Teachers’ Perspectives on the Influence of Family and Home in Children’s Academics

By

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Abstract

This research project looks at how family and home life influence students’ academics from the perspective of teachers. Participants were asked questions that aimed to capture their understandings of how family and home life influenced the academic achievements of their children. Participants were also asked to reflect back on their past experiences and describe any relationships they saw between home and school achievements. The research project used a qualitative research methodology, borrowing elements from grounded theory and case study research approaches. Four themes emerged from the data: the influence of family in students’ academics, the relationships between teachers, parents, and students, the perspective of stakeholders, and meeting student and family needs and suggestions from participants. In conclusion, teachers’ perspectives were found to be important in understanding the potential impact that families can have on students’ academics. Implications suggest ways in which both teachers and families can be empowered to build a strong support system for students in the school system.

Key Words: family, home, children, learning, academics
Acknowledgements

To my parents, friends, professors, and participants throughout this program: thank you. We finished together.

I want to dedicate this paper to my brother. You know that if it was not for you, I may still be writing.

Philippians 4:13
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction and Purpose of the Research Study

Johnny and Bobby are two classmates in a grade 1 class. Johnny’s family lives in a large house with a father with enough income for Johnny’s mother to stay at home and look after him on a daily basis. She is able to regularly take him to playdates and to the park to play. Bobby’s family, however, lives in a government-funded apartment a few streets away. Bobby’s father is not in the picture, and Bobby’s mother works two jobs in order to care for Bobby and his two sisters. Bobby’s mother is regularly unavailable to look after her children, leaving Bobby and his sisters with a neighbor; however, they only see her when they leave for school in the morning. Which child appears to have a higher chance at successfully completing and academically achieving higher standards in school? What are some of the factors that may indicate how Johnny and Bobby will fare in school? What are some other factors that come into play that are not mentioned in the brief description of their lives?

These are some of the questions that will be addressed in this study, which aims to explore teachers’ perspectives on the aspects of students’ home lives and their effects on academics. This research will look into is that of the relational link between teachers, students, and students’ homes and family lives. How are the families and home lives of primary students linked to their school learning and behaviours as seen from a teacher’s perspective? Teachers will find this study useful in understanding how to provide accommodations or modifications to better support their students; to do this, the right questions must be asked. Orfield (1994) found that asking the right questions lead to the reformation of an entire education system. This current study will be do something similar – it will ask a variety of questions in forms of interviews to better understand the perspectives of primary teachers on this issue in a large urban school board.
This study is highly reliant on the information provided by currently practising teachers within primary schools as they will be the primary source of information in the performances of children in an academic setting. To extract the important and necessary information, the right questions must be asked and in order to understand what must be asked, the literature must be thoroughly studied to ensure that the questions are in fact pointing towards answering the inquiries of this study. Badraslioglu (2012) experienced first-hand that posing the right questions ensured the production of the answer that the inquisitor sought. In this study, the researched literature will be referred to for the posing and wording of questions in order to ensure that the answers are as objective as possible, while working to build a strong foundation on which to form a theory about the relationship between teachers, students, and the students’ home lives.

1.1 Summary of Literature Review

The literature contains a vast large amount of information on how families affect the lives of students through important characteristics such as advocacy, attitudes, and support. Generally, the literature agrees that parental involvement in school and their children’s academic life results in higher levels of achievement (Alper, Schloss, & Schloss, 1995; Entwisle & Alexander, 1996; Frew, Zhou, Duran, Kwok, & Benz, 2012). The current literature sets a foundation for this research study with many studies looking at how families influence student achievement, and the importance of communication between school and home (Bryan & Griffin, 2010), consideration of how socioeconomic status is related to student academic achievement (Fleming, 2014), and to how parents’ academic backgrounds influences student achievement (Casanova, Garcia-Linares, de la Torre, & de la Villa Carpio, 2005). Although the information is not necessarily from a teacher’s perspective, these studies are some of the most prevalent in the literature regarding how a student’s achievement is impacted by their family and home life. There is less agreement in the
tangible benefits that family and home life have for children. One study shows how parents’ involvement with schools affects children (Frew et al., 2012), but not necessarily how the home life outside of school affects students’ learning.

Most of the literature base their studies on students that are at a primary school level (Herold, 2011) with a few studies focusing on students at a junior and intermediate level (Bryan & Griffin, 2010), and only one at a senior level (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005) thus far. With more research, it becomes apparent that there are more studies within the primary school level because families start to decrease their level of involvement at school relative to the age of the child (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). With a prospective view of the students’ future, perhaps it will become easier to see what primary teachers can tangibly do to better assist students who may or may not be affected by their family and home lives.

1.2 Research Questions

My study aims to fill some of the gaps in the literature by exploring teachers’ perspectives to answer my main question of how families and the home lives of primary students influence learning and behaviours at school. This research study will try to answer the following sub questions: how is parental/guardian involvement linked with children’s academic results? What evidence do teachers see of the influence of family life on students’ learning and behaviours in primary school? Lastly, what are some specific and tangible behaviours, both productive and unproductive, that teachers see as a possible result of family life? It will also be interesting to ask the teachers what have they learned about students’ families and home lives from their own observations at school?
1.3 Background of the Researcher

This research project is based on the research and exploration that I completed in my undergraduate study. With a degree in the study of children and youth care, I felt completely drawn to the role of the family in the growth of a child. My research found that those working with children largely seemed to ignore the role of families, often as a result of painting the family as the problem that needed saving from (Grupper & Mero-Jaffe, 2008). My review of the literature found that researchers ultimately agreed upon the fact that family involvement and integration in residential care is generally beneficial to children. As a teacher and master’s degree candidate, I have been given the privilege of exploring this same topic, but this time from a teacher’s perspective with respect to a student’s learning and behaviours presented at school.

In my undergraduate studies, there were many classes where professors discussed the ecological model of a child and how every level of the model affected the child. I found that although families were discussed in almost every single class, they were not specifically focused on; usually families and other external parts of the model were ignored to focus in on the child and the services that we, as child and youth care workers, could provide. I believe that the focus was centered on children as the program was focused on training professional experts in working with children; however, through observation, I noticed that families were more important than had been suggested. Despite the lesser focus of family involvement in my studies, I gained more interest in families and the effect they had in children’s lives in various settings.

My internships were a rich source of information of how families were involved in children’s care. I was able to see first-hand what family involvement looked like in planning children’s progress in residence, as well as planning children’s transition back home. The quantity of time that I spent with families in comparison to the quantity of information about
family work taught at school was questionable – how could I be spending this much time with families in this line of work when they were discussed so sparsely in my studies? As I began to ask questions about family involvement and the roles that they played in children’s lives, the importance of family became a permanently fixed idea that transitioned into a lens in how I viewed the world and the various people I encountered.

I began to find that many of my experiences that led me to my undergraduate studies were reflective of the life I lived with my own family and the moments that I shared with them, both good and bad. I started to appreciate how my experiences, and the unique moments that shaped me, have led to who I am now and how I interact with the world today. With these reflections, I began to acknowledge that many of my ideas were subconsciously seen through the lens of family and family involvement; the difference between my pre-undergraduate years and now is that I am more conscious of why and how I see and respond to the world.

Armed with an education in children, as well as a family-focused lens, this research project will definitely be approached in a manner that is pro-family involvement. In addition, my approach from an ecological perspective will dictate an emphasis on the connections and relationships between students, teachers, and families. Interview questions will be set before the interview, there may be stray questions that are asked to subconsciously direct research participants to a pro-family mindset. Furthermore, the literature that will be extracted and sorted for this project may be filtered through a pro-family involvement lens, which may contradict any findings. Again, despite efforts to be as objective as possible, it is likely that this paper will hold a bias in favour of families.
1.4 Overview

In this research study, the formatting will include five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study with the research questions, in addition to the purpose and the preceding events leading to this particular topic. Chapter 2 presents and reviews the information that is presently available in literature from previous research studies. Chapter 3 goes about explaining the methods and procedures that were used in order to complete this research project, including step-by-step actions taken to find specific participants and the manner in which data was be collected. Chapter 4 organizes the collected data into a manner optimal for analyzing the nature of the gathered data. Lastly, Chapter 5 looks into the conclusions that came about as a result of this research study, the recommendations in which teachers may use for their own practices, the limitations that this study has in application, findings, as well as methods, and possible literature for further readings and insights.
Chapter 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

One of the most influential groups in children’s academic lives is family (Dunst, 2002). Family life must be considered when programming for students with specific needs as family members are the most knowledgeable of a child’s needs and strengths (Casanova et al., 2005). In past research, it was found that involving family was a part of the reason for children’s successes in school (Harlow, 2012); however, with age, this involvement became less frequent as students started to become independent learners (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Fleming, 2014). Even so, Casanova et al. (2005) found that parents continued to have an influence on their children’s learning environment despite the decrease in parental involvement. In addition, patterns at school were also an indication of what family life was like for the student – lower-achieving students were found to have less positive family relationships (Casanova et al., 2005).

Eddy, Reid, & Fetrow (2000) stated that elementary school was an important context in how family affected students’ lives because it was the first point in life where a “broad cross-section” (p. 167) of young people took part in a social system. This large inclusive group allowed for any interventions on a large-group scale (Eddy et al., 2000). The importance of working with families must be acknowledged in order to help students in their future academic progression and career (Potvin, Deslandes, and Leclerc, 1999).

Some researchers found that the expectations of parents were a crucial part of how children performed in school (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). This asked the question of how family – particularly parents – was related to children’s learning environments at home and how some unique family dynamics played a part in children’s academic and behavioural successes. Entwisle and Alexander (1996) found that with higher expectations, higher academic
achievements naturally followed. Herold (2011) found that teachers could encourage family engagement in students’ academics from home through means of homework; teachers found that they could not be completely successful, in the reading curriculum, without the assistance from home (Herold, 2011).

This paper will break down the main theme found in literature, parental characteristics, into the academic and behavioural ways in which children’s education is influenced. The academic and behaviour presentations in school will be broken down into various related family variations: the parents’ involvement, education, socioeconomic status, and family type as it affects academics, and social behaviours and attitudinal behaviours as it influences the behaviours of students.

