shared family photos as did I. They shared that they have a family bonfire every Friday night and asked when I could come back to join them. At the end of the night, they walked me to the car, gave me hugs, and sent me on my way with a bag of chocolate chip cookies to share with my family.

Family traditions. When asked about their culture, Mrs. Washington shared that she is Irish and German, while Mr. Washington is African American. She stated that their culture does not seem to influence too many of their traditions because it was more valuable for them to build their own traditions together as a family. "We put the Christmas Tree up on Thanksgiving every year. We also sit by the fire outside at a fire pit almost every weekend together for family time." Mrs. Washington describes their family as homebodies and very close. The kids chimed in that they would both rather stay home and spend time with their mom and dad than go out with their friends. Kayla was excited that one of her friends was coming to sleepover that night, but she doesn't mind just being home. Kyle plays with one of the neighbors who is a little older than him, but he

also likes to stay close to home. Mrs. Washington commented, “Our home is small and a work in progress. We have many projects in place to make each room more family oriented.” While they are very family oriented, it was shared that everyone must help around the house with simple chores. Another household rule is that homework needs to be done before phones or TV. When asked about family morals, Mrs. Washington responded,

Being kind to one another is important in our house as well. We try to put that in our kids minds all of the time. You never know what another person is going through, so being kind can go a long way.

Home literacies. Mrs. Washington was able to reflect on her own schooling experience. She remembers being young and having flashcards to test herself and reading books because of her yearning to learn. “As a child, I was scared a lot. I grew up in a household that was not so great. Therefore, I had issues with missing my mom at school, and a hard time concentrating. Not a lot of good memories.” She was very honest with her upbringing and shared that she provides for her children, so they do not need to feel the way she felt as a child. When she had children, she wanted them to know at an early age that reading was important: “More so with Kyle than Kayla, because I was young and not thinking of that. Kyle also went to preschool and Kayla did not. She has always been self-motivated.” Today they push for their kids to practice more reading and writing at home.

Interviewer: What are your overall reading goals for Kyle?

Mrs. Washington: To be honest, I just want Kyle to love books. For him to want to read on his summer break. My goal is to have him be comfortable reading aloud and to be able to ask questions when he doesn’t understand.

To keep Kyle motivated, they offer him small encouragement. “For example, I’ll watch a YouTube video with him, or his dad will play catch for a little while. He looks forward to those rewards and stays on track with his reading.” She also shared that it can be challenging with her working so late, that she is not always there to ensure that Kyle reads every night. Mrs. Washington also mentioned her love of reading, “I read all of the time. I love, LOVE reading. Sometimes I’ll spend all day reading. If the book is good enough, I’ll usually have a hard time putting it down, even at 3am.” Mrs. Washington shared that the kids keep their book collection in bins in their rooms, while she keeps her, and Mr. Washington’s books separate upstairs. Mr. Washington mentioned that he also likes to read and watch the news. He does most of his reading from articles on his phone. It was mentioned that while they have a computer for the family, it is rarely used because everyone prefers to use their phones. Reflecting on the most positive experience reading with Kyle made Mrs. Washington smile,

When Kyle was about two years old, we had a book of a bunch of things and I would point to the image and Kyle would answer me. The one item that we had only reviewed a few times was a Xylophone, and he answered me what it was. I was truly amazed at how smart he was, even at two years old.

Kyle chimed in that he doesn’t remember that. When I asked him about reading now, he shared that it’s not his favorite thing to do. He said he gets bored of the books easily unless they are his favorite. When asked about her hopes and dreams, Mrs. Washington shared, “I really want to have my kids go to college but get scholarships, so they don’t have to work full time jobs like I did. I also hope to stay a close family and always be there for my kids when they need me.” Mrs. Washington also shared that a dream of hers is to one day own a farm and drink lemonade from her porch. The reason they live in the

house they are currently in is because of the porch, so she hopes to be able to one day have an even bigger gathering space.

While I was visiting them home, Kyle wanted to show me his bedroom. As I approached, Mrs. Washington warned, “Kyle’s very rough and his room shows it.” Entering the blue-walled room, I immediately noticed an unmade twin bed with a bunch of stuffed animals. The thing that caught my eye was Kyle’s note to me on his chalkboard wall, which said, “Ms. Greenwood, welcome to our house.” He had toys, books, and other games on the floor by the window next to his wooden play table. Kyle keeps his books in a large overflowing storage container; Mrs. Washington noted they used to be on a bookshelf, but as his collection grew, it was easier for him to keep them in the storage bins. I noticed that Kyle had a TV in his room right on top of his dresser. As I looked around, Kyle asked me if I wanted to see his favorite book. He and his mom sat down on the floor by his book collection; His collection had a variety of picture books, early readers, Dr. Seuss, and a few chapter books. Kyle was showing me his many books and quickly transitioned into me witnessing a mother-son read aloud. Kyle curled in close to his mom and began reading *Hattie the Bad* aloud. Mrs. Washington rubbed Kyle’s back as he tried to decode some of the tricky words. When he was stuck, she patiently waited to allow him to sound them out. If it was a word that was too hard, she simply gave him the word and he corrected his mistake by rereading the sentence. Kyle was able to point out funny things in the illustrations and they would both giggle together. At the end of their reading, Kyle shared with me that the book was all about a girl who made bad choices, but in the end, she realized that she wasn’t only bad, she was

good, and just made some mistakes. He shared that he could relate to this book, because sometimes he does things he should not do.

Refrigerator. The Washington's refrigerator was covered in what was important to their family. On the front of their fridge were some of their favorite family photos. There were pictures of the four of them: one was professionally done and the other was at the preschool spring fling dance when Kyle first started school. Both Kyle and Kayla's school pictures are on display as well as a picture of the two of them at their track and field banquet. They have a few baby pictures and even a picture of Mrs. Washington as a child with her father. There is a photobooth montage of Kyle and BJ as well. Also hanging on the front of the fridge are both Kyle and Kayla's report cards as well as Kayla's school schedule. There were also a few notes of important numbers. On the side of their refrigerator were two projects that Kyle completed in first grade: his Flat Gingy project and a Valentine's Day card he made for his family that said, "I whaley love you" with a whale. There were also two illustrations that Kyle recently made. They had a map of the United States right in the center. An elementary school picture of Kayla was hung saying "Wanted! Excited and ready to learn." They had a collection of pens hanging in a basket as well as a bag of Box Tops. We stood by the refrigerator together looking at all of the photos and notes written by Kyle and Kayla. It seemed as though the Washington's used their fridge as a memento of all their favorite memories. Their refrigerator had a lot of character and displayed that family time was treasured.

Parent school relationship. When discussing their experience with Chamberston Public Schools, Mrs. Washington was able to respond quite honestly. She believes that a great teacher is, "someone who cares about what happens in the classroom but wants to

learn about the child to help them learn better.” She commented that she is very happy with both teachers that her children have this year. She shared that most people would probably describe her children in a certain way,

Kyle likes to talk a lot, so a lot of people talk to him like he’s a grown up. Kayla, she’s particular when it comes to the people, she keeps around herself. If she doesn’t want to talk to you, she won’t. She might rub someone the wrong way, but it’s just that she doesn’t trust others quickly. What most people don’t know about my kids is that Kayla is very sensitive and holds a lot in. She may look strong on the outside, but she is soft inside. Not all people know that Kyle knows weird sports facts. He’ll call me at work just to talk about Ben Simmons and his stats. Very funny.

From her perspective, she believes that Kyle’s teacher may not have a clear understanding of Kyle’s intentions,

Kyle is always worried that others are not doing things right or the right way; it’s from a kind place, but his teacher might see it differently. He’s genuinely concerned about others. Aaron will share with me things that he sees kids doing and how he knows it’s wrong. He thinks about consequences in his head, which is different from most kids his age. He is passionate and has a very big heart.

Mrs. Washington went on to describe Kyle’s emotional side in relation to his ADHD medication,

His new medicine is a slow reacting medicine, so it lasts longer. He does seem a lot calmer when he takes the medicine, but still rushes and tries to be the first one done everything. When he is not on the medicine, or when it wears off, his emotional side seems to take over. It’s either 0 or a 100 with Aaron. He loves big, cries big, when he’s sad he’s really sad, when he’s mad or angry he’s really mad and angry. So, we are working on a lot of things to help him through each one. This medicine seems to be working the best. The others would only last a few hours and he would be overwhelmed the rest of the day. This one works longer, but his emotions are extreme when it’s worn off.

Mrs. Washington wishes that Mrs. Harvey knew how incredibly busy they are with everyday track practices and competitions all weekend, so they do not have a lot of extra time. Even with everything going on, they are still very close. Mrs. Washington stated

that she believes the parent-school relationship does not always feel like the parents are connected.

it kind of feels like a need to know basis, as opposed to being completely involved. I would like to be more in the know about each day. Teaching is a hard job, so being able to communicate with 20 kids' parents might be hard, but it would be helpful on the parents' part to be in the know.

Mrs. Washington went on to discuss that she appreciates back to school night, parent conferences, and the father daughter dance. The Washington's attend these annual events and actually wish there were more events for parents to be included in. She then said, if she could change one thing about the parent-school relationship, she would like to see more events like the father daughter dance so parents could feel more a part of the school.

Mrs. Washington then touched on the importance of funds of knowledge,

Interviewer: How does a teacher's knowledge of your child and family history impact their learning?

Mrs. Washington: When you know a kid, and where they come from or what they live with, you can understand why someone is the way they are. I grew up in a house with a lot of abuse and hunger. No one ever asked me about my home life. I wouldn't have said anything, but I would have felt like someone cared. A child needs to feel safe and sometimes school is the one safe place they have. If a child sees that their school is sincerely interested in them, they would feel more open to being a part of things.

Mrs. Washington was incredibly open to sharing information with the school so they would be more understanding of family circumstances, schedules, experiences, etc.

Interview with Kyle. Kyle is a student that has high energy and a huge heart. He is very compassionate and will take it personally if he witnesses one of his friends getting hurt. Kyle is a child who brings a friend a tissue box when they are

crying, offers to play with the new student, and cheers peers on when they accomplish something new. Kyle loves to help others in the classroom, especially his teacher. Academically, he is right on level for reading, however, it is not his first choice when he has free time. Kyle is quick with his math facts and can expand on his reasoning. He absolutely loves football and is very close to his family. Kyle's big heart shines through in every aspect of his day.

To Kyle, football is more than just a sport; football is his motivation for his future and his favorite way to pass time. Kyle plays flag football but hopes to one day become an NFL player. He shared that he is already considering college. He foresees himself going to Alabama because his cousin goes there, Penn State because of Saquon Barkley, or Rowan because his dad played there. Kyle enjoys school because he loves learning new things, especially Fundations.

Interviewer: What is something you wish you could change about school?

Kyle: I wish I could change my behavior. Sometimes I'm not nice and sometimes I don't listen to my teacher. I get out of my seat a lot or I get distracted.

Kyle's honesty demonstrated his maturity level; he is able to identify things he would like to improve on such as listening to his teacher, playing nicely with his friends, and not being in everyone's business. Kyle also shared that he thinks his teacher, Mrs. Harvey describes him as talkative and that he needs to read more. He admitted that now that the books are longer in second grade, he does not enjoy reading as much as he used to in first grade. When he is at home, he doesn't practice his reading unless he has to for a school project or homework, however, he does display literacy through writing letters to his friends who are sick and notes to his family. Kyle has two favorite books that always

make him laugh, *Wacky Wednesday* by Dr. Seuss and *Hattie the Bad* by Jane Devlin. He shared that he could read these and never get tired of them. When it comes to schoolwork, every one of his family members shares a helping hand.

My mom helps me read when she gets home late from work. My dad always checks my behavior and talks to me about my choices. Kayla will sit with me and if I have a question, she will help.

Kyle explained that he spends a lot of time with Kayla and that he sees her do her homework. “She has a lot of homework. I don’t know how she does it all.” When asked if Kyle could have his family involved with more school events, he replied, “I wish my mom could be my teacher.” This reminded me of a persuasive letter that Kyle wrote to his mom in first grade asking if she could become our classroom aide. In the letter, he argued that he knew his teacher worked hard and that it wasn’t fair that kindergarten teachers have classroom aides and first grade didn’t; he also commented that he knew his mom would be perfect for the job. Kyle recognizes that his parents are very supportive of working hard in school and they also really like his teacher.

Community. It was a hot, Saturday afternoon when I ventured to the track at Stockton University to meet the Washington family. Mrs. Washington informed me that it would be a very busy day being that they had to be at the track by seven am, so they would be packing their RV to prepare for the long day. When I arrived, I was taken aback by the large crowd that was attending the Junior Olympics regional qualifiers. I called Mrs. Washington and was directed to look for the brown tent in the second row. Both Kyle and Kayla were competing for the Camden Track Team, so I knew I was looking for orange and blue jerseys. As I approached, Mrs. Washington was holding a friend’s baby, then as our eyes locked, she passed him to his mom so she could come say

hello. We searched for Kyle who was hanging out with his friends and was completely shocked that I had come to see him race. His mom wanted to keep it a secret so he could be surprised, and he certainly was. He was shy at first before he began introducing me to his friends. He was wandering around with no shoes on while he was waiting for Kayla to compete. Mrs. Washington asked me questions about the school year and if I had time to do anything fun in my spare time. As we caught up, Mrs. Washington introduced me to a friend who approached. She introduced me as “The best teacher Kyle has had.” When it was time for Kayla to compete, Mrs. Washington called Mr. Washington who was in the parking lot working on their RV that was having some issues. Kayla started off strong as she ran, but then it became apparent that she was not running like herself. When she was done running, she came over to Mrs. Washington crying.

Mrs. Washington: La, that didn’t look like you out there. What was going through your head? You know this is a big meet.

Kayla: You saw who I was running against. They put me next to the best girl in my division. It got in my head

Mrs. Washington: Well that was your one opportunity and you threw it away. You know that when you are out there you need to worry about you and compete to your full potential.

Kayla: I know, I was just so distracted. *she started to cry* and now I can’t fix it

Mrs. Washington: *with tears in her eyes* I just know how hard you’ve worked for this. I just hope your performance was enough to qualify for tomorrow.

From my perspective, Mrs. Washington was hurting as much as Kayla. She wanted what was best for her daughter and she knew that she did not show all of her talent today. Kayla was running against one of the best athletes and because they were in the lanes next to one another, it got into Kayla’s head. They embraced one another for

quite some time and Mrs. Washington did her best to reassure Kayla that no matter what the result, she was talented and loved. Mrs. Washington called Mr. Washington when Kayla walked away and as she recounted Kayla's performance, Mrs. Washington began to cry. She explained that it was up to fate if her numbers would work for her to qualify for the next part of the meet. After some time, Mrs. Washington received an alert on her phone updating the qualifying times and Kayla had qualified. Mrs. Washington signed of relief, held her heart and called Kayla over to tell her the good news. They both hugged again for quite some time, while Mrs. Washington told her how much she loved her and how tomorrow will be a fresh start.

Then it was Kyle's turn to run the relay. I offered to video his race for Mrs. Washington so she could watch in real time and not be distracted by her phone. He started off the relay and ran incredibly fast. His team was in the lead by a long shot, when the last person dropped the baton. Mrs. Washington started getting nervous again as the other parents on the sideline questioned if this would disqualify them. Mrs. Washington turned to me and shared that we would need to wait and see if Kyle's team was still considered to earn a place in the race. She also told me she knew how upset Kyle would be, so she prepared me for tears. When he was done, Kyle came running over to his mom with tears in his eyes. He was as disappointed as she predicted. She reassured him that he ran great and that he should be proud of his performance. The parents waited by the fence, continuously checking their phones for the update; by some miracle, Kyle's team had also placed and would be competing the next day as well. Mrs. Washington turned to me and took a deep breath, "Wow it's been quite the day for my heart strings." Before leaving, Mrs. Washington and Mr. Washington hugged me and thanked me for

coming out in the hot weather to watch their children compete. I shared that it was genuinely my pleasure. Kyle gave me a hug and thanked me before I left.

Themes. The Washington family displayed themes of love, quality time, previous experiences, sports, communication, hard work, and determination. The Washington family demonstrates unconditional love amongst each other as well as others. They communicate openly about their day, their feelings, and their desires. The Washington family seems to display love through their words, but frequently through actions such as hugs, butterfly kisses, and snuggling. Their love transfers to all aspects of their lives. Kindness is a big theme for the Washington family. Mr. and Mrs. Washington shared that they want their children to treat others the correct way and to stand up for others. Kyle frequently does this at school; he witnesses things and tries to tell the teacher to protect his friends. While this family value, Mrs. Washington fears that it might be seen as a weakness and that Kyle is interfering or tattling in school. Mrs. Washington also shared strong feelings about a home and school connection. She seemed to want to build a bridge between home and school. She recognized the school's efforts and even suggested a few activities that the school could implement to bring parents in more frequently. The Washington's crave the opportunity to be a part of the school community through events and open communication with the school and teachers.

It was observed that the way that Washington's view life was based on their own life experiences. Mrs. Washington shared that her upbringing wasn't always easy and she would do whatever it takes to provide for her children. She communicates and demonstrates her love for her family constantly. Kyle and Kayla appreciate the sacrifices their parents make for them and show this by spending quality time at home with their

parents. As parents, Mr. and Mrs. Washington make sure their children are happy, well fed, engaged in activities, and know that they are loved.

