

**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR EDUCATORS:
ENHANCING PRACTICE AND PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS IN THE CAYMAN ISLANDS**

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Abstract

Many countries around the world including the Cayman Islands are drawing upon the principles of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) to develop curriculum frameworks for early childhood programs in response to the convergence of multidisciplinary research indicating the importance of high-quality care and learning experiences in the early years. This study investigated how teachers and parents in the Cayman Islands are responding to the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework. Specifically, this mixed methods study investigated the effectiveness of a three-month long multi-dimensional professional learning (PL) intervention designed to: 1) enhance teacher and parent understandings of DAP, and 2) empower and support teachers in the design and implementation of two Early Childhood (EC) Parent Open Houses to discuss and share DAP with parents. Four preschools were randomly assigned to either the PL intervention or comparison groups. Prior to the PL intervention, surveys were used to understand parent and teacher views of DAP and parent-teacher relationships (PTRs) finding that teachers and parents have similar views of DAP and that while both parents and teachers rated their PTRs very favorably, parent ratings were significantly higher. Pre-intervention focus groups with PL teachers revealed three themes: dichotomies and uncertainties; more communication needed and barriers to PTRs. The quantitative data analysis found that PL teachers had more positive views of DAP and PTRs after the intervention, a change not found for the comparison teachers. Both the qualitative and quantitative data analyses provided evidence that the PL intervention enhanced teacher understandings and implementation of DAP; empowered teachers, promoted more collegiality and reflexive practice; and improved teacher views of PTRs. Parent focus groups revealed that parents also had positive views of the EC Parent Open Houses. This study can inform ECCE policy and practice in the Cayman Islands.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Over the past several decades, a large body of multidisciplinary research in education, psychology, sociology, medicine and more recently neuroscience, biology and economics has accumulated and converged providing compelling evidence for the critical importance of quality caregiving and early learning experiences during childhood prenatally and in the first five years of life (Black et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2014; Mustard, 2010; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Shore, 1997; Thompson, 2016). In particular, advancements in technology have led to an explosion of research in neuroscience and biology as it applies to human development revealing that 1) the structure of the human brain is not determined at birth; and that 2) early experiences influence whether, when and how genes release their instructions for building future capacity- a biological interplay between the environment and genes called epigenetics (Jamieson et al., Nd; Mustard, 2010; Thompson, 2016). These developmental processes and influences form a strong or vulnerable foundation for lifelong learning, coping, behavior, cognition, resilience, and physical and mental health (Felitti et al., 1998; Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). Stable, enduring, nurturing care and interactions with responsive caregivers along with cognitive stimulation through play and exploration are critical for building this foundation along with adequate sleep, nutrition, and health care (Black et al., 2017; Reidt-Parker & Chainski, 2020; Thompson, 2016; WHO et al., 2018).

With the rise in dual working parents and single parent families over the past several decades, increasingly more young children are receiving group care outside of the home in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings (Raikes, et al., 2023). This trend, along with an extensive body of research evidence indicating the importance of high-quality care during this

time, has spurred economists to assess the impact of investments to improve the quality of care in ECCE settings on human health and productivity (Devercelli & Beaton-Day, 2020; Heckman et al., 2014). While the rate of return on investments in ECCE interventions depends on many factors, including childhood circumstances along with the focus, duration of exposure, and quality of programs being implemented, these economic analyses have consistently shown that countries will make as much as a 13% return on their investment in early childhood, particularly for those children living with disadvantage, due to savings in future costs of health care, social welfare, remedial education, and criminal justice systems (Campbell et al., 2014; Heckman, 2013; Heckman et al., 2014; McCoy et al., 2017; Schweinhardt et. al., 2005). Many global organizations and countries around the world including the Cayman Islands have made great strides to put these new understandings into action, but major challenges remain when it comes to the implementation and evaluation of effective policy, initiatives, practices, interventions, and provision (Raikes et al., 2023; WHO et al., 2018). The next section provides an overview of how this research translates into high quality ECCE provision.

Improving ECCE Globally and in the Cayman Islands

The quality of an early childhood program is determined by both contextual factors and process factors (Slot, 2018). The most influential contextual factors are health and safety, teacher-child ratios, class sizes, amount of indoor and outdoor space per child, the amount and quality of learning resources, and the level of teacher qualifications and experience, especially those that are specific to early childhood (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022; Burns, 2018; McCain, 2020; Melhuish et al., 2015; OECD, 2019; Raikes et al., 2023). With reference to process factors, high quality is determined by looking at caregiving, relationships, pedagogy, and early learning experiences. Contextual indicators influence process factors which in turn have a greater impact

on children's developmental and educational outcomes (Hong et al., 2019; Slot, 2018). The most salient indicators of quality are factors related to the teacher's effectiveness including education, experience, satisfaction, professional development, perceived value, and work environment conditions (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022; McCain, 2020; Melhuish et al., 2015).

Children's development can be promoted by high quality and impeded by low quality programs and high quality ECCE has a well-established compensatory value for children living in lower-quality home environments (Black et al., 2017; McCain et al., 2011; O'Connell et al. 2016; Sylva et al. 2011). With a wide range of quality available, research shows that parents generally make childcare choices as uninformed consumers, rely on intuition, informal recommendations, and preschool reputation, and they also over-estimate quality (Fenech et al., 2019; Mocan, 2007; Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2012; Sollars 2017). It is important to note that inequitable access to high quality ECCE programs plays an important role because parents from lower-income families have access to a smaller selection of programs due to cost restraints which often impact the level of quality (Melhuish et al., 2015; Raikes et al., 2023). In consideration of these findings, it becomes especially important for educators to have closer relationships with parents to enhance understandings of the issues and challenges of ECCE along with indicators of quality, thereby increasing their capacity to drive improvements together through (Fenech et al., 2019; Mocan, 2007). Indeed, many researchers have emphasized a greater need for the voices and opinions of parents and children to be considered when determining and evaluating quality (Brogaard-Clausen, 2015; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Murphy et al., 2021; Nutbrown, 2015; Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2012).

Pedagogy in ECCE can be defined as an early childhood educators' professional practice and understanding of how learning takes place and the practice that supports this, especially in

relation to building and nurturing relationships, decision making, teaching, and learning (Ontario Public Service, 2014). Pedagogy is complex and shaped by views about children, the role of educators and families, and relationships among them as well as aspects of the learning environment and how they are used to foster learning (CECE, 2020). While ideas about what exactly determines quality in ECCE have been debated (Dahlberg, et. al., 2013), the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) policy statement on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; 2020) has been influential in the development of early childhood policy and curriculum frameworks around the globe (Demircan & Erden, 2015; Hegde et al., 2014; Szente & Hoot, 2002). The document focuses on the importance of relationships and play in ECCE settings with a simultaneous consideration of culturally, developmentally, and individually appropriate practices.

In response to wider implementation of DAP in countries around the world, more recent research attention has turned to gaining a better understanding of teacher and parent beliefs and practices regarding DAP in international settings (Akin, 2013; Brown & Lan, 2015; Demircan & Erden, 2015; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Hegde et al., 2014; Jensen, et al., 2021; Vengopal, 2015; Wolf, 2020). Consistent with this focus, the most recent NAEYC statement on DAP reinforced and elaborated on the original intention that practitioners and researchers around the world be empowered decision makers who refine and adapt the guideline in consideration of their specific cultural context through collaborative and respectful relationships with families (Copple & Bredekamp, 2020). ECCE programs have enormous potential to enrich the lives of young children and their families and to promote larger societal change and yet this potential has yet to be fully realized. While significant, the statistical effect sizes for the impact of high-quality

ECCE programs on beneficial outcomes for children are half those of the impact of the home environment (Leseman & Slot, 2014; Melhuish et al., 2015). For this reason, influential global organizations are emphasizing the importance of high quality ECCE provision that harnesses its full potential to enhance the care and early experiences of young children in both the preschool and home environments through the promotion of collaborative relationships with families as emphasized in DAP (Murphy et al., 2021; OECD, 2017; Slot, 2018; WHO et al., 2018).

Along with many other countries, the Cayman Islands continues to draw from understandings of quality provision and DAP to enhance the care and education of young children in ECCE settings. The present study examines one way of building upon a specific cultural context in this endeavor by engaging with stakeholders in early childhood, including parents and teachers. The following section discusses the rationale for the study along with its theoretical and conceptual framework.

Research Problem

Recently developed government policy documents agree that early childhood teachers are integral in cultivating authentic caring relationships with children and their families and therefore in providing higher quality childcare in both the home and ECCE settings (Murphy et al., 2021; OECD, 2017). Therefore, it is concerning that the creation and nurturing of relationships with families has been identified as ‘the weakest component of the movement toward quality childcare’ (Douglass & Gittell, 2012, p. 270). Early childhood programs struggle to establish and maintain equitable communication and interactions with families (Hughes & McNaughton, 2002; Reedy & McGrath, 2010; Rentzou, 2011) and this struggle continues throughout later schooling in a way that serves to privilege families with the kind of cultural and social capital compatible with and more recognized by teachers and schools (Hill, 2010; Miller, et. al., 2014). Teachers

consistently indicate that building and sustaining positive relationships with families is a significant challenge and one that they feel least prepared to handle effectively (Downer & Myers, 2010; McFarland-Piazzese et al., 2012; Murphy et al., 2021; Sewell, 2012). This concern is magnified by the consistent research finding that parent and teacher beliefs regarding relationships with families show a positivity bias when compared to practice (Hughes & MacNaughton 2002; McGrath, 2007; Rentzou, 2011; Zellman & Perlman, 2006).

Other issues related to establishing high quality parent-teacher relationships center around beliefs and practices. Incongruent beliefs between early childhood teachers and parents regarding child-rearing practices and early years pedagogy have been connected to the finding that some early year's teachers hold negative attitudes about parents (McGrath, 2007; Shpancer, 2002; Rentzou, 2011). This incongruence can negatively impact the quality of parent-teacher relationships (Robson, 2006). Minke and colleagues (2014) found that when parents and teachers shared similar positive views of their relationship, teacher reports of the child's social skills and behavior were more positive. When considering the many benefits of promoting equitable and mutually supportive family-school partnerships along with the discrepancy between policy and actual practice, additional research investigating more effective teacher preparation and initiatives in this area continues to be identified as a need by stakeholders in the field (Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Murphy et al., 2021; O'Connor et al., 2018; Powell et al., 2010; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017; Reedy & McGrath, 2010; Sewell, 2012).

The present study is consistent with current research directions that have moved away from establishing whether or not parent engagement and quality parent-teacher relationships are beneficial for children towards the more practical question: "What specific educational initiatives and practices are effective in promoting respectful, reciprocal and supportive parent-teacher

relationships in ECCE settings that promote parent engagement?” Research studies are needed to isolate specific educational initiatives that are effective, realistic and feasible in achieving these goals more universally. Furthermore, most of the research in this area of interest is correlational, such that the direction of influence may be that favorable child learning and development causes increased parent engagement and more positive relationships with teachers and not the other way around (Reynolds & Shlafer, 2010). Research studies that evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programs, such as in the present study, will help to determine the direction of influence so that initiatives can be most effective (Downer & Myers, 2010).

International Field Experience as a Foundation for the Research

In order to more effectively understand the worlds a researcher seeks to understand, it is important for the researcher to outline the theoretical assumptions and professional experiences informing his or her inquiry (Oliver, 2012). Given that the motivation and idea for the present study came from the researcher’s professional experiences over the past twenty-five years, a brief overview is beneficial to situate the researcher within this inquiry.

I was educated in Canada and worked as a teacher until moving to the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) where I assisted in the founding of the ECCE certificate program at the TCI Community College. The majority of students were mature students who had been teaching for many years without formal training and so this led to many rich class discussions about the course content being so different from their experiences in an education system that was placing a strong emphasis on obedience, conformity, and direct instruction of academic content. The teachers became motivated to advocate for change and so to assist the teachers, I created and implemented the College Teacher Education Program (CTEP) together with the Principal of the TCI Community College. The CTEP was a non-profit charitable organization consisting of a

demonstration preschool, practice teaching placements, scholarships for local children, a resource lending library, information sessions for parents and professional development for teachers. The program evolved in response to collaborative feedback from the student teachers in a grass roots approach that was responsive and culturally sensitive. Although formal data were not collected, informal observations and participant feedback indicated a positive impact.

In 2010, I moved to Singapore where I worked on government early childhood initiatives as a curriculum writer and facilitator of information sessions for teachers and parents. These two international experiences shaped the motivation, objectives and ideas of this research study and the Cayman Islands provided the ideal setting to examine these ideas through formal research. Through fieldwork in preschools as Vice-President and President of the Cayman Islands Early Childhood Association, a registered non-profit organization, I was provided with the opportunity to become familiar with the early childhood sector in the Cayman Islands. This knowledge of the specific context informed the present study thereby increasing relevance and sensitivity.

Identified Need in the Cayman Islands

This study not only seeks to advance the research base by examining the effectiveness of a professional learning intervention but also seeks to meet an identified need in the Cayman Islands. While the Cayman Islands continues to make great strides in enhancing the quality of ECCE provision, field work and discussions with stakeholders highlighted the importance of enhancing parent-teacher communication and relationships in ECCE settings to support effective parenting and to share information about early childhood pedagogy. On a global level, this research study responds to calls for more research that examines how teachers in international contexts are responding to cultural issues that relate to and possibly contrast with the implementation of DAP (Brown & Lan, 2015; Sanders & Farago, 2018), while also responding

to calls for the examination of the less researched perspectives of parents as they respond to the same issues (Demircan & Erden, 2015; Majercikova & Hornickova, 2020; Miller et al., 2014).

The next section will provide a general overview of the key political, economic, and social features of the Cayman Islands along with a description of recent initiatives as the Cayman Islands Government has increasingly turned its resources and attention toward ECCE.

The Cayman Islands and ECCE

Located in the central Caribbean, the Cayman Islands are a parliamentary democracy and an overseas territory of the United Kingdom. In 2021, the population of the Cayman Islands was recorded at 71,105 with approximately half of the population comprised of Caymanians and the other half comprised of expatriates from many countries around the world. It is a major offshore financial center and this along with tourism contributes to more than 70% of the GDP which in 2021 was recorded at US\$72,416.00 per capita (Economics and Statistics Office, n.d.). With a very low unemployment rate and a high GDP per capita, the Cayman Islands offers one of the highest standards of living compared to other countries in the world. Public education is mandatory from the age of four years and nine months to age sixteen and free to Caymanians. With reference to early childhood provision, there are 31 privately owned preschools, one publicly funded preschool and 10 reception programs in public primary schools (Cayman Islands Government, 2020). In 2018, widescale inspections of preschools were implemented by the Office of Education Standards indicating that there is a wide variation in quality provision and in the implementation of the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework, with the lower fee-charging preschools being rated as significantly lower quality than the higher fee-charging preschools (Office of Education Standards, 2020). Furthermore, this gap widens in relation to the socio-economic level of the families the preschool serves due to the downward pressure on

tuition fees. The large majority of preschools are privately owned and managed on a for-profit basis. In line with many other countries, childcare workers (in preschools or in homes) receive very low salaries when compared to remuneration for teachers in elementary schools with mean monthly earnings of \$1209 that correspond to the fees charged by the preschool (Economics and Statistics Office, 2017). The remainder of this section provides a brief overview of policies and initiatives in ECCE in the Cayman Islands.

In 1997, a group of early childhood educators founded the Cayman Islands Early Childhood Association (CIECA), a registered non-profit organization to enhance the care and early learning experiences of young children in the Cayman Islands through teacher training and advocacy. In 2011, the Cayman Islands Ministry of Education established an Early Childhood Care and Education Unit to support their goal to ensure that all children in the country have access to high quality ECCE provision. This coincided with an increased emphasis on child safeguarding and child welfare national policies and initiatives. In 2012, the Education Quality Assurance (EQA) Unit was established to set standards and support improvements in day-care centers, pre-schools and reception programs. The EQA unit conducted a large-scale evaluation of preschools finding that the quality of provision offered was wide and varied (Cayman Islands Government, n.d.). In response, the Education Council Guidelines for ECCE centers were created in 2013 to provide information on how to become registered along with detailed information about provision, premises, health, safety, child safeguarding, leadership, and management (Cayman Islands Government, 2013).

In 2014, the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework (CIEYCF) was created by the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit to provide “support and guidance for professionals as they plan and facilitate developmentally appropriate learning experiences that

cultivate key dispositions for life-long learning” (Cayman Islands Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 8). In April of 2014, the Education Council ratified the CIEYCF as the national ECCE curriculum and efforts were underway to promote its implementation through teacher training sessions. The aspiration statement that frames the document is as follows: “Children will be self-confident, resilient, critical thinkers who are intrinsically motivated to explore their world through play and active learning, able to clearly communicate their thoughts and ideas with respect to the people and the world around them (Cayman Islands Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 9).” As such, the framework marked a shift from more traditional academic and instructional approaches common to the Caribbean region (Kinkead-Clark, 2020).

Statement of Purpose

The present study seeks to gain a better understanding of the views of parents and teachers in the lower fee-charging preschools as they navigate through the challenges of implementing the CIEYCF within the social, cultural, and economic context of the Cayman Islands. In the creation of the CIEYCF document, relevant stakeholders in education were consulted and their feedback was incorporated into the document (Cayman Islands Ministry of Education, 2015). However, to date, no formal research has been conducted to understand teacher and parent responses to the CIEYCF. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of a professional learning intervention that supports early years teachers in establishing quality relationships with parents while enhancing understandings of the early childhood pedagogy of the CIEYCF.

Specifically, this research study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the views of early years teachers and parents about parent-teacher relationships and DAP as outlined in the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework (CIEYCF) and how do these views compare within and between teachers and parents?

2. Does a multi-dimensional professional learning intervention to support teachers in creating and implementing two parent-teacher sharing and discussion sessions (EC Parent Open Houses) have an impact on teacher-reported views of DAP as outlined in the CIEYCF and parent-teacher relationships? If so, how?

3. What are the teachers' perspectives about the professional learning process and the EC Parent Open Houses following completion of the intervention?

4. What are the parent perspectives about ECCE, PTRs and the EC Parent Open Houses following the completion of the intervention?

5. In what ways do the data from the surveys and the focus groups converge and in what ways do these convergences connect with the impact of the professional learning intervention?

In Chapter One, the context and importance of the study has been presented. Chapter Two provides an overview of the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study followed by a review of the extant literature on parent engagement, parent-teacher relationships, early childhood pedagogy and professional learning in ECCE. Chapter Three provides a description of the methodology for the study, the professional learning intervention, and the data collection and analysis strategy. Chapter Four presents the results of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis and the convergence of these two data sets. Chapter Five discusses the findings and how they connect with the existing literature, the implications and limitations of the study and ideas for future research directions.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The motivation for this study came from the researcher's participation in educational initiatives and advocacy in international Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) settings to support parents and teachers in caring for young children and to enhance teacher and parent understandings of early childhood pedagogy and the importance of the early years. The involvement and engagement of parents in their children's education has long been viewed as beneficial for children (Epstein, 1995) and is an essential standard for the National Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation (NAEYC, 2005). Throughout the international field of ECCE, parent engagement and school family partnerships are viewed as essential to the provision of high-quality care to young children (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022; OECD, 2012; Murphy et al., 2021). Initially termed parent involvement, the definition was primarily limited to parents attending school-based activities or supporting the work of the school through home-based activities such as helping with homework. Earlier research primarily focused on the impact of parent involvement on academic achievement in elementary and secondary school but there has been a more recent shift to studying social and emotional development. Challenges in defining and operationalizing parent involvement in research, policy, and practice led researchers to use qualitative methods to understand stakeholder perspectives. In response to these findings, a conceptualization of parent involvement that is more complex, multi-dimensional, and relational emerged resulting in a corresponding shift to a focus on parent engagement, parent-teacher relationships, and family-school partnerships (Ishimaru, 2019; Murphy, et al., 2021; O'Connor et al., 2018).

This shift in focus lends itself to the significant role early childhood programs and teachers can play in enhancing and supporting parent-child relationships (O'Connor et al., 2018). Supporting strong and mutually supportive relationships and partnerships between early childhood programs and families is a powerful way to improve children's education, health and wellbeing in both preschool and the home (Murphy et al., 2021). While conventional approaches to parent involvement and one-way information sharing from school to home persist in many educational settings, researchers are emphasizing the importance of more reciprocal and relational strategies to build parent capacity (Ishimaru, 2019; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). This is especially important given the common finding in the research that teacher and parent reported barriers to traditional definitions of parent involvement are magnified for cultural minorities and lower-income families who are more likely to cite confidence issues, multiple demands, and poverty stressors as barriers (Johnson et al., 2003; Gross et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to focus on individualized and responsive parent engagement opportunities that are more in tune with each family's needs, circumstances, and preferences.

This literature review will present research related to parent engagement and parent-teacher relationships in connection with understandings of early childhood pedagogy. An argument will be put forth that providing opportunities for two-way communication and interaction between parents and teachers in equitable and achievable ways is an effective way to realize the affiliation, confidence, understanding and trust in this relationship that facilitates enhanced care of young children in both the home and at school. The literature review will end with a review of evidenced-based interventions and professional learning experiences that promote parent engagement and higher quality parent-teacher relationships. Finally, a case will

be made for the need to investigate the effectiveness of the professional learning intervention proposed in this study.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In an attempt to gain a better understanding of the powerful influence of the family on developmental outcomes for children, researchers have looked at both intra-family interactions and the external influences acting upon them. Like other research studies in this area of interest, the present study draws upon Ecological Systems theory to understand the bidirectional interactions between children and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Consistent with Symbolic Interactionism theory, the focus was on understanding how individuals construct ideas and make meaning through social interactions with others within a cultural context (Blumer, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978).

Ecological Systems Theory

Children develop in an environment of relationships with the adults in their life through warm, responsive caregiving and serve and return interactions (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2009). Ecological systems theory holds that development not only results from individual child factors and interactions with significant others but is also influenced by the bidirectional interactions between the systems in the child's environment. These systems include the more direct influences of family, parenting, peers, and school and then move outwards toward the less direct external influences of the community, culture, economic, and political conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). A developmental-ecological systems theory has been most often used as the theoretical perspective guiding research studies that investigate parent engagement and family-school partnerships in educational settings (Downer & Myers, 2010). The present study is guided by the principle of schools as "systems of relations," in which the needs and interests of

children and families are linked to and dependent on the needs and interests of teachers and community members and this is influenced through complex systems of bidirectional interactions (Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory proposes that a child's development is impacted by five interrelated environmental systems that move from a more direct proximal influence to a more indirect distal influence on development. The microsystem is comprised of any setting in which the child is exposed to (e.g., home, school, etc.) and the mesosystem refers to relationships that exist between any two microsystems (e.g., family-school partnerships). Moving outward, Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes an exosystem as "one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (p. 25). The outer macrosystem forms the sociocultural context within which all other systems operate and influence the developing child (e.g., culture, political systems, etc.). Given that Ecological Systems Theory proposes that the family and the school are the primary contexts within which development occurs, researchers have investigated the effects of aligning the two through efforts to promote parent engagement in schools and mutually supportive family-school partnerships.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism theory contends that symbolism expressed in language through social interactions is fundamental to meaning making and interpretation of the world (Benzies & Allen, 2001). It is this development of thought and meaning that influences an individual's actions and behavior in relation to a person's goals and their perceptions of the consequences of actions; thus, these interpretations are continuously being "formed, sustained, weakened, and transformed in their interaction" (Blumer 1969, p. 21). Symbolic Interactionism is not as

concerned with objective truths but instead with the subjective experience individuals have with objects (ideas, roles, social norms, behaviors, actions), events, and situations as they continuously construct and revise meanings through social interactions (Allen & Henderson, 2022; Blumer, 1969).

Symbolic Interactionism has served as a framework for qualitative research methods and is particularly effective when investigating complex social behavior, identifying problems, and investigating the effectiveness of solutions in applied practice (Oliver, 2012). It is not only concerned with knowing an individual's point of view, but also with how that point of view developed and how it can change or stay the same over time (Benzies & Allen, 2001). For program evaluation and applied research, the study of the original meaning and influence of symbols and shared meanings can uncover what is most important to people and how this impacts their responses to changing circumstances (Patton, 2015). Symbolic Interactionism focuses on how we “draw on common discourses, the shared understandings of our reference groups, and our own experiences and personal history to define and act in the unique present situation” (Oliver, 2012, p. 414). This is particularly relevant to parent and teacher beliefs and behavior in relation to parenting and early childhood care and education. The present study is guided by the ideas and research methods of the Symbolic Interactionism perspective because this perspective is participant-centered and sensitive to the lives and circumstances of individuals within cultural and social contexts (Benzies & Allen, 2001). The format and approach to the professional learning also draws from Symbolic Interactionism by focusing on relationships, interactions, and investigating the effectiveness of solutions in applied practice as a team.

Symbolic Interactionism has been criticized for its over emphasis on personal agency and that it does not give enough credence to the powerful influence of macrosystems (economy,

social institutions, dominant discourses, laws, etc.) over an individual's reality and understandings. The present study addresses this by integrating Symbolic Interactionism with Ecological Systems Theory to understand how individual perspectives are constructed and re-constructed at the micro level, co-constructed through social interactions and relationships at the meso-level and how these processes are influenced by wider external influences at the macro-level. It is hypothesized that opportunities for interaction and dialogue will positively impact parent-teacher relationships via enhanced understanding of perspectives. This dialogue has the potential to establish and progress a working relationship that focuses on the needs and best interests of the child (Edwards et al., 2012). Furthermore, this working relationship may be especially beneficial given the changing landscape of ECCE in the Cayman Islands and around the world.

In conclusion, a consideration of theory, research and context indicate that it is important for ECCE programs to focus on promoting and supporting parent engagement and parent-teacher relationships. The following section will provide an overview of the understandings and research findings related to parent engagement in education.

Parent Engagement

Defining Parent Engagement

Parent engagement is a complex and multi-dimensional social construct that has been defined in many different ways in educational research, policy, and practice. The operationalization and measurement of parent engagement has presented challenges when synthesizing the large body of research due to a lack of consensus and consistency on an empirical definition (Reynolds & Shlafer, 2010; Shute et al., 2011). Several important factors have presented these inconsistencies including the significance of the age of the child; the

influence of culture; the complexity of the multiple ways to be involved; the influence of parental circumstances and life stressors; and the importance of considering the bidirectional and transactional nature of parent engagement (Fantuzzo et al., 2000). In response to these issues, researchers have attempted to clarify the definition of parent engagement through theoretical models and measurement tools. Among the most popular is Epstein's (1995; 2009) model that outlines six types of involvement: parenting programs; communicating (conferences, home visits); parent volunteering; learning at home; decision making (PTA); and collaborating with the community. Drawing upon Ecological Systems Theory, Epstein's model presents three overlapping spheres of influence with the developing child at the center surrounded by family, school, and the community. The degree of overlap between the three spheres represents shared influence and is impacted by the philosophy and practices of each sphere along with time, age of the child, and current social conditions. Through this model, Epstein (2001) moved the focus of parent engagement as activities toward a focus on relationships by contending that, "the 'maximum' overlap occurs when schools and families operate as true 'partners' with frequent cooperative efforts and clear, close communication between parents and teachers" (p. 29).

The present study takes this broader definition of parent engagement as a multidimensional complex system of influence that is promoted through an on-going, reciprocal, strengths-based partnership between families and early childhood programs to support and enhance the learning, development and wellbeing of young children in both the home and in school (Clarke et al., 2010; Downer & Meyers, 2010; Halgunseth et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2021; Sheridan et al., 2012). This conceptualization considers the many varied and beneficial ways for parents to be engaged beyond the traditional emphasis of volunteering in the classroom, fundraising, attending parent councils, and engaging in school-designated and related tasks with

children in the home (Sheridan et al., 2008; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Schools can more effectively meet the specialized and diverse needs of young children and families by promoting a wide array of parent engagement opportunities (Miller et al., 2014). The next session provides an overview of research findings on the impact of parent engagement.

Benefits of Parent Engagement

Research studies initially focused on assessing the impact of parent engagement on the academic achievement of children in elementary and secondary schools (Fan & Chen, 2001; Lamb-Parker et al., 2001; Pirchio et al., 2013; Sheridan et al., 2012). Given this large body of research, several meta-analyses have been conducted finding that there is substantial evidence that the extent and quality of parent engagement in a child's elementary education is associated with positive outcomes related to many aspects of overall adjustment, positive attitudes and school achievement (Boonk et al., 2018; Dearing et al., 2004; El Nokali et al., 2010; Erdem & Kaya, 2020; Jeynes, 2005; 2012; 2017; Kim, 2019; Ma et al., 2015; Seginer, 2006). Furthermore, this association has been found for children of all socioeconomic groups (Brody et al., 2002; Serpell & Mashburn, 2012). A meta-synthesis of nine meta-analysis studies conducted by Wilder (2014) found that even though definitions of parent engagement and measures of academic achievement varied considerably across studies, there is still a consistently positive association between the two. More specifically, research findings have shown that (a) reading at home, (b) parents holding high expectations/aspirations for their children's education, (c) communication between parents and children regarding school, and (d) parent encouragement and support for learning have the strongest relationship to school achievement; whereas parent control and supervision of homework have the weakest effect (Boonk, et al., 2018; Wilder, 2014). Furthermore, there is a greater positive effect of parent engagement on student achievement when grades and teacher ratings are used versus standardized tests. While a positive relationship

between parent engagement and school achievement is well established, the variation in the strength of the relationship is based on many factors including socioeconomic status along with individual characteristics of parents and children (Ma et al., 2016; Wilder, 2014).

Whereas several meta-analyses reviewed above have explored the effects of parent engagement on students' academic performance, only one has summarized the effects on social and emotional development even though the latter is associated with many important outcomes for children including school achievement. In 2019, Sheridan and colleagues looked at the impact of parent engagement interventions on social, emotional, and mental health child outcomes finding an overall positive relationship. The greatest effects were found for parent-teacher relationships, information sharing, communication and joint responsibility for children's learning (Sheridan et al., 2019). Consistent with the research on school achievement, parent engagement with homework was not found to be significantly related to any social-behavioral or mental health outcomes. In relation to parenting, Ansari and Gershoff (2015) looked at parent engagement in Head Start programs in a large sample of over 1000 children from low-income families finding that center policies promoting parent engagement improved parenting behaviors which in turn were associated with gains in children's academic and behavioral skills. As attention has turned toward the relationship between parent engagement and social and behavioral outcomes, there has also been an increased focus on parent engagement in ECCE provision.

Parent Engagement in ECCE

Given that the positive influence of parent engagement is greater at the elementary level than in secondary school (Jeynes, 2007), research attention has been increasingly turned towards understanding parent engagement in ECCE settings. As attendance rates continue to rise, ECCE

programs are largely becoming the first point of contact between families and schools.

Therefore, the nature of this first experience can have a lasting impact on views and attitudes about school and the overall wellbeing of children and their families (Gray, 2013). Additionally, the first experience with school is the time when parents are figuring out their own role construction of how they can and might like to be involved in their child's education (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). Indeed, research studies have found that higher levels of parent engagement in ECCE lead to higher levels in elementary school (Englund et al. 2007; Hayakawa, et al., 2013). This section provides an overview of research that has looked at the long and short-term benefits of parent engagement during early childhood (OECD, 2012; Serpell & Mashburn, 2012).

As with research studies with older children, researchers consistently find a positive impact of parent engagement on children's learning and social development during the preschool years (Arnold et al., 2008; Graue et al., 2004; Powell et al., 2010). Taylor and Machida (1994) found a correlation between teacher ratings of parent engagement and teacher ratings of child development and Marcon (1999) found a positive correlation between teacher-rated level of parent engagement and teacher ratings of language, social, motor, and adaptive development in a sample of low-income urban children attending Head Start programs. Furthermore, research has also found that if a teacher views a parent as more engaged, they also report a closer relationship with the child and view the child's behavior more favorably (Cutshaw et al., 2022). Ma et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of 46 studies in later ECCE and elementary school, finding a strong correlation between parent engagement and a variety of learning and developmental outcomes. The influence of parents on these positive outcomes was found to be greater than the influence of schools. Behavioral involvement in school, home support, and home-school connection was most important for parents, whereas building institutional capacity to engage and

form parent partnerships through effective leadership was important for schools (Ma et al., 2016).

These research findings have led researchers to propose models of how parent engagement may support young children's learning and school success. Gross et al. (2020) proposed three models. The parent investment model refers to parents investing in home-based activities and behaviors that promote their child's learning, self-esteem and social and emotional development. The teacher investment model refers to teachers investing more into promoting learning and adjusting expectations for individual children if they have closer relationships with their parents. The social capital model refers to the benefits and resources gained when parents and teachers participate in a social network in which there is a greater community of mutual support and appreciation. The researchers call for further study to understand the processes through which parent engagement supports children's learning and wellbeing in ECCE (Gross et al. 2020). The differing definitions and operationalizations of parent engagement make it difficult to draw comparisons between studies and to determine the specific activities and school initiatives that are most effective (Reynolds & Shlafer, 2010). In response, researchers have been working towards a more commonly agreed upon definition of parent engagement.

Defining and Measuring Parent Engagement

In an attempt to arrive at a more standardized definition of parent engagement that is appropriate and specific to both its complex nature and ECCE, Fantuzzo et al. (2000) adapted Epstein's (1995) framework to develop the Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ) in ECCE. The FIQ is a multidimensional scale of parent engagement in ECCE that focuses on home support (learning activities/environment); direct school contact (communications) and inhibited involvement (barriers such as time constraints, financial stressors, etc.) (Fantuzzo, 2002). In

2006, Fantuzzo and colleagues extended this work by creating the Parent Satisfaction with Educational Experiences tool that asks parents to rate their interactions with their child's ECCE program in relation to teacher, classroom and school contact experiences. This research study found that in addition to role construction and efficacy, parents were also influenced by whether or not they perceived that their child's school wants them to be involved (Fantuzzo et al., 2006). This finding has also occurred in previous research studies (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and is evidenced by the finding that Head Start parents have higher levels of parent engagement than other ECCE programs that typically do not promote parent engagement to the same degree (Fantuzzo et al., 2006; Marcon, 1999). More recently, VanVoorhis et al. (2013) developed a parent engagement model with four categories: activities at home to promote learning, participation in school-based activities, school outreach, and support of parenting to promote the child's wellbeing in the home. When distinguishing between parent-initiated and school-initiated parent engagement, research has found that both have a positive impact on student outcomes independently of each other but when combined the impact is increased (Jeynes, 2012; Smith et al., 2022).

More recent research studies have extended these models by investigating how stakeholders in ECCE define parent engagement. Gross et al. (2020) interviewed parents, teachers, early childhood staff, district leaders and community leaders in an urban system serving primarily low-income families about their definitions of parent engagement. This study found universal agreement that trust and communication is important; however, specific activities to achieve this were varied along with views of whether parent engagement is the school's responsibility or a shared responsibility. School leaders described parents attending school events, conferences and being involved in decision making as important indicators of parent

engagement, whereas fewer parents included these activities in their definitions. While school-based activities were most likely to be described by all stakeholders, a wide range of activities were described in this category with volunteering on school field trips as most common. Parents being informed about what happens at school was also widely described along with expressions of frustration from both parents and teachers that responsiveness to communications is a challenge. The researchers concluded that there is agreement regarding general definitions of parent engagement but a wide range of views about specific indicators of the construct (Gross et al. 2020).

In addition to challenges operationalizing PE, there are also methodological issues related to inferring causation in studies that find correlations between parent engagement and positive child outcomes (Reynolds & Shlafer, 2010; Zellman & Perlman, 2006). These studies are affected by the well-established finding that socioeconomic status (SES) influences both parent engagement and child adjustment and achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012). Perhaps parent engagement is an indicator, motivator or even the result of a child's social and emotional wellbeing and/or success in school rather than the cause (Zellman & Perlman, 2006).

Researchers have addressed these issues in three ways: through statistical controls, through looking at schools in low SES areas with high levels of parent engagement (such as Head Start), and through intervention studies.

Intervention Studies Promoting Parent Engagement in ECCE

An interest in interventions to support parents and increase parent engagement in early childhood began with two influential studies in particular. The Chicago Longitudinal study is an experimental study of an intervention program designed to support parents (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). The researchers randomly assigned 1539 children from low-income homes to the

program's Child Parent Centers or to a comparison group and followed these children for two decades. The researchers found many of the same positive benefits as a comparable longitudinal experimental study known as the Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al., 2005) including higher achievement, improved test scores, less referrals to special education, a reduction in child abuse and neglect, more high school completion, less delinquency, more college attendance, and less arrests and depression in adulthood. While the Perry Preschool project focused on preschool provision with home visits to support parents, the Chicago Longitudinal study used parent centers to support parents with dedicated staff organizing programs of interest and linking parents to requested services and sources of support. In the Caribbean region, a longitudinal study by Walker, et al. (2005) looked at the impact of supporting parenting and home environments through a nutritional supplementation and psycho-social stimulation intervention on stunted 9-24 month old children in Jamaica. The study found that while both components of the program enhanced development when compared to the control group, psychosocial stimulation was most effective in reducing cognitive and educational deficits in adolescence.

Since these early intervention studies, many studies have been conducted to investigate the impact of interventions to enhance child development and learning through parent engagement in ECCE. Pelletier and Brent (2002) looked at parent reports of their self-efficacy and their level of parent engagement in a school-based readiness program that required parents to spend time in the classroom with teachers who served as models of positive adult-child interactions. The program led to higher parental reports of self-efficacy and this correlated with increased parent engagement (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Purtell et al. (2021) investigated a model of parent engagement that focused on building connections among children, parents, teachers, schools, and the larger community to ease the transition to kindergarten. The study found that the

program led to significantly higher teacher ratings of parent engagement and parent-teacher relationships and that this effect was greater when a home visiting component was added (Purtell et al., 2021). Shoji and colleagues (2014) looked at the perspectives of low-income Latino families who participated in an after-school program called FAST (Families and Schools Together) designed to promote parent engagement. This study used qualitative focus groups to extend findings from survey data that the program promotes social networks, social bonding, social capital, and affiliations. The qualitative data analysis found corroborating evidence that the program promoted a sense of group membership, repeated reciprocal social exchange, adoption of values through communication, shared experiences, and connections to the school (Shoji et al., 2014). In 2017, Turley and colleagues extended this research finding that the program also reduced children's behavior problems through increasing family connections and social capital.

The majority of correlational studies on interventions to improve parent engagement target parents as program recipients (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). However, research evidence also suggests that interventions targeting teacher attitudes and beliefs about parent engagement may also be beneficial to students, particularly students with additional needs and/or those facing challenges in their home environment (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). This may be especially important given the finding that teacher perceptions and reports of parent engagement, but not parent perceptions, mediate the effects of parent engagement interventions (Sheridan et al., 2012). One explanation for this finding is that the mutual information sharing and dialogue in a partnership approach is effective at supporting students. Additionally, if a student is struggling in school, a teacher may view that child more positively and increase interactions in a more supportive and committed manner if the teacher perceives that the student's parents are involved with the teacher's efforts to assist the child (Stormont et al., 2013). Thompson et al. (2017)

examined the impact of the Incredible Years teacher training program on teacher perceptions of parent engagement. Prior to the intervention, teachers who felt parent engagement was low were more likely to rate students as having more externalizing behaviors and fewer social competencies. Following the intervention, teachers who received the training were more likely to transition to a more adaptive view of parent engagement. Findings of the study support the promise of teacher training specific to parent engagement as beneficial for reducing teacher biases (Thompson et al., 2017). As such, the focus can shift away from viewing lower parent engagement as a result of deficiencies of parents toward looking at school barriers to parent engagement such as teacher beliefs and attitudes and school friendliness (Kim, 2009).

It is important to note that parents can have high levels of contact with teachers but if these contacts are predominantly negative, it may adversely impact teacher-child-parent relationships. This has been found to be more prevalent in families who have children in need of extra support across school and home settings. Early childhood teachers both require and express a need for the knowledge and skills to interact with and support all families as well as linking them to community support programs when needed (Murphy et al., 2021; Stormont et al., 2013). This is especially important given that family poverty is associated with lower parent and teacher reported parent engagement in ECCE (Cutshaw et al., 2022). Parent engagement interventions have been found to positively change parent behaviors, but parental uptake can be a challenge, particularly for families experiencing stressors. The next session provides an overview of the research that has investigated the motivators and barriers to parent engagement in ECCE.