2.1 Parental Characteristics

Parental characteristics were grouped: support, attentiveness, responsiveness, and guidance (Bronstein et al., 1996). Support was defined as affection and approval through parents’ acceptance, warmth, love, and nurturing; attentiveness as the listening and encouragement of discussion regarding their children’s feelings, interests, ideas, and experiences (Ghazi, Ali, Shahzad, Khan, & Hukamdad, 2010); responsiveness as the manner in which parents acknowledge and respond to the needs of their children, as well as provide reassurance, information, and companionship; guidance as the direction and boundaries in which parents provide for their children while teaching acceptable behaviours, values, and life skills (Bronstein et al., 1996). These characteristics were found to assist children in developing positive attitudes towards approaching academic challenges and their feelings of self-esteem, with lower incidences of anti-social behaviours with their peers (Bronstein et al., 1996; McWayne et al., 2004). A study also found that these children were also able to better grasp an understanding of
their own skills, abilities while developing their individual talents and interests (Bronstein et al., 1996).

Types of parenting styles affected the students’ levels of achievement. Parenting styles referred to the way that characterized parents’ behaviours and how they cared for their children (Potvin et al., 1999). These parenting styles were seen as a stronger predictor in academic achievement than the background of the family; however, when parenting style was combined with involvement dimension, family characteristics were found to be a weaker predictor of school (Potvin et al., 1999). Another study found that democratic parents, with some indifferent, permissive, and authoritative parents, were the most likely to be related to students with an average level of achievement in school, while democratic and indifferent parents were most likely to be related to students with a low level of achievement (Casanova et al., 2005).

Parental characteristics appeared in two types of results: academic and behavioural. Academic refers to the way in which students’ school achievements were affected by four factors of familial differences: parental involvement in school, parents’ education, the socioeconomic status of the family, and the family type of the student. Behavioural results looks into the way in which the students acted at school and the attitudes students exhibited toward academic tasks.

2.2 Academic Achievements

Academic achievements were highly influenced by the various characteristics of the students’ families with a strong emphasis on how the parents gave guidance or exerted control (Bronstein et al., 1996). Parents’ expectations were critical in how children performed academically (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996; Frew, Zhou, Duran, Kwok, & Benz, 2012) and these expectations were dependent on a variety of factors from parents’ involvement in school (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005), parental education (Casanova et al., 2005), the socioeconomic
status of the family, and the family type of the student (Entwisle, & Alexander, 1996); all were found to play a role in a students’ academic achievement.

2.2.1 Parents’ Involvement

An older study found mixed results regarding how the characteristics of family affected students’ school achievements (Potvin et al., 1999), but found that parental involvement was significant in understanding the lower level of achievements of students. One study found that parental involvement was largely influenced by students’ low levels of achievement (Dunst, 2002; Ghazi et al., 2010), which could be related to why most studies found that parental involvement resulted in a higher level of academic achievement (Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012; Frew et al., 2012; Harlow, 2012; Khajehpour & Ghazvini, 2011; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004; Pelegrina, Garcia-Linares, & Casanova, 2003; Potvin et al., 1999). These studies found that parental involvement, along with the family’s characteristics, was associated with higher grades of students.

In the studies mentioned above, the parents’ involvement was mostly in extra-curricular events – such as workshops, support groups, or school events (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Potvin et al., 1999) – and assistance with students’ homework (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Others found that parents’ involvement even before the start of the child’s academic career was significant in how the child would fare in school (Friedman, 2007; Swiatek & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2005). For example, Friedman (2007) found that kindergarten programs were more successful when the parents attended parent education sessions before the programs started. Swiatek and Lupkowski-Shoplik (2005) found that with standardized test scores, parents did not change the extra-curricular activities of their children but did note that the
test scores were helpful in identifying the child’s abilities and provided information to better help their children.

It is important to note that despite the finding that parental involvement was a result of student’s low academic achievements (Dunst, 2002), parents of students with higher levels of success in school were found to be more connected with their children’s school lives (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). The importance of family involvement is enforced by other research that found the negative effects of family characteristics on children’s academics were less pronounced with the increase of involvement (Potvin et al., 1999).

Parental involvement was not limited to parents’ initiative of involvement, but also encouraged teachers to educate parents how to engage and learn about their children’s literacy progresses (Herold, 2011). This can be applied to progression in other areas of children’s academic career, presenting how parental involvement can include professional parties of the students’ academic career as well (Herold, 2011).

The question remains as to why parental involvement was a meaningful indicator of higher grades and other academic achievements (Frew et al., 2012). Studies linked parental involvement with more positive, warm, and affective support from parents, such as praise, encouragement, discussion around choices in school academics, and becoming a part of school activities (Potvin et al., 1999; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Sheldon and Epstein (2002) found that other professionals within the school environment, such as school officials, can also apply more familial involvement activities to help create a learning, focused school environment.

Over the span of a child’s academic career, however, parental involvement decreased with an increase in the independence of students (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Potvin et al., 1999). In fact, Potvin et al. (1999) found that some studies suggest there are some negative
interactions with parental involvement and school performance at older grades. Perhaps parents’ involvement in school at earlier grades is more helpful because parents believe they have more control over their children’s academic career than when the children are older (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). In fact, earlier interventions by parents in children’s lives resulted in better results than later interventions (Dunst, 2002).

Overall, there is a strong connection between parents’ involvement and children’s academic achievements (Frew et al., 2012). Parental involvement was not the exclusive answer for students, though it was an important part of children’s academic careers (Herold, 2011). Students’ learning and development were strengthened when there was a network of influence for students (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Within this network of influence, studies found that parental educational backgrounds had a potential influence on parental involvement, affecting students’ academic achievement (Potvin et al., 1999).

2.2.2 Parents’ Education

The characteristics of parents and their parenting played a significant role in children’s development and adjustment; supportive parents encouraged the positive social and emotional growth and adjustment of children (Brostein et al., 1996; Ghazi et al., 2010). Parental education was important as it impacted children’s academic achievements (Casanova et al., 2005) and directly associated with school successes (Potvin et al., 1999). Parental education and warmth have been reported to impact school achievement (Bronstein et al., 1996; Potvin et al., 1999) though Potvin et al. (1999) state that the education of parents were more of a predictor of success than family structure or size.

Parents’ education, alongside socioeconomic statuses and parents’ expectations of students, was found to have a strong influence on students’ test scores (Entwisle & Alexander,
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One study specifically looked at the maternal education of students, finding that higher levels of education of mothers were associated with higher successes in students’ academic careers, from perspectives of classroom and teachers (Pianta, la Paro, Payne, Cox, & Bradley, 2002). From the opposite side of the spectrum, parents with lower levels of education were related to students with lower levels of achievement (Potvin et al., 1999). There appeared to be more focus on the lower levels of education of parents and its association with the lower academic achievements of students (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996; Potvin et al., 1999). Perhaps this is because these children may have limited access to the help that parents can provide or that children need as lower levels of education was not linked with the non-academic skills associated with higher levels of education (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996).

Another explanation for the association between poor academic success and lower levels of parental education theorized that parents monitor and support their children less than their counterparts, a recurrent theme in one study (Potvin et al., 1999). Support was defined as encouragement and praise from parents in regards to school, discussions around school decisions, school-related activities both in and outside school, as well as help with homework (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Potvin et al., 1999). Higher levels of education were also associated with more accurate knowledge of students’ education and the resources economically available at home (Potvin et al., 1999), leading to the next familial characteristic that affects the academic achievement of students.

**2.2.3 Family’s Socioeconomic Status**

Interestingly, most of the available literature in this area of the association between academic success and socioeconomic status were completed many years ago, and more recent literature was not as readily available (Bronstein et al., 1996; Entwisle & Alexander, 1996;
Pianta et al., 2002; Potvin et al., 1999; Vaden-Kieman et al., 1995). These studies, however, presented a clear theme that stated the resources available to students have been an indication of their school performance, influenced by a number of factors (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996; Potvin et al., 1999; Vaden-Kieman et al., 1995).

So far, parental characteristics that influenced students’ achievement have included parents’ involvement and parents’ education. Socioeconomic status appeared to have a role in how parents support and encourage social and adjustment in school (Bronstein et al., 1996). The most common findings were that students with lower levels of achievement came from families with lower levels of socioeconomic status (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996; Potvin et al., 1999; Vaden-Kiemen et al., 1995). This theme was recurrent in one study’s findings in their comparison of lower income families with higher income families (Potvin et al., 1999).

Socioeconomic status was related to the number of economically available resources at home, the parents’ expectations in children’s efforts, and the manner in which the child’s autonomy was exercised (Potvin et al., 1999). Another study showed that that lower levels of socioeconomic status were related to the limited and fewer numbers of available resources to the children of these families (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996).

Single parent families were an example of families with lower socioeconomic statuses (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996; Vaden-Kiernan, Ialongo, Pearson, & Kellam, 1995). Families with single mothers were more likely related to children with higher points in a variety of cognitive, behavioural, and psychological tests if the parent was not on welfare before the child’s 5th birthday (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). In cases of higher levels of financial anxiety, students from single mother families were predicted to be more at risk for problems (Vanden-Kieman et al., 1995). Financial anxiety is also related to inconsistent parenting, such as less child
supervision and monitoring than two-parent families, as a response to psychological stress (Vaden-Kieman et al., 1995). Some of the financial resources that were limited in availability for those with lower socioeconomic status included parental supervision and availability in reading, watching TV, and taking trips; these resources, when limited by finances, were found to be associated with children with lower grades (Vanden-Kieman et al., 1995).

Also related to family socioeconomic status was the quality of the classroom that children were registered in, though not affected by the teacher’s education or class size (Pianta et al., 2002). The children of lower socioeconomic status tended to attend schools with lower quality classrooms (Pianta et al., 2002).

Due to the numerous reasons for lower achievement as a result of lower socioeconomic status, research has tried to find ways to prevent lower school performance dependent on lower socioeconomic status (Bronstein et al., 1996). Programs looked at focus groups to help with short and long term improvement for parenting at home to help students adjust at school (Bronstein et al., 1996). Children in control groups with parents that were not a part of these programs were found to drop in their academics independent of financial status (Bronstein et al., 1996) showing that socioeconomic status can be controlled for to help students achieve academic success in school.

A common family characteristic highly associated with lower socioeconomic status was that of single parent families (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996; Vanden-Kiemen et al., 1995), an aspect of family types that has become more important with the growing number of single parent families (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996).
2.2.4 Family Type

Looking at today’s society, one can see how families have changed from nuclear families to single parent, same gender parents, or mixed families. Literature began to see an expansion in the study of these various types of families, specifically focusing on those that seem to be related to children with poor levels of academic success (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996; Potvin et al., 1999). The general themes from the literature that focused on children’s academics in relation to family characteristics, divided into two family types: one based on the parental figures available in the family and the cultural background of one’s family.

