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Small places, big outcomes: An ethnographic case study on social emotional learning skills and development, organizational culture, and place-making in small, rural schools in southern New Jersey

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SMALL PLACES, BIG OUTCOMES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY ON SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING SKILLS AND DEVELOPMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, AND PLACE-MAKING IN SMALL, RURAL SCHOOLS IN SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my encouraging, supportive, and amazing family. To my parents who pushed me to even make it through undergrad, you instilled the value of perseverance and hard work that I will forever be grateful. Your endless mornings of second breakfasts with the kids, shoulders to lean on, and pushing me allowed me to accomplish this goal. Thank you for always being there for me.

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To Mom-mom and Sprout, too.

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Abstract

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The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic case study was to describe the ways in which three school leaders from small, rural PreK-8 districts (less than 1,000 students) in Southern New Jersey used similar methods for fostering partnerships with families and bonds between individuals, families and schools to address social emotional learning skills and development in the early childhood setting (grades pre-kindergarten through third grade). In addition, this study examined how the organizational culture of the educational organizations reinforced or undermined the relationship between school and family partnerships and bonds. This study investigated the linkage between school leaders' experiences and social development theory and theory of family-school connections and how the norms, values and beliefs held by the schools and families created or maintained the organizational culture for partnership. This study encompassed research that suggested educational organizations, facilitated by school leaders, have their own culture and serve as a place where families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

School violence in the physical, verbal, and relational sense is a social problem that is affecting students and teachers both physically and psychologically (Estevez, Jimenez, & Lucia, 2018; Roberts, Zhang, Morgan, & Musu-Gillette, 2015). The events occurring in American schools are parallel to the highly charged political discourse from our nation's leaders, related to health care, immigration, and national security (Rogers, 2017). In the last three years, since the 2016 election, American schools have seen an increase in teasing and bullying suspected to be correlated to the rhetoric of national leaders (Hang & Cornell, 2019). Moreover, the national political environment of the last three years, including the topics that question the status of vulnerable groups, uncivil rhetoric, and the overall tone of discourse may have an adverse effect on students' social-emotional well-being (Rogers, 2017). These outside influences have a strong impact on students and their character development, values, and life habits (Elias, 2009).

The economic and social changes of the last forty years of the 20th century have changed the makeup of families, extended families, and close-knit communities (Elias et al., 1997). In these changes from neighbors as role models to neighbors as strangers, Elias et al. (1997) contended, "Schools have become the one best place where the concept of surrounding children with meaningful adults and clear behavioral standards" is possible and necessary. Place is defined as the space and the qualities of the space that effect the relationships and social interactions of the people (Stewart, 2010). Schools serve as a place where families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships. In understanding that place is socially constructed, the experiences, cultural values and

social meanings of the group make the place, in this case, the educational organization and community (Knox, 2005).

As a nation, it is essential children's character, commonly represented by honesty, courage, compassion, and love, is nurtured in order to ensure that democracy and our communities flourish (Soder, Goodland, & McMannon, 2001). The democratic ideals of our country rely on citizens living and working together in "desirable ways" (Soder et al., 2001; Elias, 2009). These desirable ways serve as the foundation for our democracy and the ideas of liberty, equality, and justice. Further, our system of democracy is linked to the emotional intelligence of our voters (Elias, 2009). Soder et al. (2001) present a central question in regard to our future citizens: How can we cultivate character? Historically, character education in schools focused on doing what is "right," however social and emotional learning skills and development, comprised self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills, are all part of a comprehensive agenda now in Pre-K-12 schools across the United States (CASEL, 2019; Cohen, 2006). This type of learning has the goal to cultivate learners with the ability to effectively participate in a democracy (Durlack, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Gullotta, 2015; Cohen, 2006).

Nationally, The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was launched in an effort to support social emotional learning skills and development for "fundamental life effectiveness" (Durlack et al., 2015). CASEL strives to educate public policymakers and government administrators on efforts that compliment social emotional learning skills and support standards that enhance social emotional teaching and standards (Elias et al., 1997). In 2001, National Conference of

State Legislators supported teaching social emotional skills in school and in 2007 the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Association for the Accreditation of Teacher Education recommended a focus on social emotional learning skills and development in teacher education programs (Hoffman, 2009). Most recently, in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), established that each state should determine the way in which it accounts for social emotional learning skills and development and how to analyze such programs (NCSL, 2019).

In an effort to promote the healthy development of young people, the State of New Jersey has promoted the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies released in 2017, a set of guidelines for including SEL into public school education. The competencies highlight self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills. In addition to releasing the guidelines, the State continues to be on the forefront of strong anti-bullying laws and policies and programs that support prevention (New Jersey Department of Education, 2017).

Just as the state constructs and maintains policy and programming that supports SEL skills and development, school districts accept the responsibility of educating our children in all aspects of learning and growing, such as social and emotional health (Cohen, 2006). With most of students' time awake being spent in schools (breakfast programs, after-school programs and other federal, state and district funding), the development of the whole child has become the focus of educational organizations (Lewallen, Hunt, Potts-Datema, Zaza, & Giles, 2015). Student-centered approaches that meet the physical, language, ethical, social, psychological, and cognitive needs of

students have the potential to prepare students for becoming productive and healthy members of society (Haynes, 1998).

Experiences inside and outside of the school, along with experiences with family and non-family, all contribute to development. Due to changing family structures and work schedules outside the home, children at a very young age develop a network of relationships outside their own family (Tresch Owen, Ware, & Barfoot, 2000). Under the premise of ecological theory, home and school must work together and form a strong bond in order to enhance the development potential of students (Chung & Kim, 2018). Family involvement is essential to school improvement and success. In addition, the National Council of State Legislators (2019) proposes that some policymakers still question whether social emotional learning is the responsibility of schools or families. Considering this, schools must engage families in order to promote results for all children (Epstein, 2006).

School-Family Partnerships

Educational organizations and school leaders are viewed as the lead contributors to academic learning and development and also to the holistic development of all children (Haynes, 1998). However, in order to achieve success and attempt to solve the problems of society, a myriad of expertise and effort must be tapped (Gichrist, 2006). Considering this, the mission of schools, which is the learning and development of children, is best achieved when families are included and engaged (Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). Additionally, schools, communities, and families are all affected by social and emotional issues (Elias et al., 1997). Although still viewed by some as solely the responsibility of families, addressing social emotional learning and development in schools is imperative

(Elias et al., 1997). In addition, programs that teach single-focused skills are not enough and social emotional competence must be built into the broader school environment (Elias & Arnold, 2006). For this reason, partnerships, defined as "collaborations in which individuals, organizations or groups work toward a shared goal," are developed through the shared ownership of children's SEL skills and development (Goldman & Schmalz, 2008).

Organizational Culture

An organization is defined as "a collection of individuals formed into a coordinated system of specialized activities for the purpose of achieving certain goals over some extended period of time" (Middlemist & Hitt, 1988). The organizational culture is what gives meaning and portrays the "reality" of an organization (Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2014). Meaning, or how an object or expression is interpreted, is "between" what is publicly expressed in formal and informal situations, and what is internal to a member of the organization (Alvesson, 2002). The education and development of children, as well as the effectiveness of an organization, is directly impacted by organizational culture (Chung & Kim, 2018). An examination and analysis of organizational culture in schools brings a greater understanding of the factors that influence the ability of schools and families to work together (Gilchrist, 2006; Parker & Selksy, 2004).

The Role of Families

The role of family in partnership with school leaders is crucial to the success of all school programs. Educational organizations and families have very different values and norms, yet they share a common goal (Chung & Kim, 2018). When families are involved in their child's education, they have the opportunity not only to become partners

with school leaders but advocate for their own children and reinforce academic and holistic development at home. Organization and culture are at the forefront of how school leaders can implement structures that allow for parent involvement and strong partnerships. Just as culture is assessed and analyzed through different levels that incorporate observed behavior, goals and values, partnerships are recognized by way of shared interests and responsibilities (Epstein, 2002; Schein, 2017). In this connection, the family's fundamental goal of a better life for their children compliments the school's major function of educating children and developing the next generation of citizens.

Social Emotional Learning Skills and Development

The way in which partnerships can foster and effectively develop children's education and development is through a deeper understanding of social emotional learning skills. A caring school environment, comprised of the family, school, and community, is formed through these partnerships (Epstein, 2006). Social emotional learning skills and development is facilitated through partnerships and caring groups that come together to model positive social interactions for children. Social emotional skills and social emotional development include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2019). This type of skills and development essential in the development of holistic education and future citizens. The social interaction, emotional regulation, and self-regulation that comprise this type of development are essential in reducing violence in schools and allowing for a more secure environment (Haynes, 1998). In addition, the kinds of relationships that children have with peers, adults and the community are linked to rates of violence, drug abuse, and other high-risk behaviors (Haynes, 1998).

Early Childhood Importance

The relationships that children have must be nurtured at a young age to gain the most success. Children's social and behavioral adjustment during the first year of school lays the foundation for their future school trajectories (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010; Ray & Smith, 2010). In a study by Jones, Greenberg and Crowley (2015), the social skills observed in early childhood classrooms showed significant correlation with social-emotional well-being as young adults. The early childhood years are essential to development in all areas when the fastest brain development is occurring. In recent years, many studies have been devoted to the significance of early childhood education, and great importance has been placed on the youngest grades by policymakers and other leaders. Early childhood sets the foundation for all future learning and development and must be the area in which school leaders begin the journey of cultivating effective and positive partnerships with families.

Leadership in Small, Rural Districts

The federal and state government set policies that focus all local districts on accountability and standards and provide direction for student learning, yet smaller districts have historically been underexamined (Louis, Thomas, & Anderson, 2010). Clark and Wildey (2011) examined small school districts and the necessity of shared sense of purpose to achieve high standards for all students. This idea compliments the general concept of developing social emotional capacities and the whole child is one of the fundamental goals of the school and families. Considering the number of small districts across the state of New Jersey, it is critical to examine the way in which school

leaders develop school and family partnerships that support children's social emotional development and learning.

Issues Surrounding Partnerships

A multitude of studies have illustrated the importance of linking home and family; however, there are many underlying forces that threaten the school-family partnership. These are the underlying assumptions within an organization that can be used to analyze culture. Underlying assumptions are the unconscious values and beliefs that control the actions of an organization (Schein, 1985). In the case of the school-family partnership, competition, alienation, indifference and hierarchal rankings all threaten the partnership between school leaders and families (Chung & Kim, 2018). For this reason, school leaders must have a deep understanding of organizational culture in order to combat this issue and many others that threaten the success of school and family partnerships.

Even with the multitude of studies that support and encourage the need for family and school partnerships in successful students, school leaders still do not grant culture—particularly partnerships with families—enough attention. With this premise in mind, this study highlights the association between organizational culture and place, partnerships between school leaders and SEL skills and development in the early childhood setting.

Problem Statement

We need competent workers to compete in a global market, but history tells us that a democratic society expects much more: graduates who exhibit sound character, have a social conscience, think critically, are willing to make commitments, and are aware of global problems (Soder et al., 2001). In order to meet the demands of a democratic society, schools must go beyond teaching fundamental skills and serve both

individuals and the larger society by facilitating learning on other health and social aspects of growing (Noddings, 2015; Murry, Hurley, & Ahmed, 2015). Development of the holistic child, including social emotional learning skills and development, facilitates emotional management and other competences that lead to success in life tasks and in behaving in socially skilled ways (Elias et al., 1997; Smith & Law, 2013).

Equally important, prior research has stressed the importance of the early bond between children and families, specifically parents, and the influence of family support in creating successful students (Epstein, 2002; Weisskirch, 2018). Specifically, on the topic of SEL skills and development, students are likely to witness positive outcomes when the standards between home and school are clear and partnerships are formed (Elias et al., 1996; Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). Gilchrist (2006) identified the procedures of organizations as equally important as the engagement, interaction, dialogue, and cooperation of partnerships in successful outcomes. These structures and processes are analyzed through a deep understanding of organizational culture, whereas culture is the collectively shared forms of ideas, symbols, values, norms, emotions, structures, and practices (Alvesson, 2002). Place and place-making, focused on the culture, political agendas, growth, and relationships of a place or organization, influence the entire community, including partnerships and relationships (Hopkins, 2011; Pascucci, 2015).

A common goal and vision are key factors in developing partnership with purpose for school organizations (Epstein, 2006). The most powerful partnerships between groups within educational organization are those that are created between the school and families, as they both increase their effectiveness if they work and communicate together (Chung & Kim, 2018). Particularly with SEL skills and development, children need

supportive environments, comprised of the significant adults and peers in their life, to work together as a community as they begin to grasp ways to be knowledgeable, responsible, and caring (Elias et al., 1997).

School leaders play an immense role in establishing a culture for partnerships, which are as essential for sustainability and positive student outcomes, within the organization (Elias et al., 1997; Epstein, 2006). These partnerships are particularly important in the early childhood years, up to third grade, when the ability to influence a child's school career and adulthood is present (Elias et al., 1997; Galindo & Sheldon, 2010; Ray & Smith, 2010). With this is in mind, this study concentrated on the partnership with school leaders and families through the lens of organizational culture and as a place where families become attached to and involve themselves, specifically in the area of social emotional learning skills and development.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic case study was to explore partnerships developed between school leaders and families to address social emotional learning skills and development in the early childhood setting (grades pre-kindergarten through third grade) in small, rural school districts in Southern New Jersey. This study explored the way in which school leaders fostered partnerships with families and bonds between individuals, families, and school by investigating the linkage between school leaders' experiences, social development theory, and family-school connection theory. Moreover, this study recognized educational organizations as a place where families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships. This study intended to understand the interactions between organizational culture, partnerships, and place-

making that create social emotional learning skills and development via the perspectives of school leaders and parents in grades Pre-K through grade 3.

The sample included three school leaders of small Pre-kindergarten through 8th grade districts of less than 1,000 students. Fifteen families of children in grades preschool through grade three (five from each district where a school leader was interviewed) were invited to participate in this study. I interviewed school leaders and parents or guardians of children in grades pre-kindergarten through third grade based on an interview protocol to address the research questions of this study. The sample size for this qualitative study was small as to lead to information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Interview data was recorded, transcribed and then analyzed. Additional documents were collected from the interviewees, including formal communication with families regarding social emotional learning development and meeting notes pertaining to family communication and social emotional learning skills and development. Additionally, a checklist was used in conjunction with a tour of the school to analyze the school's culture in addition to what could be learned in interviews.

This study was viewed through the theoretical lens of organizational culture, with a focus on educational organizations as places where relationships and partnerships between stakeholders, particularly school leaders and families are formed. Social emotional learning skills and development are fostered based on the bonds between individuals, families and schools (Chung & Kim, 2018; Hawkins, Smith, & Catalano, 2004). These bonds create an investment in the norms, values, and beliefs held by these groups that influence behavior (Hawkins et al., 2004). By the reason of norms, values, and beliefs influencing behavior, it is essential to study organizational culture, which

includes the artifacts, espoused theories, and underlying assumptions of an organization (Schien, 1985). In addition, working and thriving partnerships involve and require a deep understanding of many different factors, including the culture that each group brings to the union and the setting (Chapman, 2006; Parker & Selksy, 2004). Place is not the physical location of the organization, but the blending of the character of the setting and its meaning to those that inhabit it (Chapman, 2006). In conjunction, human experiences and meanings combine to create the place (Chapman, 2006). On the basis that school leaders must partner with families in pursuit of healthy relationships and social experiences that are crucial for future development and social outcomes, for this qualitative study, culture provided the context for examining social emotional learning skills and development within small, rural school districts in Southern New Jersey (Caemmrer et al., 2015; Shonkoff et al., 2002).

Research questions. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do school leaders foster partnerships with families in pursuit of healthy relationships and social emotional learning skills and development for students?
    a. How do school leaders support the development of bonds between individuals, families, and the school in an early childhood context?
    b. What are the norms, values, and beliefs held by the school and families that may encourage the social emotional learning skills and development in children?

2. What role does organizational culture, including the artifacts, espoused theories, and underlying assumptions of an organization, play in developing partnerships between school leaders and families?
    a. In what ways does the organizational culture foster place-making that develops partnerships between school leaders and families for the social emotional learning skills and development of early childhood students?
3. How do organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making interact to encourage the social emotional learning skills and development of students in an early childhood context?

Definition of terms.

Bond. The formation of a close relationship between the student, family, and school.

Holistic development. The physical, language, ethical, social, psychological and cognitive development of students (Haynes, 1998).

Organizational culture. A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group has and the shared interpretations they possess in understanding organizational events, problems and situations (Rentsh, 1990; Schein, 1985).

Partnership. "The term partnership includes concepts of involvement, engagement, participation, collaboration and other favorite terms that show people at home, at school, and in the community work together to improve schools and increase the success of all students" (Epstein, 2006).

Place. Place is defined as the space and the qualities of the space that effect the relationships and social interactions of the people (Stewart, 2010).

Place-making. Place is a socially-constructed space likened to a person or group's own personal experiences, cultural values, and social meanings that then transforms into a place for the person or group (Stewart, 2010).

Social development model. "Bonding is created through providing children with opportunities for involvement with prosocial peers and adult, ensuring they have the skills to participate effectively, and recognizing and rewarding them for this involvement" (Hawkins et al., 2004).

Social emotional development. The experiences, expressions, and management of emotions by children is defined as social emotional development. Social emotional development includes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. For the purpose of this study, social emotional development included the ability by children to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others, as well as the importance of developing strong bonds to family, school and community (Hawkins et al., 2004).

Social emotional learning skills. Social emotional learning is defined as the acquisition of knowledge related to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2019; Durlack et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lenses for this research included an emphasis on organizational culture and theories of family partnership and involvement and social development

theory. Organizational culture was used to describe the way in which an organization has shared assumptions that impact the group norms, espoused values, climate and observed behaviors when individuals in an organization interact (Schien, 1985). Place was used to explain the idea that educational organizations are a public place that fosters individual's health and well-being through a community built on the relationships and social interactions of the people (Pascucci, 2015; Stewart, 2010). Complimentary to the theories of organizational culture and place, Hawkins et al. (2004) found that social emotional learning skills and development are strongly linked to the social environment and the social bonds formed from these environments, in this case home and school. When a child interacts, social bonding is produced which creates an investment in the "norms, values and beliefs held by these groups that influence behavior" (Hawkins et al., 2004). Specifically, schools with strong social emotional competencies have climates that articulate specific skills and elements and have strong family education and involvement components. For these reasons, family-school connection was a theory used as a lens for this research. Although widely recognized and boasted as significant to student success, the theoretical foundations of family-school partnerships remain under-developed and the research is incomplete (Daniel, 2011).

Organizational culture. Through a deep understanding of culture, leaders are able to understand organizational situations and also the way in which individuals and groups interact. Lack of communication between stakeholders can also be explained through the lens of culture. The theoretical framework for this qualitative study was based on organizational culture and leadership (Deal & Kennedy, 2000; Handy, 1993; Hofstede, 2003; Schein, 1985; Trompenaars, 1993). Edgar Schein (1985) defined

organizational culture as a "pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group has learned as it solves it's problems." Organizational culture is the context for which leaders can better understand themselves and better understand others within the organization. Hofstede (2003) analyzed culture as an organizational element that was necessary to appreciate, specifically in understanding the relationship between people and the organization. When a leader confidently comprehends culture, he or she is able to maintain better relationships and more meaningful communication with members of the organization. Culture encompasses all groups within a functioning organization (Schein, 1985). This study concentrated on school leaders and families as two of the groups within educational organizations that must be recognized.

Further, culture influences every aspect of an organization, including how it addresses not only individuals and groups within the organization, but also its functions (Schein, 1985). Culture is a difficult subject, in that leaders are often inflexible when it comes to culture (Handy, 1993). With this understood, culture is still recognized as an organizational element that must combine different types and paradigms of culture in order to guarantee top performance (Deal & Kennedy, 2000; Trompennaars, 1993). It can be settled, then, that culture is a complex component of organizations that must be studied and recognized.

For this qualitative study, culture provided the context for examining the specific matter of social emotional learning skills and development. Chung and Kim (2018) expressed the influence of organizational culture in educational organizations, specifically related to partnerships between parents and educational institutions. Although families differ in many ways from school leaders and educational organizations, the

common goal of holistic development for all children is at the center of how this study began to research culture, place, and partnerships within these groups.

