STRATEGIES AND METHODS FOR INCREASING
TEACHER-PARENT COLLABORATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate successful implementation of teacher-parent collaboration in elementary classrooms. The primary research question guiding this study was: What strategies and methods do a small sample of elementary teachers use to foster a collaborative relationship with parents and what benefits have they observed for their students? Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with two elementary teachers currently working in Halton District School Board schools. For the participants of this study, teacher-parent collaboration aided in the overall learning experience for their entire class as well as improved their classroom management strategies. The findings of this study suggest that teacher-parent collaboration is enhanced when teachers use the knowledge they have gleaned from their previous experiences, both personal and professional. The implications of these findings point out that teacher-parent collaboration is significantly impacted by the role teachers, school administrators, school boards and the Ministry of Education play. Considering these implications, there are some significant changes that need to be implemented to see the full benefit for teacher-parent collaboration in Ontario classrooms. One example is a focus for administrators and schools boards to offer professional development workshops on implementing successful teacher-parent collaboration. By gaining a broader understanding of collaboration, teachers would be better equipped to work with parents and overcome challenges they may face. Ultimately, this study has pointed to the essential nature of teacher-parent collaboration as well as the commitment that teachers need to have to be successful.

Key Words: collaboration, teacher-parent collaboration, teacher strategies, best practices, team work
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1.0 Introduction: Research Context and Problem

Parents have a desire to see their children succeed. Teachers also share that desire. However, many parents feel they lack the knowledge to assist their children in school (Epstein, 2010). Teachers similarly are often unsure how they can involve parents in the education of their children due to a lack of teacher training (Henderson & Berla, 1994) as well as feelings of insecurity and fear of confrontation (Comer, 2005). Research indicates, however, that an increase in a child’s academic success can often be attributed to teacher-parent collaboration (Berger and Riojas-Cortez, 2012; Mapp, 2003; Shumow & Miller, 2001). Some of the benefits of this collaboration which have been clearly documented include the following: higher grades, better attendance and more positive attitudes towards education (Henderson & Berla 1994; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Mapp 2003; Oyserman, Brickman & Rhodes, 2007). In light of these benefits it is essential for teachers and parents to work together despite any of the challenges.

This knowledge resulted in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (OMOE) (2010a; 2010b; 2014b) development and implementation of strategies to engage all parents as part of their mandate to create equitable and inclusive schools. Within the framework of home-school collaborations, there is a focus on changing perceptions and increasing parent involvement. Parental involvement is a significant goal and target for educational reform, emphasizing the importance of Ontario educators’ working together, as well as building trust and confidence with parents (OMOE, 2010a).

Even though there is strong evidence of the positive impact a parent’s involvement has on their children’s education, many schools are still not experiencing significant teacher-parent
collaboration (Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997; OMOE 2010b; Pena 2000). More awareness is needed of the benefits teachers observe through parental collaboration (Zellerman & Waterman, 1998) as well as a better understanding of why parents are not being involved in their child’s education (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Research suggests that there are many factors that impede collaborations between teachers and parents, such as insecurities about language differences, negative school communication and lack of teacher training (Brooks, 2009; Lemmer, 2011; Mapp 2003; Pena 2000). As a result of these challenges, teachers and parents are not collaborating.

It is worth noting, the most significant role in a child’s education shifts depending on their age. For the early formative years of a child’s life, a parent is generally the most significant adult role model. When a child turns school-aged, the role of the teacher increases dramatically since they often see the child for more hours a day than the parents. During the school day, from a legal perspective, a teacher has the right and responsibility to act in loco parentis, meaning that a teacher’s role is to act in place of a parent (Kitchen & Dean, 2011). When this strict separation between the role of the parent and teacher occurs, a student’s achievement is affected. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers and parents improve their collaboration skills, so that students can be the beneficiaries. As Henderson and Berla (1994) state, “when schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life” (p. 1).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

As research has indicated, a student’s academic success improves when teachers and parents collaborate (Berger & Riojas-Cortez, 2012; Mapp, 2003; Shumow & Miller, 2001).
The purpose of this study was to examine and explore what strategies and methods elementary teachers use to foster teacher-parent collaboration and to explore what benefits they have observed for students. Ultimately, it was my hope that the findings of this research would encourage more effective teacher-parent collaboration, which in turn will enhance student achievement.

1.2 Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this study was: What strategies and methods do a small sample of elementary teachers use to foster a collaborative relationship with parents and what benefits have they observed for their students? A few of the subsidiary questions that helped to further guide this research include:

- What strategies and methods do teachers find most effective in fostering parent involvement in the classroom?
- Why do these teachers believe in teacher-parent collaboration?
- What resources do teachers find most helpful to promote parent involvement?
- What challenges do these teachers experience when collaborating with parents? What is their response to these challenges?
- What are some of the tangible benefits that teachers see when parent collaboration is established?

A primary goal of this research was to raise teacher awareness concerning the importance of collaboration with parents and the benefits that can occur.
1.3 Background of the Researcher

The topic of teacher-parent collaboration was of particular interest to me due to my experience as a parent with school-aged children. Over the past six years, I have had the privilege of collaborating with both of my children’s teachers. During this time, I became aware of a fear some teachers have of collaborating with parents due to perceived challenges. The result of these fears was that some teachers avoided collaboration all together. As a parent who seeks to be involved in my own children’s education, the transition into a teacher education program led me to be specifically interested in learning more about how collaborative relationships can lead to higher student achievement. As a future educator, I am interested in learning how to effectively foster teacher-parent collaboration for my students, so that they can reach their full potential.

As I reflect on my own experience as a student, my parents were very involved in my education. Since they both worked full time, they were not able to actively participate in school field trips or classroom activities, but they always placed a high value on education and academic success. From primary school until now, as I start my Master of Teaching program, my parents encouragement and support has been constant. I knew the importance of education from a very early age, not necessarily from conversations that we had, although that did occur, but even more so from the support I received. Over the course of my elementary, high-school and two under graduate degrees, my father in particular, has played the role of editor for many of my papers. Giving hours of his time without anything in return, other than the personal satisfaction of assisting me, he has helped me succeed and become a better writer. My mother always played the supportive role, while gently pushing me to try harder and always do my best. My parents set
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high goals for my brother and I and expected our personal best, no matter what the challenge. They valued education and taught us to do the same.

My own childhood experiences have greatly impacted how I parent, as is probably the case for most parents. I have always tried to be actively involved in my children’s learning. As a stay-at-home mom for nine years, I was able to invest a lot of time and energy into my children’s lives. Since my first-born was in Junior Kindergarten, I have tried to actively participate by volunteering both in the classroom, as well as on field trips and during school-wide events. As I contemplate my participation in my children’s education as well as my parents involvement in mine, I never really formally considered it as teacher-parent collaboration. I guess I took it for granted and thought it was “normal”. However, I now know that my experience is not indicative of the experiences of all other parents. In fact, my experiences have occurred fairly easily due to my privilege of not only having knowledge and experience with the Ontario school system (being a student here myself) but also my ability to communicate in my first language with my children’s teachers. I also acknowledge that not all parents, by personal choice or financial restrictions, have the opportunities I have had as a stay-at-home mother to participate at my children’s school. I have also learned through conversations with friends who are both teachers and parents, through volunteering at my children’s school and as I have witnessed during my practicum placements, that teacher-parent collaboration is anything but the norm. In reality, both teachers and parents, for various reasons, often choose separation over partnership.

As my role changes, I will be on the “other” side of things. I will be the teacher. I will be expected to collaborate with parents despite any of the challenges. As I transition into my new role as educator, I have become particularly interested in how teacher-parent collaboration can be
improved and more widely promoted for its benefits. My childhood experiences, as well as my experiences as a parent, have impacted my view of collaboration, resulting in my desire to see collaboration in my own future classrooms as well as the classrooms of others.

1.4 Overview

In order to respond to the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study, using a purposeful sampling to interview two teachers about the ways they collaborate with parents and the benefits of this collaboration on their student’s learning. In Chapter 2, I review the literature of teacher-parent collaboration. Next, in Chapter 3, I discuss my research design and include background information about the participants, the data collection and its limitations. Then, in Chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing research literature. In Chapter 5, I identify the implications of my research findings for my own teacher identity and practice and for the educational community as a whole. I also look at a series of questions that have been raised by the research findings and suggest areas for future research. References and a list of appendices are included at the end.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will provide a review of the literature on teacher-parent collaboration. More specifically, I review the key components of collaboration, as well as the varying definitions of parent collaboration and consider the support that research has provided to this collaboration. Next, I consider the benefits of teacher-parent collaboration on student achievement for students, and also for parents, teachers and schools. Then, I review the research on the challenges that teachers and parents face in building collaborative relationships. Finally, I highlight some of the best practices that have been suggested, tested and implemented to improve teacher-parent collaboration.

2.1 Key Components of Collaboration

Though both researchers and policy analysts recognize the significant role teacher-parent collaboration can play in a child’s academic success, they can differ in what is actually involved in teacher-parent collaboration.

2.1.1 Defining collaboration

Traditionally, collaboration has been defined as positive interactions between teachers and parents occurring inside the school to improve a student’s academic performance (Peterson, 2010). After many years of research though, there has been a shift to recognize that home-based interactions can also have a positive impact on a child’s education (OMOE, 2010b). Researchers have suggested that when a parent communicates academic expectations to their child or they simply portray a positive attitude about education, they are in fact, collaborating with the teacher and this needs to be recognized (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Tyson, 2009). In light of
this shift, the OMOE (2010b) has defined a parent volunteer as “not only someone who helps out at school during the day but also anyone who supports school goals and children’s learning and development in any way, at any place, and at any time” (p. 10). Though it may require some adjustment for teachers as well as parents, this shift is important to note since it more accurately captures what collaboration can and should entail.