2.2.4.1 Available Parental Figures

In past research, the results were mixed in exploring how academic success was affected by family demographics (Potvin et al., 1999); however, the general consensus was that single parent families – also called non-intact families – had children with lower levels of academic success (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996; Potvin et al., 1999; Vaden-Kieman et al., 1995). Children with lower levels of academic achievement were more likely to come from single-parent families (Potvin et al., 1999); single parent families coincided with having lower socioeconomic status, a fact which appeared to have a negative impact on children’s education achievements, a major limiting factor of success later in life (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996).

Two parent families were more effective in preparing children’s socializing skills before the start of school (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996), and two parent families participated more in the academic lives of their children (Potvin et al., 1999). The reasons for the success of children from two parent families were similar to those from higher levels of socioeconomic status in that parents were more likely to spend time with their children, participated in family activities, and children received more direct supervision (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). These families were
also more likely to provide affective attention and support to their children with encouragement and praises (Potvin et al., 1999). On the opposite side of the spectrum, single parent families were less able to provide attention for children than those of two parent families, linked with the stresses of also being of a lower socioeconomic status (Vaden-Kieman et al., 1995). Interestingly, the size of a child’s family did not contribute or have direct correlation with academic successes (Potvin et al., 1999).

In the comparison of academic achievements between single parent and two parent homes, students from two parent homes scored the highest in mathematics and literacy at the beginning of a study; by the end, however, though the students from two parent homes still scored the highest, the range of grades increased (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). Over the period of this study, the differences in scores decreased between the students from single parent homes and those from two parent homes (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996).

Not all is lost for those from single parent families; the presence of a second adult in a child’s life can be significant in the child’s success in school, dependent on the type of adult that is present, the gender of the child, and the socioeconomic status of the family (Vaden-Kieman et al., 1995). In addition, the parenting style in a single parent home can also significantly affect the child’s achievements in school, regardless of the education of the parent and family type (Potvin et al., 1999).

### 2.2.4.2 Culture

Some suggest that families from lower socioeconomic statuses and ethnic minorities had a different mindset and attitude towards the roles that parents and teachers play in children’s academics, as compared to those families from higher socioeconomic status and ethnic majority
(Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013), a reason for the differences in family types and levels of academic achievement of their children.

Though the literature was limited in the cultural differences between higher and lower level of achievement in children, studies suggested that the cultural differences at home may be reflected in how the children approach their academics (Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012; Parmar, Harkness, & Super, 2004). These differences were observed by teachers, noting how culture affected the behaviours presented by their students in preschool (Parmar et al., 2004). The main difference in this study was a higher proficiency in letters and numbers by Asian students than European students at the start of the children’s academic careers, though many of these differences were minimal by the end of the school year (Parmar et al., 2004). Despite the changes over time, this study showed that the difference in culture was also a factor in children’s academics.

2.3 Behaviour and Attitude Observations

Other than the academic successes as indicated with grades, there were behavioural presentations that were also apparent as a consequence of family characteristics. These behaviours separated themselves into two types: behaviours of the students in how they acted at school as social beings, and the attitudes of the students towards the idea of school, whether it was their study habits or general mindset. Frew et al. (2012) and McWayne et al. (2004) found that higher levels of parent involvement in school were a strong indicator of less disruptive events at school with more agreeable and acceptable emotional state for students. Parents’ characteristics of guidance versus control also affected how students acted socially and behaviourally in school (Bronstein et al., 1996). Generally, the more parents were supportive and affective to their children, the more likely the students were successful in their social interactions.
with peers and the more likely they felt a sense of academic competence and higher level of self-esteem (Bronstein et al., 1996).

2.3.1 Students’ Behaviours at School

Sheldon and Epstein (2002) looked into how students were influenced by three major components of their lives: family, school, and the community. With family, students naturally learned emotional and psychological lessons and affected how they interacted with peers at school (Bronstein et al., 1996). Other studies confirmed this fact (Frew et al., 2012, McWayne et al. 2004) which suggests that parents’ involvement affected more than just students’ grades. Students with involved parents were more likely to be engaged in school with more socially accepted behaviours (Frew et al., 2012; McWayne et al., 2004). Of course, the discipline styles of parents, the manner in which the family worked through problems together, and the degree of difficulties at home were also a predictor of how students will behave in their later years (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

The early years were found to be indications of how students will behave in their later years (Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012), alongside lower levels of success in school and self-identity (Bronstein et al., 1996). In the early years of school, particularly the primary and elementary years, certain characteristics and behaviours such as inattentive, impulsive, and hyperactive behaviours, were indicators of potential youth delinquency in later years (Eddy et al., 2000); the best prediction of adolescent violence were the antisocial behaviours as presented in the individual’s early years (Eddy et al., 2000; Vaden-Kieman et al., 1995).

Sheldon and Epstein (2002) suggested that the relationships children have at home, particularly with their parents, were a way in which delinquent and antisocial behaviours may be reduced because the home was such an influential place. Some schools gave specific roles to
parents at school in order to help reduce the amount of antisocial behaviours presented at school. Parenting and volunteering appeared to be the strongest indicator in the reduction of the number of students that were disciplined at school; one result was of the fewer numbers of students that were sent to the principal’s office (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Affective and positive parenting, one of the activities to help reduce antisocial behaviours, was found to help with the move to middle school with higher levels of social success (Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012; Bronstein et al., 1996). A suggested activity was a parents’ education workshop that helped parents become more aware of their children’s future and education (Friedman, 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004). A parent characteristic that was found to be especially tied to positive behaviours exhibited by students at school was responsiveness – the way in which parents recognize and respond – to the needs of the child (Bronstein, 1996). Guidance – the provision of information and guidelines by parents for students – was also a characteristic that was found to be highly associated with socially acceptable behaviours at school (Bronstein et al., 1996).

Overall, students’ education and development was improved when each aspect of their lives worked together to form a positive environment for wherever the children are (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). It is indicated in the literature that the more family and the community is involved, the more likely that students will also succeed in presenting behaviours more acceptable in schools (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

### 2.3.2 Students’ Attitudes to Academic Tasks

Positive encounters at home can lead young people to tackle challenges in academia with higher levels of expectations and success (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). These positive encounters and positive approaches to challenges enhanced a feeling of self-esteem and the understanding of their capability for independent thinking (Bronstein et al., 1996). The manner in which they
approached challenges was also important as these challenges became more difficult and complex over time and with the gradual ascent in the education system (Bronstein et al., 1996). It was found that the attitudes in which students approached challenges was related to their psychosocial competence, including a sense of academic competence and success, and presenting socially accepted behaviours (Brostein et al., 1996), especially in the students’ younger years (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996).

The guidance that parents provided was a start in building these skills, values, and learning appropriate behaviours, while students also grew aware of their talents and interests; these elements all contributed to adolescents’ interests and successes in academics (Bronstein et al., 1996). Parents’ involvement was related to greater academic motivation (Ghazi et al., 2010) and as a result, children’s successes in school (Bronstein et al., 1996; Frew et al., 2012; McWayne et al., 2004; Pelegrina et al., 2003). Parents’ academic achievements were also related to what they said and how they gave praise to their children; parents with higher levels of education were more encouraging in their children’s academics, helpful with school difficulties, and were more involved in making choices for school (Potvin et al., 1999). In addition to parents’ behaviours, parents with higher levels of education had more positive attitude towards education (Potvin et al., 1999) which supported the fostering of the youth’s own attitudes and behaviours towards school work (Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012), also reflected in the improved attendance record by these students (Barnard, 2004; Frew et al., 2012). Socioeconomic statuses and family types were reflected in the attitudes of the students towards academics (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). Lower socioeconomic statuses and single parent families tended to have less of a positive approach to school work because of their limited knowledge and experience to help their children (Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012; Entwisle & Alexander, 1996).
Cultural differences were also reflective in how students approached school work. For example, in the comparison between Asian American and European American students, those from an Asian American background tended to be more passive in their approach to school work with less aggression, less complaining, and more submission in disagreements (Parmar et al., 2004). Though the differences became minimal with regular routine (Parmar et al., 2004), the study showed that the cultural backgrounds of students’ families can be reflected in their attitudes and their approach towards academic challenges (Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012).

2.4 Conflict in Literature

Despite the overwhelming literature that supported families’ involvement in academics, there were some conflicts within and between studies. Though the literature stated the importance of parents’ characteristics in children’s academic achievements (Bronstein et al., 1995; Potvin et al., 1999), Casanova et al. (2005) found that their study was not certain that parents’ characteristics were contributors to the lower academic achievements in students. Still, Casanova et al. (2005) acknowledged that the parents’ education levels, school environments, and family processes were influential in students’ academics and helpful when building individualized programs for students.

In regards to family types, Entwisle and Alexander (1996) found in their study that the size of a family was an important factor to consider when looking at reasons for students’ academic achievements. Conflicting this information, however, was Potvin et al. (1999), finding that family size did not have any direction correlation with school achievement. This may because the focus of the two studies differed in that one looked into the family characteristics in regards to students’ development in reading and mathematics while the other looked into family characteristics as predictors, rather than causes (Potvin et al., 1999).
Pianta et al. (2002) found that as a result of a family’s socioeconomic status, the inequity in classroom was related to the child’s success, while also finding that the high quality of kindergarten classrooms contributed to the outcome of the child, regardless of the family’s socioeconomic status. Initially, these pieces of information appeared to be in conflict but the latter stated that it was possible to support a child’s future, independent of family income.

These conflicts, though they initially appeared to dismantle the argument that family is important in children’s academics, actually showed that family involvement is even more complicated than one may believe. This encourages future researchers to further study some of these conflicts and ask questions as to why and how these differences affect the way in which family is involved in students’ academics.