Place and place-making. Place-making is a philosophy and process that creates a healthy environment and builds a community for partnership and relationships (Hopkins, 2011; Pascussi, 2015; Wight, 2005). Creswell (2004) contended that people give meaning to place and play an integral part in making of a place. Educational organizations are given meaning by families and are deeply involved in the mission and the chemistry of the setting (Chapman, 2006). As populations have grown the needs of citizens and neighborhoods have become forgotten and society is more concentrated with economics than the livability of citizens (Friedman, 2010). This correlates to the ideas of character, democratic principles, and social emotional learning skills and development becoming the focus of the school. Place-making serves as the process to reverse this trend and create places that are dynamic communities that serve as culturally aware, collaborative, and sociable entities (Pascussi, 2015).

Place-making is a process in which public spaces, in this case educational organizations, are planned, designed, and managed (Pascucci, 2015). True place-making can start small, such as with partnerships between family and school, and grow to influence the entire community (Pascussi, 2015). Successful public spaces include the ability to foster social activities and engagement (Stewart, 2010). The building of community and partnerships within educational organizations can be recognized by the need of schools to serve as a place for families and to meet human needs (Wight, 2005).

Social development theory. Schein (1985) discussed the three levels of culture: artifacts, espoused theories, and underlying assumptions. Artifacts are visible structures

and observable behaviors; espoused theories are the ideas, goals, and values the organization represents; and underlying assumptions are the unconscious values and beliefs the organization has that control actions (Schein, 1985). This perspective of organizational culture, as well as the foundations of place and place-making, and the process of socialization and social norms, is directly connected to Hawkins, Smith and Catalano's (2004) social development theory, which explains how children development on "prosocial or antisocial pathways" (Knox, 2005). The theory integrates three theories of human behavior and development: social learning, social control, and differential association theories. The theory centers on the notion that individuals, families, and institutions are bonded through social interaction and involvement. "These bonds create an investment in the norms, values, and beliefs held by these groups that has the power to influence behavior" (Hawkins et al., 2004). Therefore, the culture and place of the organization and the bonds formed impact a child's ability to have prosocial or antisocial behaviors.

Theory of family-school connections. The framework of organizational culture had to be localized in order to recognize the unique relationships of families as stakeholders in the educational organization and the way families can partner with school leaders. Epstein's (2002) theory of overlapping spheres of influence recognized the home, school and community as three separate entities that work together to enhance the learning and development of children. Family and educational systems, along with the community, interact in a series of complex ways to make an impact on the development of children and affect children's learning and development (Chung & Kim, 2018). This illustrates the importance of the three groups within the organization's culture working

together and sharing responsibilities to enhance children's learning and development. The theory accentuates the notion that students are at the center of this model and that the home, school, and community working together is essential for influence to occur (Epstein, 2002).

Complimentarily to the framework on the overlapping spheres of influence, Epstein (2002) presented an outline for the ways in which school leaders can develop family partnerships, strengthen parent involvement within the school setting and extend learning and development at home. The types of parent involvement presented approach the topics of parenting, effectively communicating school-to-home and home-to-school and developing parent leaders (Epstein, 2002). This framework recognized that although school leaders want to work alongside families within the school setting, they are fearful of trying and lack the necessary support (Epstein, 2002). The framework of the overlapping spheres of influence, coupled with the framework for parental involvement, is necessary in research related to organizational culture and partnering with stakeholders. The perceptions of school leaders were analyzed to conclude the ways in which leaders feel supported, knowledgeable and validated in the area of organizational culture, place, and partnering with families specifically related to social emotional learning skills and development.

Delimitations

As with all research, delimitations must be considered, and the complexity of the social world studied must be acknowledged (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The initial delimitation of this study included the recruitment strategy for participants. The research called for three school leaders from PK-8 districts in Southern New Jersey with less than

1,000 students to be participants. Families were also interviewed for this study. With an attempt to make the sampling purposeful, it was determined that five families from each district should be invited to be interviewed. The number of five families allowed for a generous range of perceptions and experiences while still allowing for information-rich and in-depth interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Participant retention was also a concern of this study, due to the fact that families can be difficult to connect with and follow-up visits may have been an issue. In an effort to alleviate this concern, I aimed to construct a complete interview protocol that also addressed time for the interviewee to share thoughts on the research topic not directly answering the interview questions.

An additional delimitation, as with most qualitative research, was the assumption that participants would be open and honest during the interview and data collection. Similarly, because families were asked to comment on school leaders, presumed to be in a position of authority and influence, power dynamics may have affected the answers of families. To address these delimitations, I attempted to create a comfortable interview environment and managed my own comments as to avoid the influence of my own attitudes and bias to on the research.

A major delimitation of this study included the missed perspective of stakeholders within the education organization, particularly the position of teachers and students. The connection between teacher and student is powerful in its ability to model a caring relationship and teach social emotional norms (Elias & Arnold, 2006). Due to the magnitude of the study this would create in including teacher interviews and perspectives, an additional study would be beneficial in addressing this viewpoint.

The last delimitation of this study was that studies are tentative and conditional, especially when understanding culture and organization (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). A participant's own bias on the day of the interview, especially when commenting on their own child in the case of families or programs they had developed for school leaders, may affect their answers and thought process on any given day. To address this, I allowed the participants to schedule their interviews at a time most convenient for them and developed interview protocols and analysis procedures that sought to promote the voice of the participants and honor their singular experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Significance of Study

The goal of this qualitative study was to understand the relationship between school leaders and families in social emotional learning skills and development in the Early Childhood setting (grades pre-kindergarten through third grade). The findings of this study will benefit society by allowing schools and families to form more meaningful partnerships that affect our children's overall social emotional and holistic development.

Galindo and Sheldon (2010) found the largest gains in achievement in the kindergarten setting were made when students' families were involved. The early years of a student's educational career have the greatest effect on later learning and development. Family involvement can occur at the greatest level when activities are planned that increase communication and connections with families (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010). This study offered a deep understanding of organization culture, which explains lack of communication and embraces group functioning, as related specifically to students' social emotional learning skills and development. This would provide

opportunities for school leaders to set school goals and create professional development experiences that facilitate a culture that enhances family partnerships.

Family involvement is directly and critically influenced by schools (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010). This study provided the opportunity to better understand the way in which families and school leaders can effectively produce better outcomes for students. Through the theoretical framework of this study, a leader who understands culture will have more confident dealings with individuals within the organization, including families (Schien, 2017). With more assured interactions, school leaders will be able to form effective partnerships that will facilitate a positive home environment and powerful communication (Epstein, 2006).

Within the organizational culture, teachers are key stakeholders as well as the primary face of an educational organizations. Teachers will also significantly benefit from the research of this qualitative study, because when leaders are able to understand their relationship with families, professional development will be able to follow that enhances family relationships and involvement on the classroom level. Targeted professional development directly impacts instruction in the classroom and is more effective in changing teacher practice if completed in a collective environment, such as an educational organization with a strong knowledge of culture (Desimone et al., 2002). Teachers' interactions with students within the classroom setting were determined to be more valid in assessing and rating students' social skills in comparison with a child's own mother (Konold et al., 2010). Families and teachers working together to promote social emotional learning skills and holistic development of the child will be enhanced with a

greater understanding of how families feel supported and how better communication can take place.

Personally, this study served as an impetus to examine and reflect on my own experiences as an early childhood educator with a diverse background in many grade levels and school districts. It also afforded me the opportunity to connect my passions as a new mother building a young family to that of educational organizations and developing the whole child both within and outside the family. Additionally, the findings from this study may have implications on policy, practice, and research.

Policy. Although policy and legislation can sometimes limit the work of educational organizations, this research will hopefully encourage school leaders to work toward a shared culture of partnership and influence an effective and efficient organization (Chung & Kim, 2018; Haynes, 1998). Additionally, policymakers must recognize and understand partnerships as "organizationally imperative" and take action to support and develop policy that assists schools in forming effective and lasting partnerships (Epstein, 2002).

Funding and resources in the public school setting must be used in appropriate ways that help achieve success for all learners. Through research on the role and partnership of school leaders and families in social emotional learning skills and development, policymakers, leaders in education and stakeholders, such as families, will be able to focus on influencing policy, funding, and resources to better serve children's holistic development.

Practice. This study should afford school leaders a deeper understanding of culture, so they can partner with families in the developmental process. With this

increased understanding by school leaders, professional development can then be tailored to assist teachers in positively supporting children's growth in all areas. Most importantly, through this understanding, communication regarding school programs and progress related to SEL skills and development can be shared more efficiently and effectively.

Research. More research is needed to express the influence of organizational culture in early childhood education, specifically illuminating the strong connection between home and school and including all stakeholders within an organization's culture. Moreover, this study just begins to introduce place and place-making into the educational literature related to partnerships and SEL skills and development. Further research would be beneficial on influencing the school community through place-making. To enhance this study's concentration in the area of SEL skills and development, further research would be beneficial in demonstrating the correlation between high social emotional skills and academic achievement in the early childhood setting. This would bring additional validity to the whole-child approach to learning.

Outline of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic of study, presents the problem statement, the purpose of research, research questions, the significance of the study and introduces the theoretical framework. Chapter 2 provides the review of literature for organizational culture and leadership, specifically building partnerships and relationships with key stakeholders (in this case, families) and social emotional learning skills and development in the early childhood setting. Chapter 3 details the methodology used for this study, including the selection of participants, data

collection methods and analysis. Chapter 4 includes the findings of the research and Chapter 5 is a discussion on the implications of the research and how school leaders and families can develop effective partnerships that support students' social emotional learning skills and development.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter provides an in-depth review of literature that connects the theoretical framework with this research to the context of this area of study. This includes literature around social emotional learning skills and development, organizational culture, place and place-making, family-school connection theory, and other elements of early childhood education, family involvement, small, rural school districts, and environment.

Social Emotional Learning Skills and Development: A Social Problem

Research has shown that a specific set of skills is needed for participation within a democratic society (Elias, 2009; Murry et al., 2015; Soder et al., 2001). Engagement requires emotional intelligence and other social-cognitive characteristics, such as self-efficacy and empathy (Elias, 2009; Kokkinos & Kipitsi, 2012). These traits are also threaded in research relating high social emotional competencies to lower and control mechanisms of aggressive behavior, as well as an individual's psychological functioning (Huang & Cornell, 2019; Kokkinos & Kipitsi, 2012). In addition, the skills related to emotional intelligence and social aptitudes support the capabilities needed to decipher the complex issues faced by citizens in a democracy (Elias, 2009). Successful management of these life tasks come from social emotional competence and management of social emotional learning skills to behave in society (Elias et al., 1997; Smith & Low, 2013). These SEL skills include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2019). This concept dates back to the early 1900s when Dewey (1916) advocated for providing students with a multitude of skills to prepare for life in a flourishing democracy.

The theme of character and participation in a democracy continued throughout the mid-1900s, with an increased need and awareness for tolerance and global education after World War II. This concept was complimented by Buber and Smith's (1951) research on educating the whole child through character (Soder et al., 2001). Most recently, students' character and social emotional development continues to be a growing social concern, as evident from school-based programs and increased legislative pressure (Smith & Low, 2013). Although themes surrounding the importance of social emotional learning skills and development have been prominent since the early 1900s, the inclusion of family did not enter into the conversation until the 1970s. Today, the importance of the family-school connection is recognized, but further research must take place that closes gaps related to affecting an entire school population and developing an organizational culture that supports family and school partnership (Chung & Kim, 2018).

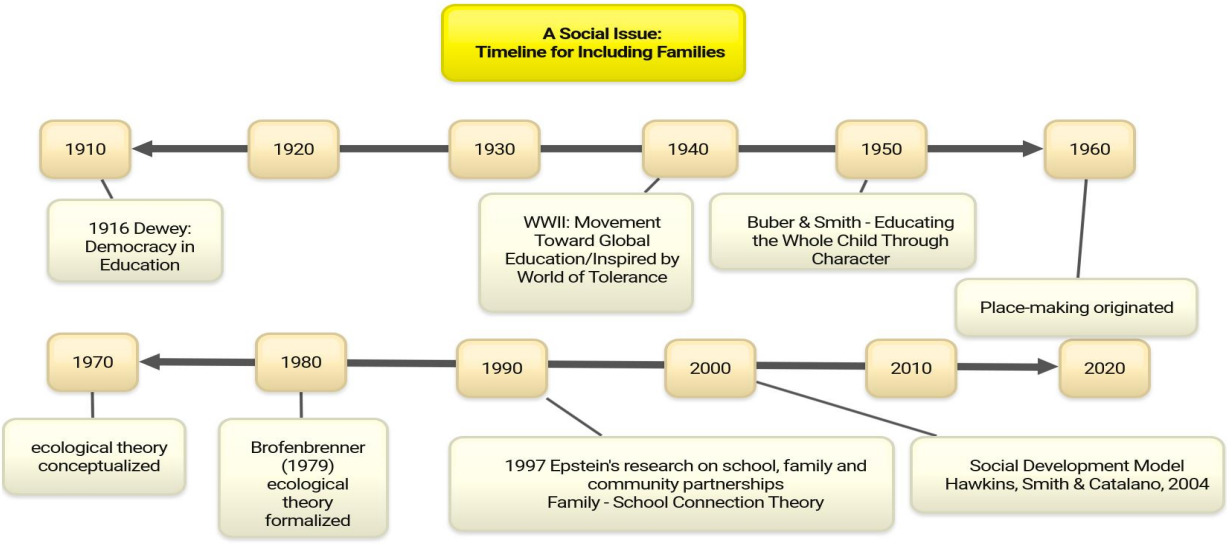

Figure 1. Timeline.

Early Childhood: A Time for Action

The way in which a child will act as an adult and the capabilities they will have, including how to behave or how not to behave, is already shaped by the time they enter school (Soder et al., 2001). Although historically a part-time experience, today the majority of children (69%) are placed into early childhood programs starting at 4- and 5-years-old (Bierman & Motamedi, 2015). The preschool years are particularly important for social emotional learning skills and development as the foundation for social emotional competence (Bierman & Motamedi, 2015). Moreover, when social emotional learning skills are used in elementary classrooms, behavior and experiences in the classrooms shift for both students and teachers, including improved quality of the classroom social environment (Rimm-Kaufman & Hulleman, 2015).

Caring, a fundamental skill of character, is rooted in the social emotional development of childhood (Cohen, 2006; Elias et al., 1997). Based on research that shows the early years affecting the entire school career, early childhood is the best time to develop a child's social emotional learning skills and capabilities (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010). Brofenbrenner (1975) analyzed the "ecological transitions" throughout a person's life and the impact these transitions have on development. When a child enters school in pre-kindergarten or kindergarten to begin their education, they are in an ecological transition, which is a shift of role, and in this case a shift in their setting (Brofenbrenner, 1975). This ecological transition is the prime moment to shape a child's social emotional competencies to have the greatest impact (Brofenbrenner, 1975).

Pathways of vertical control from the frontal lobes of the brain to the limbic system allow for big changes in emotional maturation and self-control between the ages

of 5 and 7, the prime age for children in the early childhood setting (Kusche & Greenberg, 2006). When children successfully make the "5 to 7 shift," a child can then experience a feeling, verbalizing the feeling, and take action (Kusche & Greenberg, 2006). However, in the past two decades, there has been a decrease in the number of children achieving the "5 to 7 shift" (Kusche & Greenberg, 2006). Through teaching and modeling, children should be able to successfully control themselves and pay attention in order to hit this large milestone related to self-control, emotional awareness, and social emotional development (Kusche & Greenberg, 2006).

Likewise, positive social interactions have the greatest impact during the early childhood period (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). When early prevention and intervention is used for social development, the likelihood of chronic and difficult adolescent behaviors are reduced (Catalano et al., 2003). Particularly in today's environment, preschool children are faced with more stressors than ever before, and teaching coping skills and other skills involved in social emotional learning skills and development are essential for stress management and preventing future unhealthy behaviors and emotional disorders (Elder & Trotter, 2006). Early childhood programs that include the family and teach effective methods that reinforce students' learning of social skills in school and model developmentally appropriate practices will assist students in successful social emotional development (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996).

Small, Rural School Districts

Small school districts of less than 1,000 students served as the setting for this study concentrated on family-school partnerships and social emotional learning skills and development. Small school districts in rural areas of the United States comprise 30% of

public schools and serve 19% of elementary and secondary students (Lieske & Swearer Napolitano, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Rural schools are defined as those within a local with a population of less than 25,000 residents (Lieske & Swearer Napolitano, 2010). With 1 in 3 public schools considered small and within a rural area, small districts served as the ideal setting for this research study (Lieske & Swearer Napolitano, 2010).

The research literature addressing small schools began at a large scale in the 1990s and cited smaller schools as more productive and more effective than larger schools (Lee & Smith, 1995; Raywild, 1999). A large quantity of literature is devoted to the advantages of smaller schools, including more cooperative families and having more idealized family structures and intact families (Lieske & Swearer Napolitano, 2010; Raywild, 1999). Additionally, students are found to behave better in smaller schools (Stockard & Mayberg, 1992). However, many small schools in rural communities lack appropriate mental health services, which presents a problem for the students' well-being (Lieske & Swearer Napolitano, 2010). This idea compliments the mixed methods study by Garwood et al. (2018) that recommended greater attention be given to mental health and behavior management in rural schools.

In August 2019, the State of Jersey situated mental health education on the forefront of their educational agenda with Governor Murphy signing legislation requiring all NJ schools to include mental health instruction in the K-12 curriculum (State of New Jersey, 2019). Research has shown that schools have a great impact on students' mental health (O'Reily et al., 2009). The research that advocates for mental health education in public schools urges a cultural shift for change in educational organizations and the

creation of partnerships with a whole-school approach to support inventions and programming (O'Reily et al., 2009). The whole-school approach consists of school leaders, educators, families, and community members all partnering together to build relationships in schools (O'Reily et al., 2009).

With an understanding of the aforementioned strengths and shortcomings of small, rural schools, and the importance of mental health education, it is important to have an understanding of the unique social connections, partnerships, and bonds that foster within these districts. This notion, as well as this study's lens of place and place-making to view schools as a place where families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships, is complimented by Cole (1990) and the view that "small rural schools are homes in a society where the idea of home is becoming abstract and not rooted in place" (p. 7). The social changes of the last few decades have shifted the view on the physical attributes where schools now serve as a place where relationships and social interactions are formed (Elias et al., 1997). Few studies have examined the specific theme of social emotional learning skills and development in small school districts in a rural setting.

Theoretical Triangulation

For this research it was essential and critical to study the social emotional learning skills and development of the child through a lens that represents the individual, the home and the school. Educational organizations, facilitated by school leaders, have their own culture and serve as a place where families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships. In order for a setting to function effectively and for development to occur, social interconnections between the settings must be present and participation

and communication in each setting must exist (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, for a child to develop proficiently in a setting such as an educational organization, the home and family must also be considered. This is explained through place and place-making, whereas place-making is a philosophy that place blends the character of the setting and its meaning to those who participate and interact within the setting (Chapman, 2006). Place is not simply a physical location but implies a connectedness between individuals and groups within a place (Ebersöhn, 2014). Place has meaning and understanding this can lead to a true understanding of social and cultural life within a place or organization (Oberlin & Gieryn, 2015).

In conjunction, the family-school connection theory (Epstein, 2006) supports educational organizations developing partnerships that are inclusive of families in an effort to gain the best and most positive outcomes for all students. Epstein's (2002) theory of overlapping spheres of influence recognized the home, school, and community as three separate entities that work together to enhance the learning and development of children. This theory compliments Hawkins et al.'s (2004) social development model, which focuses on the strong bonds between family, school, and community. The social development model centers on the notion that individuals, families and institutions are bonded through social interaction and involvement.

With models representing the child, the family, and the school as a place, theories surrounding organizational culture were used to represent the collective values, norms, emotions, and structures present in the educational organization. Culture encompasses all groups within a functioning organization (Schein, 1985). Together, the inclusion and

study of culture recognized and studied the ability to form and foster successful partnerships and a sense of place within organizations (Alvesson, 2002).

