

**IT TAKES A VILLAGE: COMMUNICATION AND PARENT
ENGAGEMENT**

UMUAIMAN FLOWERS SAMARI
Bachelor of Education, Mount Royal University, 2016

A project submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Faculty of Education
University of Lethbridge
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

© Umuaiman Flowers Samari, 2021

DEDICATION

To my family, blood and chosen, who make up the very core of my village.

ABSTRACT

Effective communication facilitates educational partnerships between home and school, which impacts student learning. This research explored the following question: in what ways does a teacher's communication with parents influence the nature of parent engagement? Throughout this study, open-ended discussions engaged parents in communication. This took place over the course of one school year between a teacher and parents from two kindergarten classes. These discussions happened through various media: weekly online surveys, where parents answered questions about their children's learning; parent-teacher interviews, where both educational partners set in-person student learning goals based on each child's needs; and anonymous end-of-year participant surveys. The participant surveys provided the qualitative data for this study. The surveys revealed that there should be emphasis given to parents' roles as educational partners in the school culture. This is an essential responsibility of school leaders, as they play a key part in facilitating home and school communication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my profound gratitude to Dr. Pamela Adams and Dr. Carmen Mombourquette for imparting their expertise, wisdom, and kindness towards me throughout this process. I would also like to thank my mentor Nesmah Elkestawi for her ongoing support and for sharing her love for education with me. Finally, I would like to thank my mother, Rosemarie, for everything, everything, everything.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures	x
List of Abbreviations.....	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Professional Context.....	1
Personal Context.....	4
Research Question	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review	8
The Nature Home-School Communication	8
One-Way Communication	9
Two-Way Communication.....	10
Reaching Parents Through Technology.....	12
Parent Involvement.....	13
Behavioural Involvement.....	14
Personal Involvement.....	15
Cognitive/Intellectual Involvement	15
Parent Engagement	15

Parents as Adult Learners	17
The Concept of the Learner	17
The Role of Parents as Adult Learners	18
Readiness to Learn	18
Orientation to Learning.....	18
Generative Dialogue	19
Communities of Practice.....	20
Transformative Learning and Reflective Practice	20
Person-Centred Perspective	21
Socratic Questioning.....	22
Definitions	22
Home-School Communication.....	22
Parent Involvement	23
Parent Engagement	24
Andragogy.....	24
Generative Dialogue	25
Summary.....	26
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	28
Research Question	28
Research Methodology	28
Context and Process.....	29
Question of The Week	29

Parent-Teacher Interviews	29
Email and Google Forms	30
In-Person Conversation.....	33
Data Gathering Instruments.....	34
Parent Engagement Survey	34
Analysis and Interpretation of Data.....	34
Ethical Considerations	35
Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions, and Research Biases	35
Chapter 4: Findings	37
Data Analysis.....	37
Theme 1: Use of Weekly Questions	39
Theme 2: The Usefulness of Parent-Teacher Interviews.....	40
Theme 3: The Influence of School-to-Home Communication	41
Theme 4: Strategies for Support	42
Theme 5: Recommendations for Communication	42
Summary.....	44
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	45
The Necessity of One-Way Communication.....	45
Two-Way Communication Through Generative Dialogue	46
Question of the Week.....	47
Parent-Teacher Interviews	49

Fostering an Educational Partnership through Parent Engagement	51
Limitations	52
Recommendations for School Leaders	53
School Culture	53
Fostering Reflection.....	55
Recommendations for Teachers	56
Areas for Future Consideration	58
Conclusion	58
References	60
Appendix A: Participant Survey	65
Appendix B: Email Invitation	66
Appendix C: Participant Consent Form	67
Appendix D: Questions of the Week.....	70
Appendix E: Videos for Parents.....	77
Appendix F: University of Lethbridge Application for Ethical Review of Human Participant Research.....	79
Appendix G: Thematic Data Analysis	104
Appendix H: Sample Parent-Teacher Interview Report	110

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Thematic Analysis of Findings	38
Table 2: Week, Questions, and Number of Responses to the Questions of the Week.....	70
Table 3: Explanatory Videos Shared with Parents	77

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Use of Weekly Questions Thematic Analysis	104
Figure 2: The Usefulness of Parent-Teacher Interviews Thematic Analysis	105
Figure 3: The Influence of School-to-Home Communication Thematic Analysis	106
Figure 4: Strategies for Support Thematic Analysis	107
Figure 5: Recommendations for Communication Thematic Analysis	108
Figure 6: Research Question Thematic Analysis	109

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TQS	Teaching Quality Standard
LQS	Leadership Quality Standard

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Tell me and I forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I understand.

Chinese proverb

It takes a village to raise a child. People who are a part of the village impact children greatly, knowingly or not. During children's formative years, their village grows to include members of the school community, such as teachers, whose moral imperative is the children's learning. It is in the best interest of the children and their learning that important members of their village, such as parents and teachers, have common goals regarding their education. For this to be possible, parents and teachers need to recognize and claim their positions as partners in education. One of the most important characteristics of an authentic partnership is meaningful communication. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon teachers to reach out to parents in a way that involves and engages them in claiming their role as partners in education. Indeed, it takes a village to raise a child, but it also takes a village to educate one.

Professional Context

Members of the Islamic community founded Iqra School, Calgary's first Islamic faith-based school, in 1992. The governing vision for the school was for Muslim children growing up in a non-Islamic society to have a firm understanding of their religious teachings so that they may be leaders and contributing members in society (Calgary Islamic School AJ, 2020). From the start, the school's mission remained to "develop an enriched learning community that promotes academic achievement, leadership, and Islamic Values" (Calgary Islamic School AJ, 2020, "Mission, vision, beliefs, & values"). In the beginning, community members held classes in the

basement of a Calgary mosque until the student body outgrew the space. Following this population growth of the then private school, instructors and teachers held classes in trailers. This was happening parallel to the construction site of the school's future establishment. Construction took nearly five years and, in that time, parents and other stakeholders made all major decisions regarding the school and children's education.

The Islamic community founded the school in hopes of holding onto religious teachings therefore the children's Islamic education trumped everything else. Even when considering all other educational elements of the growing school, the values of community and belonging were the most important aspects of the school's culture, something that Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) described as being a comfortable-collaborative school culture. Parents were particularly vocal about this aspect of the school.

Academic success was deemed to be important, however it was not viewed as the highest priority. Parents had an important voice in school affairs because many of them were also part of the Society that governed the school. They played an instrumental role in school governance and the ways in which school leaders and teachers did their jobs in relationship to faith development and with the overall educational program that was offered.

For the Islamic community, the appeal of private education was that the Society possessed complete agency with its funds and its decisions. Decisions about anything from educational leadership and staffing to the brand of stationary students would use was in the Society's hands. As a result, many of the educators who taught Arabic, Islamic Studies, and Quran were not certified teaching professionals but were hired because of their personal connections to the community. It was also commonplace for principals and vice-principals, who were often businesspeople, to attain their posts in the school based on their personal connections. Though many aspects of school life lacked professionalism, the school felt like a family. In this

comfortable-collaborative school culture, educators did not always ask and answer difficult questions regarding teaching and learning (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015), so when Iqra School transitioned from being a private school to a public one, the shift in priorities affected the school community at large.

Until the introduction of a formal school board that came with the move into the public system, community members, who were often parents as well, were accustomed to making most decisions that concerned the Islamic school. These processes changed drastically in 2015 with the introduction of a formal school board governing Iqra School. Policies and governance were also revised and, consequently, stakeholders who were once the primary decision-makers no longer possessed as much decision-making power. As a result, for the last five years, parents have had a strained relationship with the school. It now appears that the only time parents are involved with school affairs is when their children are in behavioural, academic, or social trouble.

From observing and communicating with parents, I learned that they did not like having an active role in their children's education only when things were unpleasant. In all fairness, there was more that educators in this school community could have done to invite parents to engage with their children's education. Parents are partners in education and at Iqra school, the parents were seeking opportunities to be more involved in that partnership. In fact, as decreed by the Government of Alberta (2018a) in the *Leadership Quality Standard* (LQS), educational leaders must foster these partnerships by "creating opportunities for parents/guardians, as partners in education, to take an active role in their children's education" (p. 4). These opportunities need to be meaningful enough to sustain the school's mission while always putting the children's learning at the forefront of everything. For that to happen, parents need to be involved in their children's education. The Chinese proverb at the beginning of this chapter puts the importance of involvement into perspective because it is through involving a person that they understand.

Personal Context

Professionally, I have spent the majority of my career as a Kindergarten teacher at Iqra School, a school that I once attended as a student. As a member of the closely-knit Islamic community, I have frequent and informal encounters with parents and students at community or religious events. As a result, I have had the chance to converse candidly with parents and students about their experience at Iqra School, both when it was private as well as now that it is part of the public education system. These conversations have sparked honest and insightful curiosity around parents' perspectives about their children's education.