This shift is also captured by the differences highlighted in Epstein and Salinas’ (2004) discussion on two possible learning environments - one that is non-collaborative and one that is. A professional learning community occurs when teams of educators and administrators work together to improve school programs and student progress. This mind-set determines how administrators lead their schools (Epstein, 2005). Whereas, a school learning community is where educators work together with students, parents and community partners to improve programs and learning opportunities, incorporating both a child’s home and school life. A key component of a school learning community is that all families are welcomed so that an inclusive environment is created. Research has shown that a school learning community can, “improve schools, strengthen families, invigorate community support and increase student achievement and success” (Epstein & Salinas, 2004, p. 12). Similarly, Henderson and Berla (1994) argue that when it comes to educating a child, “[n]either families nor schools can do [it] alone” (p. 12).

2.1.2 Policies on collaboration in Ontario

As part of their policy to increase parent engagement throughout the province, OMOE (2010b) has broadened its view on teacher-parent collaboration. In fact, the ministry website states,
it is equally important to recognize that parent involvement takes many forms [including]: serving on school councils and Parent Involvement Committees (PICs), volunteering for field trips and school activities, making sure there is a quiet place set aside to do homework, helping with homework, meeting with teachers, [and] talking to [a] child about their day at school (para 3).

Schools and school boards are expected to expand parental involvement by engaging parents and listening to their views when new plans and strategies are implemented, making communication more accessible to parents and ensuring that policies and programs are both equitable and inclusive (OMOE, 2010b). The OMOE’s (2014a) vision is to “provide greater support to ensure parents and guardians are welcomed, respected and valued by the school community as partners in their children’s education”(p. 7). It is also important to note that the OMOE (2010b) has not only mandated collaboration across the province, they have also created regional grants called Parents Reaching Out that are made available to school councils and parent organizations that are working closely with schools, school boards and also post-secondary institutions. In their efforts to increase parental involvement and student achievement, OMOE (2016) has awarded 17,000 grants since 2006 totalling more than $27.5 million. “Yet, [as OMOE (2010b) states] much remains to be done if we are to realize the full potential of parent engagement” (p. 27).

2.2 Benefits of Teacher-Parent Collaboration

As already stated, the benefits of teacher-parent collaboration have been well documented. When teachers and parents work together to help students succeed, not only students but parents, teachers and schools benefit, as will be demonstrated in this section.
2.2.1 For students

Research clearly indicates that families who work in partnership with schools contribute to the best possible education for students (Berger & Riojas, 2012; Allen, 2009). In fact, researchers argue that the primary factor for a child’s success or failure is a parent’s interest and support in their education (Bronfenbrenner, 1974 as cited in Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Bressie 1997). Arguably, one of the biggest rewards of teacher-parent collaboration is greater academic achievement and success for students.

When collaboration is at its best, “families become involved and students become more positive about school and learning...[and there is an] improvement in students’ attendance, behaviour, homework completion, and report card grades” (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004, p. 23). Similarly, other studies have found that the benefits of teacher-parent collaboration for students include: higher grades, better attendance, more completed homework, positive attitudes, fewer behaviour problems, higher graduation rates as well as increased enrolment in postsecondary education (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Sheldon, 2007). Furthermore, collaboration has also shown to increase self confidence in children whose parent’s are involved in their education (Grolnick and Slowiacek, 1994). As Mapp (2003) points out, there is over “three decades of research [showing]...a strong link between educational benefits to children and various forms of family engagement” (p. 36).

2.2.2 For parents

Other than the personal satisfaction of seeing their children succeed, there are additional benefits for parents. These include increased parenting knowledge and skills, improved interactions with both their child and the child’s teacher as well as a deeper understanding of the
role and job of a teacher (Epstein, 1990). When teachers and parents work together, parents not only develop more positive attitudes towards school and become more actively involved (Epstein, 1986), but their self-confidence increases which can lead them to pursue post-secondary studies (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson, 1988). As Henderson and Berla (1994) point out, collaboration can actually “strengthen the family not only as a learning environment, but as an economic unit” (p.15). For parents engaged in their child’s academic success, parents not only see the child succeed but can also gain self-confidence, more commitment to education as well as improved parent-child relationships.

2.2.3 For teachers and schools

Teachers as well as schools also benefit from collaboration with parents. While some teachers can struggle to find time to plan activities, for example, collaboration with parents can provide these teachers with numerous volunteer hours, proving to be an invaluable resource and support (OMOE, 2014a). Teachers who collaborate with parents report having more positive feelings towards their teaching as well as their school, a deeper understanding of the needs of their students and the ability to give more individualized attention to students with the help of parent volunteers (Epstein, 1990). There is also an added sense of community within a school when teachers and parents are building positive relationships (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie, 1992; Allen, 2009). Research also suggests that schools that have teacher-parent collaboration outperform schools that have little or no parent involvement (Epstein, 1987; Henderson, 1988). Moreover, research has also shown that collaboration can improve a school’s reputation within the community (Henderson & Berla, 1994). The OMOE (2014a) states that: “[p]arents who are engaged and actively involved in their child’s learning make Ontario’s great
schools even stronger…and with more students succeeding, public confidence in the education system can be enhanced” (p. 17).

2.3 The Challenges

Despite the documented benefits of teacher-parent collaboration including “improv[ing] schools, strengthen[ing] families, invigorat[ing] community support and increas[ing] student achievement and success” (Epstein and Salinas, 2004, p 12), the fact remains that collaboration between teachers and parents is still not widely practiced (Henderson & Berla, 1994; OMOE, 2010b). In fact, despite the benefits, there are extensive challenges that impede teacher-parent collaboration in schools today. Tensions between home and school as well as a lack of teacher training prove to make it difficult for effective collaboration to be realized (Pena, 2000; Comer 2005). There are many factors that can impede teacher-parent collaboration and lead to both sides developing false assumptions and stereotypes. “In the most severely dysfunctional schools, parents, teachers, and administrators don't like, trust, or respect one another…[which reinforces] low academic and social performance and generates blame” (Comer, 2005, p 39).

2.3.1 Tensions between home and school

Cultural, racial and economic differences, as well as work schedules, often create barriers between parents and teachers that limit collaboration (Mapp, 1997; Pena, 2000). Poor communication and organization, such as insufficient notice for teacher meetings, assemblies and field trips can further the tension that impedes collaboration (Murray, et al., 2014). Language barriers can also result in low parental engagement (Vellymalay, 2012). Schools become inaccessible when parents don’t speak the same language of the school administration and staff, especially if school communications, newsletters and meetings are not translated for parents.
(Pena, 2000). These language barriers have produced feelings of inadequacy and often feelings of failure in parents, leading to lower participation (Liontos, 1991 as cited in Rudnitski, 1992).

A parent's own academic experiences can also cause tensions and barriers for collaboration. If a parent has had negative school experiences, studies show that they are more reluctant to participate at their child’s school (Comer, 2005) and they can also pass these negative experiences or attitudes onto their children, which in turn inhibits student achievement (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Conversely, Mapp (2003) found that a parent’s level of participation can be positively influenced by their own parent’s involvement in their schooling. Yet, others are motivated to be involved in their children’s education by their own parent’s lack of involvement (Mapp, 2003).

A parent's self-efficacy can also play a significant role in how involved they are at school as well. Parents with limited education are not as likely to engage in school involvement and may avoid contacting teachers because they feel self-conscious (Mapp, 1997). Parents may also avoid teacher contact because they feel that their own inadequacies are reflected in their children and assume that teachers will criticize them or their children (Karther & Lowden, 1997). In their study, Murray et al. (2014), found that teachers were generally contacting parents only when problems with the students needed to be addressed or for mandatory parent interviews which resulted in negative and often hostile interactions. These negative interactions can cause tension between home and school creating additional barriers for future collaboration.

Families of lower socioeconomic status can sometimes feel apprehensive and uncomfortable around schools where parent volunteers tend to come from middle class families
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(Karther & Lowden, 1997). All too often in these cases, “dissatisfaction, frustration and even hostility mark the relationship between home and school” (Lemmer, 2011, p 95).

2.3.2 Lack of training

Teachers often feel self-conscious or insecure about having parents in the classroom (Pena, 2000; Comer 2005). Contributing to this challenge is the lack of teacher training in the area of collaboration and building family partnerships (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Epstein, 1990 & 2005). As Epstein (1990) argues, “[m]ost family texts and courses ignore school, and most education courses ignore the family” (p. 118). Teachers rely almost solely on their own knowledge and teaching experience when working with parents because they receive very little support and instruction on how to collaborate and involve parents in their classrooms (Lemmer, 2001; Moles, 1993 as cited in Pena, 2000). In an article for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Richards (2009) argues that “roadblocks to helping parents are numerous: It’s hard to identify the best or right way for parents to be involved…[and] teachers are not trained to help parents, and the responsibilities of doing so often are seen as falling outside their job descriptions” (para 10). As a result, many teachers leave it to a parent’s discretion to engage in their child’s education (Epstein, 2005). More research is needed on how to better equip teachers and administrators to foster collaboration between home and school (Mapp, 2003).

2.4 Best Practices for Creating Strong Teacher-Parent Collaboration

By creating a collaborative environment where everyone feels valued and included, schools can foster increased parent engagement and as a result contribute to improved student achievement. Comer (2005) states, “if parents could be involved in ways that threatened neither the parents nor the teachers, parental involvement would reach a critical mass that could
transform even the most dysfunctional school” (p. 39). Research has provided some best practices for how these collaborative school environments can be created, which will be highlighted in this section.