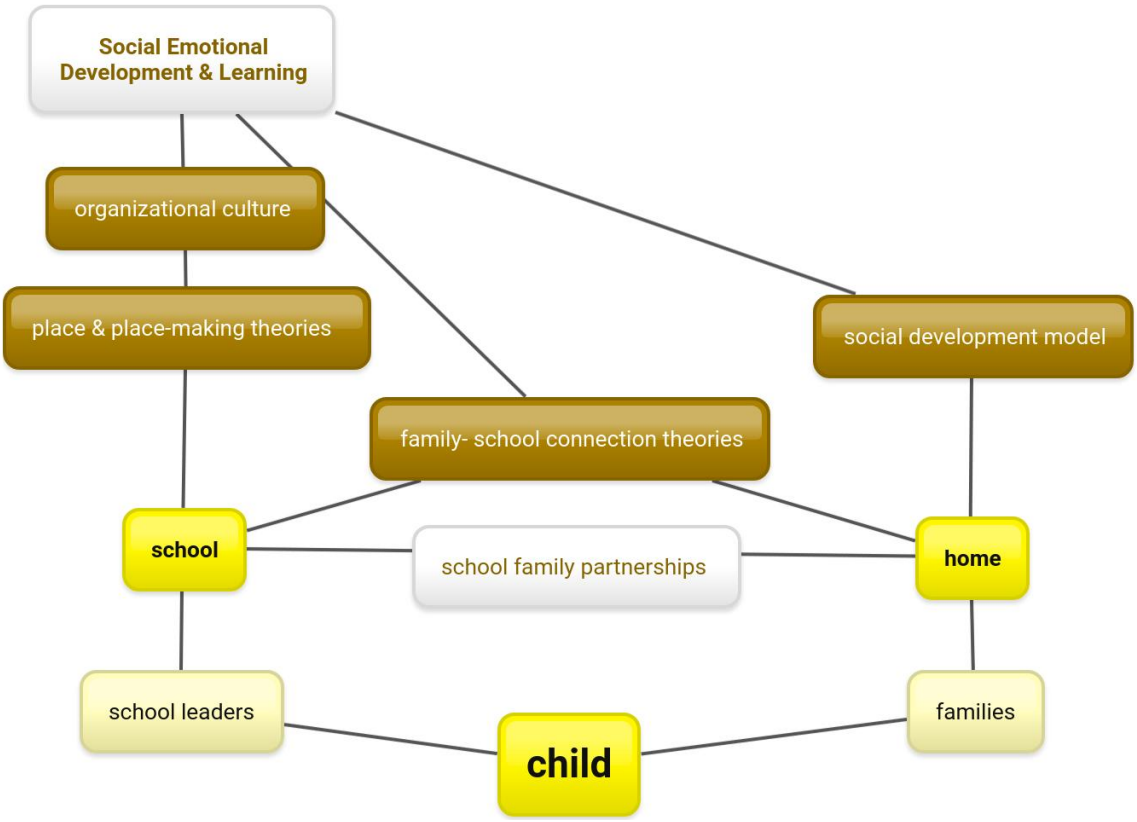

Figure 2. Concept map.

Educational organizations. The setting, as well as the larger context in which the setting is fixed, ultimately affect the way a human develops. Brofenbrenner (1979) theorized the ecology of human development with this idea in the very center. The ecological environment is comparable to a set of nesting structures that interact simultaneously and are interdependent on one another (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Trach et al., 2017). The complex interactions between a child and the social environment occurs

within these nested social systems, and includes school, family, cultural norms, practices, and beliefs (Trach et al., 2017).

In many research studies regarding social emotional development and also family-school connections, social ecological theory serves as a foundation for understanding and conceptualizing these phenomena (Huang & Cornell, 2019; Smith & Low, 2013). In that idea, Brofenbrenner's ecological theory has been used as a tool to position political, education and government systems as part of a larger context that impacts families and schools as structures that influence students (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Specifically, when researching social emotional learning skills and development, social ecological theory aides in recognizing that effective social emotional learning programs consider both individuals and the larger group (Trach et al., 2017). This research study filled a gap in the literature which recognized that the field of social emotional learning and development is primarily focused on "school-based efforts" and must include the child and the social environment (Trach et al., 2017).

Place and place-making. Educational organizations serve as a place where families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships. The purpose of utilizing place and place-making for this study was to introduce place-making into the education literature of social emotional learning skills and development through creating partnerships. Educational organizations are public places and the idea of place-making uses community input to create public places that foster's individual's health and well-being (Pascussi, 2015). Schools are more than just buildings (Fataar & Rinquest, 2019). The physical space of the school is turned into a significant place which is influenced by individual's actions, interpretations, and meanings (Fataar & Rinquest, 2019).

The human experience and the meaning given to a place comprise just as much of a setting as the physical characteristics (Chapman, 2006). Similarly, the sense of place is a relationship between the people involved and the material world (Hopkins, 2011). Place is always socially constructed, and a group's own personal experience, cultural values, and social meanings transform a space into their own place (Knox, 2005). Therefore, place is defined as a space and the qualities of the space that effect the relationships as well as the social interactions of the people (Stewart, 2010). Fataar and Rinquest (2019) claimed, "Students' encounters and interactions in the school spaces beyond the classroom are significant to students' lived experiences of school and these experiences are closely connected to emotions" (p. 27). With this knowledge, it is difficult to research and discuss partnerships in educational organizations and social emotional learning skills and development without recognizing the importance of place.

Family-school relationships and partnerships have an apparent role in the concepts and principles of place-making, yet are under-researched. The principles of place-making directly correlate to interventions used in creating family-school partnerships. These include collaborating with stakeholders to create a planning committee and linking people with common goals (Pascussi, 2015). "Building community" is at the heart of place-making and comprises dialogue and conversation (Wight, 2005). Moreover, place-making focuses on all aspects of place, including the culture, growth, sustainability, and relations of those involved (Pascussi, 2015). Place is created by individuals who engage in social interactions and networks inside of the physical space (Fataar & Rinquest, 2019). Specifically, schools identify as places, and

individuals identify with place, due to the creation, production, and shared experience of the individuals who are part of the place (Fataar & Rinquest, 2019).

Organizational culture. Schools serve as the setting where children in the early childhood setting spend most of their awake day and which influences their learning, growth, and development (Lewallen et al., 2015). Although primarily recognized as an institution that serves the academic needs of children, schools also play an essential role in preparing students to be responsible, considerate and empathetic adults (Elias, 2009; Haynes, 1998). The importance of understanding culture in regard to growth is illustrated by the way in which culture is related to the setting, networks, and roles of an environment which serve as the building blocks for human development (Brofenbrenner, 1979). In addition, organizational culture is often cited as the reason that organizational programs fail (Linnenlueck & Griffths, 2010). Therefore, the literature shows that organizational culture must be deeply understood in order to witness success in school initiatives, such as forming partnerships for student's social emotional learning skills and development.

There are many definitions of organizational culture. The theory was first formalized in the 1980s and most literature came after that time period (Linnenlueck & Griffths, 2010; Shafritz et al., 2014). Most definitions include the following: a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group has and the shared interpretations they possess in understanding organizational events, problems, and situations (Rentsh, 1990; Schein, 1985). In particular, school culture is best explained through basic underlying assumptions (Berkeymeyer, Junker, Bos, & Muthing, 2015). Schien (1985) classified the basic underlying assumptions of an organization as unconscious thoughts, beliefs and

perceptions. As this study relates to aspect of building children's character and their social emotional learning and development, Shafritz et al. (2016) compare culture to what a personality or character is to an individual. Culture is below the surface and although invisible, causes the behavior of an organization (Shafritz, et al., 2016).

Organizational culture affects the education of children (Chung & Kim, 2018). When the education of children is affected, further research must take place on how stakeholders within organizational organizations can understand and address the circumstances. Culture is essential in understanding everything about an organization. This includes the behavior, events, and processes (Alvesson, 2002). In particular to partnerships, it is important to explore the cultural dynamics of organizations and entities that form relationships because it is key in determining the success of a partnership (Parker & Selsky, 2004). Accordingly, to study the way in which school leaders foster partnerships with families in pursuit of healthy relationships and social experiences for students, organization culture must be thoroughly recognized and understood.

An individual's personality and character is viewed as an accumulation of cultural experiences within organizations, such as the school (Shafritz et al., 2016). Catalano and Hawkins (1996) demonstrated the bond that exists between students, families, and the school and the way in which children form their values, beliefs, standards and norms similar to those which they bond. This idea further supports the need for family partnerships for social emotional learning skills and development to be viewed through the lens of organizational culture. This study attempted to understand the underlying thoughts, beliefs and perceptions that affect partnerships between schools and families. Including the norms, values, and beliefs of those to whom students' bond, which directly

affects social emotional learning skills and development (Catalano et al., 2003; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Shafritz et al., 2016). The lens of organizational culture in this study distinguished it from the growing body of literature on social emotional learning skills and development.

Leaders role in organizational culture. Organizational culture itself implies "structural stability, depth, breadth…and integration" (Schein, 1985). The notion that culture is deep and unconscious is essential to leaders in understanding how individuals and groups, specifically stakeholders, interact. Interactions can refer to the involvement of different groups within an organization and also the communication of these groups. In this regard, the lack of communication can also be explained through culture (Schein, 1985). With this knowledge regarding organizational culture, school leaders must be proactive in developing family partnerships and setting goals in order to observe success (Epstein, 2006). Just as leaders are unique, the individuality of organizations is expressed through culture (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984). For this study, the necessity of interviewing and researching with three school leaders and families within those organizations was essential to the validity of the findings.

Participation of Families in Educational Organizations

In the role of family participation in education, "Participation refers to the involvement of parents in providing input or being consulted about school affairs or their children's progress without exercising influence" (Bauch & Goldring, 1998). Family involvement and parent involvement are used interchangeably in the majority of literature but will be referenced as family involvement in this research study to compliment the theoretical framework of this study and the "home" and "family" part of the family –

school connection. The shift from parent to family involvement and participation is important to recognize due to societal changes in the family dynamics (Grahmn, 2011).

The importance of family involvement in achieving success and meeting the goals of educational organizations is evident with the prevalence of literature analyzing ways to involve family members in schools (Jefferson, 2014). The literature contends that if educational leaders forge relationships between parents and the school and build on the work of existing community, parental involvement in public education will be "robust" (Roger et al., 2015). It is held that schools are the most critical influence on family involvement (Galdindo & Sheldon, 2010). Similar to the way in which schools have a distinct culture set upon their goals, structures and systems, families also have a distinct culture and history (Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). This idea compliments the literature that cites the importance of understanding and analyzing an organization's culture (Linnenlueck & Griffths, 2010; Shafritz et al., 2016).

Family–School Connection Theory

Epstein (2006) presented a framework for six types of family involvement that could assist school leaders and educators in fostering school and family partnership programs. The six types of involvement presented included parenting communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Particularly, the aspects of parenting and collaborating with the community could help in assistance of students' social emotional learning skills and development through family support programs by providing information for students and families on social support, programs, and services related to social emotional learning skills and development (Epstein, 2006). When clear communication is present and schools use planned activities

students' family, overlap of home and school settings are facilitated and family involvement can occur (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010).

The family-school connection theory urged educational organizations to adopt the notion of family-like schools and school-like families as a model for true connection (Epstein, 2006). Similar to Brofenbrenner's ecological theory, family-school connection theory also places the students at the center of the model (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 2006). The theory situates itself in an external mode, where the home, school, and community can be drawn together or pushed about, or the internal mode. The internal mode concentrates on the "complex and essential interpersonal relations, interactions and patterns of influence that occur between individuals and home, at school, and in the community" (Epstein, 2006). Epstein (2006) advises that the internal mode of the family-school connection theory can be researched at the institutional level or at the individual level. The literature supports the study of family partnerships from the lens of the entire organization. This includes gathering interview data from multiple school leaders as well as families.

Barriers in participation. Diversity issues influence participation and empowerment of families in educational organizations. In an effort to include parents in the educational process, much research and literature has been dedicated to equity in school participation (Jefferson, 2014; Martinez-Cosio & Martinze-Iannacone, 2007). Families sometimes need advocates in developing their knowledge base of cultural norms, values, and beliefs as it related to school-based policies, procedures, and culture (Martinez-Cosio & Martinze-Iannacone, 2007). Similarly, hierarchal ranking structures, indifference, and alienation affect partnerships (Chung & Kim, 2018). Brofenbrenner

(1979) recognized the barriers faced by families within his social ecological theory, stating that outside forces and demands played a large role in if and when parents could perform effectively in their duties for their children. Research has shown that the blame can be shifted away from parents and families in forming family-school partnerships (Jefferson, 2014). School leaders must offer opportunities for equal participation and compensate for the lack of relationship between home culture and school governance (Jefferson, 2014).

Further theory and research encourage school leader influence over barriers in family participation (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016). Brofenbrenner (1979) advocated for more support for families, including policy and practice shifts for additional support in settings that would allow for a better functioning family life. This idea, and principals supporting equity in family participation, maintain the integrity of utilizing organizational culture as a theoretical lens for this study. A thorough understanding of culture becomes apparent when assisting families in understanding the norms, values, and beliefs of the organization for further and more meaningful participation (Jefferson, 2014; Martinez-Cosio & Martinze-Iannacone, 2007).

School Leader and Family Partnerships

Partnership is inclusive of many ideals, comprised of concepts of involvement and collaboration (Epstein, 2006). Families and school must partner in a variety of ways in order to find success within the school and home settings that benefit the development of children (Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). When schools and families overlap in the home and school environments, true partnership is not only visible, but family involvement can be facilitated (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010). Engagement and family involvement become

increasing apparent in issues related to education and the social sciences and are widely recognized in promoting social emotional outcomes (Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017).

Studies have shown the necessity for school leaders to work toward partnership through family involvement and a "team approach" (Epstein, 2006; Sanders, 2014). Students are more likely to have positive outcomes and demonstrate positive standards if school and home have standards that are clear and comparable, which is an example of family involvement in schools (Durlack et al., 2015). Schools, working with families, play an "essential role" in preparing children to become adults with strong social emotional skills who demonstrate responsibility and care (Elias et al., 1997). Despite the recognition of success related to outcomes when families and schools partner, the theoretical foundations of family and school partnership are underdeveloped, and research is incomplete (Grahmn, 2011). This study will further the research on family and school partnerships.

Family and school partnerships combine family involvement and family participation (Grahmn, 2011). The dialogue, cooperation, and engagement that contribute to partnerships is just as important as the structure of the partnerships (Gilchrist, 2006). Successful partnerships include shared vision and purpose and a stake in the process (Goldman & Schmalz, 2008). With this in mind, organizational culture begins to have an effect on partnerships involving educational organizations. Focusing on the importance of organizational culture in partnerships, understanding the culture of an organization is essential in constructing relationships because these dynamics are a determinant of success in partnerships (Parker & Selsky, 2004).

Specifically, in small school districts, leaders take on many roles, including being the lead learners, social scientists, communicators, and the advocates for civic responsibility, democracy, and social justice (Hyle, Ivory, & McCellan, 2010). The setting of small Pre-kindergarten through 8th grade districts of less than 1,000 students for this research was important and filled a gap in the literature and also illuminate the unique circumstances of improving small schools (Clarke & Wildy, 2011).

Social Development Model

Social development model focuses on the strong bonds between family, school, and community and the importance of creating those bonds to ensure students can participate effectively in society (Hawkins et al., 2004). When a child is supported by their environment, social emotional learning and teaching competencies of social emotional development are found to be more effective (Hawkins et al., 2004). When strictly confined to the school setting, social emotional learning skills and development are not as successful as when opportunities are granted for the child to learn and practice in the school, community, and family life (Hawkins et al., 2004). The social development model is also based on holistic teaching and learning, a complimentary concept to social emotional learning skills and development (Haynes, 1998).

Brofenbrenner (1979) illustrated this idea much earlier by writing that developing children are more likely to participate and progress with someone who they share a strong emotional attachment. Social ecological theory and social development model explain the importance of the socializing units of family and school in a child's learning and development, including the interactions, activities, and involvement with these units (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). The literature on social development

model provided legitimacy to the research questions of this study, including the development of bonds between individuals, families, and the school.

The Importance of Social Emotional Learning Skills and Development

Families, school leaders, and other stakeholders have meaningful school-community relations when everyone's acts are based on common interests (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007). Connecting children's social skills to academic achievement has become a standard within early childhood education (ECE) studies (Durlack et al., 2015). To improve education as a whole, social emotional learning skills and development in children must be promoted (Elias et al., 1997). There is a broad understanding that physical, mental, and behavioral health have an effect on student's learning and performance and as such educational organizations need to focus on the needs of the whole child by adapting policies and practices that support social emotional learning skills and development (Murray, 2015).

Social emotional learning skills are likely to have the largest impact when integrated into comprehensive, multi-component programs (Smith & Low, 2013). Social emotional programs should have a strong family education and involvement features (Elias, 2009). Conjoint behavioral consultation, which is a well-known intervention focused on enhancing students' social emotional competencies and learning skills is a multi-component program which focuses on the relationships between families and schools. However, the program focuses on individual students and not students as a whole in a school setting. More research and literature must be presented on effective programming that studies the student body of a school in relation to the partnerships

formed between school leaders and families in social emotional learning skills and development.

Defining Effective Leadership to Support Student's Development

Leadership is a key theme throughout the literature and served as the impetus to this study. Educational leaders have the ability to influence change toward a shared vision through empowerment and built relationships (Northouse, 2015; Snell, 2003). Transformational is the term used for leaders who understand their organization's culture and realign it to reflect shared assumptions, values, and norms (Bass, 1985). Catalano and Hawkins (1996) indicated the importance of social emotional development being transformational. The four dimensions of transformational leadership, which are charisma, inspiration, individual consideration, and intellectual stimulation, are comparable to the characteristics of social emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and motivation (Den Hartog et al., 1997; George, 2015). Therefore, to be an effective leader with a transformational leadership style, it is essential to demonstrate emotional intelligence. In order to promote social emotional learning skills and development in students, the school must model the social skills used for emotional intelligence (Hawkins & Catalano, 1996).

Context of Research

This study encompassed research that suggested educational organizations, facilitated by school leaders, have their own culture and serve as a place where families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships. Social-emotional learning skills and development served as a catalyst for why partnerships should be formed in the early childhood setting of these small, rural school districts. The context of

this study was appropriate because the schools chosen are Pre-K – 8 school districts of less than 1,000 students. All three districts considered the school to have some aspect of a Home and School Association already in place.

Setting of the study. The setting of this study was three small, rural Pre-K-8 school districts in Southern New Jersey. The first District, Cheers Primary School, is located in the northwest portion of Atlantic County and has 748 students enrolled. According to the 2017-2018 NJ School Performance Report, 44.3% of students are economically disadvantaged (NJ School Report Card, 2018). 96.5% of the students within the district use English as the primary home language (NJ School Report Card, 2018). Cheers Primary School described their active Parent Teacher Association and the many parent involvement activities through the year, as well as their community volunteer program in the school narrative of the NJ School Report Card (2018). The School's Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) committee and the concentration on the health and wellness of students, was also highlighted (NJ School Report Card, 2018).

Bucket Filler Elementary is located in Camden County, New Jersey. The District's mission statement includes developing students who are contributing members of a global society (WTSD, 2019). The District has three elementary schools with 810 students (NJ School Performance Report, 2018). According to the 2017-2018 NJ School Performance Report, 38.7% of students are economically disadvantaged, 1.4% of students are homeless and 0.5% of students are in foster care (NJ School Report Card, 2018). The District described the parent interaction and Title I meetings, as well as the

Home and School Association fundraisers in the narrative regrading parent and community involvement on the NJ School Performance Report (2018).

Family School is located in Atlantic County, New Jersey with a population of less than 2000 residents. It is a NJ School Choice District with approximately 400 students housed in one building. According to the 2017-2018 NJ School Performance Report, 37% of students are economically disadvantaged (NJ School Report Card, 2018). 97.3% of the students within the district use English as the primary home language and 1% of students are considered homeless (NJ School Report Card, 2018). Family School described their school community as very active with a Home and School Association and uses a climate survey to provide data for school leadership in areas such as communication (NJ School Report Card, 2018).