At the beginning of last school year, after Meet the Teacher Night, a parent approached me with beaming enthusiasm saying that she had heard great things about me as a teacher. She proceeded to list all of her friends' children that I had had the pleasure of teaching and who were continuing to do well at school. She claimed that because I was a good teacher, she would be right to expect that I would be giving her child lots of homework. Though I smiled, I was taken aback by this assumption since one of my first topics of communication with parents every September is my philosophy explaining why I do *not* give homework. I appreciated the interaction because it gave me more insight into parents' perspectives regarding good kindergarten teaching. My takeaway from this interaction was that parents were eager to play a role in their children's education, but their priorities did not appear to align with current research or current teaching practices. The eagerness that the parent displayed also provided me with insight about the breadth and depth of parent's knowledge of their children's learning needs. Parents are, after all, the children's first teachers (Alberta Education, 2008) and that makes them partners in education. In previous years, my efforts to involve parents in their children's education focused on digital platforms such as a class blog, an education app called ClassDojo,

and posting pictures on Instagram. Though these efforts involved parents by informing them about what was happening in the classroom, it did not sufficiently engage them.

This research project is based on this assumption that it takes a village to raise a child and that parents are a vital part of the children's village. I am seeking to understand what strategies a classroom teacher might implement that would invite parents to assume a more active role in their children's education in ways that align with current and researched practices. I hypothesized that through this involvement in issues and conversations regarding their children's education, parents would build an understanding of educational priorities and, as a result, a capacity to support their children continuously throughout their educational journey. In embarking on this exploration, I am making two assumptions. The first is that explaining to parents the purpose behind educational practices will equip them to provide academic support that may be of benefit to their children's learning. The second assumption is that if parents understand their role as educators in their children's lives, they may be more likely to become involved in their children's education. These assumptions are validated by Alberta Education's (2008) contention that "close partnership between schools, families and communities can strengthen the connections between children's learning and experiences, within these various contexts, and make them more meaningful" (p. 3).

Partnering with parents is chiefly important when considering the ecological environment in which children develop. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system model explains the different levels of impact that various environments have on children's development. The first level, the microsystem, includes the child's immediate surroundings such as home, school, and religious institutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As home and school make up a child's microsystem, one of the initial questions I posed before engaging in this study was how detrimental is it to children's development when parents are uninformed about what happens at

school or when teachers are uninformed about what happens at home? Do students feel the miscommunication? If there is a lack of communication within children's microsystems, what becomes of the other parts of their development? How would this affect their learning? The apparent solution seemed simple enough; as a classroom teacher, I could ensure that the lines of communication between parents and me remained open. More than that, our conversations could be valuable, educational, and insightful. Exploring the ways in which I could fortify the lines of communication with parents to build an educational partnership with them became my professional goal for the school year. I was curious as to whether or not involving parents would improve educational outcomes for children (Walsh et al., 2014).

Research Question

The Government of Alberta (2018b) contended that quality teaching requires teachers in the province to appropriately communicate with parents. In the *Teaching Quality Standard* (TQS), the Government of Alberta (2018b) highlighted the importance of involving parents in children's education. In the document, the "fostering effective relationships" indicator of "providing culturally appropriate and meaningful opportunities for students and for parents/guardians, as partners in education, to support student learning" (Government of Alberta, 2018b, p. 4) provides direction to teachers. Principals are encouraged to also attend to the needs of parents as partners in education. In the LQS (Government of Alberta, 2018a), principals are mandated to model a commitment to professional learning by "engaging members of the school community to build a shared understanding of current trends and priorities in the Education system" (p. 4). The statements made in both the TQS and LQS leads to my main research question: In what ways does a teacher's communication with parents influence the nature of parent engagement? Through the limited scope of this research question, I plan to explore the

ways in which the use of generative dialogue (Adams et al., 2019) serves as a means of communication may influence parent engagement.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study will seek to explore the following question: in what ways does a teacher's communication with parents influence the nature of parent engagement? In order to delve into an answer to this question, it is important to explore the literature pertaining to related areas of study by understanding terms and concepts that inform this research project. This chapter will identify three important concepts that are foundational to this study, including the nature of home-school communication and its impact on parent involvement and parent engagement; perceiving parents as adult thinkers and learners through a framework of andragogy (Knowles, 1980); and addressing how to meet parents' andragogical needs and that is the purpose of generative dialogue (Adams et al., 2019) in this study.

This chapter will outline definitions for several concepts that are foundational to the research question that guides this study, including the nature of home-school communication, parent involvement, and parent engagement. Further, this chapter will also define andragogy and generative dialogue, which are critical areas of study that contain frameworks that guide this study. This chapter will also identify what the literature says about the effectiveness of integrating technology to foster parent engagement.

The Nature Home-School Communication

When parents participate in their children's education, it yields positive results that benefit academic achievement and socioemotional wellbeing (Fantuzzo et al., 2013). However, schools tend to underutilize parents as partners in education (Lai & Ishiyama, 2014). To foster an effective educational partnership between home and school, strong reciprocal communication is important (Graham-Clay, 2005). "Regular constructive communication" (Walsh et al., 2014, p. 1142) is significant for children's academic growth. This is because effective communication builds the learning community essential for meeting the children's needs (Graham-Clay, 2005).

There are avenues that schools and teachers may use to communicate with parents and often this starts with something as physical as a welcome sign or a smile (Lai & Ishiyama, 2004). However, expressed communication involves exchanges between parties and can be one-way or two-way (Graham-Clay, 2005).

One-Way Communication

“One-way communication occurs when teachers seek to inform parents about events, activities, or student progress through a variety of sources” (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 118).

Graham-Clay (2005) explained that some of these sources may be “an introductory letter at the beginning of the school year, classroom or school newsletters, report cards, communication books, radio announcements, [and] school websites” (p. 118). During one-way communication, information flows from the school to the parents with little reciprocal interaction. Williams and Cartledge (1997) explained that one-way written communication is most beneficial because it aids in keeping track of students’ progress through record keeping. Accordingly, the nature of correspondence needs to be efficient, organized, and clear so that parents may understand it without much confusion (Davern, 2004). For one-way communication to be effective, a consistent format is necessary; it is also helpful for teachers to inform parents from the start of the year or term how often they may expect communication from school (Graham-Clay, 2005). This is most applicable for forms of communication such as newsletters and other forms of routine written communication (Williams & Cartledge, 1997). Important, also, is communicating with parents initially about what the correspondence from school will entail (Graham-Clay, 2005). That way, parents will be attentive and know to expect communication from the teacher. Davern (2004) remarked that although one-way written communication has its benefits, it might not always be the best form of communicating important information to parents in cases where families’ first language is not English, for instance. Davern (2004) further remarked that

sometimes parents might have reading difficulties, even if English is their first language.

Graham-Clay (2005) offered the idea of two-way communication as a way for educators to resolve potential miscommunication.

Two-Way Communication

Graham-Clay (2005) defined two-way communication as involving an “interactive dialogue between teachers and parents” (p. 118). It is helpful in this form of communication to implement strategies for effective communication as improper communication may cause conflict between parents and teachers (Davern, 2004). In contrast, positive communication with parents yields “a dialogue that develops out of a growing trust, a mutual concern, and an appreciation of contrasting perspective” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 73). To achieve effective communication, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2004) recommended that children’s needs and achievements be put at the forefront of all interactive dialogues with parents. This is a noteworthy way to communicate empathy toward parents (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004), which Lai & Ishiyama (2004) explained is “a key to any working relationship” (p.106).

Some examples of two-way communication include phone calls with parents, “home visits, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and various school-based community activities” (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 118). According to Graham-Clay (2005), teachers must aim “to make these interactions as productive as possible” (p. 120). Parent-teacher conferences are a popular and traditional opportunity for two-way communication (Graham-Clay, 2005). These conferences are natural vehicles for communicating with parents because school “administrators allot time for them” (Minke & Anderson, 2003, p. 49) and require teachers to partake in them. “Because of the value of input from parents and the opportunities for interaction with them, it is important for teachers to approach parent conferences in a manner that ensures that the process will be beneficial” (Price & Marsh, 1985, p. 274). To ensure that this is the case, teachers must approach

these conferences with a thoughtful plan (Price & Marsh, 1985). Oftentimes, one-way communication characterizes parent-teacher conferences where teachers impart information while parents listen (Minke & Anderson, 2003). However, a more collaborative approach to parent-teacher conferences, characterized by two-way communication, improves the partnership between school and home (Minke & Anderson, 2003). As Lawrence-Lightfoot (2004) asserted, the conversation at parent-teacher conferences must consider “the whole child” by focusing the conversation on children’s strengths and weaknesses. Thus, teachers’ plans for approaching the conversation at parent-teacher conferences must be child-centred and teachers should possess a solution-focused mind set (Price & Marsh, 1985). Price and Marsh (1985) explained that to effectively do this, teachers must be able to listen intently to parents as this will inspire them to share more openly. Minke and Anderson (2003) added that teachers need to “listen nondefensively...and plan their responses based on the other person’s goals,” (p. 52) which, in this case, would be the parents. Parents and teachers should leave the conference feeling connected and empowered to move forward in providing children with their learning needs (Minke & Anderson, 2003). Additionally, Price and Marsh (1985) suggested that after teachers have had the chance to reflect on the meeting, they should have plans to follow up with parents to review any implications that either of them might have missed during the meeting. This is important because teachers may inform and involve parents in solutions for their children’s education. The follow-up meeting is also a good opportunity for teachers to engage parents in their child’s education by assigning them the responsibility of taking steps to further support their child.

Although the two-way communication that happens at parent-teacher conferences is important, it is often not as commonplace as their written or one-way communication. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to ensure that their written communication is clear and easy to understand

(Price & Marsh,1985). Likewise, teachers must reach parents in ways that are culturally relevant and in the age of smartphones, the nature of home-school communication relies on the advancements and convenience of technology (Goodall, 2016).