Motivators and Barriers to Parent Engagement in ECCE

Given the research support for the benefits of parent engagement and parent support initiatives in ECCE, researchers have been placing a greater emphasis on listening to the voices

of parents as the key to developing parent engagement initiatives that are both effective and taken up by parents. The Head Start programs in the United States serve as a valuable resource for study because they serve children in low-income neighborhoods and they mandate formalized parent engagement as an integral component of their two-generational focus (Henrich & Gadaire, 2008). Waanders, Mendez, and Downer (2007) looked at parent characteristics, economic stress, and neighborhood context and their relationship to parent engagement in Head Start programs. In support of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model (1995) outlining the reasons parents become engaged, the researchers found that parent characteristics such as sense of efficacy, education, and ideas about the role of teachers and parents in education were found to have an influence on home-based parent engagement, whereas context variables such as economic stress and neighborhood social disorder were found to have a greater influence on parent-teacher relationships. Furthermore, levels of home-based and school-based involvement were not correlated with each other suggesting that some parents may be choosing between these two ways of being engaged in their child's education (Waanders et al., 2007).

Studies of ECCE programs that do offer formalized parent engagement programs have indicated that low attendance by parents is often a challenging issue (Duncan et al., 2006; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). The barriers to parent engagement as revealed by parents include time constraints, schedule conflicts, having a baby at home, divorce, lack of energy, lack of interest, language barriers, self-consciousness, lack of confidence, lack of course relevance, personal problems, situational barriers, lack of childcare and time (Johnson et al., 2003; Lamb-Parker et al., 2001). Furthermore, socio-demographic factors interact with these deterrents such that cultural minorities, lower income, and unemployed parents cite confidence issues more often in addition to personal problems, childcare, and cost issues (Johnson et al., 2003). Many existing

parent engagement activities are less feasible for parents with limited resources. In a recent study, Gross et al. (2020) developed and assessed a measure of parent engagement in ECCE that accounts for these inequities by capturing behaviors and perspectives linked to children's success that are feasible for parents with limited incomes and resources (Gross et al., 2020). The Parent Engagement in ECCE Survey yielded three theoretically meaningful factors:

knowledge/expectations (i.e., parents knowing what their child is learning and holding high expectations), trust/communication, and home-based engagement (i.e., parents actively support learning outside of school). Results showed that the survey is correlated with children's academic success, positively associated with teacher ratings of parent engagement, equitable for parents, and actionable for schools (Gross et al., 2020).

Researchers have also identified barriers to parent engagement as revealed by teachers including lack of training to effectively deal with parents and support families and views that parents are disinterested (Grossman, 1999; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Parent engagement initiatives can respond to these barriers by being realistic, respectful, and relevant while also building upon the capacities and strengths of both teachers and parents. This approach is referred to as family-centered practice. Family-centered practice is a strengths-based approach that consists of a set of professional attitudes, behaviors, and practices that value collaboration with families in help giving programs that are participatory (activities to develop existing competencies) and relational (professional attitudes, such as empathy, respect, active listening, collaboration) (Dempsey & Dunst, 2004; Espe-Sherwindt, 2008; Peck et al., 2015). This approach is associated with more positive results than professionally centered practice that takes more of a deficit view of the family through a one-way approach (Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014). A closer look at the tenets of family centered practice sheds light on why traditional

intervention efforts that focus on instilling knowledge and skills alone are not as effective as programs that also focus on parental sense of competency, beliefs, preferences, needs and feelings of self-efficacy (Coleman & Karraker, 1998; Korfmacher et al., 2007). Through family-centered practice, opportunities for parent engagement can be provided more effectively by carefully listening to and responding to parents and by addressing the commonly identified barriers to parent engagement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lamb-Parker et al., 2001; Waanders et al., 2007).

When reviewing the research on teacher and parent reported barriers to parent engagement, a convincing argument can be made that the critical component to success in promoting parent engagement is through two-way communication and high-quality mutually responsive parent-teacher relationships in early childhood programs. The remainder of the literature review focuses on communication and relationships followed by professional learning activities to promote both parent engagement and parent-teacher relationships.

Parent-Teacher Relationships in ECCE

Parent-teacher relationships (PTRs) are an important but relatively understudied component of children's preschool experience (Zulauf-McCurdy & Loomis, 2023). While PTRs are important throughout schooling, they can be viewed as especially important in ECCE programs because very young children do not have the language skills to be able to inform their parents about their experiences at school (ICDI, 2012; Powell, 1998). It is not surprising then that the quality of PTRs has positive effects on parent engagement, school readiness, academic success, student motivation, mental health, social and emotional skills, parenting practices, and the quality of the caregiver-child relationship (Arnold et al., 2008; Bouffard & Weiss, 2008; Halgunseth et al., 2009; Owen et al., 2000; Pirchio et al., 2013; Serpell & Mashburn, 2012;

Smith et al., 2021; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). The quality of PTRs has also been found to promote positive outcomes for children even when controlling for social and economic differences (Arnold et al., 2008; Gross et al. 2020; Smith et al., 2022). Furthermore, when teachers report higher quality PTRs, they are less likely to label a child as a behavior problem and the child's risk for expulsion decreases (Serpell & Mashburn, 2012; Zulauf-McCurdy & Zinsser, 2021). A closer look at these findings highlights the bidirectional nature of the PTR dynamic such that a closer relationship with the parent can influence the teacher to form a closer relationship with the child and a closer relationship with the child can influence the teacher to initiate a closer relationship with the parent (Cutshaw et al., 2022).

ECCE programs that emphasize PTRs in policies and teacher training have higher quality PTRs (Cutshaw et al., 2022; Fantuzzo et al., 2006; Ma et al., 2016; Waanders et al., 2007). Studies investigating PTRs have used many different data collection methods and tools but there are three that have been used most commonly. Elicker et al. (1997) designed the Parent-Caregiver Relationship Scale to assess parent and caregiver perceptions, attitudes, and feelings about their relationship finding that trust/confidence, open communication, respect/acceptance, caring, competence/knowledge, partnership/collaboration, shared values, and affiliation/liking are most salient (Elicker et al., 1997). The items on the Parent-Caregiver Relationship Scale are very similar to the Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale created by Vickers and Minke (1995) that focuses on parents and teachers joining and communicating in their relationship. Another similar measure, the Perceived Teacher Outreach Scale (Patrikakou & Weissber, 2000), assesses parent perceptions of how often their child's teacher reaches out to them. These measurement tools have assisted researchers as they attempt to better understand PTRs in early childhood programs.

A better understanding of PTRs is particularly important to educational policymakers considering the finding that home-based involvement is more influenced by parental factors, but PTRs are more influenced by school initiatives (Waanders et al., 2007). The quality of PTRs is also closely connected with parent engagement such that teachers rate parents as more engaged when both teachers and parents rate their relationship as higher quality (Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009). Furthermore, positive congruence between parent and teacher ratings of the quality of their relationship is correlated with children's social/emotional skills and behavior (Kim et al., 2012). Teachers rate parents who engage in school-based involvement as more connected with their child's education in addition to rating their relationship as higher quality (Waanders et al., 2007) indicating that opportunities for communication provided during school-based activities may improve PTRs, which then lead to positive outcomes for the child (Pirchio et al., 2013; Powell, 1998; Wanat, 2010). Swartz & Easterbrooks (2014) found that the quality of PTRs was correlated with the child's temperament and how anxious the parent is about their child attending preschool. Findings also revealed that teacher education was correlated with increased communication and better PTRs (Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014).

While the importance of high quality PTRs is based on research evidence and stressed in policy documents, how these relationships can be realized effectively in practice has not been universally established (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). Furthermore, there has been a relevant lack of research interest in PTRs in ECCE when compared to research looking at professional relationships that best support children with complex medical and health needs (Rouse, 2012). A consideration of parent and teacher perspectives about PTRs through qualitative research can inform research and policy. A research study by Rentzou (2011) used the Parent Caregiver Relationship Scale (Elicker et al., 1997) with teachers and parents and found that parents rate the

relationship as higher quality and have more positive attitudes towards caregivers than caregivers do for them. This is consistent with research by Zellman and Perlman (2006) that identified a strong positivity bias amongst parents when asked about the efforts of teachers to engage with them and teachers were found to exaggerate their own outreach efforts. In fact, many early childhood teachers indicated that they did not view parents as partners and did not value the contributions of parents and many parents viewed caregivers as babysitters versus professionals. Other studies have also found that early years teachers often hold negative attitudes towards parents (McGrath, 2007; Owen et al., 2000; Shpancer, 2002). These studies lend support to current movements to boost the educational and professional status of the ECCE profession to increase teacher confidence while also increasing parent confidence and respect for early childhood teachers as knowledgeable and competent professionals (Rentzou, 2011).

Barnes and colleagues (2016) looked at the perspectives of early childhood teachers on PTRs finding that while successful communication was common, there were also challenges. Specifically, early childhood teachers expressed that parent demands on them were challenging and that they would like more time to connect with parents and teach them about ECCE. They also expressed that they would like more parents to volunteer and help out; be less distracted by their phones; put the child's needs first; read school policies; hold their children accountable for behavior; and respect ECCE teacher competence (Barnes et al., 2016). In a comparable study, Wolf (2020) interviewed parents and teachers in Ghana about their perceived role in ECCE. Parents felt that their role was to ensure that their child's basic needs were met (food, cleanliness) and to pay school fees, whereas teachers expressed that they want parents to be more invested in their children's educational experiences at preschool and want them to support this learning at home. Teachers were more in support of guiding young children, whereas parents

preferred authoritarian methods of control and were more in support of academic learning than teachers. Teachers primarily contacted parents when there was a problem and were often frustrated with the lack of responsiveness from parents (Wolf, 2020). It is important to note that low-income and minority parents engage in less school-based parent engagement activities than advantaged parents and this may be contributing to negative stereotypes that they are disengaged from their child's education when this may not be the situation (Bridgemohan et al., 2005; Knopf & Swick, 2007; Miller et al., 2014; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Wanat, 2010).

In a more recent study, Murphy and colleagues (2021) used online surveys and focus groups with both parents and early childhood teachers to understand their experiences with PTRs finding that parents and teachers reported overwhelmingly positive experiences working together. Parents reported feeling respected but wanted more communication with teachers about their child's learning experiences and progress. They also indicated that they would like their opinions, ideas, and priorities to be considered more often. The early childhood teachers expressed confidence in sharing children's progress with parents but much less confidence in fostering collaborative PTRs and providing support to families, particularly families facing challenges and stressors. When asked about barriers to collaborative PTRs, early childhood teachers referred to large class sizes, time constraints and managing parent expectations about the educator's role and parents referred to a need for more information exchange and teacher responsiveness. Even though the large majority of early childhood teachers reported that they had received training on working with families, they also expressed a need for additional training through face-to-face, in practice coaching and role-playing scenarios that focus on communicating with families, especially how to handle difficult situations and raise concerns with parents (Murphy et al., 2021).

Wanat (2010) looked at parental views about ways for schools to improve home-school practices and found that parents appreciate more open, frequent, specific, and immediate communication of information as well as the sharing of ideas and an openness on the part of schools to welcome unique contributions from parents. Powell and colleagues (2010) isolated the influence of parental perceptions of teacher responsiveness. They improved upon past methodological limitations by collecting data from multiple sources (parents, teachers, student assessments and classroom observations) and by controlling for classroom quality of interactions with students, level of parent engagement, maternal education, and child ethnicity. Even with these controls, this study found that parent perceptions of teacher responsiveness predicted the social and academic achievement of children. The researchers suggest that when promoting PTRs, it is important for preschools to reduce the emphasis on academic goals to adopt a more social emphasis. They also identified a need to explore effective ways to encourage teacher responsiveness and a genuine interest in families through teacher training and by providing the circumstances to enable this to happen such as teacher release time (Powell et al., 2010). In these ways, higher quality PTRs can be promoted through willingness and ease of communication and level of teacher outreach, availability, and support (Elicker et al., 1997; Pirchio et al., 2013).

Initially, PTRs were viewed as an overall construct but more recent research has focused on looking at the components of this relationship such as empathy, trust, and understanding and how these are promoted through opportunities for communication and interaction (Peck et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2022; Vickers & Minke, 1995). A closer look at these components can help to inform policy and initiatives designed to promote more positive and mutually beneficial PTRs.

Communication and PTRs

Research studies to further investigate and understand communication in PTRs are

especially needed considering that teachers hold parents who communicate more with them in higher esteem (Fantuzzo et al., 2006; Kontos & Dunn, 1989; Waanders et al., 2007). The promotion of communication between teachers and families can play a powerful role in addressing inequities given that parents with greater social and cultural capital are more likely to initiate and press for ongoing communication, whereas families with less social and cultural capital benefit when schools initiate communication with all families (Miller et al., 2014). When exchanging information and communicating with parents, schools tend to focus on sharing individual student learning even though parents indicate that they prefer the school to other available sources to also gain parenting knowledge (ICDI, 2012; Zepeda et al., 2004). Other than when problems arise, research has shown that communication primarily focuses on how parents can help their child at home with school-related activities, providing regularly scheduled report cards, and offering relatively brief parent-teacher conferences that occur a few times per school year (Bridgemohan et al., 2005; Fantuzzo et al., 2004). This time-efficient, traditional, and school-centric view of PTRs is increasingly being applied to ECCE programs (Murphy et al., 2021; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017) which have historically focused on supporting families in more individualized and informal social ways such as through home visits and communication at pick-up and drop-off times (Burton, 1992; Lawson, 2003).

There is substantial evidence that ongoing communication is a fundamental contributor to PTR quality, the establishment of a true partnership, student success, and the quality of care provided as well as promoting greater alignment between home and school settings (Duncan et al., 2006; McGrath, 2007; O'Connor et al., 2018; Pirchio et al., 2013; Wanat, 2010; Zellman & Perlman, 2006). However, the practice of ongoing communication has become increasingly more difficult to achieve over the last several decades due to changing family structure and

circumstances including increases in single-parent families, extended work hours, and busy lifestyles along with issues of time and availability for both teachers and parents (Duncan et al., 2006; Gross et al., 2020; McGrath, 2007). Communication between parents and caregivers is a powerful way to enhance mutual empathy and understanding in a relationship that faces significant challenges (McGrath, 2007; Rentzou, 2011). In her insightful book *The Essential Conversation: What Parents and Teachers can Learn from Each Other*, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) delves into the complexity and challenges of PTRs. The author contends that teachers are more likely to have a universalistic perspective in that they focus on the collective wellbeing of all students, whereas parents have a particularistic perspective in that they want to advocate for the best interests of their own child. As such, the solution lies in mutual empathy and respect through productive dialogue that requires that “each must respect and value what the other knows and sees; each must attend carefully and listen deeply to the perspective and wisdom that the other brings” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; p. 243). In 2015, Peck and colleagues used teacher interviews to understand teachers’ values, beliefs, and language in relation to empathy within PTRs. The researchers defined empathy as the ability to feel and understand what the child or parent is feeling, communicate that to them, and then respond in ways that meet their needs. Data analysis revealed that teachers whose statements conveyed empathy described PTRs in a positive way, had deeper understandings of the children, felt their role was primarily to listen to parents, relaxed their impulse to try and solve problems for families, and offered advice when appropriate (Peck et al., 2015). Perspective-taking is important when fostering positive PTRs given that staff and parent perceptions and views are not always aligned (Foot et al., 2002). Feinberg (2003) notes that it is how disagreements are negotiated between parents and teachers that has the greatest impact on the quality of their relationship.

Research studies looking at parent perspectives and preferences indicate that parents' willingness to become involved stems from concern for their children's wellbeing and so they are motivated by the opportunity to obtain feedback on their child more so than to find out more about preschool activities and pedagogy (Foot et al., 2002). When looking at parent views on quality in ECCE, parents are more personality oriented and care most about the teacher's relationship with their child and their own experiences interacting with teachers (Majercikova & Hornickova, 2020). A study in New Zealand, Duncan, Bowden and Smith (2006) found that parents want teachers to take a genuine daily interest in families to find out about the child's experiences at home and connect these with experiences at school. When asked about the things they value in their childcare centers, parents have indicated that sensitivity to individual needs, friendship, family atmosphere, flexibility, and staff empathizing with the stress of balancing work with parenting are most important (Robson, 2006). Parent preference for empathy is interesting given that mothers and teachers who have a stronger belief that maternal employment may be detrimental to young children are more likely to have lower quality relationships (Barnes et al., 2006; Shpancer, 2002). If caregivers are aware that parents appreciate empathy, perhaps they will see the benefits of reassuring mothers for the benefit of children.

Another important consideration that is less emphasized in research and policy is the value of home to school communication for the benefit of young children. A parent's sharing of information about a child's home-life (e.g., caregiving patterns or family events) or individual characteristics (e.g., child's interests, likes, fears) may help a teacher understand, better care for, and empathize with a child (McWayne et al., 2022; Zulauf-McCurdy & Zinsser, 2021). McWayne et al. (2022) investigated a strength-based home to school connections initiative in which teachers and volunteer parents (termed family advocates) co-created a plan to learn more

about families through culture sharing coffee mornings. The positive impact of this program provides evidence for the importance of preschools adopting information-seeking attitudes which can also lead to the incorporation of learning activities in school that reflect children's everyday home lives (McWayne, et al., 2022). This home to school communication has the potential to enhance mutual understanding and perspective-taking in PTRs. While interventions to enhance parenting in the home have been more prevalent, efforts to support parenting by strengthening PTRs in early childhood programs have been less extensively researched (Knopf & Swick, 2007; Sheridan et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2022; Zepeda et al., 2004). This is surprising given the potential of two-way communication between parents and teachers to improve both home and school environments through the promotion of a shared responsibility for children (Guerra & Luciano, 2010).

PTRs, Communication and a Shared Responsibility for Children

Opportunities for both school to home and home to school communication promote a shared responsibility for the care and education of young children. This shared responsibility is particularly important given that studies investigating the impact of childcare effects on young children find that the statistical effect sizes for childcare factors (curriculum, quality) are only about half that for family factors (quality of the home environment, poverty, stressors) (Leseman & Slot, 2014). The parent-child relationship has the greatest influence on a child's wellbeing and healthy development which is why a range of parenting programs have been created and studied (Mortensen & Mastergeorge, 2014). Given that parent programs that are intensive, longer term and embedded in existing services and relationships have a greater positive impact, there is a need for initiatives designed for use by early childhood teachers to support parent-child relationships (O'Connor et al., 2018; Zepeda et al., 2004). Early childhood teachers are the ideal

source to provide parenting support to the families they serve because this would also promote increased consistency of care and alignment in the child's caregiving settings of home and school. Studies of parent views indicate that parents prefer to be invited into schools and appreciate the parenting support that the school may be able to provide (Ernest, 2011; ICDI, 2012; Petrie & Holloway, 2006).

Given the powerful influence of home environments on young children, it is not surprising that ECCE programs have the greatest positive impact on young children when a two-generational approach is taken and combined with efforts to reduce the isolation of some parents through increased social networks of support (Heckman, 2006; Nores & Barnett, 2010; Shonkoff et al., 2012). When taken together with the fact that the social, behavioral and mental health needs of children continue to rise (Gray, 2013), promoting a shared responsibility for the care and education of young children is even more essential. ECCE programs are well suited to promote adaptive parenting and improve parent-child relationships through collaborative and effective PTRs and family-centered practices. Early childhood teachers are well-positioned to take on this role as part of their professional practice because they know the children through their daily experiences with them. Opportunities for the observation of children interacting with their parents along with interaction, communication and information exchange with parents will assist them in this role while also promoting more collaborative PTRs (O'Connor et al., 2018).

A study by Lang and colleagues (2016) investigated the idea of applying Feinberg's (2003) model of "co-parenting" to PTRs in ECCE. Co-parenting is a conceptual term that refers to the ways parental figures relate to each other when they have shared responsibility for rearing children in one or more home settings. This co-parenting relationship is shaped by "parents' beliefs, values, desires, and expectations, and significantly impacts parental adjustment,

parenting, family relationships, and child adjustment (Feinberg, 2003). Lang et al. (2016) suggests that PTRs in ECCE are a natural extension of the co-parenting concept referring to the former as the “co-caring” relationship. Using semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers, this study found that frequent open communication was important to both teachers and parents and that challenges arose when undermining versus support occurred and when parents and teachers disagreed on childcare practices (Lang et al., 2016). The researchers concluded that additional research is still needed to determine best practices in supporting teachers in fostering more consistent and widespread co-caring partnerships with parents (Lang et al., 2016).

The research reviewed this far indicates that the promotion of positive PTRs and shared responsibility for children in a partnership approach is beneficial for children. When parents and teachers have stronger agreement on expectations for children, child behavior and caregiving/parenting practices, children have higher social competence (Churchill, 2003; Robson, 2006). Yet studies have found that parents and early childhood teachers often hold differing beliefs in relation to these expectations (Hadley & Rouse, 2018; Ipsa, 1994). The ECCE teacher's perception of parents and their willingness and effectiveness at engaging with parents may be affected by the degree to which their beliefs are congruent (Churchill, 2003; Waanders et al., 2007). This can be problematic given that existing studies have not found high levels of congruence between parent and teacher reports of the quality of their relationships with each other (Minke et al., 2014; Zulauf-McCurdy & Loomis, 2023). There is evidence that educators see their role as sharing information about program activities and child development (Hujala et al., 2009; Tayler, 2006), whereas families state that forming trusting relationships is most important (McGrath, 2007). Hadley and Rouse (2018) emphasize that the disconnect can be addressed by developing reciprocity in PTRs. Their study found that educators were effective at

sharing the value of play, incorporating family backgrounds, and forming respectful relationships with families but in relation to reciprocity they were not building on the expertise of the families and recognizing their agency as capable decision-makers in their child's education. Rather, teachers were focusing on the more traditional 'help-giver'–'helpseeker' relationship in which parents are not giving meaningful input (Hadley & Rouse, 2018). Their study also revealed a disconnect between the language of the educators and the families. While the families were using language such as 'care', 'happy', 'safe' and 'love', the educators were using language that centered on child learning, routines, behavior, and development (Hadley & Rouse, 2018).

In a small case study that interviewed one teacher and the parents in an early year's program, Rouse and O'Brien (2017) found that while the teacher thought that she was promoting partnerships with parents and that this is very important, her behaviors were one-directional such that the mutuality and reciprocity were missing. McGrath's (2007) observational classroom case study in an ethnically and economically diverse childcare found that parents were generally more invested in building a relationship than teachers were. Sims-Schouten and Barton (2022) engaged in several focus groups with both mothers and early childhood teachers to investigate PTRs finding themes of being valued, relationships, and understanding the child's experiences at home and school when either is not there. Early childhood teachers expressed that parents have no time to talk and no time to settle their child into school and that the home situations impact how the child behaves in preschool. Parents say they have a filtered view of what goes on at preschool and would like to know more (Sims-Schouten & Barton, 2022). Taken together, the findings of these studies reveal a need to prioritize more opportunities for communication between parents and teachers in ECCE programs so that views and preferences can be shared, discussed and addressed more effectively.

Kelesidou et al. (2017) found that parent satisfaction with home-school communication and the overall quality of their child's ECCE provision was lower for parents with higher levels of education because their expectations for quality are higher. These higher expectations together with having the resources to change caregiving arrangements are both contributing factors to the finding that higher-income families are significantly more likely to benefit from higher quality ECCE provision than lower-income families (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022; Raikes et al., 2023). In their study of mothers' perspectives on school family partnerships, Miller and colleagues (2014) found four themes of connections reported by mothers which they labeled the backpack connection, school as a resource, ongoing dialogue with teachers, and a place to advocate for their child. Differences were found based on socioeconomic status such that the latter two connections were more prevalent among high SES mothers whereas the first two connections, characterized by mothers being the recipients of connections, were most commonly reported by mothers of low SES (Miller et al., 2014). In consideration of these findings, researchers recommend promoting dialogue with parents to construct understandings about high quality ECCE provision (Kelesidou et al., 2017).

Parent engagement initiatives are more likely to be successful through PTRs when both teachers and parents are respected as possessing valuable knowledge and that it is in the best interest of the child for it to be shared on a frequent and ongoing basis (Bokony et al., 2013; ICDI, 2012). These ideas are consistent with the Reggio Emilia approach to early years education esteemed for its successful community and PE practices taking the same respectful view of learning with parents as they do with children such that parents are competent and full of potential (Edwards et al., 2012). Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) advocate for a relational approach to engaging with families such that:

“a relational approach engages families around their own interests and values and respects their contributions to this process, both educators and families can grow and change, and a new kind of relationship can emerge – one that centers on shared understandings of children’s learning. “(p. 73)

This family-centered responsive approach is consistent with the Getting Ready project. Through this program, early childhood teachers were trained in effective practices to strengthen parental confidence, responsiveness, warmth, sensitivity, and support for the child’s autonomy during home visits (Woods et al., 2008). At the same time, parents were encouraged to collaborate with the early childhood teachers to set goals for parent engagement, communicate observations and thoughts, and assist in making education-related decisions for their child (Knoche et al., 2010). Several follow up studies of the Getting Ready approach have demonstrated positive results for parent-child interactions (Knoche et al., 2012); children’s early language and literacy skills (Sheridan et al., 2011); and independently observed social-emotional competencies in preschool children (Sheridan et al., 2010; Sheridan et al., 2014).

School initiatives to strengthen parent engagement and PTRs through information sharing have not been utilized uniformly in ECCE, even though the relevant research indicates that this practice has significant potential to improve the care of young children along with the potential to enhance parent understandings of early childhood pedagogy to increase consistency between home and school (Gotts, 1987; Harrison & Larsen, 1989; Knoche et al., 2010). One approach to supporting parents and promoting positive parenting is to combine parent education workshops with a practical component in an early childhood classroom. McFarland-Piazza and Saunders (2012) investigated the effectiveness of a twelve-week parent education program through classes alone versus a combined program of classes and practical experience in an early childhood classroom with the teacher modeling, mentoring, and providing feedback to parents as needed.

Both parents and teachers reported positive benefits of the combined program including linking school and home settings, improved PTRs, and the benefits of practice and feedback for parents. Furthermore, the teachers reported that the program empowered them as professionals.

A review of the research on PTRs indicates that promoting more congruent views of childrearing and early childhood pedagogy between parents and teachers can improve the quality of PTRs and encourage a shared responsibility for children. The following section reviews the research on early years pedagogy in relation to PTRs.

Parent-Teacher Relationships and Early Childhood Pedagogy

Research has shown that strengthening parent engagement and PTRs is even more worthwhile during times of educational reform (ICDI, 2012). For the last several decades, as increasingly more children are attending large group care settings, attempts to prepare children for academic demands in elementary schools have led educators around the world to implement direct instruction in academic skills at increasingly younger ages, a trend that has been termed “miseducation” and “schoolification” (Ang, 2014; Elkind, 1987; Cade et al., 2022). A neoliberal discourse of schoolification is characterized by a pushdown of instruction in academic skills, lesson plans, teaching strategies, and learning activities traditionally used with school-aged children along with an over-emphasis on assessment, testing, accountability, and evaluation (Bagnato & Ho, 2006; Bassok et al., 2016). On a global level, schoolification practices in varying degrees, depending on the country, are proving resistant to change even though the accumulation of a large body of research supports developmentally appropriate play and relationship-based early childhood pedagogy (Whitebread, 2013; Whitebread et al., 2017).

Founded in the United States as a non-profit professional association, the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) policy statement on

developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; 2020) was originally formulated in response to this growing trend toward more formal academic instruction of young children” (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The position statement on DAP contends that early care and education should be consistent with what is known from the research about child development and should ensure that learning and programs are appropriate to each child’s individual needs, social context, and culture (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The statement provides a framework for early childhood educators to consider nine major principles supported by research evidence when preparing early learning settings: 1) developmental processes reflect an interplay between biology and the environment; 2) domains of development support and are supported by each other; 3) play is essential and joyful while fostering content knowledge across disciplines, self-regulation, language, cognitive and social competencies; 4) variations due to cultural contexts, experiences and individual differences matter; 5) children are active learners who organize information and build and revise theories through interactions and explorations of the social and physical world; 6) motivation to learn is increased when their sense of belonging, purpose and agency is fostered; 7) children learn in a way that integrates disciplines and subject areas; 8) learning advances when children are provided with experiences just beyond their current mastery; and 9) technology and media can be valuable tools for learning (NAEYC, 2020).

The nine principles of DAP are consistent with the ideas of prominent learning theorists who have underscored the importance of providing young children with opportunities for the construction of knowledge through active exploration and play in a stimulating environment (Piaget, 1962), social interaction with other children and responsive adults (Vygotsky, 1978) and self-initiated learning to promote feelings of autonomy (Erikson, 1994). DAP is also consistent

with research evidence in neuroscience that there are significant lifelong benefits of ensuring that infants and young children receive warm responsive caregiving along with early learning experiences that emphasize play, exploration, child autonomy, relationships, and social interaction (Liu et al., 2017; Pellis et al., 2014; Thompson, 2016). In response, the action agenda of the UNESCO world conference on ECCE set a major goal for improving “curricula and methodologies in tune with childhood, valuing play, affection, cooperation, talent and creativity, joy, the fostering of self-confidence and autonomy, as well as active learning pedagogies that take into account a child’s point of view” (UNESCO, 2011).

Developmentally appropriate and schoolification practices have been rigorously studied and the shift to DAP is occurring in countries around the world with the introduction of curriculum frameworks such as the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework (CIEYCF). However, schoolification practices persist in practice even though there is convincing evidence that it is stressful for young children and comes at a cost to dispositions and capacities for learning (Bonawitz et al., 2011; Burts et al., 1992; Elkind, 1987; 2007; Gray, 2011; Hatfield et al., 2013; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Whitebread, 2013). There is substantial evidence supporting DAP because it promotes lasting gains in learning capacities, confidence, creativity, dispositions, conceptual understandings, and higher-order cognitive skills such as executive functions, self-regulation, and theory of mind that improve school achievement and success into adult life (Bodrova et al., 2013; Diamond et al., 2007; Eberle, 2011; Ginsburg, 2007; Fisher et al., 2009; Jechura et al., 2016; Pellis & Pellis, 2009; Pellis et al., 2014; Shore, 1997; Thibodeau et al., 2016; Yogman et al., 2018; Whitebread et al., 2017). Furthermore, research has shown that schoolification does not improve academic achievement in the long-term even though immediate superficial gains in academic skills may be observed in some children, while developmentally

appropriate programs do positively impact future academic achievement (Brogaard-Clausen, 2015; Eberle, 2011; Gelzheiser et al., 2000; Hattie, 2009; Lerkkanen et al., 2016; Marcon, 1999, 2002; Mc Clelland et al., 2006; McCoy et al., 2017; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Singer et al., 2006; Suggate, 2009; Suggate et al., 2013; Sylva et al., 2004; Vandell et al., 2010).

Many studies have provided support for the beneficial impact of DAP on young children especially in relation to the child's wellbeing, attitudes, and social and emotional behaviors (Charlesworth, 1998; Dunn & Kontos, 1997; Jambunathan, 2012; Marcon, 1992; 1993; 2002; Rushton & Larkin, 2001; Sawyer, 2017; Stipek et al., 1995). The benefits of DAP are particularly strong amongst children from low-income families who also exhibit higher levels of stress and less engagement in schoolified programs than children from higher income families (Alford et al., 2016; Hart et al., 1998; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004). It is important to note that studies that have investigated the impact of DAP versus more schoolified programs on academic achievement most often use a variety of available achievement and traditional school-based tests and grades as the measurement tool. Given that these types of assessment are not an emphasis in developmentally appropriate programs, it would be expected that children in schoolified programs would have an advantage; yet even in the short-term, these studies have mixed results, find no differences, or find in longitudinal studies that any immediate gains in academics fade out over time (Graue et al., 2004; Taggart et al., 2015).

In sum, child-initiated play, skillfully supported by specially trained early childhood educators, builds academic language, enriches conceptual development, and supports reflective and effective approaches to learning (CCL, 2006; Yogman et al., 2018). The benefits of play are so extensive, that play has been asserted as an evolutionary important activity in and of itself that

serves an essential purpose of promoting healthy brain growth and development as well as the acquisition of skills and experiences needed throughout school and into adulthood (Eberle 2011; Whitebread et al., 2017). The Canadian Council on Learning (2006) points out that play is so essential for optimal development that it is recognized by the United Nations as a specific children's right and that, "play nourishes every aspect of children's development necessary for success in school and life." When research studies focus on children's voices about their preferences in ECCE settings, the children's responses center around relationships with teachers and peers together with an emphasis on play (Howard & McInnes, 2013; Nutbrown, 2015).

The NAEYC statement on DAP has been influential in the development of early childhood policy and curriculum frameworks around the globe (Demircan & Erden, 2015; Hegde et al., 2014; Szente & Hoot, 2002) and has substantially contributed to promoting quality and greater professionalization of the field of ECCE (Cobanoglu et al., 2019; Sanders & Fargo, 2018). A review of the international research on DAP has commonly found that there exists a tension for early childhood teachers between the use of DAP and the obligation to teach mandated academic standards. In a review of the research, Pyle et al. (2017) note the inconsistencies and debates on the value and role of play and call for an integration of perspectives and practices. However, mandating academic standards while also emphasizing a developmentally appropriate approach does not consider that there is only so much time in a child's day and so it is challenging if not impossible to meet high academic expectations without forgoing children's play, social interactions, autonomy, and wellbeing (Cade et al., 2022; Lynch, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010). The growing trend of using business strategies to increase oversight and accountability in educational settings is compounding the problem because they tend to focus on more easily measured narrow indicators of pedagogy that may not always be specific to

the complexities and uniqueness of ECCE provision (Ang, 2014; Cade et al., 2022; Pascal et al., 2017). For example, schoolification practices run contrary to the importance of democracy in early childhood settings in which children and adults take part in communities of active participation, responsibility, and egalitarianism based on the understanding that the early years have a much larger role to play for future success than the narrow focus of academic readiness (Brogaard-Clausen, 2015; Dahlberg et al., 2013; Erickson, 2018; Jensen et al., 2010).

The importance of returning to an emphasis on play, child-initiated activities, and social-emotional skills in ECCE is being stressed in policy documents, school readiness definitions and by influential international organizations around the world (Fantuzzo et al., 2007; McClelland et al., 2006; Thompson, 2002; Yogman et al., 2018). Given the compelling research findings that support DAP and play, it becomes important to understand why there has been such a gap between research and practice over the past several decades that continues to persist. Researchers have called for studies to investigate parent, teacher and administrator views, interpretations, and understandings of DAP in a variety of early childhood settings (Sanders & Farago, 2018).

Stakeholder Views of Early Childhood Pedagogy

Research has found a range of definitions of what constitutes both DAP and play, and a discrepancy between beliefs and actual practice such that beliefs are more developmentally appropriate than practices (Cade et al., 2022; Charlesworth et al., 1991; Chin, 2014; Demircan & Erden, 2015). This may explain the common finding that teachers do not think that their programs are developmentally appropriate enough due to pressure from administrators, curriculum expectations and parents to use worksheets and other adult-directed methods to teach academic content (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Cade et al., 2022; Diamond, Reagan, & Bandyk, 2000; Hadley, 2012; Lynch, 2015; Zigler & Bishop-Josef, 2004). Furthermore, program

decisions that are beyond the control of early childhood teachers influence the teacher's success in implementing DAP including resources provided, teacher preparation time; class sizes and teacher-child ratios (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009). Lynch (2015) used a netnographic approach to analyze comments by kindergarten teachers on discussion boards finding that the majority of teachers want to include play but felt too much pressure from teachers, principals, and school policies to limit play and focus on academics. Many expressed that ECCE is not understood and looked down upon by educators of older children and those in positions of decision-making who do not have expertise in ECCE. Most teachers viewed play as a reward or a break for children and some opposed allowing play due to concerns that children will fall behind (Lynch, 2015).

Pyle and Bigelow (2014) used teacher interviews and classroom observations to understand this tension finding three distinct approaches for the integration of play in kindergarten classrooms: (a) play to occupy children while instructing small groups in academic skills, (b) play being viewed as a vehicle for primarily promoting social and emotional development rather than learning, and (c) play as a vehicle for academic learning through teacher incorporation of academic skills into the play environment (i.e., creating a play "bank"). These three viewpoints are in contrast to DAP in which play is child-initiated, hands-on and meaningful as children interact with each other and actively explore materials in a carefully prepared environment with the interest, support, and guidance of adults who integrate, support and facilitate foundational conceptual understandings, thinking skills and learning dispositions that underpin the later learning of academic skills while viewing children as unique individuals capable of initiating and directing their own learning with focus and engagement (Cade et al., 2022; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; 2020; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Thompson, 2016).

Given this period of change and tension, it is critical to provide initial and in-service training to early childhood teachers so that they can effectively realize DAP and share the tenets and benefits of DAP with parents and the wider community. This training may be particularly relevant to the implementation of DAP in international settings. Brown and Lan (2015) conducted a qualitative meta-synthesis to investigate how early childhood educators in international contexts are responding to DAP concluding that early childhood teachers in international settings need to apply the three tenets of DAP (developmentally, culturally, and individually appropriate practices) simultaneously in their unique cultural contexts. In a cross-cultural study of eight countries, Rentzou et al. (2019) found a lack of consensus of how play is implemented in ECCE programs finding that dominant educational and cultural conceptualizations of play are influential in the implementation of DAP and that many countries remain conflicted between provision that is child-led and play-based versus a more teacher-led schoolified approach. Hegde et al. (2014) explored Japanese teachers beliefs and practices regarding DAP in nurseries versus kindergartens finding that teachers in both settings demonstrated developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices but a distinction between the focus being “care” in the nurseries versus “education” in the kindergartens was found (Hegde et al., 2014). Jumiaan, et al. (2020) explored kindergarten teachers’ knowledge of DAP in Jordan finding that teachers with a specialization in ECCE had higher levels of developmentally appropriate views and practices. Heisner & Lederberg (2011) also found that teacher training in ECCE was associated with more developmentally appropriate views and practices.

Research in this area of interest has consistently found that the beliefs of teachers are more developmentally appropriate than their practices with low to moderate correlations between teacher-reported beliefs and teacher-reported practices (Mohamed & Al-Qaryouti, 2016; Rentzou

& Sakellariou, 2011). When studies have also looked at observations of practice, the findings are comparable. In a study by Cade et al. (2022), the researchers interviewed 16 teachers in three ECCE settings, conducted focus groups and collected samples of lesson plans, children's work, and photos of classrooms to assess the implementation of DAP. Early childhood teachers in two of the three settings focused on teacher-imposed academic content, schoolification practices, and a "one size fits all" approach with the belief that it would prepare children for success in school. Even though state ECCE requirements focus on DAP, the teachers adopted the approach of their individual school (Cade et al., 2022). In relation to ECCE in the Caribbean context, Chin (2014) employed classroom observations, interviews and focus groups with early childhood teachers in Jamaica to investigate their beliefs about DAP finding that the teachers strongly believed in DAP but that classroom practices were a mixture of developmentally appropriate and schoolified practices. The study found that personal, professional, school setting, and cultural factors influenced the implementation of DAP. Smith (2016) also found a discrepancy between teacher beliefs about DAP in interviews when compared with observations of practices in early childhood settings in Barbados. The traditional teaching methods that primarily accounted for this discrepancy were attributed to contextual factors such as insufficient classroom space, materials, mentorship, and training (Smith, 2016).

Jensen et al. (2021) used a combination of survey and interviews to understand teacher perceptions of play in South Africa finding that early childhood teachers have a range of beliefs about the value of play for learning and in the way they incorporated play into their teaching practices. Hegde and Cassidy (2009) interviewed early childhood teachers in India about DAP revealing six themes: Play Way vs. Talk and Chalk, Worksheets as Important and Essential, Group Activities as Socializing Agent, Constraints on Play, Need for Change, and Struggle

Between Belief and Practice. Teachers mentioned parent pressure to teach academics and large group sizes, teacher-child ratios and a need for more play-based materials as deterrents to DAP. Similar to many other countries, early childhood teachers expressed a need for recognition, appropriate teacher training and believed that they get little respect as an early childhood teacher, nor are they remunerated appropriately (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009). In a meta-synthesis of 62 studies researching early childhood teachers views of play-based-learning (PBL), Bubikova-Moan and colleagues (2019) found differing views on the degree of conceptual compatibility between play and learning, uncertainties as to teachers' understanding of their role in PBL and challenges in enacting PBL due to pressure from policies, parents, and curriculum expectations for academics. Consistent with past research, the researchers found that parental lack of knowledge about ECCE and misunderstandings about the value of play along with their need for tangible evidence of learning such as worksheets, is often expressed by teachers as a frustration that can also lead them to question their practice (Baker, 2014; Fung & Doris, 2012).