The Washington's lives revolve around sports. Mr. and Mrs. Washington dedicate their weekends to competitions, while their weeknights are filled with practices. Mrs. Washington shared that while sports consume their lives, it is worth the sacrifice for her children's futures. She made a point to state that if they stop enjoying the sport, then they can take a step back. Both Kyle and Kayla are hoping to get scholarships for college based on their athletic abilities. Mr. and Mrs. Washington both speak very openly to their children about their performances at sporting events. They celebrate when on a good day and provide constructive criticism on an off day; this serves to motivate their children, even though it can sometimes seem as if they are coming on a little strong. The Washingtons are very honest with their children and the kids respond well to both compliments and criticism. Both children work hard and refuse to give up when things get tough.

In school, Kyle seems to be misunderstood in the classroom. He is high energy and deeply involved in another student's business. He is frequently out of his seat, fidgeting, or talking to his peers. Although Kyle is quick to be distracted from his work, his display of fairness is not work avoidance. Kyle has a very big heart, his mom describes it as a heart she has never seen on someone Kyle's age, and he is genuinely looking out for others. Often times when he approaches a teacher about something, he witnessed or experienced, Kyle is often in a heightened state, which impacts the way he approaches adults. Because of this, many adults get frustrated with his "tattling" and often dismiss him instead of listening. When this happens, Kyle holds onto those

moments. He will come home and talk to his mom about what he experienced in the day. Mrs. Washington will sit with Kyle and discuss the situation so he knows what he could do better next time. While he is often misunderstood by others, Mrs. Washington does her best to explain why sometimes people do not always respond to him trying to do the right thing. She is teaching Kyle patience, resilience, and compassion.

The Washington family is very close knit. They are proud of their family and where they come from. My time in their home showed me how much they value family time. They were proud to share pictures of their extended family, vacations, and family memories. They have family traditions such as Friday night bonfires to allow them to reconnect after a busy week of school, work, and sports. Their love radiates through their home. The way they communicate with one another is the connection they seek to establish with the school.

The Russo Family Home Visit

I pulled up to a cotton candy pink, Victorian home with a large backyard full of dogs and knew immediately that I was at the Russo's house. As I approached, I was eager to be welcomed into the home of Mrs. Russo, Sophia, and Mia. I walked through a pathway of perfectly trimmed shrubs to see Mrs. Russo at the windowed front door with a festive wreath. Mrs. Russo is a 49-year-old middle school special education teacher. This past summer she got engaged to her fiancé, Bob, so he recently moved into her home with the girls. The inside of their home was just as picturesque as the outside. It was decorated in a very precise manner in which everything had a home, but without one decoration, the room would not feel complete. The cream-colored walls balanced the multitude of antiques collected from antique stores. In the living room next to the

kitchen, there was an entertainment center with a TV and cabinets; Sophia keeps her book collection in here with a variety of picture books and chapter books. There were two dark leather couches which made the room a place the Russo's enjoy spending time together once homework and dinner are completed. The focal point of the living room is the old antique mantle in which the Russo's decorate for every holiday. They also have a Victrola and an old piece where they store blankets. As I turned the corner, I saw the formal dining room and living room conjoined into one big room with two overstuffed gold couches and a large table that seats six. The room glowed from the Christmas tree they keep up year-round and decorate for each holiday. My shoes clicked on the hardwood floors as I walked by the piano. As I complimented her beautiful home, she shared that Sophia was hoping to move to a new home soon because this one was not her favorite style and was too small. They describe their home as small, always needing work, close knit, and overcrowded with pets. They have three dogs (soon to be four), three cats, and a rabbit. I followed her into the old farm kitchen with pine walls and sat at the kitchen table made for 6. Sophia was engaged in her homework routine: sitting at the table with the oven timer set, completing homework, and eating a snack. Mrs. Russo shared that they often set the oven timer or use a phone timer to time Sophia's nightly reading. Sophia loves using her mom's cell phone so much that she would rather play on there than on their upstairs family computer. Sophia ran over and gave me a big squeeze. As I settled in, Mrs. Russo put a water bottle on the table for me, as one of the family cats, Tuck, jumped onto the table and was immediately in my face begging for attention. Sophia kept giggling at the silly cat and asked if she could let the dogs in so I could meet them. Mrs. Russo said Sophia could bring them in a little later, since they

would be too crazy. Mrs. Russo apologized that Mia wasn't home due to her bowling practice and I reassured her that I understood how important it was for her to be at practice. I then asked Sophia about second grade, she shared that she is still very chatty and that sometimes she just needs to talk. As she ate her Gushers, she said that she really enjoys her new class but misses first grade. As she said this, Mrs. Russo sprang up from the table and said that Sophia had a surprise for me. Sophia presented me with her latest in class writing, which was about her role model. Sophia read her writing aloud,

My first-grade teacher, Ms. Greenwood, is my role model because she displays so many positive character traits and I really look up to her. Ms. Greenwood is helpful. She always helps people with words they are stuck on. Ms. Greenwood is very caring. She cares about our grades. She always wants people to get 100 on their test. Ms. Greenwood is nice. She loves clipping up. And she loves taking care of us. Ms. Greenwood is the best role model that I could ever ask for!

With tears in my eyes, I hugged Sophia and shared how special she is to me. We reminisced for a while, about the fun times we had last year. Mrs. Russo thanked me for the incredible adoption party we had in the classroom last year which included Sophia bringing a stuffed animal from court, having a cake with her adopted last name, and gifts and cards from her classmates. Sophia smiled at me as if she were back at that moment.

When I asked more about Sophia's adoption, Sophia and her mom painted me a picture of what their first meeting was like. It was Mia's idea to have a younger sister, and one day Mrs. Russo got a phone call about a three-year-old girl who was a foster-to-adopt case. "She was my first case. She was three and she was exactly what I wanted. I knew the minute I met her that she was special, and she just won me over." She explained that they had a unique situation in which she was allowed to visit Sophia before she came to live with her. They were slowly dropping off bags of Sophia's things at the house, but she didn't know that she was moving homes yet.

Mrs. Russo: Do you remember when I came over and first met you? Remember I went to your birthday party and you kept asking for Tic-Tacs and American cheese? You even said “no thank you” when I asked if you wanted me to open your yogurt.

Sophia: I do remember that. I kept asking for more yogurts and cheese.

Mrs. Russo went on to share that the Sophia had transitioned fairly well after being in three homes previous to being with them. At first, Mrs. Russo’s parents were hesitant of the idea of adoption, but the first time they met Sophia, she called them “Grand mom and Grandpa” and they immediately fell in love with her. She ended the conversation by saying, “and you would never know unless I told you.” Mrs. Russo said Sophia fit seamlessly into the Russo family even though she is very different from her sister, “Mia is very needy and clingy, while Sophia is more independent. She isn’t afraid to ask for things, like pickles at Nicks, while Mia is like, Mom, go with me. Sophia has very brave characteristics, and the other one is afraid of her shadow.” Mrs. Russo followed up her description of her girls by saying that Sophia is brave because she had to be and that they talk about her background. Sophia came from a home in which she suffered from neglect. Mrs. Russo believes others would describe Sophia as sweet, caring, and funny. She can’t believe how witty Sophia is.

After a while, Sophia brought in her German Shepherds, Chloe and Toby, and her little Pomeranian, Barkley. They recently added Chloe to their family, and we bonded over our love of German Shepherds. I shared that the only dogs I ever had growing up were German Shepherds and Sophia reminded me of the funny stories I shared with the class about my dog who passed, Cooper. She laughed as she told her mom about the time that Cooper ate an entire cantaloupe off the counter. Sophia got up to retrieve scissors and coupons, and decided she wanted to help her mom get ready for the next time she

went shopping. Toby still climbed all around me on the table and Mrs. Russo shared family stories. At the end of the night, Mrs. Russo thanked me again for allowing her family to be a part of my study. She shared that she remembers her time collecting research when she got her masters and said it was a true pleasure helping me. She gave me one final hug saying, “There will never be another Ms. Greenwood.”

Family traditions. Mrs. Russo described her family as being accustomed to the Italian ways: cooking, baking, and the seven fishes dinner. Sophia chimed in saying, “But no one eats your cooking cause your chicken was gray.” Mrs. Russo laughed saying her mom called her chicken “50 shades of gray” and admitted to still learning how to cook by trying new recipes. Some family traditions include Christmas baking, the Elf on the Shelf (Josh), putting M&Ms out for Christmas, and attending church. They attend church weekly at Saint Michaels and Sophia goes to religious school. Shopping is something they genuinely enjoy doing as a family. Sophia also shared that the family has a tradition of shopping at the Deptford mall on Thanksgiving night and decorating the house for Christmas on Black Friday. The Russos like to attend events in the community as well, such as Chamberston day and parade. Mrs. Russo hopes that her kids will go to college and do what they want to do. Both girls want to become teachers, and Mrs. Russo stated that she will support whatever they want to do. Mrs. Russo shared that her family lives by the following mottos, “Education will get you everywhere, school is very important, treat others the way you want to be treated, don’t ever tease, kindness is a big thing and treating people right, listen and be respectful.”

Home literacies. Mrs. Russo remembers her parents reading to her every night, which helped her and her siblings to become good readers. “Reading was always my

strongest. I think it's important to start young. That's what some of my special education students are missing. No one is reading with or even to them." Mrs. Russo displays her own interest in reading by always having her books out. She tells the girls that some nights when they go to bed, she can't wait to read her Danielle Steel book. "Reading is very important. We will read every night, go to the library or even book fairs. I demonstrate the importance of reading by constantly getting books." The conversation then transitioned into what a typical night looks like in their home,

Interviewer: How would you describe a school night in your home?

Mrs. Russo: Snack, Homework,

Sophia: Always snack. I ate five snacks today.

Mrs. Russo: Sitting down at the table, working with her.

Sophia: Checking my work

Mrs. Russo: Checking your work, very good Soph. Because Sophia has a tendency to either rush or skip something, you know, so I always give her the opportunity to do it independently and then I'll check it and go over it. Then she will watch TV, read, and go to bed.

Sophia: I'm reading a book with 27 chapters

Mrs. Russo went on to say how Sophia likes to push herself to read hard books and how other books seem like baby books; she is very proud of Sophia selecting to choose difficult books. "Sophia is an excellent reader. She likes to read. She is articulate. Her teacher says she doesn't comprehend, but I don't know, I feel like when I read with her she does comprehend. She's able to answer all the questions I ask her. I think her writing skills need improvement, like her letters of the alphabet. She just likes to do it her way. It's very hard to tell her no. I like to correct her because I think it is a reflection on

me. It takes a little while before she will admit that it's wrong." A positive reading experience was when Sophia went up many grade levels in first grade.

Refrigerator. The Russo's had a stainless-steel refrigerator, but they did not let that stop them from finding space to display what was important to them. While they had nothing showcased on the front, the small space on the side allowed for some decoration. There was an Amsterdam magnet holding up a paper from first grade hanging that said, "I'm lucky because of my family. I love you." Sweet little cupcake magnets holding up the winter concert information. Another first grade project was hanging, which surprised me. This was a project that had a picture of Sophia blowing kisses with little hearts coming out, however, that wasn't the side displayed. The side that was displayed was the note on the back of the canvas which stated, "Dear Mom, I appreciate everything you do for me. Thank you. I love you. Love, Sophia. 2019." The simplicity of the Russo's refrigerator still allowed them to display that words of affirmation are something they hold dear.

Parent school relationship. Mrs. Russo believes a good teacher is someone who:

is caring and compassionate. Compassion is number one for me. I want someone who tells me what's going on. I don't like teachers who don't call or ever leave a note. I want to know what happened if they had a bad day. Like if they got on red, I would want the teacher to explain it. I like teachers who call you or let you when something is wrong. Communication and someone who is caring.

On her end, Mrs. Russo prefers to write a note to communicate with the teacher; if something needs to be discussed in detail, she will ask for the teacher to call her. "I don't like to bother a teacher and I always stand by a teacher. I would never say, oh she wouldn't do that. No matter what, I always support the teacher." From Mrs. Russo's

perspective, the teachers at our school are wonderful. She loved every teacher that Mia has had. "I can't say enough good things about Chamberston. For one thing, the curriculum is amazing, especially compared to my school." Mrs. Russo commented on parent meetings that the school offers. As a family, the Russo's attend every school function offered; Mrs. Russo mentioned Back to School night, parent-teacher conferences, the ice cream social, fright night, book fairs, concerts. The Russo's also attend community events such as Chamberston day, holiday fireworks, and town parades. She would not change anything about the parent-school relationship because she thinks everything is pretty good at our school. She does want Sophia's teacher to know that she is adopted, "I always want people to know so maybe they will be more patient and understanding." When asked about how a teacher's knowledge of a student's background can impact student learning, Mrs. Russo commented,

I think they are more empathetic towards a child if they know the background or know what's going on in a child's life. They can help a child more. So I think you should divulge anything you think is beneficial because that will help the child. It could explain why they are acting out because something is going on in their life, and they aren't themselves. You never know what's going on and that's important.

Mrs. Russo expressed trust in the school and the importance of communication, compassion, and understanding a child based on her own experience as a teacher and a parent.

Interview with Sophia. Sophia is very inquisitive about classroom activity as well as the world around her. She is observant, hardworking, and extremely witty. Sophia is the first one to understand a pun or a silly joke. She actively makes connections to her life or to things she has learned in the past. Sophia can be quite chatty, but when she is redirected, she can get back on task. Sophia reads and writes on her own

accord. She loves writing letters to her teacher and creating surprises for her friends.

Sophia loves her family, especially her big sister Mia. Sophia is kind-hearted, funny, and compassionate.

Sophia enjoys many types of dance including cheer dance, tap, and jazz. In her spare time, she shared that she likes to watch TV shows, specifically Cartoon Network, and loves making crafts. Sophia's favorite thing about school is reading. Daily 5 is her favorite part of the day because she gets to choose books from the classroom library to read with a partner and independently. Sophia appreciates that her teacher, Mr. Dixon, gives her hard books to read. When asked about how she thinks Mr. Dixon describes her, Sophia responded, "I think he thinks I'm talkative, but a very good reader. He tells me that all the time." Sophia believes that a good teacher has to be nice and happy. She shared that if a teacher isn't nice, like kindergarten, then she doesn't like going to school. Sophia shared that she genuinely enjoys going to school, but if Sophia could change one thing about school, she would implement a no homework policy. Even though her mom checks her homework every night and she has someone helping her if she gets stuck, she does not like to do it. She would rather come home, eat a snack, and start watching TV. When Sophia isn't making crafts or watching Cartoon Network, she chooses to read and write for fun. When asked what that usually looks like, Sophia responded:

Well during the bookfair, they were doing a raffle at the family night. I put my ticket in the basket and somehow, I won. It was actually pretty cool that I won. I read those books a lot. I also like to practice my writing. I write notes to my mom, sister, and my friends. I just like to draw pictures with speech bubbles that match with my letter.

Sophia shared that she likes to challenge herself with the books she chooses, most of the time, but she still has her favorite picture books. "My favorite book is *Stella the*

Unicorn. I like it because it tells you to be yourself.” Sophia mentioned that she sees her sister Mia doing her 10th grade homework every day. When she was asked if she would like her family to come to school for various events, Sophia replied “No, they would embarrass me, especially my dad (Mom’s fiancé, Bob). He would wave and call out to me.” Sophia knows that her family values school. She shared that her mom saves most of her schoolwork in a bin. When asked what her family says about school, Sophia replied, “What teacher would give this stuff? It’s so hard.” Sophia’s interview showed her spunky and sassy side as she reflected on herself, her family, and school.

Community. Sophia’s family shared with me that they frequently go out to dinner, so it was no surprise when I bumped into them at the town pizza place, Nick’s Pizza. Every time I go to Nick’s I always seem to run into someone I know. I can only imagine how the people in town feel. While I was at Nick’s that Wednesday, I ran into the Russos, my superintendent, and a few coworkers. The Russo’s immediately asked me to join them; Mrs. Russo, Mia, Sophia, and grandparents were all gathered around a square table. I’ve met Sophia’s grandparents a few times at school and in Nick’s when the teachers go out for lunch. Sophia’s grandmother always jokes with me asking how I look younger every time she sees me, “Oh today you look 16! I just don’t know how you do it.” They live in town and attend every school and community event for both Mia and Sophia. Sophia’s grandparents came to the Holiday Shop, winter and spring concert, and even the book fair. Sophia’s grandpa was an elementary school teacher for 42 years, so he is eager to attend school events. Sophia was very quiet at first, not expecting me to attend the Russo’s routine of going to Nick’s every Wednesday night with family and friends. It didn’t take long for Sophia to open up. She shared that she was taking a little

break from reading, but she would start pushing herself again soon. She was saying that she was nervous being in second grade because it was so different from first grade. Mia told her that school only gets harder as you get older. I reassured her that I knew she would be successful because she is such a hardworking, intelligent, and kind young lady. This seemed to put Sophia at ease. Mrs. Russo shared with me that she just got engaged and modeled her sparkling ring for me. She was beyond excited to start this new life journey and from what I could see, the girls were equally excited. Sophia's grandparents joked with me that every time they see me, I look younger and younger. I asked how old they think I look and when they shared that I look 14 Sophia couldn't stop laughing. Mrs. Russo comforted me saying that I will age well. Once everyone decided what they wanted to eat, Mrs. Russo insisted on paying for my food. "After everything you did for my daughter, it's the least I can do." I told her it was my pleasure, but she still insisted on treating me. It was a very kind gesture and my time spent with the Russo's at Nick's showed me their gratitude for the way I cared for Sophia. I enjoyed how they were playful with each other and even included me.