Reaching Parents Through Technology

Providing parents with introductory videos at the beginning of the school year grants them insight regarding teacher or school expectations (Walsh et al., 2018). Involving parents through technology in this capacity will also influence their perspectives regarding the school environment and, ultimately, impact their involvement. Walsh et al. (2018) deduced that as a result, family involvement is also beneficial for the school environment as a whole. An effective way to foster parent involvement in a school is by way of connection. This connection can be through traditional means of communication such as phone calls and letters home or it can utilize innovative methods like online portals or videos. Diversifying the attempt to connect with parents is the best way to proceed (Graham-Clay, 2005).

In education, a marker of good practice is for schools and teachers to reach families in ways that are familiar and convenient for them so that they may be involved in their children's education (Walsh et al., 2018). The Government of Alberta (2018b) concurred that quality teachers strive to provide parents with culturally appropriate opportunities to be partners in their children's learning. Making use of technology, particularly of videos, facilitates this partnership as it maximizes the school's outreach to parents (Walsh et al., 2018). The aim of using technology is to support parents' effective engagement with their children's learning, which will "increase parental self-efficacy around supporting learning" (Goodall, 2016, p. 126). Videos that parents may access at a later date is an asset to a school's approach to communication because asynchronous access to information gives parents the opportunity to access valuable information relating to their children's learning when it convenes them, thus giving them a greater chance to

be involved in their children's education (Goodall, 2016). An additional advantage to using videos is that they are accessible because they can cater to parents' various needs that come from having different levels of education and different language needs as videos make use of images (Walsh et al., 2014). Using videos as a means for schools to connect with parents and involve them in their children's education also provides families with the chance to engage in conversations about education and schooling as they watch the videos together (Walsh et al., 2014). When the videos include learning strategies, parents are likely to implement these ideas with their children (Walsh et al., 2014), thus strengthening the home-to-school connection. Communicating with parents through a favoured medium like videos, accesses multiple domains of parent involvement as it also visually invites them into the classroom (Walsh et al., 2018; Goodall, 2016).

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement in education has been found to be beneficial to children's success (Ma et al., 2016). Maccoby and Martin (1983) described parental involvement as being the commitment that parents have to their role of fostering their children's development. According to the Government of Alberta (2011), parental involvement might look like sharing "information with parents through various modes of communication, such as newsletters, websites, and calendars" (p. 2). Parent involvement might also involve communicating with parents about the teaching that is occurring in their children's classrooms (Government of Alberta, 2011). Alberta Education (2008) emphasized that the learning process is a cooperative and communicative endeavour that is sustainable with the partnership between the multiple contexts of a child's life, namely home and school. For this reason, Alberta Education (2008) encouraged parents to continue helping their children to "extend the knowledge, skills, and attributes [they] develop in the kindergarten program" (p. 4). This invitation and governmental expectation for schools to

acknowledge the role that parents occupy in their children's education requires active efforts on the behalf of the school and classroom teachers to involve parents in their children's education.

Involving parents in their children's education requires intention. Ma et al. (2016) regarded this to be "the proactive engagement of parents" in school related activities that promote their children's learning and development. Ferlazzo (2011) characterized the term a little differently by suggesting that schools that aim for parental involvement do so by informing parents of the ways in which they may contribute to their children's education. This means parents are left following directions from the school rather than sharing their thoughts or their voice. However, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) believed that parent involvement is a multidimensional relationship that discerns between parents' involvement with their children and their involvement with their children's education. Thus, they defined parent involvement as "the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within a given domain" (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994, p. 238). There are multiple domains of parent involvement in education and Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) conceptualized three of them that have positive effects on children's education: behavioural involvement, personal involvement, and cognitive/intellectual involvement.

Behavioural Involvement

Behavioural involvement entails the kind of behavioural relationship parents have with their children's education (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). This might mean attending open houses and volunteering for field trips. Through this domain of involvement, parents communicate with their children how important they perceive schooling to be. As a result of this type of involvement, parents gain information to help them support their children in their education.

Personal Involvement

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) also recognized parents' personal involvement as another domain for educational involvement. In this respect, as personal involvement is particular to each person, parents' personal perception of schooling and education impacts that of their children. This type of involvement confirms parents' personal involvement develops and hones children's attitudes towards schooling (Ma et al., 2016).

Cognitive/Intellectual Involvement

Parents who are cognitively/intellectually involved in their children's education expose their children to an array of stimulating materials and activities to promote intellectual growth (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). This domain of involvement helps children develop higher levels of cognition (Ma et al., 2016), while providing children with the opportunity to bridge skills they learned at school with activities in which they partake at home (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). In practice, cognitive/intellectual involvement might look like parents reading books and asking their children critical thinking questions in the process, completing mathematical problems, or even discussing current events (Ma et al., 2016).

Parent Engagement

Walsh et al. (2014) maintained that "[c]hildren are the primary beneficiaries of parent involvement, as they are the individuals who are at the center of the school-home relationship and the focus of parent involvement outcomes" (p. 1145). Ferlazzo (2011) asserted that in order for schools to maximize their relationships with parents, the connection needs to go beyond parent involvement toward parent engagement. Where parent involvement identifies ways in which schools can inform parents about how they may contribute to their children's education, parent engagement coordinates ways to work with parents. While parent involvement has positive impact on children's education, parent engagement is a step beyond parent involvement. In fact,

parent engagement is a notable factor in children's development (Walsh et al., 2018). Goodall (2013) distinguished these terms by imparting that a chief difference is that parent involvement assesses parents' interaction with the school; in contrast, parent engagement highlights interaction with their children's learning and educational outcomes. Essentially, parent involvement is more school based whereas parent engagement describes parents' investment in their children's learning at home. Ferlazzo (2011) put it simply when clarifying that for schools, the goal of parent engagement is to gain parents as partners in education.

In pursuance of a partnership with parents, schools need to lead with their ears. Ferlazzo (2011) explained that administrators and teachers must develop a relationship-building process where they listen to parents' dreams and concerns in regard to their children's education. This is the foundation of effective parent engagement. Though the listening process may assume various forms, when conversing with parents it is necessary to listen to the wisdom they have gathered over the years and to the hopes they have for their children. This will lead to discussions about how the school may help in achieving those goals for and with the children. When parent engagement is successful, parents might develop a different vision of what is possible, and the school community might start to shift (Ferlazzo, 2011).

Parents' roles alter as a result of parent engagement. They evolve from being school clients to active members of the school community (Ferlazzo, 2011). They gain power and, as a result, become "leaders in education improvement efforts" (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 14). For parents to see and truly understand their role as partners in education, school leaders and teachers need to work with parents. In both the LQS and the TQS, the Government of Alberta (2018a, p. 4; 2018b, p. 4) recognized the importance of this partnership and that is why "fostering effective relationships" is the very first competency listed in documents. The journey towards parent

engagement is also a learning process for parents and in the initial stages of shifting from parent involvement to parent engagement, parents are adult learners.

Parents as Adult Learners

Adults learn differently than children, something that Knowles (1973) emphasized through his study of andragogy. Knowles (1980) explained that andragogy is a model of assumptions about learners that, in its essence, is “the art and science of helping adults learn” (p. 43). This model of assumptions about adult learning identifies that education is “a lifelong process of continuing inquiry” (Knowles, 1980, p. 41). As this is the case, adults undertake learning projects and are unafraid to seek assistance when they need help. However, when adult learners seek help from teachers, teachers tend to influence their way of thinking. This is because often, teachers approach adult learners in the same way they would approach younger learners. This is why when attempting to engage parents as partners in education who are embarking in a process of learning, teachers and administrators need to take heed of parents’ learning and intellectual needs as adults. If educators at schools are to understand how to communicate with parents as adult learners, there needs to be a basic understanding of andragogy as it pertains to its four premises: the concept of the learner, the role of the parents’ or learners’ experience, readiness to learn, and orientation to learning.

The Concept of the Learner

As learners, adults are self-directed (Knowles, 1980). To engage parents as learners, educators need to communicate with parents in a way that would nurture parents’ independent thought. This does not mean that adults lack the need of support or guidance but rather that their dependency is only temporary.

The Role of Parents as Adult Learners

Adult learners possess a reservoir of experiences that can enrich their learning (Knowles, 1980). Therefore, this should be amplified, and schools should create opportunities for parents to partake in experience-bolstering educational techniques. Knowles (1980) mentioned that engaging adult learners in discussions and problem-solving, among other things, would prove to be appropriate. Verily, educators need to support and promote adult learning by valuing the authority of the wisdom that parents already possess (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004).

Readiness to Learn

As adult learners' readiness to learn something depends on their real-life needs (Knowles, 1980), educators need to equip parents with tools to identify their needs as partners in education who have a role in supporting their children's education. Knowles (1980) enlightened by explaining that learning programs should tend to learners' practical needs, based on their readiness. Expressly, educators must meet parents where they are (Walsh et al., 2018), according to their needs as adult learners who are also partners in education.

Orientation to Learning

Adult learners view education as a means of "developing increased competence to achieve their full potential" (Knowles, 1980, p. 44). Accordingly, education initiatives that aim to engage parents as partners in education must do so through competency-development. This will assure that the skills they gain through the learning experience with the school will be useful as they apply it with their children.