Firstly, schools who are effective in parent engagement also actively seek to understand families’ backgrounds, cultures, goals, as well as the needs of their students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; OMOE, 2010b; Allen, 2009). Effective schools are better able to unify academics and family life together, since both play such a significant role in a child’s life (Epstein, 1990). While “it may be impossible to meet the needs of all parents or [to] get all parents involved, considering the factors that influence parents can lead to increased parent involvement” (Pena, 2000, p. 53). Essentially, parents who feel welcomed and invited to participate and collaborate at their child’s school are more likely to engage and contribute (Comer, 2005; Mapp, 2003; OMOE, 2010b; Pena, 2000; Richards, 2009; Vellymalay, 2012).

Secondly, ongoing communication with parents, about both their children’s academic successes as well as struggles, plays a vital role in creating a collaborative environment. Research has shown that “teachers who were leaders in parent involvement did not make stereotypic judgements about poor parents, less-educated parents, or single parents that were made by other teachers” (Epstein, 1990, p. 112). Furthermore, teachers who ensure that communication with parents is well timed and delivered through a variety of methods (Murray et al., 2014; Epstein, 1990) as well those who are flexible in offering alternative meeting times for parents (Pena, 2000; Epstein, 1990) have more successful and effective collaboration.

Communication to parents has also been prioritized at a provincial level. OMOE (2010b) has mandated, as part of their parent engagement strategy, that all schools expand their
communication strategies and provide parents with the knowledge and tools to help support their child’s education. School administrators also play a key role in ensuring that communication is consistent and equitable for all parents (Epstein, 1987).

Thirdly, support from the resource teachers and school administration is critical for successful parent involvement in schools (Brooks, 2009; Mapp, 2003; Pena, 2000; Sheldon, 2007). It is fundamental for administrators to work at developing their staff’s ability to collaborate with families. It is also essential that everyone “embraces a philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power with families…[ensuring everyone] understand[s] that the responsibility for children’s educational development is a collaborative enterprise (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 14). The principal can play a key role in creating a collaborative environment at a school by actively engaging teachers, providing teachers with relevant research strategies, encouraging teachers to work together to engage parents and modelling a positive attitude (Epstein, 1987). Schools need to make teacher-parent collaboration a top priority and not just as Mapp (2003) states, “pay lip service to the importance of family involvement” (p. 60).

Fourthly, in order for better integration of teacher-parent collaboration to occur more teacher training is needed. There is a need for pre and in service programs for both teachers and administrators to help establish more competency in building school-family partnerships (Mapp, 2003). Due to the lack of college training, “teacher in-service courses are forced to do ‘double duty’ by providing theoretical and research background on partnerships along with guidelines for practice” (Epstein, 2005, p.135). Identifying leaders as well as establishing action committees who will commit to gaining and applying new knowledge, on a school board level, can also aid in establishing more effective family partnerships (Epstein, 2005).
Some research, though, suggests that parenting styles can also play a role in a child’s academic success. Zellman and Waterman (1998) argue that parenting styles may play an even more important role than teacher-parent collaboration; reasoning that because parenting is ongoing it would play a more significant role. Some research, however, suggests that effective teacher-parent collaboration can, in fact, enhance parenting styles. Epstein (1990) argues that the effect on a parent’s behaviour, both knowledge and skills, can sometimes be the easiest to change when there is an increase in parent involvement. Regardless of the validity of Zellman and Waterman’s (1998) research, it does not lessen the importance of teacher-parent collaboration in improving student’s academic success. In fact, one could argue that when teacher-parent collaboration is combined with effective parenting styles the child is even more likely to succeed.

2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review I examined research related to teacher-parent collaboration. This review analyzed the varying definitions given to teacher-parent collaboration. It also discussed the benefits observed for students, parents as well as teachers and schools. Despite the many benefits, there can be many challenges that cause tensions between home and school. These challenges are magnified due to a lack of teacher training which can increase the difficulties in making teacher-parent collaboration a reality. There is, however, research that suggests teacher-parent collaboration is feasible if schools and parents are able to work together by building a relationship of trust and respect. In light of this, I hope to contribute further to the instructional strategies and methods used by elementary teachers to foster successful teacher-parent collaboration as emphasized in the research. Examining how educators build successful parent collaborative relationships, through the use of semi-structured interviews with elementary
educators in Ontario, it is my hope to provide a better understanding of the process and benefits observed so that teacher-parent collaboration can be more widely and effectively established, which will in turn enhance the success of students.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I describe the method I used to research teacher parent collaboration and also provide rationale for this approach. First, I discuss the procedure of my qualitative study. I then provide a description of the interview process and protocol, followed by an introduction to my participants including the sampling criteria, recruitment process and participant bios. Next, I describe how I analyzed the data and identified applicable ethical issues. Lastly, I acknowledge some of the methodological limitations and highlight some of the strengths of this study.

3.1 Research Procedures

As Merriam (2002) suggests, “[a] research study begins with your being curious about something, and that “something” is usually related to your work, your family, your community, or yourself…Often these spheres intersect” (p. 11). This is true in my case. When I started the Master of Teaching program, knowing I would be conducting a research study, I instinctively knew that I wanted to connect my dual identities - as a teacher and a parent. As a result, this study was conducted using a qualitative research method which included a literature review of existing research on the topic of teacher parent collaboration, as well as face-to-face semi-structured interviews with three teachers.

Essentially, qualitative research is “a vehicle for studying the empirical world from the perspective of the subject, not the researcher” (Carr, 1994, p. 716). One of the biggest strengths of qualitative research is that “the researcher obtains first-hand experience [which] provid[es] valuable, meaningful data” (Duffy, 1986 cited in Carr, 1994, p. 718). As Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue, “qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived...
experiences of people” (p. 2). By taking an interpretive approach, qualitative research aims to “make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them” (Jones, 1995).

As Merriam (2002) states, “qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals…The world, or reality, is not the fixed, single, agreed upon, or measurable phenomenon that it is assumed to be in…quantitative research” (p. 3). Quantitative research aims to test a pre-determined theory (Creswell, 2003) by collecting “large amounts of data using random selection…[to] determine cause and effect” (Byrne, 2001). Whereas, qualitative research aims to illuminate and grasp answers to the questions of ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ (Marshall, 1996). However, it is important to note that “the choice between quantitative and qualitative methods should be determined by the research question, not by the preference of the researcher” (Marshall, 1996, p. 522). This is especially important given that the purpose of my research was to explore and document the strategies and methods elementary teachers use to foster teacher-parent collaboration. As Carr (1994) argues, “qualitative researchers are often more concerned about uncovering knowledge about how people think and feel about the circumstances in which they find themselves than they are in making judgements” (p. 68). By using a qualitative research approach, I was able to obtain first-hand experiences of teachers in the field.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Given my research purpose, to study and examine the methods and strategies teachers use to collaborate with parents, the primary instrument for data collection was semi-structured face-to-face interviews. As Mason (2002) points out, “[i]nterviews are one of the most commonly
recognized forms of qualitative research...[especially when] interested in [a particular group’s] perceptions” (p. 63). Interviews aid in uncovering data where the researcher can determine shared understandings of a particular group (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). As O’Keeffe, Buytaert, Mijic, Brozovic and Sinha (2015) point out, “a significant advantage of semi-structured interviews is the opportunity for previously unknown information to emerge” (p. 8226). While some qualitative research takes place in the form of group interviews (Mason, 2002), I conducted one-on-one interviews. Furthermore, unlike structured interviews, where there is a set amount of questions asked in the same way to each of the interviewees, semi-structured interviews are formulated around a guide and topic (O’Keeffe et al., 2015, p. 8224). Semi-structured interviews allow the participants an opportunity to give detailed responses about their lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This is especially important to this study given that I want to learn from the expertise of seasoned teachers.

The interview questions were developed after reviewing existing literature (O’Keeffe et al., 2015) pertaining to teacher-parental collaboration. My own knowledge and experience, as both a teacher and parent, was also considered during the construction of the interview questions. After drafting my research questions, I divided them according to themes. After many careful revisions, my supervisor gave the official approval of the interview protocol (see Appendix B). The interview questions were constructed with the goal of being open-ended, neutral, and clear. By using open-ended questions, participants were able to contribute more detailed information while also allowing for the researcher to ask probing follow-up questions (Turner, 2010). Finally, semi-structured interviews allow for data to be efficiently and cost-effectively collected (O’Keeffe et al., 2015).
3.3 Participants

In this section, I review the sampling criteria I established for recruiting participants, as well as the methods I used for teacher recruitment. I have also included a section where I will introduce each of the participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

Sampling is an essential part of this study’s design (O’Keeffe et al., 2015). The following criteria was applied to each of the participants:

1. Teachers will have demonstrated leadership and commitment to collaboration with parents.

2. Teachers will have taught for a minimum of 5 years.

3. Teachers will have taught in a range of grades/positions.

4. Teachers will be employed within the Greater Toronto Area.

I chose to interview participants based on the above criteria because I wanted to gain the experience and expertise of teachers who have successfully incorporated collaboration with parents into their teaching practice over the course of their career and in a range of grades. The time span was important so that responses from teachers would be based on expertise in regards to the main research question. Experience across a range of grades was also important in order to determine how collaboration has been implemented to address challenges that may arise at various grade levels. Finally, I chose to interview teachers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) for ease of scheduling the interviews and also to inform my own practice and others who are confronted with challenges common to the GTA.
3.3.2 Recruitment

Participants for this research study were found using a combination of both convenience and purposeful sampling. As O’Keeffe et al. (2015) suggests, I combined a couple of sampling techniques to obtain representative data for this study. Convenience sampling involves selecting the most accessible participants (Marshall, 1996), for example, drawing on one’s own network to gain participants. This is also helpful in building a rapport with the participants. Purposeful sampling refers to selecting the most productive participants that will inform the research question being presented within the study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002; O’Keeffe et al., 2015). As Patton (1990) argues, purposeful sampling involves selecting participants from the most “information-rich cases…those from which one can learn a great deal [concerning]…the purpose of the research” (as cited in Merriam, 2002, p. 12). As I am immersed in a community of teacher colleagues and mentors, I was able to draw on this network in recruiting my participants, however, I was also mindful in selecting a purposeful sampling for this study.