2.5 Conclusion

Family centered means that there is a “particular set of beliefs, principles, values, and practices for supporting and strengthening family capacity to enhance and promote child development and learning” (Dunst, 2002, p. 1). This literature review has shown the importance of including the family to help the child, especially in the earlier years of students’ academic achievements. There were some limitations in many of the studies, as some focused on older grades (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Eddy et al., 2000; Pelegrina et al., 2003; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013) and one was set in a different country all together (Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012); but they all contributed to the idea that family is a vital part of a child’s life, regardless of the community the child was involved in. Family is important in understanding a child in school, whether it is academically or behaviourally focused. Overall, there are ways to overcome many of the obstacles that children face in succeeding academically, and teachers can support children in school in significant ways (Pianta et al., 2002).
Chapter 3 – METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology that I use. This chapter starts by describing the procedure that was used in this research project, specific to the research methodology that was chosen. Then the instruments that were used to collect data were described and explained, including some sample questions used. I described how the research participants were chosen and briefly describe why they were chosen. There includes a discussion about the type of information that I looked for, and the plan on how a decision was made on whether or not the information was useful or relevant to this project. Then the process of how the data was sorted and analyzed is explained. The ethical procedures that were followed are reviewed using the University of Toronto guidelines and also provide the links used as resources to help build the instruments for ethical processing. The strengths and weaknesses are identified on how the use of this particular research method was perceived, relating back to how it affected research and the data that was collected. Finally, the written portion of this chapter concluded with a summary and a preview of Chapter 4. Chapter 3 was completed with an appendix of the instruments discussed in this chapter and used in my research project.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This is a qualitative research, including a literature review, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with participants (teachers from a large school board in an urban city in Canada). This qualitative study is used to provide an in-depth description and understanding of three teachers’ perspectives on the relationship between children’s learning and behaviours in school and their family lives using qualitative research methods. My methodology borrowed methodological elements from research approaches such as grounded theory and case study. A qualitative
approach is used to help provide details in context as well as well as a different perception of the context (Jack, 2010). Literature states that a qualitative approach is the most insightful way to dive deeper into a study with rich details (Jack, 2010). The qualitative research method is the most effective method in which to understand the perspectives of teachers’ as it allows for the study of a situation in a real-life scenario and context (Creswell, 2013); this will allow for rich, individual information that is used to paint a detailed picture. With the limitation of the number and type of participants from the Master of Teacher research curriculum, using a qualitative study is the most ideal method of research. As a result of using the qualitative study methodology, readers will see a sample of the variety of relationships that teachers see within their students, between the students’ learning and behaviours at school and the circumstances from which students come from in a more holistic approach (Hanurawan, 2012).

Three different teachers from various grades in various schools were interviewed, all from the same major school board in Toronto. This gave a variety of answers that gives an idea of teachers’ perspectives on how family influenced students’ learning and behaviours, increasing the ability in which the research can be generalized. The interview questions were based on the teachers’ experiences from the previous school year – 2014 to 2015 – to allow for teachers’ insights and reflections. Teachers’ words are crucial to this research as they have the most direct interaction with students at school and are seen as the primary source of information in looking at the students’ learning and behaviours (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). This, in a qualitative approach, gives researchers rich understanding of their participants’ perspectives and in their lives as teachers (Jack, 2010; Thyer, 2012).

The qualitative study methodology allowed for the development of a detailed and rich picture of how teachers see families affecting children’s academics (Creswell, 2013; Hanurawan,
2012). Most of the descriptions were based on the information provided by the participating teachers, resulting in rich detail and a variety of themes to be used in analyzing the data. As I desired to see the relationship from a teacher’s perspective, a qualitative study methodology was the best in building a flexible, yet detailed, picture of how teachers saw the relationship between the students’ lives at school and how it related to their lives at home (Graebner, Martin, & Roundy, 2012; Hanurawan, 2012).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were implemented. Semi-structured interviews are the optimal option for this research project as it allows for the participants to expand on the various details of their lives while keeping to a general outline of what the interviewer is looking for (Leko, 2014). As this project looked to better understand the perspectives of teachers towards children’s learning and behaviours relationships with their family life, the most accurate and direct source of information was the teachers being interviewed (Khan, 2014). They can provide information that comes from personal experience, which helped to build a more accurate picture of what naturally happens in the real life classroom (Khan, 2014; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). The structured portion of the interview helped to guide the interview so that the interviewee knew what type of information to provide, though not always in the same order, dependent on the flow of the conversation (Crocker, Besterman-Dahan, Himmelgreen, Castaneda, Gwede, & Kumar, 2014). This ensured that the information provided was noteworthy and contributed to the project. Structured interviews provided questions so that the interviewer maintained consistency in the interview process and allowed for the gathered information to be comparable (Dearnley, 2005; Khan, 2014). Structure
also helped the interviewer categorize the information to analyze later, giving the interviewer a similar formation, which also helped with coding the information.

In this project, I followed a set of questions that helped the teachers explore their own thoughts and experiences with working with children who are influenced, as students, with what happens at home. These questions, as those in qualitative designs, supported to complete a picture of the teachers’ perspectives in the classroom (Leko, 2014). As this type of information can only be gathered from personal experience and not from an artificial, sterile environment (Cheseboro & Borisoff, 2007), I looked to providing questions that draws from their experiences, rather than gathering information from a series of tests or experiments.

These interviews will be collective of questions such as the following:

1. What is the relationship between a child’s learning and his or her family life?
2. If you think there are any connections, how are students affected in the work they produce at school by their home life?
3. How much of the students’ achievements and non-achievements at school are related to their home lives?

3.3 Participants

In this section, I discuss the criteria that I required participants meet so that I would have interviewees that would contribute helpful information to my study. I also include how I contacted, prepared, and interviewed the participants, and provide a brief introduction to the reader about the participants.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

My criteria were as follows:

- Participant must have at least 5 years’ experience working full-time in a classroom.
- Participant must have had experience interacting with families of their students.
- Participant must have had previously or current provided individual support for a student due to circumstances at home.
- (Optional) Participant with special education background/education will be given priority on interview list.

Each participant was chosen due to his or her experience working with children and families, specifically. Experience with working with children and families allows for the build up of experience that understands the relationships between children and family life and how these relationships affect children’s learning and behaviours at school. I specifically asked for a minimum of 5 years of experience in a classroom and consistent contact with at least one parent of a student in the class. This will ensure that the teacher has an idea of what happens in at least one of their students’ lives so that they are not simply assuming the family life a child. To ensure that the teacher had hands on experience with both student and his or her family, I also looked for teachers that provided support for children, specifically because of the students’ circumstances at home. I put teachers with special education backgrounds as priority on the list as it meant that the teacher was specifically qualified to work with children with need for support, though this was not a required criterion.

### 3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

My sample is made up of three individuals: Educator M, Educator N, and Educator O. I decided to recruit participants through personal and professional contacts. I felt that this would be the simplest manner in which I could find participants with relevant experiences, since I could ask about the participants’ backgrounds before starting the paperwork. I provided the criteria I had in order to reduce the number of participants that could become more difficult to
filter through. I asked that my contacts ask for permission for me to contact the participants so that the participants had time to think before deciding to participate. The participants were contacted via e-mail in order to receive their permission, given a general look into what I was studying, the premise of my research project and what I was researching for, what I required of my participants, and outlined the guidelines on which I will be following, therefore applicable to them. The sample size is small due to the parameters of the Master of Teaching program as well as the convenience and time frame to gather and analyze the data. Once they agreed, I set up a meeting time to settle paper work, including the signing of waiver forms. Dependent on the participants’ schedules, I continued on in the same session to start the interview process, or met at another time to interview.

At the end of the interview process, I chose to transcribe all three of the interviews that I had. In order to prevent researcher bias, I chose all three, regardless of what was said. In the case that a participant decides not to continue on in the project, there will be additional interviews on hand in order to continue forth with the project.

### 3.3.3 Participant Bios

*Educator M*

Years of experience: 21
Grade taught: K - 5
Field of specialization/study: Special Education

*Educator N*

Years of experience: 5+
Grade taught: primary to intermediate
Field of specialization/study: French

*Educator O*

Years of experience: 18
Grade taught: K - 5
Field of specialization/study: Special Education; French

In addition to the participants that were interviewed for this research project, an unofficial participant, referred to as J. Niger, was contacted for information to provide some insight for recommendations about parent involvement from the Ministry of Education.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

My data collection and analysis consisted of transcribing and coding the information that I received from my interviews. I also categorized various bits of information I gathered while also looking for themes throughout the interview. This helped me to have a better overview on the data that was collected to present a bigger picture of what looks to be the general trend in a particular school board within the particular city I am doing my research in. The themes will also help to categorize the information for further analysis later. I looked for ways to make sense of the data – patterns that the data followed, specifically through themes; these patterns are ways in which the world uses to make sense of and process information (Paine, 2015).

Throughout the interview process, I transcribed the interviews as soon as possible after the meeting so that the details were fresh in my mind. I looked into the observations that teachers saw in the classroom that they attributed to the situation at home for the student. I wanted to find out the causes that teachers thought were related to children’s home life, contributing to their school life, looking at the context of the participants (Ivey, 2012). I decided to look at specific examples that teachers provided to confirm the connection between a child’s learning or behaviour and his or her life at home; this helped me start at a tangible level which can be a starting point to dive deeper into the other information that the participants provided.

After transcribing and initial sorting, I started to code the transcript (Ivey, 2012), using my research question as a reference point to identify important information. Specifically, I
looked into the following categories: children’s level of academic achievement and how it reflects children’s family life; parents’ involvement and how it is linked to students’ academics; how children’s academics are influenced by their home life. These categories are significant because they are indications of the presence of a relationship between the students’ learning and behaviours and their family lives (Ivey, 2012).

Data analysis is an important stage in this research project. It allows for the use of the information that was gathered so that the information is more than just numbers or a certain number of words used in a conversation and to give it meaning (Khan, 2014).

Along with data collected, the null data that was not collected proves to be as important. Missing data from one participant could possibly mean that the participant chose not to speak on the topic because it was irrelevant, uncomfortable, or not encountered by the participant; in this case, it would show that the participant may have been dishonest or unsure, which would lead to a series of additional questions. With missing data from more than one participant, it would indicate the need for more awareness, education, or further research. Null data is helpful in the case of further studies and research that needs to be completed in the future.

Finally, I grouped specific words together as synonyms if they appeared as such in thesaurus.com and in context of the conversation in order to reduce the large number of codes and categories.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

For the ethical review procedures of this research project, I used the procedures as approved for the Master of Teaching program.

The participants were given a letter with consent form that lists all of what is listed in this section. The procedures include the collection of data only with the informed consent of the
participant (consent provided on paper via consent form) and give the participant the right to the confidentiality of their information with all provided information as anonymous (Hanurawan, 2012). The letter also requested that the interview be recorded in order to provide the most accurate transcript possible following the meeting. This confidentiality of their information came in the form of alphabet letters, unrelated to their names of personal and professional identities as well as the information about their place of employment. All names mentioned in the interview are masked with codes or pseudonyms (Hanurawan, 2012). The consent letter informed the teachers of all the risks that are involved with partaking in this project. Though the risks are few, they may have affected the participants in different ways, including the feelings of judgement or vulnerability. In order to reduce as much of the risk as possible for the participants, teachers were sent the questions in order to ensure that they had enough time to read over the questions and prepare their answers to provide accurate and detailed answers. This also provided the participants with enough time to decide whether they would have liked to continue with the study or withdraw before providing any information.