In sum, the implementation of DAP is influenced by teacher beliefs, teacher pre- and in-service training, stakeholder views and pressures, ECCE policy, cultural influences, and contextual factors such as resources, preparation time, class sizes and teacher-child ratios. The finding that qualified elementary teachers who also have an educational background in ECCE are more likely to have developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices (Cade et al., 2022; Heisner & Lederberg, 2011; Snider & Fu, 1990) suggests that it is exposure to DAP that influences beliefs and practices in favor of DAP. Wong (2019) found that teachers' positive experiences in a developmentally appropriate program were associated with higher beliefs and practices making in-service training combined with practical coaching and modelling particularly important so that teachers can experience the positive impact of DAP on young children. In conclusion, a review

of the research on stakeholder perspectives about DAP along with a consideration of the benefits of DAP for young children and their families indicates that continuing efforts to engage in dialogue and share information about current understandings of ECCE with all stakeholders are important. This exchange of ideas can promote stakeholder knowledge and mutual understanding of viewpoints which in turn can lead to the “goodness of fit” that promotes both quality PTRs and child development and wellbeing.

Parent and Teacher Beliefs about DAP: Goodness of Fit

The idea of “goodness of fit” between parent and teacher views and beliefs about children and learning in early childhood centers has received increasingly more attention in the research on parent engagement and PTRs. Barbarin and colleagues (2010) found that a home-school match in beliefs about childhood and socialization was more common although only in just over half of the participants. However, parents’ beliefs in pre-kindergarten predicted school readiness in kindergarten in language, literacy, and social competence whereas teacher beliefs did not. As such, a home-school match in beliefs only contributed positively when the parents and teachers shared child-centered views of children that encourage interactions to support autonomy (Barbarin et al., 2010). When parents held adult-centered views of children that emphasize control and obedience, children’s school readiness was less than optimal irrespective of whether a match or mismatch was found with teacher’s beliefs. The authors conclude that the findings provide support for the benefit of strengthening child-centered beliefs and practices in parents and teachers to enhance the care and education of children in both the home and school settings (Barbarin et al., 2010). In support of this conclusion, a study by Draper, Larsen, and Rowles (1997) intentionally taught parents about DAP through a parent education program. The researchers found a reduction in family conflict along with improved parent support and child

social skills as compared with a control group providing evidence that parental understanding of DAP transfers to interactions in the home (Draper et al., 1997).

Taken together, research indicates that it is important to strengthen the developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices of teachers through professional learning programs that focus on the benefits to children and the importance of sharing this with parents to promote more congruence in beliefs (Lerkkanen et al., 2016). Churchill (2003) found that a match in beliefs between teachers and parents about expectations for children's behavior and parenting practices has a positive impact on children's social outcomes. Demircan and Erden (2015) compared the developmentally appropriate and parent engagement beliefs of parents and teachers in Turkish kindergarten programs finding that teachers had higher developmentally appropriate beliefs than parents and that higher teacher beliefs were associated with enhanced parent engagement. Cobanoglu et al. (2019) found that early childhood teachers' self-efficacy in their teaching and parent engagement effectiveness in Turkey predicted their developmentally appropriate beliefs in a positive way. Hadley (2012) looked at family and teacher perspectives about the quality of communication and early childhood pedagogy finding major discrepancies such that teachers thought communication was satisfactory and that children should be in a child-directed play-based program, whereas parents thought that communication was generally unsatisfactory and that children should be in a more traditional academic program that valued conformity. In a study with similar findings, Dighe and Seiden (2020) interviewed parents in Ethiopia about early childhood pedagogy finding that while parents acknowledged early learning as important, their own playful engagement with children at home was low due to time and money constraints as well as perceptions of learning as a strictly academic process. Consistent with past research findings, parents expressed that children need time to play but separated play from learning.

In their investigation into administrator, parent and teacher views of play in kindergarten programs in Hong Kong, Fung and Doris (2012) found that administrators and early childhood teachers are continuing with schoolified practices due to parent pressure that is heightened by the privatization of kindergartens. The researchers found that stakeholders conceptually believed in the value of children playing but lacked confidence in the significant learning potential of play and DAP. Furthermore, administrators lacked confidence in the ability of early years teachers to effectively implement DAP and the teachers blamed lack of time, space, resources and parent pressure as the reasons for the continued focus on schoolified practices. The researchers suggest that educators need to find opportunities to listen to the views and concerns of parents and provide parents with information about the benefits and complexities of play through regular sharing of pedagogical documentation of children's learning through play. Through these practices, parents can be respectfully heard, provided with the tangible evidence of learning that they want, and be reassured that DAP is the best preparation for their child's success in school and beyond (Fung & Doris, 2012). This is consistent with the recommendations of other researchers that it is the responsibility of the preschool and early childhood staff to proactively create opportunities to communicate justifications for the benefits of DAP and discuss these issues in ways that are non-judgmental and respectful (Dighe & Seiden, 2020; Hadley, 2012).

Although the majority of studies find parental pressure for teaching academics either through teacher or parent reports, Forry et al. (2013) conducted focus groups with low-income parents finding that their expectations of quality in their child's preschool primarily focused on aspects of care but were also below professional standards. Fraser and Caddell (1999) found that parent and preschool teacher ideas for program goals in ECCE are still more likely to be focused on social and emotional learning and that communication between parents and teachers might

unveil the fact that both are succumbing to pressures from policies and practices that push academics onto young children when they do not actually agree with them (Fraser & Cadell, 1999). Overall, the idea of goodness of fit with regard to views about ECCE has implications for parent engagement and the quality of PTRs along with parent, teacher, and child relationships. Goodness of fit also has implications for another very relevant area of research that looks at differences in the social and cultural capital of families in educational settings and the impact of these differences on PTRs.

Macro-Level Factors that Impact PTRs in ECCE

In order to improve PTRs, attention also needs to be paid to the social structures, context, and political forces surrounding these relationships (Sims-Schouten & Barton, 2020). Given that early childhood teachers are predominantly female, relatively low-paid, under qualified and work in a consistently under-valued sector, issues of empowerment and job satisfaction exist (Jonsdottir & Coleman, 2014; Nutbrown 2021; OECD, 2019; Rouse, 2012). These issues along with often challenging work conditions can also lead to high levels of collective workplace stress and interfere with teacher wellbeing and professional learning which in turn impacts children through adult-child interactions and less continuity of care due to high staff turnover (Hanno et al., 2021; King et al., 2016; Markowitz & Seyarto, 2023; Totenhagen et al., 2016). Political agendas propose that the ECCE sector as a workforce is lacking and in need of transformation and this also effects parent views of early childhood teachers along with how early childhood teachers view themselves (Sims-Schouten & Barton, 2020). To gain a deeper understanding of these macro-level issues, Jonsdottir and Coleman (2014) investigated stakeholder views of the professional role and identity of Icelandic early childhood teachers. The research highlighted the challenges as early childhood teachers strive to form their professional identities amid societal

views of ECCE as less valuable domestic work and in stressful work environments with manager and policy emphasis on standards, performance, and outcomes (Chong and Lu, 2019; Jónsdóttir & Coleman, 2014). Social capital theory views social capital in general as advantages that groups of people possess that benefit them within specific social contexts and that these advantages are linked to ethnicity, language, appearance, wealth, and education (Miller et al., 2014). Therefore, the social capital issues affecting early childhood teachers as a profession and low-income families in need of childcare, make wider scale advocacy efforts for equitable access to high quality developmentally appropriate ECCE provision a high priority.

In summary, contextual macro-level factors and challenges that impact the effectiveness of early childhood teachers can be more effectively and quickly addressed if ECCE programs and teachers prioritize sharing high quality early childhood pedagogy and the rationale behind it with parents because this could lead to teachers and parents coming together to advocate in the wider community for higher quality research-based ECCE provision. Fenech et al. (2019) interviewed ten directors of ECCE settings and their findings were consistent with other research studies that parent partnerships are influenced by laws and regulations, policy context, cultural norms, and the priorities of preschools along with the ECCE teacher's own experience, education, and understanding of professional practice. Ward (2018) proposed that early childhood teachers can be passive and positioned by others or proactive and empowered, and so teacher training and in-service in ECCE needs to promote and encourage the latter positioning to promote positive change.

Early childhood programs can provide opportunities for parents to express their views and opinions in an atmosphere of respect while teachers respond to questions and provide information about research and theory in child development and education. This process has the

potential to diffuse the potential negative impact of a mismatch in views while also promoting mutual understanding and higher quality PTRs along with higher quality ECCE provision. In order for such efforts to be successful, it is important to consider the most effective elements of professional learning to support and promote these opportunities. The next section begins by providing a justification for the need for professional learning to support early childhood teachers in their work with families followed by a review of the research on successful professional learning interventions and approaches. This section will conclude by applying the research reviewed to the professional learning initiative in the present study.

Professional Learning

Within the complex, specialized, challenging, and consequential field of ECCE, it is critical to meet the professional needs of our twenty-first century early childhood teachers (Sheridan et al., 2009; Snyder et al., 2012). The goal of professional learning (PL) activities is to provide teachers with learning experiences to further develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, dispositions, self-efficacy, and competence necessary to effectively apply evidence-based practices so that early childhood programs can reach their full potential of making a highly significant positive contribution to present and future society (Farley et al., 2018; Winton et al., 2016). The majority of research studies reviewed in this literature review have concluded by recommending more pre-service and in-service PL opportunities for early childhood teachers. When considering the many benefits of promoting parent engagement and equitable and mutually supportive PTRs along with the discrepancy between policy emphasis and actual practice, research studies investigating more effective teacher preparation is relatively limited even though a need has been clearly identified (Brunsek et al., 2020; Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014; Miller et al., 2014; Powell et al., 2010; Schachter, 2015).

Early childhood teachers require the sophisticated skills and extensive understandings of ECCE necessary to bridge any gaps between perspectives and build partnerships with an often-diverse array of families (Sheridan et al., 2009). An increasing emphasis is being placed on the importance of responsive relationships with parents and two-way communication that genuinely seeks out, listens to, and responds to parents' voices, preferences, and goals for their children through a strengths-based and family centered approach (Coleman & Karraker, 1998; Korfmacher et al., 2007; Waanders et al., 2007). This emphasis includes having the professionalism to empathize with and carefully consider the perspectives of individual families even when they contradict the pedagogy of the program or the ECCE teacher's own beliefs and practices (Peck et al., 2015). When communicating with parents either through verbal methods (curriculum nights, informal conversations, etc.) or by passing along written information (curriculum content, newsletters, etc.), schools and early childhood programs tend to focus more on what is being done in the classroom and less about why it is being done (Reedy & McGrath, 2010). Early childhood teachers who can effectively communicate with parents about their child's experiences in ECCE, the importance of early childhood, and the justifications for research-based early childhood pedagogy will instill confidence in parents that their child's teacher is a knowledgeable, skilled, and competent professional (Reedy & McGrath, 2010). It can also inspire parents to join in greatly needed advocacy efforts for higher quality ECCE provision (Rentzou, 2011).

In their review of early childhood teacher education, Powell and Schmitt (2016) conclude that: 1) experimental research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of innovative approaches to enhance PTRs and DAP; and 2) studies are needed on promising strategies of PL to help early childhood teachers acquire and practice the complex skills of family centered practice. Given the

busy lifestyles and changing structure of families today, the need for PL activities to assist and support early childhood teachers in innovative ways to connect effectively with families is heightened by the recent theoretical shift towards more complex views of parent engagement, PTRs, and parenting that are bidirectional and relational (Powell & Shmitt, 2016). The present study synthesizes the key points of the extant research on PL to move from developing skills and knowledge alone to developing critical thinking, reflexivity, and the co-creation of ideas with the goal of empowering early childhood teachers (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). In their article on teacher professional learning, Bills et al. (2016) propose that we move away from the traditional priority of ensuring that teachers are meeting prescribed standards-based performance criteria through meetings and workshops and move towards a more meaningful relational approach in which PL is more enriching and gives teachers the experience of ‘being in’ and ‘feeling seen’. Affirming and empowering PL together with a culture of support is more likely to improve teacher efficacy and classroom practices (Bills et al., 2016).

Brown and Englehardt (2016) conducted a meta synthesis of qualitative studies investigating PL in ECCE to understand how PL is being conceptualized by providers and how early childhood teachers are experiencing it. Providers most often conceptualized PL as imparting best practice and expressed that this is greatly needed in the early childhood sector. The findings indicate that over-focusing on providing knowledge that prioritizes expert knowledge alone is not as effective as incorporating the teachers’ already existing knowledge of practice and then considering how this knowledge looks in-practice. The analysis found that positive views from the teachers about their PL experiences were more likely to occur when the PL was collaborative and transformative and focused on gaining a deeper understanding of the teachers’ existing knowledge-of-practice. This approach is “rooted in a democratic

understanding of schooling in which teachers know the context in which they work and are working collaboratively to transform their teaching, student learning and the larger school community” (Brown & Englehardt, 2016, p. 232). The teachers in this study indicated that they appreciated opportunities for reflection, collaboration with colleagues, individualized reciprocal feedback, and forming a professional learning community. The researchers conclude that the most effective PL provides educators with opportunities to reflect upon fundamental issues, policies, and practices as they relate to the realities of complex and diverse daily experiences with young children and their families (Brown & Englehardt, 2016).

The PL intervention in the present study was a blend of professional workshops, coaching, consultation, modelling, mentoring, communities of practice together with a focus on democratic professionalism and the whole teacher. These will be described in turn in the next section.

Democratic Professionalism

The current shift to more complex ways of viewing and implementing PL draws upon the idea of democratic professionalism because it empowers early childhood teachers as pedagogical leaders. Pacini-Ketchabaw et al. (2015) used pedagogical narrations (documentations of children’s learning experiences) as a way of approaching PL for early years teachers through the use of ongoing group reflective dialogue sessions. Through these sessions, the teachers discussed and critically analyzed various classroom situations to enhance understanding of the complexities of ECCE while also creating opportunities to engage with parents and families in the same way. When considering parent engagement, these researchers advocate for a relational approach to engaging with families such that early childhood teachers become pedagogical leaders who guide and facilitate the study of children, teaching, caregiving and the learning

process with families and colleagues (Coughlin & Baird, 2013). Given that many governments are developing new policies and curriculum frameworks in ECCE, Oberhuemer (2005) stresses the importance of giving autonomy to early childhood teachers to translate these documents into effective practice that best fits their specific context. Oberhuemer (2005) puts forth the notion of democratic professionalism and recommends that early childhood teachers need opportunities to reflect on their personal and professional beliefs in a collaborative culture. Democratic professionalism “foregrounds collaborative, cooperative action between professional colleagues and other stakeholders” (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 12). With reference to PTRs, democratic professionalism involves ensuring that meaningful communication occurs in participatory relationships with all parents including those who are more likely to be excluded both in the past and present (Oberhuemer, 2005).

The Whole Teacher Approach

Chen and McCray (2012) created a conceptual framework for PL called the Whole Teacher Approach. Consistent with early childhood pedagogy that emphasizes the “whole child”, this professional learning framework attends to the social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of growth through a focus on attitudes, knowledge, and practice (Chen & McCray, 2012). Whole Teacher PL is multi-dimensional, integrated, developmental, individualized, relationship-based, and contextualized (Chen & McCray, 2012). A review of the research on teacher PL activities specifically designed to enhance parent engagement and PTRs in ECCE settings found that additional empirical study is needed to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of teachers (Brown et al., 2009). A review of the research that has investigated effective elements of PL highlights the powerful role that beliefs play in teacher learning and practice. Vartuli (2005) reviewed the research on the significance of teacher beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of self-

efficacy on teacher practice. Similar to parent beliefs about childrearing, teacher beliefs are also based on past experiences going as far back as childhood, together with new experiences, knowledge, values, and culture. These beliefs are often subconscious, and Vartuli (2005) emphasizes that in order for PL to be most effective, these beliefs must be brought to the surface for analysis and reflection prior to and throughout the presentation of new knowledge.

Gardner-Neblett et al. (2021) examined associations between the types of PL in which teachers participate (the how) and their self-reported beliefs and practices (the what) for two sets of teachers: those who work with infants and toddlers and those who work with preschoolers (the who). The research was based on the assertion that changes in beliefs need to precede changes in practice, and that PL experiences that validate and examine existing beliefs increase the likelihood of teachers reflecting upon and examining their beliefs as they translate them into practice. Five different categories of PL were studied: workshops, coaching, classroom visitation, meetings of professional organizations, and college coursework. The researchers found that the only PL format that predicted more traditional beliefs was the most short-term and least individualized – attending a professional meeting. Though effects were small, three of the five forms of PL studied (workshops, college coursework, coaching) were associated with positive effects for both groups of teachers. The researchers conclude that even though coaching is a resource-intensive model of PL, investment in coaching models for the early childhood workforce is worthwhile as these models promote beliefs and practices aligned with developmentally appropriate experiences for young children (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021).

Jensen and Iannone (2018) gave questionnaires to ECCE experts in ten European countries to investigate their PL policies and practices in relation to implementing best practices and how they handle challenges in the ECCE system. Their focus was understanding innovative

approaches to continuous professional development (CPD) in ECCE revealing three critical aspects of CPD: critical reflection; communities of practice, and a focus on politics that address social inequality in ECCE (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). Reflection is an important component of innovative CPD and can be best facilitated if early childhood teachers participate in regular meetings that provide opportunities to share personal experiences and reflections together in groups (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). These more complex conceptualizations of the provision of PL have the potential to empower early childhood teachers and improve their confidence, agency, and feelings of self-efficacy in supporting and advocating for children and families (Sims-Schouten & Barton 2022; Vartuli, 2005).

Communities of Practice (CoPs)

PL activities have been criticized for being sporadic, disconnected, fragmented, and lacking in authentic teacher voice and follow-up (Helterbran & Fennimore, 2004). A review of the literature indicates that PL is more effective when it is long-term and ongoing, embedded in practice and incorporates teacher voice, collaboration, and reflection (Helterbran & Fennimore, 2004; Howe & Jacobs, 2012; Koh & Neuman, 2009; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008). Snyder et al. (2012) propose that the type and intensity of PL experiences can focus only on developing or enhancing skills or it can also extend this learning with systematic follow-up that includes practice, support, and feedback in applied contexts through continuous professional learning. These experiential forms of PL have been found to be more effective and are increasingly being applied to PL programs in ECCE (Snyder et al., 2012).

The utilization of Communities of Practice (CoPs) are an example of promising experiential forms of PL. Originating in the work of Lave and Wenger (1991), CoPs are based on the theory of situated learning which contends that learning is social and occurs through daily

experiences. This is also consistent with Symbolic Interactionism which contends that individuals continuously construct and revise meaning and understandings through social interactions (Allen & Henderson, 2022). Three elements occurring at the same time distinguish CoPs from other situated learning experiences: 1) the participants share a domain of interest and shared competence; 2) they participate together in a community of trust and collaboration as they learn together; and 3) they share knowledge, problem-solve, and advance their practice in the domain of interest through sustained interactions (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Powell, Diamond, and Cockburn (2013) discuss the promising practice of creating professional learning communities consisting of a select group of teachers, consultants and/or researchers who work together to collaboratively improve practice in a specific area through the implementation of an educational initiative in a process that is ongoing and supported by mutual reflection and collaborative action. A review by Vescio, Ross and Adams (2008) focused on empirical studies that have investigated the impact of professional learning communities on changes in teacher practice finding that student achievement improves as teachers become more empowered and child-centered.

CoPs are closely connected to what is referred to as collective inquiry or action research. Action research involves teachers working together in the planning and implementation of an initiative and then documenting the process and impact to determine future directions (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). Action research is based on the premise that people are motivated because of a desire to improve their practice and that this is supported through ongoing exchanges between teachers together with experts and leaders in the field (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). Continuous professional learning activities through action research and CoPs are closely related to the idea of early childhood teachers as pedagogues who research teaching and learning together with their

colleagues, families, and the young children they teach (Edwards et al., 2012). This collegial approach gives teachers the opportunity to teach each other by observing each other, engaging in dialogue, and working together to plan, design, research and reflect upon professional learning that is shared within the community (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008).

Mentor-Coaching

Coaching and mentoring provide individualized on-site responsive support through the formation of a trusting supportive relationship intended to encourage the sharing of problems and concerns necessary for lasting changes in practice (Knoche et al., 2013; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008). Mentor-coaching is most effective through a partnership that is characterized by reciprocity, respect for differing points of view, active dialogue, and opportunities for reflection (Friedman et al., 2012). Knoche and colleagues (2013) used in depth interviews to investigate the use of coaching in early childhood settings finding overwhelmingly positive responses and revealing five major themes that were important to the teachers participating. The first theme was the qualities of the coach, which included knowledge and expertise, experience with children, perspective taking, being caring and approachable, and having effective listening skills. The second theme related to the provision of resources by the coach including ideas, strategies, and the coach's physical presence including being willing to "pitch in" and help. The third theme related to qualities of the relationship including reciprocity, mutual trust and respect, dependability, communication, feedback, and empowerment. The fourth was the participants' transformation including improvement of practice, empowerment, and affective changes. The teachers also identified challenges such as wanting more time with the coach, experiencing discomfort with regard to feeling that they were being evaluated, and difficulty applying strategies resulting in wanting "more time, more showing, more helping" (Knoch et al., 2013).

In a comparable study, Brown and colleagues (2009) interviewed 28 early childhood teachers who participated in the Getting Ready PL intervention. The training institute presented collaborative methods followed by regularly scheduled individual and group coaching sessions facilitated by an expert. Teachers requested the coaching sessions as needed to share, reflect, ask questions, create goals, and discuss strengths and challenges. Findings revealed that teacher beliefs, perceptions, and perspectives of their practice changed and that the teachers appreciated the coaching support. In particular, the coaching provided opportunities for ongoing support through the process of change in complex practice. The researchers concluded that PL interventions to enhance parent engagement need to give teachers enough time to both acquire skills and internalize a philosophy of practice related to those skills with the support of coaching (Brown et al., 2009). In a comparable study, Koh and Neuman (2009) randomly assigned teachers to a language and literacy course only group; a course and coaching group; and a control group during a PL program. The researchers found that teachers in the course and coaching group were significantly more effective in enhancing the quality of the language and literacy environment. In a meta-analysis of the effects of PL on program quality and child outcomes, Egert et al., (2018) found that the number of PL hours offered to early years teachers is correlated with improvements in program quality irrespective of teacher qualifications, that coaching was three times more effective than other methods, and that PL positively impacts child outcomes via enhanced program quality. The following section provides an overview of the PL intervention developed and used in this study in connection with the existing research.

Professional Learning in the Present Study

Sheridan et al. (2009) systematically reviewed PL methods in ECCE and concluded that empirical studies are needed to investigate the key components of PL that are associated with

desired outcomes. This study will investigate the effectiveness of EC Parent Open Houses in facilitating discussion, mutual sharing of information, and the co-construction of ideas with the goal to promote enhanced understandings of children through democratic professionalism (Oberhuemer, 2005). The PL intervention will expand the focus of developing skills and knowledge alone to developing dispositions to learning and empowering educators. The latter is particularly important for early childhood teachers given that they are generally undervalued and under compensated on a global scale (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022) which can lead to a low perception of themselves as professionals (Chan, 2018; Chong & Lu, 2019). The PL intervention will consist of a blend of professional workshops, coaching, consultation, modelling, mentoring, communities of practice, and collective inquiry or action research. The PL will focus on the specific teaching practices and activities that have the potential to promote parent and teacher understandings of early years pedagogy and enhance PTRs. This multi-dimensional PL is suited to the present study given that it has been found to be particularly effective with less qualified teachers and during periods of reform (Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008).

The Whole Teacher conceptual framework will be utilized to address teacher beliefs, attitudes, and practice simultaneously (Chen & McCray, 2012). The teachers in the present study will begin the process by completing the researcher-designed questionnaire to assess beliefs and attitudes about early childhood pedagogy and PTRs. These questionnaires will then serve as a springboard for discussion in the focus groups to qualitatively gain more detailed information and a deeper understanding of teacher beliefs and perspectives to inform the PL intervention. The focus groups will be followed by two half-day learning sessions with the goal of enhancing teacher knowledge and understandings of the two focus areas of the CIEYCF. In these sessions, information and research evidence will also be shared and discussed regarding the positive

influence of parent engagement and PTRs on child wellbeing, learning and development. Following each of the two sessions, a CoP consisting of the teachers and the researcher will then function as a collaborative, contextualized, ongoing PL experience that includes authentic teacher voice and professional autonomy over an extended period of three months. With regard to practice, the focus in the present study is for teachers to be provided with an opportunity to apply the knowledge from the workshops into existing practice in a meaningful way with the EC Parent Open Houses as the guiding and culminating educational initiative. The CoP combined with the coaching and consulting will allow for teachers to work through challenges and personalize new knowledge so that internalization of practice is more likely to occur (Chen & McCray, 2012). Affirming and empowering PL together with a culture of support is more likely to improve teacher efficacy and classroom practices (Bills et al., 2016).

In conclusion, this literature review presented research related to parent engagement and parent-teacher relationships in connection with understandings of early childhood pedagogy and the importance of the early years. An argument was put forth that providing opportunities for two-way communication and interaction between parents and teachers in equitable and achievable ways is an effective way to realize the affiliation, confidence, understanding and trust in this relationship that facilitates the enhanced care and early learning experiences of young children in both the home and at school. A review of evidenced-based interventions and professional learning experiences that are most effective informed the PL intervention of the present study that was intentionally designed to promote parent engagement and higher quality parent-teacher relationships. Taken together, this literature review provided justification for the need to investigate the effectiveness of the PL intervention proposed in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In its pragmatic worldview, the present study used a mixed methods approach to address both confirmatory and explanatory questions about the effectiveness of a PL intervention (Patton, 2015). With regard to confirmatory research questions, the present study was a program evaluation involving “the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and results of programs to make judgments about the program, improve or further develop program effectiveness, inform decisions about future programming and increase understanding” (Patton, 2008, p. 39). Through explanatory questions, the present study addressed the argument that the failure to find statistically significant differences in the outcome of a program initiative using quantitative data does not necessarily mean that important effects have not occurred because these differences may be qualitative instead of quantitative (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, statistical outcomes of complex social systems can only measure what has been conceptualized and operationalized in advance of the creation of a questionnaire, whereas qualitative methods can detect and understand unanticipated outcomes (Patton, 2015). Therefore, the present study investigated what occurred while also investigating why it occurred through explanatory questions in focus groups. In order to inform effective policy, this study was designed to determine both the level of predicted outcomes from the quantitative data but also the context when interpreting statistical outcomes with regard to the depth, detail and meaning of those outcomes to the families and teachers so as to personalize the evaluation (Patton, 2015).

In their review of 62 studies investigating teacher views of DAP, Bubikova-Moan et al. (2019) found that only eight studies used both quantitative and qualitative data indicating a need for mixed methods research in this area of interest. A convergent parallel mixed methods design

was used in the present study such that quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed separately and then compared to each other in a side-by-side approach to assess convergence or divergence of the data sets (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, this study followed a pragmatic paradigm to evaluate the impact of an intervention to determine the intended and unintended outcomes with regard to the behaviors, skills, dispositions and views of the parents and teachers involved (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). The design is suited to the research questions and is informed by theory, the current state of knowledge in the literature and the relevant international professional field experience of the researcher. The within-design consistency exists because the qualitative and quantitative components fit together in a logical sequence to support each other and enhance understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2009). The pragmatic paradigm is an inter-subjective approach that works back and forth between objective and subjective frames of reference considering both the objective to generalize to other contexts and the importance of achieving shared meaning with the participants (Morgan, 2007). This approach has the benefit of assisting the researcher to “develop results and interpretations that expand understanding, are comprehensive and are validated and confirmed” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018, p. 221). The term “intervention” in this study refers to the half-day workshops, the PL process to support the teachers in applying the new learning into practice, and the creation and implementation of the EC Parent Open Houses. The findings can be used to inform future ECCE policy and practice in the Cayman Islands.

Participants

Selection of Participating Schools

Participating schools met the following selection criteria: a) the early childhood center is privately owned and operated and not part of a larger elementary school; b) at least one of the

teachers in each classroom has educational training in either ECCE and/or the CIEYCF in-service training in the Cayman Islands; and c) the preschool charges fees below the median fee charging independent preschools (fees for full day range from \$500 to \$1600/month). The first criterion is important because the ECCE centers selected would be specialized and focused on early childhood. The second criterion was based on the advisement of the ECCE Unit suggesting that the teachers would benefit from a certain level of professional knowledge about ECCE and/or the CIEYCF to experience comfort and success in the PL process and activities. The third criterion was important because the purpose of the present study was to examine a PL intervention in schools that primarily serve lower to middle-income families and where teacher remuneration is often significantly lower than the higher fee-charging preschools. Selection criteria A and C were discovered by looking at the inspection results and/or websites of the preschools. Selection criteria B is standard for preschools in the Cayman Islands and was confirmed at each center when meeting with the owner/director to ask if they were interested in participating in the study.

Using these selection criteria, ten schools out of a possible twenty privately owned and operated preschools in the Cayman Islands were identified. The researcher contacted the ten identified schools in a randomized order and asked if they would like to participate in the study. The first four schools out of the ten selected schools that agreed to participate were selected. These four schools were then randomly assigned to either the PL intervention or Comparison groups. This resulted in two schools in the PL intervention group and two schools in the Comparison group. The reason for selecting only four schools for participation in the study is that the in-depth PL intervention was extended over three months and the data collection strategies were extensive given the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. However,

the inclusion of two schools in each condition was an attempt to reduce the impact of possible individual school and teacher differences to broaden the applicability of the findings and to ensure that if a school dropped out of the study, there would most likely still be at least one school in each of the intervention and comparison groups.

Participant Group

Four preschools participated in the study. PL Intervention Preschool A consisted of a total population of 37 children and 9 teachers and PL Intervention Preschool B consisted of a total population of 56 children and 11 teachers. Of the two comparison schools, Preschool C had a total school population of 30 children and 5 teachers and Preschool D had a total school population of 35 children and 6 teachers. The final sample for data analysis was comprised of 31 teachers and 158 families. Participants in the present study were early childhood teachers/practitioners in Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands with 20 PL intervention and 11 comparison teachers. Participants were women ranging in age from 21 to 58. The large majority had high school education while 8 teachers had levels one, two (certificate) or three (diploma) in ECCE through to 4 teachers who had a degree in education. Of the 31 teachers, 2 were Caymanian and 29 were from countries within the Caribbean and the Philippines and working in the Cayman Islands through annual work permits. This participant sample with reference to education, experience and residency status is representative of the lower fee-charging preschools in the Cayman Islands. The teachers' experience ranged from 1 to 35 years. There were 92 parents who completed the questionnaires on PTRs and DAP. For the post-data collection, School D, a comparison school, did not want the PTR survey data to be included in the study and so post-intervention survey data for School D is for the DAP survey only and all PTR survey data pre- and post-intervention for School D were not included in the data analysis.

Informed Consent

The directors and teachers in both the PL intervention and Comparison schools were given informed consent forms describing the purposes, objectives, and important aspects of the research project, stating that no harm from participating is anticipated and that their contributions will be kept private and confidential (see Appendix A). It was stressed that any school, director, teacher, and parent who decides not to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time throughout the duration of the study will not influence their relationship with the ECCE Unit or the Cayman Islands Early Childhood Association (CIECA) either now or in the future. Due to the fact that at the time of data collection, the researcher was serving on the Executive Committee of the CIECA, it was important to emphasize the second assurance in particular, which was done both verbally when meeting with the teachers to explain the study and in writing through the consent forms. Furthermore, the teachers were informed that they will still receive the gift certificate of \$30 for participating even if they withdraw from the study (see Appendix A). Informed consent information was also shared with parents in a parent communication and meeting, on the first page of the questionnaire and prior to participating in focus groups following the intervention (see Appendix B).

Procedures

The proposed study was a quasi-experimental study. Some participants received a professional learning (PL) intervention and others did not receive the intervention. The PL intervention involved 1) a half day professional learning workshop, 2) three weeks participating in a community of practice with the mentoring, modelling and coaching of the researcher provided; 3) the community of practice: teachers applying the new knowledge in their practice while preparing for the EC Parent Open Houses; and 4) implementation of the EC Parent Open

Houses for the teachers to share their knowledge about the PL topic with parents as the parents visited the classroom together with their child to explore and share the learning environment.

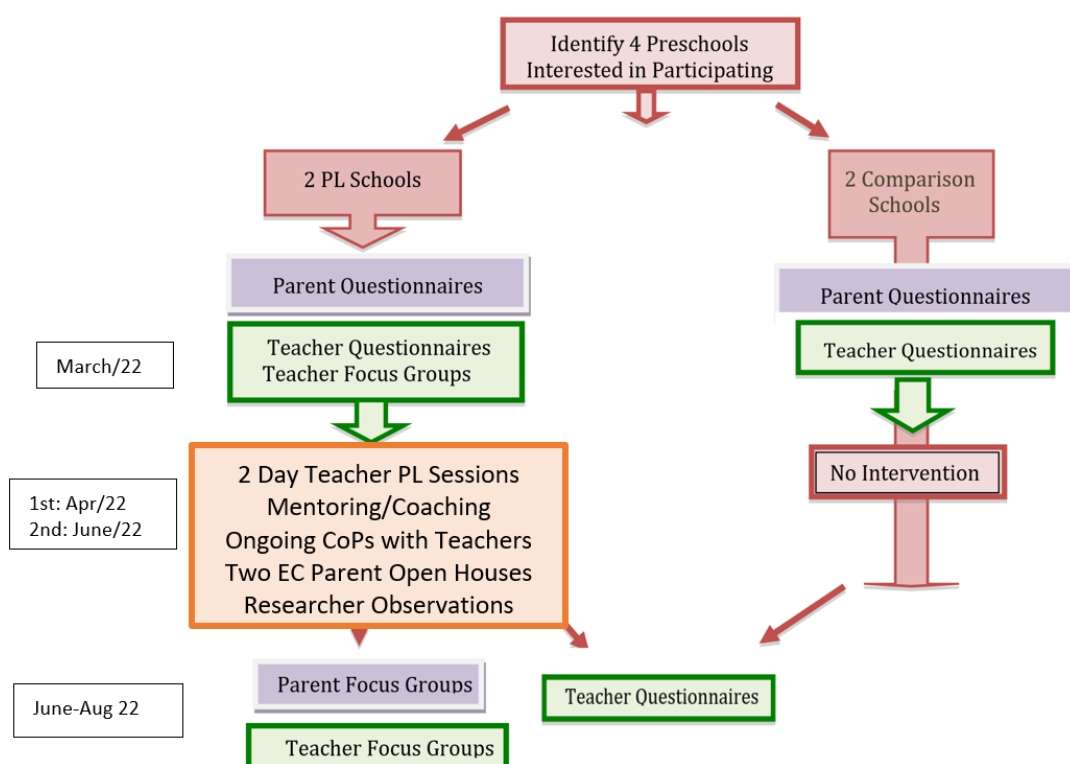
The term “PL” in the proposed study refers to both the PL process and the goal of the PL

Community of Practice: the implementation of two Early Childhood (EC) Parent Open Houses.

The procedures are described below in three sections: Pre-PL intervention, PL Intervention, and Post-PL intervention. Figure 1 displays a diagram of the procedure.

Figure 1

Diagram of Procedure



Pre-PL Intervention Data Collection

Prior to the PL intervention, both parents and teachers in all four preschools were surveyed about their views on ECCE pedagogy and about their relationships with each other. Following this, PL teachers participated in focus groups prior to starting the PL process.

Parent and teacher surveys. A 44-item Likert scale questionnaire (see Appendix C) was used. Section One (20 items) assessed parent and teacher beliefs and attitudes about early childhood pedagogy (DAP). Section Two (24 items) asked parents and teachers to indicate their views about their relationship with each other. The two sections will be described in more detail below along with the pilot testing, validation, and administration procedures.

Section One consisted of 20 statements asking respondents to rank each statement related to DAP on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, agree, strongly agree). The statements are specific to the major indicators of DAP in early childhood pedagogy with reference to a) schoolification (items 1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 12); b) play (items 4, 5, 9, 13, 20), and c) teacher role to encourage autonomy/intrinsic motivation (items 8, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19) and a remaining 3 general items about early years in general, teacher qualifications, and parent-teacher communication (3, 14, 15). These focus areas were chosen because a) they are key components of DAP; and b) they are highlighted in the CIEYCF's guiding statement: "Children will be self-confident, resilient, critical thinkers who are intrinsically motivated to explore their world through play and active learning, able to clearly communicate their thoughts and ideas with respect to the people and the world around them" (Cayman Islands Ministry of Education, 2015). The items in Section One were created by the researcher drawing upon the CIEYCF, Yen's (2008) Parent Beliefs Scale (PBS) (about DAP), and the Parent Play Beliefs Scale (PPBS) (Fogle & Mendez, 2006).

Section One of the questionnaire in the present study started with 26 items and was pilot tested in three ways. Firstly, it was given to three members of the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit of the Cayman Islands Ministry of Education for expert input and feedback. Secondly, the questionnaire was given to 32 student teachers in an ECCE teacher training course

for feedback and input. Thirdly, the questionnaire was given to volunteer parents of preschool children not involved in the present study. This third pilot test included three groups: 1) test-retest: 5 parents completed the questionnaire on two occasions separated by one week; 2) 7 parents completed both Section One of the researcher-created questionnaire and the Parent Beliefs Scale (Yen, 2008) – an existing measurement tool of parent views on DAP in early childhood programs with established reliability and validity; and 3) volunteer parents who completed the questionnaire were asked to meet and discuss the questionnaire with the researcher and provide feedback. Three parents agreed to meet with the researcher to provide feedback. This pilot testing was completed for the purpose of refining the instrument for the present study. As a result, the wording of items changed in response to feedback (e.g., items 18 and 19 which both ended with the same phrase were changed from “...when young children do not behave the way we want them to” to “...when young children do not behave”. Following completion of pilot testing, 20 of the original 26 items were selected through this process as a result of feedback regarding clarity of particular items and feedback indicating that 26 items made the survey too long. This decision was made to increase survey response rate by having a survey that has 20 items that fit onto two pages which would be less daunting and onerous for both the teachers and parents under study (26 items needed three pages). Furthermore, the items were selected to best represent the three subscales of the survey: schoolification, play, and teacher role in ECCE. The test-retest reliability for Section One of the survey was .86 and the Pearson correlation coefficient of Section One to the PBS (Yen, 2008) was .936 significant at the .01 level. See Appendix C for the complete survey.

Section two consisted of a total of 24 items. Section two assesses teacher and parent views on their relationship with each other (PTRs) using an already existing measurement tool:

the Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale (PTRS-11, Vickers & Minke, 1995). The *Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale* is a 24-item measure to assess the quality of the parent-teacher relationship, with versions available for both parents and teachers. Items are rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *almost never*, 5 = *almost always*) and form two subscales: Joining and Communication. Higher scores indicate greater perceptions of affiliation and support, dependability and availability, and shared expectations and beliefs, and more information sharing in the parent-teacher relationship. Vickers and Minke (1995) reported Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .98 for the Joining subscale for both parents and teachers – (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20, 24), and a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .85 for teachers and .86 for parents on the Communication to Other subscale (items 5, 9, 11, 13, 15, 18, 21, 22, 23) with a sample drawn from elementary schools. Dr. Minke has given her permission to use this measurement tool for the present study through email correspondence. The PTR survey can be found in Appendix C of this dissertation.

Administration of the surveys. The researcher was present in the preschools at pick up times over a period of two weeks in March of 2022 to request parents to fill in the written questionnaire. Parents were welcome to either take the questionnaire home or the researcher offered to remain present for any parent who preferred to fill it out in the preschool center. No parents chose the latter option. Parents in all groups were also given the option of an online questionnaire. The teachers in both the PL intervention and Comparison groups completed the teacher version of the survey prior to the PL intervention commencing.

Focus groups. Just prior to beginning the PL process, qualitative data was collected through focus groups with the teachers in the initiative schools and this data was also used to inform the PL component. Focus groups are both an interview and an observational technique that allow the researcher to hear the perspectives of the participants on the topic of interest along

with observing the interactions among participants (Teddie & Tashakori, 2009). Focus groups have a conversational element that allows for thoughts and perspectives to emerge in the interactions between participants (e.g., enthusiastic agreement indicated from other participants to comments made by one participant), which would not be revealed in interviews (Morgan, 2007) and this synergy allows for group norms to be identified (Barnes et al., 2016). Therefore, focus groups are consistent with Symbolic Interactionist theory which focuses on the co-creation of knowledge through dialogue and interactions. Focus groups allowed the voices of the participants to be expressed and heard with the goal of enhancing empowerment and collegiality in relation to the PL Intervention and the EC Parent Open Houses.

The focus groups were conducted by the researcher and were audio-recorded. The researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim prior to data analysis. The pre-intervention teacher focus groups contained guiding open-ended questions related to the surveys but was responsive in delivery to encourage the teachers to communicate more freely with each other in a discussion like format (see Appendix D). Both the pre and post intervention teacher focus groups concluded with a summary of the key points for verification by the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The post-intervention focus group questions can be found in Appendix E.