3.3.3 Participant bios

Kaitlin

At the time of the research, Kaitlin is a Grade 2 primary school teacher with the Halton Region School Board in Ontario, Canada. After completing a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed), she taught Grade 5. She then taught Grade 1 and Kindergarten. She has been teaching for 12 years and has been at her present school for the last nine years. Kaitlin is also a parent to a boy with ADHD who is in Senior-Kindergarten at the time of this research. Kaitlin provides insight on the strategies and methods she has found effective in incorporating teacher-parent collaboration in a classroom.
Amber

At the time of the research, Amber is a Grade 2 French Immersion teacher with Halton Region in Ontario, Canada. Amber completed a degree in History from Trent University and has a strong background in early childhood education. She worked in a French daycare for three years before pursuing her B.Ed. She has been teaching for six years. She began her career with teaching Grade 7 Core French and has also taught Grade 1 and Grade 4 in the French-Immersion streams in York-Catholic and Hamilton Region School Boards. Amber’s first-hand experience in a teacher-parent collaboration provides insight into the specific practices of teacher-parent collaboration that take place in a French-Immersion setting.

3.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative research analysis, at its core, entails an understanding of what is being studied, integrating the connections that occur, theorizing about the ‘why’ and ‘how’ these connections are occurring, and finally re-contextualizing (Morse, 1994 as cited in Turner, 2000). As a result, analysis of the data, ideally, occurs simultaneously with data collection, which allows the researcher to adjust the interviews with the evolving understanding that the data presents (Merriam, 2002; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

During data analysis, the researcher must interpret and make sense of what was revealed and gathered from the interview process, also known as themes or coding (Creswell, 2003). In this study, the purpose was to examine and explore what strategies and methods elementary teachers use to foster teacher-parent collaboration. During my analysis, I drew on coding procedures, which involved transcribing interviews and coding the data, as it relates to my research purpose and questions. “The themes formulated from the data and the words of the
participants drive home the story…bring[ing] their experiences to life, thus allowing us to make
a connection” (Campbell, 2014, p. 3). It is also important to note that I also acknowledge the
“null data” – that is, what participating teachers did not speak to, and why this matters. In this
section of the chapter, I describe the various stages of data analysis.

After I conducted my interviews, I then transcribed them and reviewed them multiple
times. The interviews were recorded for better accuracy but it also helped to capture the
subtleties in participants’ voices, such as tone and emotion (Warren & Karner, 2010). Next, I
-coded my transcripts. As Saldana (2009) suggests, “[c]oding is not a precise science; it’s
primarily an interpretive act…[a] transitional process between data collection and more
extensive data analysis” (p.4). During the coding process, I used both descriptive codes which
summarizes what the participant was stating as well as vivo codes which uses direct quotations
from the participant (Saldana, 2009). Once my coding was completed, I then grouped the codes
that were similar into categories. As I did this, I re-examined and re-evaluated the categories
numerous times. As I examined the categories and looked for themes and I situated them within
the research questions outlined in Chapter 1 and the existing literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Ethics are crucial to the process of qualitative research. Qualitative research methods call
for a “trustworthiness via credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (Jackson
II, Drummond, & Camara, 2007, p. 26). Moreover, anonymity is essential, as DiCicco-Bloom &
Crabtree (2006) point out, participants “may share information that could jeopardize his or her
position” (p. 319). As a result, participants in this study were given pseudonyms as well as their
identities and any identifying indicators were excluded. In addition, the data collected remained
on a private, password protected computer that only myself and my supervisor had access too and will be erased after five years.

An informed consent letter (see Appendix A), stating the purpose, duration and procedures of this the study was obtained from each participant. Moreover, a copy of the interview questions (see Appendix B) were sent to each participant prior to the interview taking place. All interviewees were assured that information gathered during the interview process would be treated confidentially. As suggested by DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006), I informed each participant before beginning, and throughout the duration of the research study, that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any questions they did not feel comfortable with. Interviews were audio-taped and personally transcribed. This allowed me to gain a better understanding of the data and also provided additional opportunities for reflection between interviews (Merriam, 2002; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

The use of member-checks further allowed participants to examine, clarify, or re-tract any statements in the interview transcripts before data analysis started. This added validity to the data by ensuring that the interviewer was objective in the transcription of the data. There are no known risks that the participants had to undergo in this study. Participants were informed that participation in this project might, in fact, be beneficial for them as the study included opportunities to reflect on their teaching practices. Moreover, there was no pressure on the potential participants as the involvement in the research project was entirely voluntary.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The potential limitations for this research study include the role of the researcher as well as the limited sample size. In a qualitative research study, the key role of the researcher is to be
the interpreter. As Merriam (2002) suggests, this interpreter role may result in biases that can impact the analysis of the data. However, by acknowledging these biases we can aim to not only identify them but also monitor the impact they are having (Merriam, 2002). In fact, Peshkin (1988) argues, that these biases “can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected” (p. 18).

Due to the limited sample size of this study, there are no generalizations that can be made to the larger population (Jackson II et al., 2007). However, it is noted that this is not always the goal of all research studies. This study will give a depth of knowledge that comes from the semi-structured interview process and the lived expertise of the teacher participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Thus, while not informing a larger population, this study could be quite beneficial to other elementary teachers or teacher candidates, like myself, who want to inform their own practice on teacher-parent collaboration.

Another methodological strength of this research study is the design of the one-on-one interview process. This gives the researcher the ability to represent and contextualize the knowledge and lived experiences of the interviewees (Byrne, 2001). This process allowed the interviewer to communicate with the participants in a way that enhanced the data collection by allowing for follow-up questions and fluidity of questioning, resulting in more relevant data. As DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree (2006) states, “[t]he individual in-depth interview allows the interviewer to delve deeply into social and personal matters” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Moreover, as previously stated, the personal reflection needed in this study by the
participants can be seen as beneficial in informing their practice and reflecting on their personal experiences.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the research methodology used for this study. First I examined the research approach and procedure, by discussing the significance of qualitative research and distinguishing it from quantitative research. Next, I described the instruments of data collection by identifying semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data. Through these semi-structured, face-to-face interviews I was able to capture a deeper understanding of the strategies and methods used by my participants to achieve successful teacher-parent collaboration. I then identified the participants of the study, by first listing the sampling criteria applied to recruit the interviewees. Next, I clarified the recruitment process used which included a combination of convenience and purposeful sampling in order to maximize the depth of my data. This was followed by a brief introduction to each of the participants. Next, I described my data analysis procedures, where I coded the individual interview transcripts before establishing any common themes or patterns across the data. I also considered the ethical review procedures such as participant consent forms, the use of pseudonyms for each of the participants, the right to withdraw and data storage. Then, I considered some of the methodological limitations of this study, including the role of the researcher and limited sample size. Finally I highlighted some of the strengths of this study, including the benefits of acquiring data through the first-hand experiences of elementary teachers. In the next chapter, I report on the findings of my research.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report and discuss my primary findings from interviews with two Halton Region primary educators to answer the research question: What strategies and methods do a small sample of elementary teachers use to foster a collaborative relationship with parents and what benefits have they observed for their students? The data was collected from face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with two educators who have first-hand experience in successful teacher-parent collaboration. With this understanding, I hope to contribute insight on how other teachers can best implement practices of collaboration to maximize the success in their own classrooms. I will discuss my findings and then relate my findings to the literature. Finally, I will end with a brief discussion to summarize the main themes.

4.0.1 Themes and key findings

The beliefs, views, and personal experiences of my participants on teacher-parent collaboration presented five themes and key findings as well as a number of sub-themes. The general themes and key findings of this research include the following:

• 4.1 Educators Indicated that Ongoing, Positive Communication as well as Leveraging School Personnel was Essential to Effective Teacher-Parent Collaboration

• 4.1.1 Educators facilitated collaboration with parents by initiating frequent and positive communication about their child’s educational goals using a variety of teacher-directed resources
• 4.1.2 Educators facilitated collaboration with parents by making use of the personnel support available at the school

• 4.1.3 Educators’ past experience with parent collaboration indicated that exhibiting approachability and empathy are crucial to positive collaboration

• 4.2 Educators Indicated That Both Family Experience as well as Previous Teacher Experience has Helped to Solidify Their Belief in Teacher-Parent Collaboration

• 4.3 Educators Indicated Time Constraints and Interpersonal Conflicts Can Hinder Teacher-Parent Collaboration

  • 4.3.1 Educators indicated that lack of time may pose challenges to teacher-parent collaboration

  • 4.3.2 Educators indicated that interpersonal conflicts may hinder teacher-parent collaboration

• 4.4 Educators Indicated That Teacher-Parent Collaboration Resulted in a Number of Positive Outcomes Both Relationally and Academically

  • 4.4.1 Educators indicated that teacher-parent collaboration fosters more meaningful relationships with parents

  • 4.4.2 Educators indicated that teacher-parent collaboration improved learning for both individual students as well as the entire class

  • 4.4.3 Educators indicated that they experienced enhanced classroom dynamics as a result of teacher-parent collaboration

• 4.5 Conclusion
4.1 Educators Indicated that Ongoing, Positive Communication as well as Leveraging School Personnel was Essential to Effective Teacher-Parent Collaboration

The following theme discusses the strategies and methods that the participants found most beneficial when collaborating with parents. First, both participants found that when they initiated consistent and frequent communication through a variety of methods, their collaboration with parents was more successful. Second, both participants found school personnel to be a helpful resource in facilitating collaboration. Finally, showing empathy and exhibiting approachability played a key part in the success of the participants collaboration with parents. This is an important aspect of this study since it helps give a better understanding of the best practices of teacher-parent collaboration.