Conclusion

The above literature review affirmed the need for school leaders and families to form partnerships and for research on this topic through the lens of organizational culture. In order to improve education as a whole, social emotional learning skills and development must be promoted. Organizational culture as the theoretical framework of this research in forming partnerships distinguishes this study from the growing body of literature on social emotional learning skills and development (Elias et al., 1997). The literature further validated the setting of the study and the participants by showing gaps in research that supported the entire organization and developing an organizational culture and a place that supports family and school partnership (Chung & Kim, 2018). The following chapter will review the methodology for this study, including an overview of the participants, data sources, and data collection methods.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter will provide information on the design of this research study. A review of the study's purpose and research questions is included. The rationale for choosing qualitative research, strategy of inquiry, sampling strategy, and role of the researcher will also be addressed. In addition, ethical considerations will be discussed in this chapter.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative, ethnographic case study sought to explore partnerships developed between school leaders and families to address social emotional learning skills and development in the early childhood setting (grades pre-kindergarten through third grade) in small, rural school districts in Southern New Jersey. The purpose of this study was to describe how three school leaders from small Pre-K-8 districts (less than 1,000 students) in Southern New Jersey used similar methods for fostering partnerships with families and bonds between individuals, families, and schools. This study examined how the organizational culture of the educational organizations reinforced or undermined the relationship between school and family partnerships and bonds. This study investigated the linkage between school leaders' experiences and social development theory and theory of family-school connections and how the norms, values, and beliefs held by the schools and families created or maintained the organizational culture for partnership. This study encompassed research that suggested educational organizations, facilitated by school leaders, have their own culture and serve as a place where families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships. On the basis that school

leaders must partner with families in pursuit of healthy relationships and social experiences that are crucial for future development and social outcomes, for this qualitative study, organizational culture provided the context for examining social emotional learning skills and development within small, rural school districts in Southern New Jersey (Caemmrer et al., 2015; Shonkoff et al., 2002).

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do school leaders foster partnerships with families in pursuit of healthy relationships and social emotional learning skills and development for students?
    a. How do school leaders support the development of bonds between individuals, families, and the school in an early childhood context?
    b. What are the norms, values, and beliefs held by the school and families that may encourage the social emotional learning skills and development in children?
2. What role does organizational culture, including the artifacts, espoused theories and underlying assumptions of an organization, play in developing partnerships between school leaders and families?
    a. In what ways does the organizational culture foster place-making that develops partnerships between school leaders and families for the social emotional learning skills and development of early childhood students?

3. How do organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making interact to encourage the social emotional learning skills and development of students in an early childhood context?

Rationale for and Assumptions of a Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research design is an active learning process in which the goal is to contribute to improving the human condition (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as follows:

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The scholar builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, repots detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

Qualitative research is built upon the idea that humans make meaning of social phenomena through what is seen, heard, and felt (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). In order to capture this, researchers gather data from people, places, event, and activities, then group those data into information, and creating knowledge through the interpretation of that information (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The researcher, as the means through which qualitative studies are conducted, set this methodology apart from other forms of research as they function as the primary instrument though which data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Qualitative research was appropriate for this research because it assumes collaboration and partnership between participants and the researcher, which makes it more likely that the research will benefit the participants (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The social emotional learning and development piece of this study compliments the

ultimate aim of qualitative researchers and educators, which is to serve people's well-being (Hostetler, 2015). This study used the lens of culture research to elicit meanings and interpretations, which is complimented by the use of qualitative research (Rentsh, 1990). The conceptual framework and research questions developed for this study complimented the foundations of qualitative methods and the avoidance of formal hypothesis prior to research (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Strategy of Inquiry

The design of this research encompassed a qualitative, ethnographic case study. Ethnographic case studies focus on the cultural dimension, or the ethnography, of a particular program, or case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Most important, cultural studies, such as this, require a unique approach to inquiry because the cultural norms and values of an organization are sometimes invisible (Rubin & Rubhin, 2012). Ethnographic case studies are best used to investigate a cultural setting, which compliments the focus of this research study (Merriam, 1998). In addition, ethnographic case studies focus on the analysis of a group, in this case small, rural school districts in Southern New Jersey of less than 1,000 students (Merriam, 1998). This was particularly significant to this particular study, because analysis of the group led to an in-depth understanding of relationships within the setting and the relationship between place and the participants.

Ethnography. Ethnography is used to study human society and culture, including the beliefs, values, and attitudes that encompass behavioral patterns (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the reason that the lens of culture was being used for this study, ethnography was crucial as both the process and product of this research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One of the most important aspects of ethnography is the rich

description obtained by the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The happenings of the organizations and personal feelings, ideas, insights, and impressions of the participants were studied in depth through the ethnographic design of this research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Immersion into the site and time spent with the group being studied are both essential in understanding culture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ethnography allowed for extensive fieldwork to occur with direct observation, communication, and interactions with the participants, as well as opportunities for formal and informal interviews (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) presented ethnography as a product, which assisted in organizing all the data into concepts and themes that conveyed the sociocultural characteristics of the group.

Case study. Researchers use case studies for the investment in the discovery, rather than the confirmation (Merriam, 1998). Case studies are prevalent throughout the field of education and particularly effective if interested in the "why" in the search for meaning and understanding. This is true particularly on organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making interacting to encourage the social emotional learning skills and development of students in an early childhood context for this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case studies help facilitate the process of research focus, in this study small, rural Pre-kindergarten through 8th grade districts of less than 1,000 students were selected as the case (Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The idea of a "bounded system" determines whether a study is a case study and each study must be assessed to determine the boundness of a topic before settling on a case study approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, the case must have limits

and refer to one specific program, person, or entity to be analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, the unit of analysis is the early childhood grades within small, rural PreK-8 districts of less than 1,000 studies in Southern New Jersey. Once a case is determined, in-depth description and analysis of the bounded system, or case, can occur (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Additionally, case studies offer intensive descriptions and analysis to gain a deep understanding of meaning (Merriam, 1998). This complimented the purpose of this study which strove to analyze the meanings that construct culture and place of schools in which families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships.

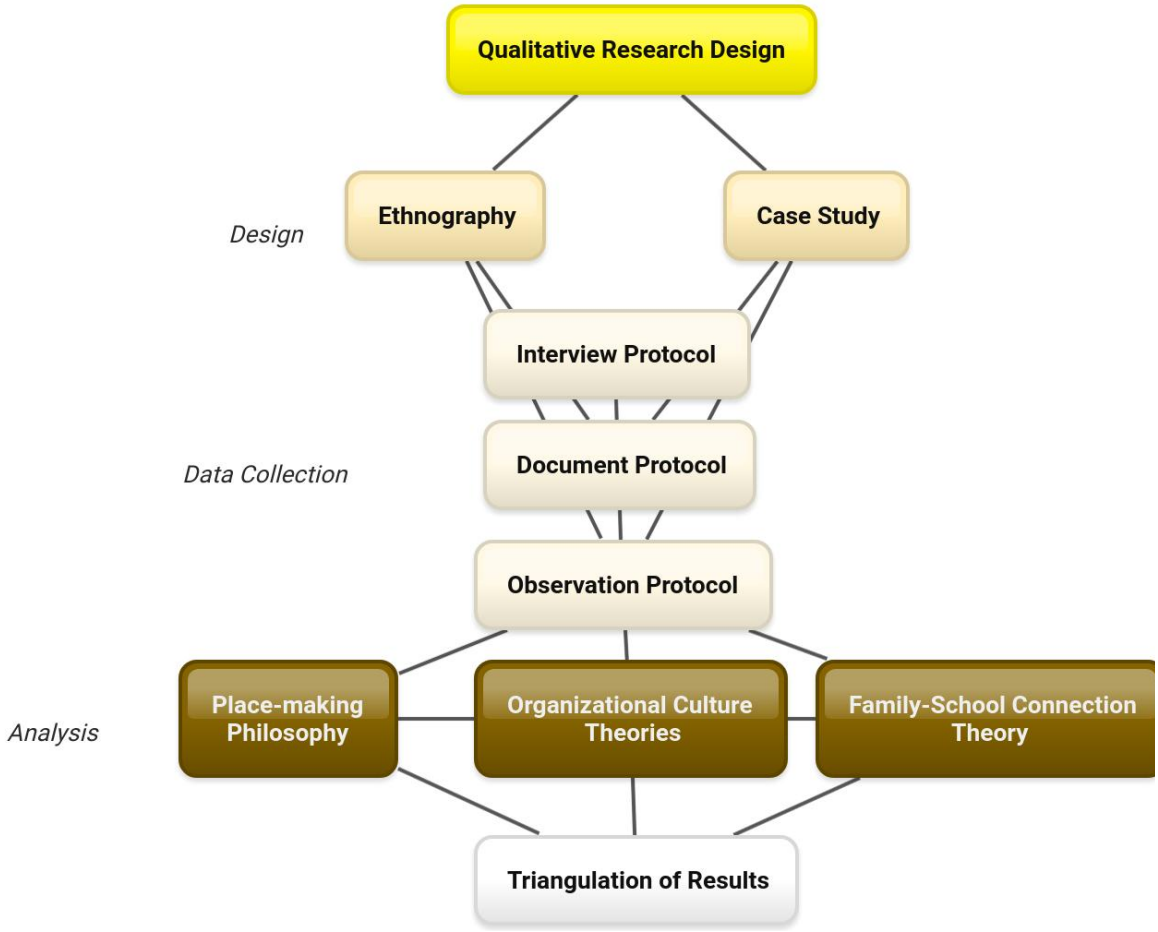

Figure 3. Qualitative research design.

Setting and Participants

The sample for this study included three school leaders of small, rural Pre-kindergarten-8th grade districts of less than 1,000 students in Southern New Jersey. Fifteen families of children in grades preschool through grade three (five from each district where a school leader was interviewed) were invited to participate in this study. This size took into account the feasibility of access and data collection with families being involved, as well as my own ability to form research relationships with the study participants (Maxwell, 2012). The criteria for selecting study participants at the school

and school leader level was a Pre-K – 8 school with less than 1,000 students enrolled on the last released NJ School Performance Report and a school or district leader of each of the selected districts. Pre-K-8th grade schools were chosen, because of the literature and research that supports small districts strengths and also analyzes the shortcomings of these districts while still recognizing that small school districts in rural areas of the United States comprise 30% of public schools and serve 19% of elementary and secondary students (Lieske & Swearer Napolitano, 2010; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The criteria for selecting families of children was an immediate family member or guardian of a student in grades preschool through grade three, who live in the same home as the student.

Sampling strategy.

Case. The sites and individuals of this study were purposefully selected in order to best understand the problem and research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2016). Patton (2002) contended that a relatively small sample selected purposefully describes the uniqueness of each site and allows for common themes to be discovered. In order to sample the districts criterion sampling was used (Merriam, 1998). These small, homogenous samples allowed this particular sub-group of school districts and leaders of small, rural Pre-K-8 schools in Southern New Jersey to be studied in depth and represented the unique nature of the case of the study (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). The Pre-K-8 schools represented the case, or a bounded system and the unit of analysis to be investigated (Merriam, 1998). Particularly for case studies, this type of sampling was beneficial because it reflected the purpose of the study and allowed for information-rich cases (Merriam, 1998).

Participants. A sample within the case requires a second set of criteria to be used to identify participants (Merriam, 1998). For the families of the students, the second set of participants for this study, snowball/chain sampling was applied and provided information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). I engaged in the process of snowball sampling by having participants identify other participants that met the criteria of this research study (Patton, 2002). In addition, key names that were mentioned repeatedly in interviews were approached to participate (Patton, 2002). They were invited to participate via email, phone calls, and face-to-face interactions within the school community during other interviews and observations.

The school leaders were interviewed in their respective schools and contacted via email and phone to invite them to participate in the study. Special consideration and preparation for these interviews occurred, due to the nature of these individuals being considered elite, or influential and prominent in their organization (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Due to the fact that these participants offer valuable information because of their position, the interviews were less structured and more open-ended, as elite informants generally respond well to broad topics and intelligent open-ended questions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The participants were informed of the study through a description on the consent form to participate in this research study. The consent forms can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection Methods

For this study, data collection included participant interviews, document collection, and observations within the early childhood, educational setting where school leaders and families were partnered. Prior to data collection, approval from the Board of

Education at all three school districts was received. In addition, approval was received from the Rowan University institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research.

Interviews. Qualitative interviews were used as a data collection method and included open-ended questions to elicit views and descriptions from the research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews are used in qualitative inquiry to understand individual perspectives and events and experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Interviews offer insight into participant's thinking and produce data for the researcher (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Qualitative interviews focus on research questions and differ from ordinary conversations in that they have an explicit purpose (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Cultural interviews were used for this study, which explored the ideas, terms, phrases, behaviors, and choices that reflected the norms and values of the organization (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Active listening was used, rather than targeted questioning, to allow the participant to use their own voice (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

In addition to focusing on the norms, values, and expected behaviors, the in-depth interviews were conducted in the form of dialogues to encourage expression and clarification of the experience being investigated (Moustakas, 1994; Rubin & Rubin; 2012). The interviews were completed one-on-one and in-person or via telephone depending on the availability and preferred communication of the participant (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Documents. Documents in qualitative research are used to describe written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative documents were collected in the form of Board of Education meeting minutes and Home School Association meeting minutes to further collect data and gather information

pertaining to the open communication related to school-family partnerships and organizational culture. The documents represented data to which the participants interacted with and had given attention and written evidence of language and words used by the participants and schools (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Documents reveal data that could be further pursued through observations and interviews. This represents data that "cannot be observed" (Merriam, 1998).

Observations. Qualitative observation includes taking field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Particularly, ethnographic observation was used as ethnographers study cultural groups (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Participant observation was used within the research of this study, coupled with formal interviews, interpretation of artifacts, and the researcher's own experience of events and processes (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Observation allowed for a deep understanding of the artifacts, espoused theories, and underlying assumptions of an organization that may not have come as easily through other means, such as interviewing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Schien, 1985). The observations facilitated firsthand experience with the sites and the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The observations allowed me to triangulate the emergent findings in conjunction with the interview data and document analysis (Merriam, 1998).

The conceptual framework, problem, and research questions of a study determine what is to be observed (Merriam, 1998). For the purpose of this study, observations were used to determine how organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making interact to encourage the social emotional learning skills and development of students in an early childhood context. Observations facilitated a better understanding of what participants

may not have talked about in interviews, and in which the case, or the school, could be observed firsthand (Merriam, 1998).

Instrumentation

Three instruments were used for this study, including interview protocol, document protocol, and observation protocol. The protocols guided the research and are described below.

Interview protocol. Interview questions were designed to support the study's research questions. The developed protocol was used and audiotaped via a recording service. Additionally, notes were recorded during the qualitative interview. The open-ended structure of the interview protocol permitted participants to define the world in their own terms and in unique ways (Merriam, 1998). Probes were also used in the interview protocol in an effort to ask for more details, clarification, and examples (Merriam, 1998).

Two interview protocols were developed for this research study, including eight questions for school leaders and nine questions for families. The interview protocol for school leaders included questions related to background, family partnerships, school mission and vision, creating a healthy partnership, and encouraging social emotional learning skills and development in students. The interview protocol developed for families included background information and questions related to the bond felt with the school, family-school partnership, and encouraging social emotional learning skills and development. The complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix C and Appendix D.

Document protocol. Public documents were collected for the purpose of this study, including meetings from Board of Education and Home and School Association minutes. The document protocol's intention was to study the way in which organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making interact to encourage the social emotional learning skills and development of students in an early childhood context. The complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix E.

Observation protocol. For the purpose of this study, the qualitative observation included a checklist that was developed only for this research. The checklist was used in a "walk-through" capacity. The complete interview protocol can be found in Appendix F.

The table below illustrates the relationship between the research questions that guided this study and the interview protocol, document protocol and observation protocol. The complete protocols are included in Appendix C, Appendix D, Appendix E, and Appendix F.

Table 1

Research Questions and Protocol

Research questions	Interview protocol	Document protocol	Observation protocol
RQ 1: How do school leaders foster partnerships with families in pursuit of healthy relationships and social emotional learning skills and development for students?	SLQ2, SLQ6, FQ2, FQ3, FQ7, SLQ9, SLQ10	AA1, AB1	I4
RQ 1a: How do school leaders support the development of bonds between individuals, families, and the school in an early childhood context?	SLQ4, FQ4, FQ5	AA2, AB2	I5
RQ 1b: What are the norms, values, and beliefs held by the school and families that may encourage the social emotional learning skills and development in children?	SLQ3, SLQ3a, SLQ7, SLQ7a, SLQ8, FQ7a, FQ8, FQ9	AA3, AA4, AA5, AB3, AB4, AB5	I3
RQ 2: What role does organizational culture, including the artifacts, espoused theories and underlying assumptions of an organization, play in developing partnerships between school leaders and families?	SLQ2, SLQ3, SLQ3a. SLQ6, FQ2, FQ3, FQ7	AA3, AA4, AA5, AB3, AB4, AB5	I1, I2
RQ 2a: In what ways does he organizational culture foster place-making that develops partnerships between school leaders and families for the social emotional learning skills and development of early childhood students?	SLQ3, SLQ3a, SLQ5, SLQ6, SLQ6a, SLQ7, SLQ7a, SLQ8, FQ6, FQ7, FQ7a	AA1, AA3, AA4, AA5, AB1, AB3, AB4, AB5	I3
RQ3: How do organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making interact to encourage the social emotional learning skills and development of students in an early childhood context?	SLQ3, SLQ3a, SLQ5, SLQ6a, SLQ7, SLQ7a, SLQ8, SLQ9, FQ2, FQ3, FQ6, FQ7, FQ7a, FQ8, FQ9	AA1, AA3, AA4, AA5, AB1, AB3, AB4, AB5	I1, I2, I3

Data Analysis

Qualitative data is given meaning when the researcher participates in the complex process of immersion, organization, and interpretation (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Throughout the process, I referred to my conceptual framework to identify relevant information and shape preliminary categories (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). First, I sought to fully understand the data through immersion, or fully knowing the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Next, I analyzed the data by organizing (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) the data into chunks by categorizing and coding. This was facilitated through "pre-coding" significant participant quotes, observation notes, document passages, and observation notes (Saldaña, 2016). As I participated in the data collection and pre-coding phase of the research, I kept the research concern, theoretical framework, research questions, and goals of the study in focus at all times to concentrate and stay focused on coding decisions for later (Saldaña, 2016).

Coding. After that research was organized, the qualitative data was analyzed using a two-tier coding process which was facilitated through manual coding. *In vivo* coding, or "literal coding," was used as the first cycle coding method. *In vivo* coding uses the actual language found in the qualitative data, which allows for the participants' own words, including terms generated by certain cultures, to be used (Saldaña, 2016). *In vivo* coding is particularly effective in studies that prioritize the participants' voice and allowed the meanings of participants' experiences to be captured (Saldaña, 2016). In order to appropriately use *in vivo* coding, I first gave attention to the words and phrases that stood out. Then, I constructed memos and used a second cycle of coding in an effort to "condense" the number of codes (Saldaña, 2016).

In addition to coding, analytical memos were constructed after the transcripts and documents were complete. Analytical memos were particularly effective for analyzing the documents and observations collected because these memos served as the information that was coded for further analysis (Saldaña, 2016).

Second cycle coding was used as a more advanced way of reorganizing and reanalyzing the data coded in the first-cycle (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding was used as a second cycle coding method because it not only organizes, but attributes meaning to the organization (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding is appropriate for exampling social networks and patterns of human relationship, which compliments the cultural lens of this study (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding was used as a catalyst to develop statements of themes, patterns, and networks of relationships in the data (Saldaña, 2016).

Finally, I brought meaning to the organization of data through interpretation (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Through the construction of analytical memos, I participated in "codeweaving," which is "[t]he actual integration of key code words and phrases into narrative form to see how the puzzle pieces fit together" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 48). Diagrams and network relationships were developed and understood through code-weaving and the construction of these analytical memo narratives (Saldaña, 2016).

The ultimate outcome of in-depth analysis in case studies is to understand the study from the perspective of the participants (Merriam, 2009). Complimenting the data analysis and coding techniques used for this study, as well as the role of the researcher recognized in the coming sections, the researcher's own perceptions and interpretations become part of ethnographic case studies, and in such, is woven throughout the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is reflected in qualitative research as a result of the credibility of the study, including the degree of confidence in the data, interpretation of the data, and the methods (Connelly, 2016). Credibility, conformability, dependability, and transferability must all be established in order to have trustworthiness (Amankwaa, 2016).

Credibility is the most important factor in the trustworthiness of the study and includes the confidence in the study and confidence in the truth of the study (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016). Credibility of this study was supported by the literature review, which highlighted the purpose of my study, as well as the need for the research based on gaps in the literature. The persistent observation, reflection, and analytical memos that were constructed bring credibility to this research study (Connelly, 2016).

The confirmability of a study is the degree to which the findings are consistent and the extent in which the participants shape the study (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016). Researcher bias and interest are outlined below and did not shape this study. The data for this study was triangulated through the use of an interview protocol, document collection, and observation, as well as the theoretical framework (outlined in Chapter 2). Triangulation is recommended for ensuring the conformability of a qualitative research study (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016).