Themes. The Russo family demonstrated themes of education, togetherness, family ties, adoption, reading, and community. The Russo's family tree is full of teachers and aspiring teachers. One of Mrs. Russo's life quotes is that school can get you anywhere in life. Mrs. Russo encourages both of her daughters to work hard in school and to always do their best. She provides a steady routine for her daughters by checking Sophia's homework and ensuring she reads every night. Sophia and Mia take it upon themselves to write notes and to read in their spare time. Mrs. Russo also displays her strong beliefs in education by supporting the school and teachers. She shared that she

will always side with the teachers and that she does not usually like to bother a teacher because she knows how busy they are. Mrs. Russo appreciates the relationship she has with Sophia's teacher and wants him to know her background so he can be more patient with her.

Sophia's adoption plays a large role in the Russo family. Sophia has transitioned quite well since being adopted officially in 2019. Her adoption still plays a large role in her life because of what she experienced before being placed with the Russo's. Mrs. Russo wants people to know that Sophia was adopted and that she has become the girl she is today because of the love, support, guidance, and care she has received in her new home. Sophia being well dressed and groomed is important to her because Mrs. Russo wants her to feel taken care of.

The Russo's are very close with their grandparents. They show that family time is very important. They enjoy going to Nick's Pizza on Wednesdays, the Chinese Buffet on weekends, Cowtown, antique stores, or shopping at the outlets. Sometimes Sophia chooses to just spend her weekends at her grandparents' house because she loves spending time with her grandparents and laying in their comfy bed with their cat. Sophia also likes to spend some quality time with her mom; she won't fall asleep unless Mrs. Russo lays with her and watches Mama's Family. Anytime they spend together is valued time, but they particularly enjoy Sharing how their day was around the dinner table. The Russo's like to go out to eat a lot and engage in community events. Mrs. Russo grew up in Chamberston and is very proud of her small hometown. She takes her girls to as many community events as possible. The Russo's enjoy being a part of the community, school, and their family.

The Gallagher Family Home Visit

I drove down streets of Chamberston I never knew existed, and on a backroad, I arrived at the Gallagher's house. They had a large RV parked by the driveway and had a variety of fall decorations on their front porch. The front door was open, awaiting my arrival. Mrs. Gallagher greeted me at the door and as I took off my jacket, Ryan attacked me with a hug. Once I was through the front door, I was standing in their living room. The cream-colored walls were decorated with picture frames and floating shelves, which held family pictures frames and little quote blocks. Their hardwood floors were covered by a small area rug beneath the coffee table, which was in front of two brown cloth couches. Their large Smart TV was in the corner of the room by the stairs leading upstairs. In the opposite corner was a play pin for Emily as well as many of her large toys. The Gallaghers shared they spent the most time in their living room, which connected to their open kitchen. I followed them into the kitchen where Mr. Gallagher and Emily were sitting. I was surprised to see another adult in the kitchen, and Mrs. Gallagher explained that her younger sister Nikki had been living with them for a while, so she would also be joining us. As I settled in at the kitchen counter, Mr. Gallagher stepped away from his job as a hydraulic pump mechanic and was acting as the family chef. He cooked Ryan some grilled chicken and veggies on the stovetop, while the water boiled for perogies for the adults. The kitchen looked newly refurbished with a new countertop and cabinets on the island which had two black bar stools. On top of the island was a vase of fresh flowers, a candle, a golden pineapple decoration, and a pink envelope waiting to go in the mail. On the large wall behind me was a message board which kept the Gallagher family organized with all of their upcoming events. The

kitchen table sat 6 and they had a height chair for Emily by the sliding back door. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher shared the story of how they met when they attended Chamberston high school; she was a sophomore and he was a senior. Mrs. Gallagher laughed as she shared that Mr. Gallagher messaged her on Myspace, but she dismissed his attempt to talk to her because she wanted him to talk to her in person. Mr. Gallagher added that he was very shy and nervous, but he did talk to her. They smiled at each other as Mrs. Gallagher said, “and ever since then, it was history. We just clicked.” They went on to describe that they are now so happy with their two children, Ryan, 7 years old, and Emily, 18 months. “Ryan is very intelligent, but I can say that I think he is a bit of a follower. He is very calm and relaxed. Emily is totally not calm, but she is very independent. She wants what she wants and that’s it. Ryan is very sweet, he’s an extrovert while she is an introvert. People always comment on Ryan’s manners and respectfulness.” Mrs. Gallagher stated that she wanted that to be instilled in him, especially because of where she works as a financial aid counselor at a local college. She stated that because she sees people in her generation that do not have manners, she doesn’t want people to view her children that way.

Their two dogs were in a small little gated area in the kitchen barking like crazy and the larger dog was in a bedroom. Mrs. Gallagher was my room mom last year, and the most organized room mom I have ever met, so we reminisced on the great group of kids that were in my class last year. She asked about my class this year and shared that it has been a somewhat difficult transition for Ryan into second grade. He would occasionally lose points on Class Dojo and recently got a lower math grade than he usually gets. The Gallaghers set high expectations for Ryan, so they were not happy

when they saw his grades and behavior slipping. As we talked about the transition from first to second grade, Ryan very politely asked if he could ask me a secret question. He whispered into my ear asking what my favorite Disney movie was. I told him that I loved *Beauty and the Beast* and immediately ran into the family room to put it on the TV with their new Disney Plus subscription. As we continued to talk about school, Mrs. Gallagher reminded me of how appreciative her family was for all of my efforts last year. She shared that it was important to her to write to my superintendent to express her feelings,

As I stated I am a Chamberston alumnus, and prior substitute I have seen a lot of teachers come, go and stay in Chamberston. Many teachers have cared but I have never seen this much effort from a teacher at this level. Chamberston should hire more teachers like Ms. Greenwood. I just felt it was very important for me to express our appreciation and to emphasize how truly thankful we are for Ms. Greenwood this year. She will truly be missed next year when Robert moves onto 2nd Grade but I am sure she will be at Chamberston for years to come. Ms. Greenwood is an amazing teacher that goes above and beyond to make a difference for a child, and I hope that Chamberston School District recognizes her efforts.

Being in the home of the Gallagher's I was reminded how important it is to build relationships with the parents. Mr. Gallagher walked me down memory lane as he explained that before Ryan was in my class, he was having behavior difficulties in school. When he was in the PK4 program he was sent to the principal and needed to be picked up. I was very surprised to hear this, considering Ryan's manners. As we spoke, Emily ran around the house with a very stern look on her face. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher joked that she was shy and not very friendly, but Emily kept her distance and played on the floor nearby. Ryan pulled out some Pokémon cards and was explaining who a good Pokémon is based on their energy levels. He then asked if I wanted to see his room. We walked upstairs and he introduced me to his stuffed animal collection, his hermit crab, and even his bedroom library. He pulled out his favorite

stuffed animals as Emily ran around the room with a board book in her hand. As the night came to an end, Ryan gave me a big hug and Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher shared they were happy to help with my schoolwork. We agreed to stay in touch, and I walked to my car.

Family traditions. Mrs. Gallagher walked me through her family tree: Her dad wasn't in her life when she was younger, but she knew that her dad's grandfather was first generation in America from Sicily. Mrs. Gallagher's grandmother was French Canadian, and her grand pop grew up in Philadelphia, but his father was born in Germany. "So, I have a mix of Italian, German, and a little bit of Canadian in there." She then shared that her heritage plays a role in her family traditions. "I do cook a lot of Italian dishes. My mom and dad didn't stay together, but when she remarried, she married a guy whose parents were very Italian, so my mom always cooked Italian meals, so that's how I cook." She also shared that she wasn't very religious, but she was raised Catholic and so was her husband. Most family traditions are around the holidays for the Gallagher's, such as cooking Thanksgiving dinner for about 25 people, going to see Christmas lights in Pitman and Swedesboro, and opening one gift on Christmas Eve. This was a tradition that Mrs. Gallagher had when she was a child and passed it on to her family. When asked why they chose to stay in Chamberston, Mrs. Gallagher responded,

Honestly, we didn't want to. I know everyone. At first, we were looking outside of Chamberston, but the price range was just not realistic to be honest, it was going to be what we had in our pockets at the time. Then I got more comfortable; I was comfortable with the school and talking to the people because I already knew them, or if they didn't know me, they knew my sisters. I think it was familiarity, I've been here forever. We live in the Chamberston bubble.

Mr. Gallagher added that his dad and sisters live in Chamberston and Mrs. Gallagher's mom lives in Chamberston as well. While sharing stories about their family and cousins,

Mrs. Gallagher shared that Ryan was the first boy in 23 years born on her side of the family. When she announced her pregnancy, everyone bought dresses because they just could not believe it. While their family is quite large, the Gallagher's have their own hopes and dreams for the four of them:

We have a travel trailer that we just bought. My point for bringing that up is that we want to have a good family relationship to stay close. I know it's hard to stay as close as you want, but I want my kids to feel like family vacations and things like that create a close knit-ness. And he knows that he can trust in me that he can share things because we have spent so much time together.

They describe their home as cozy and chaotic because of the dogs, one they jokingly call the Kraken, and Emmy always running around. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher described their weekends being very busy with sports, house warmings, baby showers, and wedding showers for their friends. Ryan was looking over my shoulder and asked if he could read my next question, which was "How do the kids help around the house?" Ryan shared that he does the dishes and Emily helps him put the forks away. He also vacuums the stairs with his own personal vacuum. He collects the trash bags in the house so his dad can bring it outside. Ryan helps feed the dogs too. His reward for chores and his behavior in school are video games or board games on the weekends. Some family mottos they live by include, "You get what you get, and you don't get upset, always tell the truth, and do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Home literacies. Because Emily is so young, the Gallaghers were able to easily reflect on what early literacy looks like in their home. "So, she literally loves books, that's how I got her to walk. She has these two mini books with you know, those little cardboard ones, and I had them and was waving them and she finally walked. I swear." While I was in their home, Emily was in her room sitting on her giant unicorn and was

“reading” her board books. Mrs. Gallagher shared this is something she loves to do on her own. Both parents take turns reading to Emily, but Ryan spends a lot of time reading to her. For Ryan, reading comes quite naturally. Mr. Gallagher shared that Ryan really likes to read. Mrs. Gallagher said that is more about challenging Ryan with his book selection; he always wants to read easier books. “I try to get fun books. He likes the Flyers, so I got Wayne Gretzky. I wanted him to have books that he is interested in.” She then talked about what it looks like in the home while Ryan is reading. “I’m trying to get him to work on his comprehension. So, he has to read a page and after he reads, he needs to tell me what it is about. So that’s what we are working on now.” They both describe Ryan as a very strong reader and writer with incredible handwriting. Mrs. Gallagher reflected on an experience when he was young, “We started him so young, so things just clicked very quickly. He would read words I didn’t even know he could read. So, Barbara Ann’s had this huge chalkboard and he would just say, pancakes while looking at the board.” Mr. Gallagher then shared, “When he was young, probably Emily’s age, he had a tablet and it was all educational stuff. It was phonics based. He started talking at 9 months. He knew crazy shapes from this app, like a dodecahedron. I’m not saying he is gifted, but he excelled quickly.” The Gallagher’s were able to identify early signs of literacy in their home because of Ryan’s self-motivation.

When asked about their own memories reading as children, Mr. Gallagher quickly chimed in giggling, “I remember that mole book. *The Story of the Little Mole Who Went in Search of Whodunit.*” Mrs. Gallagher explained, “It’s a book about a mole who gets his head pooped on. It’s horrible.” Mrs. Gallagher’s favorite was *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* and *The Black Lagoon* books. “I will never forget those it was in 3rd grade with

Mrs. Catalfano. I will never forget that. Those were great we had competitions to get those. And now they have the *There was an Old Lady* books, those are awesome too.” Mr. Gallagher chimed in, “I don’t really remember my parents enforcing reading. At least not like we do with him. I really don’t remember.” Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher do not identify as readers. Thinking back to her own school experience, Mrs. Gallagher shared,

I always liked school. My friends that I’m friends with now, I was friends with in second grade, so we’ve literally been friends for over 20 years at this point. But I was always very into school. I was on honor roll and things like that, National Honors Society. I was the go-to cheerleader girl.

Mr. Gallagher had a different response “I liked school until high school. I was lazy and I...” Mrs. Gallagher cut in laughing, “then he was a juvenile delinquent. When I dated him, teachers would always ask why we were dating.” When questioned about their children’s future, Mrs. Gallagher, “They have two options: college or an alternative school. One or the other. I don’t even care if it is a trade, they never use in their life at least they have something to fall back on. I know you can’t make people do it.” Mr. Gallagher chimed in, “I wish it was more of like, you need to go to school. It was left up to me to make a decision. I was halfway to an associate degree, but it’s just not happening right now.” The Gallagher’s acknowledged that their life revolves around school. They engage Ryan in conversation each day after school by asking different questions to hear about his day, . “I want him to be able to talk to us, so I ask him, how was your day? Was there something bad or something that made you upset? What made you happy? Then you are able to get stories out of a seven-year-old.” Clearly, education is a strong family value fostered by Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher.

Refrigerator. The Gallagher's refrigerator displays various factors of their home literacies. It is very clear that they are big sports fans because of their multiple Flyers and Eagles magnets. They have a laminated sheet of a list of their bills they pay monthly; they use a dry erase marker to check off the bills as they are paid. They have future doctor's appointment reminders hanging. A list of Ryan's chores is also displayed on the front of the refrigerator to serve as a reminder for him. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher's phone numbers are hanging in large print in case of emergency. Ryan's schoolwork is displayed including his Foundations dictation test, some artwork, and even his report card. Ryan colored a superhero picture which is also hanging proudly on the fridge. They have magnets from Gatorland and Disneyworld representing some family vacations. The Gallagher's also have pictures of the four of them, the kids, and even cousins on the refrigerator. Their refrigerator demonstrates multiple facets of family literacy.

Parent school relationship. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher repeatedly mentioned the importance of school and the role they play as parents to contribute to Ryan's success in school. They both are a part of his nightly homework routine and even do additional reading to help him advance his skills.

- Interviewer: What does a typical night look like in your home?
- Mrs. Gallagher: Most of the time, he's home with the kids. I'm on the second shift, so I usually get home around 7-7:30.
- Mr. Gallagher: So usually he's with her sisters or my sister and he does his homework right after school and then I get both of them. Make sure his homework is done.
- Interviewer: Does he usually do homework independently?
- Mr. Gallagher: Yeah, but we gotta check it though

Mrs. Gallagher: I haven't been checking it as much because I want Mr. Dixon and even for you, because I want you to know that he does his own homework, even if he gets one wrong, there's nothing wrong with that.

When asked about how Ryan's teacher views him, Mrs. Gallagher shared that she thinks he sees Ryan as a good student. Mrs. Gallagher wants Ryan's teacher to know,

I get it, you are a teacher and there is professionalism there, but I don't want it to feel like I'm not the bad guy, you're not the good guy. I don't want it to be like that. I want it to be like, listen, this is my kid, and this is your kid you have to keep. I want them to understand that I'm not going to the principal. Me and you can figure this out, I have to deal with you for the rest of the year. So, I don't care what they say, it's your classroom and that's how it goes. To get on the same level with everything.

She followed up by sharing an example of how Ryan got a 75 and an 80 on his last math test and how they were not the grades they were used to Ryan bringing home.

So I didn't bring it up to Mr. Dixon yet because I wanted to address it with Ryan first. I took the test and asked him the questions and he answered them in a snap. I want him to understand that he is rushing, and he needs to work that out on his own. I already explained to him that it's better to be the highest grade than the first one done.

Mrs. Gallagher then brought up how she and I communicated last year. We made sure that we were on the same page with how to help Ryan succeed academically and behaviorally in the classroom by trying things in school and at home to help Ryan.

You have created a product of good society at this point. I do, I wrote that letter about you and praised you because you have no idea how much you have changed him. If you looked at him in PreK3, PreK4, and kindergarten, he is a completely different child and we really thank you. You really have made a huge difference for our son.

They shared that he went to summer school for behavior and was even sent to the principal's office in his early school years. He was an only child and people were suggesting having him practice sharing, but he had no one to share with. They

appreciated that I was the first teacher to offer suggestions for things I would do in the classroom and things they could try at home to keep routines consistent for Ryan. Mrs. Gallagher shared that she believes a good teacher is one who communicates and individualizes the strengths of his or her students.

The Gallagher's think Simmons has a good parent-teacher relationship. "I like how they have the Dojo and Remind to communicate with parents. They used to do the PreK nights, but I don't think they have anything like that for the older grades. Those were great; we loved those. We do the ice cream social, the book fair family night, and trunk or treat." They wouldn't really change anything about the parent school relationship because the Gallagher's believe that the school does a good job communicating. They also like how our principal shares tips and messages with the parents. When asked about how a teacher's knowledge of a student or a family, Mrs. Gallagher commented, "I think that knowing information from a prior year isn't always a good thing because that can make or break a relationship. I think it should be a clean slate each year. A teacher knowing a student individually and what they do really helps the student in general." The Gallagher's shared that while they know that Ryan is unique, he is not a unique student. They understand that many kids learn in the same style as Ryan, so teachers can plan to keep all students engaged.

Interview with Ryan. Robert is an abstract thinker; he often finishes his work before the rest of the class and can get distracted while he waits for others to catch up. He works to be the best at everything he attempts. He enjoys the idea of a competition and thrives knowing that he has the best handwriting in the classroom. When he is motivated, there is no stopping Robert from accomplishing his goal. His best

subject is math due to his ability to explain his thinking and automatic knowledge of math facts. He is a huge fan of Super Mario, loves his little sister, and enjoys playing pretty much all video games. He gets very disappointed in himself when he makes a mistake because he knows that he will need to report back to his parents. Robert has a fun, positive attitude about learning and looks forward to learning new things.