PL Intervention Process

The PL process was completed with the teachers in the two PL schools and not with the teachers in the two Comparison schools. The PL process took approximately three months to complete and was comprised of two phases: one for each of the two EC Parent Open House topics: Play and Responsive Literacy. The PL intervention process included the following components: a) a half-day teacher PL workshop session that provided in depth coverage of the topic for the upcoming EC Parent Open House; b) a half day coaching and reflection session in

the classroom to practice applying the topic to teaching practice together with the researcher; and c) ongoing researcher support through coaching, modelling and consultation as requested by the teachers as they prepared for the implementation of the EC Parent Open Houses through multiple site visits of a minimum 10 visits per school for each topic.

The EC Parent Open Houses occurred approximately four weeks after the PL workshop sessions with the coaching and consulting, modelling, and mentoring in the CoPs occurring in the time between each PL workshop session and the corresponding EC Parent Open House. Consistent with the finding that the effectiveness of PL increases when it is longer-term and ongoing (Howe & Jacobs, 2012), the PL process was multidimensional including information sharing, coaching, modelling, and ongoing consultation in communities of practice. The PL intervention utilized the Whole Teacher conceptual framework for in-service professional learning that attends to social/emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of growth via developing attitudes, knowledge, and practice (Chen & McCray, 2012). The PL process was informed by the results of the pre-PL intervention parent and teacher questionnaire data and the teacher focus groups to enhance the facilitator's understanding of the existing parent and teacher views of the CIEYCF, DAP and PTRs. Discussion and reflection were key components of the PL sessions serving as an extension of the teacher focus groups so that the teachers could tie the new information to their existing knowledge, views, understandings, and the specific context along with their existing practice. The researcher prioritized a partnership orientation to empower learners that included a genuine respect for each learner's point of view through collaborative decision making and learner choice and active dialogue between coach and coachee, along with opportunities for reflection and authentic application of learning through the EC Parent Open Houses (Friedman et al., 2012; Knight, 2007).

The PL process prioritized the use of strength-based support establishing a positive and encouraging relationship with participants viewing the participants and respecting them as early childhood democratic professionals (Buysse & Wesley, 2005; Sheridan et al., 2009). Frequent visits to intervention preschools following the PL and leading up to the EC Parent Open Houses were included as opportunities for the facilitator to provide additional support, address challenges, and provide guidance (Powell et al., 2012). This provides a longer engagement period giving more time for a closer relationship to be created between the researcher/coach and the teachers (Domitrovich et al., 2012). Greater success in teachers putting group training PL sessions into practice has been found when it is followed by on-site individualized mentoring from a coach (Powell et al., 2012; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008). Consistent with the positive benefits of teacher mentoring and coaching (Chen & McCray, 2012; Powell et al., 2013), the PL included a half-day coaching session with the researcher as an opportunity for the researcher to provide modeling, feedback, and support to the teachers as they practice applying the topic from the PL session into their teaching practice. Coaching is most effective when the coach has experience in both ECCE and adult education including strategies for active learner participation engaging in behaviors such as listening, observing, modeling, providing feedback, facilitating problem solving, generating solutions to challenges (Dunst & Trivette, 2009).

In summary, the PL process focused on the Whole teacher (Chen & McCray, 2012), Democratic Professionalism (Oberhuemer, 2005), group sessions, coaching, consultation, and communities of practice (CoPs) as overviewed in more detail in the literature review. The PL incorporated the three elements of CoPs: 1) the participants share a domain of interest and shared competence; 2) they participate together in a community of trust and collaboration as they learn together; and 3) they share knowledge, problem-solve, and advance their practice in the domain

of interest through sustained interactions (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Notes and photographs taken during these visits also served as qualitative data to assist researcher notetaking for the purpose of triangulation. Due to photo permission, confidentiality, and child safeguarding issues, the photos were not shared in the write-up of the study.

Half-day PL group sessions. The half-day PL learning sessions were designed to share information and research findings about parent engagement and PTRs with teachers. The half-day PL sessions also covered in detail the topic for the upcoming EC Parent Open House. Therefore, the first PL session focused on holistic learning through play and the second session focused on literacy learning through warm responsive adult-child interactions to encourage autonomy/intrinsic motivation. The half-day PL sessions were designed and facilitated by the researcher to prepare the PL teachers with the skills and knowledge to assist them in the creation and implementation of the two EC Parent Forums. The format of the PL sessions included informal group discussions, activities, and role-playing (see Appendix G). The focus was to work together as a group to help the early childhood teachers understand the topic and collaborate to translate the new learning into practice. In addition to application in practice, the teachers also collaborated to plan a presentation of the material to parents in a way that is authentic, culturally responsive, and sensitive. The PL process and CoP included genuine teacher input and voice in designing the EC Parent Open Houses embedded in ongoing problem-solving and reflective practice. The primary goal of these PL sessions and the follow-up coaching and consulting was to build capacity in the teachers and promote interaction that fosters enhanced sensitivity to teacher perspectives on the part of the participatory researcher (Patton, 2015).

EC Parent Open House implementation. There were two EC Parent Open Houses: one as the culminating activity for the first PL topic of Play and a second EC Parent Open House as

the culminating activity for the second PL topic of Responsive Literacy. The EC Parent Open Houses were teacher created and facilitated during the PL workshop sessions and family-centered in an attempt to empower individual teachers and parents while at the same time giving preschools autonomy to be culturally sensitive and most relevant to the communities they serve. The researcher provided support that is responsive to each individual teacher's needs and preferences with regard to both the creation and implementation of the EC Parent Open Houses. In an attempt to overcome the commonly identified barriers to parent engagement and to be responsive to the needs of the preschool parent and teacher community, the EC Parent Open Houses were offered on a drop-in basis during the usual range of pick-up time (3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.). This was done so that teachers were not asked to lengthen their already long working day and so that parents would have the flexibility to attend within a longer time frame that worked best for them and so that they could stay as long as they like based on personal preference. The EC Parent Open Houses were well advertised (the information flyer can be found in Appendix H) and the preschool and teachers encouraged parents to attend. Given that social events hosted by early childhood programs have been linked to positive outcomes for families and teachers with regard to relationship and community building (Duncan et al., 2006; Soji), both sessions focused on teachers, parents and children interacting informally with each other in the preschool setting. The preschool provided refreshments and a slideshow with a collection of pictures of children learning for all attending families to enjoy together with their children. This was an added component to enhance and extend social networks and relationships between parents and teachers and to provide parents with more information about their children's experiences in preschool. The researcher circulated throughout the preschool during the event observing, interacting and taking photographs.

Objectives of EC Parent Open Houses. The EC Parent Open Houses were designed by the teachers and offered by the preschool to provide parents and teachers with an opportunity to share and discuss issues of practice and research findings in ECCE as connected with the two focus goals of the CIEYCF in this study: Play and Responsive Literacy. It is important to note that the term DAP in the present study was taken from the name of NAEYC's position statement and that consistent with the statement, the term DAP includes developmentally, individually and culturally appropriate practices. The PL intervention had the goal of considering, incorporating and promoting understandings of all three. The EC Parent Open House objectives were:

- 1) enhance teacher knowledge of the PL topic through application and sharing in practice
- 2) enhance parent knowledge of the PL topic.
- 3) empower teachers and parents in their roles.
- 4) foster equitable, positive, and respectful parent-teacher-child relationships and mutual understanding through communication and interaction.
- 5) enhance teaching practice through a better understanding of early childhood, individual students, parent preferences, and children's home environments (i.e., developmentally, individually and culturally appropriate practices)
- 6) support and enhance parenting confidence through information exchange and dialogue between parents and teachers so that parents gain information about ECCE and about their child's experiences in school in general and in relation to the PL topic and to encourage consistency between home and school.
- 7) act as a springboard for parents and teachers to create individualized plans for parental engagement and ongoing communication that are responsive to both teacher and parent needs and preferences, and

8) facilitate the implementation of the CIEYCF through consideration of the varying ideas and perspectives of interested stakeholders.

Observations during the EC Parent Open Houses. The researcher documented the content and components of the PL process using handwritten notes and photographs. The focus was on gathering observational evidence to determine if the goal of fostering early years teachers who are pedagogical leaders in their practice with families was achieved and if so, to what degree. The observational notes served to triangulate the quantitative and qualitative post-intervention data findings. Furthermore, this documentation served to provide additional information about the process of the intervention to inform possible future replication for research purposes or for offering the PL intervention on a wider scale. The present study followed the recommendations of Sheridan et al. (2019) who conducted a systematic descriptive review of the empirical literature to characterize key features of PL and to offer suggestions for future research recommending that researchers should identify and clearly define the active ingredients and components (e.g., workshops, coaching) and include information about the learners and the context.

Anecdotal notes and photographs were taken of the teachers and parents in both EC Parent Open Houses. Specifically, observations of teacher and parent behavior and interactions during both offerings of EC Parent Open Houses were documented by the researcher following the completion of the event. The photographs were used as a springboard for recording the observational notes. These observations looked for teacher practices that encourage positive parent-teacher relationships through family-centered and capacity building approaches and through respectful information sharing and dialogue about early years pedagogy. This process generated fifty-five pages of typed reflective field notes together with 124 photos taken at the EC

Parent Open Houses that included pictures of classroom set-ups, and teacher-child-parent interactions. Photographs are not shared in this dissertation in the interest of child safeguarding and maintaining confidentiality. The initial coding of the researcher notes taken at the EC Parent Open Houses used the list of categories and subcategories from the post-intervention focus group transcripts using the constant comparative method of analysis. The notes were examined for consistencies and inconsistencies with the codes, categories and themes of the post-intervention focus group data and also analyzed for new pieces of information that did not fit into the list of categories already created but were considered relevant. In these cases, either an existing category was adjusted, or a new category was created.

Post-PL Intervention Data Collection

Teacher surveys. Approximately one week following the completion of the EC Parent Open Houses, the teachers in both the PL and Comparison preschools were asked to complete the same teacher questionnaire (part one) given to teachers prior to the intervention for a second time. Teachers in all three of the four preschools also completed the parent-teacher relationship scale (part two) for a second time.

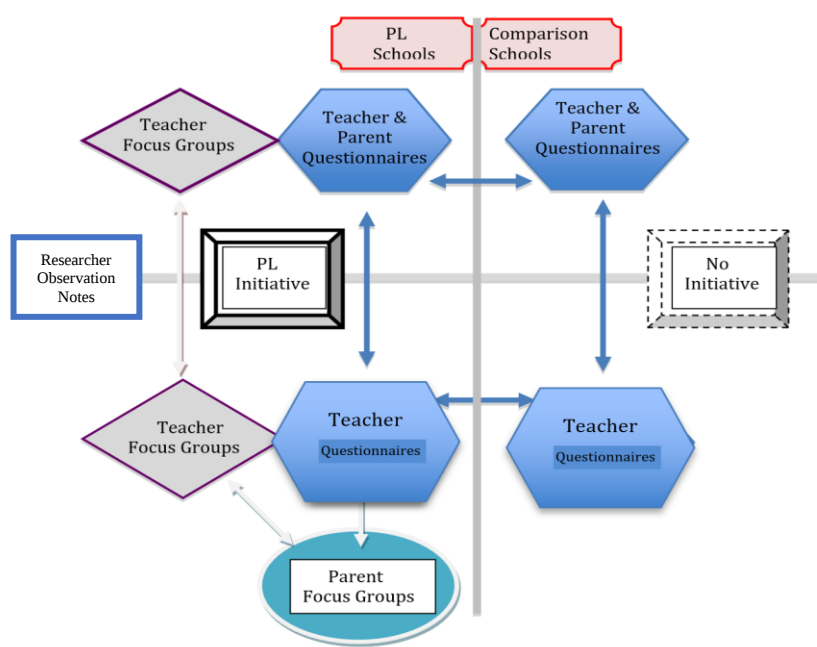
Parent focus groups. After the completion of the PL intervention, parents who attended at least one EC Parent Open House were asked if they were interested in participating in a focus group with other parents to discuss the EC Parent Open Houses, ECCE and PTRs. These focus groups were audio-recorded and took place in the preschool. In its pragmatic focus, the post-intervention parent focus groups had the goal of yielding practical and useful insights and focused on gaining an understanding of the parents' perspectives (Patton, 2015). Parents were asked about their thoughts about ECCE, the items on the survey, and their relationships with teachers. They were also asked what they thought of the EC Parent Open Houses (e.g., What, if

any, do parents think was/were the outcome/s of the EC Parent Open Houses? Do parents think they are worthwhile? Would parents like them to be continued? Why or Why not? How could the EC Parent Open Houses be better?

Teacher focus groups. Approximately one week after the second EC Parent Open House was completed, the teachers participated in focus groups with the researcher to learn about their perspectives on the PL intervention. These focus groups were audio-recorded and took place in the preschools. The post-intervention teacher focus groups also had the pragmatic goal of yielding practical and useful insights and focused on gaining an understanding of the teachers' perspectives and reflections on both the PL process and the EC Parent Open Houses (Patton, 2015). Teachers were asked about what they believe to be the outcomes (if any) of the PL process and/or the EC Parent Open Houses on their teaching practice and relationships with parents (see Appendix E). The purpose of this qualitative data collection was less about comparing teacher responses but instead focused on gaining a deeper understanding of each teacher's views, perspectives, and responses to the PL intervention and their views of how parents and children responded. While the flow of questions and discussions was flexible, the overall focus was to ascertain teacher views of the intervention process and outcomes.

Data Analysis

Consistent with the convergent parallel mixed method design of the present study, the quantitative and qualitative data sets were analyzed separately, reported separately in the results section, and then brought together using a side-by-side comparison at the end of the results section and again in the discussion section noting whether there was convergence or divergence in the two data bases (Creswell, 2014). Figure 2 displays an overview of the data collection and analysis.

Figure 2*Overview of Data Analysis***Quantitative Data Analysis**

Exploratory research questions to gain an understanding of parent and teacher views of DAP and PTRs pre-intervention were answered using descriptive statistics to look for similarities and differences in views indicated by means and standard deviations. Parametric and non-parametric statistical tests were also employed to determine if there were any significant differences pre- to post-intervention between and within groups. An overall mean score for DAP and PTR items for both parents and teachers was calculated using a scale of 1-5 that corresponds with the Likert scale used for each question with higher scores indicating more DAP beliefs and more favorable views of PTRs.

DAP Survey Data Analysis. Parent and Teacher DAP surveys pre-intervention were analyzed in relation to respondent type (teacher or parent); condition (PL intervention or

Comparison); and for the DAP questions by category (play, schoolification, teacher role). Items 3, 14, 15 were of relevance to the questions under investigation in relation to overall views about ECCE and PTRs and were placed in a General Items category. This data was further analyzed to determine if parents and teachers have similar or contrasting views of DAP overall and/or in relation to particular categories and/or items and to determine which items, if any, had the most and least agreement. The data from the teacher and parent surveys were analyzed separately for Survey Part One: Early Childhood Pedagogy/DAP and Survey Part Two: Parent-Teacher Relationships to answer the following questions:

1. What are the pre-intervention teacher views of DAP in relation to the three categories of the survey: play, schoolification, and teacher role? Are teacher views similar to each other or is there a wide range of views by category (play, schoolification, teacher role) and/or for specific items? Which categories and items have the most and least agreement among teachers?
2. What are the parents' views of DAP in relation to the three components of the survey: play, schoolification, and teacher role? Are parent views similar to each other or is there a wide range of answers for each category and/or for each question? Which categories and items have the most and least agreement among parents?
3. How do the teacher views of DAP pre-intervention compare to parent views of DAP? Which categories and/or items have the most agreement between parents and teachers? Which items have the most disagreement?
4. What are the teachers' views of their relationships with parents and how similar or different are their views as a group?
5. What are the parent views of their relationships with teachers and how similar or different are their views as a group?

6. Do parents and teachers rate the quality of their relationships similarly or are there differences? If there are differences, which specific items had the most agreement and disagreement between groups?

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from the pre-intervention teacher focus groups was analyzed to gain a greater understanding of teacher views of the three focus areas of the questionnaire and their existing relationships with parents to inform the PL intervention. This pre-intervention focus group data was also used for the purpose of triangulation to the pre-intervention DAP and PTR quantitative survey data. The post-intervention teacher focus group data was analyzed to understand PL teacher perspectives of the PL process and the EC Parent Open Houses and to look for teacher reported changes in their beliefs and practices along with teacher reports of what they believed to be the outcomes and impact of the intervention on themselves, children, and parents. The data analysis of the teacher focus groups post-intervention was more focused on determining changes in values, attitudes, and beliefs along with the addition of evaluation coding to ascertain beliefs about the merit and worth of the EC Parent Open Houses, causation coding to determine why participants think particular outcomes occurred and magnitude coding to determine an overall rating of the program as effective, mixed, or ineffective (Miles et al., 2014).

The post-intervention parent focus groups were analyzed to gain a better understanding of parent views of DAP and the EC Parent Open Houses and these were compared to teacher views both pre- and post-intervention. The parent focus groups were conducted following the second open house in both of the intervention schools. In School B, there were nine parents present and in School A, three parents attended. One additional parent focus group was conducted after the

teachers did their own EC Parent Open House #3 to gain more insight into parent views of ECCE, PTRs and the EC Parent Open Houses given the smaller numbers of the parent focus groups post-intervention. The researcher's observational notes of both teachers and parents during the EC Parent Open Houses were analyzed to determine consistency between data sets (i.e., were the researchers observations of the teachers and parents during the EC Parent Open Houses consistent with the teacher and parent focus group findings). Collectively, what categories and themes emerged in the pre-intervention and post-intervention teacher focus groups and are they consistent with the existing research, theories, and conceptual frameworks? As a mixed methods research study, data analysis included the comparison of qualitative and quantitative data to determine if the qualitative data analysis was congruent or incongruent with the findings of the quantitative data analysis and if so, in what ways?

The researcher conducted the four focus groups pre-intervention, two at each of the intervention schools. The rationale for two groups in each school was to keep the overall group numbers low so that more participants would have the opportunity to share more frequently. The post-intervention focus group data was collected in three focus groups. Preschool A participated in one focus group together which lasted 66 minutes and the other two took place at the Preschool B and were 33.05 minutes and 16.44 minutes long. Given the very high level of agreement between teachers in all three focus groups as indicated by head nodding and vocalizations of agreement, along with the importance of protecting and increasing anonymity, the data will be presented in aggregate form. This overview will use the word "teachers" to refer to the teachers as a group. Qualitative coding began with the focus group transcripts as they represented the larger of the two qualitative data sources. Categories created from the post-

intervention focus groups were then used to examine the researcher's hand-written notes and photographs of the EC Parent Open Houses.

The process of conducting the focus groups and transcribing the audio recordings served to familiarize the researcher with the data in particular with regard to the mood, tone, and level of perceived agreement between teachers based on their reactions to the statements of other members in the group. Each of the four recordings were transcribed verbatim, with the exception of noting times when there was much agreement after a statement. Quotations were only used in the results section when there was agreement from the other participants in the focus group indicated by head nodding and affirmations of the statement made so that the quotes are also representative of the group rather than just the individual speaking. The data analysis and coding was completed for each of the four focus group transcripts one after the other for each step of the data analysis process. Thematic analysis with an open approach was chosen to allow for culturally specific perceptions to emerge (Jensen et al., 2021) and In Vivo coding was also used to "prioritize and honor the participants' voices" (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 74). During reading and re-reading of the transcripts, significant statements emerged and as they were identified, themes and sub-themes were developed based on the clustering of those significant statements (Creswell, 2014).

Coding began with reading through the transcripts one after the other and making notes in the margins. Open coding was done at the beginning of data analysis to tag any unit of data that might be relevant to the study using notations. This data was then analyzed again using coding "to retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily available units" allowing reoccurring patterns to be identified, and similar patterns to be combined (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 73). This

was followed by axial coding to combine codes into fewer and more comprehensive categories, to relate categories to each other and for refining a category scheme (Corbin and Strauss 2015). The creation of categories ensured that they were exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitive to the data, and conceptually congruent (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Pattern coding was used to group the first cycle codes into a smaller number of categories and overarching themes (Miles et al., 2014). A coding scheme was developed based off of the themes emerging from the data and knowledge of the literature. The majority of codes referenced clear and substantive issues and within each larger theme, sub-themes were created. Specific passages were assigned more than one code when appropriate as there was overlap due to the complexity and inter-relatedness of the concept of DAP. Descriptive codes were developed from the data to label words or short phrases from the language of participants to highlight commonalities and emerging themes. Magnitude coding was also used to indicate the intensity with which the participants in the focus group agreed with the statement of another participant (noted as agreement on the transcripts) to help determine the degree to which statements made by one participant were representative of the dominant views of the group (Miles et al., 2014). In the final stage of data analysis, the established codes were then grouped together under the categories through a process that allowed for the themes to emerge.

Validation of Analysis. Guba and Lincoln (1989) propose that the criteria for trustworthiness include credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. These four criteria collectively indicate the quality of the data and were used to ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the present study. Credibility refers to whether the researcher's written work is believable from the participants' perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility techniques include prolonged engagement of the researcher in the research settings, persistent observations,

triangulation of data and member checks. The present study employed prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checking to increase credibility. Prolonged engagement was achieved by virtue of the depth of the PL intervention and the extended time for the PL intervention and data collection. Member checks involve confirming the researcher's representation of the phenomena of interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). Member checks worked particularly well with this research study because the teachers and the researcher collaborated with one another in the meaning making process. With reference to the pre-intervention data, member checks happened regularly between the researcher and the participants throughout the PL process and to confirm the researcher's representation of the phenomena of interest post data analysis. The researcher met with two participants from each of the intervention schools and provided them with the data analysis, codes, categories, and themes and they were given an opportunity to make comments provide feedback and make any corrections. All four teachers agreed with the codes, categories, and themes of the analysis and did not suggest any changes to the interpretation. Confirmability is also supported by peer debriefing. In reference to peer debriefing, the researcher shared the findings of the data analysis with a colleague who has experience in leadership roles in several Cayman Islands preschools comparable to the preschools in the present study to help examine assumptions, thoughts, and interpretations of the teachers' statements. The findings were consistent with her experiences and understandings of ECCE in the Cayman Islands.

Triangulation supports the credibility of findings by showing that at least three independent measures agree with each other, and this can be accomplished through triangulation of data source, method, researcher, and by theory (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Triangulation in the present study was achieved through data source by the use of surveys, focus

groups and researcher observational notes and photographs throughout the PL process. The use of multiple methods of data collection meant that the researcher could compare and cross-check data collected at different times and through different methods (Patton, 2015). The transferability of inferences from the research settings to other similar settings is also key in determining the quality of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order for other researchers to make comparisons with other contexts, the participants own words were heavily used to illustrate the emerging themes.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

The research questions were investigated using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The presentation of findings will be organized around the relevant research questions with the quantitative data presented first followed by the qualitative data. The pre-intervention quantitative results are presented first for both parents and teachers followed by the post-intervention quantitative results for teachers. The qualitative results will be presented after the quantitative results with the pre-intervention teacher focus group findings presented first and the post-intervention teacher focus groups presented second. The findings of the post-intervention parent focus groups will be presented alongside the presentation of the pre and post-intervention teacher focus groups as relevant. Lastly, the researcher observational data collected at the EC Parent Open Houses will be presented alongside the results of the pre- and post-intervention teacher focus groups. Finally, the qualitative and quantitative data will then be reported together in a side-by-side approach at the end of the chapter.

Quantitative Data

Pre-Intervention: Survey Results

An overall mean score for DAP and PTR items for both parents and teachers was calculated using a scale of 1-5 that corresponds with the Likert scale used for each question with higher scores indicating more DAP beliefs and more favorable views of PTRs. These scores were then analyzed and compared using descriptive statistics. The 152 survey responses from parents and teachers were analyzed and the value for Chronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .79$ indicating good internal consistency.

DAP survey results for parents and teachers. The DAP survey data for both parents and teachers pre-intervention were analyzed to look at mean DAP scores and standard deviations for each item and then again for each of the three categories: schoolification, play, and teacher role. Table 1 summarizes the mean parent and teacher scores pre-intervention for each DAP survey item grouped together under the three categories: Schoolification, Play, and Teacher Role followed by the three items grouped as General DAP. Some items were reverse scored such that indicating strong agreement with the item translated to a lower DAP score. These are items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 17 and 18 and are noted by a * in Table One.

Table 1*DAP Survey Means and Standard Deviations for Parents and Teachers*

DAP Items by Category	Parents		Teachers	
	M	SD	M	SD
Schoolification	2.2	1.0	2.4	1.1
1. It is important for preschool children (PC) to be taught separate subjects (like math, language, science) at separate times like in elementary school. *	2.0	.96	2.3	1.2
2. Important for PC to work quietly at tables most of the time doing activities planned by T.*	2.9	1.1	3.4	1.3
6. Activities like chanting, memorizing flashcards, copying, & workbooks are important. *	1.8	0.9	2.0	1.0
7. It is important to give preschool children tests to find out what they know. *	2.4	1.1	2.7	1.1
10. It is important for PC to be challenged to learn academics early so that they will do better in school and in life. *	2.3	1.1	2.2	1.1
12. It is important to give preschool parents a report card that shows the child's learning in each area of the program compared to other children (A,B,C,D, or Good, Satisfactory etc.)*	1.7	0.8	2.0	0.7
Play	4.2	0.8	4.3	0.7
4. When PC play, they are not learning anything that will help them do well and get good grades in primary school. *	4.3	0.8	4.0	0.4
5. It is important for preschool classrooms to have areas for play such as a block building area or pretend kitchen/home-living area.	4.4	0.7	4.8	0.4
9. It is important for PC to explore & play with other children for most of day.	3.9	0.9	4.1	1.1
13. It is important for PC to play outdoors for at least one hour in the a.m. and one hour in p.m.	4.3	0.6	4.4	0.8
Teacher Role	3.0	0.9	3.1	1.1
8. PC learn best when the teacher tells them what to do and the children do it correctly.*	3.0	1.2	3.4	1.4
11. It is important for PC to choose what they want to do and learn about most of the time.	2.7	0.9	3.2	1.1
16. Important for Ts to let PC talk about their thoughts, feelings/questions/ideas most of day.	4.5	0.6	4.2	0.9

17. If a teacher is too sensitive and caring, then PC will take advantage and not behave. *	3.4	1.1	2.7	1.2
18. It is important for teachers to use punishments (like time out) when PC do not behave.*	1.9	0.9	2.2	0.9
19. It's important to give PC rewards like stickers to teach them how to behave.*	1.9	0.9	2.4	1.1
20. Most important thing I want PC to learn is how to get along well with other children.	3.7	1.0	3.5	1.3

General Items	4.4	0.7	4.5	0.9
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3. The PC's social, emotional, physical & academic learning are equally important.	4.7	0.5	4.6	0.9
14. It is not important for early years teachers to have university degrees and professional training because they are just babysitting	4.0	1.0	4.2	1.2
15. It is important for the preschool teacher and parent to communicate with each other at least once per week to share information about the child and things happening at home/school.	4.6	0.6	4.6	0.5

Note: M=Mean and SD=Standard Deviation. Items marked * were reverse scored. Scores highlighted gray reached statistical difference. PC= preschool children. T=teachers

Since we had a small sample size, determining the distribution of the DAP mean scores pre-intervention for parents and teachers was important for choosing an appropriate statistical method to analyze pre and post-teacher DAP data. Therefore, a Shapiro-Wilks test was performed and did not show evidence of non-normality ($W = 0.96$, $p\text{-value} = 0.33$) for the pre-intervention parent DAP data and also did not show evidence of non-normality ($W=.96$, $p\text{-value}=.31$) for the pre-intervention teacher DAP data. Based on these outcomes, and after visual examination of the histograms of DAP scores, it was decided to use parametric tests to analyze the DAP survey data.

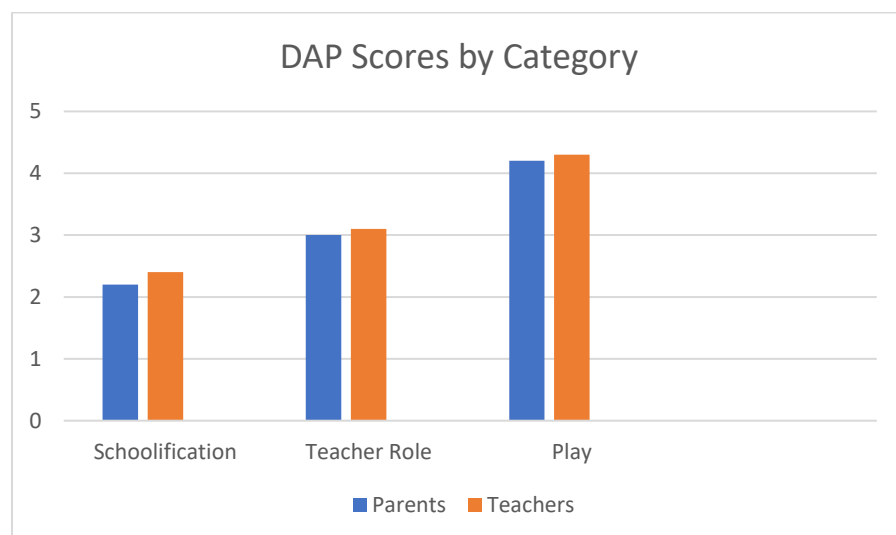
Data analysis of parent and teacher views of DAP found that teacher and parent overall mean DAP scores pre-intervention were very similar with teachers having slightly higher DAP scores than parents. T-tests were used to test for significant differences because there were only two groups being compared. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the DAP mean scores of 31 teachers ($M=3.34$, $SD=0.4$) and 90 parents ($M=3.24$, $SD=0.37$) pre-intervention finding that there was no statistically significant difference in DAP scores, $t(48)=-1.24$, $p=.240$. When independent sample t-tests were run for each of the twenty items separately, only items DAP 5, $t(119)=2.83$, $p<.001$; DAP 11, $t(119)=2.15$, $p=.034$; and DAP 17, $t(119)=-$

2.97, $p=.004$ reached statistical significance with teachers being more DAP on Items 5 and 11 and parents more DAP on Item 17.

An analysis of items by category grouping revealed that for schoolification items, parents and teachers had relatively low DAP scores ($M=2.2$ and 2.4 respectively) indicating that both parents and teachers agree that schoolification practices are important in ECCE. For the items in the Play category, both parents and teachers had high DAP scores ($M=4.2$ and 4.3 respectively) indicating that both parents and teachers agree that play is important in ECCE. For the items in the Teacher Role category, parent and teacher responses showed middle range DAP scores ($M=2.9$ and 3.0 respectively) indicating uncertainty for both parents and teachers regarding the role of teachers in ECCE settings (i.e., 3 was “unsure” on the Likert scale). Furthermore, both parents and teachers followed the same trend in that they both had the lowest DAP scores for their views on schoolification, followed by teacher role next, and their DAP views of play were the highest of the three categories. Figure 3 shows the mean DAP scores for each of the three categories in the pre-intervention DAP surveys for parents and teachers.

Figure 3.

Mean DAP Scores for Parents and Teachers by Category



The widest range of scores was found for items 2, 8, 11, 17 and 19 indicated by the standard deviations when examining means. Higher standard deviations revealed that Item 2 (teachers $M=3.4$, $sd=1.4$; parents $M=3.0$ $sd=1.2$), Item 8 (teacher $M=3.4$ $sd=1.4$; parents $M=3.0$ $sd=1.2$); Item 11 (teachers $M=3.2$ $sd=1.1$; parents $M=2.7$ $sd=.9$); Item 17 (teachers $M=2.7$ $sd=1.1$; parents $M=3.4$ $sd=1.2$) and Item 19 (teachers $M=2.4$ $sd=1.1$; parents $M=1.9$ $sd=.9$) had the most variability within and between teacher and parent groups with teachers being more DAP on Items 2, 8, 11 & 19 and parents being more DAP on Item 17. Four of these five items (items 8, 11, 17 & 19) with the most variability were in the Teacher Role category while none were in the Play category and only one (Item 2) was in the Schoolification category further indicating the uncertainty among both teachers and parents regarding the teacher's role in ECCE.

PTR survey results for parents and teachers. 59 parents completed the PTR survey and teachers completed 156 PTR surveys. The value for Chronbach's alpha for all 24 items was $\alpha=.71$ indicating internal consistency. Since there was a small sample size, determining the distribution of the PTR mean scores pre-intervention for parents and teachers was important for choosing an appropriate statistical method to analyze pre and post-teacher PTR data. Therefore, a Shapiro-Wilks test was performed and it did show evidence of non-normality ($W = 0.93$, $p\text{-value} < .001$) for the pre-intervention PTR data. Based on these outcomes, and after visual examination of the histograms of PTR scores, nonparametric tests were used to analyze the PTR survey data.

The data from the PTR surveys revealed that both parents ($M=4.34$, $SD=.49$) and teachers ($M=4.07$, $SD=.54$) rated their relationships with each other very favorably. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare the PTR mean scores for teachers ($Md=4.21$) and parents ($Md=4.39$) pre-intervention to determine if there were any significant differences

between groups. Data analysis found that parent PTR scores were significantly higher than teacher scores and this difference reached statistical significance, $U=3070$, $Z= -3.77$, $p<.001$.

The means and standard deviations for the PTR items that teachers rated as lowest are summarized in Table 2 alongside those for parents on the same items. For 4 of these 5 items, the teacher ratings were lower than parent ratings with the exception of item 9 for which teacher ratings were slightly higher than parent ratings. The majority of teachers ($M=1.7$, $SD=1.38$) and parents ($M=1.7$, $SD=1.34$) indicated that they wanted to improve their relationship with each other on Item 24 indicating the lowest means of all of the PTR items.

Table 2

PTR Items with lowest teacher ratings in comparison to parent ratings

Means of PTR Items with Lowest Teacher Ratings	Parents		All Ts		PLT Post	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3. I expect more from this parent/teacher than I get.*	3.81	1.44	3.28	1.47	3.9	1.3
4. We see this child differently. *	4.22	1.22	3.49	1.36	4.0	1.4
9. I ask this parent/teacher for suggestions	3.17	1.28	3.21	1.42	3.3	1.4
14. We agree about who should do what re. child.	4.14	1.34	3.44	1.49	3.9	1.3
20. This parent/teacher is sensitive to my feelings.	4.32	1.24	3.57	1.68	4.3	1.2
24. I would like to improve the relationship.*	1.70	1.34	1.70	1.38	3.6	1.6

Note: M=Mean and SD=Standard Deviation. Items marked * were reverse scored. T is teachers. PLT Post is PL teachers' post-intervention scores. Items that were significantly higher for PL teachers from pre- to post-intervention are highlighted gray.

Post PL Intervention Findings

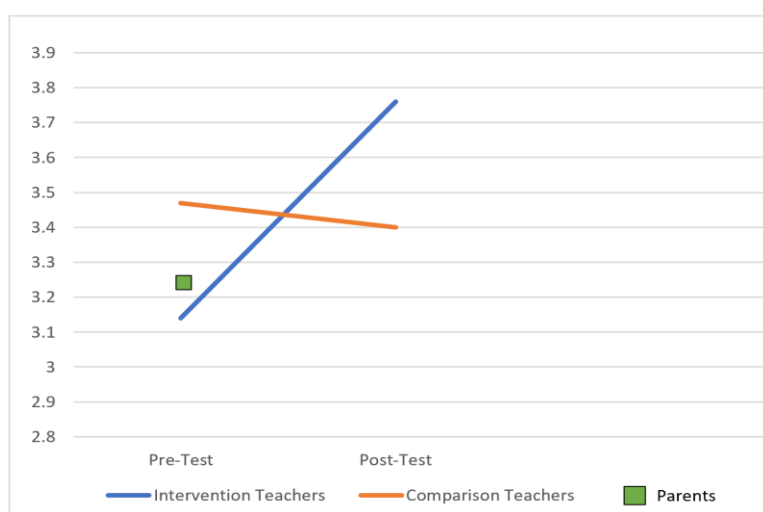
Before statistically analyzing the impact of the PL-Intervention on the variables of interest by comparing the post-test scores of the PL and Comparison Groups, the data was examined to determine if there were any significant differences in the scores of these two groups prior to the PL intervention. To do this, a series of independent samples t-tests were conducted on the pre-intervention DAP scores for the PL and comparison teachers. Following this, paired sample t-tests were conducted to compare the pre- and post-intervention DAP scores for teachers in the PL and Comparison groups. As in the pre-intervention data analysis, for the PTR data analysis, Mann-Whitney U tests and Wilcoxin Rank sum tests were used to examine the PTR data because the Shapiro-Wilks test found evidence of non-normality in the PTR data.

DAP survey findings. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the DAP mean scores for the 20 teachers in the PL group ($M=3.14$, $SD=0.29$) and the 11 teachers in the Comparison group ($M=3.47$, $SD=.48$) pre-intervention to determine if there were any preexisting differences between groups. No statistically significant difference was found $t(29) = -1.62$, $p = .127$. Statistical examination of the post-intervention DAP survey data employed paired samples t-tests. These analyses were performed on the pre- and post-intervention DAP survey data for the Comparison and PL teachers separately to determine if any changes occurred in overall mean scores for DAP views from pre to post intervention. The first paired samples t-test found that the mean DAP scores for the comparison teachers from pre-intervention ($M=3.47$, $SD=0.52$) to post-intervention ($M=3.4$, $SD= 0.65$) did go down slightly but this difference was not statistically significant $t(10)=.489$, $p=.635$. The second paired samples t-test found that the PL teachers' ($N=20$) mean DAP scores did rise from pre-intervention ($M=3.14$, $SD= 0.29$) to post-intervention ($M=3.76$, $SD=.47$) and that this difference reached statistical significance

$t(19)=-6.23, p=.001$. Figure 4 shows the pre and post mean DAP scores for Comparison and PL Teachers.

Figure 4

Pre and Post Mean DAP Scores for Comparison and PL Teachers



While an independent samples t-test performed on the parent and teacher mean DAP scores pre-intervention did not show a statistically significant difference in scores $t(48)=-1.24, p=.240$, the post-intervention DAP mean scores for the PL teachers ($M=3.76, SD=.47$) were significantly higher than the parent mean DAP mean scores ($M=3.24, SD=.37$) at post-intervention and this difference reached statistical significance at $t(108)=-5.6, p=.001$. When the post-intervention DAP mean scores for comparison teachers ($M=3.4, SD=.65$) were compared to the parent mean DAP scores ($M=3.24, SD=.37$), no statistical difference between scores was found $t(119)=-1.25, p=.215$.