Dependability in qualitive research is the consistency of the findings and the prospect that the findings could be repeated (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016). The dependability of this research study was illustrated by the protocols developed (outlined

in Chapter 3 and include in the appendix), as well as the analytical memos used to track decisions about the study (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016).

Finally, the transferability of a study illustrates how the research could be applicable in other contexts and other settings (Amankwaa, 2016; Connelly, 2016). The rich description of the context of this study (outlined in Chapter 2) informed readers of the case of this study and illustrated the ways in which the research could transfer.

Role of researcher. First and foremost, as a qualitative researcher, I am a learner participating in an active learning process (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative studies and must recognize the great responsibility of creating a study that recognizes biases (Merriam, 1998). I have the specific task of maximizing the opportunity to collect data and produce meaningful information by responding in the field appropriately (Merriam, 1998). The idea that qualitative research is interpretative is fostered by the notion that what I observed, read, heard, analyzed, interpreted, and represented in this study was filtered through my own beliefs and notions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Due to this nature of qualitative research, reflectivity was practiced in order to identify how my own biases, values, and personal background shaped the interpretations of this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

As a member of the White, middle class, my experience does not encompass the totality of the human experience (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Adding to this, my experience as an early childhood educator for ten years and as a mother of two young children, may affect my experience. Day-to-day, I interact with children of an early childhood age and have a strong belief in what social emotional learning skills and

development should look like and feel like. I also value the importance of partnering with families for positive student outcomes.

In an effort to be ethical and acknowledge my own role in the research, I strived to understand how the participants in this research would react to and put myself in their position (Maxwell, 2013). I recognized that not every school leader would find social emotional learning skills and development, teaching to the whole child, and family partnerships as important as I have acknowledged them to be in my own career and path. My own position in relation to this study affects the research process and I recognize that I was close in position to many of the participants, as a mother of two young children in a small town in Southern New Jersey. However, my life experiences, including being a teacher, doctoral candidate, and outsider to the cases separated me from the participants.

I was able to address these experiences that would affect my research through a deep and strong understanding of the research process and a constructivist viewpoint. Constructivism and constructivist learning follow the belief that learning is an active process in which we do not discover knowledge, but construct it (Smartwood & Williams, 2016). In contrast with knowledge reproduction, knowledge construction incorporates reflection and interactive learning. This complimented the use of qualitative research for this study and the reflection piece on experiences from the participants. I consider myself to be an interpretive constructionist researcher, meaning I consider myself with, "the lenses through which people view events, the expectations and meanings that they bring to a situation" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 19). At the center of my own educational philosophy, I believe that in order to grow, learn, and positively impact student learning and development, we must actively participate within

communities, partnerships, and relationships to reflect on what is being done and build our own, and collective, knowledge.

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board of Human Subjects (IRB) of Rowan University granted approval of this study prior to data collection. Permission to conduct this study was also obtained from the Board of Education of each of the three schools I conducted research. In order to seek approval from the Board of Education of the sites, I provided a brief proposal and submitted it for review that explained why the site was chosen, the activities that would occur at the site, how the results of the study would be reported, and what could be gained from the study for each of the schools (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In addition, to protect the identity of each of the participants of this study, names were omitted from all documentation and replaced with a pseudonym.

The nature of qualitative research involves interactions with individuals, and because of this, ethical considerations must be in made in terms of participants and the relationship developed. Specifically, for this research study, the issue of power and ethics was considered. The research centered around the interviews of three school leaders from different school organizations. These school leaders must act in an ethical way and we discussed social emotional development and learning, which is a great reasonability of the school leaders and moral endeavor in itself (Wood & Hilton, 2012). As a researcher, I hold authority over the research study, yet the school leaders hold ultimate authority over their organization. In an effort to reduce the power differences, I attempted to be encouraging and authentic.

Conclusion

In this chapter the research design for this qualitative study was presented. The purpose of the study and the research questions were revisited, and the data collection methods were addressed. Data analysis and the role of the researcher were also presented. The research findings will be presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic case study was to describe the ways in which three school leaders from small PreK-8 districts (less than 1,000 students) in Southern New Jersey used similar methods for fostering partnerships with families and bonds between individuals, families, and schools. This study examined how the organizational culture of the educational organizations reinforced or undermined the relationship between school and family partnerships and bonds. This study investigated the linkage between school leaders' experiences and social development theory and theory of family-school connections and how the norms, values, and beliefs held by the schools and families created or maintained the organizational culture for partnership. Place was used to explain the idea that educational organizations are a public place that fosters individual's health and well-being through a community built on the relationships and social interactions of the people (Pascucci, 2015; Stewart, 2010). Chapter 4 will provide an overview of the findings that were developed from data collection and analysis. For this study, data collection included participant interviews, document collection, and observations within the early childhood, educational setting. Findings presented in this chapter will include developed themes that sought to answer the research questions that guided this research study.

Data Collection Overview

For this study, data collection included participant interviews, document collection, and observations within the early childhood, educational setting. Qualitative interviews offered insight into the participant's thinking and explored ideas, terms,

phrases, behaviors, and choices that reflected the norms and values of the organization (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews were completed one-on-one and in-person or telephone depending on the availability and preferred communication of the participant and ranged in time from 25-60 minutes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews were transcribed and interview data collection was completed once reoccurring themes and data saturation developed.

Documents were also collected and analyzed to describe the written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study (Merriam, 1998). Recent Board of Education minutes, that were available to the public on-line, were analyzed, as well as Home and School Association minutes, that were available to the public on-line. Concurrently, qualitative observation took place to allow for a deep understanding of the artifacts, espoused theories, and underlying assumptions of an organization that may not have come as easily through other means, such as interviewing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Schien, 1985). The observations were completed in walk-through capacity with the school leader at the time of the school leader interviews.

Participants

The sample for this study included three school leaders of small, rural Pre-kindergarten-8th grade districts of less than 1,000 students in Southern New Jersey. Fifteen families of children in grades preschool through grade three (five from each district where a school leader was interviewed) were invited to participate in this study. The criteria for selecting families of children was an immediate family member or guardian of a student in grades preschool through grade three, who live in the same home as the student. Ten families were interviewed before data saturation occurred. Data

saturation includes an exhaustion of categories, whereas small amounts of new information are produced in comparison to the "effort expended to get them" (Merriam, 1998). Sampling through snow-ball sampling, data collection, and the beginnings of data analysis were combined, and similarities came through in the data collection process. When the similarities began to produce the necessary emerging patterns and small amounts of new information were produced, data saturation occurred, and data collection ended.

Cases. The first District, Cheers Primary School, is located in northwest portion of Atlantic County and has 748 students enrolled. Cheers Primary School described their active Parent Teacher Association and the many parent involvement activities through the year, as well as their community volunteer program in the school narrative of the NJ School Report Card (2018). Ms. L., the school leader at Cheers Primary School, has been a member of the Cheers Primary School community for eight years as a school administrator, with this being her second year serving as principal. With a background in elementary education, speech therapy, and curriculum, Ms. L. is nearing the "end of her career" according to her interview. Ms. L. uses her experience as a parent to connect with families.

The second District, Bucket Filler Elementary School, is located in Camden County, New Jersey and is home to 810 elementary students. The District described the parent interaction and Title I meetings, as well as the Home and School Association fundraisers in the narrative regrading parent and community involvement on the NJ School Performance Report (2018). Mr. D. is a new principal with only a few months experience at Bucket Filler Elementary School. As a former special education teacher, he

continuously noted his attempts to make strong connections with his teachers and the families in the school community.

The third District, Family School, is located in Atlantic County, New Jersey with a population of less than 2000 residents. Family School described their school community as very active with a Home and School Association and uses a climate survey to provide data for school leadership in areas such as communication (NJ School Report Card, 2018). Dr. M. has his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and serves as the Chief School Administrator at Family School. Dr. M. discussed his work toward building a school community, connecting with teachers, families, and students, and building a brand for Family School.

Table 2 and 3 provide an overview of the important characteristics of the participants who participated in this study.

Table 2

School Leader Interview Participants

Participant	School	Years in present position	Years at institution	Highest degree	Field of study
Dr. M.	Family School	2	2	EdD	SPED
Ms. L.	Cheers Primary	2	8	MA	Elementary Ed, Speech
Mr. D.	Bucket Filler Elementary	1	1	MA	SPED

Table 3

Family Interview Participants

Participant	School	Relationship to child	Years in school community	Children in school system	Grades of child(ren)
Lisa	Cheers Primary	Biological mother	7	2	K, 3
Amy	Bucket Filler Elementary	Biological mother	5	1	3
Jennie	Cheers Primary	Biological mother	2	3	K, K, 8
Kate	Family School	Biological mother	5	3	2, 2, 4
Stacey	Cheers Primary	Biological mother	6	3	K,3,5
Kristina	Cheers Primary	Biological mother	1	1	1
Nora	Family School	Biological mother	5	3	1, 3, 4
Betty	Bucket Filler Elementary	Biological mother	1	2	PK, K
Rose	Cheers Primary	Biological mother	4	2	PK, 3
Kelly	Cheers Primary	Biological mother	5	2	2, 4

Data Analysis

Meaning was given to the qualitative data through the process of immersion, organization, and interpretation (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). I participated in the data collection and pre-coding phase of the research, while keeping the research concern, theoretical framework, research questions, and goals of the study in focus at all times to concentrate and stay focused on coding decisions (Saldaña, 2016). Manual coding was

used as the data went through two cycles of coding. *In vivo* coding uses the actual language found in the qualitative data, which allows for the participants' own words, including terms generated by certain cultures, to be used (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding was used as a second cycle coding method because it not only organizes, but attributes meaning to the organization (Saldaña, 2016).

In addition to coding, analytical memos were constructed after the transcripts and documents were complete. I then use code-weaving to integrate the reoccurring and important words and phrases into narrative form (Saldaña, 2016). Diagrams and network relationships were developed and understood through code-weaving and the construction of these analytical memo narratives (Saldaña, 2016). Themes were developed through the network relationships and illustrate how the research answered the research questions of this study while allowing for the participants' own words to be used.

Discussion of Findings

The following research questions guided theme generation through analysis of data:

1. How do school leaders foster partnerships with families in pursuit of healthy relationships and social emotional learning skills and development for students?
    a. How do school leaders support the development of bonds between individuals, families, and the school in an early childhood context?
    b. What are the norms, values, and beliefs held by the school and families that may encourage the social emotional learning skills and development in children?

2. What role does organizational culture, including the artifacts, espoused theories and underlying assumptions of an organization, play in developing partnerships between school leaders and families?
    a. In what ways does the organizational culture foster place-making that develops partnerships between school leaders and families for the social emotional learning skills and development of early childhood students?
3. How do organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making interact to encourage the social emotional learning skills and development of students in an early childhood context?

Findings that emerged from the data analysis included big bonds in small places, cultural values, building community, a place for families, and connecting for social emotional learning skills and development.

The first theme represented the idea that families and students feel a strong bond in small school districts, related to the concept of "family-like" schools. This theme included the ideas of family-to-leader bond, student-to-school bond, and family-like schools. The second theme portrayed the way in which cultural values and shared meaning produce place and cultivate "buy-in" to common ideas, goals, values, and vision to influence the organization. Central to this theme was espoused theories and shared vision. The third theme described the building of a community, or the meaningful communication that occurs between the school and home to foster involvement and partnership between the units of family and school. The way in which the school fosters social activities and partnership, including the Home School Association, as well as effective communication, was illustrated in this theme. The fourth theme described how

school leaders, families, and teachers play an integral part in the making of place within a school community. Central to this theme was the school, the family, and the teacher as liaison and blockade. Finally, the fifth theme described how social emotional learning skills and social emotional development, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills are nurtured when the people, objects, movements, language, and interactions occur to create place and create meaning. A common language and the home were central ideas to this theme.

Big bonds in small places. A bond is the formation of a close relationship between the student, family, and school. Hawkins, Smith and Catalano (2004) found that social emotional learning skills and development are strongly linked to the social environment and the social bonds formed from these environments, in this case home and school. When a child interacts, social bonding is produced which creates an investment in the "norms, values and beliefs held by these groups that influence behavior" (Hawkins et al., 2004). Each of the three contexts that served as cases for this study, Family School, Cheers Primary, and Bucket Filler Elementary, were filled with school logos displayed in the entry way and photos in the hallways of teachers and students, school leadership enjoying a game with a young student, and friends eating lunch together. These elements are a physical sample of the bond that is felt within a school community. When participants were asked to describe the bond they felt with the school, many shared narratives that illustrated an "intimate relationship." Using the words, "this is home," "leaning on each other," and "love," school leaders and families interviewed expressed the feelings and emotional attachment that creates bonds. Similarly, family participants

connected the ideas of family-to-leader bonds, student-to-school bonds, and family-like schools to being a member of a "small school" community.

Family-to-leader bonds. Across all three cases, families shared the "involvement" felt between the families and the school leader. One family participant from Family School, Kate, shared her experience when her daughter was placed on a ventilator in the hospital:

> The school leader called me personally to see how she was, to see how my family was and if I needed anything. So, I don't know, I mean you can't really put into words, something like that, because in my opinion that's not happening in other districts. I don't know he's a principal/superintendent and you're getting a call from him about your family. I mean, listen, we're in a small school…So I don't even know if you can put that into words, right, to describe how much involvement is there between parents and the faculty.

Kate's comments mirrored that of other participants and her feelings demonstrate the bond that she feels to the school leader at Family School. The phone call Kate received was an illustration about the involvement she felt between the school leader and her own family. At Bucket Filler Elementary, a family participant shared her interactions with the school leader. Amy said:

> You know just seeing [the superintendent] with the kids, she knows all the kids by name. And, you know, especially the amount of kids you have and she knows them from when they were little growing up. It's really, you know, a nice thing I think to see that.

Commonly when speaking of school leaders, family participants commented on feeling the "interactions" with school leaders with parents and children. Knowing the students' names, likes and dislikes, and family information were mentioned by families when they were asked if they felt a bond to the school.

School leader participants echoed the "why" of the bonds illustrated by families, with Ms. L commenting, "I want to be known for helping families." Ms. L., principal of Cheers Primary, added to this thought by saying that she has to take it, "one family at a time." Ms. L.'s statement indicates the work that it takes to form a bond with families, by urging other school leaders to take it "one family at a time," and also her personal reason for working diligently at this aspect of being a school leader. Helping families is something she would like to be known for at the end of her career.

Student-to-school bonds. Schools serve as a place where families become attached to and involve themselves, and the bonds felt serve as an illustration of that attachment. Social interaction and involvement were concepts shared throughout data collection with school leader and family participants. Dr. M., the Chief School Administrator at Family School, demonstrated the bond of students to the school through his message to families on the first day, sharing:

> I'm a big believer in, you need to get students and you have to put them in a community. When you're talking about students, we need to get them involved, and when I'm talking to parents, "What sports are they and what activities are they getting involved?" I still remember day one here. I said, "Every single person here will participate in an activity or sport. So, if you've never run before you're going to start running. No, I'm just gonna come in school and follow through and

> not get involved." There's so much research that saying you have to be involved and that's where people find value. So, like leaning on each other and being part of a team deals with that social emotional piece. It's when you're isolated and don't have friends and don't feel valued when bad things happen.

"Leaning on each other," "involvement," and building "relationships" were consistently discussed in interviews, with families scheduling playdates to assist in students' relationships within the school and striving to be involved in sports and activities as a family. Involvement is related to bonds through Social Development Model, which presents:

> Bonding is created through providing children with opportunities for involvement with prosocial peers and adult, ensuring they have the skills to participate effectively, and recognizing and rewarding them for this involvement. (Hawkins et al., 2004)

Families talked about "International Day" at Family School, monthly award assemblies at Cheers Primary School, and working together to complete "bucket-filler" entries for a program at Bucket Filler Elementary School as examples of involvement from the student with the school. This involvement facilitates the bonding created between the student and the school

Family-like schools. Families feel thankful for the unique relationships present in their schools. Specifically, a pattern arose with families reflecting on everyone "knowing" each other. Relationships and bonds were illustrated in the way families described the familiarity of the members of the school community and the feelings

associated with the comfortable nature of a small school. Nora, from Family School, shared:

> I love how small it is, like each person knows, like everyone knows the kids' names. I know everyone's name. They know my kids' personalities, not even just their names, you know what I mean, even down to the secretaries.

Kate, from Family School, furthered the notion of small schools and familiarity, saying, "I'm so grateful that [our school is] very small. There's a very intimate relationship." This intimate relationship was described by many families throughout the interviews. Overall, participants continued to speak about school leaders, teachers, and key stakeholders knowing their children and their interests. Kelly's comments furthered the idea of a small community at Cheers Primary School and shared:

> But I love that school community. You know, it's a community unlike any other. You find your niche within it, but the people in that building…I know they love my kids I know they've got my kids best interests at heart. And that feels so good.

That "feeling good" was a common sentiment shared amongst participants. Many participants cited feeling and using the word "vibe" as soon as they walked into the school. The vibe, or feeling capable of being sensed, relates to the emotions that families feel when they enter the school. The vibe that was shared by Kelly, of Cheers Primary School, and other participants, was associated with the level of comfort felt within the school, which relates to the family-like atmosphere.

The notion of "family-like" schools was an on-going theme when speaking with family participants. **"**Family" was first brought into the conversation by Kate, from Family School, when she explained:

> I feel that [our] school is very unique and different in a lot of aspects. It's small, so it's very, very parent involved, very administrator and teacher involved. They rely heavily on [parent involvement]. I feel that they look to us for a lot, and we look to them for a lot, so it's really been a great relationship. And I don't know, I don't have anything to compare it to as far as other bigger districts, right, but it truly is like a family.

Kate's interpretation of involvement linked to relationships is key in understanding the relationships that are fostered in small schools. Throughout the interviews with both school leaders and families within the small schools, the concepts of bonds, relationships, and involvement were woven into the data collected.

Patterns arose as participants described the social connections students also share with each other and families share with other families. Kristina, a family participant from Cheers Primary School, commented:

> I like that it's a smaller school district…she's going to be with these same children for so long. And to me, I feel the parents get to know each other a little bit better, you know, instead of having a class of 24.

The idea that parents get to know "each other a little better" was also noted when speaking of parent communication, including connecting on social media and parent blogs. Rose shared her personal experience with families connecting using social media, saying, "It's an avenue where I actually get info about what might be going on, you now…you know, parents' complaining about something. You know, on social media." The aspect of complaining, although not a common thread throughout the interviews,

relates to the families' emotional connection, or bond, felt with other families. Sharing the positive, and the complaints, is an example of the relationships in small schools.

Frequently in the interviews, families also discussed feeling comfortable to connect with teachers via social media, knowing teacher's own children, and having teachers with children in the school system. Kelly, a family participant from Cheers Primary, commented:

> I think a lot of the teachers live in that community, raise kids and families in that community they've been there for so long, sometimes it changes things, but I think other times that gives them a sense of community.

Commonly, teachers were represented as helping foster the relationship and involvement within the school. The experience, such as when a school leader makes a personal phone call, a superintendent remembers a student's name and interests, and the sense of community shared by families, illustrate the attachment and bond families feel to their school.

Cultural values. Place is defined as the space and the qualities of the space that effect the relationships and social interactions of the people (Stewart, 2010). The physical space of the school is turned into a significant place which is influenced by individual's actions, interpretations, and meanings (Fataar & Rinquest, 2019). The human experience and the meaning given to a place comprise just as much of a setting as the physical characteristics (Chapman, 2006). In understanding that place is socially constructed, the experiences, cultural values and social meanings of the group make the place, in this case, the educational organization and community (Knox, 2005). Cultural values are the core principles and ideals of an organization or community. Sitting down in three

separate school leaders' offices, there were very different physical attributes of the space they occupied. Mr. D., principal of Bucket Filler Elementary, in his first year used a conference room filled with moving boxes and files, while Ms. L. and Dr. M. had offices with small conference tables, inspirational quotes, and photos of their school.

Although very different in physical space, the three school leader participants in this study discussed "buy-in" from the community toward their school mission and vision. A vision is the school's goal for the future, while the mission provides the steps planned to achieve that goal. Buy-in represents the approval and agreement the school leaders worked to obtain from stakeholders. The physical space occupied by the school leaders and the school community as a whole do not represent the place but are shaped by the people and the actions. The school leaders discussed their work in producing a school community where all stakeholders have a place to become attached, involve themselves, and construct partnerships.