In unpacking these premises of andragogy, Knowles (1980) summarized that adult learning experiences need to consider adult learners holistically by considering their self-directedness, their lived experiences, their need to learn relevant material, and their need to develop their competence. In 1973, Knowles remarked that great teachers in history who tended

to the needs of the adult learners all had one thing in common; they engaged learners by engaging them in mental inquiry. The Greeks are a prime example. They would present the group with a quandary and the learners would work together, pulling from their collective experience, to find a resolution (Knowles, 1973). This method of teaching and learning is called a Socratic dialogue. Engaging parents as adult learners in a discussion of this extent is a good place for schools to start (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004). Rooted in Socratic reflective questioning (Adams et al., 2019), generative dialogue is a practical approach for school community members to utilize when working towards the common goal of student learning through parent engagement.

Generative Dialogue

Adams et al. (2019) defined generative dialogue as an “interaction between individuals that has the power to cause or give rise to productive, creative, and unique understanding” (p. 96). Generative dialogue provokes intentionality in regard to student learning as asking authentic guiding questions is the basis of this approach. Adams et al. (2019) further explained that generative dialogue as a skill set for conversing “with the purpose of clarifying and bringing into existence new ideas and thoughts that lead to more purposeful action” (p. 96). To promote deep thinking and understanding about education and student learning through self-reflective discussion, authentic inquiry is necessary (Adams et al., 2019). This is beneficial for educators when communicating with parents as partners in education because generative dialogue inspires competence building and problem solving. Through this reflective process, educators, or parents as partners in education in this case, emerge with a plan of action. This dialogue emerges by way of “frequent and focused” conversations that educators start and sustain with guiding questions and strategies that result in evidence of growth (p. 102). Active listening is therefore integral to the “disarmingly simple, yet frustratingly complex” process (p. 102). Active listening is also important component to communicating with parents as adult learners because it is through active

listening that educators can “encourage elicitation of the often-hidden expertise of parents” (Minke & Anderson, p. 51). Adams et al. (2019) expanded on generative dialogue as a conceptual framework that contains four key elements: communities of practice, transformative learning and reflective practice, person-centred perspective, and Socratic questioning.

Communities of Practice

A community of practice is a group of individuals who interact often to deepen their knowledge and understanding in a shared area of interest or concern (Adams et al., 2019). Learning is a way to be an active participant in communities of practice and participating individuals’ inevitable impact the communities as they grow and learn over time. As learning entails active participation in communities of practice, educators and parents, according sociocultural understandings of these communities, need to recognize the place they occupy within these communities. Active participation is possible if members of the communities of practice meet adult learners’ needs. As an outcome of engaging parents in communities of practice, more collaborative efforts will be present between educators and parents to plan for children’s learning (Minke & Anderson, 2003).

Transformative Learning and Reflective Practice

For adult learners, critical reflection is necessary to meet their intellectual needs (Knowles, 1973). Through critical reflection and experience, adults reconstruct the understanding of the world that they had acquired previously, thus shifting their frames of reference (Mezirow, 1991). This shift or transformation is known as transformative learning. Transformative learning is “the process of altering established frames of reference through critical interrogations of the assumptions and premises underlying constructed meanings of experiences with the goal of acting on these transformed understandings” (Adams et al., 2019, p. 99). This is a clear benefit why transformative learning and reflection are important in shaping the generative dialogue

process (Adams et al., 2019). Davern (2004) concurred that when communicating with parents, it is the role of the educators “to create a process that is inviting and meaningful for parents” (p. 25) and as a result, parents will be more engaged and responsive to the process. Davern (2004) further explained that educators could ask parents open-ended questions about the information they are interested in learning to further benefit them in their role as partners in education.

Person-Centred Perspective

In order to build a relationship that will sustain the honest and reflective process of generative dialogue, educators need to be genuine (Adams et al., 2019). This genuineness means that educators are aware of their perspective and context, which will lead to adult learners feeling comfortable and cognizant of theirs. This acceptance on the behalf of both parties will create an appropriate and conducive climate for generative dialogue. For effective critical self-reflection and learning to take place, mutual respect and empathy are crucial. In order to assume a person-centred perspective, educators need to commit “to listening more and talking less” as this is the way to recognize parents’ beliefs (Adams et al., 2019, p. 101). This recognition of beliefs will provide educators with the necessary information to support reflection. When communicating with parents, asking them questions and genuinely listening to their responses will indicate that educators are receptive to their ideas and experiences and that will demonstrate respect for them as partners in education (Davern, 2004). For this to be a respectful and successful process, placing children’s learning at the centre of the conversation is important (Price & Marsh, 1985). “When parents and teachers begin to trust each other and recognize the mutuality of their concerns for the child” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 73), the dialogue is one that is embracing, non-adversarial, and collaborative.

Socratic Questioning

Socrates, the famed Greek philosopher, cultivated insight and understanding among adult learners by asking open-ended questions that focus on understanding concepts, issues, and theories (Adams et al., 2019). Open-ended questions, known as Socratic questions, invite reflection upon big ideas and varying perspectives. In practice, Socratic questions inspire the unearthing of ideas and assumptions with the purpose of learning. Davern (2004) found that asking open-ended questions was important in building effective partnerships with parents because it is through asking questions that parents share their perspectives as partners in education. Concurrently, asking Socratic questions highlights parents' values, wants, and needs for supporting their children's needs (Minke & Anderson, 2004). Active listening is as important as asking questions. Minke and Anderson (2003) explained that when educators are actively listening to parents' perspectives or concerns, they must be attentive and non-defensive in order to understand and respond to parents' goal. Effective dialogue is rooted in trust, requires "risk-taking, courage, and grace" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 73).

Definitions

Home-School Communication

Berger (1991) explained that there are two avenues for home-school communication that are distinguished as one-way and two-way communication.

One-way communication. Graham-Clay (2005) defined one-way communication as being communication from the teacher or the school with the intent of informing the parents or guardians of a student. Williams and Cartledge (1997) identified that there are several ways that one-way communication occurs but written communication is the most effective. Williams and Cartledge (1997) classified newsletters and report cards as being forms of one-way communication. For the purpose of this study, one-way communication will hold its inclusive

definition of being a term that defines any communication that originates from the school and is directed to parents of guardians.

Two-way communication. Davern (2004) explained that communication is most effective when there is a dialogue between the school and the home. This dialogue, though it assumes many forms, is what Graham-Clay (2005) defined as two-way communication. Minke and Anderson (2003) explained that the most effective form of two-way home-school communication is parent-teacher interviews as they are ritualized, and school authorities allot time and importance to them. Another effective way to engage in two-way communication with parents is through the use of technology (Walsh et al., 2018). For the purpose of this study, the term two-way communication means any type of dialogue between the teacher or the school and the students' families, be it in person or through the use of technology.

Parent Involvement

Maccoby and Martin (1983) described parental involvement as being the commitment that parents have to their role of fostering their children's development. According to the Government of Alberta (2011), parental involvement might look like sharing "information with parents through various modes of communication, such as newsletters, websites, and calendars" (p. 2). Parent involvement might also involve communicating with parents about the teaching that is occurring in their children's classrooms (Government of Alberta, 2011). According to Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994), there are three domains that make up parent involvement: behavioural involvement, personal involvement, and cognitive/intellectual involvement. Where behavioural involvement entails the kind of behavioural relationship parents have with their children's education, parents' personal involvement considers the perception that parents have of education and schooling as a whole and the impact it has on the children (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Cognitive/intellectual involvement entails that parents tend to

their children's cognitive and intellectual development (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). This might look like parents engaging in conversation with their children where they ask them critical thinking questions (Ma et al., 2016). For the purpose of this study, the term parent involvement encompasses Maccoby and Martin's (1983) definition, coupled with the Government of Alberta's (2011) definition of the term as they are most relevant to the societal context of this study. For this study, parent involvement is defined as parents' active role to foster their children's educational development, which can include things such as reciprocal communication with their children's school.

Parent Engagement

Ferlazzo (2011) identified that parent engagement is a step beyond parent involvement. Goodall (2013) distinguished these terms by imparting that a chief difference is that parent involvement assesses parents' interaction with the school; in contrast, parent engagement highlights interaction with their children's learning and educational outcomes. Essentially, parent involvement is more school based whereas parent engagement describes parents' investment in their children's learning at home. For the purpose of this study, the term parent engagement highlights Ferlazzo's (2011) definition of the term along with Goodall's (2013) distinction between parent involvement and parent engagement. Ferlazzo (2011) explained that parent engagement is an extension of parent involvement but with the aim to gain parents as partners in education. Goodall (2013) asserted that parent engagement entails parents' interactions with their children's learning outcomes.

Andragogy

Andragogy is a model of assumptions about learners that, in its essence, is "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). Andragogy has four premises: the concept of the learner, the role of the parents' or learners' experience, readiness to learn, and

orientation to learning. Through the concept of the learner, Knowles (1980) explained that adult learners are primarily independent. The role of parents' or adult learners' experience contributes a great deal to their learning thus their wisdom needs to be valued throughout their learning experience (Knowles, 1980). Knowles (1980) rationalised that adult learners are ready to learn something new when a need arises in their real-life experience. An educator's role becomes to help their adult learners understand what they need to know (Knowles, 1980). In the context of educators communicating with parents, they have the "responsibility to create conditions and provide tools and procedures for helping" (Knowles, 1980, p. 44) parents understand what they need to know as partners in education. Orientation to learning is the final premise of andragogy and it entails learners "developing an increased competence" (Knowles, 1980, p. 44) to manage their real-life experiences.