4.1.1 Educators facilitated collaboration with parents by initiating frequent and positive communication about their child’s educational goals using a variety of teacher-directed resources

In order to facilitate collaboration with parents, both participants emphasized that positive, teacher-initiated communication at the beginning of the year was vital to its success. Amber, a primary French immersion teacher, stated that “starting off the school year with positive communication is the time best thing that I have ever learned.” Kaitlin, a primary public school teacher, described how she sends out emails to families before the school year starts and also makes calls during the first week or connects at pick up with families. She stated “as soon as the class list goes up I usually reach out to all families via email.”

In addition to having early, intentional communication with parents, frequent communication was also a theme that was consistent across both participant interviews. Both
Kaitlin and Amber clearly communicated throughout their interviews that frequent, consistent communication was a key to their success in teacher-parent collaboration. Amber stated that she has found that “the more communication between [home and school] the better.” For Kaitlin, frequent, open communication and check-ins were vital. She said, “if a student was getting an N in a learning skill, it was never out of the blue. It was always through a lot of open dialogue and goal setting between home and school.” Being accessible and flexible was another way that Kaitlin collaborated with families. She stated, “I have an open door policy so parents can drop by any time or volunteer whenever they have a chance if they have a police check.” Kaitlin pointed out that in her experience, frequent communication also results in more parent involvement in the classroom.

Both Amber and Kaitlin agreed that collaboration with parents happened more seamlessly when they used a variety of teacher-directed communication tools such as classroom websites, agendas and face-to-face meetings. Amber found that agendas as well as the classroom website was one of the most useful tools for frequent, weekly communication with parents but also relied on face to face meetings when sharing strategies and setting goals with parents and students. While Kaitlin relied heavily on student agendas as well, she also had a classroom blog that she updated daily with pictures and anchor charts to keep parents updated on student learning. Kaitlin also mentioned that using email, text and EDSBY (which is a social media application that Halton Region schools use) was also very helpful in communicating with her student’s families. While Amber mentioned having past negative experiences using email and prefers face-to-face meetings or phone calls, Kaitlin preferred using email or face-to-face meetings and rarely used phone calls.
The participant responses were in agreement with OMOE’s (2010b) mandate to prioritize frequent, consistent communication with parents as a provincial-wide goal to ensure that all schools expand their communication strategies so that parents are provided with the knowledge and tools they need to support their child’s education. The findings of this study are also in agreement with research conducted by Murray et al. (2014) which suggested that best practice for teacher-parent collaboration is something that occurs frequently and consistently. As Richards (2009) states, teachers should “call home when kids are doing well, instead of only when they misbehave” (para 32). While research does not necessarily provide specific tools teachers should use, such as email or agendas, it has shown that using a variety of communication methods is one of the best practices for successful teacher-parent collaboration (Murray et al., 2014; Epstein 1990). Furthermore, teachers like Amber and Kaitlin who ensure communication with parents is well timed and delivered through a variety of methods (Murray et al., 2014; Epstein 1990) as well those who are flexible in offering alternative meeting times for parents (Pena, 2000; Epstein, 1990) are more successful and effective in collaborating with parents.

4.1.2 Educators facilitated collaboration with parents by making use of the personnel support available at the school

Both Kaitlin and Amber felt that their collaboration was strengthened when they worked closely with the Special Education Resource Teachers (SERT). They indicated that having a SERT was very beneficial in collaborating with parents, especially with parents of students with special needs. Amber indicated that talking with the SERT at her school about parent interactions was particularly helpful for her. She stated that “it is helpful to have someone with more
experience or experience with a particular family that can walk you through and give you advice.”

Kaitlin echoed this sentiment by stating that it was “helpful to have the SERT there supporting me in parent meetings, especially with a high needs student.” Amber also indicated that her school administration was very helpful and supportive when working with parents. In fact, Amber indicated that “receiving tips about what has worked best in the past or having the principle sit in on meetings has been a really awesome resource.”

Similar to the findings of this study, research has suggested that having the support of school administration plays a vital role in creating a whole school approach to collaboration (Mapp, 2003; Pena, 2000). Moreover, research has indicated that teachers who have support from school personnel are highly successful in gaining parent involvement and support (Brooks, 2009; Mapp 2003; Pena 2000; Sheldon, 2007; Epstein, 1987). In light of this research as well as Amber’s experience with a supportive administrator, principals can play a vital role in the success of teacher-parent collaboration by providing teachers with strategies as well as modelling a positive attitude.

4.1.3 Educators’ past experience with parent collaboration indicated that exhibiting approachability and empathy are crucial to positive collaboration

Being approachable and empathic are character traits that both Amber and Kaitlin found helpful in initiating collaboration with parents. Both participants felt that when they actively listened to parents and created an environment where parents were comfortable sharing, collaboration was more successful. Amber pointed out that collaboration works best for her “when parents feel heard and feel that their child is well looked after.” She also said past experiences “helped me understand how to approach parents more.” For Kaitlin, successful
collaboration in her classroom was facilitated best when she “remembered to smile, exude warmth and show genuine care about the whole child.” In fact, Kaitlin stated that she viewed herself “as the kids ‘school mom’…there to meet their emotional needs as well as their academic ones.” Similarly, as Richards (2009) stated teachers should, “smile, stand outside school at the end of the day and know [the] parents' names” (para 3). These findings are supported by research conducted by Comer (2005) and Vellymalay (2012) which suggested that parents who feel welcomed and invited to participate and collaborate at their child’s school are more likely to engage and contribute.

4.2 Educators Indicated That Both Family Experience as well as Previous Teacher Experience has Helped to Solidify Their Belief in Teacher-Parent Collaboration

Personal and professional experience can often give a more enhanced perspective for educators to pull from. This theme centres on how the participant’s experiences, both from their family life and teaching career, have reinforced their beliefs and views on teacher-parent collaboration. This is an important aspect of this study since it helps to highlight how an educator’s beliefs and views can strengthen teacher-parent collaboration.

Kaitlin felt that becoming a parent was an important turning point in her teaching career because it enhanced her ability to collaborate with parents. She stated,

becoming a parent really put into perspective the idea that sending your child into someone’s else care for the whole day, every day, can be a really scary thing and it gave me an appreciation about all the other factors that can impact a kid’s day before they even get to school. Before I had kids, I didn’t really get it - that something could really
set off a child’s day…but now [as a parent] I have more of the whole picture which helps with empathizing and truly understanding.

Kaitlin also pointed to the fact that the lack of communication with her son’s school also helped to solidify her belief in teacher-parent collaboration. She stated, “I just mostly try to treat parents as I’d like to be treated as a parent…my son has ADHD and open dialogue is essential for knowing how he is doing in both environments and suggesting and sharing strategies.” While not a parent, Amber drew from her experience as an aunt to gain some context for what home life is like and the stress that school can cause parents and students. Amber indicated that her experience as an aunt, seeing her siblings navigate homework and extra-curricular activities with her nieces and nephews, helped her to “understand how to approach and empathize with parents more.”

Professional experience from years of teaching can also provide the needed understanding to enhance collaboration with parents. Both Amber and Kaitlin felt that their collaboration improved significantly since they first started teaching. Amber indicated that her mentor teacher modeled successful collaboration which also helped increase her belief in its importance. Furthermore, Amber recognized that both her positive and negative experiences with collaboration in the past had helped her to realize not only her strengths and weaknesses but also helped reinforced her belief in the importance of teacher-parent collaboration. Kaitlin also felt that collaboration had been something she had worked on and become stronger at over time stating, “the more you teach the better…or the more prepared you feel.” Amber and Kaitlin’s experiences instilled in them a greater appreciation for, and deeper commitment to, teacher-parent collaboration.
Both personal or professional experiences can strengthen an educator’s collaboration because they are better able to see and understand a families’ point of view. Research has shown that collaboration between educators and parents occurs most effectively when educators and school administrations actively seek to understand the backgrounds and cultures represented in their school as well as the goals and needs of their students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; OMOE, 2010b). However, this research does not point to the important role a teacher’s lived experiences brings to this work. My findings have made a richer and deeper connection than previous research to the importance of educator’s beliefs being solidified by their personal and professional experiences. Educators, like Amber and Kaitlin, who empathize and better understand the perspectives represented in their classrooms, are more successful in collaborating with parents, improving and strengthening the connection between both schools and families (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Allen, 2009).

4.3 Educators Indicated Time Constraints and Interpersonal Conflicts Can Hinder Teacher-Parent Collaboration

The challenges that participants faced when collaborating with parents as well as their responses to those challenges will be discussed next. Both participants indicated that time constraints for both themselves and parents hindered the success of teacher-parent collaboration. They also communicated that interpersonal differences between themselves and parents made collaboration challenging. This is an important aspect of this study because it provides important insight into how educators are responding to challenges when collaborating with parents.
4.3.1 Educators indicated that lack of time may pose challenges to teacher-parent collaboration

A parent’s lack of time as well as a teacher’s lack of time can present threats to the success of teacher-parent collaboration. In Amber and Kaitlin’s experience, most parents worked outside of the home, making it more difficult to establish communication and also limiting the parent’s involvement at the school. Amber stated,

when both parents work outside of the home, it’s harder for them to come in and also harder to find the time to communicate. But when a parent stays home it becomes a lot easier to get a hold of them and for them to come into the classroom.

Kaitlin discussed the impact of her own lack of time, stating, “An obstacle for me is having limited opportunities to get to the phone and if I do have time it’s likely not at a time that works for parents.” As a result of time constraints, both Amber and Kaitlin relied heavily on agendas for daily communication. Amber said,

when you make a habit for parents to look at the agenda every night and I am looking at it every morning, we are guaranteed to see the notes and communicate with each other and it’s an everyday habit so it’s easy and quick and people can do it when they have time.