Following the interview, which spanned from 30 to 60 minutes, participants’ raw data were stored on a password-protected device that only I was able to access in order to ensure as much confidentiality as possible. The only people that were able to see or hear the collected information is myself and the participant who partook in the interview.

The participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any point in the research with no penalty for withdrawing from the project (Khan, 2014), monetary or psychological. As all the participants chose to continue, they were given the chance to review the transcripts from their interviews and choose to change or retract any information they provided. This provided the participants with time to review their information and change anything that they felt was an
inaccurate portrayal of their work or job. Checking over their transcript also helped to reduce the risk of feeling vulnerable or judgement because they were allowed to indicate the feel of the final gathering of information that was used in the data analyzed. This also helped to build validity and reliability (Ivey, 2012).

Following the completion of the research project, all information will be held on a secure device and be deleted or destroyed (dependent on the medium) within five years.

3.6 Limitations and Strengths

The limitations of this research project include the low number of participants included in the data collection. Due to the limited time of this program, I was unable to gain a large and varied sample of teachers from a larger number of schools. With more time and more personal interaction with the teachers, this would have been a more desirable sample because it would allow for this study to gain a much more answers and have access to a larger sample, resulting in a more accurate collection of data (Lipscomb, 2012). In addition, it was would have been helpful to receive the input of parents and students to receive even more details of a child’s life at home and connect the information together to provide a more complete picture. With the MTRP ethical guidelines, however, only teachers were accessible to interview for information. In the limited time, it was also an impossible feat in this study to collect even more data collected across Canada, though this would have been beneficial to be more applicable to a broader Canadian context.

Though every precaution was taken in order to ensure participants of their confidentiality, the face-to-face interviews may have affected the participants’ responses; they may state a statement though it is not reflective of their values. People may have difficulty voicing their true opinion when given the opportunity to make the complaints or ideas official, regardless of the
audience. Only the interviewees can be completely sure of whether or not they were completely honest in their verbal answers. After giving the participants the opportunity to review their transcripts, the information may also be more accurate, but it can also become more skewed if the participants did not feel that the information reflected their teaching practices in an acceptable light, as experienced by another researcher (Dearnley, 2005).

Perhaps next time, an initial paper questionnaire could be passed out with a return envelope (with send address and stamp provided) so that participants can anonymously send in their answers, though they limit the quantity and nature of the answers a researcher can collect (Leko, 2014). This type of survey can help the researcher better understand the context from which the participants are coming from in order to prepare more applicable and meaningful questions for the interviewed participants.

Of course, there are many strengths to this research project – the reason why this specific instrument of data collection was used. With semi-structured interviews, the teachers are given a say in what the research indicates (Jack, 2010; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014); this is helpful as the teachers are the ones who are the frontline workers in the field of education. Their words are recorded rather than a summary. Their experiences, though unique, show the richness and diversity in education that proves the need for further study in this field. In qualitative research, this is especially true in giving researchers an opportunity to become more knowledgeable about the field they are studying (Thyer, 2012). Though an anonymous paper survey could potentially provide more accurate information, it would definitely be limited in the details that come with interviews. Interviews also allow for teachers to clarify any question that they do not understand or for the interviewee to direct them back to the topic that the research study focuses on.
Beyond the publication of the findings, the research project is also a way in which teachers can validate their own experiences and knowledge gained throughout their years of teaching. As one author found, the relationship between the researcher and participant can be seen as a partnership where one is telling the other of their experiences in a joint experience (Rossetto, 2014). They could potentially be helping a teacher in the future by preventing certain circumstances from or encourage others to push for more for their students. It allows for teachers to reflect, out loud, and talk through some of their own experiences and thoughts that perhaps they were unable to share in the past. In this way, this experience could be therapeutic for many teachers (Rossetto, 2014). Through reflection as an agent of change, they may be able to come up with more ideas on how to work on their teaching practices or innovative ways of supporting their students (Rossetto, 2014).

Interviewing also helps teachers and readers connect some of their practice with theory. It provides a learning tool for the teachers in reflection (Hanurawan, 2012), but also for the readers that are able to see this research project from a different perspective. Some qualitative research methods, such as interviews, can help to build up the lives of those that are studied by researchers (Thyer, 2012).

3.7 Conclusion

Overall, this chapter provided a detailed summary of the process of putting this research project together starting with the preparation to collect data. I described the significance of using semi-structured interviews and why it was important for this particular research project. I provided the criteria that needed to be met for the participants to be applicable to contribute to this project. All the steps taken in completing this project were to ensure that the interviewees felt safe and comfortable while ensuring that the data collected was rich, accurate, and significant.
Every precaution possible in this program was taken in order to ensure that all the ethical requirements were met, though there were a few limitations due to the nature of this program. Regardless, there were also many strengths as to how the research was conducted which will ensure that the research is as accurate as possible with the guidelines and limitations that were placed on the progression of this project.

In the following chapter, the product of Chapter 3 will be presented which include the data collected and the findings with analysis of the data.
Chapter 4 – RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introductory Overview

In this section, there will be a larger picture look at similarities and differences on the focus of the interviews. Following this overall understanding, the findings from the three interview data will be organized, analyzed, and discussed.

The themes from this project are the influence of involving family in students’ academics, the relationships between teachers, parents, and students, the perspective of stakeholders, and meeting the student and family needs as well as suggestions from the participants.

4.0.1 Similarities in Interviews

When participants were initially approached for interviews, all agreed that the focus on the relationship between families and schools was a relevant one. As Dunst (2002) states, family is an influential group in elementary students’ lives and the data gathered from the interviews are reflective of this. All participants discussed what was observed in the classroom and the connections that they found related to the family of their students. Throughout the interview, the participants freely alternated between using the word “family” and “parent”, with a stronger focus on the parents as the spokesperson for the students’ families, perhaps because the interview questions used the term “families” when referring to home life. There was significant discussion concerning the interaction between the participants and parents within the school amongst all participants. This suggested that the relationships were not as directed through the student as literature made it appear in Chapter 2 of this research project, but rather that the teachers and parents had a lot more direct contact than assumed by the researcher.

Throughout the interviews, each participant discussed a similar approach to the question of family integration. Each talked about meeting with parents, as well as discussing best methods
to support the student and family with a school team. Each participant’s end focus was the
students and how all the experiences and interactions with parents influenced the students’
learning and academic success. All participants stated the parents’ support was important to help
the child.

There was a general consensus that teachers and parented needed to collaborate in order
to help students. Participants agreed that integrating families, particularly parents, a partnership
for a strong support system for a student’s learning was important. In addition, participants
agreed that in the case that the parents are unable to forge a successful and supportive partnership,
the teachers needed to do as much as they could in order to support the child.

Finally, all major themes were present in each interview. The first theme looks at how
involving family in students’ academics influences the academic achievement of students. The
second theme explores how the relationships between teachers, parents, and students are related
the achievements of students. The third theme voices the perspective of various stakeholders.
The final theme discusses how to meet the student and family needs as well provides suggestions
from the participants.

4.0.2 Differences in Interviews

There were few differences between participants’ responses; the differences were found
in the details of specific teacher interactions with students and parents. One was that of sending
homework with students over vacation with their families. One participant stated they would not
provide homework if not requested, though this difference could easily have been explained had
further probing had taken place. Despite the small sample size, it was surprising to see the
limited variation between participant responses. One can wonder whether the similar responses
emerged because of the closely-knit school community and the similarity in the mindsets.
4.0.3 From Codes to Themes

As discussed in Chapter 3, categories were determined from common groupings of codes. Themes were determined by examining the similarities between more than twenty groups of categories. As the themes emerged from the data, there were various overlaps in the categories. Much of the data excerpts were difficult to completely segregate from one another because there were so many factors that influenced each other. Many of the stories that the participants told held a combination of the themes that had a reciprocal influence on each other.

4.1 Theme One: Influence of Involving Family in Students’ Academics

Participants spoke of some their firsthand experiences with students who struggled in school, later found home life was related to students’ difficulty in focusing on academics. They stated that the influence of home varied from life events, to routines instilled at home, to the reflection of parents as seen within the students, and the reflection of the overall family values, culture, and history. Visibility of parents in schools and the differences in academics were also influenced by family involvement. Finally, participants reflected back on how school, and effectively their teaching, was related their students’ home lives as well.

Participants shared about students who struggled as students and as social individuals. Educator N told a story about a student who was presumed to need a diagnosis for a learning disability because of academic struggles. Through some investigation and meetings with the school support team, the participant discovered that the student was dealing with a very complicated and messy divorce and separation at home between the parents. The struggles the student faced at home were strongly linked to the struggles faced at school. The student was focused on the difficulties at home rather than in school. Educator N emphasized the importance of observation of behaviour and any changes in academics before assigning causation to a
concern. Similarly, Sheldon & Epstein (2002) found that difficulties at home were a predictor of difficult future student behaviour.

Another parent was constantly at the school, asking a participant about homework, assignments, and projects. Educator N stated that the parent’s child was one of the top achievers in the class, although “If her mother removes her support, she won’t be achieving as high.” Past research confirmed that a student’s academic successes were significantly influenced by parents’ involvement in the school, even before the start of the child’s academic career (Friedman, 2007; Swiatek & Lupkowski-Shoplik, 2005).

These two stories were different cases of how family’s involvement at school can influence the child’s learning and academic achievement. This aligned with Sheldon and Epstein’s (2002) study which highlighted how students were influenced by three major aspects of their lives: family, school, and the community. Family was noted to be strongly influential. In this particular research, most of the students’ local communities were located within close proximity to the school environment, thus having a potential influence on family involvement in school life. The participants’ stories painted a picture of how students’ lives integrated emotional beings and academics, which underlined how the struggles faced at home were reflected in students’ work at school.

Educator N specified the importance of routine at home that reflected the routines at school to help students be successful in their studies. These routines comprised of allotted time that was scheduled to focus on completing homework. It appeared that socioeconomic status can be a factor in the problem of unestablished routines at home. Educator N noted that for students without parents available at home to set homework routines in place, usually had lower levels of academic achievements. Students with parents at home who established routines to help with
managing time had higher levels of academic achievement. Likewise, Vaden-Kieman et al. (1995) found that families considered of a lower socioeconomic status provided less attention to their children than their counterpart. This was also reflective of research that linked lower socioeconomics and lower levels of academic achievements (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). The link is clear between the socioeconomic classes associated with family types and students’ academic achievements.