Examination of the means showed that the DAP scores of PL teachers went up post-intervention for all items except Item 13 which went down slightly (4.3, 4.2) and Item 18 which stayed the same. Paired sample t-tests for each individual DAP item revealed that the scores for Item 4 in the Play category; Items 1 and 6 in the Schoolification category; and Items 8, 11, 16, 19

and 20 in the Teacher Role category were significantly higher from pre to post intervention for the PL teachers. In the General category, Item14 was also significantly higher post-intervention indicating that the PL intervention led to the teachers agreeing more strongly that early childhood teachers need qualifications. The results of these paired sample t-tests appear in Table 3.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for PL Teacher's DAP scores by Item

DAP Items by Category	Pre		Post		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Schoolification	2.5	1.0	3.1	1.2		
1. It is important for preschool children (PC) to be taught separate subjects at separate times like in elementary school. *	2.1	1.1	3.5	1.2	-5.66	<.001
2. Important for PC to work quietly at tables most of time doing activities planned by teacher.*	3.4	1.2	3.8	1.3		
6. Activities like chanting, memorizing flashcards, copying, & workbooks are important. *	2.0	0.9	2.5	1.1	-2.03	.028
7. Important to give PC tests to find out what they know. *	2.5	1.0	3.0	1.3		
10. Important for PC to be challenged to learn academics early so will do better in school/life. *	2.1	1.0	3.2	1.4		
12. Important to give preschool parents a report card that shows the child's learning in each area of the program compared to other children (A,B,C,D, or Good, Satisfactory etc.)*	2.0	0.7	2.4	0.9		
Play	4.3	0.8	4.6	0.7		
4. When PC play, they are not learning anything that will help them do well and get good grades in primary school. *	4.0	1.0	4.8	0.5	-2.88	.005
5. It is important for preschool classrooms to have areas for play such as a block building area or pretend kitchen/home-living area.	4.8	0.4	4.9	0.3		
9. It is important for PC to explore & play with other CH most of day.	4.2	0.8	4.5	0.8		
13. It is important for PC to play outdoors for at least one hour in the a.m. and one hour in p.m.	4.3	0.9	4.2	1.2		
Teacher Role	3.0	1.1	3.5	0.9		
8. PC learn best when T tells them what to do & CH do it correctly.*	3.5	1.4	4.2	0.9	-1.90	.036
11. It is important for PC to choose what they want to do and learn about most of the time.	3.1	1.1	4.1	0.9	-2.76	.006
16. Important for T to let PC talk about their thoughts, feelings, questions & ideas for most of day.	4.1	1.0	4.6	0.5	-2.13	.023

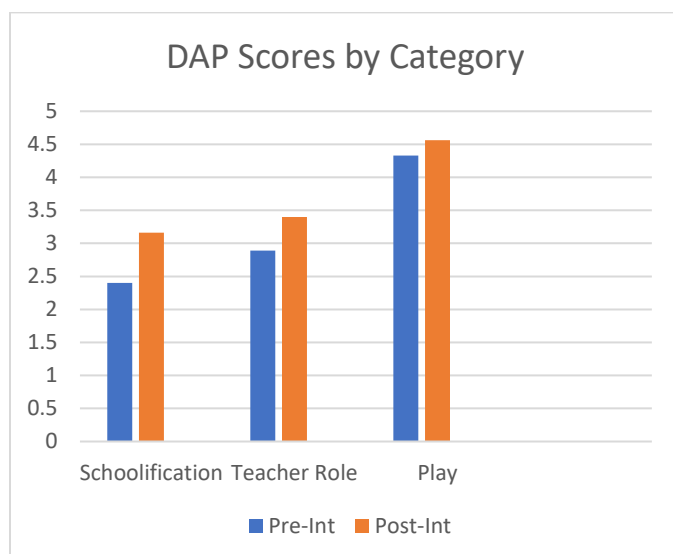
17. If a T is too sensitive and caring, then PC will take advantage and not behave. *	2.6	1.2	2.9	1.5		
18. It is important for Ts to use punishments (like time out) when PC do not behave.*	1.9	0.7	1.9	0.9		
19. Important to use rewards like stickers to teach PC to behave.*	2.2	0.9	2.8	1.2	-1.99	.031
20. Most important thing I want PC to learn is how to get along well with other children.	3.4	1.3	4.0	0.7	-1.83	.041
General Items	4.4	1.0	4.8	0.4		
3. Social, emotional, physical & academic learning equally important.	4.5	1.1	4.9	0.4		
14. It is not important for early years teachers to have university degrees and professional training because they are just babysitting	4.0	1.3	4.7	0.7	-2.05	.027
15. It is important for the T and P to communicate with each other at least once per week to share information about child/home/school.	4.7	0.5	4.9	0.2		

Note: M=Mean and SD=Standard Deviation. Items marked * were reverse scored. Scores highlighted gray reached statistical difference. T=teacher, PC= preschool children, P=Parent

When analyzing the pre- and post-intervention DAP data for PL teachers by mean score for each of the three categories (i.e., schoolification, teacher role, play), it was found that the Schoolification category had the greatest increase in DAP scores, followed by the Teacher Role category and lastly the Play category. The DAP scores for seeing the value of play were already high pre-intervention but even so they did change in the positive direction (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

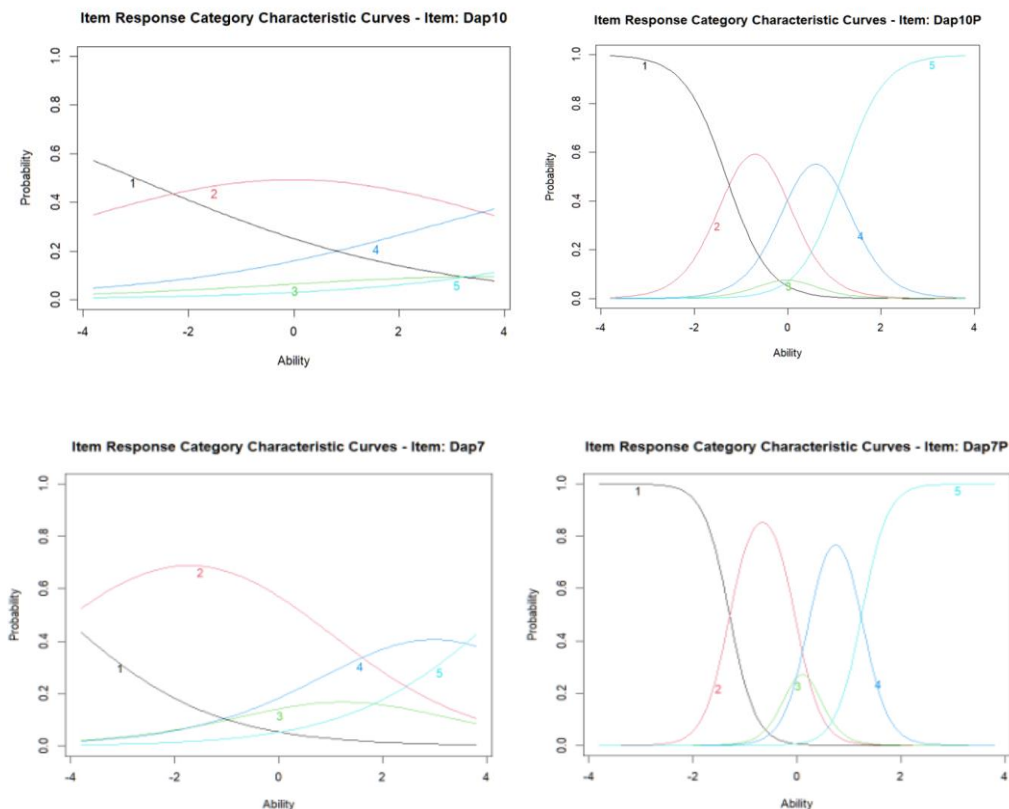
Mean DAP Scores by Category for PL Teacher from Pre- to Post Intervention

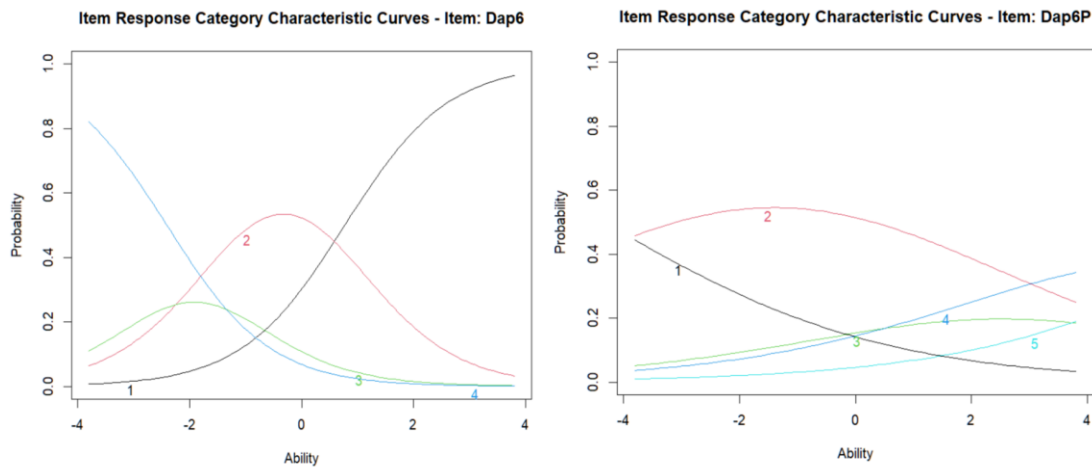


Item Response Theory. Given that the Schoolification category showed the greatest increases, these scores were further analyzed using Graded Response Model (GRM), an Item Response Theory (IRT) technique suitable for rating scales (Samejima, 1969). The **Item R** package for latent variable modelling and item response theory analyses was used for this analysis (Rizopoulos, 2006). Item Response Theory allows for analysis of responses for each item based on the overall “ability” that the survey is measuring. In this case, “ability” refers to how DAP the respondents are overall and this is examined in relation to the probability of their responses on individual survey items. The Response Category Characteristic Curves displayed in Figure 6 found that the responses on Items 7 and 10 were predictive of DAP ability and that predictability increased post-intervention. The same was found for Items 1, 2, and 6.

Figure 6

Item Response Category Characteristic Curves for DAP Items 7, 10 and 6





Note: Pre-intervention figures appear on the left side and post-intervention figures are on the right side for each item.

The Item Response Category Characteristic curves for Item 6 (Activities like chanting, memorizing flashcards, copying, & workbooks are important for preschool children) showed that pre-intervention, teachers with an overall higher DAP ability did not respond in the predicted way for this item. Specifically, respondents with higher DAP ability were still likely to choose a lower DAP answer for this item. However, post-intervention, the predictability of response for Item 6 changed to response curves that were more in line with the overall DAP ability of the respondents and more in line with the other schoolification items; although the post-intervention characteristic curves were not as defined as the curves on items 1, 2, 7 and 10.

The histograms for the DAP Items that showed the greatest change in response distribution from pre to post intervention can be found in Appendix J. Items 1 and 2 in the Schoolification category also showed predictability of item response patterns and can be found in Appendix K. The Item Response Category Characteristic curves are also an indication of how accurately the items on a survey are measuring the construct it was developed to measure.

Qualifications and DAP Scores. Finally, an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine if there was a difference in DAP scores for teachers with qualifications in ECCE and those with minimal or no qualifications in ECCE pre-intervention. The analysis found that there was a significant difference in DAP scores of teachers with qualifications ($N=15$, $M=3.56$, $SD=.41$) and those without qualifications ($N=16$, $M=3.12$, $SD=.26$), $t(29)=3.56$, $p<.001$. An independent samples t-test was also used to determine if the level of teacher experience was related to DAP scores and did not find a significant difference in DAP scores for teachers with more experience ($N=16$, $M=3.32$, $SD=.33$) compared to those with little or no experience ($N=15$, $M=3.35$, $SD=.48$), $t(29)=-.28$, $p=.390$.

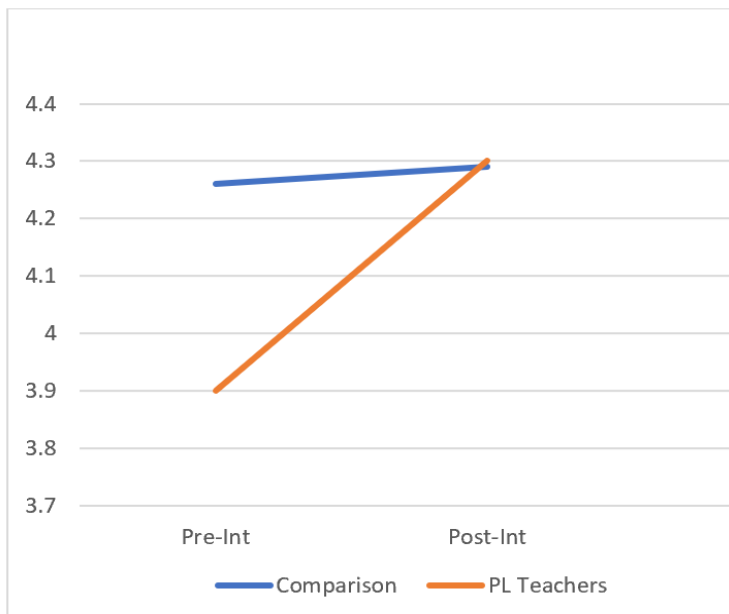
PTR survey findings. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to compare the pre-intervention PTR scores of the PL teachers ($md=4.06$, $N=96$) and the comparison teachers ($md=4.33$, $N=60$) to determine if there were any pre-existing differences between groups. The analysis found that the comparison teachers PTR scores pre-intervention were significantly higher than the PL teachers PTR scores pre-intervention, $U=1920$, $Z=-3.50$, $p<.001$.

For the PL teachers, a Wilcoxin Sign Ranked test found a significant difference in the PTR scores for PL teachers from pre-intervention ($md=4.06$, $N=96$) to post-intervention ($md=4.33$, $N=91$), $Z=-4.07$, $p<.001$. The PL teachers scores were significantly higher after the intervention. For the teachers in the comparison group, there was no significant difference in the PTR scores from pre-intervention ($md=4.33$, $N=61$) to post-intervention ($md=4.41$, $N=45$), $Z=-0.99$, $p=.323$. Therefore, even though the comparison teachers had significantly higher PTR mean scores compared to the PL teachers before the intervention, the mean scores of the PL teachers were significantly higher from pre- to post-intervention whereas the mean scores of the

comparison teachers were not significantly higher from pre to post-intervention as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7

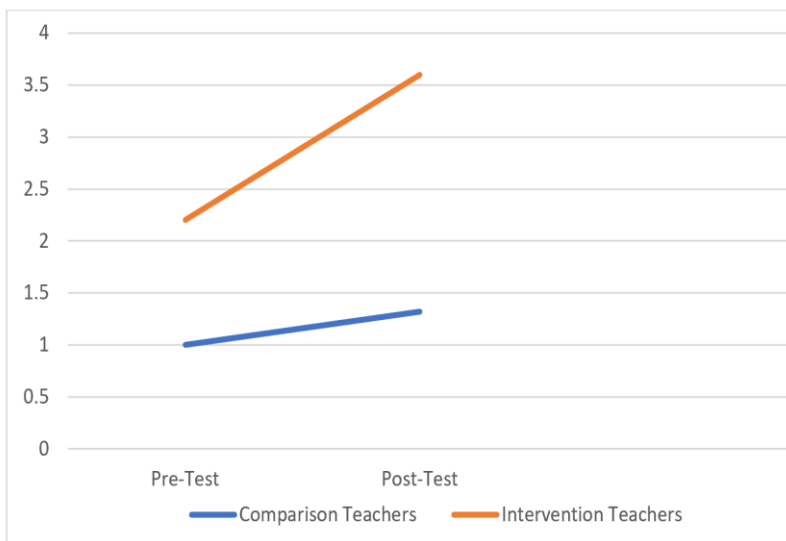
PTR Mean PTR Scores from Pre to Post-Intervention for PL and Comparison Teachers



Also of significance, a Wilcoxin sign-ranked test revealed that the PL teacher scores on PTR Item#24 (I would like to improve my relationships with this parent), were higher post-intervention ($M=3.59$, $SD=1.66$) than they were pre-intervention ($M=2.15$, $SD=1.63$) and this difference was statistically significant $Z=-3.06$, $p<.002$. Furthermore, a Mann Whitney U test was used to compare the post-intervention scores on Item#24 for the PL teachers ($M=3.6$, $SD=1.61$) and the comparison teachers ($M=1.32$, $SD=1.03$) finding that the PL teacher scores on Item 24 post intervention were significantly higher than the Comparison teacher scores $U=534$, $Z=-6.82$, $p<.001$. Therefore, participation in the intervention resulted in the PL teachers being significantly less likely than the comparison teachers to indicate that they want to improve their relationships with parents as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8

PTR Scores for Item 24 Pre and Post for PL and Comparison Teachers



Note: Item 24: *I would like to improve my relationship with this parent.*(reverse scored)

Wilcoxin Signed Rank tests were run to determine if there were any significant differences in the PL teacher scores from pre- to post-intervention for the items that scored lowest in comparison to parents at pre-intervention (see Table 2). Table 4 displays the results of these analyses. All items other than Item 3 were significantly higher post-intervention.

Table 4

Wilcoxin Signed Rank tests for Lowest Scoring PTR Items for PL Teachers

Means of PTR Items with Lowest Teacher Ratings	Pre		Post		Z	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
3. I expect more from this parent/teacher than I get.*	3.4	1.4	3.9	1.3	-1.66	.097
4. We see this child differently. *	3.3	1.4	4.0	1.4	-3.12	.002
9. I ask this parent/teacher for suggestions	2.7	1.3	3.3	1.5	-2.93	.003
14. We agree about who should do what re child.	3.9	1.5	4.3	1.3	-3.36	.001

20. This parent/teacher is sensitive to my feelings.	3.6	1.5	3.9	1.2	-2.20	.028
24. I would like to improve the relationship.*	2.2	1.6	3.6	1.7	-3.06	.002

Note: M=Mean and SD=Standard Deviation. Items marked * were reverse scored. Significant differences are highlighted in gray on the p values.

Qualitative Data

The pre-intervention teacher focus groups were analyzed to gain an understanding of the PL teachers' perspectives on the two variables of interest: DAP (early childhood pedagogy) and parent-teacher relationships (PTRs). The post-intervention teacher and parent focus groups were analyzed to understand parent and teacher perspectives on ECCE, DAP, PTRs, and the EC Parent Open Houses. The researcher observational notes taken at the EC Parent Open Houses will be presented together with the post-intervention teacher focus groups findings. The pre-intervention focus group data will be presented first and then this will be followed by the post-intervention focus group data. At the end of this section, data analysis for the teacher focus groups pre- and post-intervention will be presented. Following the qualitative data results, the quantitative and qualitative results will be compared through a side-by-side approach to assess convergence or divergence of the mixed methods data collected and analyzed (Creswell, 2014).

Pre-Intervention Qualitative Data

The qualitative data from the four pre-intervention teacher focus groups were analyzed separately using thematic analysis to look for emerging themes, commonalities, or patterns in the data (Teddie & Tashakori, 2009). Overall, three themes evolved from pre-intervention data analysis: 1) Dichotomies and Uncertainty; 2) More Communication Needed; and 3) Barriers to PTRs and Parent Engagement. Each theme is discussed in more detail below.

Theme One: Dichotomies and Uncertainties. In relation to the first theme, the first dichotomy was expressed by teachers as they talked about the importance of play and DAP in ECCE but then also emphasized the importance of academics and schoolification. All teachers in all four pre-intervention focus groups were in strong agreement that children should have opportunities to play at preschool. While teachers unanimously endorsed play as valuable learning for young children, they also expressed the importance of teachers structuring and directing the play to ensure “real learning” occurs so that the children “can be learning but still playing” and so that they can better learn the content of the theme-based teaching (i.e., community helpers; plants, etc.). Teachers in all four focus groups brought up guided, structured, teacher-directed, play-based, and free play variations of play. Many teachers felt that when children have free play, they can “make more than a mess” or be “too loud” or “go all over the place”. The teachers agreed that free play teaches “basic things” like sharing, tidying-up, turn-taking, and how to interact with each other. In both schools, teachers reported that free play mostly occurs early in the morning when the first children arrive and during outdoor play. Some teachers also used “free play” as a reward for finishing academic work, an opportunity to occupy the whole group while small groups of children take turns to do academic work with the teacher, and as a break when the children can “let down their hair”. When asked how much children should play, the teachers agreed when one teacher expressed, “Not the whole day; play will give them their free time ... whoever finishes first can go to play and that pushes others who are not finished.” The teachers did not mention giving the children input into their learning experiences but did mention providing choice in which area of the classroom the children could visit.

The teachers in all four focus groups pre-intervention also supported academic learning in ECCE with agreement and many had strong feelings about the need to justify academic learning

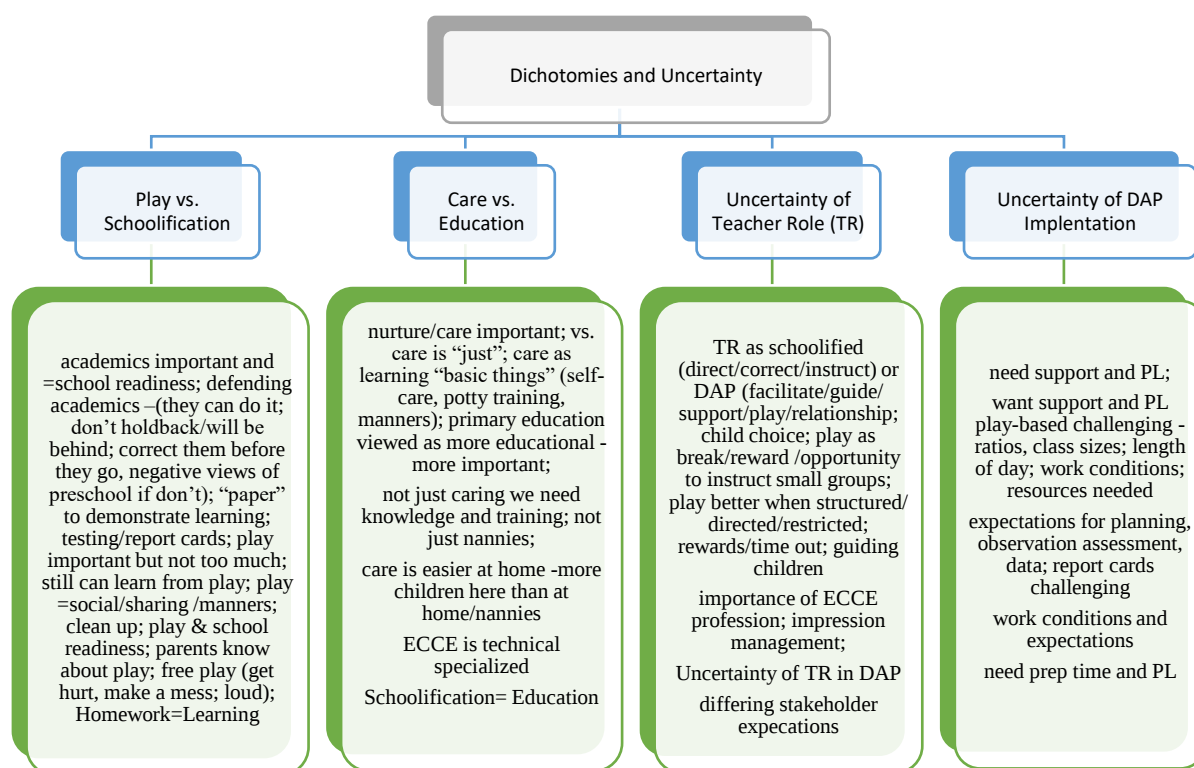
in preschool expressing with group agreement, “You can’t just wait until they get to a certain age and then do it.” These expressions came from the belief that children are capable of learning academics and they do not want young children to be “left behind” and that, “if they can do it, why hold them back?” One teacher said, “it’s not just playing or interacting; we’re able to give them pencils and let them write and trace lines; even if it’s not perfect, start working on that area early so that when they reach five they know how to write letters and their name.” Examples of schoolification mentioned were lesson plans, teacher direction, going to the board, pencil grip, teacher instruction, lessons, worksheets, testing/assessment, report cards, fine motor skills, and children knowing colors, shapes, numbers, tracing lines, learning letters, reading their names, etc. In all four focus groups, teachers expressed that schoolification practices in ECCE are needed to prepare the children so that they will be better able to cope in elementary school. For example, one teacher said with group agreement, “if the child comes to preschool and just plays with the box and then that teacher (elementary teacher) has to start all over”. This was further emphasized by the teachers that they and/or their preschool will have negative reputational consequences if their students go to elementary school and are found to be behind in academics.

The second dichotomy was the relative importance of care versus education. Teachers felt that caregiving was important but spoke often about the importance of teaching the children and placed a greater value on their role as educators. The use of the word “just” in the focus group transcripts sheds light on this dichotomy. The word “just” was used before the words: daycare, nannies, pick them up whenever they want, pick up and go, receive the babies, pay fees, feed them, change them, potty training, babysitters, nannies, daycare, nursery, free play, play and interaction. This was very relevant to both dichotomies indicating the importance of schoolification and education over play and caregiving. The teachers did not place as great an

emphasis on the benefits to children's learning and development of receiving warm, responsive caregiving and having their needs met while at preschool. However, the teachers did agree that caregiving and nurturing is important for children with one teacher saying, "academics is important; but social and emotional is important too; it's a balance for me."

In relation to uncertainty, a wide range of answers were given when discussing what young children need to learn at preschool including "basic things" like manners, eating, potty training, self-care, independence, interacting with others, behavior, sharing, taking turns, tidying up, etc. while placing an emphasis on both play and academics. The teachers expressed frustration in navigating through the challenges of what they viewed as differing stakeholder expectations of what young children should be learning and doing in ECCE programs. With strong agreement, the teachers expressed the stress of this with one teacher saying: "It's a lot of pressure on us, when the education officers come, they are expecting something different; the principal is expecting something different; parents are expecting something different, and we are trying to please the three" and "it's kind of difficult - we wonder if we are doing the right thing ... and we are trying to do everything to please each." While teachers expressed more confidence in their caregiving and teaching of pre-academic skills, uncertainty was expressed in relation to their role to support learning through play. This is consistent with the quantitative finding that the category of teacher role on the survey had the most uncertainty in views. Many teachers in all four focus groups expressed a need for more support and guidance in how to implement play-based learning with one teacher saying, "we need ideas of how to be play-based... we start to google this up and that and then I say let me relax myself ". The categories and codes for the theme Dichotomies and Uncertainty are displayed in Figure 9.

Figure 9.

Categories and Codes for Theme One: Dichotomies and Uncertainties

Theme Two: Teamwork Through Increased Communication. The teachers talked about wanting more parents to take a greater interest in ECCE and wanted more communication with parents. Initially this theme was split into two themes of “Three in a Team” and “Increased Interaction/Communication” but it was decided to combine them given their inter-relatedness when considering the references, codes, and categories. Teachers expressed with strong agreement that they want more help and support from parents including reinforcement at home with homework, theme learning, and children’s behavior. One teacher expressed the need for more teamwork with group agreement saying, “Some (parents) don’t realize and know that having a child – it’s three in the team: the teacher, the parent, and the child.” Many of the teachers brought up the uniqueness and individuality of children in relation to their

“backgrounds” such as culture, home circumstances, personal situations and experiences and how closer PTRs would help them understand and teach and care for the children more appropriately and effectively.

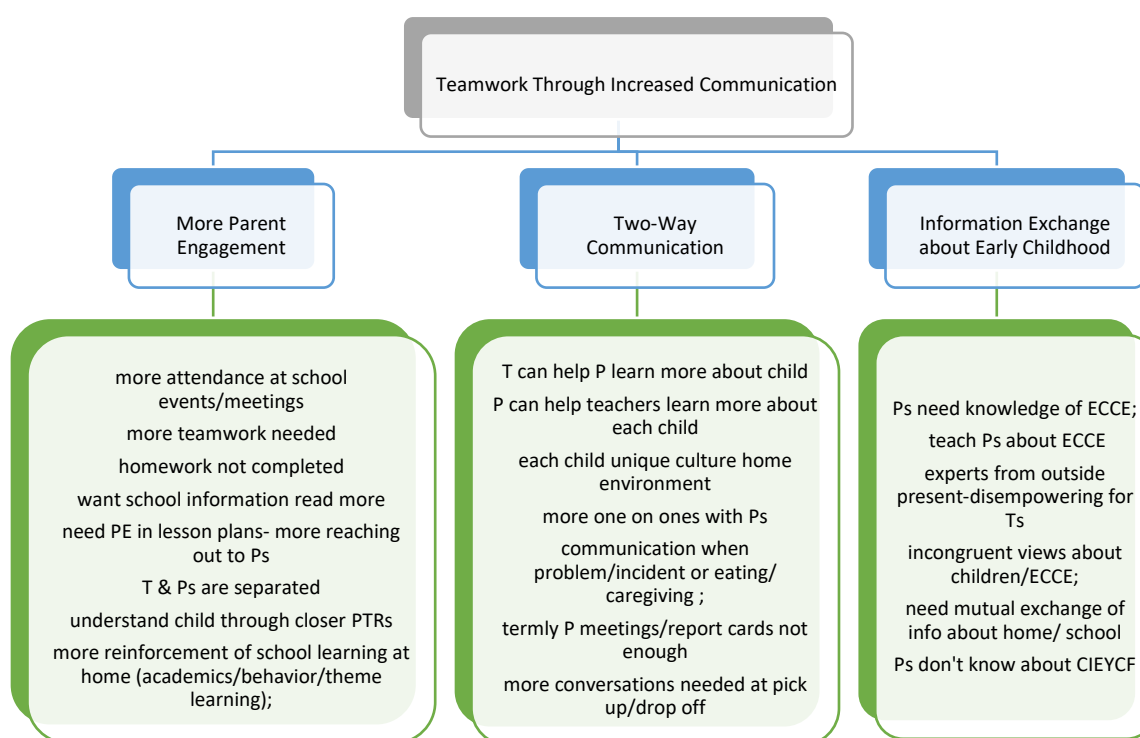
Teachers unanimously agreed that most communication and interaction with parents occurs when there is an incident or problem or during regular reporting and parent-teacher interview times (2-3 times/year) or through monthly or termly PTA meetings. The latter being more about school-wide information sharing. While conversations at pick-up and drop off do happen, the teachers wanted them to happen more often and with more of the parents. Teachers expressed that parents are busy and trying to balance work and family pressures and so pick up and drop off times are often rushed and attendance at school events can be low. Many teachers said they want more communication and interaction with parents because they believe it is important for the child’s wellbeing, learning and healthy development and to help them understand the children better. The teachers did not just want parents to know about school, they also wanted to know more about home and so they were in support of the mutual exchange of information versus the traditional one directional school to home communication. The importance of “one on ones” with parents was stressed by many teachers with the rationale that “we could get information about what the child is doing at home when we’re not there and the parent gets information about the child here at school... so you see how it connects.” Teachers agreed that their schools should make parent engagement a bigger priority and take more actions to promote it including having it as “part of lesson planning”.

The teachers were in strong agreement that they would like to share information about ECCE with parents and were very eager to support parenting by sharing what they know about the children and ECCE. They believed that parents do not know enough about early childhood

pedagogy and are not familiar with the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework. The teachers expressed that they are capable of sharing information about early childhood with parents and that when experts come to share information with parents it can be disempowering for them (also raised as a Barrier to PTRs). The categories and codes for the theme Teamwork Through Increased Communication are displayed in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Categories and Codes for Theme Two: Teamwork Through Increased Communication



Theme Three: Barriers to PTRs. In this third theme, two major barriers to PTRs were revealed. The first barrier was that parents need to know more about the importance of ECCE expressed as, “they don’t know the seriousness of it”. This was related to the emphasis by teachers that they need more appreciation for the important job they are doing from stakeholders

and the wider community. The second barrier was busy lifestyles, and time constraints due to long work hours of both teachers and parents expressed by teachers as “just pick up and go”.

The teachers felt very strongly that parents and the wider community need to be educated about the importance of ECCE. There was unanimous agreement that parents think later schooling is more important and the teachers felt that they were not being viewed as “real teachers”. A few of the many related comments on this issue were: “they don’t think early years is educational”, “they don’t think it’s the same as other school”, “they think it is just a nursery... they just come and we take care of them and they play and that’s it”, “they don’t even know that real learning is happening here” and “in primary school, if they say grade two meeting this week or whatever, they (parents) don’t want to miss that meeting.” The teachers spoke about ideas to improve this situation with the hope of more support from their preschool leaders: “I think the center needs to try to implement something to put forward to the parents and really educate them that their child is not only coming to a preschool to be babysat, to be cleaned and changed and fed because most of their concern is not about what they are learning” and “maybe they can put flyers or something to the parents for them to really understand more about this and to be more appreciative of what the teachers are doing in preschool, you know, for their child.”

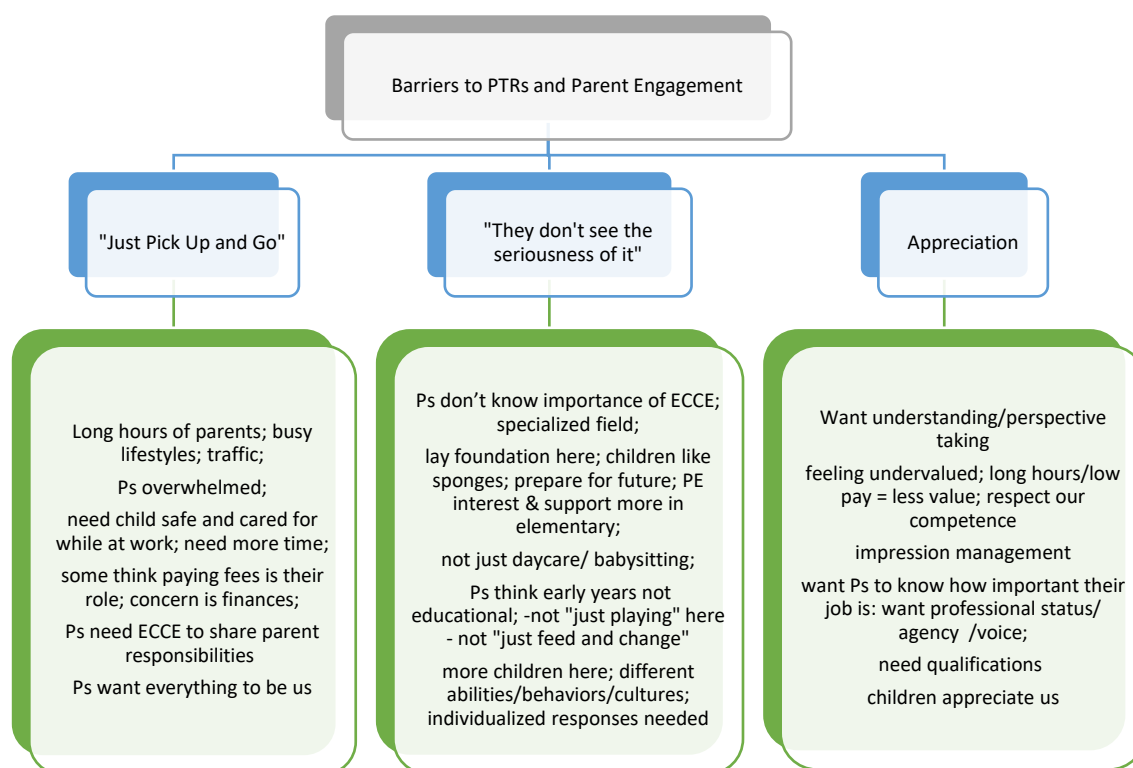
The teachers felt very strongly that they deserve more appreciation and respect for the job they are doing. “Like (we) need to feel more appreciation... they need to really respect us because this is the foundation” and justified this with statements about the importance of early experiences for lifelong learning and success with comments such as “this is when they are sponges – they soak up everything” and “this is the foundation”. The teachers were in strong agreement that they wanted to have professional agency and show their competence to parents. The teachers expressed agreement regarding disempowerment. One participant expressed, “If we

have a PTA meeting then a stranger comes from outside to talk to the parents ... and then they just leave and they're always in a hurry... so we can't step up. It's always people coming from the outside... we want one on ones with parents and then we can talk about the child, and we can say, mummy, what would you like your child to learn?" Interestingly, this view, which was expressed in all pre-intervention focus groups with strong agreement, summed up the rationale behind the PL intervention and the EC Parent Open House initiative of the present study.

All of the teachers felt very strongly that ECCE teachers need educational qualifications. One participant summed this up with enthusiastic group agreement by saying, "So remember, these are little humans here so why would you want to have a novice here... what kind of society are you going to create if you don't have a strong foundation?" The teachers were clear that although they are striving for professional recognition and status, they are motivated to do the job because the children appreciate them: "the love of these kids, what we do, they show you more than anything else." Teachers in all four pre-intervention focus groups expressed that they wished they had better turn-outs from parents at school events and more interaction with parents. The teachers emphasized existing barriers to this stating that they believe that parents are stressed and overwhelmed with busy lives, work, family, and financial concerns. For example, one teacher said, "I think they should treat early years with more respect ... not just pick-up and drop-off" and "they have too much at home – too stressful". The teachers felt that the long work hours of many parents combined with their own long work hours mean that it is challenging to find the time for parent engagement, closer PTRs and to support learning at preschool in the home. The categories and codes for the theme of Barriers to PTRs and Parent Engagement are displayed in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Categories and Codes for Theme Three: Barriers to PTRs and Parent Engagement



Pre-Intervention Qualitative Themes in Relation to Parent Focus Groups

The data analysis for the parent focus groups was conducted using constant comparative method by using the codes and categories from the pre and post-intervention teacher focus groups. Like the quantitative data, the qualitative parent data showed considerable convergence with the teacher data. When teachers were asked questions about what they thought parents want for their child in ECCE, the teachers answers were intuitively accurate to what the parents expressed in the parent focus groups and what the parents indicated on the surveys.

The three pre-intervention focus group themes were also apparent when looking at parent views on both the surveys and focus groups. Like the teachers, parents agreed that play is important but also thought learning academics is important because they did not want their children to be behind when they get to elementary school. When discussing what parents want

their children to learn in preschool, teachers shared that parents want their children to learn social and emotional skills which the teachers associated most with the benefits of play. Teachers also expressed that parents want their children to be “competent enough for the transition” and so they do not want their child to be “only playing because they see play as just playing and not learning.” One teacher described some parents as being “against play”. Consistent with the teacher views of what parents think, in the parent focus groups, one parent stated, “they need to have the basic fundamentals of preschool...reading and how to count... writing their names properly...identify numbers, letters and I guess some site word lists.” As the teachers thought, parents “knew about play” and saw value in play for children’s learning and wanted their children to have opportunities to play mostly to learn to socialize and share. One parent said play should, “be a big part of their day.” Teachers expressed how parents, “know about play” and want their children to play but many parents do not want the children to get “messed up or hurt”. The parents agreed that they were pleased at all the things their child was learning in preschool such as academic skills, songs, sharing, “talking more” and “coming out of their shell”.

Consistent with the survey responses, parents thought that ECCE settings should be similar to elementary school set ups but they also thought children should get more time to play in preschool and have more time outdoors with nature. Consistent with the quantitative results, parents expressed that the child’s social, emotional, physical, and academic development are equally important. In relation to DAP, one parent said that she thinks children can have opportunities to choose but that the teacher should organize this to “keep order” which was consistent with the teacher views of play. Teachers expressed that caregiving is important to parents too and that parents want their child to be cared for and safe in a secure environment while they go to work and parents too emphasized this. Teachers shared that while some parents

are not as concerned about the learning side of preschool, others put pressure on teachers and children for academic learning. Examples of this are: “Apart from the learning, they (parents) want the kids to be nurtured too” and while some parents want homework, the teachers reported that other parents say things like “I want him to enjoy his childhood and don’t want him to have too much homework”. These findings are consistent with the teachers’ view that differing stakeholder expectations both within and between stakeholder groups are a challenge for them.

Consistent with the quantitative results, parents reported being very content with their relationships with teachers. They did not necessarily want closer relationships although they did express that they would like more communication about what is going on at school, more work sent home, and that they would like homework, specifically mentioning worksheets or some other academic learning activity. This wanting evidence or records of “learning” is consistent with the teachers’ concerns that if the children play, there is no record of the learning for them to show to parents and other stakeholders including preschool inspectors. As consistent with the parent PTR survey responses, parents were satisfied with the closeness of their relationships with teachers with one parent stating, “I think it’s close enough for us.” There was a disconnect between the level of closeness teachers thought they had with parents versus what parents thought they had with teachers. Teachers wanted closer relationships in many ways whereas parents focused on wanting more communication about what their child was doing and learning about in school. One parent said, “I think they talk to us a lot here” but then followed up with “I just want to see more.” While the parents did not express a need for the importance of “three in a team” as they were more in line with separating the roles of themselves and the teachers, they did appreciate the EC Parent Open Houses for giving them a chance to communicate with their child’s teacher as well as an opportunity to interact with their child. One parent used the same

terminology that the teachers used in the focus groups when she said, “we got to have a “one on one” at the EC Parent Open Houses with the teachers” which parents agreed was valuable.

As the teachers guessed, parents were more interested in learning about their individual child’s progress and behavior than about early childhood in general. Parents in School A also talked about the importance of oversight and inspections by Ministry officials because they felt it acts as a check and balance. Parents said that it is reassuring to know that someone is “behind them” to ensure safety and quality because they “do not really know” what is going on at the preschool. The teachers in all focus groups unanimously felt that parents do not know enough about what goes on at preschool and that they do not know about the Cayman Islands Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (CIEYCF) which was corroborated in parent focus groups and discussions at the EC Parent Open Houses. In the parent focus groups, all of the parents said that they are not familiar with the CIEYCF. The teachers expressed a need to invite parents into school to share early childhood pedagogy and the CIEYCF with them. They also expressed that it is important to share information about nutrition, appropriate use of technology and guiding children’s behavior. One teacher said, “some (parents) think that they just pay fees and drop their child and they don’t know what happens here.” Parents also expressed not knowing enough about what happens at school when they spoke about the importance of preschool inspections.

In contrast to the teachers expressing that most parents do not think ECCE is important, parents in the focus groups agreed quite strongly that early years are important and that a lot of learning goes on in preschools. One parent even said that ECCE is more important. This could be a result of skewing of the sample given that attending was by invitation and optional and so the most engaged parents were probably more likely to volunteer to attend a focus group. Just by taking the time to be there, they are showing that they think ECCE is important. Parents even

used some of the same vocabulary as teachers did to express the importance of early learning such as saying that children are “like sponges” in how fast they can learn and that ECCE is the “foundation” for future learning. One parent even said, “this is the first stage where they will learn most of what you need to go through life. The rest is just getting you ready to be a worker.” This latter comment was met with head nodding, laughter and agreement from the other parents.