Generative Dialogue

Conceptually, generative dialogue is the ability to generate deep reflection by means of conversation (Adams et al., 2019). Adams et al. (2019) defined generative dialogue as an "interaction between individuals that has the power to cause or give rise to productive, creative, and unique understanding" (p. 96). As a conceptual framework, generative dialogue contains four key elements: communities of practice, transformative learning and reflective practice, person-centred perspective, and Socratic questioning (Adams et al., 2019). A community of practice of a group of individuals who interact often to deepen their knowledge and understanding in a shared area of interest or concern (Adams et al., 2019). Transformative learning is "the process of altering established frames of reference through critical interrogations of the assumptions and premises underlying constructed meanings of experiences with the goal of acting on these transformed understandings" (Adams et al., 2019, p. 99). The person-centred perspective provides the principles for engagement necessary to the generative dialogue process (Adams et

al., 2019). In order for members in the generative dialogue to be engaged there must be a good understanding of the role of the adult learner's experience, which is a concept that derives from andragogy (Knowles, 1980). Socratic questioning is a style of discourse that originated with Socrates, the famed Greek philosopher (Adams et al., 2019). This style of discourse is characterized by focused and systemic asking open-ended questions with the intention of provoking understanding and encouraging insight (Adams et al., 2019). For the purpose of this study, the term generative dialogue will retain its original definition by Adams et al. (2019).

Summary

The literature surrounding parent communication, andragogy, and generative dialogue has indicated that building an effective partnership between home and school, communication needs to be clear and intentional. This means, educators communicating with parents should be mindful of the means through which home-school communication occurs. The use of accessible methods of communication is most appropriate for home-school communication. The literature on andragogy has put an emphasis on the need for adult learning experiences to consider adult learners holistically by considering their self-directedness, their lived experiences, their need to learn relevant material, and their need to develop their competence. In this case, when engaging with parents as partners in education, it is helpful to consider that they are embarking in a process of learning; therefore, teachers and administrators need to take heed of parents' learning and intellectual needs as adults. For adult learner needs to be met, Knowles (1980) remarked that engaging adult learners in discussions and problem-solving, among other things, would prove to be of benefit to their learning experience. Generative dialogue (Adams et al., 2019) makes that kind of learning experience possible between teachers and parents. As a means to develop in-depth conversation and reflection, generative dialogue (Adams et al., 2019) facilitates the process of engaging parents as partners in education.

What does it look like when a teacher considers the research surrounding the nature of communication, andragogy, and generative dialogue, when planning to engage parents as partners in education? In what ways does a teacher's communication with parents influence the nature of parent engagement? This study explores these questions and the holistic journey towards building a healthy educational partnership with parents through parent engagement.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

To explore the research question governing this study, there needs to be consideration of a teacher's purpose for communicating with parents and the ways in which this home-school communication impacts parent engagement. Adams et al. (2019) enlightened the importance of question-asking for productive dialogue. Therefore, one major component of how I approached communication with parents throughout this study was through asking them pertinent and relevant questions.

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways a teacher may engage parents as partners in their children's education. This study explored the ways in which a teacher's communication with parents influenced the nature of parent engagement. The research project sought to answer the following question: *In what ways does a teacher's communication with parents influence the nature of parent engagement?*

Research Methodology

The research method is important in order to explore each research question appropriately (Neuman, 2014). A qualitative research design was necessary to explore the open-ended research question that governed this study because, as Mertler (2017) explained, qualitative research requires "systemic observation in order to gain knowledge [and] reach understanding" (p. 11). In particular, this study endeavored to answer *in what ways*, or *how* a teacher's communication with parents influences the nature of parent engagement, which makes it a qualitative study that is also descriptive (Neuman, 2014).

Context and Process

As the purpose of the study was to understand the ways in which a teacher's communication with parents would influence the nature of parent engagement, the target population for this study were the 76 parents of 38 students from my kindergarten class that I taught during the 2019-2020 school year. Since Iqra School is an Islamic faith-based school, in addition to all being parents to kindergarteners, participants in this study also shared the same Islamic faith. Every participant spoke another language besides English; however, most participants were not English language learners. This descriptive study, as its name denotes, aimed to describe situations as they are (Neuman, 2014). Therefore, the data-gathering technique used to describe the ways in which a teacher's communication with parents influences the nature of parent engagement included a survey. However, there was a robust process of communication with parents prior to administering the survey and that is outlined below.

Question of The Week

One source of collecting data on parent engagement were the questions of the week. Throughout the school year, participants answered weekly questions pertaining to their children's education (Appendix D). The weekly questions spanned over the course of 33 weeks and, on average, 9.61% of all parents voluntarily responded weekly. This amounted to an average of seven responses weekly.

Parent-Teacher Interviews

Twice in the school year, parents met with me during parent-teacher interviews to speak to me of their kindergartners' progress. As important opportunities to clearly and effectively communicate with parents face-to-face, parent-teacher interviews served as a platform for informative conversations about parent engagement. These interviews were also where parents made goals with me about ways in which they may support their students' learning at home.

The parents of 27 out of 38 students attended the November parent-teacher interviews, where they each set a goal to support their students' learning at home. That is 71% of all participants. The February parent-teacher interviews were slightly different where the parents of 19 out of 38 students attended parent-teacher interviews and set a goal to support their students' learning at home. That is 50% of all participants.

Email and Google Forms

The use of email was essential for this research because it was the primary form of communication between home and school. Weekly, parents would receive a newsletter that included important notices and information, as well a link to the Question of the Week. The weekly email also included information on what we had covered in class that week and what we would be covering in class the upcoming week. Along with this information, the email also included links to videos, articles, and blog posts to help parents support their children's learning at home.

In order to communicate with parents on an on-going and weekly basis, I asked the Questions of the Week through Google Forms. Part of the Google Suite, a collection of Google Applications that work through the Cloud, Google Forms was the ideal question-asking application as it allowed for participants to answer questions in a variety of ways. The simplicity of the Google Forms application was user-friendly for the participants. Iqra School also used Google Suite applications throughout all the grade levels, so this consistency also factored into the reason why Google Forms was the appropriate data gathering instrument for the Questions of the Week.

Through the use of Google Forms, I sent out weekly questions that voluntarily invited parents to engage in a virtual, written dialogue about educational practices and priorities in

Kindergarten (Appendix D). The Alberta Education (2011) kindergarten curriculum informed many questions so that parents understood the curricular expectations.

For multiple fruitful conversations with many parents at once, the form included questions (Appendix D) that respected the following format:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your child's name?
3. A relevant question about educational priorities in kindergarten
4. What is one question you have for me this week?

The reason for asking for the parents' name was so that I would be able to engage parents in proper conversations more personally when I was replying to their responses to the weekly question. These replies usually happened in the form of email correspondence but at times, parents and I had in-person conversations. The reason for asking the child's name was so that I understood which child each parent was referring to, which gave me more insight into how I would provide parents with a reply or suggestions, if warranted. When certain responses would be more personal to the parent or the child, I would usually continue the conversation via email by asking clarifying and reflective questions. In this sense, I used generative dialogue (Adams et al., 2019) to inform my weekly questions and the ways in which I followed up on those questions.

Generative dialogue is a process of deliberate conversations that focus on learning and growth (Adams et al., 2019). Conducive to continuing the dialogue, I left an open-ended question that provided parents with the opportunity to ask me anything pertaining to their children's learning. The questions I asked the parent the following week were usually in response to a parent's comment, reply, or question from the week prior. In order to gauge how parents were receiving the questions or whether they were in need of additional support, every few weeks,

usually every four weeks, I would send them a Google Form to check in. These check-ins allowed me to assess how the virtual conversation was unfolding and whether parents needed additional assistance with anything pertaining to their children's learning.

The generative dialogue framework by Adams et al. (2019) governed the ways in which I asked the questions to the parents. Initially, when asking parents questions to engage as partners in education, I asked them questions that focused on clarifying their expectations so as to get insight into how they perceived the role of teachers and parents in education. The first week's question was: *what are some expectations that you have of me as your child's teacher?* The second week's question about expectations was similar however, it was more directed towards parents' role in their children's educational journey: *what may I expect from you as a partner in your child's education?*

As the weeks progressed, the weekly questions started to morph and mould to the parents' needs, depending on their responses to the questions from the week prior. For instance, if a parent asked questions about helping children with their writing due to a weak pencil grasp, I engaged in a private email correspondence with the parent to ask viewpoint-rendering questions. In addition to that exchange, the topic of conversation would inform the question of the week for the following week. The reasoning behind this was that if one parent had a concern about education that would apply to other parents or students, there is a likelihood that other parents had similar questions or concerns. Addressing questions about education in this way led to multiple individual conversations with parents in which I used the generative dialogue framework to structure the correspondence with them. These individual conversations with parents were so effective that I invited more input by adding an additional question to the weekly question form that would invite parents to reflect and ask questions: *what is one question you have for me this week?* The benefit of adding this question was that it allowed parents to explore the areas in

which they needed assistance, along with asking for that assistance. Often, they would elaborate on their ideas and ask multiple questions relating to the topic of the week's question. However, at times, parents would ask questions relating to education that were not kindergarten-specific because they were seeking to understand something relating to their children in a different grade. All questions and the conversations were deliberate and aimed to empower parents as partners in education who engaged in their children's learning.