"Buy-in" included shared vision, mission, goals, and decisions, as evident from the narratives shared by the school leaders. Lisa's comments illustrated the way in which families understand the importance of "buy-in" at Cheers Primary School to the shared goals of the school. She shared: "If [school leaders] understand the importance of [including families], if they feel it's important, they will make it and then parents will feel that." Lisa's comments reflect the notion that the engagement by school leaders with family members contributes to the initial buy-in from families.

Throughout the interviews, school leader participants illustrated the ways in which they included, engaged, and attempted to give families a voice in the decision-making process. Dr. M., the Chief School Administrator at Family School, discussed

creating district goals, committees, and giving families the opportunity to become leaders:

> We created a district goal with our parents' input, and one of them is to invite parents through the door. We're building upon that and it's looking at how we can get them involved in decision-making. So, last year it was about telling parents, but now I want their input and it to be a three-dimensional piece. Just not one gathering, I want to come back to creating committees, with them, and creating more opportunities.

The three-dimensional decision-making idea shared by Dr. M. the Chief School Administrator at Family School, is linked to child, the home, and the school all working together toward a common goal. In addition to giving families a voice, school leaders discussed the ways in which they connect with families to earn their respect, trust, and partnership. Ms. L., principal of Cheers Primary, shared the way in which she relates to the families in her school, "This is what worked for me as a Mom. I tried this, you just related to them. There is just more of that personal connection." That personal connection is a strategy for including and engaging families, but it is also related to the bonds felt within the school and the families' comments related to investment in the community. In contrast, Mr. D., principal of Bucket Filler Elementary, discussed the more formal methods for involving families in the decision-making:

> I created a committee of parents and myself, and we met once a month, and essentially the purpose of that was more for me to invite them into the school to be a part of decisions that would be right for the school."

When families are involved and engaged, they feel respected. Betty, a family participant from Bucket Filler Elementary, shared: “They’re voting on a new logo for the school. I feel like they involve parents a lot. I think they respect us and our opinion.”

However, involvement and engagement go beyond the school leader’s actions. One family participant commented on the “missing piece” if parents are not involved and engaged. Rose shared:

> I feel like it’s a good school. I feel like if I am not involved, and even more than I am currently, like me, showing up and picking up volunteering, going to the Board of Education meetings, going to every PTA meeting and providing the feedback, there will be even less communication. I’ll be less aware of what’s going on and how it affects my kids. I mean, that’s really, I don’t really care all the details of what’s going on, but I do care how it affects my children.

This highlights an underlying assumption of educational organizations, which is that lack of involvement is equal to lack of open communication. Many families commented on the belief that they become room mom, involved themselves in the PTA, and volunteer for classroom events so that they “know” what is going on in their child’s classroom.

Espoused theories. With the understanding that the espoused theories are the ideas, goals, and values the organization represents, school leaders described the importance of working together with families and “branding” their school (Schien,1985). Dr. M., the Chief School Administrator at Family School, shared:

> I feel that some just send their kids and they don’t have that buy-in into our school. So that’s been my number one mission of branding [our school and mascot] in all I talk about. I watch it even through social media posts with

> parents. I want everyone to understand, regardless of what town they may live in that they feel is this is a home.

Dr. M.'s comments speak to the way in which school leaders can obtain "buy-in:" branding, communication, and the feeling of home. Ms. L. and Mr. D. echoed these attempts in their interviews by trying to make themselves "visible" in the community.

The districts each had some observable and physical proof of their espoused theories representing partnership, family involvement, and social emotional learning skills and development. Mr. D shared his school's mission statement which illustrated the connection between social emotional learning skills and development and partnerships:

> Our district's mission [included]…social and emotional growth to encourage the development of personal strengths, positive self-image, and appreciation for the uniqueness of each individual through community partnerships and engagement.

Family School's goals and mission, shared in Board of Education minutes, aligned to these ideals, including, "Continued growth in student academic achievement and social emotional well-being," and being "Committed to working with parents and the community."

Shared vision. Partnerships include a shared vision, which was highlighted throughout interviews with families and school leaders. School leaders worked toward "buy-in" with their shared vision by having all stakeholders "understand" the mission and vision. Dr. M., the Chief School Administrator at Family School, discussed the way in which a school leader can help foster the idea of community and transparency to obtain an understanding. He shared:

> Everything I write is always school community, school community, because you need to have that buy-in and I think you need to be transparent. And you know I guess we say transparent, [but] I just believe you need to put out to parents like what you're doing and why you're doing it and. And because it's sometimes it is hard to get them through the door, show yourself [and] show your face in the community.

Transparency was a common theme in the interviews, with the words "honest," "clear," and "open communication," being used throughout the data. In the data collected, families continuously addressed the desire to be included and engaged, adding to the idea of a shared vision within the school community. Lisa, a family participant from Cheers Primary School, gave a specific voice to this focus, by sharing:

> I feel like a little bit of respecting that family component of what [families] bring to the table is realizing you're an educator, but if you need to have the whole other side on board, it does help.

Lisa's comment reflects the internal realization, or emotional intelligence, that school leaders must have in order to work together with families. Just as cultural values are the core principles and ideals of an organization or community, transformational is the term used for leaders who understand their organization's culture and realign it to reflect shared assumptions, values, and norms (Bass, 1985).

Building community. "Building community" is at the heart of place-making and comprises dialogue and conversation (Wight, 2005). Family involvement can occur at the greatest level when activities are planned that increase communication and connections with families (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010). Organizational culture explains lack of

communication and embraces group functioning, as related specifically to students' social emotional learning skills and development for this study. When I sat down with family participants and school leaders, the aspect of knowing what is occurring daily, weekly, and monthly in schools was a common thread throughout the interviews. School leaders commonly discussed the newsletters they shared with the school community, urging teachers to invite families to classroom events, and making themselves available to families. Families consistently shared the importance of communication to their relationship with the school, including phone apps for communication, logs, and being able to reach a teacher by phone. Across the data, family participants used the words "clear communications," "open communication," and "keep the lines of communication open both ways."

Social activities and partnership. Data collected through interviews, observations, and documents demonstrated that the schools in this ethnographic case study valued the social activities and engagement of families that lead to partnership. Family School's Board of Education minutes, obtained through document collection, indicated the school would like to, "Ensure a school environment that is welcoming and inviting, accessible, safe, and secure." At Cheers Primary, the Parent Teacher Association and Education Foundation are given opportunities to speak in an informational portion of the Board of Education meetings and promote activities, such as fundraisers, scholarships, and teacher grants. This physical evidence highlights the desire and attempt of the school and school leaders to use communication to invite and engage families in partnership. Betty, from Bucket Filler Elementary, shared a families' view on social activities and engagement within the school setting, saying:

> I feel like, you know, they genuinely care about informing us, you know, there's lots of meetings, especially the beginning of the school year to, you know, help you be the best you can be. And make sure your kids are happy.

The desire to keep communication open was repeated in school leader interviews. Mr. D., principal of Bucket Filler Elementary, shared his thoughts on partnership linked to communication:

> And I think that's where it becomes a partnership, when there's that transparent and honest communication, and parents feel comfortable asking questions or reaching out.

Mr. D. added to his thoughts by sharing the benefits of partnership between school leaders and families, saying, "It makes our job pretty easy when parents are taking that it's a partnership." Ms. L. and Dr. M. both expressed the importance of partnership for the success of the school community.

Home and school association. One avenue that almost every family participant mentioned for being active and engaged was the Home and School Association, which is also referred to as the Parent Teacher Association. School leaders and families both used the terms interchangeably when discussing the organization that serves to plan activities, fundraise, and work with the school as partners. Amy, from Bucket Filler Elementary, noted, "The Home and School Association is really great to try to build relationships between the teachers and the parents."

All three districts described an active Home and School Association in the narrative of their NJ School Report Card, which is evident from data collection and the common idea of the importance of the association. Families consistently mentioned the

hard work of the Home and School Association, the appreciation felt by school leaders for the Home and School Association, and also the idea that the Home and School Association is a major part of the school community. Kate, a family participant from Family School, shared:

> So, they do have the Home and School [association] which works very closely with school administrators, and the school system because it's part of it. You know, there's the Education Foundation…and parents are always welcome to be involved with things like that.

Using the words "good PTA," and activities are fostered "mostly through PTA," the Home and School Association was introduced into the conversation by the participants in almost every interview and serves as an example of a social activity and more-formalized partnership within the school community between school leaders and family.

Effective communication. Families and school leaders commonly mentioned the social media piece throughout interviews, including "branding your school in today's world," the need for "instant answers," and families turning to social media right away. Central to this idea, Dr. M., the Chief School Administrator at Family School, shared his ideas on parents turning to social media:

> We're committed to your child and we're committed to this community. There are going to be things that you may not like and there's going to be things that aren't going to go the way that you felt it should have. And we're going to make wrong steps here, but at the end of the day we're here to service your child and you and we're going to do the best we can and we're going to learn from you. So there's a professional way and if you feel like something needs to be addressed, reach out

to us, but I want you to remember a school pride is number one and going into Facebook or anywhere else and speaking about us isn't going to fix any of that.

These comments are reflective of documents collected from the school's Board of Education minutes, that highlighted, "Communication by providing meaningful feedback and input opportunities in order to strengthen family, school, and community partnerships." Mr. D., principal of Bucket Filler Elementary, added to the idea that open communication fosters a better relationship and partnership between the school and families, sharing:

> I think a lot of people are afraid to reach out to families when there's a problem because there may be some kind of backlash. Right? But my point is, if you are proactive and you're inviting families in and you're, you're not reaching out to them just when there's a problem, then the chances are when something does happen, you're not going to have that fight.

Mr. D.'s comments regarding communication reflect a deep understanding of culture. Lack of communication between stakeholders can be explained through the lens of culture. Facilitating a culture that enhances communication and family partnerships is felt by all stakeholders, including teachers and families. In data collection, families frequently shared their appreciation for teachers communicating daily and weekly. Kelly, from Cheers Primary, gave a voice to this appreciation by sharing, "They send pictures of things they take during the day that you might never see because you're not there, right, you're not an involved classroom day-to-day."

The day-to-day communication is also an aspect of the partnership between schools and families in which families took responsibility. In addition, they commonly

commented on the responsiveness of phone calls, emails, messages through classroom apps, and teacher conferences. Kristina discussed the comfortable nature in which she communicates with Cheers Primary School, saying:

> I felt like I was able to talk with them and, really, you know, ask questions but you know being a new parent, you know, you don't know what avenues to take and which, you know, and I, you know, does my child need help?

Kristina's comments were echoed throughout the interview process, with school leaders commenting on bridging the gap between home and school through communication. Mr. D., principal of Bucket Filler Elementary, shared that school leaders should, "Talk about the things they dealt with outside of the school and how we can bridge home with school." He furthered his comments regarding communication home-to-school, saying, "We teach them to be independent, but that doesn't mean that you cut off communication with the family."

A place for families. Schools serve as a place where families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships in schools. Place is always socially constructed, and a group's own personal experience, cultural values and social meanings transform a space into their own place (Knox, 2005). In such thought, family participants discussed the importance of schools a place where their children have become attached. Kelly, from Cheers Primary, shared:

> [My daughter] learned to read in that building, develop friendships in that building. She's played and gotten hurt; you know all of those things that you're going to remember when you get bigger. Yeah, all those times she lost a tooth in

class, you know, all those silly little things at the school she did it. That just illustrates the bond.

The school. School leaders discussed the ways in which they build the idea of a "school community," including engagement, involvement, and partnerships in shared decision making, social events, and associations. Dr. M., the Chief School Administrator at Family School, went further with this idea, stating, "I don't see where schools are separate than your community."

His comments were illustrated by a family participant from Family School, Kate, who highlighted the ability of the school leader to become not only part of the school community, but the community-at-large, sharing:

> I feel that [the school leader] has an investment in the community and in our school. I mean, he came to "Trunk or Treat" with his family the first year he was here. I mean, that's huge, bringing his family into our family.

Kate's story highlights the ability for a school leader to be an active leader in the community and enhance the strong bonds, involvement, and attachment families feel to the school. Consistently in data collection, families shared a story that reflected a school leader going "above and beyond" to illustrate an investment in the community.

The family. In the interviews, school leader participants all mentioned the changing family structure in today's society, by citing poverty, family needs, and grandparents raising grandchildren as special circumstances they must consider when partnering with the family and the making of place within the school community. The school leaders commented on the social emotional needs of students coming from a

unique family structure being different than those of a "functioning" family unit. Dr. M. , the Chief School Administrator at Family School, shared:

> I have the belief that it's not the parents [responsibility], and if you have parents that aren't educated, or are ignorant to what this is and maybe they were raised a certain way, like I'm not sitting here making judgment that they should be better. It's our job to model these things and share with them. These are the things that we're doing at school here. Here's some tips that you can do at home, opening the door inviting them in. And then they're learning that tribe mentality. Right? These ools like, "Oh, I could try this, I didn't think about getting my kid involved in that." And they're just all going to make our society a better place.

Dr. M. referenced a "tribe mentality" that compliments the making of place within the school and the collective values, norms, emotions, and structures that are present within schools.

Family participants commented on attributes of their family that are unique and hinder their involvement and engagement in the school and in activities. Kelly, from Cheers Primary, shared:

> I think the timing of the meeting, I mean I say it's like once a month or maybe, I don't know if that's exactly what it is, but every few weeks, there's a meeting, right at seven o'clock at night on a Wednesday. I'm a single mom. I get the email with the meeting agenda and look through the notes sometimes. But am I the voice in the room? No. I'm sure that they don't want the same for people sitting in their room, but it needs to be more acceptable and more available, like they have their husband's at home watching the kids. Like, it's just not me.

Although she would like to be in the room and participating in the meetings for the Home and School Association, Kelly's own family structure hinders her own involvement. This was echoed throughout interviews with families discussing new jobs, babies, and other circumstances that influence their own involvement. Lisa, of Cheers Primary School, furthered this idea by giving a voice to grandparents as involved family members, saying:

> There's a lot of active grandparents in this generation in this community. Right now, there's a lot of parents that it's a two-parent working household. And there's a lot of grandparents doing all the pickups, drop offs, school parties, it's not necessarily biological parents, right? It's a bonus family member of some sort.

Data collection showed a consistent effort by families to involve themselves in their child's education in some way, and the idea of finding one's "niche" was repeated by family participants.

The teacher as liaison. Family participants described teachers as their gateway into the school community and typically mentioned teachers when answering questions related to bonds, communication, partnership, and SEL skills and development. Teachers are very "involved" with families day-to-day within the school community. Mr. D., principal of Bucket Filler Elementary, discussed the importance of fostering the relationship and involvement between families and teachers, saying:

> One of the things I typically have required of staff members is to actually invite parents in for different events, like once per marking period…to allow them to kind of see some of the things we're doing with our students.

Through heavy communication with the teacher, families at times do not feel the same connection to the school leader or the school that is felt with the teacher. Amy, from Bucket Filler Elementary, commented:

> The school develops the curriculum, and I assume that the principal involved in that. So, like I feel like they do have an influence on his [social emotional] learning but they're not like the day to day in the trenches kind of stuff.

Teachers have a powerful connection with students and families, and this connection must be recognized and the role they place in the making of place must be appreciated.

The teacher as blockade. Bringing a different voice to the important role teachers play in the making of place, the idea of teachers as a blockade between school leaders and families was raised. Ms. L., principal of Cheers Primary, shared:

> Teachers have become such an important piece of this family partnership. It's just such a large piece of the family partnership, because for school leaders, it's kind of like the school leader almost has a blockade with a teacher to get to the families. The teachers are in the trenches.

Teachers in the "trenches" was a term used in multiple interviews and the topic of teachers was introduced by family participants and school leaders throughout the interviews, while talking about "parent teacher conferences," and "teacher relationships."

Connecting for social emotional learning skills and development. Social emotional learning skills and social emotional development, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills are nurtured when people, objects, movements, language, and interactions occur to create

place and create meaning. Partnerships flourish related to SEL skills and development when progress is shared through open communication.

A common language. School leader participants and family participants all spoke a common language related to the programs and structures built into the school environment that benefit SEL skills and development. Ms. L., principal of Cheers Primary, commented on the common language spoken by participants, saying, "Programs allowed us to find a common language for social emotional learning." School-wide expectations and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs also allowed participants to speak a common language and were consistently mentioned as a way the school encourages SEL skills and development in students. In documents collected and analyzed, one school provided a SEL Initiatives to Date presentation at a Board of Education Meeting, that specifically highlighted the programs and structures present for SEL skills and development. The district and school goals were highlighted, which included supporting the social emotional health of students. The school was able to meet this goal through the implementation of two programs, Zones and Second Steps and through Love and Logic training for the district. Love and Logic training includes research-based behavioral approach embedded in district professional development.

Setting structure for the way school leaders, teachers, and staff interact was common throughout the cases of this study. Dr. M., the Chief School Administrator at Family School, expanded on the expectations of classroom interactions that build self-awareness and self-management, saying:

> So rather than working towards for teacher approval, [the students] should have approval and feel their self-worth. Right? And then how they deal with things. I

> want teachers in small group instruction I want them conferencing, talking to students, and working on students creating goals. So, it's that continuum of learning I am here and watching them build a wonderful relationship, "Look how you're improving and you're writing or reading. Wrong way, right way, keep going, kid."

The addition of SEL skills and development in professional development repeatedly emerged in the data collection. The schools have included morning meetings to self-regulate and reflection into their daily routines. Dr. M. added:

> I read *Time to Teach* and it was about best practices, like how to engage students, how to deal with conflict, how to set expectations and procedures in your room, like that's just great teaching. So, we constantly are talking about it, especially through my walk- through observations.

The consistent professional reading and development demonstrated through the interviews supports the SEL Competencies released in 2017 by the State of New Jersey, a set of guidelines for including SEL into public school education. One school leader participant did mention the competencies in their dialogue.

The success of the programs and structures built into the daily school-life for students was discussed in the data collection. Lisa, of Cheers Primary School, shared her thoughts on how teaching SEL skills and development benefits all students, saying:

> I think it like breaks down barriers that everybody is at least on a level playing field getting that at least some of [social emotional learning skills]. Now, if somebody is fostered even more at home, fantastic, but you at least know that some of these kids that are not being treated right, being treated poorly, you

know, given a bad example of a proper social, you know, situations. I think that's really important to do. And I think our school district has identified that and that's why they've rolled out this these programs, which is excellent.

The school-wide expectations in PBIS programs and other school-wide approaches foster the idea of school as a place where families become attached. Mr. D., principal of Bucket Filler Elementary, shared his thoughts on school as place, saying:

> We try to overcomplicate it too much when, when really a lot of kids that come into schools like they're coming from places where they're either not getting stability, structure, or love, and they need that. So, when they come into schools, like my thought process or my goal is, you know, I never want a kid coming to school unhappy, like this should be their stability and safe place.

The home. The home setting is an important piece in the development of partnerships that support SEL skills and development. Partnerships are visible when schools and families overlap in the home and school environments (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010). School leader and family participants all talked about the connection between home and school in supporting learning. Kristina, from Cheers Primary School, shared, "During the day, I do feel that it [is the school's responsibility]. But, really does start at home and then it should be encouraged at school." When the standards between home and schools are clear, family involvement in partnership is clear. Amy, a family participant from Bucket Filler Elementary, shared the ways in which she supports SEL skills and development in the home setting, saying:

> I started with attachment parenting and then that brought me to like the peaceful parenting or peaceful discipline type of, you know, where it looks like the whole

> brain and like Dan Siegel and, like, "aha" parenting stuff. So it's like very much about like the emotions or feelings behind behaviors and looking at like, why are they doing what they're doing and how do you meet the, what are the unmet needs and how do you, you know, identify that and help them through that.

Families described reading books, modeling behavior between siblings, and connecting learning between home and school as common ways they support SEL skills and development at home. Betty, from Bucket Filler Elementary, illustrated partnership in SEL skills and development when she shared:

> We're working on this with her, you know, reinforce it at home, and [I asked the teacher], "What do you think I should do?" and she said, "Well, one thing that she seems to have a friendship, a little friendship with one girl you know maybe a playdate outside of school would be helpful." So, we did and we had a playdate and was great. You know, it helped her so much.

In this narrative, the school's partnership represents a "team approach," between the school, family, and student in building SEL skills and development in both the home and school setting. Studies have shown the necessity for school leaders to work toward partnership through family involvement and a "team approach" (Sanders, 2014; Epstein, 2006). Students are more likely to have positive outcomes and demonstrate positive standards if school and home have standards that are clear and comparable (Durlack et al., 2015).