Ryan cannot wait to go to college so he can become a Pokémon card maker. He enjoys playing board games, like Mouse Trap, video games, and playing with his toys, like Optimus Prime. Ryan wrestles and is very proud of earning a trophy last wrestling season; he hopes to do it again this season. He shared that he likes going to school because learning is fun. He likes social studies the best because he gets to learn about a lot of different things. Ryan's favorite thing about Mr. Dixon is that he is very nice. Ryan thinks a good teacher is "smart and teaches you a lot." According to Ryan, Mr. Dixon views Ryan as good, nice to others, and helpful. Even though he is very fond of his teacher, Ryan wishes that school could have more play time. To practice reading and writing at home, Ryan shared that he plays leapfrog games for fun. He shared that his favorite book is *The Polar Express* because he likes that they have a movie for the story. Ryan does his homework on his own, he often starts it before his bus gets called after school. When he gets home, he unpacks his stuff, works on his homework, then plays. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Aunt Trish stays with him and on Tuesdays and Thursdays Aunt Nikki is home with him. Ryan stated, "The important stuff that comes home in his folder, I save for mom to see and keep. The not important stuff goes in the trash, or actually the recyclables." Ryan wishes that his family could come into school more for the fun days, like PJ day. He thinks they would also like to

wear PJs like the kids. Ryan shared, “My family says school is good for kids to help them learn a lot.” Ryan recognizes his family’s opinion of school and applies himself to be the best in the classroom.

Community. The elementary school’s Home and School Association was hosting their annual Trunk-or-Treat event. This event was well organized: The Home and School Association advertised well, gave out wristbands ahead of time, and informed the participants that there would be about 350 trick or treaters. The students had pre-registered by sending in two dollars for each trick or treat, so the night of the event they wore the wristband that was sent home to prove they had registered. I attended the event with another first grade teacher and her family which included her husband, her four-year old daughter, and her eight-month old daughter. When we arrived, we were taken aback by the number of people, and the amount of decorations, and candy. Our school parking lot had looked like the inside of a Halloween store in simply a few hours after school had ended. They had about 40 cars, including a hearse. Each trunk was decorated in a unique way. Some were superhero themed; some were scary, and some were cute. There was one car that had a huge cardboard cutout of a nose, and they had to pick the nose to get candy, which the kids loved. As I walked around, previous students ran up to me to share a hug and brag about how much candy they have gotten. I saw some parents and they shared how their child was doing so far this school year. One of the families I bumped into was the Gallaghers. Ryan was dressed in a scary black mask with lots of sharp teeth, while Emily was wearing a Tinkerbell costume completed with a light up green wand. Ryan was running around with his cousin Caleb and was extremely excited to bump into me. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher followed with a wagon full of snacks, drinks, and warm

clothing. They were socializing with Mr. Gallagher's sister and a few other adults. The boys raced around and commented on all the car decorations, while the parents trailed behind keeping a close eye on them. The boys had a rule that they needed to stay as close as one car away from their parents so they could ensure they were safe. As I walked around, I made note of the parents that were participating. This event was entirely funded by parent donation; the parents purchased decorations, candy, and costumes for this event. There were parents decked out in costumes and were making small talk with each group of people who walked by to say, "trick or treat." In one car, I had reached my hand in the bowl to get candy for Ryan and a little boy dressed as a clown had jumped up to scare me. He was pretending to be a decoration and had completely fooled me considering I had jumped back away from the car giving many a good laugh. Ryan was so thankful it was me who reached into the car as opposed to him. I was amazed at the sense of community I witnessed during this two-hour event. It seemed as though everyone knew each other; there were hugs followed by, "We need to get together" from many. As I was leaving, I noticed very few teachers attending the event. It seemed to mean a lot to the students and the parents I had bumped into that they were able to see me. Although it was an event at the school, because it was after hours, it had somehow felt different. The welcoming parents, decorations, costumes, and snacks had made me feel as though I was a part of the community. While my time spent with the Gallagher's was brief, I was given a strong sense of what it means to be a part of the Chamberston community.

Themes. The Gallagher's established themes of family, hard work, achievement, communication, community, and education. The Gallagher's show great support for both

the town and the school system in Chamberston. They grew up in Chamberston and so they have a lot of trust and experience in the community. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher discussed the importance of family throughout my time in their home. They were willing to share their heritage, the story of how they met, and even walked me through the family connections of cousins and family friends. They rely on their extended family, specifically siblings, for childcare as well as to engage in family activities on the weekends. They express love, kindness, and communication as important family values.

In terms of literacy, the Gallaghers seem to instill the importance of literacy into their children based on their own experiences. Mrs. Gallagher shared that she was an honors student who was on the National Honors Society. She valued education when she was in high school and wanted to make her work reflect her abilities. It seems as though she wants Ryan to follow in her footsteps. When she works with Ryan, she likes to check his comprehension before allowing him to continue. Mrs. Gallagher's efforts reflect feedback she has received from the school to help Ryan advance to the next level. Mr. Gallagher shared that he enjoyed school but started to lose interest in high school. He also mentioned that he wishes his family pushed him to advance his education. It seemed as though he wants Ryan to experience a level of education that he did not experience. Mr. Gallagher was pushing more for going to college, while Mrs. Gallagher seemed okay with college or alternative school. Either way, the Gallagher's wanted both their children to understand the importance of working hard in school.

The Gallagher's clearly value education and want what is best for Ryan. They vocalized their frustrations from years past with Ryan. Teacher's labeled him as a

behavior problem, attributing to him attending summer school to improve his behavior. Mrs. Gallagher stated, “I think that knowing information from a prior year isn’t always a good thing because that can make or break a relationship. I think it should be a clean slate each year.” Ryan’s “silly” behaviors at a young age set the expectations very high for him to improve. Ryan now understands that if he acts out in school, he will have a consequence at home such as losing electronics. This keeps Ryan motivated in school, but can occasionally lead to breakdowns, not because of his actions, but because he knows the consequence that will follow if he doesn’t turn his day around. For this reason, The Gallagher’s value teacher communication because they like to understand what Ryan’s mistakes were so they can handle it appropriately at home. They also encourage good behavior to keep Ryan focused on his studies. The Gallagher’s appreciate teachers who allow children to start fresh in their classroom and who can individualize instruction to highlight their strengths of each child.

Finding Commonalities Among Households

I learned a lot from being welcomed into the Washington, Russo, and Gallagher homes. All families demonstrated themes of family, love, kindness, and consideration for others. While each family displayed their love in different ways, love was very apparent in each household. The Washingtons displayed signs of physical touch; they showed love by sitting close to one another, butterfly kisses, and hugs. The Russos shared that they loved spending time together shopping, so they displayed love through acts of giving. The Robinsons were about words of affirmation; they ensured that they used kind words and showed appreciation for each other’s actions. Each family talked about the importance of time spent together. Whether it be at the dinner table, family

vacations, nights spent at home, or new adventures, each of the three families wanted to make new family memories.

Family traditions. Family traditions were important to each family. While most family traditions were based around the holidays, each family seemed to pass on traditions from when the parents were young. All of the families also shared that they were very close with their relatives. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins seemed to play a large role in their lives. Whether it be for childcare, family activities, or looking back at old memories, each family mentioned the importance of spending time with their extended family. The children shared times that they spent with their families as well. The three families also exhibited signs of believing in similar life mottos: following the Golden Rule, doing your best in school, and working hard to achieve your dreams. The Russos and the Gallaghers both grew up in Chamberston, so they demonstrated strong ties to the community. They actively engaged in town events and activities. The Washingtons, however, spend most of their time engaging with the sporting community as opposed to the Chamberston community. All three families are very busy on the weekends providing new experiences for their children.

Home literacies. When it came to home literacies, each family had a different style and various memories of their own experiences. The parents were able to recall some sort of reading memory as children. Mrs. Washington shared that she remembered making and rehearsing flashcards as a study tool. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher each stated their favorite books as children. Mrs. Russo remembered her parents reading to her and her siblings and accrediting them to her reading skills. The children also shared some of their favorite things about literacy. Kyle shared that he isn't the fondest of reading

independently, however he enjoys reading aloud to his parents or his parents reading books to him. Sophia loves reading and writing and chooses to challenge herself with her book selection. She even shared that her favorite book was one that taught the reader to be themselves. Ryan also enjoys reading, although sometimes he chooses books out of comfort as opposed to challenging his ability. Each family was actively engaged in their child's homework routine. The Washington's took turns looking at Kyle's work depending on who was home from work. Mrs. Russo sat at the table with Sophia to ensure she was doing her work correctly. Mr. Gallagher shared that he will usually check Ryan's work and Mrs. Gallagher was okay with some being wrong occasionally so the teacher could see Ryan's true ability. All parents stressed the importance of school to their children. The children recognized that their parents encouraged them to do their best in school because it would help their future.

All of the parents believed that the school was doing it is best to support their children in becoming successful. The parents shared that they appreciated the communication, events, and curriculum that were a part of their children's academic lives. The parents were able to recall school events such as back to school night, trunk or treat, parent teacher conferences, the ice cream social, etc. The most popular events were the ones directly with the teachers: back to school night and parent teacher conferences. While most of the parents were pleased with the school events, they were hoping for a few more events so they could feel more included. Kyle and Ryan said they would love their parents being more involved, while Sophia said her family would embarrass her if they came into the classroom. The parents shared that they appreciate open communication with the teachers. They expect teachers to share what is going on in

their child's day, especially if they have a problem with their behavior. The parents asked for teachers to work with the parents to ensure they are on a level playing field. Mrs. Washington shared that a good teacher is one who cares about the students in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Mrs. Russo built on that answer by stating that when teachers know about a student's background, they are better able to help them in the classroom. Mrs. Gallagher shared that teachers should see each child as an individual and that they should get a fresh start every year.

Caring. The theme that resonated the most was that the parents want to know that the teacher cares about their child. While the parents and the teacher agree that the child attends school to focus on academics, both parties are fully aware that children also develop socially and emotionally while in school. To attribute to the growth of the whole child, it is imperative that the teachers show how much they care for the children. Mrs. Washington shared that Kyle's big heart is often misunderstood, which upsets him. A teacher who can listen to Kyle when he needs to get something off his chest would be the most supportive so his honesty and compassion can be viewed as an asset. Mrs. Russo discussed the importance of educators understanding that while Sophia seems put together now, she came from a broken background before her adoption. A teacher who is empathetic and patient would support Sophia to flourish into the intellectual, witty girl she is. Mrs. Gallagher noted that making one's own judgements is important because children grow year after year. A teacher who has an open mind and can communicate would best support Ryan academically and behaviorally; this would allow Ryan to continue being the smart, funny, and kind second grader he is. These three families

shared how much they love their children and they just want a teacher to love their child for who they are.

Conclusion

Chapter five looks at the school environment through an interview with the principal, second grade teachers, and even classroom observations. Themes presented will be analyzed to understand the school day for the three students.

Chapter 5

Evaluation of the School Environment

“Language differences, prior literacy experiences, and availability of resources at home affect how readily children adjust to school literacy practices” (Compton-Lilly, 2019, p. 29).

Introduction

This chapter presents an interview with the elementary school principal and two second grade teachers who have the participating students in their classes. These professionals were questioned about their educational experience, culturally relevant pedagogy, home-school relationships, and their knowledge of the participating families. Another source of data was collected through classroom observation. Because the three students were previously in my classroom, I wanted to see how they have transitioned into second grade. It was important for me to witness their relationship with their teacher and peers. This information helped me understand how educators implement funds of knowledge into their classrooms and where the school could insert more student interest and culture into the learning environment.

Principal Interview

Mr. David Penrose has dedicated 33 years to education. Mr. Penrose’s current position is the principal of Theodore A. Simmons Elementary, which he has held for the past five years. He has earned his Ph.D. in Comparative Religion, a master’s in educational administration, and a Masters in English. His career in education allowed him a vast amount of experience. He taught high school English and Spanish, 7th grade English, Gifted and Talented: Creative Writing and Theatre Arts for 3rd to 12th Graders,

college-level English, and has been an elementary principal for seven years. He also finds it incredibly important to be involved in the school community, even though he does not live in Chamberston, to experience students outside of the classroom and to serve as a mentor to the student population. In his career, Mr. Penrose has been a high school band director, play director, coach, leader of an accreditation committee, Senior Class Dean of Students, and ran professional development as a new teacher mentor. He strongly believes that in order to grow as a professional, it is important to get involved. Education runs in his family; his father was principal for 44 years and inspired him to go down the path of education.

He promised himself that when he became principal, he would be able to take all of his expertise and apply it to an entire school. He prides himself on knowing all of the students in his building by name, demonstrating the importance of building a trusting relationship with students. Mr. Penrose is constantly asking his staff to keep him informed of classroom instruction and specific student needs so he can best support them. He comments that the biggest challenge of being principal is balancing all of the responsibilities: state reports, paperwork, communication with teachers, and knowing student needs. He states, “Being a good principal requires good juggling skills with organizational skills and if you don’t have that, you’ll have a really tough time. It’s tough to begin with.” As he reflects on the students, he states, “We want students to be successful and achieve on their level. Education isn’t just one sided. It’s also a social and emotional piece. I try to be mindful of that while putting forth good academic effort.”

Culturally relevant teaching. When considering culturally relevant pedagogy, Mr. Penrose recognizes how diverse the school’s population is and how it makes for great

educational opportunities. When asked to define culturally relevant pedagogy, he states, “I think you have to be able to understand that each student, all 700 of them. That’s our clientele, we have to be able to reach out to those students and remember that what we teach and how we teach needs to be sensitive on a global level and that includes their cultures, backgrounds, experiences. I think if you are able to be sensitive to that, you’ll have a greater opportunity to show and be successful as a classroom teacher.” He believes that the school demonstrates culture through the curriculum, materials, class activities, and lesson plans. When asked to clarify what a specific lesson would look like that was culturally relevant, he shares, “Not necessarily every week, but the teacher could select materials in any discipline with specific selection. Maybe direct instruction or something that is tangential, not just the delivery of the lesson. It could be things found in the classroom, artifacts, those types of things are exemplars.” Mr. Penrose believes it comes down to designing lessons to reflect relevant things that students are reading to build the literacy bridge.

Parent-school relationships. Mr. Penrose believes the key to success in a school is the relationship with parents. He declares the parent-school relationship at our school is warm and cordial. “The way we speak to parents is very positive. It’s a true partnership. I make sure to say thank you at assemblies for the true partnership here. For me, it’s not a one-sided business. There are parents and guardians attached. Bottom line we need to have them on our side, that’s important.” Mr. Penrose reveals that we need the parents to buy into what we are trying to do with their children. He believes in constant (as much as possible), positive communication with parents. Mr. Penrose shares that it is necessary to share academics, but also behavioral and social things because of his belief in the whole

child. As a principal, he uses Class Dojo and Facebook to keep the school connected. He will share information relevant to the school calendar, social events, but also tips for the children's wellbeing. While reflecting on established programs at the school, Mr. Penrose recognizes the Home and School Association, individual teacher programs for parents, and the CCC (Child Connection Center). Mr. Penrose comments on the importance of a parent-school relationship.

We can't lose sight of the fact that they send us their babies every day and we need to do our best in order to do our 100% best. We would need more input, information, and detail from them on what could be happening at home, what they are seeing at home, and what activities are they doing to help stimulate learning and creativity. So, to just enhance what we already do in the classroom.

If there was one thing he would like to see with the parent-school relationships, he would like to see more collaboration with parents. Mr. Penrose is very proud of the school climate and values the established relationships.

Teacher Interview: Mrs. Harvey

Danielle Harvey has been teaching for a total of eight years. She has been both a first and second grade teacher at Simmons Elementary. She lives about twenty minutes from Chamberston. Mrs. Harvey has her Bachelors in Humanities and Masters in Elementary Education K-5. Mrs. Harvey has always wanted to be a teacher since she was young, stating that she just had a feeling that it was what she was made to do. At this time, she has no plans of going back to school because of balancing her business she owns with her husband and her four children. When her children grow up, she might consider going back to school. "Knowing that I have made a positive impact on one or more lives. Knowing that I can make a students' day in multiple ways, that they aren't

always difficult tasks” is the most rewarding part of teaching for Mrs. Harvey. When asked about the most challenging part of teaching, Mrs. Harvey responded,

Behaviors. The most challenging part of teaching for me is dealing with behaviors that occur consistently. It takes time away from other students and their learning and growing. It’s difficult to balance. Also, I feel as though the curriculum is sometimes not developmentally appropriate.

Mrs. Harvey believes the most important role of being a teacher is educating the whole child: socially, emotionally, and academically.

Culturally relevant teaching. Mrs. Harvey recognizes that the 700 student population is made up of mixed cultures. When asked about culturally relevant pedagogy, she took a minute to consider what this term means, stating she is not too familiar with this phrase. As she unpacks it, she states, “I don’t think students take their culture into consideration. I don’t think it’s really affecting them academically or socially.” She shares that other than ELL and other services, the school doesn’t seem to spend much time specifically focusing on the cultures of students. In her own instruction, Mrs. Harvey considers her ELL students. “In my guided reading groups, I have to do huge vocab frontloading for my ELL kids. I take their culture into consideration.” She shares that the curriculum doesn’t specify culture.

Interviewer: What could we change in the curriculum to highlight students’ cultures?

Mrs. Harvey: I think we should celebrate their cultures and let them share more about where they come from in their culture. I don’t think we do enough of that. I think it would help them learn more about their own cultures and let them see the differences within each other and how it’s cool. We seem to only stick to the “American” traditions like Christmas and Thanksgiving and all that and we don’t celebrate all things.