Kaitlin also indicated that updating the classroom blog requires a lot of time on her part and is not always feasible with a full day of work in the classroom as well as evening commitments at home. However, Kaitlin stated, “if there is a day that I don’t necessarily feel energetic enough to put something up on the blog…I just remember that I wish I knew what my kid was up to.”
The tensions between home and school have been well-documented in hindering teacher-parent collaboration (Pena, 2000; Comer 2005; Epstein and Salinas, 2004; Henderson & Berla, 1994). In fact, other studies have documented similar challenges to those experienced by Amber and Kaitlin (Mapp, 1997; Pena, 2000). However, while past research focussed on the challenges for parents including language barriers, time constraints and cultural or economic differences (Pena, 2000; Comer 2005; Epstein and Salinas, 2004; Henderson & Berla, 1994), the participants of this research also indicated that a teacher’s lack of time can also impede collaboration. As a result of these known time constraints, the OMOE (2010b) has broadened the definition of a parent volunteer to include “not only someone who helps out at school during the day but also anyone who supports school goals and children’s learning and development in any way, at any place, and at any time” (p. 10).

4.3.2 Educators indicated that interpersonal conflicts may hinder teacher-parent collaboration

Both participants indicated that conflicting personalities, past negative experiences and language barriers were all hindrances to teacher-parent collaboration. In Amber’s experience, aggressive communication from parents led to difficulties in collaborating with those parents. She stated,

I have given my email [address out]…as easy access so whenever parents had a question about homework or anything we could be in contact. But I found that parents were using it as an outlet for their frustrations and because it wasn’t face to face or a phone call they were able to say whatever they wanted to…they were getting aggressive in how they
were communicating…it became a venting system, where their children couldn’t see
what they were writing, rather than a form of communication to help each other.

As a result of her negative experiences, Amber stopped using email as a form of communication
and began to rely on agendas and phone calls. Her reason for preferring phone calls was that
“you get to talk to each other and hear the tone of each other’s voice.” She also stated,

I’m a bit scarred by parents coming in and being aggressive…[and these] negative
experiences have sort of made me hesitant to have parents in the classroom…which, in
this case, my collaboration with these parents has been strictly for their child’s learning.

Despite her negative experiences, Amber remained committed to teacher parent collaboration by
adapting her communication methods.

Language barriers can impede teacher-parent collaboration as well. When teachers and
parents do not speak the same language or their first languages are different, communication can
be difficult. Kaitlin’s school, for example, was in an area with a high number of Russian families
who were new to Canada. While some of these families spoke English, many did not speak
fluent English, making communication difficult. To overcome these challenges, Kaitlin asked
parents who were fluent in both Russian and English to help translate conversations and school
communications. Amber also noted that language barriers can hinder collaboration. She stated,
“teaching French Immersion makes it sometimes harder to get the parents to volunteer because
they need to be speaking French in the classroom.”

Past research suggests that without effective collaboration, “children still tend to fall
behind if their parents do not participate in school events, develop a working relationship with
their teachers, and keep up with what is happening at school” (Henderson & Berla, 1994, pg 14).
The benefits of working towards collaboration were emphasized by Comer (2005) who stated “if parents could be involved in ways that threatened neither the parents nor the teachers, parental involvement would reach a critical mass that could transform even the most dysfunctional school” (p 39). Like the challenges shared by Kaitlin and Amber, research has also shown that interpersonal challenges, including conflicting personalities (Pena, 2000), language barriers (Vellymalay, 2012; Pena, 2000) and past negative experiences (Comer, 2005), can hinder teacher-parent collaboration. As a result, it is important for teachers to be adaptable and resourceful, like Amber and Kaitlin demonstrated, so that these challenges may be overcome and effective collaboration may be achieved.

### 4.4 Educators Indicated That Teacher-Parent Collaboration Resulted in a Number of Positive Outcomes Both Relationally and Academically

Educators and parents working together on the same team was a strategy that both Amber and Kaitlin felt was essential to successful collaboration. Being on the same team and working together was an important aspect of their teacher-parent collaboration. Both participants of this study indicated that they had more meaningful relationships with parents leading to increased trust and respect as well as more effective communication. They also found that their collaboration with parents enhanced the learning of not just individual students but also the entire class. Finally, both Kaitlin and Amber indicated that they saw the benefits of collaboration for their own teaching practice as well. This aspect of the study relates to the larger issue of teachers fully comprehending the importance of teacher-parent collaboration and the tangible benefits gained by it for parents, students and teachers.
4.4.1 Educators indicated that teacher-parent collaboration fosters more meaningful relationships with parents

Through successful collaboration Amber and Kaitlin indicated that there was an increase in trust and respect as well as improved communication. As Kaitlin said, “I personally feel that collaboration results in friendly relationships and genuinely enjoying each other…it’s important to build friendly relationships with parents and chat often about daily events to build trust.” Kaitlin pointed out the this trust allowed parents to open up and communicate any “special needs like an allergy or ADHD or epilepsy or anxiety or a special family circumstance.” Amber echoed this sentiment stating, “the more you communicate with parents the more they will trust you... and the more they will want to collaborate.” Kaitlin also pointed out that “if you chat with parents often and are interacting with them when positive things happen…parents don’t really feel nervous when potential concerns are brought up…because you’re on the same team.”

Moreover, Amber recognized that successful collaboration meant a more meaningful relationship. She stated, “if I have good collaboration with parents then the parents won’t have their backs up against me because we have a good relationship.”

Similarly to Amber and Kaitlin’s experience, other research has demonstrated that teacher-parent collaboration results in improved interactions for parents with both their child and the child’s teacher as well as a deeper understanding of the role and job of a teacher (Epstein, 1990). Henderson and Mapp's (2002) research revealed that successful teacher-parent collaboration had two things in common: a “focus on building trusting collaborative relationships…[and] a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared” (p. 14). Both Kaitlin and Amber echoed these sentiments that as an educator and parent work on the
“same team”, the goals of collaboration are clarified. Moreover, parents are also encouraged to have open communication with teachers and talk about accommodations that may be needed for their children. Essentially, when it comes to educating a child, “neither families nor schools can do [it] alone” (Henderson and Berla, 1994, p. 12). The result of this collaborative environment is that both parents and teachers feel valued and meaningful relationships are established.

4.4.2 Educators indicated that teacher-parent collaboration improved learning for both individual students as well as the entire class

Both Amber and Kaitlin acknowledged that there were both personal and academic benefits from teacher-parent collaboration. These benefits were realized by individual children of the collaborating families as well as the rest of the class. As Amber explained, “if you are all on the same page then the child is going to benefit the most because when home and school are working together it works really, really well for the child.” Collaboration in Kaitlin’s classroom reflected this by ensuring that the whole child was supported because as she said “without feeling good emotionally, learning can’t take place.”

Higher academic achievements occur when teachers and parents are working together. For Kaitlin, academic performance of her students increases with collaboration because at it’s core is the idea that parents and teachers play on the same team to coach and mentor the kids to reach their personal best…because learning doesn’t stop at the bell - its in the kitchen, cuddled up at bedtime and at the grocery store…parents need to support their child’s learning because if they do, the child’s self-esteem builds and leads to more hands on deck and more guided practice of individualized, targeted skills.
Kaitlin further explained that an additional benefit of collaboration is “parents keep the teachers in the loop about their child’s interests, teachers can try and engage them more and create inquiry opportunities.” Amber agreed that collaborating with parents increased academic performance. She said “I collaborate with parents to communicate about how their child is progressing and what they can do to help their child…either challenge their child more or help their child keep up.” Similarly, Kaitlin also saw an increase in academic achievement as a result of collaboration with parents, stating,

I communicate results of check-ins often with parents so we all can help build on skills that are difficult for them or extend the learning when it is easy for them…[and] there is a definite increase in homework completion or studying for tests because the parents know how to support their child.

For both Amber and Kaitlin, collaboration with parents was a key in helping their students reach their academic potential.

Student accountability was another benefit that Kaitlin and Amber indicated they saw from their collaboration with parents. Kaitlin noticed that a student’s accountability increased when a positive relationship existed between home and school, stating, “if kids know that their parent and teacher talk a lot and its such a team effort, it increases respect and accountability.” Amber echoed this sentiment stating, “I find that when students know I have a relationship with their parents and we that we are all on the same team…the student knows that we all know what is going on and they are called to that higher standard.”

Amber and Kaitlin also agreed that the benefits of collaboration are not limited to the individual student, but also extend to the entire class. Through collaborative relationships with
parents the entire class benefits from the expertise and willingness of even a few parents who volunteer their time. Kaitlin regularly has parents come into the classroom to teach and volunteer. She described that,

some parent volunteers read with students…one mom owns a dance studio so she came into teach dance to the class and another mom came in with ducklings to teach us about the life cycle of birds, it was really neat for everyone to see.

In this way, collaboration with the parents of only a few students benefitted the entire class. In Amber’s classroom, these benefits seemed to be especially helpful to her during the busy seasons when it was difficult to meet with individual students. As she explained:

when I am swamped and I am struggling to get caught up with guided reading and things like that…and I know when there are certain parents that I can work with it makes it a lot easier to help get my students caught up…I see a lot of benefit with it…I walk them through how I do guided reading and they come in twice a week and work with the lower reading groups, when I would only be able to sit with the child once a week.

Both Amber and Kaitlin also agreed that the whole class benefits when parents come on field trips. The added supervision of a few parents makes the field trips possible for the whole class.