In-Person Conversation

Price and Marsh (1985) rationalised that parent-teacher interviews need to be properly planned because parents and teacher have much to gain from the conversation with one another. They suggest preparing a summary of the conversation and sharing it with parents as an official report of the interview (Price & Marsh, 1985). For this reason, in preparation for parent-teacher interviews, I prepared a report for each child, of which I made two copies. The parents kept one copy and I kept the other. Each report included information regarding the students' points of excellence, points for improvement, and a suggestion for what parents may do at home to help the child. The reports were in point form so that they would be concise and clear, something that Price and Marsh (1985) also suggested.

The conversations at parent-teacher interviews followed the generative dialogue (Adams et al., 2019) question format outlined to prompt reflection, with some modifications to the questions so that they were more relevant to the conversation with parents:

1. Since we last spoke, how have you been supporting your child's learning?
2. What have you tried that has worked? What have you tried that has not worked?
3. How do you know that it has worked?

These were the questions I asked parents with whom I had had conversations about their children's learning prior to parent-teacher interviews. After engaging in a brief reflective

conversation about the support they provide their children’s learning, I shared my report about their children’s learning with them. Stapled to the back of the parents’ report, I included a section for goal setting, where I asked them the final generative dialogue question: *what is one thing that you may do between now and the next time we meet to support your child’s learning?* They took the time they needed to reflect, and we discussed how they may support their children’s learning before they wrote down their goal. As they wrote down their goals, I typed up their responses and I later emailed my copy to them, just in case they misplaced their paper. Adam et al. (2019) explained that this final question is important because it reinforces “an ethos of shared responsibility” (p. 72).

Data Gathering Instruments

Parent Engagement Survey

Over the summer of 2020, one of the school’s administrative assistant sent out an email invitation (Appendix B) to parents to complete the engagement survey (Appendix A). The email included a link to the survey and the participant consent form (Appendix C). The parent engagement survey (Appendix A) consisted of nine questions designed to provide me with answers to this study’s research question: in what ways does a teacher’s communication with parents influence the nature of parent engagement? For the sake of familiarity and consistency, this final parent engagement survey (Appendix A) was administered through the use of Google Forms.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

As participants only received a participant consent form relating to the participant parent engagement survey (Appendix C), for this study, in-depth data analysis only included data from the parent engagement survey (Appendix A). Neuman’s (2014) three step process was used to code the data and analyze for themes. During the first read through of data, called open coding,

“[brought] themes to the surface from deep inside the data” (Neuman, 2014, p. 481). Generating themes was something that happened simultaneous with reading the data and the data notes because, as Neuman (2014) described, it was during this open coding stage that a list of themes emerged. Further, this focus on data during open coding also involved “assigning code labels for themes” (p. 482).

During the axial coding stage, the second read through the data, the focus shifted from being primarily on the data to focusing on revisiting and examining the codes made during open coding (Neuman, 2014). The axial coding stage also entailed making links and connections between the codes and the themes by reviewing the thematic categories of the data and ensuring that codes relate to each other in a reasoned manner. This also meant consolidating themes to make them more comprehensive.

Once the main themes were identified, the final read-through, known as selective coding, involved going over all of the previously determined themes and codes. The purpose of selective coding was to identify cases within the data to support the themes and the codes. This was the stage used to “elaborate more than one major theme” (Neuman, 2014, p. 484).

Ethical Considerations

This study followed the Ethical Review of Human Participant Research guidelines (Appendix F) and stayed in accordance with ethical considerations. The school principal and the school board’s superintendent granted their permission to conduct this study.

Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions, and Research Biases

This research project was conducted with parties who had an existing relationship with the researcher. As this project sought to answer the ways in which a teacher’s communication with parents would influence the nature of parent engagement, participants in the study were

parents of kindergarten students at Iqra School, whereas the investigator was a kindergarten teacher at Iqra School. All the participants in the study provided their consent (Appendix C).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Parent participants completed an anonymous survey (Appendix A) through Google Forms, a digital survey tool. Initially there appeared to be 10 responses; however, four were duplicate and one was illegible, resulting in five useable participant responses. In order to understand participants' perspectives, all five useful responses to each question were analyzed for themes and sub-themes in relation to the research question: *in what ways does a teacher's communication with parents influence the nature of parent engagement?*

Data Analysis

For the thematic data analysis of the survey responses, Neuman's (2014) three step coding process was followed. The data was combined into five overarching clusters during the open coding stage of the thematic analysis process: the use of weekly questions, the usefulness of parent-teacher interviews, the influence of school-to-home communication, strategies for support, and recommendations for communication. Within each of these clusters, major themes emerged, some of which are recurring (see Table 1). In order to distinguish the anonymous parent participants in this study, each of the participants have been alphabetized.

Table 1

Thematic Analysis of Findings

Main Themes	Clusters	Subthemes
Theme 1: Use of Weekly Questions	Parent support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent reflection • Home-school communication • Better understanding of the curriculum
Theme 2: The usefulness of parent-teacher interviews	Parent support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher and parents working together (partners in education) • Support student learning at home • Informative
Theme 3: The influence of school to home communication	Increased parent engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of action plans • Better understanding of child's needs
Theme 4: Strategies for support	Great communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better understanding of the curriculum • Timely feedback and responses
Theme 5: Recommendations for communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written communication • Verbal communication 	

Theme 1: Use of Weekly Questions

Responses to questions three and four from the participant survey informed this cluster. Question number three was a multiple-choice question that asked *which mode of communication was least helpful and why?* Question number four was the open-ended question *in what ways did you find the weekly questions useful in supporting your role as a partner in education?* The main theme that emerged from the responses to the open-ended question was that parents felt that the questions of the week were a good support for parents as they supported student learning at home.

Participant A described how the weekly questions were a good tool for reflection on student learning. They stated that it allowed for them to reflect on their student's learning goals. This allows for the participant to have a better understanding of their child as a learner so that they may support their child's learning at home. Similarly, Participant C believed that "the weekly questions were amazing. [The questions] helped parents explain to the teachers where the child required additional help or where the child was excelling." Participant D expressed a similar sentiment and said that the questions of the week helped to make things more understandable for parents. Participant E said: "[i]t helped me understand where my child was and where he needed to be. The suggested resources were also very useful in supporting my child." The subthemes that appeared are parent reflection, home-school communication, and a better understanding of the curriculum.

Conversely, Participant B perceived that the weekly questions were not useful in supporting their role as a partner in education. In fact, 60% of the respondents felt that the mode of communication that was least helpful was the question of the week, either because they never had the time to answer the questions, they preferred another means of communication, or they did not find the questions to be useful.

Theme 2: The Usefulness of Parent-Teacher Interviews

The open-ended question from the survey asked: *in what ways did you find setting a goal at parent-teacher interviews useful for guiding how you could support your child's learning at home?* The main theme that emerged from the responses to this question was that parents felt that setting goals at parent-teacher interviews was a good support for parents as partners in education as the interviews provided them with an action plan to implement with their children at home. This is similar to the first theme inasmuch as parents felt supported through the use of weekly questions and through the parent-teacher interview. However, because the parent-teacher interviews were child-specific as opposed to the weekly questions, which were general, the clusters from each theme are separated.

Participant A explained that setting goals at parent-teacher was useful inasmuch as “having expert advice that is practical and beneficial and easy to perform.” Participant A was referring to asking child-specific questions and receiving appropriate suggestions for their child during the interviews that were manageable for them to implement at home. Participant B said that the setting of goals at parent-teacher interviews was useful in knowing what to work on with their child. Participant C responded: “[g]oal setting is always helpful for children who are learning, the children with the help of parents and teachers achieve their goals in a timely manner.” Participant D shared that they found parent-teacher interviews to be informative. They were able to bring up their questions and concerns about supporting their child's learning at home and receive resources like suggestions for additional at home practice and links to activities. Correspondingly, Participant E said: “[i]t helped me understand where my child was and where he needed to be. The suggested resources were also very useful in supporting my child.” A few subthemes also emerged in the coding process of the data. The subthemes included participants' beliefs that goal setting at parent-teacher interviews facilitated

teachers and parents working together, supported student learning at home, and informed parents about each of their children's individual educational goals with steps on how to achieve them.

Theme 3: The Influence of School-to-Home Communication

Responses to questions number six and number eight from the participant survey comprised the data analyzed in this cluster. Questions number six asked the following open-ended question: *how has this year's experience with the school-to-home communication process influenced how you see yourself as a partner in your child's education?* Question number eight was a Likert scale question that asked: *how would you describe your level of engagement with your child's education this year?* The main theme that emerged from the participant responses was that there was an increase in parent engagement.

Participants gave elaborate answers to the open-ended question that described the impact of this school-to-home communication. Participant A responded that as a result of this communication process they "started to put in action multi-step plans." This is in reference to parent-teacher interviews where parents made a goal to support their children's learning at home and elaborated how they would follow through with the goal. Some parents made multi-step plans during the interviews. Participant C stated the following: "I was incredibly impressed with the [Kindergarten (KG)] communication and learning schedule. I always see myself aiding my children in their education no matter how old they are." Participant D confirmed that they saw themselves as a partner in their child's education, the same as previous years. Participant E claimed: "I definitely feel a lot more involved with [my child's] learning and have a better understanding as to what type of learner he is." The subthemes that arose were the implementation of action plans and parents having a better understanding of their children's needs.