Conclusion

The findings of this study give an overview of school leaders and families voices, as well as observation and visual document collection, to describe the way in which

organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making interact to encourage the social emotional learning skills and development of students in an early childhood context. Findings that emerged from the data analysis included big bonds in small places, producing place, a social place, a place for families, and connecting place were discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

This qualitative, ethnographic case study sought to explore partnerships developed between school leaders and families to address social emotional learning skills and development in the early childhood setting (grades pre-kindergarten through third grade) in small, rural school districts in Southern New Jersey. The purpose of this study was to describe how three school leaders from small PreK-8 districts (less than 1,000 students) in Southern New Jersey used similar methods for fostering partnerships with families and bonds between individuals, families, and schools. This study examined how the organizational culture of the educational organizations reinforced or undermined the relationship between school and family partnerships and bonds. This study investigated the linkage between school leaders' experiences and social development theory and theory of family-school connections and how the norms, values and beliefs held by the schools and families created or maintained the organizational culture for partnership. This study encompassed research that suggested educational organizations, facilitated by school leaders, have their own culture and serve as a place where families become attached to, involve themselves, and construct partnerships.

On the basis that school leaders must partner with families in pursuit of healthy relationships and social experiences that are crucial for future development and social outcomes, for this qualitative study, organizational culture provided the context for examining social emotional learning skills and development within small, rural school districts in Southern New Jersey (Caemmrer et al., 2015; Shonkoff et al., 2002). The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do school leaders foster partnerships with families in pursuit of healthy relationships and social emotional learning skills and development for students?
    a. How do school leaders support the development of bonds between individuals, families, and the school in an early childhood context?
    b. What are the norms, values, and beliefs held by the school and families that may encourage the social emotional learning skills and development in children?
2. What role does organizational culture, including the artifacts, espoused theories and underlying assumptions of an organization, play in developing partnerships between school leaders and families?
    a. In what ways does the organizational culture foster place-making that develops partnerships between school leaders and families for the social emotional learning skills and development of early childhood students?
3. How do organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making interact to encourage the social emotional learning skills and development of students in an early childhood context?

The theoretical lenses for this research included an emphasis on organizational culture and theories of family partnership and involvement and social development theory. Organizational culture was used to describe the way in which an organization has shared assumptions that impact the group norms, espoused values, climate and observed behaviors when individuals in an organization interact (Schien, 1985). Placemaking was

used to explain the idea that educational organizations are a public place that fosters individual's health and well-being through a community built on the relationships and social interactions of the people (Pascucci, 2015; Stewart, 2010). Complimentary to the theories of organizational culture and place, Hawkins, Smith and Catalano (2004) found that social emotional learning skills and development are strongly linked to the social environment and the social bonds formed from these environments, in this case home and school. Family-school connection was also a theory was used as a lens for this research. For this study, data collection included participant interviews, document collection, and observations within the early childhood, educational setting. The sample for this study included three school leaders of small, rural Pre-kindergarten-8th grade districts of less than 1,000 students in Southern New Jersey. Ten families of children in grades preschool through grade three participated in this study. Interview, document, and observation data was collected and analyzed.

To improve education as a whole, social emotional learning skills and development must be promoted. Organizational culture, as the theoretical framework of this research in forming partnerships, distinguishes this study from the growing body of literature on social emotional learning skills and development (Elias et al., 1997). Literature validated the setting of the study and the participants by showing gaps in research that supported the entire organization and developing an organizational culture and a place that supports family and school partnership (Chung & Kim, 2018).

Description of the Case

The setting of this study was three small, rural Pre-K-8 school districts in Southern New Jersey. The first District, Cheers Primary School, is located in the

northwest portion of Atlantic County and has 748 students enrolled. Bucket Filler Elementary School is located in Camden County, New Jersey has three elementary schools with 810 students (NJ School Performance Report, 2018). Family Schools is located in Atlantic County, New Jersey with a population of less than 2000 residents.

Discussion of Findings

School leaders foster partnerships for SEL skills and development. The first research question asked how school leaders foster partnerships with families in pursuit of healthy relationships and social emotional learning skills and development for students. This study found that school leaders foster partnerships with families through social activities and engagement. In addition, when meaningful communication occurs between the school and home, interaction, involvement, and partnership between the units of family and school is fostered. Meaningful communication, social activities, and partnership are all fostered through school leaders' "building community," which includes the dialogue and conversation that is at the center of place-making (Wight, 2005). Students are likely to witness positive outcomes for SEL skills and development when the standards between home and school are clear and partnerships are formed (Elias et al., 1996; Sheridan & Wheeler, 2017). When school leaders established welcoming and inviting school environments that articulated a culture of open communication, families felt comfortable in asking questions and acknowledged the partnership that exists between the school and family. These environments, which included "genuine care," and a value on the engagement of families, were described in missions and vision statements, as well as being evident in the physical observations and participant voices.

Family participants shared their desire to connect to the school and know what was occurring daily in the school community as a way to involve themselves and create a partnership. School leader participants shared the ways in which they meet this need, including newsletters, inviting families in, and making themselves available to family. The strength of communication between the school leader and the family was evident in the interviews shared and also in the documents collected through the Board of Education minutes. These findings are consistent with established research that found when clear communication is present, overlap of home and school settings are facilitated and family involvement can occur (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010). When the schools studied used different modes of communication, such as newsletters, social media, and blogs, and planned activities that increased communication, such as Back-to-School night and family nights, families felt more involved and connected to the school. Families expressed these by discussing their level of comfort with the school increasing with increased communication and the care they felt when school leaders shared information openly.

Social activities and partnership. Complimentary to the findings of social ecological theory and social development model, data collected through interviews, observations, and documents demonstrated that the schools in this ethnographic case study valued the social activities and engagement of families that lead to partnership (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). Just as these theories explain the importance of the socializing units of family and school in a child's learning and development, including the interactions, activities, and involvement with these units, partnership includes involvement, engagement, participation, and collaboration that show

people at home, at school, and in the community working together (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Epstein, 2006). Welcoming, inviting, and safe were terms consistently used by school leader and family participants. The documents furthered this idea by highlighting the desire and attempt of the school and school leaders to use communication to invite and engage families in partnership, through inviting families to speak at Board of Education meetings and promoting activities, such as fundraisers, scholarships, and teacher grants. School leaders planned activities purposely and expressed the importance for partnership for the success of the school community.

Home and school association. A formal avenue for developing the partnership between school leaders and families was the Home and School Association, which is also referred to as the Parent Teacher Association. These findings compliment previous research Chung and Kim (2018), which found that the most powerful partnerships between groups within educational organization are those that are created between the school and families, as they both increase their effectiveness if they work and communicate together. In data collection, family participants consistently noted the strong relationships built between the school and families within the Home and School Association the idea that the Home and School Association is a major part of the school community. These findings support the use of family-school connection theory in understanding partnerships (Epstein, 2006), which supports educational organizations developing partnerships that are inclusive of families in an effort to gain the best and most positive outcomes for all students. The Home and School Associations in this study were described as essential to the school community in providing financial support, supports for teachers, and as a way that families can feel involved in the day-to-day

school community. The HSA represents a formal aspect of the partnership between school leaders and families. Epstein's (2002) theory of overlapping spheres of influence recognized the home, school, and community as three separate entities that work together to enhance the learning and development of children. In data collection, the Home and School Association was introduced into the conversation by the participants in almost every interview and served as an example of a social activity and more-formalized partnership within the school community between school leaders and family.

Supporting development of bonds. The first research question also encompassed how school leaders support the development of bonds between individuals, families, and the school in an early childhood context. Bonds include the formation of a close relationship between the student, family, and school. Social Development Model teaches that bonds not only create an investment in the norms, values, and beliefs held by groups that relate to the organizational culture, but also foster social emotional learning skills and development (Hawkins et al., 2004). This study found that school leaders support the development of bonds by involving families and creating an intimate relationship in both the social and physical place. Many family participants used the words "this is home" and "love," which express the feelings and emotional attachment that create bonds. The close relationship defined in bonds is reflective of a strong emotional attachment.

Big bonds in small places. Commonly when speaking of school leaders, family participants commented on feeling the "interactions" with school leaders with parents and children. Knowing the students' names, likes and dislikes, and family information were mentioned by families when they were asked if they felt a bond to the school. These interactions were described as "intimate" and "family-like" and were related back to the

idea that because the schools were small, the bonds were larger. These findings coincide with a large quantity of literature devoted to the advantages of smaller schools, including more cooperative families (Lieske & Swearer Napolitano, 2010; Raywild, 1999). A pattern arose with families reflecting on everyone "knowing" each other. Relationships and bonds were illustrated in the way families described the familiarity of the members of the school community and the feelings associated with the comfortable nature of a small school. Participants used the words, "this is home," "leaning on each other," and "love," to express the feelings and emotional attachment that creates bonds.

Schools serve as a place where families become attached to and involve themselves, and the bonds felt serve as an illustration of that attachment. Strong feelings, along with living, sensing, and experiencing a place are how a person identifies with a place (Fataar & Rinquest, 2019). The ideas of bond and place, including physical space and social interaction, also overlap with social development model, which centers on the notion that individuals, families and institutions are bonded through social interaction and involvement (Hawkins et al., 2004). The physical spaces of each of the schools in this ethnographic case study included large photos of teachers and students, school leadership enjoying a game with a young student, and friends eating lunch together, which represented the bond felt within the school community.

Previous research found that social relations do not just occur in the physical space but are produced through social interaction (Massey, 2005). This study also found the importance of the social interaction, including a school leader making a personal phone call, a superintendent remembering a student's name and interests, and the sense of community shared by families, which illustrates the attachment and bond families feel to

their school. Social interaction and involvement were consistently discussed by both school leaders and families, with school leaders calling for student involvement in sports and activities in an effort to find value and develop a network of friends. Likewise, families attempting to schedule playdates to build relationships with other students and families in the school community.

Norms, values, and beliefs that encourage SEL skills and development. The first research question also strived to find the norms, values, and beliefs held by the school and families that may encourage the social emotional learning skills and development in children. Social emotional learning is defined as the acquisition of knowledge related to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2019; Durlack et al., 2015). The experiences, expressions, and management of emotions by children is defined as social emotional development. Social emotional development includes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. For the purpose of this study, social emotional development included the ability by children to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others, as well as the importance of developing strong bonds to family, school, and community (Hawkins et al., 2004). This study found that when schools develop district goals, missions, and visions that ensure families are included, engaged, and given a voice in the decision-making process, partnerships flourish to meet the needs of students, including SEL skills and development.

All school leader participants shared their work toward "buy-in" to common ideas, goals, values, and vision to influence the organization. With the focus that

partnerships are defined as collaborations toward a shared goal, such as SEL skills and development, participants' feelings and views on "buy-in" were essential in understanding how families and schools can develop a shared ownership of children's SEL skills and development (Epstein, 2006). Family participants echoed the importance of "buy-in," saying that families will "feel" the level of importance school leaders place on including families. The idea of family "buy-in" builds on the bonds formed with families that create an investment in the norms, values, and beliefs of the organization. The interaction and involvement between families and the school is not only important to "buy-in" which school leaders desire, but also to a child's learning and development, which is explained through social development model. When families are included and engaged, the mission of schools can be achieved. Throughout the interviews, school leader participants illustrated the ways in which they included, engaged, and attempted to give families a voice in the decision-making process, including creating district goals, committees, and giving families the opportunities to become leaders.

Cultural values. Cultural values are the core principles and ideals of an organization or community. In understanding that place is socially constructed, the experiences, cultural values, and social meanings of the group make the place, in this case, the educational organization and community (Knox, 2005). School leader and family participants echoed the importance of including families and how this effort was built into the school community in the physical space, actions, and engagement of school leaders. School leaders discussed the ways in which they connect with families to earn their respect, trust, and partnership, an example of cultural values, including inviting parents through the door and creating opportunities for partnership. These values were

expressed through interview data, observations, and document collection, which explains the idea that respect, trust, and partnership are values engrained into the organization's culture.

Espoused theories. The common discussion of espoused theories shed light on organizational culture and the way in which families, as stakeholders, can partner with school leaders. With the understanding that the espoused theories are the ideas, goals, and values the organization represents, school leaders described the importance of working together with families and "branding" their school (Schien,1985). Mission statements and goals of the schools each had some observable and physical proof of their espoused theories representing partnership, family involvement, and social emotional learning skills and development. These espoused theories permitted a deep understanding of culture, including the culture that each group brings to the union and the setting (Chapman, 2006; Parker & Selksy, 2004). These values, ideas, and beliefs, which are held by those to whom students' bond, also directly affect social emotional learning skills and development (Catalano et al., 2003; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Shafritz et al., 2016).

Organizational cultures role in developing partnerships. The second research question asked about the role organizational culture, including the artifacts, espoused theories, and underlying assumptions of an organization, play in developing partnerships between school leaders and families. A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group has and the shared interpretations they possess in understanding organizational events, problems and situations influences the organization (Rentsh, 1990; Schein, 1985). This study found that while school leader's actions relate to partnerships with families, a

shared vision and communication were the main focus of organizational culture's role in the involvement and interaction between school leaders and families.

Shared vision. Educational organizations and families have very different values and norms, yet they share a common goal (Chung & Kim, 2018). A vision is the school's goal for the future, while the mission provides the steps planned to achieve that goal. School leaders related the shared vision back to the "buy-in" they were striving for, by having all stakeholders "understand" the mission and vision of the organization. Both school leader and family participants shared community, transparency, and engagement as the shared vision within the school community. While allowing for a deep understanding of organizational culture, the shared vision of an organization also relates back to the principles of place-making, including linking people with common goals (Pascussi, 2015). Common goals, including partnerships for the success of all children, including success SEL skills and development, was evident in the sites for this research.

Effective communication. The level to which parents feel comfortable to ask questions and reach out can be easier for school leaders to understand if they have a deep understanding of organizational culture. Transparency was a common theme in the interviews, with the words "honest," "clear," and "open communication," being used throughout the data. Physical evidence taken from observations of the cases also reflected the assumptions participants shared regarding communication. Assumptions based on effective communication included, families sharing their appreciation for teachers communicating daily and weekly, families feeling more comfortable and satisfied when their phone calls, emails, and messages were responded to quickly, and the social media piece that has changed communication in the last few years. Families and school leaders

commonly mentioned the social media piece throughout interviews, including "branding your school in today's world," the need for "instant answers," and families turning to social media right away.

With this understanding of the changing world, and how families appreciate being communicated with, school leaders have a deep understanding of the artifacts, espoused theories, and underlying assumptions of their organization that play a role in developing partnerships between school leaders and families. When leaders truly realize the espoused theories and shared vision of the organization, more powerful communication can occur. Clear communication and planned activities collectively facilitate family involvement and engagement (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010). Facilitating a culture that enhances communication and family partnerships is felt by all stakeholders, including families.

Fostering place-making. The second research question also asked how organizational culture fosters place-making that develops partnerships between school leaders and families for the social emotional learning skills and development of early childhood students. Place is a socially constructed space likened to a person or group's own personal experiences, cultural values, and social meanings that then transforms into a place for the person or group (Stewart, 2010). The idea of place is not physical but blends the character of the setting and its meaning to those who participate and interact within the setting (Chapman, 2006). This study found that place-making is fostered through the idea of a "school community," including engagement, involvement, and partnerships in shared decision making, social events, and associations.

Similar to previous research that found place is created by individuals who engage in social interactions and networks inside of the physical space, this study found school

leaders and families play an integral part in the making of place within a school community (Fataar & Rinquest, 2019; Pascussi, 2015). Family participants shared narratives that reflected the ability for a school leader to be an active leader in the community and enhance the strong bonds, involvement, and attachment families feel to the school. Likewise, school leaders discussed the ways in which they build the idea of a "school community," including engagement, involvement, and partnerships in shared decision making, social events, and associations.

A place for families. Families have changed, as have communities, but schools continue to serve as a place where the family, and students, can involve themselves in and form relationships and construct partnerships. This desire is complimentary to the prevalence of literature analyzing ways to involve family members in schools and the importance of family involvement in achieving success and meeting the goals of educational organizations (Jefferson, 2014). Family participants commented on attributes of their family that are unique and hinder their involvement and engagement in the school and in activities. Although circumstances impacted engagement, data collection showed a consistent effort by families to involve themselves in their child's education in some way. Families commented on the ability of the school leader to be part of the school community. Family participants were appreciative when school leaders showed an "investment" in the community. The community piece builds upon the idea that place is socially constructed. One school leader gave a voice to the importance of place, by comparing the school community to a "tribe." This "tribe mentality" compliments the making of place within the school and the collective values, norms, emotions, and

structures that are present within schools. School leaders' actions in regard to creating place enhanced the strong bonds, involvement, and attachment families felt to the school.

Organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making. The third research question asked how organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making interact to encourage the social learning skills and development of students in an early childhood context. This study found that partnerships related to SEL skills and development flourish when progress is shared through open communication, including a common language and overlap in the home and school environments.

Organizational culture explains open communication between stakeholders, as well as lack of communication. For this study, organizational culture explained how open communication was an espoused theory of the organizations. Across the data, participants used the words "clear communications," "open communication," and "keep the lines of communication open both ways." With the understanding that the espoused theories are the ideas, goals, and values the organization represents, communication was consistently highlighted by school leaders and families as a value of the organizations (Schien, 1985).

School leader participants and family participants all spoke a common language related to the programs and structures built into the school environment that benefit SEL skills and development. The common language spoken by participants represents verbal and physical evidence of the partnership that existed between school leaders and families. The common language and words used by participants highlighted the desire and attempt of the school and school leaders to invite and engage families in partnership. When the standards between home and schools are clear, family involvement in partnership is clear. Partnerships are visible when schools and families overlap in the home and school

environments, in this case the common language present in both settings (Galindo & Sheldon, 2010).

The overlap between the home and school environments corresponds to place and place-making. School leader and family participants all talked about the connection between home and school in supporting learning. The building of community and partnerships within educational organizations can be recognized by the need of schools to serve as a place for families and to meet human needs (Wight, 2005). These human needs, as evident from the voices of the family participants, includes the holistic development of the child, including physical, language, ethical, social, psychological, and cognitive development (Haynes, 1998).

Connecting for social emotional learning skills and development. Social emotional learning skills and social emotional development, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills are nurtured when the people, objects, movements, language, and interactions occur to create place and create meaning. The creation of place involves people, as well as language, and is a consequence of the interaction of all these elements in creating meaning (Frelin & Grannas, 2014). Students' interactions in school are significant to students' lived experiences and are closely connected to emotions, which influences encounters with place (Fataar & Rinquest, 2019). Place and place-making, focused on the culture, political agendas, growth, and relationships of a place or organization, influence the entire community, including partnerships and relationships (Hopkins, 2011; Pascucci, 2015). Organizational culture, including the espoused values of an organization, impact the ability for school leaders to foster partnerships with families and create place where

bonds are nourished, schools are given meaning and families are deeply involved in the vision of the organization.

Conceptual Framework Revisited

The study found that creating an intimate relationship in both the social and physical place, the development of bonds, the norms, values, and beliefs that encourage SEL skills and development and when families are included, engaged, and given a voice in the decision-making process all foster place-making, which interacts with organizational culture and partnerships for SEL skills and development. Organizational culture was used to describe the way in which an organization has shared assumptions that impact the group norms, espoused values, climate and observed behaviors when individuals in an organization interact (Schien, 1985). Place was used to explain the idea that educational organizations are a public place that fosters individual's health and well-being through a community built on the relationships and social interactions of the people (Pascucci, 2015; Stewart, 2010). Complimentary to the theories of organizational culture and place, Hawkins, Smith and Catalano (2004) found that social emotional learning skills and development are strongly linked to the social environment and the social bonds formed from these environments, in this case home and school. When a child interacts, social bonding is produced which creates an investment in the "norms, values and beliefs held by these groups that influence behavior" (Hawkins et al., 2004). The results of this study indicated that the connections between place-making, organizational culture, and partnerships develop a school community with overlap in the home and school environments.

Implications

Findings from this ethnographic case study added to the research surrounding place-making, organizational culture and partnerships for SEL skills and development. This study provides an understanding and insights for policy makers, educational leaders, and key stakeholders working in education.