The research also highlighted benefits of collaboration similar to those shared by Amber and Kaitlin. As Mapp (2003) points out, there is over “three decades of research [showing]…a strong link between educational benefits to children and various forms of family engagement” (p. 36). Arguably, one of the biggest rewards of teacher-parent collaboration is greater academic achievement and success for students (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Sheldon, 2007), as both Amber and Kaitlin attributed in their classroom. When collaboration is at its best, “families become
involved and students become more positive about school and learning…[and there is an] improvement in students’ attendance, behaviour, homework completion, and report card grades” (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004, p. 23). In fact, research shows that families who work in partnership with schools help to contribute to the best possible education for students (Berger & Riojas, 2012; Henderson and Berla, 1994). Examples shared by both Kaitlin and Amber expanded the scope of these benefits highlighted by previous literature mentioned in Chapter 2. While previous research focused on the benefits for individual children of teacher-parent collaboration, the findings of this study brought attention to the benefits of teacher-parent collaboration for the whole class.

4.4.3 Educators indicated that they experienced enhanced classroom dynamics as a result of teacher-parent collaboration

Kaitlin and Amber agreed that they personally benefitted from collaboration with parents. For Kaitlin, collaboration created cohesion for her students. She said she noticed that a student’s respect for her increased as a result of collaboration with their parents stating that “when students see that there is a positive relationship between home and school their respect increases because they know that their parent and teacher talk a lot and its a team effort.” This increased respect resulted in a more cohesive learning environment and better classroom management. Moreover, through Amber and Kaitlin’s collaboration with parents they both felt better supported in their role as teachers. It gave Kaitlin a feeling of “more hands on deck…[and] that we all play on the same team.” She further explained that when close relationships were built with parents they were “more receptive to any constructive feedback that was provided.” Amber agreed, and added
that collaboration enabled a sharing of tips and strategies with each other and further explained that collaborating in this way improved classroom management. She stated,

if a student is struggling, then I request a meeting with the parents and collaborate on how we can help the child work better in the classroom. Sharing what works best at home and what I have noticed that works well in the classroom…this worked particularly well with behaviour but also when students are struggling with the second language and things like that…having sat down with the parent and having them tell me what works really well for their child and then going back into the classroom has made it so much easier because I am able to know that this child does not respond to this strategy and try something else…this has been super helpful as far as classroom management goes because parents know their kids.

Kaitlin also explained how face-to-face meetings with parents helped her with classroom management strategies. She shared one example stating,

when a student was having a lot of trouble to conflict resolution…the mom and student came in to meet and brainstorm ideas together. Instead of me just saying what we are going to do, we came up with some ideas together like reading books at home and school about winning and losing.

Collaboration can also aid in supporting children with special needs like an allergy or learning accommodation. Kaitlin was able to better support students through “special circumstances like a new sibling or family separation or divorce” as a result of her frequent communication and check-ins with parents. As previously mentioned, Kaitlin also enjoyed and
appreciated the “friendly relationships and genuinely enjoying each other” throughout her teaching career as a result of her commitment to collaboration.

As shown in Kaitlin’s example of having “more hands on deck”, collaboration can add to the sense of community within a school. This was also recognized in past research done by Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie (1992). Amber indicated that while time constraints often make it difficult for teachers to find time to plan activities or complete guided reading goals, collaboration with parents can provide teachers with numerous volunteer hours which proves to be an invaluable resource and support for teachers. Previous research also highlighted this benefit stating that “teachers become more proficient in their professional activities, devote more time to teaching, experiment more, and develop a more student-oriented approach” when collaboration is occurring (Henderson and Berla, 1994). In fact the OMOE (2014a) stated that “parents who are engaged and actively involved in their child’s learning make Ontario’s great schools even stronger” (p. 17). As Amber and Kaitlin indicated, sharing strategies between home and school is beneficial to both the teacher and the child. This was also supported by Allen’s (2009) research study. Overall, both this study as well as previous research agreed that schools that have higher parent collaboration outperform schools that have little or no parent involvement (Epstein, 1987; Henderson, 1988; OMOE, 2104a). When collaboration is at its best, classroom dynamics improve because teachers and parents are working together for the betterment of the individual students and the class as a whole.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that teachers who are successful at teacher-parent collaboration implemented a variety of strategies and methods. These strategies included
frequent, intentional and positive communication with parents, relying on personnel support at
the school as well as demonstrating empathy and approachability towards families. Educators
indicated that their belief in teacher-parent collaboration was solidified by both their personal
and professional experiences. While time constraints and interpersonal conflicts between
teachers and parents were indicated as possible hindrances, the tangible benefits of teacher-
parent collaboration significantly outweighed these challenges. These benefits included more
meaningful relationships with parents, academic benefits for individual students as well as the
entire class and enhanced classroom dynamics. The findings of this study add value to existing
research by emphasizing the benefits that can be realized through an unwavering commitment to
teacher-parent collaboration. To overcome the challenges of collaboration, the participants of this
study implemented a variety of strategies and methods and experienced many positive results for
students, parents and themselves. While previous research has focused on the benefits for
individual students, the current study includes a focus on how the entire class benefits as a result
of teacher-parent collaboration. The hope is that as teachers become more informed about the
importance of teacher-parent collaboration and hear the personal success stories of primary
educators, they will not only grow in knowledge but also in passion to ensure future success
through teacher-parent collaboration. Future research needs to be done on how teachers are
finding success with teacher-parent collaboration as the benefits are significant. The findings of
this study will be further reviewed in Chapter 5, in which I will also discuss broader implications
for future research and note how they will influence my personal research and future teaching
practice.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the implications of my research study. First, I provide an overview of the key findings of my research and their significance. I then discuss the broad implications of these findings for the educational community as well as the implications for me as both a teacher and researcher. Next, I make recommendations for the following areas: Ontario Ministry of Education, faculties of education, schools, and teachers. I then identify important areas of further research. Finally, I conclude by summarizing my findings and speak to their significance.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

As reviewed in Chapter 4, teacher-parent collaboration is accomplished using a variety of methods and strategies. A key finding of this study was that the success of teacher-parent collaboration is linked to an educator’s commitment to ongoing, positive communication. Both participants indicated that their collaboration with parents was more successful when communication was teacher-initiated, consistent and frequent and carried out using a variety of methods. Participants also recognized that gleaning support from school personnel can also be a valuable resource in facilitating collaboration with parents. Furthermore, participants recognized that a vital aspect of successful collaboration was their ability to exhibit empathy and approachability to families of their students.

Participants of this study indicated that both family experience as well as previous teacher experience has strengthened their beliefs and commitment to teacher-parent collaboration. In fact, both participants recognized that their beliefs and views about teacher-
parent collaboration was reinforced by these experiences. Furthermore, they recognized that they experienced enhanced success with teacher-parent collaboration when they pulled from these experiences since they were better able to see and understand a families’ point of view.

The tension between home and school can pose as challenges to teacher-parent collaboration. While past research focussed on the challenges for parents including language barriers, time constraints and cultural or economic differences (Pena, 2000; Comer 2005; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Henderson & Berla, 1994), the participants of this research indicated that a teacher’s lack of time can also impede collaboration. In addition to time constraints, both participants indicated that interpersonal differences between themselves and parents can also add to the challenges of collaboration. To overcome these hinderances, it is important for teachers to be adaptable and resourceful, as demonstrated by Amber and Kaitlin.

Both participants recognized there were relational and academic outcomes that positively impacted their teacher-parent collaboration. Being on same team was a strategy that both Amber and Kaitlin indicated as vital to successful collaboration with parents. As a result of working with parents, both participants noted that they built more meaningful relationships, had an increase in trust and respect as well as more effective communication with parents. An added benefit to their collaboration with parents was an enhance learning environment for not just the children of the parents collaborating but also for the other students in the class. Kaitlin and Amber also agreed that they experienced personal benefits from their collaboration with parents. For Kaitlin, cohesion was created through her collaboration with parents, noting that “when students see that there is a positive relationship between home and school their respect increases because they know that their parent and teacher talk a lot and its a team effort.” This increased in respect
resulted in a more cohesive learning environment and better classroom management. In addition, Amber noted that collaboration with parents provided her with opportunities to share tips and strategies which in turn resulted in stronger classroom management. Finally, through their collaboration with parents Amber and Kaitlin both felt better supported in their role as teachers. Across the scope of both this study as well as past research, an increased level of teacher-parent collaboration is linked to higher performance school-wide when compared to schools that have little or no parent involvement (Epstein, 1987; Henderson, 1988; OMOE, 2104a).

5.2 Implications

I outline the implications of my research, in this section, for both educational research community which includes educators, schools and school boards as well as speak to the implications it will have on my own future teaching practice.

5.2.1 The educational community

As research suggests, when teacher-parent collaboration increases, “students become more positive about school and learning…[and have improved] attendance, behaviour, homework completion, and report card grades” (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004, p. 23). As a result, it stands to reason, that everyone benefits when school personnel do everything within their power to cultivate meaningful relationships with the parents of all of children attending their school. Both the findings of this study and past research, speak to the significance of the benefits that can be realized when educators show steadfast dedication and commitment to teacher-parent collaboration. To overcome the challenges of collaboration, the participants of this study implemented a variety of strategies and methods and experienced many positive results for students, parents and themselves. For that reason, my desire is for the education community to
become more informed about the importance of teacher-parent collaboration, hear the personal success stories of primary educators and increase their own passion to ensure future success through teacher-parent collaboration.

Previous research clearly indicates that students benefit from having their families work in partnership with their teachers (Berger & Riojas, 2012; Allen, 2009). However, collaboration has traditionally been defined as positive interactions between teachers and parents occurring inside the school to improve a student’s academic performance (Peterson, 2010). Similar to research conducted by Hill and Tyson (2009), the participants of this study used a broader definition of teacher-parent collaboration. Thus allowing for parents to have a varied amount of involvement, both in and outside the classroom.