Participant B mentioned that the school-to-home communication process did not influence how they saw themselves as a partner in their child's education. However, when answering question number eight in the participant survey, Participant B said that they were very engaged in their child's education this year. In fact, 80% of the respondents said they were very engaged in their child's education this year. The other 20% of the respondents said that they were engaged in their child's education this year.

Theme 4: Strategies for Support

The open-ended question from the survey examined: *In what ways did you feel that your child's kindergarten homeroom teacher supported you this year as a partner in education? In what ways could this be improved?* The responses to this question highlighted that parents felt most supported through the use of effective communication.

Participant A explained that they appreciated that the kindergarten teacher “[explained] the curriculum basics” and provided the extra practice for their child, as needed. Participant B said that the kindergarten teacher provided “[g]reat communication, keep me up to date on my child and what was going on in class.” Participant C described: “[t]he KG teacher was on top of everything. She was amazing. She answered all emails quickly when there were questions I had. The KG team had homework sent like clockwork. Everything was executed in a timely fashion. I believe if there was more time the children had with the teacher (frequency/daily class) it could have improved.” Participant D and Participant E provided illegible responses to this question. The subthemes are that parents had a better understanding of the curriculum and received timely feedback and responses from the teacher.

Theme 5: Recommendations for Communication

Responses to questions number two and nine from the participant survey informed this cluster. Question number two was a multiple-choice question that asked *which mode of*

communication was most helpful? It provided participants with a choice between email, videos, in-person meetings, video calls, phone calls, question of the week, or other. In addition to selecting an option, participants were asked to elaborate their answer by stating why they found that specific mode of communication to be most helpful. Question number nine was a related question, where participants responded to the following open-ended question: *what are your suggestions for improving parent communication next school year?* The two main themes that surfaced in the responses to this cluster were written communication (email) and verbal communication (face-to-face and video calls).

For question number two, 60% of respondents indicated that written communication, namely email, was their preferred method of communication. The remaining 40% preferred verbal communication, indicating that either in-person or video calls were ideal. Participant A believed that email was the most helpful mode of communication because it kept a record of all the information and was accessible at any time. In question number 9, Participant A's suggestion for parent communication next school year was to continue email correspondence. Participant B also preferred email to other forms of communication because it was "easy to check, easy to reply." For question number nine, Participant B recommended that child-specific progress emails would be a good idea rather than waiting for parent-teacher interviews to hear about a child's progress. Participant C also preferred email to other forms of communication. "As a parent it was easier to keep track of classroom activities and communicating with the teacher," explained Participant C. For question number nine, Participant C stated: "I believe that email and face-to face is the best form of communication."

Participant D's preferred form of communication was in-person meetings because these types of conversations were easier to understand. For question number nine, Participant D recommended that everything stayed the same for the upcoming school year. Participant E

found video calls to be the most helpful mode of communication. “Since we couldn’t be in face-to-face meetings, video calls allowed for a more intimate and personal experience for both me and my child,” elaborated Participant E. For question number nine, Participant E shared the following: “I think for the most part, everything is being done really well! Having both video calls and emails as a way to communicate have served to be really useful.”

Summary

Communication between teachers and parents is a process that involves multiple means of interaction. Thus, communication plays a dynamic role in the educational partnership between teachers and parents. The importance of communication is highlighted in the findings from the participant survey, where parents explained the impact that communication had on their engagement with their children’s learning at home. The communication process needs to be considered as a whole when evaluating its effectiveness with parents as partners in education.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Fostering strong reciprocal communication between a teacher and parent is an important strategy to create a sense of collaboration and partnership (Graham-Clay, 2005). To further explore this partnership, this study examined the ways in which a teacher's communication with parents influences the nature of parent engagement. A teacher's communication with parents need not only consider various types and forms of communication but also that the purpose of communication is to strengthen that educational partnership.

Based on the results of the parent survey described in Chapter Four, three themes will be addressed and linked to the existing body of scholarship around parent engagement: the necessity of one-way communication, two-way communication using generative dialogue, and fostering educational partnerships. Saphier and King (1985) explained that “[s]chool improvement emerges from the confluence of four elements: the strengthening of teachers’ skills, the systemic renovation of curriculum, the improvement of the organization, and the involvement of parents and citizens in responsible school-community partnerships” (p. 67). Aptly, this chapter will also discuss two of these elements: the strengthening of teachers’ skills and parent involvement in education and how they pertain to educational leaders.

The Necessity of One-Way Communication

In one-way communication, information flows directly from the school to home (Graham-Clay, 2005). In this study, a majority of one-way communication happened digitally through the use of email correspondence, the main source of communication. Davern (2004) emphasized the importance of keeping one-way communication efficient, organized, and clear in order to communicate effectively with parents. In this study, parents received all weekly email correspondence on the same day of the week, so they knew to expect it. In addition to receiving information about upcoming school events, the emails provided parents with information

regarding their children's learning as it pertained to the curriculum and their children's development as kindergarteners. Parents' responses to the survey indicated that they appreciated the nature of the one-way communication, namely the frequency and predictability of the content of the communication

In the frame of the TQS (Government of Alberta, 2018b), the nature of one-way communication as it unfolded in this study addressed the importance of "fostering effective relationships" by providing parents with a culturally appropriate opportunity "to support student learning" (p. 4). As the use of email correspondence was culturally appropriate for parents, it became a beneficial and meaningful form of one-way communication. Effective communication is critical in creating an educational partnership with parents as it is an indicator of the "fostering effective relationships" competency in the LQS (Government of Alberta, 2018a, p. 4).

Two-Way Communication Through Generative Dialogue

Graham-Clay (2005) defined two-way communication as comprising an "interactive dialogue between teachers and parents" (p. 118). Involving parents in an interactive dialogue creates a mutually supportive working relationship between home and school (Lai & Ishiyama, 2004). To be successful, these interactive dialogues must be "as productive as possible," (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 120). The findings of the study indicated that parents were more purposefully engaged in their children's education because they interacted with the curriculum more and therefore knew the curricular areas to support that would enhance their child's achievement. This is due to the effectiveness of two-way communication. One participant indicated that over the school year, they started to put in place multi-step plans at home to support their children's learning.

One purpose of communicating with parents in this study was to address the LQS (Government of Alberta, 2018a) indicator of "creating opportunities for parents/guardians, as

partners in education, to take an active role in their children’s education” (p. 4). To make these two-way communication opportunities with parents meaningful, I applied the generative dialogue framework (Adams et al., 2019) as a point of reference. The intention behind using a framework such as generative dialogue with parents was to sow seeds of intention and reap the benefits of reflective practice. York-Barr et al. (2005) affirmed that the goal of facilitating reflective practice in parental communication is improved student learning. The process of reflective practice, however, is an active one. This means that partaking in reflective practice will require active participation and in the case of two two-way communication, parents were invited to engage actively as partners in education through generative dialogue. This parental engagement through communication unfolded through the use of two strategies: Questions of the Week, and Parent-Teacher Interviews.

Question of the Week

Given the advancements of smartphones, culturally relevant home-school communication can rely on the convenience of technology (Goodall, 2016). Therefore, this begs the question, how to encourage a meaningful dialogue with parents as partners in education through the use of technology? The solution was to ask parents an intentional and often reflective weekly question that would allow them to communicate their perspective and experience, while also allowing a space for them to ask questions in return. The goal for the question of the week was to foster educational partnership with parents so that as partners, parents and teachers may positively impact student learning. However, for reflective practice to lead to increased student learning, partners in education must apply their understandings in an actionable way (York-Barr et al., 2005). The use of generative dialogue when communicating with parents was a novel undertaking, especially in a digital space. The initiative was new, and parents had mixed reactions to it.

A major unforeseen event in the 2019-2020 school year was the COVID-19 pandemic that forced the shutdown of in-person instruction and moved classes online. Initially, this was a stressful situation for both parents and I, however because we had been in constant communication all year long, the questions of the week proved to be a great way for parents to share feedback on the virtual lessons and advocating for their needs in supporting their children's learning at home. Parents' responses to the weekly questions became a great tool for me to navigate my students needs through the online learning period.

Some parents found that the weekly questions prompted them to reflect on their role as partners in education. As Adams et al. (2019) explained, this reflection or deep thinking is a direct result of authentic inquiry. Some parents also felt like they were provided with a platform through which they may communicate, and they enjoyed the process because they felt heard. Interestingly, parents expressed that as a result of the question of the week, they felt more comfortable and confident supporting their children's learning needs. They appreciated understanding educational priorities and increased their knowledge of kindergarten learning goals and curricular outcomes. This equipped them to support their children's learning at home through hand-on practices and learning activities or through age-appropriate conversations about their children's bedtime stories. This support that the students were receiving at home would manifest in the classroom through how students interacted with their learning. It looked different for every child but often meant that a child would come to class talking about how they were excited to do a craft because they practiced using scissors at home. In other instances when children's learning is supported at home, they come to class more confident about their skills in general. Most notably, students come to class joyful and ready to learn.