Looking past only cultures, Mrs. Harvey recognizes the importance of integrating student interest into her daily instruction. She was able to share many student specific interests and how knowing these things plays a large role in her classroom.

I use their interests in lots of ways. I use it as a behavior modification for certain kids that have behavior plans. Like my one student, has major behavior issues, but he is really into those little army soldiers, so everything for his behavior is geared toward those little army things. I like to take their interests into consideration during discussions. I turn my teaching in a direction toward what they are interested in to make them more into learning.

Mrs. Harvey is aware of the importance of integrating culture into the classroom and recognizes that the school could do more to appreciate the diverse student population. In her classroom, she is sure to use student interests to guide her behavior management and daily instruction.

Parent-school relationships. Parent-School relationships are something that Mrs. Harvey feels are crucial to the success of students. “I think it’s pretty strong if the parents choose it to be. I think the school does its part in getting the parents involved. And if the parent wants to be involved, then there are plenty of activities and ways that they can.” She uses Class Dojo, email, weekly newsletters, phone calls to communicate, but she clarifies that it depends on the situation to determine which communication she will use. In terms of communication she received from parents, some want to work as a team and some will say things like, “Oh, good luck with him” when she tries to address behavior issues. She expects parents to ensure homework is done, come to Back to School Night, address when students struggle, and help her keep children on pace at home, especially with a lesson they may have struggled with. Mrs. Harvey was able to recall various programs that encourage parent involvement, “Back to School night,

conferences, BSI conferences, Read Across America, fright night, PBSIS did some things, Wizards Basketball night, and Trunk or Treat.”

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about the parent-school relationship, what would it be?

Mrs. Harvey: I don't think there is really much we can change because I feel like we are doing a good job. Mr. Penrose (principal) has his Class Dojo, which is good communication with parents. I think it's just up to the parent. I don't think there's too much that we can change on our end.

Mrs. Harvey is aware of the importance of parent engagement and feels as though the school puts forth a lot of effort. She shared that she has many parents who constantly seek a relationship and some parents she has not even seen this school year. Overall, she believes our school does a good job communicating with parents.

The Washingtons. Mrs. Harvey describes Kyle as high energy, disruptive, and loving. In her opinion, he is a student who does well when she stays on top of him to ensure he is doing his best and not rushing to be the first one done. Mrs. Harvey shares that Kyle is always involved in everyone else's business, which causes him to be disruptive; he takes medicine for ADHD twice a day and she does follow his 504. Some accommodations for Kyle include preferential seating to be in the front of the classroom as well as seated near classroom role models, teacher/student check ins to ensure he is taking his time, teacher will verbally check with Kyle for understanding of expectations. According to his 504, Kyle will be rewarded when he completes his work carefully and with accuracy. She cites Kyle's strengths as how caring he is, his determination to complete his work to the best of his ability, and his social personality. Kyle's biggest weakness is how hard he is on himself, especially in terms of his reading goals. Kyle wants to be above reading level, but often shares that he doesn't enjoy reading in his

spare time. Mrs. Harvey shared that I am Kyle's role model, and that he does not stop talking about me and his experience in first grade. When asked about what she knows about the Washington family, Mrs. Harvey responds,

Well I know that he is very close with his mom. I know that he has an older sister Kayla, I had her in first grade. I know there is an older brother, but I don't know where he is, if he lives with them or somewhere else. I don't know if I've ever met dad. It seems like dad isn't as involved as mom, but I know mom works a lot too and doesn't get home until late.

She shared that she has gathered this information based on the level of communication she has had with mom and what Kyle has told her. She has strong communication with mom through email, Class Dojo, and various meetings; she appreciates being on good terms. In addition to knowing the family history, Mrs. Harvey knows Kyle very well. She recognizes his various interests, track and football, and does her best to incorporate them into the lessons to keep Kyle focused on the work.

Teacher Interview: Mr. Dixon

Austin Dixon started his career as a long-term sub in 3rd grade. He is now in his second year of teaching second grade; he has both Sophia and Ryan in his class this year. He has his BA in Elementary Education and his BA in American Studies from Rowan University. After a few more years of teaching, he plans on going back to school for his MA in School Administration. He lives close to Rowan University, so he can see himself going back to Rowan for grad school. Mr. Dixon wanted to become a teacher because he enjoys seeing success and learning through mistakes. He also believes teaching can provide a lot of happiness, a sense of fullness, and pride in one's self. The most rewarding part of his job is when he can figure out the exact teaching practices to use to help each child with their learning style. Challenges he faces are attention issues

from students, economic backgrounds, access to technology in comparison with other districts, huge disparities in levels and ability for math, reading, and writing, and parent assistance and support with work at home. Mr. Dixon believes the most important role as a teacher is to create a safe learning environment that will allow every child to exit his door with more life skills and knowledge than they entered with every day.

Culturally relevant teaching. Mr. Dixon views our school population as very diverse; he recognizes that our school is predominantly White and African American, some Hispanic, Turkish, and very sparse Indian and Asian population. He describes culturally relevant teaching as, “What we need to teach but at the same time, showing it in a way that applies to the people the information is being taught.” Mr. Dixon believes that our CCC (Child Connection Center) helps with recognizing student’s differences by having various connection days throughout the school year. He references the “Week of Respect ” where students are reminded of the importance of respect for all people. When thinking about the curriculum, he highlights that we are required to teach Holocaust and Amistad lessons, as well as incorporating Black History Month and Influential Americans. He does believe that the math program forces cultures on the students by using names like “Pedro, Felipe, and Tyquan” for word problems. “I feel like math uses overly exaggerated names which isn’t necessarily appropriate. I think a better way would be to use names that are a little more relevant and not out worldly. And some of my students laugh at names they have never heard of before and it takes away from the lesson.” Mr. Dixon also encourages a change to the writing curriculum because the students are not always given the option to write about their culture or interests but are instead given a topic to write about.

In his own teaching practice, he tries to talk to parents early in the year to become more culturally relevant. “For example, I had Jehovah’s Witnesses last year, so I decided to do a lot of holiday parties. I did a lot of parties that were more appropriate for them, like Cranberry day instead of Thanksgiving. I also try to stay away from Christmas. I’ve also had Indian students, so I asked them to present on the holidays they celebrated, so it was kind of like a dual-purpose day. So, around Halloween, they were also learning about Diwali.” While considering if our school does enough to celebrate different cultures, Mr. Dixon acknowledges that it depends on the teacher.

Interviewer: Does our school do enough to represent cultures?

Mr. Dixon: “There are teachers who will have the students who can share their culture freely, whereas other rooms culture isn’t expressed. The school could do more to allow for cultures to be expressed or brought out, I feel like that’s the one thing that the school could do as a whole. Maybe not making it a whole day, but just over the intercom mentioning, like today is Diwali, the Indian festival of lights. It would allow the students to have that moment of, you guys don’t know it and I do.”

Mr. Dixon believes that all children should have that moment of their culture being recognized in the classroom, and the teachers are the ones who need to help make that happen.

Parent-school relationships. Referencing parent-school relationships, Mr. Dixon recognizes that it depends on the group of students. He shares that in comparison to last year, his students this year are better behaved, and their homework is done; even if the students have questions, the parents will reach out to him for clarification on how to complete the homework. “The relationship is kind of touch and go. There are a lot of parents that don’t like school, so they have kind of shut off to the teachers. They won’t reach out. It could be based on a personal experience or their kids’ experience.” To

communicate with the parents, Mr. Dixon uses Class Dojo and makes phone calls; he tries to make 3-4 calls per week based around behavior. On the parents' end, he expects to see the "read" message through Class Dojo, so he knows that they have acknowledged his messages. Class Dojo also links to his behavior management, so parents are able to see their child's point system in real time and will comment on what they see from time to time. Mr. Dixon is aware that our school has programs for parent engagement, but instead of listing them, he commented that our CCC and Basic Skills (Math and Reading) do a great job communicating with parents on student accomplishment. He mentions that teachers do a great job communicating and wishes that parents could put more trust into the educators.

Interviewer: If you could change one thing about the parent-school relationship, what would it be?

Mr. Dixon: That they trust us more. That would be the biggest thing. If they put more trust into the school because I feel like they don't put enough trust in us to get them to where they need to be and understand why we are doing certain things. I understand that that's a lot of personal experience and experience from the past.

Mr. Dixon realizes that some of the distance from parents could be perhaps from their own personal experience with the school system. With this information in mind, he is very particular about the way he approaches parents.

The Russos. Mr. Dixon would describe Sophia as talkative, excited, and willing to work. She gets pretty good grades but talks a lot and distracts herself. Sophia's strengths are her social skills, that she is very observant, and the level of care she has for her work. He thinks as things become more challenging in life and she needs to focus on the little things, her ability to notice things will definitely benefit her. Sophia's weaknesses are her energy levels, talking, and distractions.

Interviewer: What do you know about the Russo family?

Mr. Dixon: I know Mom is a special ed teacher and I know that she is pretty reasonable. I've talked to her a few times about little things, but she's pretty reasonable. And that's really all I know. I only know that she lives with Mom.

Again, Mr. Dixon commented on how he wishes he had more time to get to know his students and their home lives. He knows that I am Sophia's role model based on her last writing activity, in which she shared how much I care about my students and how I want them to get good grades. To conclude the interview, Mr. Dixon shared that he knows, "Sophia comes from a caring home, she is always well dressed, always in a good mood, so she must have a pretty good home life."

The Gallaghers. Mr. Dixon describes Ryan as motivated, kind, and intelligent. From Mr. Dixon's viewpoint, Ryan is a little talkative in class, but he is a "very, very, very" bright kid. He believes Ryan's social skills and mathematical skills his greatest strengths. His weaknesses include his perfectionism and his emotions, which both present themselves in the classroom quite frequently. Mr. Dixon knows Ryan's role models are firefighters because they are brave, smart, and care about people. When asked about his knowledge about Ryan's homelife, Mr. Dixon tried to piece together the little bits of information he has received,

I don't know much, but they seem like they are a pretty close-knit group. Mom really cares because he will always tell me if he gets a bad grade, well I shouldn't say bad, because a B isn't bad, but if he gets a B, he says that mom will take things away. Pressures are tough for him because they have a lot of expectations.

Mr. Dixon also shared that the only people in Ryan's life that he was aware of were Mom and Dad. He then said, "I wish I had the time to get to know my students, but I know almost nothing about most of my kids and it's really sad that we don't have the time in

the day.” He shared that he would be open to spending time sitting down with parents in the beginning of the year to just get to know them, but he knows that most teachers would oppose any extra meeting times that aren’t mandatory.

Mrs. Harvey’ Classroom Observation

My experience in Mrs. Harvey’ room was very comfortable because Mrs. Harvey was my collaborative teacher during student teaching. Because I had the privilege of learning from Mrs. Harvey for about four months, I am familiar with her teaching style. I sat on the side of the room by the windows so I would be close to Kyle, but still out of the way to not distract other students. Mrs. Harvey has a total of 19 students, 7 girls and 11 boys. I observed her teaching Foundations. To keep things fair, she uses a class numbering system to do the drill sounds, which ensures that all students get a turn. The drill sounds include reviewing vowels, consonants, glued sounds, and vowel teams which are marked are review cards with little post its. During the lesson students sit at their desks and keep their full attention on Mrs. Harvey. From my observation, the second grade Foundations is a lot more fast-paced and requires more skills to practice daily. They began their lesson by looking at the word of the day, “mimic.” Mrs. Harvey allowed the students to guess what they thought the word meant and to use it in a sentence. Once they talked about the definition and used it in proper context, they added the word of the day into their octopus book. We do this in first grade, but the level of independence increases in second grade. The students spent about three minutes marking mimic, writing the sentence, and scooping it for phrasing. As they worked, Mrs. Harvey monitored the room by checking each student's work before putting their books away. She encourages students by saying things like, “Nice handwriting dude! That’s a

big improvement!” and “You guys have some good handwriting today!” Once their books were away, the students retrieved their Foundations gel board to practice their previous trick words. They were independently practicing their words while they waited for their classmates to complete their work. As every student finished, Mrs. Harvey had the students practice their spelling words on their gel boards as a class. Then quickly moved onto new information, which included words with -ind, -ost, and -onk. As she walked through the room, she praised her students, even reminded one boy that he earned “2 army figures” as a part of his behavior management system.

Mrs. Harvey specializes in finding ways for students to stay engaged and to help students with unique learning styles. To teach multisyllabic words, she gave the kids too cotton pads, which encouraged them to break the words into syllables and touch the pads to distinguish when to break the word up. I noticed that some students were able to breeze through segmenting the words, while others had a difficult time. Mrs. Harvey walked around the room and helped the struggling students and after a little more practice with the cotton pads, they got the hang of the new information. The final part of the lesson was dictation; Mrs. Harvey said a word while the students would spell it in their Wind books. They used this as practice for their upcoming unit test. At the conclusion of this activity, Mrs. Harvey used the document camera to demonstrate the appropriate spelling and marking of the words, while the students used the red pens to correct their work. Students were honest when marking their work. At the conclusion of the lesson, Mrs. Harvey reminded the students that they did a great job during this lesson and that they would shortly be moving onto math.

Kyle. During the Foundations lesson, I closely watched Kyle and his interaction with his teacher. The phonics-based lesson lasted about 45 minutes and during this time Kyle raised his hand about seven times and got out of his seat four times. When writing the word of the day into his octopus book, Kyle got started right away and Mrs. Harvey checked to ensure his sentence was written correctly. She commented, “Practice makes perfect! Very impressive!” and Kyle beamed up at her. He also displayed impulsive behavior by calling out to ask what page the vowel teams were on, which Mrs. Harvey ignored. While he was using the gel board, Kyle realized a handle from the breakfast bag fell off, got out of his seat and returned it to his teacher. Once Kyle wrote all of his words on the gel board, he called out again asking, “Do we rewrite the words when we are done?” but Mrs. Harvey did not acknowledge him. At this point, Kyle became distracted by staring out the window, looking around the room, and even got out of his seat to ask his teacher if he should do it again. As they were working Kyle’s attention drifted towards the student who was tapping their pencil, causing Kyle to cover his ears. During dictation, Kyle was talking to his neighbor and even cheered for her at one point for getting the correct answer. His overall behavior displayed that he was easily distracted and wanted his teacher to continuously check in on him.

Mr. Dixon’s Classroom Observation

Before entering Mr. Dixon’s classroom, I had previously asked him where he would like me to sit, so I would not be a distraction. He said that his back table would be perfect and would allow me to be close to both Sophia and Ryan. When I entered the classroom, the class was doing their Foundations lesson. I noticed that Mr. Dixon has 20 students including 12 boys and 8 girls as well as a classroom aide, Mrs. Reed. They

began their lesson by having a student be the drill leader and demonstrating to the class how to sky write their trick words. This activity served as a review to words they had previously learned. During this time, Mr. Dixon watched the class follow along and politely corrected them by saying, “one problem I’m seeing is we have a floppy noodle arm friends.” This made the class giggle. To introduce the word of the day, Mr. Dixon has the students turn and talk to brainstorm a definition. A few pairs shared their answers before Mr. Dixon challenged the students to use the words in a sentence. To regain the students’ attention, Mr. Dixon said, “Super friends” and the students responded by making the noise “Woop” to demonstrate that they were listening. When Ryan shared the sentence, “My mom mimics the dog barking,” Mr. Dixon shared a personal story which made the students laugh. Another student said that they mimic a girl named Jocelyn and Mr. Dixon responded, “Well, Jocelyn is a pretty cool student to mimic” making her smile. Instead of using a preset sentence to add to their octopus books for the word of the day, Mr. Dixon chose a sentence that one of the students shared and said, “Ah, this one reminds me of my childhood.” When the students began to work, Mr. Dixon went over to a colored lightbulb hanging on the wall and said, “Okay, this is a red activity, so no talking” and he changed the bulb to red. Looking closer at this great classroom management tool, I saw a sign by the light bulb that read, “Green-inside voice, Blue-whisper voice, Red- no talking.” Once the students added the sentence to their book, they were told that they had completed their Foundations lesson for the day.

They then transitioned into a Social Studies lesson about Native Americans. Most of our school’s social studies curriculum is based around holidays. It was only appropriate for the students to be exposed to Native Americans with Thanksgiving

quickly approaching. Silence filled the room when Mr. Dixon asked, “What are Native Americans?” He explained that the students may know them being referred to as Indians, but it is now appropriate to call them Native Americans. He compared the Native Americans lives to the students, which really grasped their attention. “How do you get food? We have Acme right here in Town! Do you think the Native Americans had an Acme?” This opened up the discussion for students to consider hunting and gathering and how they would prefer to get food. Mr. Dixon also asked the students what their punishments might be at home if they were to get into trouble at school so he could compare it to Native Americans getting cold water splashed in their face for misbehaving. Many students would prefer the freezing cold water in the winter over telling their parents about a bad day and losing electronics. Once they completed their discussion, the students completed a then and now sort.