The parents commented on how much they need the ECCE program so that they can work and that they appreciate the help with raising their children. As many teachers also brought up as a major issue for parents, the parents mentioned that the preschool fees are a challenge for them financially. One parent said, “For me, it’s the expense. I think that’s top of the line... because I want to send him to the best one but at the end of the day, the price range... it’s a problem.” Parents commented that the teachers spend a significant amount of time with their child which makes them important in the lives of their families. As per the theme Barriers to PTRs and “Just pick up and Go”, parents views were consistent with teacher views agreeing that, “Drop-offs are usually very quick because I have to get to work.” Teachers also commented on busy lifestyles as a barrier to communication many times. Parents also mentioned wanting to know about their individual child with particular reference to learning, behavior, and safety but did not mention wanting to know more about ECCE in general. Although when asked if they knew about the CIEYCF, they said they did not know about it but would like to know more. This was a match with the teachers’ views that they wanted parents to know more about ECCE.

Post Intervention Qualitative Data

The data analysis and coding was completed for each of the three post-intervention focus group transcripts one after the other for each step of the data analysis process. The teacher post-intervention focus group data analysis revealed four major themes: Theme One: Value of

Multidimensional PL; Theme Two: Intervention Enhanced PTRs and Parent Engagement; Theme Three: More DAP; and Theme Four: Empowerment and Collegiality. Table 5 provides a summary of participant quotations during the post-intervention focus groups alongside the corresponding categories. These categories were then combined to allow the four themes to emerge. Each of the three focus group recordings were transcribed verbatim, with the exception of noting times when there was agreement from the other participants after a statement was made by one participant. Quotations for this results section were only used when there was agreement from the other participants in the focus group indicated by head nodding and affirmations of the statement made and/or a follow-up statement by participants expressing a similar view so that the quotes are also representative of the group rather than just the individual speaking. Therefore, the examples of quotations in Table 5 are representative of the PL teacher sample as a whole.

Table 5

Sample Quotes for Post-Teacher Focus Group by Categories

Category	Sample Quotes
Effective Coach Qualities	“Your attitude, you being there, the support...and you being involved” “The great effort you put in for us and your kindness” “Your love and passion and excitement” “It was like you were just like a part of us” “You weren’t a stranger” “You were there with us” “When you helped out on the playground, that was awesome” “Support, support, that’s what we need”
Value of PL: CoPs Workshops Mentoring Coaching Modelling	“Workshops are not really support. It’s just something to just give us and its just like we’re in a traditional classroom-we just sit and observe but we don’t really understand” “We got some different ideas and resources... children can learn from anything” “When (researcher) came in, the children were all over the place...but then she had the toy animals and book and started singing the song” “Based on the information you gave us on the slides-the vast information...I took notes and then by reading back and trying to see where I fall short and trying to adjust”
Opportunities for Information Exchange	“These OHs- it’s actually teaching them how to incorporate different stuff at home” “We were able to communicate with the parents on a longer term...we got to express teaching... to show parents because most of them are concerned about the pen, but by seeing how the kids can learn without pen and paper, they were totally amazed” “We got to have a conversation- they could ask what the child can do, and I could tell them” “A parent asked me, “is this what you teach here, with the centers? For some of them it is new” “I think it was very educational ...they could see hands on how the child learns” “We got to have one-on-ones”

Learning About Each Other	"To see parents engaging with their child... I actually got to feel what it is like for them being at home. "I'm very impressed with the parents to be honest" "They (parents) see our value now" "It let them be aware some of what we go through dealing with the children on a daily basis" "Parents saw...we're actually doing something because most of them kind of think...we are only babysitting them...but they don't see that we are actually teaching them" "We got to know them more in a comfortable setting" "One baby didn't want to go home & parent said - teacher needs to rest" "I got to see parents reading stories"
Empathy Perspective-Taking	
Child Response to Parent Open Houses	"The child was there and so excited to see her mommy doing reading and writing with her... she was actually asking her mother a question ... something we don't even get from her. But she's so excited to see her mommy there." "I could hear her (and the teacher) talking and the child was so happy to be actually showing mommy what she can do" "they were bonding together" "they were persuading parents to come" "they were calling out names on slideshow"
Teacher-Reported Parent Response to Parent Open Houses	"At first, they wanted to hurry and go...after they realized how interesting it was, they (stayed)" "Harder to reach" parents were there" "Parents were looking how we interact with the children, how we take care of them" "They had to interact with their children...had to do what we do" "They said wow because they saw all the work we do" "They could see hands on how their children learn through play" "Now they understand that sitting with the child (with a toy) is more beneficial and also a bonding time" "I saw a lot of parents taking pictures" "Once they started, they didn't want to stop" "I think the OHs, it really was what they wanted"
Increased Parent Engagement	"I mean, the Open Houses, they actually got them more involved" "Children get to see their parents in their space and so they get to show them what they're actually doing at school" "They ask more questions now" "We have good communication now" "They are more open now" "Before ... they just dropped the children and go...now they have time to say, "How's my baby today?" "Mostly they (parents) are asking about behavior...when we do the OH they say my child is learning something different. It's not only how they behave"
More DAP	"My understanding has changed... my approach is different" "They're learning more now" "Can learn to write other ways...actually learned more because the paper is too tedious for them" "Can have an entire discussion about just the cover" "Allow them to explore now more" "Children are more liberated" "Interact more with them" "Before it was too much of a dictating approach now, I know, you guide them" "Want students to have a say" "Activities in your presentation...they're learning more now" "Before they sat too long...now there is no trouble everybody listens" "You can learn from them as well" "We're learning to listen to them"
Children's reactions to more DAP	"My kids keep on telling me, "Teacher, I love you so much, this is the best day ever... best class ever" "I love this teacher - what we're going to do tomorrow? And they anticipated it so much" "The variety of reading materials you mentioned did a lot... the first morning I had the Cayman Compass, and they took it, and I heard the conversation, and it was so interactive! I was thinking it would be too big for them" "They're super excited now"
Collegiality	"We are sharing activities and ideas now" "We were in full support of each other, and of you, because we knew that it's not just about your research, you were giving us something that we need" "Helped us in having an understanding as to how to really teach...it's not just that anybody can do it... it is very strategic, technical and there must be some skills you must use ... So, it was for me a fulfilling experience" "We feel more professional now" "Very satisfying"
Professionalism	

Themes from Post-Intervention Teacher Focus Groups

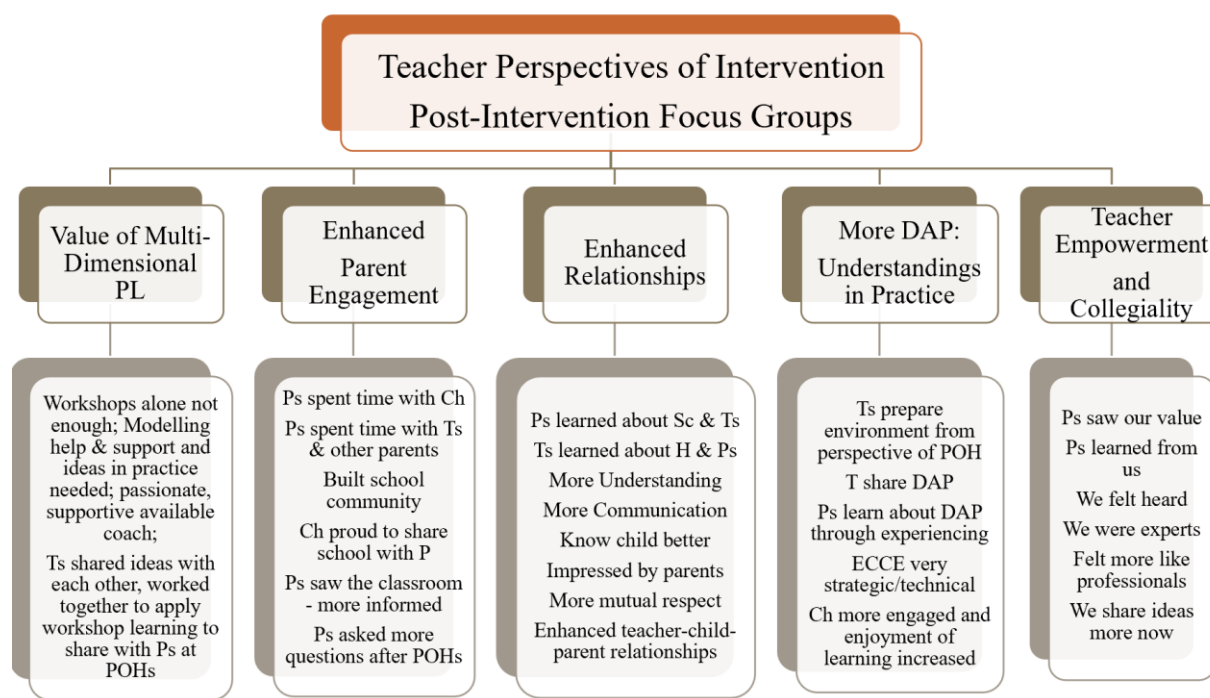
The four themes from the post-intervention teacher and parent focus groups were: 1) Value of Multi-Dimensional PL; 2) Enhanced Parent Engagement and Relationships; 3) More

DAP and 4) Teacher Empowerment and Collegiality. The data analysis of the observational notes and photographs was very consistent with the categories and themes of the post-intervention teacher focus groups. A summary of the notes taken for the first half of the PL Intervention: The Play EC Parent Open House is provided in Appendix I.

The post-intervention teacher focus group themes, categories, and quotes will be presented in turn in the following section. Example quotations will be presented but it is important to note that there was a high level of agreement amongst teachers indicated by follow up comments and reactions from the other teachers noted as agreement on the transcripts. Findings from the data analysis of the pre-intervention teacher focus groups will be combined where appropriate to highlight indicators of the impact of the PL intervention in relation to changes in teacher beliefs, views, practices, and professional self-concepts (see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Teacher Perspectives of the Intervention Components



Theme One: Value of Multi-dimensional PL. As presented in Table 5, the teachers talked about the benefits of the multi-dimensional approach to the professional learning intervention including coaching, mentorship, and the establishment of a community of practice to collaborate together in the implementation of the EC Parent Open Houses. Teachers felt strongly that combining a workshop with a longer-term practical component was much better than just workshops alone. For example, Participant 1 said, “Workshops are not really support. It’s just something to just give us and its just like we’re in a traditional classroom- they’re just throwing information at you...we just sit and observe but we don’t really understand” When asked what is helpful, the teachers responded with enthusiastic agreement, “action” and “you were in here supporting”. When reflecting on the workshops, the teachers expressed qualities of a presenter that are valuable. Participant 13 said, “If (the presenter) is passionate about it and it is something they love, you are going to present with the love and the passion and excitement and whoever is receiving it will get it. So, thank you.” The teachers also talked about the benefits of the two workshops before each EC Parent Open House and in particular gaining ideas for DAP from the pictures of examples of classroom set ups and children’s learning in a DAP program on the slides. For example, Participant 6 said, “We got some different ideas and the resources... doesn’t have to be something you buy in a store...it can be recycled” and this was followed by “Children can learn from anything.” Participant 13 said, “Based on some of the information that you gave us on the slides... the vast information... and what you were talking about ... I took notes and then by reading back and try to see where I fall short somewhere and trying to adjust those.” This latter quote indicates that the teachers adopted a more proactive and empowered reflective approach. In the pre-intervention focus groups, expressions were not as proactive and empowered as they were following the intervention. For example, in the pre-intervention focus

group, when referring to differing stakeholder expectations, one teacher stated, “We wonder if we are doing the right thing ... and we are trying to do everything to please each.”

The teachers also commented about the importance of valuable qualities and behaviors of coaches/mentors/facilitators that maximize the success of the PL and CoP. All of the teachers in the three post-intervention focus groups expressed appreciation for the ongoing support and emphasized how much they felt they need additional support in being as successful as they want to be in their jobs and to assist them in implementing new learning from workshops effectively into practice. The teachers noted observing the positive responses of the children when the researcher was reading and singing with children indicating the benefits of modelling. When referring to the addition of consulting to the PL process, Participant 16 said, “When we had a question, there was an answer there for us.” Teachers appreciated the following qualities of a coach: “great effort” “kindness” “love and passion and excitement”, “your enthusiasm and being so receptive”, “the dialogue”, “your attitude” “helping out (in any way needed)”, “being part of us”, and finally the need for support: “support, support, that’s what we need” was most emphasized on many occasions by all of the teachers.

Theme Two: Enhanced Parent Engagement and Relationships. The enhanced relationships came through in the analysis as increased empathy and positivity from teachers. This is summed up by Participant 15 who expressed the sentiment below showing an increased sense of empathy, perspective taking, and understanding of parents and received a strong reaction of agreement and applause from the other participants:

“I don’t know if it was the questionnaire or the whole research that you are conducting or sending parents (to open houses), but it dawned on me that I don’t know we as educators really stopped to think that as much as we have Billy in our classroom - Billy’s mum – we have to care about her. We have to care about Billy’s dad ... you know sometimes we’re caring for these little humans, and we have no idea, you know, what the parents are going through, the struggles they have to deal with... And I think that it’s like this whole

research, it opened me up to say, we have a connection that we have to deepen, and I can say now, that that is my takeaway from this entire research. So, thank you.”

The expressions in the post-intervention teacher focus groups were consistent with the higher ratings of PTRs found in the post-intervention surveys with Participant 12 saying, “To be honest, I was really impressed with the parents.” While the teachers were impressed with some parents, they also commented on seeing how some parents might benefit from support. They expressed their opinions about parents more sensitively and empathetically in the post-intervention focus groups and spoke about them more from a position of support. For example, when the teachers talked about some parents “struggling” in the Responsive Literacy EC Parent Open House because their child was not engaged with the book, the teachers talked about helping by encouraging the child to read and “boosting” the parents’ confidence. The teachers also discussed their ideas for how they can approach the next EC Parent Open House to respond to some of their observations and further support parents with their children. In particular, they noticed that the parents were more comfortable in the first EC Parent Open House on Play because they had the flexibility to take on a more active or passive role interacting with their child. However, in the second topic of literacy, there was more pressure for them to interact with their child as they read a book together. The teachers in Preschool B proposed that at the next EC Parent Open House, they would offer a combination of the two approaches to see how parents and children respond. A follow-up request for the researcher to come and support the teachers with their next EC Parent Open House indicated lasting changes in practice as well as the teachers truly embracing the initiative as worthwhile. Both intervention preschools did another EC Parent Open House in the new school year.

The teachers expressed how beneficial it was to learn more about each other by being together with children and parents in the classroom environment and how it gave them insights

into who the child is and into the child's home life. Participant 12 expressed this, "For me, seeing the parents coming out and you know engaging with their children, learning, being in their space at school and to see what they're actually learning about says a lot." The teachers appreciated opportunities for communication with parents. For example, Participant 9 said, "I think it was very educational for the parents because they saw a difference and then you get to speak to them, and they could see hands on what the child learns...how they learn through play. That was exciting." Participant 5 said, "They (parents) said "wow", because they saw all the work that we do. You know, we play with them, we have patience with them. And sometimes they don't know this job we do." Many teachers expressed this latter sentiment with statements that parents learned that "We're not just babysitting." and "We are actually teaching them." and "They saw our value." Participant 2 talked about how both parents and teachers learned more about the children by saying, "She (mother) was surprised and said, "the boy doesn't talk to me at home and (at the Open House) he talked and talked." Many times, teachers in all focus groups mentioned how children are unique and that they are different at home than at school. The teachers in the pre-intervention focus groups expressed many times about how important they thought it is for them to have more one-on-ones with parents. In the post-intervention focus groups, the teachers noted that the EC Parent Open Houses provided them with an opportunity to realize this goal. In the parent focus groups, parents also referred to this benefit of the EC Parent Open Houses using the same terminology saying, "It was really good just having that one on one with the teacher."

Many of the teachers talked about the benefits of interaction and communication at the Open Houses. For example, Participant 14 said, "Well for me you know, it was a great experience, especially the fact that we were able to communicate with parents...you get to

express teaching and everything basically that happens in the classroom to be able to show parents what was done...and basically it helped them understand how important play is in learning.” Participant 7 said, “I got to have a conversation and to see parents reading stories. And we had talks and they could ask how their child is doing and I could tell them.” There was also an increased expression of empathy and understanding for the parents. For example, when the teachers were explaining why they would be willing to come in on a Saturday for an Open House, Participant 8 said, “because if you love what you do and you love children ... you realize that you're impacting the world. And a lot of parents don't understand children and they don't understand how to deal with children. And a lot of them need help.” When talking about the benefits of the Open Houses, Participant 9 went on to say, “Because a lot of parents just think that giving the child the toy and they sit with it alone and play. That’s just it. But now they understand that sitting with the child is more beneficial for them and the child and is also a bonding time with them.” The teachers’ highly favorable and positive views of the PL intervention are consistent with their pre-intervention expressions of wanting closer relationships and more communication with parents and they saw the benefits of promoting “three in a team” through the EC Parent Open Houses. Participant 10 said, “We got to know them a bit more – in a more comfortable setting. We could talk and be familiar with them and their children and the interaction was right.” Participant 16 said, “Children got to see their parents in their space and so they get to show them what they are actually doing at school, you know, to get the parents involved as well.” Participant 11 expressed, “I mean, the Open Houses, they actually got them more involved when they come and see. I think they have more appreciation for the teachers now.” Participant 13 said, “So, it’s not just to say that the parents are not being involved ... some

parents don't know how & these Open Houses- it's actually teaching them how to incorporate different stuff at home."

When asked what they thought about the reactions of parents to the EC Parent Open Houses, teachers expressed that they thought parents enjoyed visiting the classrooms with their child and that many parents were convinced to go in by their child and then had so much fun, they decided to stay. One teacher said, "you know these little persuaders" when referring to the children excitedly encouraging their parents to attend. Participant 6 said, "When they came in, they wanted to hurry and go, right. After they realized how interesting it was, they didn't even remember that they actually had something to do." The EC Parent Open Houses had very high turnouts especially when compared to most other school wide events and the teachers noted that "harder to reach" parents participated. For example, Participant 7 said, "I got to see parents that just pick up and go." The teachers attributed the large turnouts to the timing and the format of the EC Parent Open Houses (see Appendix H). Both parents and teachers thought that the large turnouts were in part due to the flexibility of the timing given that it was drop-in over a two and a half hour period at pick-up time. One parent said, "it was good because you get a timespan to work with so you say I can make it for this time...and you can do it...because here it's all about work." Parents stated in agreement that they appreciated the drop-in method of operating the EC Parent Open Houses stating that it is difficult for them to make a certain time due to work and other obligations but the flexibility enabled them to attend. One parent said that that EC Parent Open Houses are important enough that she will take a late lunch to be able to go to them and another stated, "They should do them more often."

Participant 16 explained that it is not just teachers and parents that developed a better relationship but that she thinks the EC Parent Open Houses helped parent-child relationships:

“So by them coming to the school and seeing what is really going with their child, it will benefit them to have a better relationship with their child at home.” Participant 14 shared that she told a parent, “It’s very important that you stay... then I could hear her and (the other teacher) talking and the child was so happy to be actually showing mommy what she can do.” In the same way the teachers expressed the benefits of seeing the children with their parents and getting an idea of what it is like at home for the child. The parents also saw this as a benefit with one parent saying, “I liked when I got to see his teacher and I got a feel of what he is like here at school because at home he is different.” Many other parents expressed the same sentiment that they liked seeing the classroom set up and their child interacting at preschool and that this helped them to get a better “understanding of exactly what they do within a day.” One parent mentioned that other than the EC Parent Open Houses, they have rarely spent time inside the preschool. In the parent focus groups, parents commented on how happy the children were and how excited they were to have their parents in preschool with them with one parent saying, “They should do it more often so parents can interact with their children. Come see what they’re up to.”

With reference to the long-term impact of the intervention on parent engagement, the teachers stated that after the intervention, the parents asked more questions and shared more information at drop-off and pick-up times. Teachers talked about increased parent engagement and noted that it was lasting. For example, Participant 3 said, “We can talk about everything now with their children. It’s not like before, like only one word and that’s it and then they pick up and go.” Other teachers expressed the same sentiment with agreement: “they’re more comfortable now talking to us” and “we talk more with them now, you know, about their children.”

The researcher’s observation notes and the parent focus groups revealed a benefit that was not directly referred to by teachers in the post-intervention focus groups. This was the

benefit of the EC Parent Open Houses for building connections within the school community referred to as Community Building. One parent said with lots of agreement from the group, “It was really nice. I was excited to come in here with all the people and you know, get to meet the other parents, and see what my child is like at school.” Another parent talked about the benefit of putting names to faces of the other children their child talks about at home. These were the statements that resulted in a new category being formed of “building community connections” as a beneficial impact of the of the EC Parent Open Houses. This formed a new category and the researcher scanned the teacher post-intervention focus group data to look for any evidence of this new category being referred to by the teachers. Evidence was not found for this category in the teacher focus groups and so it remained as a category specific to the observational notes and parent focus groups.

The quantitative data analysis found that PL teachers rated PTRs significantly higher than they did in the pre-intervention surveys. In the focus groups, the teachers unanimously agreed that their relationships with both parents and children improved because of their participation in the study. The teachers expressed with enthusiasm how much the children enjoyed and benefited from the experience and how excited they were to show their parents their classroom and all the things they learn at preschool. In the researcher observations of the EC Parent Open Houses, the children were smiling and happy and excited. Like the parents and teachers, children went back and forth between interacting with their friends, parents, and teachers in informal ways. Participant 2 noted, “the bigger ones (children) were holding their (parent’s) hands and were like, “Oh mummy look, and mummy look over here!” The event was intentionally planned for flexibility and freedom of movement around the preschool including the classrooms, slideshow, refreshments, and the garden. This flexibility allowed the parents and teachers to be comfortable

following the child's lead. In the researcher observations, it was noted that the children really enjoyed the refreshments and showing their parents the slideshow that the teachers had prepared ahead of time of the children learning in relation to the EC Parent Open House topic. The children watched the slideshow with their parents, friends and teachers and were calling out names as the various slides appeared. The teachers' skills in facilitating the EC Parent Open Houses and ensuring that it was a positive experience for parents and children were noted in the observational notes as impressive. There were instances of children becoming frustrated or experiencing difficulties participating in the activities. The teachers were effective at addressing these situations thereby providing valuable modelling to parents about how to guide and support young children.

Theme Three: More DAP Understandings, Beliefs and Practices. Consistent with the quantitative results, the qualitative analysis indicated that the DAP beliefs of PL teachers increased from pre-to post-intervention. In the post-intervention focus groups, the teachers talked often about their changes in beliefs and practices as an outcome of the intervention. Participant 11 stated, "My understanding has changed so my approach is different...I know worldwide we have to move over from the traditional approach." Participant 14 expressed, "I didn't want to just write the plan and pre-prepare, I wanted the students to have a say... and so I am realizing that emergent is that you observe and make notes and you prepare from that." Participant 9 explained that before she was strict with her lesson plans but since the PL intervention, she talks to the children, and she learns from them as well because she had not thought about it that way. She went on to say that the children's responses to a lesson plan can "flip it around" and "that's fine." This more flexible and responsive developmentally appropriate approach to teaching and learning was expressed frequently in the post-focus group data. When reflecting on her change in

practice, Participant 12 said, “I want students to have a say... through my observations and interactions with them...and from their feedback, I was able to generate ideas and prepare the environment.” With reference to literacy, one teacher explained how she showed the parent that you can follow the child’s lead when reading a book, and that she can “have an entire discussion about just the cover” if the child is interested. The teachers stated that they are listening to children more and giving them opportunities to explore the environment a lot more since the intervention. Participant 11 summed up her reflection and change of beliefs and practices in the following quotation describing the responses of the children,

“My kids keep on telling me, “Teacher, I love you so much, this is the best day ever, this is the best class ever” (lots of laughter and agreement) I love this teacher, teacher what we’re going to do tomorrow? And they anticipated it so much and then ... I was like, “seriously, what we have been doing before this?” What did I say based on my reflection, before it was too much more of a dictating approach...now I know, you guide them, and they’re more liberated.”

The teachers also attributed their changes in views and practices to the PL intervention process. When referring to the workshop component, Participant 10 said, “the variety of teaching materials that you mentioned (in the workshop) we should incorporate, did a lot, especially for my kids.” The researcher’s observations and photographs from pre-intervention to post-intervention also indicated significant changes in practice with reference to the classroom set-up and learning environments and the photos of the children interacting and exploring in the new environment that were incorporated into the EC Parent Open House slideshows. The teachers transformed the classrooms into intentionally prepared learning areas to encourage hands-on child-centered and directed play opportunities often hand-making many of the materials as they were drawing upon the ideas that had been presented and discussed at the workshop. Teachers in various classrooms had a class bank with credit cards, money and checks; a lemonade stand with recipes, measuring cups, utensils and real lemons; a cookie store with a cash register, menu and

stove; an entire garden growing area with live plants to care for and a grocery store; and a creative activity with flowers, leaves, sticks and natural materials to go along with the book, “Not a Stick”. The photographs showed a significant transformation from desks, chairs, and tables to defined centers intentionally prepared to encourage and enrich child-initiated and directed play and exploration. The photographs also showed the children’s positive and inspiring reactions to these more developmentally appropriate experiences.

Theme Four: Empowerment and Collegiality. The teachers talked about the EC Parent Open Houses helping parents to “see our value.” Participant 1 expressed, “It let them be aware some of what we go through dealing with the children on a daily basis” and Participant 12 stated, “They (the parents) saw our value...that we’re actually doing something because most of them kind of think, you know, we are only babysitting them, watching them or what not, but they don’t actually see... we are actually teaching them.” The latter quote is very connected with the findings of the pre-intervention focus groups because the teachers stated many times pre-intervention that they wanted more value, recognition, and appreciation for the job they do, and that parents and the wider community view them as “just babysitters”. In the pre-intervention focus groups, teachers also talked about how important the early years are because they are the “foundation of all later learning” and children are “like sponges” when they are young. In the post-intervention focus groups, the teachers commented many times about how parents saw their value and learned more about how much children learn in preschool.

When compared to the pre-intervention focus groups, the teachers placed a greater onus on themselves as having the professional responsibility to understand and empathize with families and try to promote parent engagement and closer PTRs themselves. The researcher’s observational notes and the tone of the post-intervention teacher focus groups compared to the

pre-intervention focus groups showed greater positivity, enthusiasm, inspiration, and empowerment. The teachers in the pre-intervention focus groups had talked about how experts coming in to present to parents was disempowering for them because they “can’t step up” and that they wanted to take on a greater role in this regard. For example, Participant 6 commented that there are “always people come from outside and no response from us...but you see, you’re getting our feedback now” followed by other participant comments of agreement such as “we like it”, “it is nice”, “you’re listening to us now” and “it’s important.” In the researcher observational notes, it was noted that the teachers were in fact “stepping up” during the EC Parent Open Houses, circulating and interacting with children and parents as they thought most appropriate maintaining flexibility and demonstrating professional judgement. The teachers responded to parents’ questions, children’s communications, and shared information about early childhood pedagogy in authentic and natural ways as opportunities presented themselves. In the parent focus groups, parents communicated that they would rather learn information about ECCE from their child’s teacher than an expert with one parent saying, “...because they know on a day-to-day basis what they (the children) are doing” and “I suppose the teachers are trained by the experts.”

With reference to collegiality, the teachers reported more collaboration as a staff with Participant 9 sharing, “Recently, I was eavesdropping on these two (other teachers), and they were saying, “how are we going to set up, what are we going to do?” The teachers were reflective and empowered by the PL experience with Participant 7 stating, “The approaches were designed to help us in having an understanding as to how to really teach these students...it’s not just that anybody can get up and do it... no, it’s very strategic, technical and there must be some skills that you must use to really teach them. So, for me, it was for me a fulfilling experience.”

The teachers reflected upon and discussed the differences between the two EC Parent Open Houses. The teachers in both schools noted that the second format was more challenging for some parents, and this was also noted in the researcher's observational notes. The teachers thought that both formats were beneficial for different reasons. The first EC Parent Open House about Play gave parents flexibility in taking an active or passive role interacting with their child and the second focused on showing parents how to read with their children in developmentally appropriate ways and supporting them to do this with their child. The teachers decided that at the next EC Parent Open House, they would offer an approach that is in between the two levels of structure and see how the parents and children respond. This demonstrated both an enthusiasm to continue with the initiative and reflexive and responsive professional practice on the part of the teachers.

When discussing the impact on themselves as professionals, the teachers mentioned that they ask a lot of questions now of themselves and each other and that they have "...more interaction now and more communication" and "sharing of best practice". When asked about the work involved for the EC Parent Open Houses, the teachers in all groups stated that they would like to do them once a month. Participant 8 summed up the rationale for wanting to continue by saying, "At the end of the day, it showed us what more we can do." Teachers in School A talked about how they would be willing to give up their free time to do an Open House on Saturdays. In the pre-intervention focus groups, teachers expressed wanting their preschools to encourage more parent engagement through school-wide initiatives and by including it in lesson planning. Post-intervention, the teachers placed a greater onus on themselves as having the professional responsibility to understand, empathize with and support families by advocating for and promoting parent engagement and closer PTRs themselves.

Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

In a convergent parallel mixed methods design, two data sets are combined in the attempt to gain a clear picture of the phenomenon under study and to validate one set of findings with the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). An integration of the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data analysis indicate convergence and validation of findings. In this study, the quantitative data found a significant difference from pre- to post-intervention for the PL teachers in their views of DAP and PTRs, and the qualitative data revealed a positive impact for the program that both confirmed and shed additional light on the quantitative findings and effectiveness of the measurement tools and the PL Intervention (Patton, 2015).

The survey analysis found that teachers and parents endorsed both play and schoolification and that the most uncertainty was found in the teacher role category as indicated by mid-range DAP scores. These findings are consistent with the qualitative theme of Dichotomies and Uncertainties whereby teachers and parents expressed that they see the value of play but also see the value of schoolification in pre-academic skills to prepare children for elementary school. The post-intervention qualitative theme of More DAP Beliefs is consistent with the quantitative finding that the DAP beliefs of PL teachers were significantly higher from pre- to post-intervention; a change that was not found for the comparison teachers. The pre-intervention surveys showed uncertainty for both parents and teachers about the teacher role in ECCE. However, the PL teachers scores for the teacher role items significantly increased following the intervention indicating that changes in practice occurred. The post-intervention teacher focus groups and researcher observations throughout the PL intervention provided additional support to this finding with noticeable changes in practice described by the teachers, evidenced by the changes to the social and physical learning environment and by the fact that the

teachers in both intervention schools did another EC Parent Open House in the new school term by choice.

With reference to PTRs, while both teachers and parents rated their relationships very favorably pre-intervention, parents rated their PTRs significantly higher than teachers. The pre-intervention qualitative themes of More Communication Needed and Barriers to PTRs are consistent with the teachers' lower ratings of PTRs on the pre-intervention surveys. In the pre-intervention focus groups, the teachers wanted more help, support, and appreciation from parents. They expressed that they want parents to know how important ECCE is and how hard they work and for parents to know that their job requires training and experience – specifically that it is not just babysitting/daycare. Parents were much more content with their PTRs in both the surveys and the focus groups. They too talked about time constraints being a barrier to closer PTRs, wanted more communication about what their child is doing at school and for work to be sent home. As the teachers thought, the parents did not know about the CIEYCF but when asked in the parent focus groups, parents stated that they would like to know more.

The post-intervention focus group theme of the PL Enhanced PTRs and Parent Engagement is consistent with the quantitative finding that the PL teachers' ratings of their relationships with parents were significantly higher post-intervention and that teachers were significantly less likely to say they wanted to improve their relationships with parents. The PTR survey items that showed significant changes were: "I expect more from this parent than I get"; "We see this child differently"; "I ask this parent for suggestions"; and "This parent is sensitive to my feelings". In the post-intervention teacher focus groups, the tone and content indicated more empathy, perspective taking, and positive teacher views of parents. Teachers and parents both expressed that the EC Parent Open Houses were beneficial and that they learned more about

each other, the children and ECCE. The teachers noted that parents had more appreciation for the job they do and its importance following the PL intervention. Furthermore, the opportunities for communication provided at the EC Parent Open Houses were viewed as beneficial and teachers reported that increased parent engagement and communication occurred following the intervention.

Table 6 summarizes an integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings post-intervention in relation to the impact of the PL Intervention. The DAP and PTR surveys, teacher focus groups and the researcher's observational notes showed convergence serving to triangulate the findings.

Table 6.

Integrated Quantitative and Qualitative Results Post-Intervention for PL Teachers

Quantitative		Qualitative
Findings	Focus Group Results	Researcher Observations (Photos/Notes)
DAP scores were significantly higher post-intervention for PLTs but not CTs PLT DAP scores were significantly higher than parents post but not pre-intervention – a change not found for Comparison Ts Belief in play high pre- but also increased post	Post Theme: More DAP: less uncertainty about teacher role and how to implement DAP; more positive about DAP & impact for CH, “My understanding has changed... my approach is different” “From the slides you showed us, the vast information: it’s easier for me to actually use it.” Emphasis on schoolification and justifying its use in pre-intervention FGs not found in post FGs. Many benefits of DAP expressed by teachers. Post Theme: Empowerment & Collegiality: collaborate more; sharing of best practice	Classrooms changed dramatically after first workshop on play in preparation for the first POH. PLTs responded to the modelling, consulting, and coaching with enthusiasm using their own ideas and collaborating together to prepare the environment to stimulate child-directed play and encourage responsive literacy; (e.g., a book about creative block building with physical blocks; clipboards with blank paper in all areas); Photos showed CH and PLTs happier, more engaged. At POHs, Ps were asking questions about what the children do at school and how they learn and PLTs answered drawing upon their learning experiences from the PL. PLTs explained how they support/encourage child-initiated play and responsive literacy and about listening more to CH and responding to their initiations/thoughts/ideas. PLTs emphasized the benefits of play, responsive caregiving and teaching children to initiate & direct their own learning.

PLTs greatest rise in DAP scores for schoolification then for teacher role DAP items with sig. change were: 1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 16, 19 & 20 with five in Teacher Role More likely to think ECTs need qualifications-benefit of PL	Ts described more DAP/ less schoolification. They also described teacher role in DAP more specifically with less uncertainty; Ts attributed the changes to the multi-dimensional PL through coaching, consulting, and CoPs. “More of a dictating approach before: “now I know you guide them.” “Allow CH to explore now” “interact more; “CH more liberated”; “Able to generate ideas now”; “Want students to have a say”; “Emergent is coming out now”	In classrooms and at the POHs, CH were reading with each other and PLTs in small groups vs. traditional whole group. PLTs were interacting and responding to CH’s initiations and interests. PLTs were carefully and intentionally preparing the environment and supporting CH as they explored. PLTs’ role changed to extend facilitate, support vs. correct, direct, instruct. Photos showed CH having input, initiative and directing own learning together; interactive print-rich centers were created for dramatic play. CH used materials in centers to create, explore and interact with support of PLTs. PLTs were empowered by PL and the ongoing support they felt they needed to put learning from workshops into practice effectively. During the CoP, PLTs asked questions, collaborated together and intentionally changed practice to implement more DAP.
PLTs rated PTRs significantly higher post-int and CTs did not. Items showed sig. changes: “I expect more from this parent than I get”; “We see this child differently”; “I ask this parent for suggestions”; and “This parent is sensitive to my feelings.	Pre-FG Themes of More Communication Needed and Barriers to PTRs less in Post FG Post-FG Theme: Enhanced PTRs & PE: more empathy; learned about each other; less frustration with Ps; empowered to promote PE and PTRs; More positive attitudes, tone, content, more valued: “They see our value now.” Harder to reach Ps at POHs-high turnout. Lasting increased PE “They ask more questions now at pick up /drop off.” “More open now.” Ps expressed benefit of learning more about their child and building school community	PLTs and Ps shared information about home and school in informal ways at POHs. Ps walked around the classroom and CH showed them various materials, books, centers, activities and artwork. PLTs and Ps observed each other interacting with CH. PLTs were embracing the opportunity to share what they know about ECCE with Ps and were answering questions and pointing out the many ways CH learn in the areas of the classroom. Ps showed genuine interest. Interactions observed were positive and meaningful. The PLTs were helpful/supportive if the P was having a problem interacting with CH (e.g., one CH refused to read with her mother and walked away – PLT intervened sensitively and successfully). Ps had opportunities to see PLTs’ ability to skillfully guide children. PLTs also watched slideshow together with Ps & CH at times- an effective springboard for further discussion about learning represented in the pictures.

Note: PLT=Professional Learning Teachers; CTs= Comparison Teachers; CH=Children; P= Parents; POH= EC Parent Open Houses; PE=Parent Engagement; CoP=Community of Practice

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

In program evaluation and applied research, the study of the original meaning and influence of symbols and shared meanings can uncover what is most important to people and how this impacts responses to changing circumstances and new initiatives (Patton, 2015). Therefore, the present study had two major purposes. The first was exploratory to gain a better understanding of parent and teacher views of their relationships with each other and to examine and compare their views of early childhood pedagogy in relation to the developmentally appropriate Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework (CIEYCF). The second purpose was to investigate the effectiveness of a multi-dimensional professional learning (PL) intervention that focused on supporting early years teachers to engage in communication and information exchange with each other and with parents about children and early childhood pedagogy. The goal of the PL intervention was to enhance teacher and parent knowledge of early childhood pedagogy and developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) while also enhancing the quality of parent-teacher relationships (PTRs).

The pre-intervention teacher focus group data revealed interesting insights into the issues and challenges facing ECCE consistent with the extant literature and Ecological Systems theory. The findings highlight the macro-level challenges impacting quality provision and the implementation of DAP, professional image, professional confidence, and agency of early years teachers and how these challenges impact PTRs revealing three themes: Uncertainties and Dichotomies; Increased Communication Needed, and Barriers to PTRs. Following the PL intervention, both the survey and focus group data analyses provided evidence that the PL intervention changed teacher reported DAP beliefs, understandings, and practices; empowered teachers, promoted more collegiality and reflexive practice; and improved their views of PTRs.

The format and approach to the PL intervention was based on the theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism such that opportunities for interaction, dialogue, and reflection amongst teachers in response to new learning and within a specific cultural context provided an opportunity to co-construct new meanings and understandings together in a Community of Practice. Consistent with Symbolic Interactionist theory, the post-intervention teacher focus groups revealed four themes: More DAP, Enhanced Relationships and Parent Engagement, Value of Multi-Dimensional PL, and enhanced Empowerment and Collegiality. This discussion section will address the findings in relation to these themes and the research questions and connect these findings to the extant literature and the theoretical frameworks informing this research study.

Parent and Teacher Views

Parent and Teacher Views of DAP

The present study found a high level of agreement between parents and teachers in relation to their views and beliefs about early childhood pedagogy prior to the intervention. With reference to DAP as outlined in the CIEYCF, teachers and parents shared very similar views on the pre-intervention surveys and in focus groups even though previous research studies have found that teacher views of DAP are higher than views of parents (Demircan & Erden, 2015; Fisher et al., 2008; Hadley, 2012; Wolf, 2020). Perhaps the relatively lower educational qualifications of the teachers under study contributed to this finding given that higher academic qualifications in child development and ECCE are associated with more developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices (Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2010; Heisner & Lederberg, 2011; Jumiaan et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2005). The findings are consistent with this explanation because the teachers in the present study with higher qualifications in ECCE had significantly higher

DAP survey scores pre-intervention when compared to the teachers with little or no qualifications. Another explanation for the teachers and parents having similar DAP scores could be that teachers in the present study did not have experience working in high-quality developmentally appropriate programs. This also explains why teachers in this study with more experience did not have higher DAP scores than those with little or no experience. Previous research studies have found that it is experience in high-quality developmentally appropriate programs specifically that positively impacts developmentally appropriate views and practices (Cabanoglu et al., 2019; Egert et al., 2018; Wong, 2019). The finding that the PL teachers' DAP views were significantly higher than both the comparison teachers and parents after the PL intervention also supports these explanations. The PL intervention provided the teachers with opportunities to gain positive experiences of DAP implemented effectively.

With reference to views of early childhood pedagogy, both teachers and parents were in strong agreement that they value play and believe it is important to provide children with opportunities for play but they were also in strong agreement that it is important to provide children with schoolified teaching methods and learning activities (e.g., direct instruction in pre-academic skills; worksheets; assessments). This is consistent with prior research findings that even though parents tend to have less developmentally appropriate views than teachers, they also show views consistent with supporting both ends of this dichotomy (Wolf, 2020). ECCE teachers have also been found to have mixed views of early childhood pedagogy whereby they value play and DAP but also endorse schoolification or developmentally inappropriate practices in ECCE settings (Baker, 2014; Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Cade et al., 2022; Chin, 2014; Cobanoglu, 2019; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Kim et al., 2005; Smith, 2016).