According to Educator N, students reflected their parents. Though this was one participant, it was clear throughout all interviews that this was related to how the students behaved in school. All participants shared an example of how a student’s attitude towards school or their lack of work ethics reflected parents’ interaction with their students at home. For example, culture was a shared characteristic within a family and can also be reflected in students’ academics (Alvarez-Valdivia et al., 2012; Parmar, Harkness, & Super, 2004), thus an important point to be recognized when discussing students or parents within the school environment.

Family values were consistently noted as a factor in how home life affected a student’s learning at school. These values were more than the culture and traditions shared by their communities but looked at specific values of each parent and how it reflected the attitudes towards school that each child had. Educator N stated:

I had students coming to me and saying, ‘Okay, my mom doesn’t care how I do core French because it’s not an important subject.’ Then how can you expect any achievement from this student when their parents told them, ‘Don’t do that’? ‘Don’t try hard’?

This quote showed a reflection of how a parent’s opinion about certain subjects strongly influenced how students saw the value of these subjects or school as a learning environment.
These values were reflected how the parents prioritized academics; their values went hand-in-hand with setting up homework routines at home, reflecting the routines at school to prioritize academic work. Participants acknowledged that the history of the family’s experiences with school systems and teachers highly influenced how parents approached teachers and any sort of assistance program that the teachers wanted to put in place. The differences in culture were reflected in the differences of family values, as recognized by Parmar et al. (2004).

Some studies claimed families with lower socioeconomic status did not have positive approaches toward school because of their own past experiences, as well as their limited knowledge of how they could help their child learn (Entwisle & Alexander, 1996). In line with current literature, participants found that many of the parents they had difficulty communicating with were those that saw the Western education system through the lens of a different culture. Due to the parents’ past experiences in the education system and negative encounters with teachers, these parents had difficult time opening up to the participant teachers and accepting the differences between their academic experiences and their children’s academic experiences.

All of these factors tied in with the understanding that a student’s general attitude toward academic tasks were influenced by the attitudes their parents held toward education and teachers in the past. Ghazi et al. (2010) supported these stories; students’ parents as will be made evident, fostered motivation and attitudes.

Participants noticed a difference in a student’s academics when their parents were more visible around the school. Though the context was not thoroughly explained, frequently visible the parents on school property were related to the children of higher academic success. This was a possible reflection of the emphasis and priority these parents placed on school because of their personal experiences in prioritizing and achieving higher levels of education in their own
academic careers (Pianta et al., 2002). These parents were also involved beyond academics, taking part in school events and responding to teacher initiated conversations through electronic communication such as websites. Educator M compared their previous and current school of employment, Highlighting the differences in student support: “Those other 4 years, it was very difficult to get parents into the schools. A lot of parents worked night shifts; they weren’t around to help their children with homework.” The participant continued on to say that the parents and teachers had problems with communication because of the parents’ lack of availability, and so were unable to partner together in a supportive manner for the students.

All participants were consistent in positively responding to the significance of family involvement. Working with parents helped to build a strong support system for students so students could get the encouragement and resources needed for their own academic success. Family involvement was not only helpful to students in making meaning of what was learned at school, but also meant students would have meaningful people in their lives as a part of their education, giving them the motivation to persevere and work harder.

Participants were asked to think in reverse and reflect on whether they had seen students take problems from school to home, and whether it influenced them at home with their families. All participants gave examples of what they observed in their teaching. Educator O noted: “…if the students’ learning at school is not positive, they take that home. …I mean, we’ve had tons of parents, ‘we can’t get them to do homework, we fight every night, we cry every night.’” Similarly, a cycle formed where positive family interactions brought forth positive interactions at school. This was done through communication and by building strong, positive relationships between the teachers, parents, and students.
4.2 Theme Two: Relationships Between Teachers, Parents, and Students

The theme of relationships between the teacher and parent, family and student, and student and teacher was apparent in all interviews. This is reasonable was each participant noted that stakeholders must work together to build a positive academic experience for the student. All participants communicated that teachers and parents needed to work together, perhaps with teachers including more family-incorporating programs. They acknowledged the importance of teachers’ response to a parent’s thoughts and concerns. Participants briefly mentioned the relationship between parents and students, highlighting control exerted by parents on their children. Not all relationships were positive.

Participants discussed the need for a relationship between teachers and parents to support students. Educator M found communication with parents to discuss what the teacher could do to provide resources for the parents to use and support their children at home. Educator O found a student’s learning journey was smoother when parents were diligent in checking the resources teachers used to notify students of their homework. Educator N suggested having a dialogue with parents so that the parents felt heard, and responding in a way to build a stronger level of trust. All agreed that a mutual trust between teachers and parents was important to build this relationship.

One method to build trust was to deliberately include family in the learning experience. Educator N recognized not all students were able to work on projects with their families at home; they instead provided assignments that students could complete with their family or on their own. Encouraging family members’ involvement in assignment completions engaged families in the student’s learning experience as well as created a relative, contextual learning environment for the student. Sheldon & Epstein (2002) suggested home is a highly influential place, which
suggests difficult behaviours at school can be lessened through building positive home lives (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

Participants told stories of varying parent responses about students’ struggles at school. Educator M faced a situation where the parents withdrew their child from the school because they did not want any support for their child. This educator also connected with a parent who opened up as to why their child was having difficulty at school, relating to many difficulties the family was facing at home. Educator N met with parents who initially seemed distant, not wanting support, but later embraced academic support when approached in a positive manner.

Participants were from a school within a somewhat affluent neighbourhood, a factor connected to a child’s successes in life (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). They found within their school many parents’ interactions with their children enabled them to be less responsible and independent. Participants expressed the parents’ role should be to encourage their children to live more responsible and independent lives but felt there was very little motivation from parents.

On the other hand, participants found there were some parents whose relationships with the students were very tense. Often, parents put pressure on students to reach high academic scores, aligning with parents’ values in academics. Educator O noticed that unhappy and anxious students were often related to parents who were unhappy with their child’s progress, and wanted to see higher grades. Research suggests teachers can potentially help by holding parents’ education workshops to raise awareness of students’ academic future education (Friedman, 2007; Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Participants felt that some parents were too overbearing and needed to better understand the needs of their child. Participants expressed frustration with parents that did not understand how important it was for a student to have the proper tools to succeed. Often, the parents’ views
on how students should learn, based on their past experiences, prevented their children from receiving what they needed in order to succeed in school.

In addition to pressure, participants brought up parents who exerted too much control over their children. These parents were always at the schools to ensure that their child completed all their work and were noted to, “hand feed their children, and don’t want to take their eyes off their kids”. Other parents assigned extra work to their children at home, forcing the child to complete homework and then extra work on top of that, especially if the student did not appear to understand the material covered in class. They thought excessively working their child would fix the student’s struggle to understand material. Often, these students were later diagnosed with learning disabilities, though parents did not want to accept this diagnosis. One parent was unable to physically separate from their children may have struggled with mental health.

4.3 Theme Three: Perspectives of Stakeholders

The voices of the stakeholders – teachers, family, and students – were a theme that emerged. Voices of teachers were important to recognize as they narrated an understanding the relationship dynamics between the teacher, family, and student. Participants’ thoughts also explored what each party had experienced and what difficulties they were facing in their respective roles in the students’ learning experience.

The teacher’s role, as reiterated by the participants, was to do their best to provide the resources and support the student needed to achieve their personal academic success. Within this role, several responsibilities reflected how teachers could support struggling students and their circumstances.

One responsibility acknowledged by all participants was to recognize patterns of those who were struggling in school. These patterns were based on what the teachers already knew
about their students. If there was a student with high grades that took an unexpected drop in grade levels, or if a student who was usually comfortable with particular subjects was suddenly struggling in those areas, teachers needed to recognize that something else is happening. With recognition, participants said that they would approach the situation by communicating with the student and using differentiated instruction. Participants would also go to the student’s parents to talk about what was happening at home so they could be made aware of how to better support the student. The teachers’ roles were active because they made the initial move to find resources and research the background of their students. Likewise, in a study by Herold (2011), teachers found it was difficult to have a successful reading program without assistance from home. In current research, teachers were the ones to contact families and call in the school support team to discuss how to further support the student and find resources for the family. Educator N recalled:

The teachers like to discuss their students in all different ways, some which are not for the record, but at the end of the day, every teacher understands that the well-being of the student is a priority. …we always understand that at the end of the day, it’s our job to help them.

Educator M recognized that there sometimes was a need to expand the role of the teacher, which could overlap with some of the responsibilities of a parent. Some of these roles included assisting students whose parents struggled with providing supports such as putting a homework schedule together to follow or finding a social worker to talk to. This expansion of the teacher’s role was especially reflected by participants with children. Likewise, Pianta et al. (2002) stated that there were many ways to overcome the obstacles that children face academically and teachers can support students in significant ways.
Participants suggested that a parent’s perspective dependent on the family’s cultural background and experiences. Some parents asked for academic support for their child, often initiating the conversation when they felt a need. Others did not ask for support or any help for their children because they did not think that their children needed it. A parent’s perspective on a matter was important because they were often the ones that needed to approve the support systems that could be set in place for a student. Parents’ interactions with their children were also important in encouraging students aim for success at school. Research by Ghazi et al. (2010) found that attentiveness and encouragement through parent-child discussion on the child’s feelings, interests, and experiences were important in building positive attitudes towards school.

Parents were also particular on how they were approached on certain subjects. Educator O recalled a parent that thought her child was lazy, despite the praise that the teachers had for the student, who was perceived to be hard working at school. This perception made it difficult for the student to gain any support during class because the student would face consequences at home for any help that he did receive. This was particularly true for families that had parents who grew up with traditional teaching and learning methods. Parents perceived current technology, teaching methods, and provincial curriculum were enabling students to be lazy, rather than as support systems and resources to help their child’s reach their full potential. Participants expressed that, parents’ perception, not the process, were the barrier to receiving resources. Parents needed education on how technology and resources help support and assist learning so that parents could feel comfortable enough to trust the teachers, something that is also encouraged in a study by Herold (2011). A parent’s attitude toward learning had to be addressed for them to understand and encourage their children to give their best in school.
Educator N found that the student’s perspective was also important to get a full picture of the relationships between all stakeholders of their learning. Teachers needed to understand how and why students were driven to do their best in school. Without understanding this, it was difficult for teachers to talk about approaches to motivating students at school. Students were rarely found to have intrinsic motivation to learn. Instead, they valued the opinions and praise of their parents and teachers, an important reason as to why parents were needed in the child’s learning environment.