Sophia. The second I entered Mr. Dixon’s classroom, Sophia straightened up in her chair, sitting tall and focused. She smiled at me then turned her attention right back towards Mr. Dixon. It was not long before Mr. Dixon needed to speak to Sophia about playing during Foundations. “Remember, eye contact is how I know you are listening. It’s respectful.” While sky-writing her trick words, Sophia was playing with her flats, with one on her foot and the other off. It took her awhile to sit back down after the activity because she was still playing with her shoe. When Mr. Dixon directed the class to turn and talk to discuss the definition of the word mimic, her partner used the word in a sentence. Sophia, immediately said to her partner, “No, he did not say sentence, he said, ‘What does it mean?’” This statement demonstrated that she was specifically listening to directions and understood Mr. Dixon’s expectations. As the lesson progressed, Sophia

began talking to her neighbors and making faces at them as Mr. Dixon taught; he never corrected her because it seemed as if he did not notice. When they transitioned into social studies and were talking about how families can be different, one student brought up foster care. Sophia shouted, “I know all about foster care! I was in foster care!” but unfortunately her relevant comment was overlooked. Sophia slumped down looking disappointed that she was not invited to share this information. After this, she began playing with her shoes again. From my perspective, it looked like she was trying to connect with the lesson, but once she was ignored, she lost her attention. Mr. Dixon also shared that Native American girls were forced to marry at 15. One final attempt at connecting to the lesson, Sophia raised her hand to share, “My sister is 15 and she wouldn’t like that” (making a disgusted face at the thought of her sister being married). Mr. Dixon allowed other students to share their sibling’s ages but did not comment on Sophia’s connection. During my observation, Sophia seemed to have a very difficult time staying on task although she knew the information. She did attempt to share personal connections with the class, but when they were not acknowledged in the way she was hoping for, she seemed more disconnected from the lesson.

Ryan. When I entered his classroom, I immediately saw Ryan crying because he had turned his card to yellow. Mr. Dixon uses both Class Dojo and a behavior chart for his behavior management. The students were on the carpet, but Ryan refused to go because he needed time to himself. Mr. Dixon allowed Ryan to cry with his head in his arms on his desk for a few minutes, while Mrs. Reed approached Ryan whispering, “Come on, turn your day around,” to ask him to join the other students on the carpet. When Ryan slowly lifted his head, Mr. Dixon held Ryan’s hand and guided him

to the front of the room to be the Foundations drill leader. This helped Ryan get right back on track for the lesson. Mr. Dixon says, “Good recover my friend, move your card back to green.” For the rest of my observation, Ryan was one of the shining stars in the classroom due to his attentiveness and determination to stay focused. When the class was copying their word of the day sentence into their octopus books, Mr. Dixon called Ryan to the front. “Ryan, my pro of sentence scooping, come on up.” Ryan was a model and scooped the sentence for his classmates to copy. When Mr. Dixon was talking, Ryan put his finger over his lip and asked his classmates to “shhh” so he could hear what Mr. Dixon was saying. During my observation, Ryan displayed his emotional side because of his behavioral choices but quickly recovered. Once he composed himself, he was actively participating, engaged in the lesson, and demonstrated role model qualities.

Data Analysis

Pressures on teachers. My experience in Mrs. Harvey and Mr. Dixon’s classrooms revealed that both teachers genuinely care about their students; however, they both feel as though the demands of the second-grade curriculum leave little time for other activities. Puzio (2017) recognizes that teachers feel they need to teach to the standards. “Teachers are sometimes prevented from providing culturally sustaining pedagogy by their sense of obligation to local authority figures and policies (p. 230). He also recognizes that while teachers try to adhere to the expectations of authority figures, teachers may find themselves teaching against their personal beliefs. For example, both Mrs. Harvey and Mr. Dixon recognize the importance of building student relationships, however, they put relationship building on hold in order to best prepare students for the next grade. Teachers then feel the pressure to decide what is most important: following

the curriculum, assisting students in finding their identity, recognizing culture, educating the importance of praxis.

Teacher characteristics. The educators who were a part of this study shared they knew they were meant to be teachers. Mr. Penrose's father was in education and pathed the way for his son. Mrs. Harvey stated she knew ever since she was a little girl this was something she was destined to do. Mr. Dixon is driven in the field of education and hopes to further his career by getting his master's in administration. All three educators recognized that teachers are there to make a difference in their students' lives. Nieto (2006) describes the qualities of teachers who make a positive difference in the lives of their students as possessing the following qualities: sense of mission, solidarity with, and empathy for, their students; the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge and conventional wisdom; improvisation; and a passion for social justice (p. 463). During my classroom observation, both teachers attempted to make connections to student interests through conversation and book selection. Mrs. Harvey lightened the tense school day by calling her students fun nicknames, such as "dude," while Mr. Dixon made playful jokes with his students based on the content. The students responded well to both teachers' playful demeanors. The teachers made an effort to make students excited to learn. Mrs. Harvey stated she believes in education the whole child. According to Nieto, her sense of mission is ensuring students are growing socially, emotionally, and academically. Mrs. Harvey also demonstrates improvisation when integrating student interests into the curriculum.

I use their interests in lots of ways. I use it as a behavior modification for certain kids that have behavior plans. Like my one student, has major behavior issues, but he is really into those little army soldiers, so everything for his behavior is geared toward those little army things. I like to take their interests into consideration

during discussions. I turn my teaching in a direction toward what they are interested in to make them more into learning.

Mr. Dixon demonstrated the courage to question mainstream knowledge by attempting to include all students for worldwide holidays. He described allowing students to teach their classmates about Diwali and Cranberry day. Mr. Penrose demonstrated Nieto's quality of solidarity with, and empathy for students. "We want students to be successful and achieve on their level. Education isn't just one sided. It's also a social and emotional piece. I try to be mindful of that while putting forth good academic effort." Being in the same room as these educators, it was very clear the level of love and compassion they have for education and their students.

Passing of responsibility. As the expectations continue to rise in education, educators seem to have a difficult time managing all of the responsibilities required of them. Because the expectations are ever-changing, a domino effect of passing off responsibility appears. When new research and strategies are announced, administrators ask staff to test the new suggestions. This trickles down into the classroom, and eventually teachers ask parents to attempt new techniques at home. In order to see positive change in a school atmosphere, each group needs to take ownership over their responsibilities to create a culturally inclusive environment. Puzio (2017) comments, "Learning how to enact culturally sustaining pedagogy takes time, reflection, and, above all, being deeply attuned to our students. It cannot and should not be done alone; instead, it should be done in collaboration with our students, their families, and the community (p.230). By working together, funds of knowledge can be integrated seamlessly into the school environment.

Administration. Mr. Penrose states that he recognizes the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy in a school setting. As he defined culturally sustaining pedagogy, he detailed what the role of a teacher would look like. He shared that being sensitive to student cultures, backgrounds, and experiences allows for a teacher to be successful. When asked what a culturally relevant lesson would look like, Mr. Penrose spoke very generally. He mentioned choosing specific materials such as artifacts to assist with culturally relevant pedagogy but did not specifically detail what he would expect to see in each classroom.

Not necessarily every week, but the teacher could select materials in any discipline with specific selection. Maybe direct instruction or something that is tangential, not just the delivery of the lesson. It could be things found in the classroom, artifacts, those types of things are exemplars.

Mr. Penrose shared that it “comes down to designing lessons to reflect relevant things that students are reading to build the literacy bridge.” Culturally relevant pedagogy goes beyond book selection and literacy strategies, it is about making sure all students feel accepted, included, and recognized in a school setting. Paris (2016) suggests,

pre-service teacher initiatives across institutions, there are opportunities—really requirements—for building relationships of dignity and care—for disrupting deficit frames— be those in traditional school classrooms, in arts programs, or summer immersion programs. In these programs preparing teachers are *with* students of color and *in* communities of color across their preparation—they are challenged to *study* the concepts of equity and learn to *live* them at once (p.10).

As a school leader, it would be powerful for him to encourage all teachers to display culturally relevant teaching. By setting a standard in the school that all students need to be recognized, real change can occur.

Teachers. Teachers seem to look toward the school for guidance in administering new concepts. Mrs. Harvey shares that she focuses her instruction for English language

learners in her guided reading groups to build their vocabulary and background knowledge. In contrast, she shares, “other than ELL and other services, the school doesn’t seem to spend much time specifically focusing on the cultures of students.” Mrs. Harvey also recognizes that the current curriculum does not integrate student culture.

According to Paris (2016),

we must continue to think about the trajectories of teacher learning and enactment across these five commitments in a field where most teachers (and teacher educators) are White, most students aren’t, and all teachers and students are situated in a society characterized by pervasive practices and policies based in ideologies of White, middle class, monolingual norms of achievement (p.9).

Paris goes on to explain that relating to students because of their differences can be White centered framing, so it is important to teach within cultural communities. It then becomes imperative that teachers are reflecting on their teacher practice to ensure they are not teaching from a White perspective. Building on Mrs. Harvey’s statement, Mr. Dixon believes the writing curriculum needs to be updated to allow students more choice to write about their culture or interests. They shared that the curriculum doesn’t reflect funds of knowledge, however, they were not able to give specific examples of how they can make a change in their classrooms. “Culturally sustaining practices cannot happen if a teacher does not value young people of color, if they are working from deficit frames” (Paris, 2016, p.7). Although Mrs. Harvey and Mr. Dixon identified room for improvement in a school setting, they did not purposely showcase culture in their classrooms. They recognize that they both have diverse classes, but they need to take action to create a culturally sustaining environment by integrating culture and student voice into the curriculum. “One major need for teacher education, and something that should be a coherent mission across the field, is to develop programs, resources, and *the*

will to foster a teaching force and a teacher education force that is representative of the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of our schools” (Paris, 2016, p.5). While these teachers are able to identify what the school could do to make a change, it would be beneficial for them to reflect on their own teaching practice. When the teachers begin to demonstrate praxis, students will understand the importance of actively making change in the school community. “Culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exists in society. The teachers I studied work in opposition to the system that employs them” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 140).

Parent-school relationships. In terms of parent-school connection, teachers witness varied interactions from parents. Mrs. Harvey shares that she has some parents who are extremely involved, like Mrs. Washington, and other parents she has not met. In terms of defining parental involvement, most conclusions are speculated. Mrs. Harvey assumed, “It seems like dad isn’t as involved as mom, but I know mom works a lot too and doesn’t get home until late” when discussing the Washingtons. Although Mr. Washington works three jobs, he is the primary adult home when Kyle is completing his homework. Either Kayla or Mr. Washington check over his work. Mrs. Harvey assumes mom is more involved because that is her point of contact for Kyle. Mrs. Harvey comments, “I think it’s just up to the parent. I don’t think there’s too much that we can change on our end.” Bergnehr (2014) maintains that schools are unaware of their own potential to develop parent support. In order to develop an effective school design for parental involvement, there needs to be various levels of engagement. Delgado-Gaitan (2007) states, “Three basic levels of influence in students’ academic lives include family,

the school, and the community. Not only are basic cultural values and beliefs learned in the family, but also daily practices often speak louder than words” (p. 28). Mr. Penrose shares that in order to establish a true relationship with families we need communication to better understand the students.

We would need more input, information, and detail from them on what could be happening at home, what they are seeing at home, and what activities are they doing to help stimulate learning and creativity. So, to just enhance what we already do in the classroom.

While the educators were able to identify the importance of family-school connections, they still only took the time to get to know parents at the surface level. It would be beneficial for Mrs. Harvey to know that Mr. Washington works three jobs because she would understand that although he is busy, he manages to help Kyle with his homework. As Mr. Penrose stated, we do need more input, information, and detail from parents and all we need to do is show that we care enough to listen.

Students as individuals. The teachers shared that time restraints make it difficult to get to know their students. While time is a large factor, teachers often plan instruction for a group of students; it is easier to view the students as a class opposed to individuals. Spindler and Spindler (1983) state “the intense brutality of a system that does not really seem to ‘see’ children” (p. 75). Nieto (1992) defines not ‘seeing’ all children as monocultural education. “It is an education reflective of only one reality and biased toward the dominant group” (p. 212). Mrs. Harvey and Mr. Dixon pointed out that our school celebrates the dominant group holidays. Mrs. Harvey stated, “We seem to only stick to the ‘American’ traditions like Christmas and Thanksgiving and all that and we don’t celebrate all things.” To make a change, the school would need to review the way

they celebrate groups of students, to ensure all minorities are represented. Mr. Dixon pointed out that “our school is predominantly White and African American, some Hispanic, Turkish, and very sparse Indian and Asian population.” While he was able to identify the diverse population, Mr. Dixon could not think of specific examples that represented each of these groups. It is important to recognize that students are different and that they bring unique views and experiences into the classroom. Groups often feel overlooked or misrepresented because they are not represented in school. In an effort to represent a sense of inclusion, teachers often state that they do not see color when looking at their students. According to Ladson-Billings (1994) “Color-blindness, whereby a teacher might say that he or she does not see color, is identified as dysconscious racism” (p. 35), which could also be described as equating equality with sameness (p. 36). For a student like Kyle, who is mixed, recognizing both his White and African American backgrounds could help him form a sense of identity. For a student like Sophia, who is very familiar with her identity, it can be discouraging when teachers do not acknowledge her contribution of detailing her life experiences to the class. During the classroom observation, the class was discussing foster care and Sophia shouted that she was in foster care. Mr. Dixon could have allowed her to detail her experience in foster care to add to her classmate’s understanding. Because most students have not experienced foster care, Mr. Dixon attempted to keep the conversation moving about families that more students could relate to. This was a missed opportunity because the class could have learned more about the foster care system from someone who lived it first-hand. Ladson-Billings (1995) maintains, “Instruction should be empowering for the whole group, not just focused on the individual” (p. 160). When instruction highlights funds of

knowledge, students gain a voice. They begin to feel empowered because they are seen by their teacher and their classmates. Nieto (1992) believes teachers are not the only expert in the classroom and they disempower students if they deny them their expert knowledge. (p.32). Teachers need to relinquish power to the students for the good of the classroom. “The typical classroom is an unusual social construct in that students sit next to each other but are discouraged from having conversations. The teacher, usually, is the wise sage and is all-knowing; students are encouraged to outdo each other rather than cooperate” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 59). In a classroom where students display funds of knowledge and teachers assist in culturally sustaining pedagogy, Ladson-Billings identified teachers expecting students to take responsibility for teaching one another. (p.76).

“Celebration of culture.” “The central assumption held by many educators that culturally sustaining pedagogy means simply incorporating diverse stories, language, or food into the classroom—is far from true. (Puzio, 2017, p.230). Mrs. Harvey and Mr. Dixon both shared that they believe cultures should be celebrated. Mrs. Harvey shares that students should be able to celebrate their cultures. She recognizes, “We should celebrate their cultures and let them share more about where they come from in their culture. I don’t think we do enough of that. I think it would help them learn more about their own cultures and let them see the differences within each other and how it’s cool.” Mr. Dixon states that he believes simple changes could allow for students to celebrate their cultures, such as an announcement on the school intercom or celebrating holidays students may have never celebrated before. Mr. Dixon gave an example of celebrating Cranberry day opposed to Thanksgiving. The students were given the

opportunity to explore a new culture while building on their existing knowledge. It is recognized that Mr. Dixon is attempting to break through the barrier of teaching mainstream holidays, however, still focuses his attention on student culture around holidays. In his interview, the school principal stated that he doesn't believe culturally relevant pedagogy needs to be integrated into every lesson because he wants the concept to be tangible. Nieto (1992) maintains, however that multicultural education can "be seen in every lesson, curriculum guide, unit, bulletin board, and letter that is sent home" (p. 215). To move past theme culture days with food and music, it is important teachers integrate multicultural education into every lesson. Nieto (1992) summarizes multicultural education into seven basic characteristics: anti-racist education, basic education, important for all students, pervasive, education for social justice, a process, and critical pedagogy. (p. 208). It is suggested that teachers use texts that include diversity, inclusivity, and point driven perspectives to elicit student cultures. Mrs. Harvey mentioned she is cognizant of her book selection to engage students in sharing interests, traditions, or culture. Ernst-Slavit (1997) recommends teachers reading bilingual books in students' heritage language. Lee (1993) suggests teachers help students interpret texts based around their social discourse practices. (Puzio, Keyes, & Jiménez, 2016) share teachers could also collaborate with students to transform an English text into a text of their heritage language. These instructional practices have the potential to sustain students' cultures while supporting their literacy development. Puzio (2017), argues that it is not enough to introduce students to a multicultural book or artifact. There needs to be a conversation based around culture and traditions. "Collectively, these narratives show that culturally sustaining pedagogy is *how* educators use cultural artifacts and practices,

not just *what* they use (p.230). Mrs. Harvey shared that she does not believe that students' cultures impact them academically or socially. While it may appear that students are not impacted by their cultures, students may not mention their traditions or beliefs because they are not encouraged to celebrate their heritage.

Communication. The importance of communication also transfers to the parents. All three educators identified the importance of communicating with the families and acknowledged that our school does a lot to keep parents informed. Technology played a large role in communicating with parents; while some letters and notes still go home in the folder, a primary form of communication included email, Facebook, Remind101, and Class Dojo. Mr. Penrose, Mrs. Harvey, and Mr. Dixon commented that they value and appreciate their communication with parents. All three educators believe that they already do a lot to build a relationship with parents, that they wouldn't change much about their communication. Mr. Penrose stated that he would like to see more of a collaboration. Pushor (2001) comments on the home and school partnership,

In this changed script, there was no longer a protectorate, no longer a protector and a protected. No longer were educators entering a community to claim the ground of school. No longer were educators working alone to design and enact policies, procedures, programs, schedules, and routines for the sole benefit of the children of the community. Instead, in the new script, educators were entering a community to create with parents a shared school landscape—a landscape in which "parent knowledge (p. 244).

Pushor argues that a new script would entail a shared space for parents and schools. Mr. Dixon commented one thing he would like to see shift with the home-school relationship would be having the parents trust the school more. Mr. Dixon does recognize their lack of trust may be due to their own experience in school. Keis (2006) reflects on Latino

parents, “The majority of parents in our program have had very limited formal education in their home country. The literacy process can be a daunting encounter for them, and low self-esteem is an obstacle for many to overcome” (p. 14). While these educators would like to see an increase in parental involvement, they need to be mindful when communicating with parents and planning family events.