The DAP survey in the present study had three categories: schoolification, play, and teacher role in ECCE. In relation to the three categories, both teachers and parents were in the strongest agreement that they value play and that children's social, emotional, physical, and academic learning are equally important resulting in the highest DAP scores. However, consistent with past research, teachers indicated in the pre-intervention focus groups that play that is structured and directed by teachers is more important for learning than child-initiated play; with the latter primarily being viewed as a break, a reward, or as an opportunity to occupy children while teachers instruct small groups in schoolified ways (Cade et al., Lynch, 2015; Pyle & Bigelow, 2014). In the parent focus groups, parents thought that child choice and play are beneficial but that there should not be too much of this because the teacher needs to "keep order", a common misconception found in the research about developmentally appropriate versus schoolified programs. In the focus groups prior to the intervention, teachers also supported this viewpoint that children are more likely to be loud, make a mess and have more social conflicts when they are playing versus when they are engaged in more structured and schoolified activities (Jensen et al., 2012; Rentzou et al., 2019). Both teachers and parents pre-intervention agreed in their views in favor of schoolification resulting in the lowest DAP survey scores but PL teachers showed significant changes in their views post-intervention.

The greatest uncertainty found in both the surveys and the focus groups was in relation to teacher and parent views of the teacher role in ECCE. This category of the survey referred to more specific teacher behaviors required in a schoolified approach versus a developmentally appropriate approach. It can be deduced that while parents and teachers want children to both play and learn academic skills, they become more unsure when asked their opinion regarding the specific behaviors and practices ECCE teachers need to engage in within a developmentally

appropriate versus a schoolified approach. This finding is consistent with research that has found that teachers are more uncertain about their role in implementing DAP (Bubikova-Moan, 2019); that beliefs are more developmentally appropriate than practices (Charlesworth et al., 1991; Chin, 2014; Demircan & Erden, 2015); and that teachers who have spent time in a high-quality developmentally appropriate program have stronger beliefs and higher quality DAP (Hamre, 2014; Wong, 2019). Furthermore, teachers who have experience, qualifications and/or in-depth PL opportunities specific to DAP and child development have been found to be more developmentally appropriate in their beliefs and practices (Cade et al., 2022; Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2010; Heisner & Lederberg, 2011; Kim et al., 2005; Jumiaan, et al., 2020).

Prior research has also found that DAP views on a survey are lower than views when rating video segments of children in schoolified versus developmentally appropriate programs (Jensen et al., 2021). This also lends support to the explanation that when those who have not spent time in early year's classrooms are faced with the specific teacher behaviors of schoolification in practice, it lowers their schoolification beliefs. This might explain the finding that many kindergarten teachers in schoolified programs faced with high expectations for academic skills, accountability, and an over-emphasis on assessment have expressed genuine concerns for children's wellbeing (Kuschner, 2012; Lynch, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010). Furthermore, these research findings suggest that the views of play as being loud and disorganized in the present study prior to the intervention could be the result of this teacher uncertainty and can explain their expressed need for support in how to implement a developmentally appropriate play-based program effectively. Indeed, the change in DAP views and practices following the PL intervention based on the findings from the surveys, focus groups

and researcher observations suggests that support and experience in how to implement DAP effectively strengthens developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices.

While curriculum documents and policies consistent with DAP, such as the CIEYCF, have been introduced in many countries around the world, schoolification is proving resistant to change even though a large body of multidisciplinary research has provided evidence that it is stressful for young children, comes at a cost to dispositions and capacities for learning and that these negative effects persist (Bodrova, et al., 2013; Burts et al., 1992; Elkind, 1987; 2007; Fisher et al., 2009; Gray 2013; Hatfield et al., 2013; Whitebread, 2013) whereas DAP promotes child wellbeing and lasting beneficial gains in learning capacities and dispositions that do improve school achievement and success into adult life (Brogaard, 2015; Hattie, 2009; McCoy et al., 2017; Sylva et al., 2004; Whitebread et al., 2017; Yogman et al., 2018). The findings in the present study are indicative of the period of change that the global field of ECCE is going through. It can be inferred that parents and teachers are now convinced about the value of play and relationship-based ECCE settings for young children, but that they are not yet ready to let go of their belief in the importance of schoolification practices for getting children ready for school. Furthermore, the findings of the present study suggest that this period of change is resulting in a range of beliefs about ECCE within and between stakeholders. Both in prior research and in this study, teachers have reported feeling pressure from various stakeholders (parents, principals, experts, elementary school teachers and education officers) who they view as having differing expectations of what ECCE provision should look like both within and between groups. Consistent with past research (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009), the teachers felt that parents put pressure on them to teach academic skills and have a need for tangible evidence of learning such as worksheets. Parents in the focus groups corroborated this

view but there were also parents who emphasized the importance of play and nurturing children. The dominant viewpoint as found on both the parent and teacher surveys and in the focus groups was that teachers and parents think that both DAP and schoolification are important in ECCE settings. The teachers also agreed strongly that there would be repercussions for them and their preschool if the children they teach were not prepared academically when they went on to elementary school.

This dual emphasis is problematic because DAP and schoolification can be viewed as dichotomies such that it is challenging if not impossible to meet high academic expectations without forgoing an overall approach that values children's play, social interactions, democracy, relationships, and child choice, autonomy, and wellbeing (Cade et al., 2022; Kushner, 2012; Lynch, 2015; Nicolopoulou, 2010). Kushner (2012) emphasizes this dichotomy when he argues that "once play is put into the service of achieving the academic goals of curriculum, it is no longer play." (Kushner, 2012, p. 248). Furthermore, early years democracy occurs when children and adults learn together through active participation, responsibility, emancipation, and egalitarianism giving children a genuine voice, while schoolification practices run contrary to these ideals (Brogaard-Clausen 2015; Dahlberg et al., 2013). In her article about actualizing children's rights in the Caribbean through early childhood care and education, Kinkead-Clark (2020) talks about the importance of educating stakeholders about DAP and child-rearing to move towards an approach that views play and active engagement as fundamental to children's learning and wellbeing and moves away from more didactic and authoritarian ways of raising and educating very young children. Many have argued that schoolification and the neo-liberal discourse of accountability through competitive assessment and inspections are threatening this democratic way of being with young children in large group care settings as these early years are

increasingly being viewed as preparation for later schooling and not inherently important in and of themselves (Brogaard-Clausen, 2015; Cade et al., 2022; Erickson, 2018; Jensen et al., 2010; Kuschner, 2012).

As found in previous studies, teachers mentioned barriers to implementing DAP as lack of preparation time, large group sizes, inadequate resources, not enough training, and stakeholder expectations for schoolification (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Wolf, 2020) along with dominant cultural and preschool-specific beliefs and practices (Cade et al., 2022; Chin, 2014). The present study provided evidence that multi-dimensional PL opportunities can address these issues effectively. While teacher views of DAP were very similar to parent views pre-intervention, the PL teachers, but not the comparison teachers, had significantly greater DAP scores than both comparison teachers and parents at post-intervention providing evidence that the intervention increased PL teacher-reported views of DAP. Furthermore, the post-intervention teacher focus groups revealed the theme: More DAP Knowledge, Beliefs and Practices. Significant changes also came through in the researcher observations and photographs of the teachers and learning environments throughout the PL process and during the EC Parent Open Houses serving to triangulate the findings from the surveys and focus groups. In relation to issues of democracy in ECCE, the PL teachers talked about the children's positive responses to the changes and their own experiences of joy and fulfillment in changing from a "dictating" to "guiding" approach that "liberated" the children.

In addition to the dichotomy between schoolification and play, this study also found a dichotomy between the relative value and importance of education versus care. Teachers reported that parents care about their child being nurtured and cared for in a safe and secure environment while they go to work and parents corroborated this. Consistent with past research,

teachers felt that their role as caregivers and as educators were both important but placed a stronger value on the educational role, viewing it as more professional and worthy of respect. They expressed many times that they want parents and the wider community to know “how much” important learning takes place in ECCE settings. This difference in views regarding care versus education has been found in the research with care more emphasized in the earlier years and education in later schooling (Forry et al., 2013; Hadley & Rouse, 2018; Hegde et al., 2014) and with teachers of older children “looking down” on teachers in early years for this reason (Kim et al., 2005). In this study, teachers in the pre-intervention focus groups referred to caregiving behaviors (diaper changing, feeding, etc.), babysitting, nursery, daycare, and play using the word “just” whereas when they talked about teaching lessons, theme content, and pre-academic skills, these expressions were not prefaced with the word “just” thereby coming through as more important. This viewpoint runs contrary to the well-established research findings in neuroscience that warm, responsive caregiving and serve and return interactions with interested, nurturing and supportive adults are the critical mechanisms for learning, wellbeing and healthy brain growth and development with significant lifelong benefits (Jamieson, Nd; Murphy et al., 2021; Mustard, 2010; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2009). In the post-intervention focus groups, the teachers did not discuss the dichotomy of care versus education indicating that the PL intervention promoted the understanding that caregiving is not separate from but instead an integral and influential part of learning and pedagogy during the early years in particular (Curby et al., 2013; Hamre, 2014).

Teacher and parent views of the importance of ECCE can shed light on a potential contributing factor to the finding that teachers value their role as educators more than caregivers. The teachers spoke often and with strong emotion regarding their belief that parents view later

schooling as more important and that parents are more engaged in elementary school. Sollars (2017) found that families were relatively uninformed consumers and that childcare services were viewed by families as an opportunity for them to return to work whereas kindergarten was viewed as a place for learning. Consistent with past research, the teachers in the present study also referred to the long preschool hours as downgrading their status compared to elementary school teachers (Sims-Schouten & Barton, 2020). This perspective views ECCE primarily as an economic service to parents so that they can work while their children are taken care of in a safe environment. As such, the economic function of ECCE provision can be viewed as less professional than the education function and this in turn impacts the practice and identity of early childhood teachers while also serving as a motivator for schoolification practices (Hostettler Scharer, 2012; Jonsdottir & Coleman, 2014; Nutbrown, 2021). These macro-level issues are consistent with the qualitative pre-intervention theme of Barriers to PTRs and parent engagement discussed in more detail below.

It is important to note that in contrast to the teachers expressing that most parents do not think ECCE is important, parents in the focus groups agreed quite strongly that early years are important and that a lot of learning takes place in preschools. One parent even said that ECCE is more important. This could be a result of skewing of the parent sample given that attending the parent focus groups was by invitation and optional. As such, the most engaged parents were probably more likely to volunteer to attend a focus group because just by taking the time to be there, they are demonstrating that they think ECCE is important. Parents even used some of the same vocabulary as teachers to express the importance of early learning such as saying that children are “like sponges” in how fast they can learn and that ECCE is the “foundation” for future learning. One parent even said, “this is the first stage where they will learn most of what

you need to go through life. The rest is just getting you ready to be a worker.” So, while parents expressed the view that early childhood is an important stage in a child’s learning, this view is either not coming through to the teachers or the parents in the focus groups in this study are not representative of most parents. The former explanation is evidenced by teachers feeling more respected and valued by the parents following the EC Parent Open Houses and the latter explanation is consistent with the common finding that a range of beliefs within stakeholder groups exists in ECCE.

Parent and Teacher Views of PTRs

Teamwork through increased communication “three in a team”. Teachers in the present study valued parents and endorsed the important role that parents play in their child’s wellbeing, learning, and development. Accordingly, and consistent with past research, the teachers felt that parent education about ECCE and its importance is greatly needed to improve home environments, parenting, and PTRs (Guo & Kilderry, 2018). As found in past research, parents and teachers rated their relationships with each other very favorably with the parents rating the relationships as significantly better than teachers (Barnes et al., 2016; Drugli & Undheim, 2012; Murphy et al., 2021). This was consistent with the teacher views expressed in the pre-intervention focus groups because the teachers emphasized that they want more help, support, and appreciation from parents and the wider community; whereas in the parent surveys and focus groups, parents indicated that they were content with their relationships and level of support and closeness. This finding is also consistent with prior research findings that teachers want more support from parents and that parents rate the relationship as higher quality and have more positive attitudes towards caregivers than caregivers do for them; particularly with families from lower-income backgrounds (Barnes et al., 2016; Rentzou, 2011; Wanat, 2010). Research by

Zellman and Perlman (2006) also identified a strong positivity bias amongst parents when asked to rate their satisfaction with their caregiver's efforts to engage them.

Consistent with the findings of this study, Drugli and Undheim (2012) found a high level of satisfaction with the overall relationship for parents and teachers even though they both expressed not knowing very much about each other or the child's experiences in the other setting (home or school). Even though parents and teachers rated their relationships favorably, both in this study and past research, parents and teachers expressed wanting to improve their relationship and know more about the child in the other setting through more communication (Drugli & Undheim, 2012; Reedy & McGrath, 2010). When asked in the focus groups, parents did mention wanting more communication with specific reference to homework and knowing more about their own child's learning, behavior, and safety. Parents did not mention wanting to know more about ECCE in general and this is also consistent with past research (Rouse & O'Brien 2017; Wanat, 2010). While early childhood programs have tended to focus more on what is being done in the classroom and less about why it is being done (Reedy & McGrath, 2010), the EC Parent Open Houses effectively addressed the importance of sharing both what is being done and the justifications for why it is being done at the same time.

Parents and teachers in the present study talked about barriers to opportunities for information sharing, communication, and stronger PTRs, such as busy lifestyles and time constraints in finding time to communicate more with each other. Consistent with the findings of this study, other studies have also found that teachers and parents state that availability of time is a barrier to parent engagement and closer PTRs (Fenech et al., 2019). In the focus groups, teachers in the present study talked about how many parents are stressed and overwhelmed and have limitations on their time. This is problematic because past research has found that time and

continuity are prerequisites to forming positive PTRs (Gross et al., 2020; Pirchio et al., 2013; Vuorinen, 2021). Parents also spoke of these challenges in the parent focus groups indicating their limited time and their dependence on the preschool teachers to help them with child rearing and in meeting the needs of their child. While teachers appreciated this, they still wanted parents to view ECCE as more important as indicated by the In Vivo coding of “they don’t see the seriousness of it”. In the pre-intervention focus groups, teachers expressed that they want more help and support from parents, which is consistent with previous research studies (Hegde & Cassidy, 2009; Wolf, 2020).

While parents in the present study indicated that ECCE is important, this view is not translating into parent engagement and behavior as viewed by the teachers. It is important to note that teachers have been found to be more likely to rate parents of lower income as less interested and involved in their child’s education (Bridgemohan, van Wyk & van Staden, 2005; Gross et al., 2020). As found in prior studies, teachers in the pre-intervention focus groups felt like they were doing everything alone for the children’s education expressing frustration with some parents (Barnes et al., 2016; Wolf, 2020). Lower income families have stressors and time limitations along with limited choices in selecting childcare that make them more likely to be satisfied with their child’s preschool and want to outsource aspects of child-rearing to ECCE teachers, rather than engage in time consuming advocacy and partnerships (Chikutuma, 2017; Cutshaw et al., 2022; Drugli & Undheim, 2012; Fantuzzo et al., 2006; Ghosh & Steinberg, 2022; Peyton et al., 2001). Teachers may misunderstand this as parents being less interested and less engaged because they may not be considering that there are a multitude of ways for parents to be engaged in their child’s learning and development (Gross et al., 2020; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). The EC Parent Open Houses addressed these misunderstandings given that in the post-

intervention focus groups, the PL teachers expressed greater empathy, understanding and appreciation for the challenges parents face balancing work and family obligations. One teacher even stated that, “I was quite impressed by the parents to be honest.”

Lower-income parents have also been found to be more likely than higher income parents to believe their child’s preschool is good in relation to expert ratings of quality. Parents of higher socioeconomic backgrounds have been found to expect more from their preschool in terms of partnerships and communication along with closer PTRs, and therefore rate preschools as lower in quality if these are not present. As noted, higher income families are more likely to have the time and flexibility to engage in these partnerships and the agency to advocate for them (Chikutuma et al., 2017; Cutshaw et al., 2022). In the pre-intervention focus groups, teachers expressed that parents struggle with the cost of childcare and this was corroborated in the parent focus groups with parents indicating that they want the best care for their child but that school fees limit their choices. These findings are consistent with a similar study in which interviews with parents and teachers found that they have differing visions for the role they would each like to play in ECCE settings (Wolf, 2020). This study by Wolf (2020) found that parents focused on their role as ensuring that their child’s basic needs were met (food, cleanliness) and that school fees are paid, while teachers expressed that they want parents to be more invested in their children’s educational experiences at preschool and in supporting these experiences at home.

In the pre-intervention focus groups, teachers expressed that parent demands on them were challenging and that they would like more time to connect with parents and discuss DAP in ECCE. Teacher views expressed in the pre-intervention focus groups were similar to the findings of a study by Barnes et al. (2016). The teachers in both studies expressed that they would like more parents to volunteer and help out, be less distracted by their phones, focus more on their

child's learning and development, read preschool policies, hold their children accountable for behavior, know more about ECCE, and to have greater respect childcare provider competence (Barnes et al., 2016). Furthermore, the teachers reported that communication most often occurs when there is an issue or concern and that this can negatively impact PTRs. Finding ways for less formal two-way communication between teachers and parents about children in positive ways, such as the EC Parent Open Houses, is important for building parent engagement and enhancing PTRs and in turn promoting children's positive outcomes (Turley et al., 2017). Consistent with prior research, teachers reported that other than when problems arise, the exchange of information for the majority of parents is one-directional and comes primarily from regularly scheduled report cards and relatively brief parent-teacher conferences that occur a few times per school year (Bridgemohan et al., 2005; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Wolf, 2020). The EC Parent Open Houses provided an opportunity to add to these opportunities for parent-teacher interaction in a new way that focused more on two-directional information sharing and communication to promote the mutuality and reciprocity that has been found to lead to higher quality PTRs (Hadley & Rouse, 2018; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017).

When looking at the survey results for both parents and teachers, the items that teachers rated significantly lower than parents can shed light on what is important to teachers in the PTR. The teachers were significantly more likely to report that they and the parent have different views of what the child should be doing at school, see the child differently, and do not always agree on who should do what regarding the child. The other item that teachers rated significantly lower than parents pre-intervention was "this parent is sensitive to my feelings". Consistent with the focus group findings, this item was rated significantly higher by the PL teachers post-intervention. Of particular note was that in the post-intervention PTR surveys, PL teachers were

much less likely to indicate that they wanted to improve their relationship with parents, and this change was not found for the comparison group. The results of the focus group data analysis provided additional support for this finding. In the post-intervention focus groups, the teachers did not talk about the need to improve their relationships with parents, whereas this was emphasized in the pre-intervention teacher focus groups. Based on these findings, the PL intervention improved relationships with parents which is significant given that higher quality PTRs are associated with many beneficial outcomes for children, families, and teachers (Ernest et al., 2011; Ma et al., 2016; McWayne et al., 2022; Zulaur-McCurdy & Zinsser, 2022).

Contextual Barriers to PTRs and Parent Engagement. One barrier emphasized by teachers in the pre-intervention focus groups, is that wider society still undervalues ECCE and the work of early childhood teachers and this has been found in the literature to decrease their confidence and self-perception as professionals (Fenech et al., 2019; Nutbrown, 2021; OECD, 2019; Sims-Schouten & Barton, 2020). In the pre-intervention focus groups, teachers expressed that parents “don’t see the seriousness of it” and so they would like parents to know more about ECCE and its importance for lifelong learning and wellbeing. The market-based approach to ECCE provision that occurs in most countries assumes that parents are informed and autonomous consumers to ensure greater quality (Fenech et al., 2019). Studies including this study, suggest that parents have a fairly limited knowledge of the specialized field of ECCE and of their child’s experiences at preschool (Fenech et al., 2019; Sollars, 2017). When asked, all of the parents in the present study did not know about the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework (CIEYCF), which was consistent with teacher views that parents do not know about the document. When asked if they wanted to learn more, many of the parents said that they would. So even though parents expressed that ECCE is important in the focus groups, it appears

that this view could be built upon by sharing the many reasons why with parents. In consideration of these findings, promoting dialogue between teachers and parents to share and discuss understandings about high quality ECCE provision can be an effective way to engage parents in wider-scale advocacy efforts (Kelesidou et al., 2017; Mocan, 2007; Rentzou, 2011).

Early childhood teachers indicating that they want to be more valued has consistently been found in the research (Hostettler Scharer, 2021; Sims-Schouten & Barton, 2020). The predominant societal view of ECCE as less important than later schooling is most likely the reason that research has found that early childhood teachers often defend the importance of their jobs and express a need for the specialized training required to do their jobs effectively (Hostettler Schärer, 2018; Jonsdottir & Coleman, 2014). Evidence for this was found in the survey results and in the pre-intervention focus groups in this study. With reference to Symbolic Interactionism, the “generalized other” is the ability to take into account a set of dominant attitudes and expectations larger society has for particular groups and individuals. The teachers in the present study were engaging in “impression management” in that it was important to them to change dominant views of early childhood teachers or their “professional looking glass self” (Allen & Henderson, 2023). Past research has found that the lower level of educational training of early childhood teachers can be disempowering such that their knowledge and experience can be ignored or situated behind the scenes (Brogaard-Clausen, 2015; Fenech et al., 2019). The frequent comment by teachers in the pre-intervention focus groups that, “we are not just babysitters” has been prevalent in research studies (Fenech et al., 2019). In contrast, in the post-intervention focus groups, teachers spoke more about the positive impact of the PL intervention on these issues with a more proactive, positive, and confident stance. The PL teachers especially appreciated that many parents noticed and recognized how challenging and important their jobs

are at the EC Parent Open Houses. When considered from the theoretical perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, the opportunities for interaction and the resulting meanings that evolved from the PL intervention were influential in revising the professional looking glass self of the PL teachers in a more positive way (Allen & Henderson, 2023).

Jonsdottir and Coleman (2014) framed their study of the professional role and identity of Icelandic preschool teachers around the functions of ECCE: the educational function (what young children need to learn, the economic function (enabling parents to go to work), and the social justice function (the powerful role ECCE can play in diminished social inequalities). The findings of the present study were consistent with Jonsdottir and Coleman (2014) in that teachers were valuing the educational function over the economic function and that teachers did not refer directly to the social justice function. The present study sheds additional light on this by looking at both teacher and parent views finding that parents were valuing the economic and educational functions more equally than teachers. While the social justice function was not mentioned specifically by the parents or the teachers, it was alluded to by both parents and teachers when they expressed that parents have a difficult time paying preschool fees thereby limiting their choices for early childhood provision and that teachers have a difficult time managing financially due to low remuneration.

The present study found that PL teachers' ratings of their relationships with parents were significantly higher after the intervention and this change was not found for the comparison teachers. After the EC Parent Open Houses, teachers reported having a greater understanding and appreciation for parents. This supports the hypothesis of the study and findings in the research that increasing opportunities for interaction at the EC Parent Open Houses can reduce stereotypes and misconceptions while increasing understanding, empathy, and perspective-taking

on the part of teachers and parents (Ernest et al., 2011; Gross et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2016). This increase in empathy along with the higher teacher ratings of PTRs post-intervention is consistent with the research of Peck and colleagues (2015) who found that teachers whose statements conveyed more empathy described PTRs in a more positive way. Additionally, teachers conveying empathy were found to also have strength-based understandings and views of children and families while also valuing diversity (Peck et al., 2015). After the intervention, the PL teachers reported that parents were more “open” and would ask more questions at pick up and drop off times than they did before. Furthermore, the teachers expressed that the EC Parent Open Houses contributed to parents appreciating and valuing them more and also promoted a greater understanding of the importance of ECCE.

The PL Intervention

The post-intervention data analysis provided evidence of the effectiveness of the PL intervention revealing the following four themes: EC Parent Open Houses Improved Relationships; More DAP; Value of Multi-Dimensional PL and Teacher Empowerment and Collegiality. The first two themes were discussed above as they relate to the pre-intervention focus group themes of Barriers to PTRs and Dichotomies and Uncertainties. The third and fourth themes, the Value of Multi-Dimensional PL and Teacher Empowerment and Collegiality will be discussed below.

Value of Multi-Dimensional PL. In a review of the research on early childhood teacher education, Powell and Schmitt (2016) call for experimental studies to investigate the effectiveness of innovative approaches to enhancing PTRs and promising practices to increase ECCE teachers knowledge and effective use of family-centered practice and DAP. The present study provided evidence for the positive impact of a PL intervention that brought together a

blend of professional workshops, coaching, consultation, modelling, mentoring, the Whole Teacher approach, democratic professionalism, and communities of practice (CoPs). Findings provided evidence for the value of this multi-dimensional approach to professional learning that was focused on preparing for and achieving an authentic in-practice goal through a collaborative CoP. Specifically, in the present study, the teachers expressed many times and with enthusiastic agreement that workshops alone are not as effective because they do not “engage” them nor do they address their questions of practice to the extent required. The teachers agreed that workshops are too much like a “traditional classroom” overloading them with information and then expecting them to translate this information into practice on their own. The teachers emphatically agreed that the CoP with ongoing coaching and consulting support to apply the knowledge from the workshops in preparation for the EC Parent Open Houses was “the support we need.” These findings are consistent with a meta-analysis of PL studies that found that coaching is the most effective professional learning mode of delivery and that it positively impacts children (Egert et al., 2018).

Past research has found that experience with high quality DAP increases developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices. Therefore, PL opportunities that include CoPs to implement DAP effectively with the support of coaching and modelling are more beneficial for longer term changes in beliefs and practice than stand-alone workshops which are less likely to provide this positive in-practice experience (Helterbran & Fennimore, 2004; Snyder et al., 2012; Wong, 2019). Research has found that over-focusing on providing knowledge for practice that prioritizes expert knowledge alone is not as effective as taking a more democratic approach by gaining a deeper understanding of teachers’ already existing knowledge of practice specific to their unique contexts (Brown & Englehardt, 2016, Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021). The teachers in

the present study referred to the expert model as not as effective and expressed appreciation for the opportunities in the focus groups and CoPs to reflect on what they know, make a genuine contribution to the PL and to be heard. This contributed to the empowerment that was found in the present study with one teacher stating, “you see, you’re listening to us now.” The critical elements of CoPs were apparent in this study with teachers sharing a common goal, collaborating as they learn together, problem-solving and implementing practice through sustained interactions (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The addition of the researcher mentor/coach supported this process and was appreciated by teachers who agreed that “when we had a question, there was an answer there for us” as they implemented the new learning into practice.

In the pre-intervention teacher focus groups, this study found that teachers expressed wanting more appreciation, engagement, communication, and support from parents. Past research has found that early years teachers often hold negative attitudes towards parents (McGrath, 2007; Owen et al., 2000; Shpancer, 2002) indicating a need for PL to assist teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively work with families. Through the analysis of the researcher observations of the PL intervention and EC Parent Open Houses, the teachers demonstrated family-centered practices displaying the motivation, skills, and capabilities to interact with parents in supportive and effective ways. The concept of democratic professionalism holds that PL is also needed to boost the status of the profession, the confidence of caregivers, and the confidence of parents that caregivers are knowledgeable and competent professionals (Oberhuemer, 2005; Rentzou, 2011). There was a notable difference when comparing the focus groups before and after the intervention in the level of comfort and the amount of reflexivity as well as the collegiality and confidence. The teachers were noticeably enthusiastic and empowered and eager to share and discuss the PL intervention together. They

even stayed late after the EC Parent Open Houses to share their experiences together with each other and the researcher. The findings of the teacher focus groups and researcher observations revealed that the process of this PL intervention empowered teachers and inspired motivation, reflection, agency, and collegiality.

The positive impact of the PL Intervention may also be the result of the incorporation of the Whole Teacher approach (Chen & McCray, 2012) which promotes attending to the social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of professional growth. Instead of the traditional one-way method of presenting information in a stand-alone workshop, PL can be more meaningful and more likely to facilitate lasting change if it is more responsive and relational carefully considering and building upon existing experiences, knowledge and beliefs (Sheridan et al., 2012). Bills et al. (2016) advocated for moving away from the traditional information dispensing model toward professional learning that is relational and supportive, giving teachers the experience of “being in” and “feeling seen.” As stated in the post-intervention focus groups, “Workshops (on their own) are not really support - it’s just something to just give us and it’s just like we’re...in a traditional classroom...we just sit and we just observe but we don’t understand.” The teachers in the post-intervention focus groups paid a considerable amount of attention to how the PL intervention provided them with the support and encouragement they felt they needed. One teacher expressed this by saying, “We were in full support of each other, and of you, because we knew that it’s not just about your research; you were giving us something that we need.” This sentiment is important as it demonstrates that DAP was something the teachers wanted for themselves and the children they care for rather than being imposed upon them by the research study and the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework.

In their investigation of coaching as a PL practice, Knoche and colleagues (2013) uncovered the perspectives of coachees entitling their article, “More Time, More Showing. More Helping. That’s How it Sticks”. The present study extended and supported this research by finding that the PL teachers commented on the qualities coaches or mentors need to be successful including being passionate, knowledgeable, supportive, trustworthy, and part of the learning community. One of the themes from the Knoche et al. (2013) study was the effectiveness of the provision of resources by the coach, including ideas, strategies, materials, and the physical presence of the coach being willing to assist in a variety of ways. Interestingly the teachers in the post-intervention focus groups mentioned the researcher being willing to assist in any way needed with one teacher saying, “when you helped out on the playground, that was awesome!” The teachers appreciated the coach going above and beyond to help support them in implementing the new learning into practice and of the coach being, “one of us”. Unlike the findings of Knoch et al., (2013), the teachers in the present study did not express experiencing discomfort with regard to feeling that they were being evaluated by the coach (Knoch et al., 2013). The findings support the claim that the approach of the coach/mentor is important to improve teacher response, efficacy and classroom practices (Bills et al., 2016). Mentor-coaching is most effective through a partnership approach and culture of support characterized by affirmation, understanding, reassurance, reciprocity, respect for differing points of view, active dialogue, and opportunities for reflection and this is consistent with both the PL and the findings of the study (Bills et al., 2016; Friedman et al., 2012).

In summary, this research study found positive responses of the teachers to the multi-dimensional PL experience. When the results are considered together with past research, the positive views, affective changes, increased DAP, and empowerment found in the surveys, focus

groups and researcher observational notes can be connected to the utilization of a PL approach that is ongoing and incorporates teacher voice, collaboration, and reflection (Friedman, 2012; Howe & Jacobs, 2012; Koh & Neuman, 2009; Onchwari & Keengwe, 2008). One significant finding is the increased empowerment and collegiality of the PL teachers which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Empowerment and collegiality. There was a notable difference from the pre-intervention to post-intervention focus groups on the teachers' level of comfort and their reflexivity as well as their attitude, collegiality and confidence. This change was found in the post-intervention teacher focus groups and the researcher's observational notes throughout the PL process and during the EC Parent Open Houses. In the focus groups, the teachers expressed that they collaborate and "share best practice" with each other more since the PL intervention. In the researcher observational notes, this significant change was also noted in the visits leading up to the EC Open Houses. Teachers were busy collaborating and sharing and discussing ideas with each other as they implemented the new learning from each workshop. This empowerment lead to the teachers initiating a variety of job crafting techniques such as changing focus and tasks to be more developmentally appropriate, changing relationships to be more collaborative and expanding perspectives to see the bigger issues in ECCE such as the significance of PTRs and the importance of early childhood (Hostettler Scharer, 2012). Job crafting is a professional learning practice that occurs when early childhood teachers are provided with opportunities to reflect upon and discuss their profession together and this was provided by the focus groups and CoPs in this study. Job crafting is a practice that has been found to promote more work engagement and satisfaction for teachers (Hostettler Scharer, 2012).

The EC Parent Open Houses combined with the PL training empowered teachers to share their knowledge of DAP in a strength-based, family-centered, responsive, and informal way while also addressing the parents' view that they would like to know more about their child's learning at school. In the pre-intervention focus groups, the teachers stated that they want more opportunities for information-sharing and one-on-one time with parents about individual children (both home to school and school to home) and about ECCE. Teachers felt very strongly that it was more difficult for them to "step up" under the expert model: "If we have a PTA meeting then a stranger comes from outside to talk to the parents ... and then they just leave and they're always in a hurry... so we can't step up." Following the PL intervention, the findings of the data analysis of the focus groups and the researcher's observational notes revealed that the PL teachers experienced a shift that Ward (2018) referred to as moving from being passive and positioned by others to being more proactive and empowered. The teachers spoke about ideas of how to use what they learned about parents and children from the previous EC Parent Open House to plan for the next ones. Parents in the present study also said that they liked that the teachers were sharing the information about early childhood pedagogy at the EC Parent Open Houses rather than the expert model because the teachers also know their child and spend so much time with their child. This is especially important given that past research has found that parents want teachers to take a genuine daily interest in families so that they can find out about the child's experiences at home and use this information to enhance learning experiences and caregiving at school (Duncan et al., 2006).

The EC Parent Open Houses were time efficient in that they combined mutual information sharing about children, opportunities for parent-teacher-child interactions, the enhancement of preschool community connections, and the sharing of general information about

ECCE into one event. This is important given that time is a commonly identified barrier to parent engagement and closer PTRs in early childhood settings (Fenech et al., 2019; Reedy & McGrath, 2010). Fenech (2019) contends that conversations with families about the significant role played by high quality ECCE in influencing future society can help to reframe ECCE as a public good rather than “solely a childcare commodity purchased by working families positioned as consumers” (Fenech et al., 2019, p. 718). This latter viewpoint is more likely in countries like the Cayman Islands where ECCE provision is mostly provided by for-profit private businesses. Fenech et al. (2019) found that teachers attributed their drive to build parents understandings to their passion and belief in providing the best care and learning experiences for young children. This finding is consistent with the PL teachers’ positive responses in the post-intervention focus groups. The goal of building parents’ understandings of the importance of the early years and what constitutes high quality ECCE provision is an important one from an advocacy standpoint (Fenech et al., 2017). A study by Ozler and colleagues (2018) found that teacher PL that included supporting teachers in becoming parent education facilitators had a more positive impact on children’s behavior, social and emotional outcomes than just the PL workshop alone. Taken together, the PL intervention in the present study served as an effective way to enhance the care and learning experiences of young children through both immediate and more distal influences as outlined in Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

The assertion that community understandings of the importance of ECCE serve as a macro-level influence is consistent with Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The EC Parent Open Houses functioning as a vehicle to change viewpoints at the micro and meso-levels is an example of how Ecological Systems Theory is connected with the ideas of Symbolic Interactionism. Specifically, micro-level interactions have the power to change dominant

viewpoints that then have the power to impact macro-level influences. These macro-level changes can then impact young children and their families further at the micro-level. Both parents and teachers in the present study felt that holding EC Parent Open Houses once per month is really important. In the post-intervention focus groups, the parents were very appreciative of the format of the EC Parent Open Houses (they were drop-in at pick-up time over a two-hour period rather than a set time) because this gave them the flexibility and increased their chances of being able to participate. This format along with including the children (who excitedly convinced their parents to attend) was reported by both parents and teachers as a contributing factor to the large turnouts and the fact that “harder to reach” parents participated. Teachers also appreciated that they were conducted during their regular working hours rather than in the evenings, given that the latter would create a longer day in an already long and demanding workday. Parents in the focus groups mentioned several times that they were reluctant to take up additional teacher time because the teachers already work such long days. The teachers in both schools organized another EC Parent Open House in their schools in the fall term and invited the researcher to come and provide support indicating a lasting change in practice.

The teachers in the present study were eager to share their knowledge and experience with parents to enhance parenting and the EC Parent Open Houses provided an opportunity to do this and to gain practical experiences observing parents and children to build further knowledge of how to support parents (O'Connor et al., 2018). While Drugli and Undheim (2012) found that teachers emphasized the importance of communicating information about school to parents much more than the importance of parents sharing information about home with school, this study found that even before the intervention, teachers talked about the value of learning more

about the children's home lives. The teachers talked about supporting children in the home and wanting more communication and information sharing with parents rather than wanting the parents to volunteer in the school which is a commonly held definition of parent engagement by teachers, parents, and administrators (Gross, 2020). Perhaps the teachers in the present study understand that the parent community they work with has limited time and opportunity to volunteer in the preschool and participate in school-based activities. Overall, teachers' attitudes in the present study shifted from frustration with parents that the teachers themselves "have to do everything" to a greater empathy and perspective-taking and a view that it is an important professional responsibility to engage parents in responsive and feasible ways to establish closer and mutually supportive PTRs (Gross, 2020).

After the PL intervention, the teachers expressed an even greater belief in the value of home to school communication because they learned more about the children's home lives and families at the EC Parent Open Houses. The opportunities for them to accomplish this through interacting with and observing parents and children interacting together contributed to the teachers overwhelming support of the value of EC Parent Open Houses as also evidenced by the survey results. Both teachers and parents communicated that the EC Parent Open Houses had a positive impact on parent-child relationships in addition to PTRs. This is particularly important given that parent-child relationships have the most powerful influence on outcomes for children (Lang et al., 2016; O'Connor et al., 2018). Other benefits of the EC Parent Open Houses that were highlighted by both parents and teachers were the opportunity to meet and interact with so many of the children, teachers, and parents in the school community; seeing their child in school interacting with teachers, parents, and other children; and getting to know each other and the children better. The promotion of community connections mentioned by parents as a benefit of

the EC Parent Open Houses is significant given that community connections have been found to increase the social capital of families and promote positive child outcomes (Shoji et al., 2014; Turley et al., 2017).

Implications of Findings

The present study provided important information that can be used to effectively inform future policy and practice in the Cayman Islands' early childhood sector with reference to professional learning initiatives. The importance of returning to an emphasis on play, child-initiated activities, and social-emotional skills in ECCE is being stressed in policy documents, school readiness definitions and by influential international organizations around the world (Fantuzzo et al., 2007; Hemeter et al., 2006; McClelland et al., 2006; Thompson, 2002; Yogman et al., 2018). The Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework is consistent with this educational reform and shift in practice. Given the persistent gap between research, policy and practice, researchers have called for studies such as the present study to investigate parent and teacher views, perspectives, interpretations, and understandings of DAP in early childhood settings around the world (Sanders & Farago, 2018). In the present study, insight was provided into the perspectives of parents and teachers about early childhood pedagogy and parent teacher relationships within the specific social, economic, and cultural context of the Cayman Islands providing an opportunity for their voices to be represented in academic scholarship. Given that professional learning opportunities are effective in bridging the gap between policy and practices (Egert et al., 2018), understandings from the present study can inform initiatives in relation to future professional learning initiatives and in ongoing efforts to enhance the quality of early childhood provision in the Cayman Islands by the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit and the Cayman Islands Early Childhood Association.

The findings of the present study are important on a global scale because there are fewer mixed-methods studies investigating parent-teacher relationships than qualitative or quantitative studies alone (Murphy et al., 2021). The present study found that multi-dimensional PL initiatives can improve teacher understandings of DAP and enhance PTRs which in turn have been found to enhance program quality and child learning and development (Egert et al., 2018). The results can also contribute to the more effective implementation of widespread educational policy and practice promoting the importance of parent-teacher relationships in ECCE by empowering teachers through multi-dimensional professional learning opportunities and engaging parents through preschool wide initiatives such as EC Parent Open Houses. ECCE policy is complex because it is concerned with childcare and early education, and also with the child's health, nutrition, social welfare and protection, women's employment, and equal opportunities. Research evidence from this study and prior research studies provides evidence that legislation and public policy needs to prioritize supporting the needs of working parents with young children including flexible work schedules and paid time off to attend parent-teacher meetings and parent engagement activities such as EC Parent Open Houses (Barnes et al., 2016; Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). The findings of this study are important because research evidence is clear that the quality of PTRs has positive effects on children's developmental outcomes, parent engagement, school readiness, academic success, student motivation, mental health, social and emotional skills, parenting practices, as well as the quality of the caregiver-child relationship (Arnold et al., 2008; Bouffard & Weiss, 2008; Churchill, 2003; Halgunseth et al., 2009; Owen et al., 2000; Pirchio et al., 2013; Serpell & Mashburn, 2012; Smith et al., 2021; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

The present study was informed by the theories of Symbolic Interactionism and Ecological Systems theory. Symbolic Interactionism guided a deeper understanding of how beliefs are formed and explained by individuals in a preschool community, and how these can be changed over time through experiences and interactions between members in the group through initiatives such as PL opportunities and EC Parent Open Houses (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Oliver, 2012). In a review of the research, Schachter (2015) recommends using theories to inform “the design and delivery of PL that recognizes both the knowledge and experiences teachers already hold”, their “dispositions” and their “decision-making processes” to “capitalize on these multiple sources of knowledge.” (Schachter, 2015, p. 31). The teacher focus groups and parent and teacher surveys pre-intervention were intentionally designed to recognize and understand this pre-existing knowledge and experience specific to the unique context. Furthermore, the workshops focused on teachers personalizing the new knowledge, relating it to existing understandings and then applying it with support from coaching, mentoring, and consulting. Parent-teacher relationships exist within a broader context and the findings of this study shed light on how individual perspectives are constructed and re-constructed at the micro-level, co-constructed through social interactions and relationships at the meso-level, and how these processes are influenced by wider external influences at the macro-level in ECCE settings. Jensen and Iannone (2018) contend that critical reflection and a focus on politics that address social inequality in ECCE are important components of PL in ECCE.