Educator N talked about how students perceived themselves. Self-perception influenced the academic success of the students. Research confirmed this claim from a behavioural and social perspective, and stated that positive attitudes and higher self-esteem were related to lower incidences of anti-social behaviours (Bronstein et al., 1996; McWayne et al., 2004). When a student had a positive perception of self and perceived their parents and teachers to be happy with the work that they produced, they were more likely to be motivated in school because: “kids need their family’s acceptance that every kid learns differently.” Educator N discussed how the motivation for success came from the parents of the students and without this motivation students would not make an effort to do better in school. Other research proves this to be true; Potvin et al. (1999) linked higher grades and other academic achievements with warm and positive parental involvement as well as praise, encouragement, and discussion about school within the family. Again, a student’s desire to do well in school was strongly motivated by the relationship they had with their parents.

4.4 Theme Four: Meeting Student and Family Needs and Suggestions

According to the participants in this study, teachers had the role of meeting a student’s academic needs and, because students’ values were a reflection of their parents, also meeting the
family’s needs. This was expressed as a need for clear, positive communication between teachers and parents, a need to have taught students the skills to be successful in later academic pursuits, and a need to have provided the proper support for students and parents to move forward in the students’ academic lives.

Communication was a frequently suggested subtheme throughout this research project. Participants consistently reiterated the need for constant and clear communication between teachers and parents to provide the best support for the students. Even outside of the academic realm, youth workers found that communication with families was crucial for young people’s development and aftercare success, despite physical separation from family during residential care (Maid, Smokowski, & Bacallao, 2008). For this study, communication took place through a variety of methods including in-person conversations, e-mails, phone calls, and Remind – an app that teachers used for one-way text reminders. Participants noticed that parents often wanted to keep these lines of communication open through the positive responses that participants received when communicating.

Educator O told a story of a parent that was constantly in the classroom and school, who asked to observe the classes of their child. Educator O clarified that the parent was not dropping in because there were issues or concerns at home, but because of her own desire to watch her child. In the end, Educator O had to communicate with the parent, build a relationship, and gain their trust so that the parent felt comfortable enough to leave the child with the participant. Good communication skills were important for teachers to have when discussing student support to invite parents into a partnership, rather than demanding or in an offensive manner. Constant communication assured parents of their child’s safety, successes, and their struggles within the classroom so that the parents did not feel isolated from their child’s learning experience.
Communication came up in almost every question of each interview, showing its importance in the field of education.

Communication was also used to exchange information between teachers and parents, giving each other background knowledge of events at school or at home, or to bring attention and awareness to behaviours or lack thereof that could indicate a student’s struggles. Communication ensured all the stakeholders were on the same page when they gathered to talk about support plans for the student.

Through communication, participants recognized how important it was for the students to learn essential life skills such as responsibility and accountability. Living in a middle class community meant that their students had privileges that not many other students held, such as having a parent or grandparent at home to dress and feed them. Not all students had parental support at home, however, and literature supports the idea that there are obstacles that many students feel they must face on their own. Teachers are invited to leave their comfort zones in order to support students in significant ways (Pianta et al., 2002). Responsibility was an encouraged life skill by the participants, such as remembering homework or carrying one’s own bag to school. These behaviours were recognized to be related to control parents exerted over their children, preventing them from learning life skills they would need in the future. Educator M stressed the need for parents to teach their children life skills at home in order to accompany the routines and learning that happening at school. One study also supports this suggestion to teach acceptable behaviours and life skills at home (Bronstein et al., 1996). Researchers noted it was important to include family when programming for students with specific needs because family members were the most knowledgeable of children’s strengths and weaknesses (Casanova et al., 2005).
Participants suggested the need for collaborated support for students from their parents and teachers. Participants expressed that they were willing to help parents by providing support for students in areas where parents felt that they were ill-equipped to. Teachers are willing to work with parents around scheduled vacations or other various obstacles to ensure that the students learned the lessons and life skills needed to be independent in the future.

Finally, participants also suggested the need to offer support for the parents as well. When the all parents within a household worked irregular or long hours, children often lacked the support needed to do well in school. In his research, Herold suggested that teachers should educate parents on how to engage and learn about their child’s learning (2011). Similarly, participants suggested offering tools and resources to parents for their own benefit, from class websites to attending workshops hosted and taught by teachers at school. This way parents were up to date and were better equipped to help their children at home.

4.5 Conclusion

In this research project, participants focused on sharing their stories on the relationships that existed between a student’s academics and their lives at home. Participants were generally in agreement with one other, and each theme supported the others.

Having the family involved in student’s academics was overall very influential, as suggested by related studies (Casanova et al., 2005; Herold, 2011). Participants found students who faced difficult situations at home were showing signs of difficulty in their academics and found this correlation to be very common. In addition, participants found the family’s culture, values, and history related to the support students were able to receive from school without having to face negative consequences at home. Parents who were more visible within the school grounds were also found to be an indication of their children doing well, probably due to the
availability of parents’ support at home and school. Finally, teachers also recognized the relationship could reverse as well and a student’s academics at school also had an influence on the student’s home life.

All participants described the importance of the relationships between the teacher, the family, and the student. Though these relationships were generally positive, starting with the collaboration of teachers and families to build support systems for students, there were many negative relationships as well. Participants articulated the difficulties that some students experienced due to their parents’ focus on academic achievements – aligning with their own personal values – and the constant pressure from parents for their child to reach this goal using only traditional methods of learning.

From here, participants looked at the perspective of the three stakeholders (teachers, parents, and students), exploring how each group perceived the relationships. Teachers generally seemed to agree on the need for parental involvement, while some parents perceived the need for their children to learn in a specific manner that was not always conducive to the student’s learning style. Participants also brought up the voice of the student, as they recognized that the student’s own values were just as important as the teacher’s or parent’s in working towards a better support system for the student’s learning.

Finally, the participants all emphasized the need for communication whenever working with the families, especially the parents, of students. They found that constant and clear communication was helpful for parents to be made aware of supports available for their children and to simplify the collaboration between teachers and parents. All participants mentioned the importance of work ethics, such as responsibility, that students needed to learn and be taught, both at home and at school, in order to round out their learning experience. The participants
discussed the support that teachers could provide for students and their families. Often times, families are unaware of how to support their children, and through communication and collaboration, teachers and parents are able to make the school a better learning environment where students can thrive.

Next, in Chapter 5, some implications and recommendations based on this current study will be suggested. There will also be suggestions for future research in this field of study as well as some final thoughts at the closing of this research project.
Chapter 5 – IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Introductory Overview

The current study explored teachers’ perspectives on family involvement in students’ academics. In this chapter, the previous chapters will be summarized and the implications of this research project will be discussed. Chapter 5 will also provide a brief overview of the key findings and their importance in context of this research as well as in the broader context of education. This chapter will discuss how current and new teachers can apply the findings of this project and will suggest directions for future research.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Significance

In the previous chapter, interviews with the participants of this study brought up very similar answers from which emerged four general themes: implications of involving family in students’ academics, relationships between teacher, family, and student, perspectives of stakeholders, and meeting student and family needs. These themes pointed to the concept of partnership between teachers and parents to support students in their educational and personal growth.

In the first theme, the implications of family life on academics were reflective of events at home. For example, some students’ successes were thought to be dependent on a parent’s assistance and support, rather than the individual student is ability. Routines at home that are reflective of school routines are helpful for students to achieve academic success. Students are a reflection of their parents and their values; if the parents placed school as a priority, then students accepted these values as their own. Other implications included how parents who were physically at the school more often were associated with higher achieving students. Participants also saw that the decisions made by teachers had an influence on the students’ lives at home.
Positive learning at school was associated with happier parents, related to happier home lives for students.

The relationships between teacher, family, and student were a common second theme. Participants mentioned the importance of collaboration between parents and teachers. Collaboration meant sharing important details from home and school that could influence a student’s academic performance and personal development. Teachers were encouraged to intentionally include family in programs so that a student could learn and grow with parents and parents can become more aware of the student’s learning. One participant encouraged positive communication to work through difficult scenarios with teachers and parents. Between parents and students, there was found to be a lack of support for academic failures in addition to achievements and students did not seem to enjoy school when parents exerted a lot of control over their children.

In the third theme, participants expanded on the different perspectives of the stakeholders: the teacher, family, and student. For teachers, there were additional responsibilities that saw the importance of gaining family support to help their students achieve. Sometimes teachers needed to initiate conversation around providing support for a student to do well in school. For parents it could be difficult to receive support for their child because some parents felt it would encourage laziness. Parents were open to understand how additional help would benefit their child when teachers took the time to approach this subject from a positive perspective. Finally, students needed intrinsic motivation from how they perceived their parents and teachers to view the students’ works and efforts. The more the students received encouraging feedback, the more effort they put forth.
In the final theme, participants discussed how teachers can meet the needs of both student and family. Constant and clear communication was key and helpful to ensure teachers and parents were aware of what influenced the student. Teaching important various life skills, like responsibility and developing positive and healthy work ethics, would help them later in life. It was also important that there was support for parents as well. Often parents want to help, but are unaware of how they can be involved. Teachers were encouraged to give parents resources and support as well.

Overall, participants were for family involvement as it benefit their students, as literature finds. The data collected has implications for further development of the educational system.

5.2 Implications

In this study, there are important implications for a variety of circumstances. The broad implications of this research include the importance of making changes to encourage teachers to support families. In a more focused perspective, this research showed me that as a future teacher it is important to intentionally and deliberately incorporate family into the lessons and homework that are sent home. As well, it is important to communicate with other teachers to collect information and share resources in order to make informed decisions.

5.2.1 Broad

This present study looks at how teachers perceive family involvement as an important factor in a student’s success in school, but all layers of the education system can help to develop a supportive educational environment.

First of all, it is important for all sectors in the field of education to understand the importance of families in students’ academic successes as how teachers see it. All of the participants in this project gave recommendations for how parents can be involved. These
changes can be applied if the field of education acknowledge and accept this information is provided present by the front line workers in education – the teachers. Presently, there are steps being taken to educate upcoming and current teachers on families. These efforts include conferences, such as the Building Futures Conference, that consist of workshops to help provide information on including families in education.

This research encourages all levels and divisions within the Ministry of Education to reflect on what is available right now as support for the parents of students in elementary classrooms. How can they further assist teachers to help develop a partnership with parents to support future students? What are some ways that families can be supported so that all students have similar opportunities to succeed? The provincial level of education can provide culturally-sensitive methods to support the students who are having difficulty at home and help encourage a positive view of school by parents. Understanding the perspectives of teachers, parents, and students also allows for a deeper understanding of the root of students’ struggles, helpful in finding solutions for the root problems within the education system, not just the symptoms.