Efforts in the community. The educators of Chamberston were proud of the community events they host annually. Mrs. Harvey was aware of the various parental programs including, “Back to School night, conferences, BSI conferences, Read Across America, Fright night, PBSIS did some things, Wizards Basketball night, and Trunk or Treat;” however, she only attends the ones that are mandatory, much like the rest of the staff. While these educators state they recognize the importance of building the parent-school relationship, they also are aware that many teachers are not willing to work over their required time. Ladson Billings (1994) focused research on eight teachers who were highly effective with African American students. Her findings detailed fluid and equitable relationships because teachers were willing to learn from their students. These teachers also lived in the community, attended community events, and used community service. While Simmons educators stated the importance of building a sense of community and a relationship with the parents, they did not report individually making an effort to connect to students outside of the school setting. None of the educators in this study live in the community. Besides going to the pizza place for lunch on Fridays they do not spend additional time in the community. Based on her experience as a parent, Pushor (2011) revisits her view of education, “I learned to enlarge my conceptualization of parent engagement by attending thoughtfully to what happens off the school

landscape, in the world of the home and community, as well as what happens in school” (p. 471). It is necessary to recognize that students are learning in all aspects of their lives as well as environments. By engaging in community events, teachers would be able to maximize relationships with students, parents, and the borough.

Conclusion

Chapter six presents the conclusions and implications of the study as well as recommendations for further topics of study.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

“Studying the history of family literacy programs and current research on the subject will help teachers make decisions that support and extend family literacy practices while developing initiatives that honor family strengths and knowledge” (Compton-Lilly, 2019, p. 27).

Summary

In her study of family literacy practices, Compton-Lilly (2019) stated, “It is often worth remembering that literacy does not happen on a level playing field” (p. 29). Educators are quick to create a standard curriculum that they believe will meet the needs of each student; however, these curriculums lack diversity, student interest, student experience, and family background. In order to develop an all-inclusive program, teachers need to understand students on a personal level. It is important to deeply impact them beyond just an academic level. Students need to personally connect to the information they are learning to be able to add it to their knowledge bank. In order to fully understand the lives of some families in my district, an ethnographic approach was necessary in order to learn their culture, feelings, beliefs, and meanings of relationships between people as they interact within their culture (Fields & Kafai, 2009). Through my research, I was able to explore background experiences, explain behaviors, disclose family desires, and identify literacy practices in the home. Findings in this study provide educators with a concrete example of how funds of knowledge can benefit students in the classroom and the importance of reimagining a parent-school relationship.

Ethnography provides insights and demonstrates the importance of funds of knowledge. While it is not feasible that teachers conduct an ethnographic study on every

student, the findings do provide rationale for forming more reciprocal relationships with parents and the research methods provide ideas for increased understandings through conversation and strategic home visits. Once teachers identify and analyze their students' cultures, routines, goals, interests, and learning styles, they can modify their teaching to integrate the specific needs of their students. By integrating funds of knowledge into the classroom, educators experience an increase in student engagement, understanding, and achievement.

Making Connections in the School Environment

My research was inspired by the negative opinions teachers held of parents in my district. Instead of taking the time to get to know the families, some teachers were quick to make assumptions about the parents. Research shows that the viewpoint of these educators was only prohibiting their students from being successful in the classroom by creating barriers between home and school. "When educators engage parents in schools, they ensure that there are reciprocal benefits for parents and families through their engagement, both within and outside of the boundaries of the school's agenda" (Marsh, 2010, p. 9). Being a part of a reciprocal relationship allows teachers to understand the families, while families are able to build trust in the teacher. Often times the teachers are viewed as the knowledge holders of the children and the parents' familiarity of their child is overlooked. "Educators are positioned as holders of knowledge: of curriculum and programming; of school policies, procedures, and practices; of appropriate expectations. Parents are positioned as recipients of this knowledge, which implies they are unknowing, or less knowing, than educators" (Marsh, 2010, p. 6). In the findings of this study, both second grade teachers felt like they only knew Kyle, Sophia, and Ryan

academically. Due to the demands of the curriculum and fast paced lessons, the teachers lacked insight into the homes of these students. The teachers reported that the connection they shared with the parents was on a need to know basis. The three families attended back to school night, parent teacher conferences, and communicated with the teacher about behavioral concerns. Beyond the expectations of school functions, the parents did not share information about their families because the teachers did not ask. In the teacher interviews, both Mr. Dixon and Mrs. Harvey disclosed that they are aware of the importance of building connections and relationships with both students and their families. Both teachers attempt to build relationships in the classroom through positive praise, book selection, and conversation. While both teachers reported they wanted to further engage in building relationships with their students, they missed valuable opportunities to do so during my classroom observation. For example, during the social studies lesson in Mr. Dixon's class, Sophia's comment about foster care was overlooked. This would have been a valuable time to allow Sophia to share her experience in foster care and build on how different her life is now. In Mrs. Harvey's class, Kyle was very easily distracted. If Mrs. Harvey engaged in a conversation with Mrs. Washington, she would know that when Kyle has a difficult time paying attention, Mrs. Washington hopes he would be able to vocalize what is distracting him so he can get back on task. This connects back to the importance of communicating with parents because sometimes the parents have different aspirations for their children in the classroom that the teacher is not aware of.

“With parent involvement, the focus is placed on what parents can do to help the school realize its intended outcomes for children, not on what the parents' hopes, dreams,

or intentions for their children may be or on what the school can do to help parents realize their personal or family agendas” (Pushor, 2012, p. 467). By visiting the homes, I was able to understand the hopes and dreams of each of the families. Some families shared their family goals, while others elaborated on their hopes for their children. “They have goals of a university education for their children, instill strong values of respect for others, and possess a tremendous amount of pride and a strong sense of identity-in addition to the more practical knowledge in which their children share share on a regular basis” (Moll & Gonzlaez, 1992, p. 137). Mrs. Washington expressed that she and her husband push their children so hard in sports because they hope their abilities will afford them an opportunity of a scholarship to go to a great university. Mrs. Russo detailed that she wants her children to be happy with their career, and they will most likely attend Rowan University because it is a great teaching school. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher disclosed that they hope their children will attend either university or a trade school. With these goals in mind, each set of parents hold education to a high standard in their homes.

While in the homes of each family, the parents shared that they are actively engaged in their children’s academic and social lives. According to Wilkins and Terlitsky (2015), “realizing the time and effort they have invested into reading with their child has yielded such great benefits in their child’s academic growth and behavior can be a gratifying reward for parents” (p. 205). Mr. Washington shared that he is home with Kyle and Kayla after school most days and checks their schoolwork and talks with his children about their days. Mrs. Washington works late nights, but still manages to find time to read with Kyle. They both shared how they work together to keep him motivated

and interested in reading. Mrs. Russo makes a point to sit down at the kitchen table with Sophia everyday after school to check over her homework while Sophia has her after school snack. Mrs. Russo also demonstrates her own love of literacy by actively reading and discussing the importance of reading and writing with Sophia and Mia. Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher shared that although they are not active readers, they are pleased that Ryan loves to read. They recognized that Ryan is pretty self motivated with his reading, but they still sit down to listen to him read and check his comprehension. The parents shared that they all try to keep their children motivated to become better readers by challenging them with higher level texts. “When parents take an interest in, and are involved in their child’s education, they contribute to the child’s success not only in school but throughout his or her adult life” (Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1995).

Gaining Insight into the Benefits of Home-School Relationships

In chapter 4, parents reported they would like to be more involved in knowing what happened in their child’s day. Mrs. Washington specifically wonders about Kyle because of his big heart and ADHD diagnosis. Although he is medicated, she often questions if his behaviors are reflecting his diagnosis. It seems as if Kyle is often misunderstood because others look at him with a deficit perspective. Instead of seeing his compassion for others, some may only see his ADHD. Mrs. Washington worries that teachers see him being fidgety, out of his seat, and in other’s business because of his diagnosis; most of the time, he is trying to help a friend or the teacher. While Mrs. Washington stands up for Kyle and his choices, she will also have a conversation with him when he makes mistakes. Mrs. Washington expects teachers to do the same when Kyle has an issue in the classroom. Weiss (1998) reflects on his study of mixed method

approaches for parent communication. “Our quantitative data suggest that schools sometimes neglect to involve parents in the process of addressing students' problems at school” (Weiss, 1998, p.5). Mrs. Harvey reports our parent-school relationship is strong. “I think it’s pretty strong if the parents choose it to be. I think the school does its part in getting the parents involved. And if the parent wants to be involved, then there are plenty of activities and ways that they can.” The disconnect becomes apparent because the teachers and parents have two separate definitions of parent-school communication. The classroom teacher, Mrs. Harvey, believes parents define parent-school relationships by the number of events the parents are invited to attend. By offering back to school night, parent-teacher conferences, and social events at the school, it seems most parents are content with their relationship with the school. Mr. Dixon commented that his expectation of the parents when he sends them messages is to at least read it, not necessarily respond. Mrs. Washington, Mrs. Russo, and Mrs. Gallagher hope to hear specifically from a teacher when their child has a difficult day or shows a change in their behaviors. Mrs. Washington hopes to have weekly updates if Kyle is having an off day, she would like to discuss it with the teacher. Mrs. Russo is aware that Sophia can be very talkative, so if she were to be too distracting, she would expect a call from Mr. Dixon. Mrs. Gallagher has high expectations for Ryan’s grades; she likes to communicate with the teacher when his grades drop. “This finding suggests some level of disconnection between schools and parents of students with learning difficulties, which could be due to numerous factors such as misunderstanding, alienation, or insufficient communication” (Weiss, 1998, p.5). To support students with learning difficulties such as ADHD, and students who are easily distracted in the classroom with silly or talkative behaviors,

teachers need to be more open minded about what communication parents are expecting. At parent-teacher conferences, they could even ask parents how much they would like to be involved with their child's daily academics. From the classroom observation, it was very clear that Kyle, Sophia, and Ryan displayed distractible behaviors. Kyle was staring out the window, unsure of the directions and also began talking to his neighbors. Sophia was playing with her shoes and constantly whispering. Ryan was upset because he got into trouble. The only behavior that was corrected was Ryan's crying. Mr. Dixon made an effort to help Ryan turn his day around. It is difficult to say if the teachers were aware that Kyle and Sophia were distracted during the lesson; they might have ignored the behaviors or simply did not see them happening. All three parents reported that they speak to their children about their actions in the classroom. "We have learned of schools' attempts to address children's academic and behavior problems without fully engaging parents in this process, and of the potentially intimidating and alienating effect this may have on parents" (Weiss, 1998, p.10). If teachers would have communicated the silliness, talking, or playing, the parents most likely would have spoken to their children so they would correct these behaviors. It is important to remember that communication goes both ways.

One might wonder why it is important to be exposed to information about the parents' careers, family traditions, weekend schedules, and displays of literacy. These small bits of information piece together the function of each family and detail character traits of each student. McNaughton (2002) notes that current school structures might not meet the cultural and linguistic needs of families who are in the minority. It then becomes imperative that the school becomes aware of the characteristics of families and

how they contribute to the classroom learning environment. “Undoubtedly, each child brings a new dimension to the transmission of literacy style and values within the family” (Taylor, 1997, p.23). Understanding what each family values helps teachers understand student choice, dialogue, and behavior in the classroom. Compton-Lilly (2019) alludes, “School spaces are formal and sometimes uncomfortable for parents and guardians, and visiting homes demonstrates a willingness on the part of teachers to reach out to families and a commitment to learning about children and their lives” (p. 30). Teachers who want to be exposed to the home demonstrate a level of caring that most educators do not display. This allows parents to build trust in the teacher, eventually exhibiting more effort on both sides of home and school. Home literacies share valuable information on what might be missing from the curriculum to ensure all students are included.

“Visiting homes allows teachers to witness previously invisible literacy practices. They can identify texts read at home, learn about religious literacy practice, and discover family interests and hobbies” (Compton-Lilly, 2019, p. 30). Teachers are exposed to the funds of knowledge of each family when they enter their homes. The importance of home visits is to soak in the customs of the home. “While some educators treat home visits as opportunities to share school approved literacy practices, ethnographic home visits are designed to help educators and researchers to learn from families” (Compton-Lilly, 2019, p. 30). Home visits allowed me to recognize something in myself that I wanted to fix as an educator. I assumed that because parents were not familiar with our ELA curriculum, that they were exposing their children to poor reading strategies. I was always eager to share new phonics and reading strategies with the parents because I thought it would be beneficial if we were using the same strategies at home and in school. While consistency

is constructive, I was taking away from the authenticity that comes with home read alouds. It was not until I witnessed Kyle snuggle up to Mrs. Washington that I realized that children reading to their parents is not a strategy lesson, but instead a celebration of reading. Children should be showing off their skills that they have developed overtime and should feel a sense of pride during their nightly reading. According to Curry's (2016) research on understanding the influence of home on literacy practices, "Mothers asked their children questions about pictures, character, and events in the stories and helped them with word pronunciations and meanings" (p. 73). The focus wasn't on decoding unknown words, but instead having a discussion about the meaning of the text and enjoying family bonding time. I also realized that I didn't give the parents credit for their education and knowledge of literacy. "Sophisticated reading behaviors (e.g. labeling, schema activation, questioning) were apparent in the shared reading interactions between parent and child. Adult modeling, correcting/repeating, questioning, elaboration, encouragement and praise were just a few of the interactions that were evident in the shared reading events" (Curry, 2016, p. 73). While Mrs. Washington was not sitting on the floor with Kyle and pointing to an anchor chart, she was engaging in literary conversation with her eight-year-old. At that moment Kyle was enjoying quality time with his mom and that grounded my understanding of literacy practices in the home. While reading in the home may look different, that did not mean it was incorrect.

Being in the home taught me that while educators have an idea of what literacy should look like, it is different in every home. Often times, teachers view parent engagement as attending back to school night, signing up for parent-teacher conferences, checking the homework folder, and signing reading logs, but the truth is, there is so much

more to it. Each family's funds of knowledge contributes to what parent engagement looks like in the home. Some parents actively check homework, while other parents quiz their children nightly on new information. Some parents allow children to learn through apps on various electronics, while others sit down and read trade books with their child. Scheduling can interfere with routines, such as work and sports practice, however involved parents make an effort to find time to work with their child. Some households simply communicate with their child by asking questions about their day to engage in a form of literacy. Entering the home allows the educator to develop a more detailed picture of what life is like for each of their students, while allowing parents to play a part in their child's academic life. Home visits allowed me to recognize that while each family might have differing home literacies, cultural backgrounds, and life goals, each family had the same desired result: for their child to be successful and to know they were cared for.

Limitations

Qualitative data was analyzed to reach conclusions for this study. This mini-ethnography was a four month study. Most ethnographic research lasts for a few months, even years, in order for the researcher to integrate themselves fully into the culture and daily lives of the involved participants. Becoming embedded in the culture is a challenge due to time constraints (Fusch, 2013). This funds of knowledge study was limited to three families all who have children in the second grade. The decision to include a few participants is related to the goal of richness and thickness of the data (Abrams, 2010). These families had similarities in socio-economic status, number of children living in the home, two parent households, and working parents. Because of the limited number of

participants, the study lacked diversity; two students were white, while one student was mixed race. All students were from English speaking homes. “Educators must be careful to not generalize research findings from particular communities. Existing research reveals important lessons that must be learned from particular families and communities” (Compton-Lilly, 2019, p. 29). It is important to note that the participants commented from their own experience, and not all people involved with the school have similar feelings. Some feelings toward the parent-school relationship could have been skewed due to the parents growing up in the district and having personal ties to the school community. The study could be improved by extending the diverse races, socio-economics, and languages and allowing more participants over a longer time period.

Data collection also contained limitations. This research was influenced due to my previous relationship with the families; therefore, contains some bias. A researcher's cultural and experiential background will also contain biases, values, and ideologies that can affect the interpretation of a study (Bernard, 2012). The researcher is the research instrument and cannot separate oneself from the research. It includes the researcher's personal perspectives and biases (Snow, Morrill, & Anderson, 2003; Wolcott, 2009). The parents were willing to disclose personal information due to the trust we have established, however, which they may not be willing to share with other educators. “Unstructured interviews have limitations and concerns regarding time constraints, failure to recognize and account for non-verbal cues, failure to understand and account for metaphors, and lack of reflexivity on the part of the interviewer” (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). Being engrossed in the home environment allowed for data to be collected from the researcher's perspective. Having only one researcher record data allows for

misinterpretation or even missed moments of opportunities. Hearing and understanding the perspective of others may be one of the most difficult dilemmas that face the researcher (Fields & Kafai, 2009). Finally, transferability can be a concern because mini-ethnographies tend to be very specific about the topic (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Because this study is focused on funds of knowledge, it may not pertain to other educational research.

Implications for the Field

As I sat in each home and gathered their funds of knowledge, my mind began to race as I imagined how this information would be valuable in a school setting. Each of the households visited possessed similar values and funds of knowledge that can be tapped for use in the classrooms (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992). How can teachers implement funds of knowledge to develop a culturally responsive classroom? In what ways can funds of knowledge benefit parent information sessions based on literacy? What components of the curriculum can be adjusted to foster an inclusive learning environment for all students based on their funds of knowledge? “Teachers should explore the various opportunities that can allow them to learn more about their students’ life outside of the classroom and to bring their students’ life outside of the classroom and to bring their students’ life into the classroom” (Lin & Bates, 2010, p. 183). With a few adjustments to one’s teaching routine, all teachers can implement funds of knowledge and culturally relevant pedagogy into their teaching practice.