Policy. In order to meet the demands of a democratic society, schools must serve both individuals and the larger society by facilitating learning on health and social aspects of growing, including SEL skills and development (Murry et al., 2015; Noddings, 2015). This study revealed Since 2017, State of New Jersey has promoted the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies, a set of guidelines for including SEL into public school education. The competencies highlight self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills. This study found that partnerships flourish related to SEL skills and development when progress is shared through open communication, including a common language and overlap in the home and school environments. Other studies have found that social emotional competence must be built into the broader school environment (Elias & Arnold, 2006).

Although the competencies from the State of New Jersey do highlight skills and early learning standards, policy makers should take measures to address the importance of family partnerships and overlap in the home and school environments. Professional development at the district and school leader level should be available in order to best include and engage families. Based on this study, financial opportunities should eb afforded as part of the competencies for grant money that supports family involvement, workshops, and training.

Just as the state constructs and maintains policy and programming that supports SEL skills and development, school districts accept the responsibility of educating our children in all aspects of learning and growing, such as social and emotional health (Cohen, 2006). This study found that when schools develop district goals, missions, and visions that ensure families are included, engaged, and given a voice in the decision-making process, partnerships flourish to meet the needs of students, including SEL skills and development. Local boards of education and key stakeholders should work toward a shared decision-making process, including parent advisory councils and opportunities for families to become included and engaged in every aspect of the school, especially programing that supports SEL skills and development.

Research. Based on the findings of this study, more research is needed to express the influence of organizational culture in early childhood education, specifically illuminating the strong connection between home and school and including all stakeholders within an organization's culture. A delimitation of this study was that studies are tentative and conditional, especially when understanding culture and organization (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Family participants typically commented on their own child, which guided their though process and answers to questions related to organizational culture. Moreover, this study just begins to introduce place and place-making into the educational literature related to partnerships and SEL skills and development. Further research would be beneficial on influencing the school community through place-making.

To enhance this study's concentration in the area of SEL skills and development, further research would be beneficial in demonstrating the correlation between high social

emotional skills and academic achievement in the early childhood setting. This would bring additional validity to the whole-child approach to learning. Learning is facilitated by the teacher. The connection between teacher and student is powerful in its ability to model a caring relationship and teach social emotional norms (Elias & Arnold, 2006). An additional study would be beneficial in capturing the voice of teachers related to family partnerships for SEL skills and development.

A limitation of this study was the representation of families that participated in this study. All of the family participants were biological mothers. Citing poverty, changing family structure, family needs, and grandparents raising children, participants shared that the social emotional needs of students with unique home situations are different than those of a functioning family unit. In an effort to provide opportunities to include diverse voices and best meet the needs of all children, it is recommended that family members representing different genders and relationships to the child in the school be included.

Practice. This study found that while school leader's actions relate partnerships with families, communication was the main focus of organizational culture's role in the involvement and interaction between school leaders and families. A common thread discussed by school leaders and family participants was the involvement of teachers in the day-to-day involvement and engagement with families in the educational organization. Participants offered contrasting views when discussing the role that teachers play in developing partnerships between school leaders and families. While the teacher was presented as "in the trenches" and a liaison to fostering the partnership, one school leader viewed teachers as blockade to, "get to the families." Teachers must be

included and engaged for best practices to occur for students' SEL skills and development.

In 2007 the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the National Association for the Accreditation of Teacher Education recommended a focus on social emotional learning skills and development in teacher education programs (Hoffman, 2009). The results of this study greater offer a greater understanding of how families feel supported and how better communication can take place. Targeted professional development directly impacts instruction in the classroom and is more effective in changing teacher practice if completed in a collective environment, such as an educational organization with a strong knowledge of culture (Desimone et al., 2002). Professional development is suggested that enhances family partnerships, communication, and involvement on the classroom level.

The school counselor's role was considered when the participants discussed SEL skills and development. Cheers Primary School, one of the cases in this study, sited the school counselor pushing into classrooms, creating curriculum that supports SEL skills and development with teachers, and instructing on SEL skills and development in the classroom. Some family participants also gave a voice to the role of the school counselor in offering communication regarding SEL skills and development to families. In an effort toward best practice, school counselors, when available, should be part of the development of family partnerships and given a voice in the decision-making process, along with families.

Leadership. In order to promote social emotional learning skills and development in students, the school must model the social skills used for emotional intelligence

(Hawkins & Catalano, 1996). Leaders should reflect on their own social emotional competences, including social emotional skills and social emotional development include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills (CASEL, 2019). Through the development of these core competences, school leaders will be able to regulate their own social emotional skills, make thoughtful decisions related to SEL skills and learning though policy and practice, and cultivate strong stakeholders in the school community and partnerships with families.

Emotionally intelligent leaders can lead effectively because they use their emotional connection with people to lead and monitor themselves through social awareness (Goleman et al., 2001). Goleman (2004) found that the components of emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, social skill, and empathy, which are complementary to the CASEL SEL skill competences. Leaders should participate in reflective practice in an effort to evaluate their own emotional intelligence that impacts the school community.

When thought of as an influential process, leadership is all-encompassing as a trait, ability, skill, behavior, and relationship. When these ideas are brought together, leaders have ability to inspire, influence, and interact to make change (Northouse, 2015). This type of influence requires transformational leaders. A leader transforms follower into more highly motivated followers who provide extra effort to perform beyond expectations of leaders and followers (Wren, 1995). Transformational leaders recognize the end of education is not only provide education, but democratic citizenship and participation in civil society (Shields, 2010). It is essential for educational leaders to

create learning contexts of communities in which social capital is enhanced in a such a way as to provide equality and opportunity for students (Shields, 2010).

Recommendations

This study found that school leaders foster partnerships with families through social activities and engagement. When meaningful communication occurs between the school and home, interaction, involvement, and partnership between the units of family and school is fostered. Meaningful communication, social activities, and partnership are all fostered through school leaders' "building community." The participants in this study voiced that meaningful communication includes exhibiting "genuine care" and placing value on the engagement of families. School leaders should connect with families on a consistent basis through newsletters, social media, or blogs, and invite families into the school. Formal avenues for developing partnerships between school leaders and families, including the Home and School Association, should be promoted and respected by school leaders as a major part of the school community. Families should make every attempt to join such organizations in an effort to gain the best and most positive outcomes for all students. Differing itself from other studies, this research found that when school leaders involved their own families in the school community and shared experiences as a parent themselves, communication and feelings of engagement from families were enhanced.

This study found that school leaders support the development of bonds by involving families and creating an intimate relationship in both the social and physical place. School leaders should work toward knowing their students' names, likes and dislikes, and family information in an effort to enhance the bonds families feel to the school. The physical space of schools should include large photos of teachers and

students, school leadership enjoying a game with a young student, and friends eating lunch together, which represent the bond felt within the school community. Families should attempt to schedule playdates and activities outside of the regular school day to build relationships with other students and families in the school community. In addition, small schools should capitalize on the "intimate relationships" that can occur, such as school leaders making individual phone calls to families in need.

This study found that when schools develop district goals, missions, and visions that ensure families are included, engaged, and given a voice in the decision-making process, partnerships flourish to meet the needs of students, including students' SEL skills and development. School leaders should develop mission, vision, and goals with key stakeholders, including families, that highlight partnership. The mission, vision, and goals of the school should reflect best practices for developing partnerships as they represent the espoused theories of the organization. Best practices include social activities, engagement, developing bonds, communication, shared decision-making, and overlap in the home and school environments. Artifacts, including the visible structures and observable behaviors, should reflect these practices in the physical and social place and represent the mission, vision, and goals of the school, including photographs, posters, and inviting spaces. Based on this study, local Boards of Education, and school associations, such as the Home and School Association and educational foundations, should offer funding and grant money that support these goals, including family involvement, workshops, and training. Differing itself from other research, this study highlights the idea that best practices cannot just be surface, but entrenched in the school's culture, mission, and vision.

This study found that while school leader's actions impact partnerships with families, communication was the main focus of organizational culture's role in the involvement and interaction between school leaders and families. School leaders should work toward "buy-in," or having all stakeholders "understand" the mission and vision of the organization by being "honest," "clear," and "transparent." School leaders should be self-reflective and realize the espoused theories and shared vision of the organization in an effort for more powerful communication to occur. School leaders and teachers should also work toward a culture of responsiveness. This study found that families feel more comfortable and satisfied the quicker their phone calls, emails, and messages were responded.

This study found that place-making is fostered through the idea of a "school community," including engagement, involvement, and partnerships in shared decision making, social events, and associations. Best practices for fostering partnership with families for SEL skills and development should include and engage families by giving them a voice in the decision-making process. Local boards of education and key stakeholders should work toward a shared decision-making process. School leaders should develop parent advisory councils and opportunities for families to become included and engaged in every aspect of the school, especially programing that supports SEL skills and development. Families should take an active role when given opportunities to participate in decision-making and serve as advocates for their children's development.

This study found that partnerships flourish related to SEL skills and development when progress is shared through open communication, including a common language and

overlap in the home and school environments. The findings from this study provide opportunities for school leaders to set school goals, develop school programs that facilitate a common language, and create professional development experiences that facilitate a culture that enhances family partnerships. This study found that teachers serve an important role in family partnerships and this role should be respected by school leaders as the organization's culture moves toward partnership. School leaders should target professional development that enhances family partnerships, communication, involvement, and overlap on the classroom level.

Conclusion

This qualitative, ethnographic case study sought to explore partnerships developed between school leaders and families to address social emotional learning skills and development in the early childhood setting (grades pre-kindergarten through third grade) in small, rural school districts in Southern New Jersey. The school leader and family participants in this study shared their own voices for how partnerships are fostered, including creating an intimate relationship in both the social and physical place. This study found that school leaders support the development of bonds, the norms, values, and beliefs that encourage SEL skills and development when families are included, engaged, and given a voice in the decision-making process. The idea of the "school community" fosters place-making, which interacts with organizational culture and partnerships for SEL skills and development.

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Appendix A

Consent to Take Part in Research Study

Title of Study: SMALL PLACES, BIG OUTCOMES: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY ON SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING SKILLS AND DEVELOPMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, AND PLACE-MAKING IN SMALL, RURAL SCHOOLS IN SOUTHERN NEW JERSEY

Principal Investigator: Dr. Ane Turner Johnson

You are being asked to participate in this research study. This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you wish to volunteer for this research study. It will help you understand the purpose of the study and how the findings will be used. If you have any questions at any time during the research study, you should feel free to ask them and should expect to be given answers that you understand. After an understanding of this research study, you will be asked to sign this informed consent if you agree to participate.

The Principal Investigator, Dr. Ane Johnson, or Christina DiDonato Dillon, will also be asked to sign this informed consent. You will be given a copy of the signed consent form to keep. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by volunteering for this research study or by signing this consent form.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic case study was to explore partnerships developed between school leaders and families to address social learning skills and development in the early childhood setting (grades pre-kindergarten through third grade) in small, rural school districts in Southern New Jersey. This study explored the way in which school leaders fostered partnerships with families and bonds between individuals, families and school by investigating the linkage between school leaders' experiences and social development theory and theory of family-school connections. This study intended to understand the interactions between organizational culture, partnerships, and place-making that create social emotional development and learning via the perspectives of school leaders and parents in an early childhood setting.

Why have you been asked to participate in this study?

The criteria for selecting study participants at the school and school leader level was a Pre-K – 8 school with less than 1,000 students enrolled on the last released NJ School Performance Report and a school or district leader of each of the selected districts. The criteria for selecting families of children was an immediate family member or guardian of a student in grades preschool through grade three, who live in the same home as the student.

How many subjects will be enrolled in this study?

Three school leaders and fifteen family members will participate in this study.

How long will my participation in this study take?

The duration of an individual's participation in this study is between 45 to 60 minutes.

Where will the study take place?

The study will take place in your natural setting, a place of your choice so that you can feel comfortable.

What will you be asked to do if you take part in this research study?

You will be interviewed in the form of dialogues. Interviews will be audio recorded with your permission.

What are the risks and/or discomforts you might experience if you take part in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study.

Are there any benefits for you if you choose to take part in this research study?

This study should afford school leaders a deeper understanding of culture, so they can partner with families in the development process. With this increased understanding by school leaders, professional development can then be tailored to assist teachers in positively supporting children's growth in all areas. Most importantly, through this understanding, communication regarding school programs and progress related to social emotional learning skills and development can be shared more efficiently and effectively.

What are your alternatives if you don't want to take part in this study?

There are no alternative treatments available. Your alternative is not to take part in this study.

How will you know if new information is learned that may affect whether you are willing to stay in this research study?

During the course of the study, you will be updated about any new information that may affect whether you are willing to continue taking part in the study. If new information is learned that may affect you, you will be contacted.

Will you be paid to take part in this study?

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

What will happen if you are injured during this study?

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study.

What will happen if you do not wish to take part in the study or if you later decide not to stay in the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, or you may change your mind at any time. If you do not want to enter the study or decide to stop participating, you may do so without penalty.

What are your rights if you decide to take part in this research study?

You have the right to ask questions about any part of the study at any time. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you can call:

Office of Research Compliance (856) 256-4078– Glassboro/CMSRU

Who can you call if you have any questions?

You may contact Dr. Ane Turner Johnson at 856-256-4500 x3818 or johnsona@rowan.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you will not be penalized if you refuse to participate or decide to stop.

If you agree to participate, you must be given a signed copy of this document and a written summary of the research. You should not sign this form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have been given answers to all of your questions.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name: _____

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator Obtaining Consent

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject have been accurately answered.

Researcher Obtaining Consent:

_____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Audio Addendum to Consent Forms

You have already agreed to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Ane Turner Johnson. We are asking for your permission to allow us to audiotape as part of that research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team.

The recording(s) will include identifiers such as the number of years of experience, title of role, and description of responsibilities within your role. Your name will not be audio-recorded.

The recording(s) will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to subjects' identity in the form of a pseudonym. The recording(s) will be destroyed upon completion of the study procedures.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

AGREEMENT TO BE AUDIO RECORDED

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

I have read this entire form, or it has been read to me, and I believe that I understand what has been discussed. All of my questions about this form or this study have been answered.

Subject Name: _____

Subject Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator Obtaining Consent

To the best of my ability, I have explained and discussed the full contents of the study including all of the information contained in this consent form. All questions of the research subject have been accurately answered.

Researcher Obtaining Consent:

_____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Interview Protocol – School Leaders

1. Interviewee Background
    a. How long have you been in your present position? At this institution?
    b. What is your highest degree?
    c. What is your field of study?
2. What are your experiences with family partnerships?
3. How does your school mission and vision include families and partnerships with families?
    a. Are these values being lived out day-to-day in the school?
4. How do you foster the development of bonds, or close relationships between the student, family, and school?

    Probe: Is it working – why or why not?
5. How do you help create a healthy environment for collaboration with families?
6. What is the strategy and structures do you use to foster partnerships with families?
    a. …As related to students' SEL skills & social emotional development (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills?

Probe: Is it working – why or why not?

7. How does the school encourage SEL skills & social emotional development in students in practices and policies?

8. How does the school encourage SEL skills & social emotional development in students in curriculum and instruction?

9. What do you believe families do to encourage the SEL skills & social emotional development in children?
10. How would you describe your role as related to your students' SEL skills & social emotional development?

Post interview comments and/or observations

Appendix D

Interview Protocol – Families

1. Interviewee Background
    a. How long has your family been a part of this school community?
    b. How many children do you have in the school system?
    c. What grade is your child (children) in?
2. What are your experiences in partnering with the school?
3. How does your school include families and partner with families?
4. Please describe the bond, or close relationship, if any, that you feel with the school?
    a. Please describe the bond, or close relationship, if any, that your child feels with the school?
5. How does your school foster the development of bonds, or close relationships between the student, family, and school?

    Probe: Is it working – why or why not?
6. How does your school create a healthy environment for collaboration with families?
7. How do you foster a partnership with the school?
    a. …As related to students' SEL skills & social emotional development?

Probe: Is it working – why or why not?

8. How does the school encourage SEL skills & social emotional development (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills) in students?

9. How do you own encourage your child's SEL skills & social emotional development?

Post interview comments and/or observations

Appendix E

Document Protocol

Artifact A: Board of Education meeting minutes

1. What are the activities and actions of the school that foster partnerships?
2. What are the activities and actions of the school that foster bonds?
3. What are the activities and actions of the school that foster social activities and engagement with families?
4. How does this document describe the norms, values and beliefs held by the school that affect partnerships?
5. How does this document describe the norms, values and beliefs held by the school that affect SEL skills & social emotional development?

Artifact B: Home and School Association meeting minutes

1. What are the activities and actions of family groups that foster partnerships?
2. What are the activities and actions of the family that foster bonds?
3. What are the activities and actions of families-at-large that foster social activities and engagement with families?
4. How does this document describe the norms, values and beliefs held by families-at-large that affect partnerships?
5. How does this document describe the norms, values and beliefs held by families-at-large that affect SEL skills & social emotional development?

Appendix F

Observation Protocol

School:

Date:

Indicator	**Present**	**Not Present**	**Notes/Evidence/Documentation**
1. The school Mission Statement or Vision Statement includes a commitment to family relationships or partnerships.			
2. The physical place includes elements that show a focus on partnerships.			
3. The physical place includes elements that show a focus on SEL skills & social emotional development, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills).			
4. Partnership between stakeholders is evident in the physical space.			
5. Bonding between individuals, families, and the school is evident in the physical place.			
General Observations:			
Comments:			

Appendix G

Cover Letters of Informed Consent

August 22, 2019

Dr. M.
Superintendent

Dear Dr. M.,

I am currently completing the dissertation portion of the Ed.D. program in Educational Leadership at Rowan University. I am proud to be working with Dr. Ane Johnson as the chair of my committee on a qualitative, ethnographic case study.

The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic case study is to explore partnerships developed between school leaders and families to address social emotional development and learning in the early childhood setting (grades pre-kindergarten through third grade) in small school districts in New Jersey.

Your involvement would include:

- An approximately one-hour interview with you, as the school leader.
- A one-hour interview with five families from your school regarding social emotional development and partnerships.
- A 10-minute walk through observation of your school (not including classrooms).
- Collection of public minutes for Board of Education and Home-School Association (or PTA) meetings.

I would be more than happy to speak with you in-person or over the phone about this opportunity. If you choose to move forward, I would appreciate the approval of the Board of Education at their next meeting and your signature on the attached consent form.
I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you.

Kindest regards,

Christina DiDonato Dillon
Ed.D. Candidate, Rowan University

August 22, 2019

Ms. D.
Principal

Dear Mr. D.,

I am currently completing the dissertation portion of the Ed.D. program in Educational Leadership at Rowan University. I am proud to be working with Dr. Ane Johnson as the chair of my committee on a qualitative, ethnographic case study.

The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic case study is to explore partnerships developed between school leaders and families to address social emotional development and learning in the early childhood setting (grades pre-kindergarten through third grade) in small school districts in New Jersey.

Your involvement would include:

- An approximately one-hour interview with you, as the school leader.
- A one-hour interview with five families from your school regarding social emotional development and partnerships.
- A 10-minute walk through observation of your school (not including classrooms).
- Collection of public minutes for Board of Education and Home-School Association (or PTA) meetings.

I would be more than happy to speak with you in-person or over the phone about this opportunity. If you choose to move forward, I would appreciate the approval of the Board of Education at their next meeting and your signature on the attached consent form.
I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you.

Kindest regards,

Christina DiDonato Dillon
Ed.D. Candidate, Rowan University

August 22, 2019

Ms. L.
Principal

Dear Ms. L.,

I am currently completing the dissertation portion of the Ed.D. program in Educational Leadership at Rowan University. I am proud to be working with Dr. Ane Johnson as the chair of my committee on a qualitative, ethnographic case study.

The purpose of this qualitative, ethnographic case study is to explore partnerships developed between school leaders and families to address social emotional development and learning in the early childhood setting (grades pre-kindergarten through third grade) in small school districts in New Jersey.

Your involvement would include:

- An approximately one-hour interview with you, as the school leader.
- A one-hour interview with five families from your school regarding social emotional development and partnerships.
- A 10-minute walk through observation of your school (not including classrooms).
- Collection of public minutes for Board of Education and Home-School Association (or PTA) meetings.

I would be more than happy to speak with you in-person or over the phone about this opportunity. If you choose to move forward, I would appreciate the approval of the Board of Education at their next meeting and your signature on the attached consent form.
I look forward to the opportunity to speak with you.

Kindest regards,

Christina DiDonato Dillon
Ed.D. Candidate, Rowan University