With the understanding of the significant role teacher-parent collaboration can play in a student’s overall success, it essential that teacher-parent collaboration be more widespread. As such, school administrators, school boards and the Ontario Ministry of Education can play a pivotal role by providing teachers with professional development workshops as well as practical resources that can be used to ensure successful teacher-parent collaboration. The role of a teacher is to support and inspire their students to success. Therefore, if educators refuse to collaborate with parents they are doing an injustice to their students. Moreover, participant responses were in agreement with OMOE’s (2010b) mandate to prioritize frequent, consistent communication with parents as a provincial wide goal to ensure that all schools expand their communication strategies so that parents are provided with the knowledge and tools they need to support their child’s education. “Yet, [as OMOE (2010b) states] much remains to be done if we are to realize
the full potential of parent engagement” (p. 27). As a result, those who create the policies need to ensure that there is province-wide follow through on the mandate that are set-forth.

5.2.2 My professional identity and practice

As a parent, I have always had a strong commitment to collaborating with my children’s teachers. Now, as a future educator I started this journey with a desire to work closely with the families of my students. Now, after conducting research on the practices of teacher-parent collaboration, my commitment and understanding of its importance has strengthened. As I listened and then analyzed the responses of the participants, I realized that it is not only about the benefits or struggles that a teacher faces but the commitment they have to collaboration for the sake of their students. In response to some of the challenges to teacher-parent collaboration, the OMOE (2010b) has broadened the definition of a parent volunteer to include “not only someone who helps out at school during the day but also anyone who supports school goals and children’s learning and development in any way, at any place, and at any time” (p. 10). This broader definition of collaboration allows teachers and parents to work together in numerous ways and not just the “cookie-cutter” collaboration that has traditionally occurred on field trips and inside the classroom. As a future educator, I am committed to using a broader definition of parent involvement and remember that it does not require the physical presence of parents on school property, but just consistent involvement and communication between home and school. Overall, the knowledge that I received from my participants will stay with me for a lifetime and inform my teaching practice.
5.3 Recommendations

After an analysis of the findings, the following recommendations are offered to the following areas: Ontario Ministry of Education, faculties of education, schools and school boards as well as teachers.

5.3.1 Ontario Ministry of Education

- It is important that the Ministry of Education review and revise their policies on teacher-parent collaboration as trends in education and families change.

- The Ministry of Education should take a higher degree of responsibility to research the best practices of teacher-parent collaboration.

- As a result of the Ministry of Education’s mandate to increase teacher-parent collaboration, there should be an increase in funding and provision of professional development workshops to support teachers in collaboration with parents.

5.3.2 Faculties of education

- It is important that teacher candidates be taught about the importance and benefits of teacher-parent collaboration as well as practical strategies and methods for implementing it in their future teaching practice.

- Due to its importance, faculties of Education should designate more of their resources to research the best practices of teacher-parent collaboration.
5.3.3 Schools and school boards

- It is critical that school administrators and school boards mandate school-wide initiatives that create a warm, inviting and supportive environment where families are welcomed and frequent communication between home and school is carried out through a variety of methods (i.e.: email, social media, phone calls, blogs).

- It is important that the school principal and other school personnel are supportive in the efforts teachers are making to collaborate with parents.

- Regular staff meetings are also important since they provide the principal with opportunities to suggest methods and strategies on how teachers can initiate successful collaboration with parents.

- Schools and school boards need to provide professional development opportunities for teachers to learn how to successfully collaborate with parents and overcome challenges they may be having with parents.

5.3.4 Teachers

- Teachers should start the year with positive communication that is teacher-initiated. It is essential for teachers to ensure that communication with parents is frequent, consistent and carried out through a variety of methods (i.e.: social media applications, phone calls, emails, blog posts, notes in the agenda).

- Teachers should be warm, friendly and approachable. Furthermore, they should build relationships with parents that are built on trust and respect.
It is important for teachers to participate in regular professional development opportunities to learn more about successful collaboration strategies as well as how they can overcome hindrances to collaboration.

As supported by the broaden definition of collaboration, teachers should be open to collaborating with parents through a number of different avenues inside and outside the walls of the classroom. (i.e.: field trips, family projects, at-home reading).

5.4 Areas for Further Research

While there is quite a lot of research on teacher-parent collaboration, the focus is usually more on the importance of collaboration or the benefits collaboration can have in a classroom. I believe that through my research, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the methods and strategies that my participants implemented when working with parents. However, due to the size and scope of this study, I feel that this is an area that could benefit from further research. I also believe that doing further research on the view and beliefs from the parents’ perspective would be beneficial and could provide a more well-rounded perspective. Interestingly, Kaitlin indicated that parents who are also teachers seem to be less likely to collaborate. Researching how collaboration works with parents who are also teachers could be another area of further research. Finally, as a result of both participants speaking to the importance of the support they received from school administrators and resource teachers, I believe there should be further research on school-wide approaches to teacher-parent collaboration. By examining the strategies and methods of a whole-school approach, research could inform the polices mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education as well as polices at the school board level.
5.5 Concluding Comments

This chapter provided a summary of my findings which are outlined in Chapter 4. Vital to the success of teacher-parent collaboration is a commitment to ongoing, positive communication. For the participants of this study, teacher-parent collaboration aided in the overall learning experience of their entire class as well as improved classroom management strategies. My research also found that teacher-parent collaboration was enhanced when teachers gleaned knowledge from their previous experiences, both personal and professional. Next, I described the implications teacher-parent collaboration can have on the broader educational community. The findings of this study point teachers, school administrators and school boards to the significant role teacher-parent collaboration can play for the entire school climate. Moreover, this study supports the significant benefits that are outline in OMOE’s (2010b) mandate that teacher-parent collaboration be implemented province-wide. This was followed by a discussion of the implications for my own future teaching practice. Overall, my commitment to working families and using a broader definition of parent collaboration, keeping in mind that it may look different for each family, has been strengthened by this study.

Considering these implications, I then outlined recommendations for the following areas: Ontario Ministry of Education, faculties of education, schools and school boards as well as teachers. A focus on offering initial teacher courses as well as professional development workshops on implementing successful teacher-parent collaboration was given. Next, I considered areas for further research, including the need for teacher training institutions, school boards, school administrations and teachers to take on more responsibility for researching, training and creating opportunities to collaborate with parents. By gaining a broader
understanding of collaboration, teachers can be better equipped to work with parents as well as overcome challenges they may face. As educators, we need to be flexible and open to improving our teaching practice for the betterment of all our students. In sum, this study has pointed to the essential nature of teacher-parent collaboration as well as the commitment that teachers need to be successful.
Teacher-Parent Collaboration

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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Date:____________________________

Dear

My name is Rahel Young 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 what strategies and methods elementary teachers use to foster teacher-parent collaboration and what benefits they have observed for students. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have a range of positions, have taught for a minimum of 5 years and have a demonstrated commitment to parent collaboration. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.
Sincerely,

Rahel Young

Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic
E-mail: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

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 Rahel Young and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) ______________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script:
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn what strategies and methods elementary teachers use to foster teacher-parent collaboration and to explore what benefits they have observed for students. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your experiences with teacher-parent collaboration. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Background Information:

1. How long have you worked as a teacher?

2. What is your current position?
   a. What grades and subject areas do you currently teach?
   b. Grades previously taught?
   c. Do you fulfill any other roles in your school? (e.g. coach, advisor, member of parent council, leader)

3. Can you tell me more about the school you teach in? (e.g. size, demographics, program priorities)

4. How would you describe the level of parent involvement at your school, overall? What indicators of parent involvement (or lack thereof) in the school have you seen?

5. Can you tell me more about what experiences contributed to developing your interest in, and preparation for, collaborating with parents?
   a. Personal experiences? (e.g. as a parent, own K-12 schooling etc.)
   b. Educational experiences? (e.g. course work, teachers college, additional qualifications, professional development)
c. Professional experiences? (e.g. teaching experience, positions, particular events/scenarios that happened)

**Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs:**

6. How would you describe parent collaboration? What does it mean to you? What does it involve?

7. Why do you think parent collaboration is important? What are the benefits of collaboration with parents?

8. In your opinion, what factors *facilitate* successful collaboration with parents? Please, provide examples.

9. In your opinion, what factors *hinder* successful collaboration with parents? Please, provide examples.

10. In your view, why is parent collaboration not more common in schools? What are some the key barriers to teacher-parent collaboration?

11. How do you distinguish between the roles of parents and teachers and their significance for students’ learning and development? In what ways are these roles similar and different?

**Teacher Practices:**

12. Can you tell me more about the specific ways that you collaborate with parents? What does collaboration look like in your teaching practice?

13. If I were to spend the day in your classroom, what evidence would I see of parent collaboration?

14. Which parents do you collaborate with and why? What range of factors determines which parents you collaborate with?

15. How do you initiate collaboration with parents?

16. How common is it for parents to initiate collaboration with you? What are their reasons for doing?

17. Can you describe a few examples of how you collaborated with parents in a range of ways?
18. What outcomes have you observed as a result of parent collaboration?

19. Please describe how parent collaboration has affected you as a teacher. Please, be specific.

20. Please share about a parent collaboration that became a valuable learning experience for you as a teacher?
   
   a. Outcomes for your relationship with parents? Outcomes for your students? Academic achievement? or other?

21. What methods of communication do you use to communicate with parents and why?

22. What are some personal strategies you have found to be helpful in the area of parent collaboration?

23. How, if at all, have your views about parent collaboration changed over time? Why do you think that is?

24. How, if at all, would you say that your collaboration with parents has improved over the years? What would you attribute to that?

**Supports/Challenges and Next Steps:**

25. What do you consider to be your greatest personal challenge in collaborating with parents?

26. What range of challenges do you experience when collaborating with parents?
   
   a. How do you respond to these various challenges? What would further support you in responding to these various challenges?

27. What range of factors and resources support you in collaborating with parents? (e.g. school community, demographics, material resources, translators, ELL programming for parents in the school etc.)

28. What tools or resources would you like to see at your school to further develop and support parent collaboration?

29. What advice would you give to new teachers in order to help them successfully collaborate with parents?

**Thank you for your participation in this research study!**