Building relationships. Building a relationship with the families is important from the very start of the school year to establish that educators value their participation in school. “When teachers develop relationships with parents, they serve as conduits for

parents as parents become involved in their child's education and the school community” (Wilkins & Terlitsky, 2015, p. 209). An easy way to communicate with parents at the beginning of the school year is sending an envelope in the mail with a few important papers: a welcome letter, supply list, parent survey, and a student survey. The welcome letter would include a teacher introduction and information about the classroom, which allows the parents to get to know the teacher before meeting them on the first day of school. Both the parent and student surveys would be brought to school with the student on the first day of school. The purpose of the parent survey would be to have a baseline of information about the families. Some topics one might include in their survey are as follows: who lives in the home, occupations of parents, holidays celebrated, strengths and weaknesses of the child, information on how their child likes to learn, and goals parents would like their child to achieve. The student survey allows the student to feel like they are bonding with the teacher by sharing some of their favorite things, such as their favorite foods, color, games, songs, movies, books, etc. The teacher can then utilize this information when they begin building their learning community the first few weeks of school.

Home visits. The best way to break through the school barrier and get to know the parent's values is to enter their home and witness their lifestyle firsthand. “Research on parent engagement provides the field of education with a new plotline to replace the story of school as protectorate” (Pushor, 2012, p. 447). By entering the home, parents are given the opportunity to share on their terms and the teacher then becomes the listener and observer. According to Peralta-Nash (2003), “in order to improve the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students, it is fundamental that teachers understand

the relationship between pupil's home culture and school learning" (p.112). Home visits provide teachers with a cross-cultural learning experience, as long as they are prepared and trained for home visits. In order to get the desired outcome from a home visit, quality outweighs quantity. (Raikes, 2006). Based on her home visit experience, Pushor (2012) comments, "I noted how, in the complexity and busyness of their daily lives, they figured out, and lived out, rhythms, patterns, routines, and rules around holiday and cultural traditions, and such things as bedtimes and meals, allowances and household tasks, and friendships and curfews" (p. 470). Teachers must know what to look for while in the home and plan ahead with appropriate questions to ask to make the best use of their time in the home. "Home visits should be considered as a possible tool in schools and be introduced in teacher preparation programs" (Lin & Bates, 2010, p. 183). It is recommended that new teachers are exposed to the importance of building home-school partnerships through home visits, but it is noted that all teachers would benefit from entering the home of their students. Pushor (2012) comments on the importance of understanding why teachers are redefining the professionalism that comes along working with parents and how this should be integrated into the requirements for becoming a teacher. Young educators need to be exposed to the research behind building parent relationships so when they are in the field, they actively apply these strategies to their teaching.

Parent information sessions. When teachers break down the barriers between home and school and view students in a different context drastic changes become apparent. Pushor & Ruitenberg (2005) witnessed culturally appropriate programming, an increase in attendance and participation, positive identity formation, access to

technology, the opportunity for voice, and family correspondence. Families and students feel empowered when they are given the opportunity to share information about themselves and their community. When planning parent information sessions or parent engagement activities, it is important to acknowledge the work parents have already applied to the parent-school relationship. Pushor (2011) comments, "such a co-construction acknowledges that children are cared for and educated at home and they are cared for and educated at school. It invites teacher candidates [and teachers] to consider their work . . . as intertwined with that of other caregivers and educators who hold a place in the lives of children" (p. 226). The work of parents often goes unrecognized, so acknowledging their hard work opens the door to building a relationship. It is also important to highlight cultural factors that make families unique, to demonstrate a level of appreciation. As Kroeger and Lash (2011) stated, "language and cultural practices that differ from the school's, parents' and children's identity development, familial roles and structural differences in families are devalued and negated and resources of the community are underutilized" (p. 270). By utilizing the community resources as well as building on families' cultural backgrounds, educators can create a common ground which is welcoming for all.

The purpose of culturally relevant pedagogy is to make all students feel welcome and celebrated, while giving students an opportunity to learn about cultures varying from their own. As educators, we need to take into consideration that not all parents feel comfortable building a close-knit relationship with the school. Bergnehr (2015) clarifies, "School may have negative connotations for some parents, the newsletter appeared to attract mostly mothers, and non-English-speaking parents may be excluded from the

information gleaned by reading the letters” (p. 173). Mr. Dixon comments, “If they put more trust into the school because I feel like they don’t put enough trust in us to get them to where they need to be and understand why we are doing certain things.” In an environment where parents may feel uncomfortable, it is not fair to ask them to put more trust into a relationship. Some parents need to slowly build that relationship with the school before putting all their trust into a system where traditionally parents are overlooked. “Educators are positioned as holders of knowledge: of curriculum and programming; of school policies, procedures, and practices; of appropriate expectations. Parents are positioned as recipients of this knowledge, which implies they are unknowing, or less knowing, than educators” (Marsh, 2010, p. 6). In order to build a comfortable, and productive environment for parents, they need to know their voices matter. Delgado-Gaitan (2007) developed guidelines of what an effective home-school relationship consists of including, commitment, communication, continuity, and collaboration (p.29). As teachers gain a concrete understanding of integrating funds of knowledge into the classroom, they will no longer feel the pressure to prioritize all the skills students need to accomplish; these skills will become a natural part of one’s teaching.

Adjusting the curriculum. Teachers then utilize the information gathered in the homes and apply the newfound information to their teaching. Educators should purposefully include student culture and interests into each lesson. It is known that oftentimes schools overlook student culture and teach to the majority. By entering the homes of the students and being inquisitive about family background, educators can learn about family cultures and traditions. Teachers then turnkey the learned information to

seamlessly integrate culture into daily instruction. “It can be seen in every lesson, curriculum guide, unit, bulletin board, and letter that is sent home” (Nieto, 1991, p. 215). This gives students a sense of identity. “I believe the most important thing is not that our children learn English, but rather that they maintain their own culture and language, because it is truly their language and culture which gives them a sense of dignity” (Keis, 2002, p. 295). By allowing students the opportunity to share experiences, they develop a sense of ownership and become proud of their background. They can then transfer their wisdom to their peers. Moll & Gonzalez (1992) recognize that in this context, most of the teaching and learning is driven by student interest, in contrast to classrooms, where information is forced from a teacher influence (p. 134). “This relationship can become the basis for the exchange of knowledge about family or school matters, reducing the insularity of classrooms, and contributing to the academic content and lessons” (p. 139). By allowing students to celebrate their backgrounds, a classroom takes one step closer towards integrating culturally relevant pedagogy. Nieto (1992) maintains, “Education must involve the interaction of students with teachers and schools, not simply the action of teachers and schools on students” (p. 2). Teachers can also tailor the curriculum to highlight culture through multicultural literature, announcements of various cultural holidays, and integrating various languages. It could be something as simple as changing a name in a math problem to a foreign name or counting in another language to integrate some culture into lessons. In her studies of culturally relevant teaching, Delpit (1998) mentions “each cultural group should have the right to maintain its own language style” (p. 292). Many schools are moving away from “culture celebration” days to make students’ literacies apparent in all aspects of students’

lives. Ladson-Billings (1995) discusses the fluidity and equity involved in engaging in student relations.

It was common for the teachers to be seen attending community functions (churches and sports events) and using community services (beauty parlors and stores). The teachers attempted to create a bond with all of the students, rather than an idiosyncratic, individualistic connection that might foster an unhealthy competitiveness. This bond was nurtured by the teacher's insistence on creating a community of learners as a priority (p. 163)

Developing a culturally responsive classroom. Culturally relevant pedagogy can benefit students in the classroom but can also be translated to parents. Using information gathered from home visits can allow teachers to assess what the parents want from a parent-school relationship. Teachers need training in culturally sustaining pedagogy. Teachers may stick to the traditional ways in the classroom because of their lack of background and training on differing backgrounds. "Research findings suggest that these teachers lack the requisite background knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively teach children from socio-linguistically diverse backgrounds due to their limited cultural knowledge and exposure to issues of diversity" (Lin & Bates, 2010, p.179). When schools are planning parent information sessions, it is important to take into consideration the viewpoint of the parents. Delgado-Gaitan (2007) recommends the following suggestions to academically support both students and parents: tutoring, mentoring, study skill classes, computer classes, volunteering in the community, personal identity workshops, collaboration with community organizations. Schools can also set up parent groups to discuss personal topics or concerns in a supportive environment (Wilkins & Terlitsky, 2015). This school related network allows parents to feel connected and appreciated.

Communication. Communication is important to help maintain a positive relationship with parents throughout the year. Wilkins and Terlitsky (2015) recommend sharing positive information throughout the school year such as sending home certificates of the child's academic and behavioral achievements as well as notes to parents thanking them for their support. As an educator, I personally send home two positive notes a week for two separate students. I am cognizant that not all families have access to technology, so to reach all families, I send paper copies home. For my families who do have access to phones and computers, I share pictures of the class weekly on the Remind app with parents, so they are able to see science experiments, theme days, and accomplished work. It is critical to understand each parent's preferred form of communication to ensure communication is welcomed. These small gestures allow parents to feel included and in touch with their child's schooling.

Recommendations for Further Research

More research is necessary to provide further support for this study's findings. The purpose of this study was to identify funds of knowledge and the importance of integrating each family's background and experiences into the learning environment. Findings of this study are consistent with findings of previous research (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992; Taylor, 1997; Pushor, 2012). This study analyzed the parent-school relationship from various perspectives: administrators, teachers, parents, and students. As a next step in my research, I would have liked to share the family responses to interview questions with the teachers and vice versa. It would be interesting to build on their reactions to the information they shared about one another and how this could improve daily instruction, communication, and future relationships in a school

setting. While this study focused on how parents view the parent-school relationship thus far into their child's schooling, it is recommended that further research track how parent's perspectives change as their child progresses through the school system.

The main focus of this mini-ethnography was to get to know the participants' family literacies and understand their opinion of parent-school relationships. "A next step in our research will be to explore the perspectives of teachers and school personnel, to discover their view of home-school communication and the challenges they identify in communicating with parents" (Weiss, 1998, p. 10). By understanding the parent-school relationship from a teacher's perspective, future researchers could further explore the need to communicate with parents and the benefits that come with focusing additional time and effort into family relationships.

In terms of school wide research, it would be valuable to survey the teachers, aides, and administrators on their knowledge of funds of knowledge and culturally relevant pedagogy. This information could serve to provide appropriate professional development and training to encourage teachers to develop an all-inclusive curriculum, create a positive learning community, and establish relationships with families for the good of their students.

Conclusion

This research inquiry began from teachers believing that parents do not care about their children's education. Because of unchecked folders, low back to school night attendance, lack of signups for parent teacher conferences, and unsigned reading logs, some teachers assumed that parents were not interested in playing a role in their children's academic lives. Findings from this mini-ethnographic study reveal that parents

want to be involved in their child's education; the involvement just looks different in every home. No matter the homework routine, the study skills, the parental involvement, these parents want to see their children reach their full potential in the school community. Parents are teaching their children self-motivation, hard work, resilience, kindness, and compassion for others. While teachers cannot go into the homes of all of their students, there are different methods to discovering family's funds of knowledge such as interviews, surveys, and family artifacts. Another option to uncover students' funds of knowledge is going into the community and engaging with the families by becoming an active community member. This gives the teacher an opportunity to connect with multiple students and families while engaging in community events. Uncovering funds of knowledge allows culture, backgrounds, and interests of each student to flourish in the classroom. The parents crave a relationship with the teachers where they know their child is loved and taken care of while at school.

Pushor (2012) concludes her research on parent engagement, stating things she looks forward to developing with parent-teacher connections. I also look forward to the day the school is common ground for both teachers and parents to communicate and work together for the good of the child. I look forward to the day teachers recognize the unique literacy practices families display in their homes and integrate funds of knowledge into their daily instruction. I look forward to the day where all teachers value culturally relevant pedagogy to allow students of all cultures and backgrounds to feel empowered. I look forward to the day my research makes a difference to a student, a family, a coworker, or another teacher researcher.

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Appendix A

Principal Interview

Background

- What degree(s) do you currently have?
- Where did you obtain your degrees from?
- Tell me about your experience in education.
- How long have you been a principal?
- Did you always know that you wanted to become a principal?
- What do you find rewarding about being the principal of an elementary school?
- What are some challenges of being the principal?
- What is your most important role as a principal?

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

- Can you describe the student population at our school?
- How would you define culturally relevant pedagogy?
- How does our school represent culturally relevant pedagogy?
- In what ways does our school curriculum incorporate students' cultures into daily instruction?
- What components of the curriculum can be adjusted to foster an inclusive learning environment for all students based on their interests, cultures, and backgrounds?
- In your opinion, how can teachers use student cultures and interests during their teaching?
- Do you believe that our school does enough to value the varying cultures of our population? Explain.

Parent-School Relationships

- How would you describe the parent-school relationship at our school?
- In your own words, describe why parent-school relationships are necessary?
- As the principal, how do you encourage communication with parents?
- What programs does our school have in place to encourage parent engagement?
- When parents reach out to you, what is the most common concern?
- If you could change one thing about the parent-school relationship, what would it be?

Appendix B

Teacher Interview

Background

- What degree(s) do you currently have?
- Where did you obtain your degrees from?
- Do you have any plans to go back to school? If so, what would you like to study?
- How long have you been teaching?
- Why did you choose teaching?
- What is the most rewarding part of your job?
- What are some challenges you face as a teacher?
- What is your most important role as a teacher?

Cultures & Student Background

- Can you describe the student population at our school?
- How would you define culturally relevant pedagogy?
- How does our school represent culturally relevant pedagogy?
- In what ways does our school curriculum incorporate students' cultures into daily instruction?
- What components of the curriculum can be adjusted to foster an inclusive learning environment for all students based on their interests, cultures, and backgrounds?
- How do you connect student cultures and interests to your teaching?
- Do you believe that our school does enough to value the varying cultures of our population? Explain.

Home-School Connection

- How would you describe the parent-school relationship at our school?
- How do you communicate with parents?
- What communication do you expect from the parents?
- What type of communication do you receive from parents? (do they ask you a question about homework, share info with you, dismissal changes, personal info, etc)
- What programs does our school have in place to encourage parent engagement?
- If you could change one thing about the parent-school relationship, what would it be?

Family Background

- How is _____ doing in class?
- What are his/her strengths?
- What are his/her weaknesses?
- Use 3 words to describe _____.
- What do you know about the _____ family?
- Who does _____ live with?
- Who is _____'s role model? How do you know?
- From your impression, how would you describe the _____ family?
- Describe your communication with the _____ family.

Appendix C

Parent Interview

Family Background

- Tell me about your family.
- How did you meet?
- How would you describe your cultural background?
- Can you share some cultural traditions your family participates in?
- What traditions do you have that are unique to your family?
- What made you settle down in Clayton? How long have you been living here?
- How are you involved in the community?
- What do you do for a living?
- What hopes and dreams do you have as a family?
- How would you describe your home? What about your child's room?
- Describe a typical school night in your home. Weekend? Dinner?
- How do the kids help around the house?
- What are some household rules you have?
- What are morals/life lessons that you live by?

Literacy

- What did early literacy look like in your home?
- How do you encourage reading and writing?
- What is your earliest memory of reading and writing as a child?
- Tell me about your experience at school as a child.
- Did you attend college? How do you feel about your children attending college?
- How do you display an interest in reading and writing as an adult?
- How would you describe your child as a reader and as a writer?
- How is storytelling, music, or other forms of literacy used by members of your family?
- How does your family use reading and writing in the community? (ex. Church, shopping)
- What are some of the things that you are doing to help your child with school?
- What is something you wish your child's teachers knew about your family?
- What is a positive experience you have had with your child with reading and writing?
- Has your child ever shown frustration when it comes to reading and/or writing? Can you describe what that looks like?
- How was reading encouraged this past school year at school or at home?
- How does your child typically feel about going to school?

Children

- How would you describe your children?
- How do you think someone else would describe your child?
- What are some special talents that your child has?
- What is something that most people don't know about your child?
- What interests your child?
- What is your child scared of?
- How do you think your child's teacher views your child?

Parent-School Relationship

- In your opinion, what makes a great teacher?
- How would you describe the parent-school relationship at our school?
- Do you communicate with teachers/school? Describe what that looks like.
- What communication do you expect from teachers?
- What type of communication do you receive from this year's teacher?
- What programs does our school have in place to encourage parent engagement?
- If you could change one thing about the parent-school relationship, what would it be?
- What do you wish your child's school/teacher knew about your child? your family?
- Does our school host enough events for families? Explain.
- What events would you like to see?
- How does a teacher's knowledge of your child and family history impact their learning?

Appendix D

Student Interview

- How old are you?
- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- Do you want to go to college?
- What do you like to do for fun?
- What sports or activities are you involved in?
- What do you like best about school?
- What is something you wish you could change about school?
- What makes a good teacher?
- What is your favorite thing about your teacher?
- How do you think your teacher describes you?
- What is something you wish your teacher knew about you?
- How do you practice reading and writing at home?
- What is your favorite book? Why?
- How does your family help you with schoolwork?
- What does your homework routine look like?
- Do you wish your family could come to school for events? Tell me more.
- What does your family do with the papers and projects you bring home from school?
- Do you see your family members read or write at home?
- What does your family say about school?

Appendix E
Classroom Literacy Observation Tool

Component	Activity	Dialogue	Observations
Foundations			
Ready Gen			
Daily 5			
Read Aloud			
Guided Reading			
Writing			
Independent Writing			

Appendix F
Ethnographic Observation Collection Sheet

Activities	Environment	Interactions	Objects	Observation	Dialogue

Appendix G
Home Visit Photos