The findings from the pre-intervention teacher focus groups highlighted the macro-level challenges that ECCE teachers face with reference to low remuneration and perceived value, dominant discourses about the importance of preschool versus later schooling, and access to higher educational qualifications. Research studies have found that the status of ECCE teachers

varies by country and that this status has an impact on the formation of high quality PTRs and ECCE programs (Hujala et al., 2009). ECCE provision can be viewed to have an economic, educational and social justice function (Vandenbroeck et al., 2010). While teachers mentioned the economic challenges of low wages for teachers and for parents of paying preschool fees along with the importance of early childhood generally, the powerful role that investment in ECCE can play in creating a more equitable and prosperous future society was not directly raised in the focus groups even given the compelling research evidence supporting this (Campbell et al., 2014; Heckman, 2013; Lancet, 2017; Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). Interactions with families can work to build community understandings of the importance of ECCE reframing it as a public good in need of collective adult responsibility (Fenech et al., 2019).

High quality ECCE presents challenges because it requires significant financial investment and yet in order to achieve the economic function of ECCE, costs need to be kept low enough that it is worthwhile for parents, particularly those from low-income families, to participate in the labor force. As a result, the salaries of early childhood teachers are very low in most countries around the world and this is often combined with challenging work conditions (e.g., vacations, preparation time, length of work day, etc.) (King et al., 2016; Nutbrown, 2021). This is especially concerning because early childhood teachers and the children they care for deserve to be more valued by larger society and also because there is research evidence that the financial security and wellbeing of teachers is correlated with children's positive emotional and social expressions and behaviors in the classroom (King et al., 2016). These issues also impact PTRs because parents and teachers can find themselves on opposite sides of the problem (Jonsdottir & Coleman, 2014; Sollars, 2017; Vandenbroeck et al., 2010). The results of this study provided evidence that inequities in access to quality ECCE can be effectively addressed through

multi-dimensional professional learning targeted at supporting teachers in the implementation of DAP and the enhancement of PTRs through EC Parent Open Houses.

The evidence provided is compelling enough to justify the additional cost of adding coaching, consulting, and communities of practice to professional learning initiatives that have primarily been implemented as stand-alone workshops. Consistent with past research, these more complex conceptualizations of the provision of PL have the potential to empower teachers and improve their confidence, agency, and feelings of self-efficacy in supporting and advocating for both children and their families while also improving program quality and children's learning and development (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2021; Sims-Schouten & Barton 2022; Vartuli, 2005; Vescio et al., 2008).

Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by the quasi-experimental design because random assignment of individual participants to the PL intervention and comparison groups was not possible. This presents challenges when making the claim that if differences are found between groups, it is the PL intervention that caused these changes rather than pre-existing conditions in the preschools. This limitation was addressed by matching preschools based on social demographics, school fees charged, and quality rating data and then randomly assigning the schools to the PL intervention or comparison groups and also by assessing change from pre- to post- intervention in both groups. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods generated data that not only looked at determining parent and teacher views but also looked more closely into the “why” of survey responses. This helps to address the limitation that respondents may misinterpret and/or have varying interpretations of survey items. Furthermore, in a convergent design, the combination and integration of qualitative and quantitative data in a mixed methods approach assists the researcher in getting a more comprehensive idea of what is being explored and serves as

triangulation such that one data set can serve to validate the findings of the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Given the lack of formal research in ECCE in the Cayman Islands, providing both qualitative and quantitative evidence provides a more comprehensive understanding and can have a greater impact on more stakeholders.

In this study, the quantitative data found a significant difference from pre to post intervention for the PL teachers in their views of DAP and PTRs, and the qualitative data revealed an effect for the program that confirmed the quantitative findings and effectiveness of the measurement tools (Patton, 2015). Given these encouraging findings, future research studies could investigate implementing this PL initiative and EC Parent Open Houses on a wider scale in the Cayman Islands. It would be beneficial to do this in phases and randomly assign preschools to conditions. It would also be beneficial to include classroom observation data of teacher behaviors and practices along with child responses to the intervention. Recently developed observational tools designed to measure the quality of teacher-parent interactions could be utilized in a follow-up study to assess these interactions more systematically in place of the researcher observational notes used in this study (Hummel et al., 2022; Maras et al., 2018). Another limitation is that data collection and analysis focused primarily on teacher reports. This narrow focus was addressed in part by adding the researcher's observational notes to the data collection strategy. It was also addressed by including pre-intervention parent surveys and post-intervention parent focus groups. Classroom observations along with parent surveys and focus groups before and after the PL Intervention can address this limitation in future studies.

Another limitation of the present study is that survey data for parents was only collected pre-intervention and not post-intervention. Even so, this data still provided insights to establish a baseline of parent views about DAP and PTRs and compare these views to those of teachers. The

parent focus groups post-intervention also addressed this limitation as the data collected shed more light into the parents responses on the pre-intervention surveys and their views of the EC Parent Open Houses. While all teachers in the intervention and comparison conditions completed the surveys, parent participation was voluntary and so the results have the potential to be confounded by the fact that parents who completed and returned the surveys are different from the parents who did not. Furthermore, parents who chose to participate in the focus groups may not be representative of all parents. Specifically, it is more likely that the parents who value ECCE more and have more positive relationships with the school/teachers would be more likely to volunteer their time to participate in the study. Another limitation is the sensitive nature of the PTR survey. As a result, School D asked that the PTR survey results for parents and teachers be excluded from the study. Future research could address these limitations by collecting parent surveys and focus group data pre and post-intervention and by adding additional schools to allow for withdrawal. Taking additional measures to emphasize confidentiality is also very important.

The present study is limited by the researcher's position as President of the Cayman Islands Early Childhood Association (CIECA). This limitation was addressed in the informed consent forms for the teachers through reassurance that their participation in the study is entirely voluntary and will in no way impact their relationship with the researcher or the CIECA. Furthermore, the researcher made it a priority throughout the process to emphasize to the teachers that the goal of the study is exploratory to investigate the impact of the PL intervention. A related consideration is that the teachers and parents may have been impacted by social desirability bias in the surveys and focus groups, particularly given that the researcher is known in the community. One attempt to address this limitation in the surveys was to reverse score items as needed so that items consistent and inconsistent with DAP were equally stated in the

affirmative. This limitation was also addressed by the researcher's approach to facilitating the focus groups and the PL intervention in a way that conveyed respect, appreciation, affirmation and an openness to the teachers' perspectives. Furthermore, the intervention in the study was based on the existing developmentally appropriate national early childhood curriculum framework in the Cayman Islands with the goal to assist teachers in being successful in meeting the expectation from the Ministry of Education that this curriculum be implemented effectively. Indeed, one teacher stated this with much agreement from the other teachers by saying: "We were in full support of each other, and of you, because we knew that it's not just about your research, you were giving us something that we need"

Another related limitation is that the researcher alone analyzed the focus group data which does not allow for establishing inter-rater reliability and so the results are more vulnerable to researcher bias. The present study employed prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checking to address this limitation. Member checks worked particularly well with this research study because the teachers and the researcher collaborated with one another in the meaning making process through prolonged engagement. Member checks were also employed to confirm the researcher's representation of the phenomena of interest post data analysis. A strength of the study was that the researcher conducted and transcribed the focus group recordings personally which enhances familiarity with the content and with the mood, tone, and level of agreement and interactions between members of the focus groups.

With regard to ecological transferability, the potentially unique circumstances, culture, and lifestyle of the Cayman Islands might be limiting; however, the results can be used to inform policy and practice for preschool education and professional learning initiatives in the Cayman Islands and other Caribbean countries. Notwithstanding, the results of the present study were

overall very consistent with prior research studies in the area of interest conducted in many countries around the world as presented in the literature review and discussion chapters. Future research could replicate this study in other cultural contexts and settings to investigate the generalizability of these findings.

Conclusion

Over the past several decades, a large body of multidisciplinary research has accumulated and converged providing compelling evidence for the critical importance of quality caregiving and early learning experiences during childhood prenatally and in the first five years of life (Black et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2014; Jamieson et al., Nd.; Mustard, 2010; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Shore, 1997; Thompson, 2016). Many global organizations and countries around the world including the Cayman Islands have made great strides to put these new understandings into action, but major challenges remain when it comes to the implementation and evaluation of effective policy, initiatives, practice, interventions, and provision (Kinkead-Clark et al., 2020; Raikes et al., 2023; WHO et al., 2018). Along with many other countries, the Cayman Islands continues to draw from global understandings of quality provision. While efforts are being made to implement developmentally appropriate research-based documents, such as the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework (CIEYCF) into practice, it takes time, careful consideration of context, shared understandings, and sustained effort to support centers, teachers, and families through this process. This research study responded to calls for more research that examines how teachers and parents in international contexts are responding to cultural issues that relate to the implementation of DAP (Brown & Lan, 2015), while also responding to calls for the examination of the less researched perspectives of parents (Demircan & Erden, 2015; Majercikova & Hornickova, 2020; Miller et al., 2014).

It is well established that infants and young children develop in an environment of relationships (Murphy et al., 2021; Mustard, 2010; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2009) and so the focus of this study was to promote and enhance parent-teacher relationships. Early childhood teachers are integral in cultivating authentic caring relationships with families and children (Murphy et al., 2021; OECD, 2017) and studies such as the present study are important to investigate the effectiveness of specific educational practices that are effective and realistic in supporting early childhood teachers to promote these mutually beneficial relationships more universally in early childhood programs. The goal of PL activities is to provide teachers with learning experiences to further develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, dispositions, self-efficacy, and competence necessary to effectively apply evidence-based practices when caring for and educating young children so that early childhood programs can reach their full potential of making a significant positive contribution to present and future society (Farley et al., 2018; Winton et al., 2016).

ECCE programs can enhance teacher and parent understandings of the importance of high-quality ECCE provision, developmentally appropriate practice, parent engagement and parent-teacher relationships for the wellbeing, learning and healthy development of young children. While significant, the statistical effect sizes for the impact of high-quality preschool on beneficial outcomes for children are half those of the home environment (Leseman & Slot, 2014; Melhuish et al., 2015). Therefore, the importance of high quality ECCE provision that harnesses its full potential to enhance the care and early experiences of young children in both the preschool and home environments through collaborative and respectful parent-teacher relationships and a two-generational approach is paramount (Bendini & Devercelli, 2022; Forry et al., 2013; Murphy et al., 2021; OECD, 2017; Slot, 2018). Furthermore, the more educated parents become about ECCE and its importance, the higher the quality of early childhood

provision as parents are well-positioned to advocate for and drive quality improvements in ECCE (Ghosh & Steinberg, 2022; Kinkead-Clark, 2020).

The findings of the present study also contribute to the research investigating effective professional learning in ECCE settings. Evidence was provided for the value of professional learning communities to address issues, effectively implement initiatives, and positively influence the general public's perceived worth of the care of young children in all settings by helping parents to recognize the expertise of preschool teachers and their professional competence (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). As such, evidence was provided for the value of providing such PL opportunities and Early Childhood Parent Open Houses on a wider scale while shifting from an expert-model of information sharing with parents to empowering ECCE teachers to step up in this role given their effectiveness in doing so in the present study. The PL intervention in the present study found significant positive changes in teacher beliefs and attitudes about early childhood pedagogy, parent-teacher relationships and their level of empowerment, collegiality, and their self-concept as professionals.

Macro-level influences, such as dominant views that ECCE is not as important as later education, impact ECCE teacher remuneration and this has spurred on efforts to elevate the status of the profession and advocate for the importance of high quality ECCE provision to promote social equality (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; 2020; Nutbrown, 2021; OECD, 2019). These issues along with challenging work conditions can also lead to high levels of collective workplace stress which in turn impacts children through adult-child interactions and less continuity of care due to high staff turnover (King et al., 2016; Hanno et al., 2021; Markowitz & Seyarto, 2023; Totenhagen et al., 2016). These challenges are expressed by Rhian Evens Allvin, NAEYC's Chief Executive Officer in the following statement: "We know that families and early

childhood educators support each other and share a commitment to ensuring the best for children and yet our underfunded system means that families and educators can sometimes find themselves on different sides of issues related to the balance of affordability, quality, and compensation in early childhood education.” Professional learning opportunities used in the present study that empower early childhood teachers and promote higher quality parent-teacher relationships can lead to parents and teachers engaging in advocacy efforts together.

The Ecological Systems Theory shapes the study of child development highlighting the powerful impact that the macro system (government policy, economic factors, laws and values) has on the child’s immediate context or micro-system as well as the meso-system or relationships within the micro-system. A dominant belief that ECCE teachers do not need professional qualifications persists even though research findings, including those of the present study, indicate that they require specialized training and sophisticated skills in order for the sector to successfully implement DAP and promote positive and mutually supportive PTRs (Heisner & Lederberg, 2011; Jonsdottir & Coleman, 2014). When considering a Caribbean perspective, Burns (2018) argues that providing teachers and parents with knowledge of DAP is essential for promoting the ideal Caribbean Community (CARICOM) citizen who is prepared for success.

Given that warm responsive relationships have a critical impact on the children’s healthy development (Mustard, 2010; Thompson, 2016), it is not surprising that the most salient contextual indicators of quality ECCE provision are related to the effectiveness and wellbeing of teachers including qualifications specific to ECCE, professional learning, work conditions, support and appreciation, and remuneration commensurate with the importance of the job and their influential role in society (King et al., 2016; Nutbrown 2021; Slot, 2018). Young children are more likely to thrive when their caregivers (parent, relative, nanny or teacher) have reduced

stressors, feel valued and have a sense of wellbeing (Forry et al., 2013; King et al., 2016; Nutbrown, 2021). The PL intervention in the present study positively impacted these indicators of care for both teachers and parents and demonstrated that additional support through multi-dimensional professional learning is a worthwhile investment to enhance the quality of ECCE provision. While children, teachers, and families in ECCE programs around the world would benefit from more recognition, support and investment at the macro-level, many ECCE teachers including those in the present study are motivated to give their all each day to the children they care for because as one teacher in the present study said, “the love of these kids, what we do, they show you more than anything else.”

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Forms Teacher/Directors

Date: April-July, 2022

Study Name: Professional Learning for Discussion Forums with Parents: Enhancing Parent-Teacher Relationships in Early Childhood Programs in the Cayman Islands

Researcher: Nicola Peterson-Williams, 267 Winters College, York University, 416-736-2100;
Nicola_Peterson@edu.yorku.ca

Program of Study: PhD in Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Dear Director/Teacher,

I am a university student from Canada and I live in the Cayman Islands. I am pursuing a Doctorate Degree in Education (PhD) with York University in Canada. I am completing my research project here in the Cayman Islands with the permission of the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit of the Cayman Islands Ministry of Education. I am writing to request your participation in this study.

Purpose of the Research: The purpose of the research study is to investigate the effectiveness of a teacher professional learning initiative designed to support early years teachers in the creation and implementation of two parent information sharing and discussion sessions. These sessions will be called Early Childhood Parent Forums (EC Forums) and will have the objective of promoting positive parent-teacher relationships and facilitating the implementation of the Cayman Islands Early Years Curriculum Framework (CIEYCF). EC Parent Forums will provide opportunities for parents and teachers to share and discuss issues, ideas, policies, and research findings in early childhood.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: The researcher will visit the teacher's classroom on several occasions to observe teacher and child behavior specific to two focus areas of the aspiration statement of the CIEYCF: responsive teacher-child interactions that encourage autonomy and intrinsic motivation and learning through play and active learning. Following this, teachers and parents will be asked to fill in a questionnaire asking them about these two focus areas and parent-teacher relationships. The teachers will then be asked to engage in a focus group interview with the researcher followed by two one-day professional learning sessions facilitated by the researcher and separated by approximately six weeks (one for each parent forum). These sessions will address the two focus areas and the benefits of fostering positive parent-teacher relationships and this will lead on to working together with the researcher to create two Early Childhood Parent Forums (one for each focus area). These EC Forums will take place over a three-month period from February to April of this school year. The teachers will have input into the design, format and implementation of these parent forums with the help and support of the researcher and can take on as much of a role in this process as they feel comfortable with. Each EC Parent Forum will be held two times within the month it is scheduled. The teachers will be given a gift certificate in appreciation for the twenty hours of time put into the professional learning sessions, data collection and the creation and implementation of the EC Forums over the three-month period. Following completion of the study, the teachers will be asked to fill in the same questionnaire again and participate in a 45-minute meeting with the researcher to provide their feedback. Classrooms will be observed again following the intervention. The parents will be asked to fill in a fifteen-minute questionnaire on two separate occasions, to attend two EC Forums (one hour each followed by a special family activity of one hour) and to participate in a parent group to discuss the questionnaires. If a parent chooses to participate in all three components, the total time commitment will be approximately six hours.

Risks or Discomforts: We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from participation in the study.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: It is expected that participation in the study will enhance professional understanding of the CIEYCF, early childhood education and ways to foster and strengthen relationships with parents.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time.

Withdrawal from the Study: If you decide to stop participating in the study at any time, you will still receive the full amount of the promised pay for participation in the project. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project, including your child's school, the Cayman Islands Early Childhood Association and the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit at the Cayman Islands Ministry of Education. In the event that you withdraw from the study, associated data collected will be immediately destroyed.

Confidentiality: All of the information you supply including class observations will be held in confidence. Unless consent is specifically indicated, the names of teachers, students and schools will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Data from the interviews will be collected using a digital recorder and handwritten notes will be taken of class observations. This data will be safely stored in a locked facility and on a password protected computer hard drive. Only research staff will have access to the information. The data will be stored for five years and then destroyed by erasing data from the audio recordings, hard drives and by shredding paper transcriptions. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research, please feel free to contact Nicola Williams (Nicola.Peterson@edu.yorku.ca), the supervisor Jacqueline Lynch (jlynch@edu.yorku.ca) or the Faculty of Graduate studies, York University (by telephone at 416- 736-2100 ext. 22051 or by email at gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee; York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (tel. 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____, consent to participate in a study titled "Professional Learning for Discussion Forums with Parents: Enhancing Parent-Teacher Relationships in Early Childhood Programs in the Cayman Islands" conducted by Nicola Williams, York University. I understand the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____ **Date** _____ Participant
Phone or Email Address: _____

Signature _____ **Date** _____ Principal Investigator

Appendix B: Consent Form/Cover for Parent Questionnaire

Dear Parents:

I am a university student from Canada and I live in the Cayman Islands. I am pursuing a Doctorate Degree in Education (PhD) with York University. I will be completing my research project next year in several early years centers with the permission of the Early Childhood Care and Education Unit of the Cayman Islands Ministry of Education.

The goal of this research project is to gain a better understanding of parent views about early childhood programs in the Cayman Islands. I would really appreciate you taking approximately fifteen minutes to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire has two parts. The first part asks you about your views about early childhood education and the second part asks you about your relationship with your child's teacher. The questionnaire also asks you for some general information about your family. Since the questionnaire assesses beliefs, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. You are welcome to skip any questions that you do not want to answer or feel uncomfortable answering. You will also be asked if you wish to participate in a group with other parents to discuss the questionnaire. Participation in this discussion group should take approximately one hour and is optional.

There are no risks to you whether you decide to participate or not in this study. You are under no obligation to participate and may terminate participation at any time. If you decide not to participate, this will not influence the nature of your relationship with York University, the researchers, your school or any other group associated with this project either now, or in the future. All data generated from your participation shall be immediately destroyed if you decide to withdraw.

I will keep a master list of participant/code correspondences in a locked file drawer only available to me. After the data are analyzed and prepared in the final form as results in articles or conference presentations, the master list will be shredded within one month. The data will be securely stored on a password protected computer hard drive and will be erased after 5 years. A report of the findings will be shared with your school. Unless you choose otherwise your name in this study will not be identified (a code will be used). Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

I appreciate your support of this study. If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Nicola Williams (Nicola_Peterson@edu.yorku.ca), the supervisor Jacqueline Lynch (jlynch@edu.yorku.ca) or the Faculty of Graduate studies, York University (by telephone at (416) 736-2100 ext. 22051 or by email at gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee; York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you may contact A.M. Collins-Mrakas, Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (by telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Yours sincerely,
Nicola Williams

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I _____, am aware of the nature of this research study with the teachers of my child. The study is being conducted by Nicola Williams at York University. I understand the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____
Signature _____

Date _____ Participant
Date _____ Principal Investigator

Appendix C: Parent and Teacher DAP and PTR Surveys

Part One: Parent Questionnaire: Please read the following statements and circle the choice that best describes how much you agree or disagree. This questionnaire asks you about your beliefs and so there are no right or wrong answers. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. The term “preschool” in these statements refers to two, three and four-year-old children.

1. It is important for preschool children to be taught separate subjects (like math, language, science) at separate times like in elementary school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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2. It is important for preschool children to work quietly at desks/tables most of the time doing activities planned by the teacher.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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3. The preschool child's social, emotional, physical, and academic learning are equally important.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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4. When preschool children play, they are not learning anything that will help them do well and get good grades in primary school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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5. It is important for preschool classrooms to have areas for play such as a block building area or pretend kitchen/home-living area.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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6. Activities like chanting, memorizing cards, copying, and workbooks are important for preschool children.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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7. It is important to give preschool children tests to find out what they know.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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8. Preschool children learn best when the teacher tells them exactly what to do and then the children do it correctly.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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9. It is important for preschool children to explore and play with other children for most of the day.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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10. It is important for preschool children to be challenged to learn academics early so that they will do better in school and in life.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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11. It is important for children to choose what they want to do and learn about at school most of the time.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	----------	-------	----------------

12. It is important to give preschool parents a report card that shows how the child is learning in each area of the program compared to other children (A,B,C,D, or Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Needs Improvement).

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	----------	-------	----------------

13. It is important for preschool children to play outdoors for at least one hour in the morning and in the afternoon.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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14. It is not important for early years teachers to have university degrees and professional training because they are just babysitting.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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15. It is important for the preschool teacher and parent to communicate with each other at least once per week to share information about the child and anything that may be happening at home or at school.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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16. It is important for preschool teachers to let preschool children talk about their thoughts, feelings, questions, and ideas for most of the day.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
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17. If a teacher is too sensitive and caring, then preschool children will take advantage and they will not behave.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	----------	-------	----------------

18. It is important for preschool teachers to use punishments (like time out) when young children do not behave.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	----------	-------	----------------

19. It is important to give preschool children rewards like stickers to teach them how to behave.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	----------	-------	----------------

20. The most important thing I want my child to learn in preschool is how to get along well with other children.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	----------	-------	----------------

Part Two: Parent Views about the Parent-Teacher Relationship (Vickers & Minke, 1995)

For each statement below, please indicate how much it describes your interactions with your child's preschool teacher. If the choices don't apply to you and your child's preschool teacher, then please write NA (not applicable) beside the statement.

Statements	Never	Once in a While	Some-Times	Most of the Time	Always
1. We cooperate with each other.					
2. I respect this teacher.					
3. I expect more from this teacher than I get.					
4. We see my child differently.					
5. I don't like the way this teacher talks to me.					
6. This teacher respects me.					
7. We have different views of what this child should be doing at school.					
8. We trust each other.					
9. I ask this teacher for ideas to help my child.					
10. It is difficult for us to work together.					
11. I tell this teacher when I am worried.					
12. We have similar expectations for my child.					
13. This teacher tells me when my child is doing something well.					
14. We agree about who should do what regarding my child.					
15. I tell this teacher important things about my child.					
16. This teacher keeps her promises to me.					
17. If there is a problem, I have to solve it myself.					
18. I ask this teacher about how my child is doing.					
19. When things aren't going well, it takes too long to work them out.					
20. This teacher is sensitive to my feelings.					
21. I tell this teacher when there is a problem.					
22. Communication is difficult between us.					
23. When there is a problem, this teacher does not do what needs to be done to solve the problem.					
24. I would like to improve my relationship with this teacher.					

Views about the Parent-Teacher Relationship (Vickers & Minke, 1995)

For each statement below, please indicate how much it describes your interactions with your student's parent/s. If the choices do not apply to you and this parent/s, then please write NA (not applicable) beside the statement. Thank you so much!

Statements	Never	Once in a While	Some-Times	Most of the Time	Always
1. We cooperate with each other.					
2. I respect this parent.					
3. I expect more from this parent than I get.					
4. We see this child differently.					
5. I don't like the way this parent talks to me.					
6. This parent respects me.					
7. We have different views of what this child should be doing at school.					
8. We trust each other.					
9. I ask this parent for suggestions.					
10. It is difficult for us to work together.					
11. I tell this parent when I am worried about the child.					
12. We have similar expectations for this child.					
13. This parent tells me when this child is doing something well.					
14. We agree about who should do what regarding this child.					
15. I tell this parent important things about this child.					
16. This parent keeps her promises to me.					
17. If there is a problem, I have to solve it myself.					
18. I ask this parent's opinion about the child's progress.					
19. When things aren't going well, it takes too long to work them out.					
20. This parent is sensitive to my feelings.					
21. I tell this parent when there is a problem.					
22. Communication is difficult between us.					
23. When there is a problem, this parent does not do what needs to be done to solve the problem.					
24. I would like to improve my relationship with this parent.					

Appendix D: Teacher Pre-Intervention Focus Group Questions

The teacher focus group will begin with, “thank you for meeting with me to discuss your views about early years care and education, young children and parent-teacher relationships.

The pre-intervention teacher focus group will have guiding open-ended questions related to the questions asked on section one of the questionnaire.

- 1) What are your thoughts on the surveys, DAP? PTR?
- 2) What do you think children should be doing in ECCE programs each day – what do you value the most for your students? Why?
- 3) What do you think parents want their child to do in ECCE programs each day? What do parents care about?
- 4) Is there anything you would like to focus on more in the classroom? Why or why not?
- 5) Do you think ECCE children should play in preschool? Why or Why not?
- 6) Do parents want their children to play at preschool?
- 7) What do you think of the aspiration statement of the CIEYCF? Do parents know about this? Why or why not?
- 8) Do you think teachers should let children make choices for themselves sometimes?
Should teachers encourage children to try out their own ideas/do things for themselves?
Why? Why not?
- 9) What are your thoughts about the parents in your school? Relationships?
- 10) Do you think it is a good idea for parents and teachers to discuss major issues in ECCE?
- 11) Of all the things we discussed, which is most important to you? Why?
- 12) Provide a summary of the discussion (2 minutes).
- 13) Is this an accurate summary of our discussion today?
- 14) Is there anything we should have talked about in this discussion but didn't?

Appendix E: Teacher Post-Intervention Focus Group Questions

The flow of questions/discussion will be flexible, but the overall focus will be guided by:

- 1) What are your perspectives on the PL process- strengths, weaknesses, challenges?
- 2) What are your perspectives on the EC Open Houses – strengths, weaknesses, challenges?
- 3) Have you noticed any changes in your beliefs about early years pedagogy and children? What about changes in practice?
- 4) Have you noticed any changes in your relationships with parents?

At the end of the focus groups, the teachers will be asked to identify the main points of the discussion.

Appendix F: Parent Focus Group Questions

1. What are your thoughts on ECCE? What is most important to you for your child's experience at preschool?

2. What do you want your child to do each day?

3. What do you want them to learn?

4. Is preschool important? Why or why not?

Do you think children need to be in preschools? Why or why not?

Should preschool teachers have educational qualifications? Why or why not?

4. What do you think about relationships between preschool teachers and parents?

5. Do you talk to your child's teacher as much as you want? Would you like to talk more? Why or why not?

5. Should this be a close relationship? How often should parents and teachers talk with each other?

6. What did you think of the EC Parent Open Houses? Did you find them beneficial? Why or why not?

7. Would you like the school to provide this opportunity more often?

8. What about the timing and set up as drop in?

9. There is a Cayman Islands Early Childhood Framework – do you know about it?

Depending on answer: Would you like to know about it?

10. What more would you like for your child's preschool education? How do you think it could be better?

Appendix G: General Overview of Teacher Professional Learning Half-Day Sessions

Focus on: Capacity Building, Strengths Based, Empowering, Encouraging, Supportive

Sessions will be very interactive and responsive to teacher input/needs/preferences

Timing: 2 Half Day Sessions: One for Each of the Two Topics

Content:

Introductions/ice breakers, etc.

-discuss the major topics of the teacher focus groups and share the qualitative data analysis of the pre-intervention teacher and parent focus groups

-share the results of the parent and teacher questionnaires

-share and discuss information and research findings about the importance and value of parental engagement and parent-teacher relationships/partnerships

-talk about their personal experience with the CIEYCF and issues of implementation

-focus on “families as complex systems, mutuality in exchanges between teachers and parents, and the multidimensionality of family contributions to children’s learning” (Powell & Schmitt, 2016, p.135)

-objectives of the EC Parent Open House will be presented and discussed.

-cover in detail the topic for the upcoming EC Parent Open Houses

EC POH#1 Holistic Learning through Play; POH#2 Responsive Literacy in the Early Years

-practical strategies, ideas, collaboration to set-up physical learning environment and enhance relational environment to encourage child-initiated and directed learning through exploration, inquiry and play to foster self-regulation, executive functions, child focus & engagement

-teacher role to facilitate/extend/support versus correct/direct/instruct

-Plan EC Parent Open Houses in collaboration as a group- each teacher’s plan may be different depending on comfort level and personal preference

Teaching Strategies Used for the PL Session:

-Power Point Presentation by Researcher about focus area/topic with many photographs and examples of children in DAP programs

-Chalk Talk: teachers discuss responses to statements about ECCE and the topic (play or literacy) in small groups and then share and discuss

-I used to think but now I think...(and other Visible Thinking Activities)

-Whole group and partner discussions

-Sharing and connecting the material to personal experiences

-Scenario discussion and analysis

-Planning and practicing ways to present the material to parents at the EC Parent Forum

-Role play in the classroom as teachers and children, parents and teachers

Researcher Approach: respectful, strengths-based, capacity building, existing beliefs, knowledge and practice as the starting point, acknowledge, respect and consider differing perspectives,

Appendix H: Sample of Invitations to Parent Focus Groups and EC Parent Open Houses

Sample EC Parent Open House Invitation:



We hope you stay and miss the traffic and find out more about your child's learning!!!

Please drop into the school with your child at pick up time and visit your child's classroom. It is a special time for your child to show you their classroom together with friends, teachers, and other parents. While visiting, we will be focusing on the importance of learning through play. We hope to see you there!!

Open House: What is Play?

Thursday May 12th, 2022

Where:
4:00-6:00 p.m.

Refreshments and Slideshow of Learning Provided!

Parent Focus Group Invitation:



PARENT DISCUSSION SESSION

Facilitator: Nicola Williams
Wednesday May 4th
5:30-6:30 p.m.

We invite you to come and discuss your thoughts and ideas about preschool education

Refreshments and Childcare Provided!
We hope you can join us and miss the traffic!!

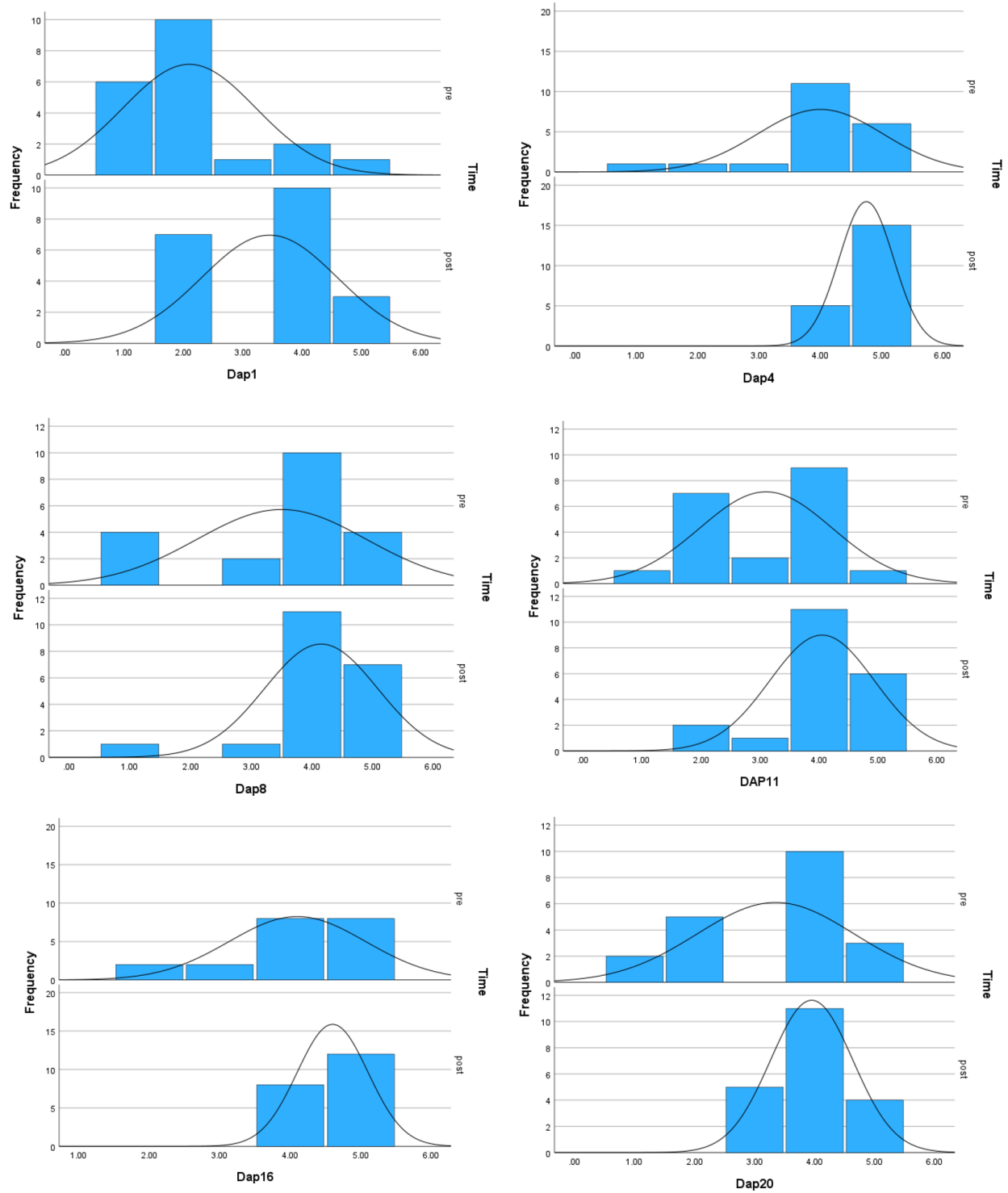
Appendix I: Summary of Researcher Observational Notes of Part One of the PL Process for EC Parent Open House #1

The teachers began the PL process with the completion of surveys. Many of the teachers were apprehensive about participating in the research study. It became immediately apparent that building trust and a safe learning space was going to be critical. The pre-intervention focus groups began with some reluctance and apprehension but as the discussion proceeded, for all four groups, the teachers were opening up and it was obvious that they enjoyed sharing ideas and discussing ECCE once they got used to the idea. After a segment on the teachers feeling unheard and disempowered, one of the teachers in the pre-int focus groups said, “you see, you’re listening to us now.” Some teachers were more reluctant to speak than others but all teachers contributed. There was a large amount of agreement among teachers which was demonstrated by laughter, head nodding and vocalizations of agreement. It was ideal that in all four pre focus groups, the teachers expressed that they wanted more opportunities for communication with parents to learn more about families and to share early childhood pedagogy because this lead right into the discussion of the EC Parent Open Houses. The proposal of the EC Parent Open Houses was really not needed as the teachers had already put forth the concept prior to knowing this part of the intervention. This was really important because it meant that the idea originated from them too and ownership of an idea often helps with dispositions and motivation. The in-class workshop was next and the presentation was about Learning Through Play and DAP in early childhood. The teachers in the one school came dressed in professional attire and even decorated the room. It was clear that they were excited and taking the process very seriously, which was very impressive, encouraging and admirable. Once the topic was planned as the importance of play, the teachers started making plans as to how the EC Parent Open House would be organized. They were excited about preparing. Over the next four weeks, the photographs of the process showed that the classrooms went through significant changes and the teachers put in an enormous amount of work most often during their personal time to create classroom centres to encourage hands-on child-centred play opportunities using natural and recycled materials such as using recycled boxes for children to build with in response to the story, “Not a Box” and sticks, leaves and flowers for self-selected art and building opportunities. They often hand-made many of the materials as they were drawing upon the ideas that had been presented and discussed at the workshop. One teacher made a class bank with money, credit cards and checks and another made a cookie store, another made an entire garden growing area and grocery store. One photograph in particular shows the teacher making lemonade with the children using real lemons, recipes, measuring cups and cooking materials. There are five children in the picture observing, talking and contributing to the process. The looks on their faces were pure joy, engagement and interest and the teacher is smiling, clearly enjoying the activity and the response of the children. The photographs showed a significant transformation from desks, chairs, and tables to defined centres for play. We had a WhatsApp group chat together and ideas and requests for support were frequent. The researcher made many trips to the preschool to lend support, advice and guidance which was noticeably appreciated and emphasized in the post intervention focus groups. The teachers were excited and collaborating and sharing ideas. They were also helping and supporting each other to prepare. The children had input too and helped where it was appropriate.

The EC Parent Open Houses ran from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on a drop-in basis rather than a set-time which was intentional because parents finish work at different times and so some have challenges making for a particular time especially if the time is before 5:00 p.m. and others do not want to wait for the event to start if they finish work sooner. When some parents picked up earlier than 4:00 p.m., we invited them in and started earlier. Traffic is an issue in the Cayman Islands and so parents are in a rush to get on the road as soon as possible. We informally promoted the POHs as “miss the traffic sessions”. The drop-in two-hour time range also helped with the flow of parents coming through at different times as this reduced any issues of crowded spaces. As parents came at pick up time, they went to the garden where all the children were playing to take their child inside for the Open House. The children were encouraging their parents to go in with them which helped enormously with turn-out. The teachers were very encouraging too. The Principal at one school was amazing at encouraging the parents to come in. Some parents stayed a long time, and the range was ten minutes to well over an hour for many parents. As the teachers noticed, once they got in there, they had so much fun with their child that they stayed longer than planned.

We also had a slide show that the teachers had prepared of the children learning over the past month along with some refreshments. The children watched the slideshow with their parents while they ate, calling out the names of their friends and teachers. Teachers also took time to watch the slideshow together with children and parents when it made sense. I was very impressed with the teachers professional judgement and how they knew what to do even though the format was informal and responsive. It was very impressive. The researcher circulated around the preschool during the Open Houses mostly observing teachers, parents and children and taking notes but also having discussions with teachers, parents, and children as they arose. The photographs were the springboard for the notes taken after the Open Houses were over. The teachers were impressive and the photographs showed parents, teachers and children interacting with each other in many ways. The teachers circulated in their room, responding to children and parents as appropriate in a very skilled way. They had informal discussions about individual children, early childhood pedagogy and answered parent questions and listened to parent contributions. Some of the discussions were about daily events and happenings as well but you could see the relationship building happening in all types of communication. The children interacted with friends, teachers, and their parents in varying degrees. There was a real sense of community in both schools. When the Open House was over, the teachers all stayed to clean up and get ready to go home. The mood was of excitement and accomplishment. Teachers were laughing and sharing stories of the event. When I went home after the first one, I described it to my son as “magical” when he asked how it went. The teachers had worked so hard and were noticeably proud and empowered to have been the “experts” at the Open Houses instead of an expert coming in from the outside. There was a great blend of mutual information sharing about pedagogy and about individual children. The teachers were open and professional and responsive and sensitive. There were incidents of children having challenges but the teachers also handled these very well modelling to parents their expertise at supporting children. As one teacher said, when parents were struggling with their child’s reactions, the teachers tried to support and “boost the parents” confidence and facilitate successful interactions. For the most part, children responded to the teachers requests and guidance more so than they did with their parents.

Appendix J: Histograms of Individual DAP Items with Significant Differences from Pre to Post Intervention



Appendix K: Item Response Category Characteristic Curves for DAP Items 1 and 2