Finally, school boards are responsible for taking care of the teachers, families, and students by providing funds for various programs and forming school councils, including the Parent Involvement Committee (People for Education, 2009). This research helps school boards see and understand where teachers see need for more financial program support and focus on those areas. School boards can give room for teachers and parents to work together so that the support system for students is stronger and more complete. As this current research finds, students’ successes are linked to parental involvement and teacher-parent partnerships can help to cover any gaps within the support that each party provides.
5.2.2 Narrow

Beyond the implications for school boards, individual schools and teachers can partner with parents by encouraging them to participate in a variety of ways that reflects the diversity of family lifestyles. Schools can include and modify programs or events to deliberately incorporate family involvement so that parents and students can enjoy the learning experience together. Teachers can engage families in ways that reflect their identity. In addition, students can use these experiences with their parents to build intrinsic motivation through admiring their work alongside parents and teachers.

On a smaller scale, I find that this research reveals much about a family’s influence on a student. For me, as a new teacher, family is important to include for any part of a child’s life. In fact, one literature review directly reflects how important families are in children’s growth (Lee, 2015) and participants in this current study are also in agreement. In this research project, however, it became very clear that teaching is beyond just classroom management and understanding concepts. In fact, these two important aspects of teaching are difficult to achieve in the isolation of the classroom. Teachers have to ensure that students are not distracted from learning at school because of home circumstances. Teachers are unable to change the circumstances in a child’s life, but it is possible to be aware of home issues so that teachers can make adjustments to help balance a student’s life. Teachers will influence a child within the many hours spent with the child in a day and even through the assignments given can influence a student as much as a fight at home can affect a child. The participants seem to agree that all circumstances must be taken into consideration when teaching. Teachers need to look beyond the classroom and see more than what is directly in front of them.
As a researcher, this research project is very revealing about how aware teachers are of their students’ circumstances. New teachers are encouraged to talk to their experienced co-workers for support, though initially I felt that I would be a burden and decided not to. After completing the interviews for this research project however, it has become very clear that the process for this project is the same process that teachers go through to gain knowledge and understanding about their own students. A teacher cannot effectively teach without knowing the students just like a researcher cannot understand a perspective without interviewing. Hopefully my research helped new teachers realize that talking to other teachers and asking for support is a way of researching how to become a better teacher and better support their students. In addition, the experiences that teachers speak of may help new teachers build better relationships with parents and avoid mistakes that others have made in the past.

5.3 Recommendations

It is not enough to solely acknowledge that families are important in students’ academics. Tangible changes must be made so that the acknowledgement turns into action. There are three recommendations that arose from the implications of this study:

1. Recognize the importance of engaging parents beyond the school property;
2. Provide more professional development (PD) opportunities for teachers;
3. Open up the floor for teachers to voice how they can be supported to engage parents.

J. Niger, from the Ministry of Education, stated that there are current efforts by the Ministry of Education that are expressed through the Parent Engagement Strategy (personal communication, January 12, 2016). He recommends that boards and schools recognize the value of parent involvement in the home. In line with what participants state in this study, when boards and schools recognize the importance of parent involvement, there may be more resources for
teachers to engage with parents outside of the school property without having to disrupt their personal schedules. Niger (personal communication, January 12, 2016) states, “Too often, boards and schools talk and think about only the types of parent involvement that happen only at the schools”.

Professional development is recommended by Niger to encourage professionals towards providing more opportunities for parents to become involved in their children’s academic careers (personal communication, January 12, 2016). Professional development opportunities are resources with which teachers can be empowered to discuss the issues that both teachers and parents face in communicating with each other. According to Niger, teachers can learn through professional development how to overcome the obstacles to parent involvement and better serve the community that they are working in (personal communication, January 12, 2016).

This research focuses on how teachers perceive this relationship between family and school and the influences it has on student academic achievement. Through this study, it is clear that teachers are already quite aware of what is happening in their students’ lives. This research recommends that policy makers within the field of education give teachers more voice to speak on what would help support the families and students that they work with. From administrators to school boards to the Ministry of Education, teachers should be the primary source for data on how parents are currently invited into students’ learning, how parent involvement can be improved, and how teachers can be supported so that teacher-parent relationships can be strengthened.

In addition to the recommendations that this study implies, further research should be completed in order to find scientific data that can help to support all levels in the field of education.
5.4 Areas for Further Research

The findings of this research can be taken in many directions. Future research can explore how specific home circumstances influence students at school or how specific school events influence students at home. Studies can look at how various types of families, based on family structure, culture or socioeconomic status, influence students differently at school and compare the students’ academic achievements. Without the limitations of this research project, future studies can make students’ voices heard with their own stories of how their families and teachers influence their learning and successes. Research can further look at how school achievement influences home life and try to pinpoint where this cycle starts.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This research aimed to explore how teachers see the influence of family life on students at school. The results are clear in stating that teachers saw family life as a crucial influence on students’ learning in many different ways including parent involvement at school to the implementation of regular routines at home dedicated for schoolwork.

The voices of the participants in this project spoke from years of experience that now enlighten lay people about the importance of families in education. These voices spoke to make clear that academics are more than simply studying in a classroom and more than a teacher who is able to clearly explain concepts.

The themes that emerged from this research project are important for anyone that has a direct or indirection relationship to academics, whether it is through their own experiences, their perspective on education, the financial stakeholders and administrative teams that influence the schools, or those who have a person close to them that are attending elementary school. By understanding the influences on a student’s academic achievements, one is learning that
education is beyond the physical walls that indicate where academic learning is expected to happen. Understanding the exterior, and often implicit, factors ensure that students can get the support they need from all areas of school so the support for their learning is well grounded.
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Appendix A: Form

September 2015

To the participants in this study,

My name is Grace and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the perspectives of teachers on the relationship between students’ learning and behaviours and their home lives. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have had more than 5 years’ experience interacting with students and their families. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

The purpose of the present study is to explore how the home lives of primary students affect their learning and behaviours at school, from a teacher’s perspective. The various home life factors that teachers perceive as affecting students’ learning at school will be explored. The primary-level educators participating in this study will be selected based on the number of years they have had experiences with students with learning difficulties or based on the school environment and whether or not there is a high level of awareness for students with learning difficulties.

This local study will be carried out in Toronto, Ontario under the supervision of Professor Ken McNeilly, Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning in Education, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. The data is being collected for the purposes of a Master of Teaching Research Project and perhaps for subsequent research articles.

A pre-interview questionnaire will be provided initially to collect background information. This will be followed by a face-to-face interview of approximately 30-60 minutes. During the interview you will be asked questions about your thoughts and perspectives on the influence families have on your students’ learning and behaviours, your expectations and responsibilities as a teacher, your satisfaction and concerns, the ways in which you perceive your role changing in supporting your students, and the nature of external influences on your opinions. As the interview proceeds, I may ask questions for clarification or further understanding, but my part will be mainly to listen to you speak about your views, experiences, and the reasons you believe the things you do. During the interview, I will be using several recording device to allow for a transcription of the interview, which will be returned to you for review and any editing. Additionally, I may take notes to supplement the recorded interview. After the interview, I will write brief notes that will be used to assist me in remembering the surroundings of the interview (i.e., characteristics of the site).

It is the intention that each interview will be audio taped and later transcribed to paper. You will be assigned a number that will correspond to your interviews and transcriptions. Your transcript will be sent to you to read in order for you to add any further information or to correct any
misinterpretations that could result. The information obtained in the interview will be kept in
strict confidence and stored at a secure location. All information will be reported in such a way
that individual persons, schools, school districts, and communities cannot be identified. All raw
data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

You may at any time refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the interview process. You
may request that any information, whether in written form or audiotape, be eliminated from the
project. At no time will value judgments will be placed on your responses nor will any
evaluation be made of your effectiveness as a teacher. Finally, you are free to ask any questions
about the research and your involvement with it and may request a summary of the findings of
the study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (416) 824-3124 or at
gjy.lee@mail.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Ken McNeilly at
kenneth.mcneilly@utoronto.ca. Finally, you may also contact the U of T Office of Research
Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or
416-946-3273.

Thank you in advance for your participation.

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I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions
that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from
this research study at any time without penalty.
I have read the letter provided to me by Grace Lee and agree to participate in an interview for the
purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Name: ___________________________ School: ___________________________
Signed: ________________________ Date: ____________________________

Please initial if you would like a summary of the findings of the study upon completion: _____
Please keep a copy of this form for your records.
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Section A: Background
1) How many years have you worked as a teacher? What settings?
2) Have you worked with students that had families involved in their academics? If so, how long?
3) What are your thoughts on the relationship between home and school?*

Section B: What/How
4) Is there a relationship between a child’s learning and his or her family that you have seen in your teaching career? If so, what is the connection and how do you think students are affected?
5) Describe some of the academic successes and failures of students and any relations to their home lives that you may have seen.
   a. How do you and your colleagues discuss the relationship between students’ academics and family?
6) What sort of trends or patterns do you link to family life?
7) After you meet family members of a student, have there been times where a student’s learning at school is better understood? Can you give an example?
8) Have you seen any active inclusion or exclusion of family in a student’s learning program? If so, how did it affect the student and his/her academics?
9) Do you think any of the students’ achievements and non-achievements at school are related to their home lives? If so, how?
10) If you have addressed students’ academic concerns with their family, what are some methods you have used?
11) Have families or students responded to your address of students’ academic successes or failures? If so, how?

Section C: Why?
12) How do families react or respond (if at all) to their children’s successes or failures in school?
   a. Can you give examples of families that did not respond the way you hoped?
13) Why do you think some families respond negatively or positively if/when you suggest support for their child?
14) How did you know if a student’s academic success/failure was affected/not affected by home life? Are there any connections?
15) Do you think that the students’ learnings affect their family life? Why or why not? To what extent?
16) Why do you think that students’ achievements or non-performance is thought to be linked with their families?

Section D: Barriers/Next Steps
17) Do you think that families should be involved in children’s academics? Why or why not?
   a. If so… what do you think teachers can do to help students who appear to have little/no support at home?
b. What are some ways that you can encourage or prevent family life to influence academics?

18) What would you like to suggest for other teachers to support students who struggle in school for home life reasons (negative or positive – families take many vacations/trips)?

19) What are some strategies that you feel would help students at school and at home?

20) What are changes you would like to make for some of your own students at school to help them with their learning?

21) Any last thoughts? Anything you feel is important to mention?