The Government of Alberta (2018a) identified this as the "leading a learning community" competency through the indicator of "establishing opportunities and expectations for the positive

involvement of parents/guardians in supporting student learning.” (p. 5). Further, Goodall (2016) revealed that technology can be a valuable tool to engage parents effectively to “increase parental self-efficacy around supporting learning” (p. 126). For a majority of the parents in this study, this was the case, and it was a joyful realization for them to recognize that they were capable of supporting their children’s learning. Barth (2001) observed that student learning is fragile and that for students to be successful learners, they need learning to be modelled for them. Adult learning models student learning. That is one of the reasons why inviting parents to partake in an active and engaging way as partners in education allows them to learn alongside their students and it also models learning for children as well.

Davern (2004) explained that asking parents open-ended questions about an educational topic of interest to them is an effective way to engage parents in their role as partners in education, but the challenge remains: how do educators reach parents when an avenue of communication fails? Graham-Clay (2005) explained that diversifying attempts to reach parents is important because not every avenue for communication is preferred by every parent. Two-way written communication is time consuming, especially when it requires self-reflection. In the survey, some parents explained that the question of the week was too big a time commitment and, therefore, they were unable to share their responses. For them, this mode of communication was not a preferred one. This is evidence from the study that self-reflection is a big undertaking, especially when it is prompted using technology. Therefore, conversations that are driven by open-ended questions and prompt reflection are better had through a different communication avenue; they are better had in person at parent-teacher interviews.

Parent-Teacher Interviews

Parent-teacher interviews were prime opportunities to have productive conversations with parents regarding their perspective and role as partners in education. Similar to the weekly

questions, parent-teacher interviews provided parent with a platform to speak, set goals, and prompt reflection all in the context of supporting students. However, parent-teacher interviews granted the additional opportunity to speak about each child's specific needs face-to-face, where goal setting and reflection were also happening in person. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2004) explained that the key to having successful conversations with parents is putting students at the forefront of the discussion since it encourages both parents and teachers to recognize "the mutuality of their concern for the child" (p. 73). In doing so, there is also a collaborative nature to the conversation which, as Lawrence-Lightfoot (2004) suggested, creates "the risk-taking, courage, and grace" that a trusting dialogue requires (p. 73). Minke and Anderson (2003) mentioned that parents should leave parent-teacher conferences empowered to support their children with their learning needs. This is evidence that the two-way in-person communication was successful and was one reason why generative dialogue (Adams et al., 2019) was the framework that guided the conversations at parent-teacher interviews.

I started the interviews by asking parents to share their lived experiences with supporting their children's learning at home because I wanted to give parents an opportunity to first engage in a discussion. This approach was informed by studies in andragogy in which Knowles (1980) explained that adult learners require experiences that consider their self-directedness and lived experiences. This is the lens through which I have considered parents throughout the study. The conversations proceeded to becoming generative dialogues as I asked parents more self-reflective questions with the purpose of understanding the ways in which they support their children's learning at home (Adams et al., 2019). As a concluding question to each interview, parents were asked to answer the following question verbally and on paper: between now and the next time we meet, what is one thing you can do to support your child's learning at home? "This question is important in reinforcing an ethos of shared responsibility" (Adams et al., 2019, p. 72) for student

learning. The generative dialogue framework (Adams et al., 2019) was additionally beneficial because it highlighted the importance of setting goals with a question instead of a statement. They contended that questions prompt a deeper thinking process that leads to informed action as partners in education. In this capacity, the parent-teacher interviews were opportunities to embody visionary leadership by “communicating a philosophy of education that is student-centred and based on sound principles of effective teaching and leadership,” (Government of Alberta, 2018a, p. 5).

Parents responded well to the way that parent-teacher interviews unfolded. They said that parent-teacher interviews helped them to better understand their children as learners. Goal setting provided parents with a point of reference for their children’s progress. In addition, parents said that they found that setting goals made supporting their children’s learning at home practical and beneficial. Parents’ feedback regarding the benefits of setting a goal at the end of their interviews aligned with the benefits outlined by Adams et al. (2019) in the generative dialogue approach. They stated that student learning is a shared responsibility and that, as a process, generative dialogue “[brings] into existence new ideas and thoughts that lead to more purposeful action” (p. 96). Parents reflected; they established action plans for their children’s learning. Most notably, parents followed through with their action plans.

Fostering an Educational Partnership through Parent Engagement

Barth (2001) wrote about a community of learning where parents shared their own experiences as learners by simply replacing the “*what did you learn in school today?*” dinner time question with “*let me tell you what I learned at work today?*” (Barth, 2001, p. 24). Parents from that community of learning reported that this level of parent involvement stimulated their children’s learning at school because children saw their parents modelling what it means to be a learner. When adults spend time reading, posing questions, engaging with learning, it inspires

children to do the same. Therefore, it is important to involve parents in conversations of this nature so that they understand the role they play on a critical level as partners in education.

The objective of parent engagement is to gain parents as partners in education (Ferlazzo, 2011). This partnership is key because parent engagement highlights parents' investment that they have in their children's learning at home (Goodall, 2013). Ferlazzo (2011) explained that the foundation of proper parent engagement is to develop a relationship-building process where school leaders and teachers listen to parents' wishes and concerns about their children's learning. This study revealed that relationship-building can be achieved successfully through the use of communication.

Parents explained that they increased their knowledge of curricular basics as a result of the communication process they experienced throughout the school year. They also communicated that they enjoyed feeling connected to what was happening in the classroom because they felt more informed on their children's progress. This, in turn, made it possible for them to support their children's learning better at home.

Limitations

The biggest limitation of this study was the sample size. Since the nature of this study required me to work closely with parents of my students, it was a small study. Of course, participation was optional so when a person decided to opt out of the study, the number of participants decreased. Another limitation was that I was conducting a study where there was a power dynamic. In order to mitigate that, the parent survey was sent in the summertime, after all of the students report cards were submitted and I no longer held any power over the students or their parents. The surveys were also anonymous for that reason.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the study because for a moment, parents needed a platform to ask questions and vent their frustrations and the question of the week form was the

perfect communication avenue for them to do that. However, I noticed that because the parents had been engaging intentionally in their children's education all year long, they had a good sense of what their children's learning goals were. Although the pandemic affected the trajectory of the questions of the week, it did not negatively impact our two-way communication. This is because a good and clear line of communication had been established throughout the school year.

Recommendations for School Leaders

This study explored ways in which a teacher's communication with parents influenced the nature of parent engagement and revealed several recommendations for school leaders. What actions can school leaders take to enhance the nature of two-way communication? This starts with the school culture (Saphier & King, 1985) that supports an environment of reflective practice (Brookfield, 2017).

School Culture

The LQS (Government of Alberta, 2018a) highlighted that school leaders are responsible for "creating opportunities for parents/guardians, as partners in education to take an active role in their children's education" (p. 4). To effectively foster that educational partnership, the school culture needs to be evaluated. "Teachers are culture shapers" (Saphier & King, 1985, p. 68); if school leaders want to prioritize any type of change that would lead to improved educational partnership between home and school, teachers need to be included in this vision. To do this, school leaders need to communicate their vision and values with their fellow educators. "Giving shape and direction to a school's culture should be a clear, articulated vision of what the school stands for, a vision that embodies core values and purposes" (Saphier & King, 1985, p. 67).

Open and effective communication is characterised by its transparency. Both Bennis (2013) and Fullan (2020), stressed the importance of transparency in effective school

leadership. Bennis (2013) explained that “[t]he ubiquity of information and the bandwidth of access that leaders have and are exposed to will continue to grow in amazing ways, and this will make transparency inevitable” (p. 635). Transparency should hence be embraced with the digitization of communication. Fullan (2020) echoed this sentiment by stating that school leaders need clear and transparent goals, communicated effectively in order to build a school culture that focuses on improvement. Sergiovanni (1984) offered that school leaders may approach communicating their vision to other educational partners by embodying aspects of symbolic leadership. Sergiovanni (1984) explained that “symbolic leaders are able to communicate their sense of vision by words and examples,” (p. 8). “[They] provide opportunities for others in the school to experience this vision and to obtain a sense of purpose so that they might come to share in the ownership of the school enterprise more fully” (p. 8). For school leaders who want to improve two-way communication in their schools between teachers and parents, this might look like modelling effective communication between themselves and the other educators in the building. Taking this idea of effective two-way communication further and applying it to how it may impact parent engagement, school leaders can model for teachers what reflective practice looks like through generative dialogue so that teachers may use that in their own practice and possibly in their communication with parents.

Barth (2002) warned that change in a school culture will require the replacement of dysfunctional elements with desirable qualities. This cannot happen without a blatant awareness of the elements that make up the school culture such as a pattern of norms, values, and even myths that can be quite resistant to change (Barth, 2002). However, as Barth (2001) expressed “[i]f you continue to do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got” (p. 22). School leaders, when planning to implement change, in addition to being transparent in their communication, need to ensure that the other educators understand the

purpose of the change. An effective way to implement that change clearly and effectively is through reflective practice.

Fostering Reflection

To enhance student learning, school leaders should be committed to the learning of educational partners (Barth, 2001). The school culture of learning requires special attention as it undergoes change. Changes to aspects of school culture—including the culture of learning—such as norms or even beliefs, require a pause (York-Barr et al., 2005). “To change our practices, to change our beliefs, and to alter our own theories of change, we must slow down and have reflective conversations that allow us to think through possible changes” (York-Barr et al., 2005, pp. 2-3). For school leaders, implementing reflective practice with the purpose of onsetting change yields intentionality and creates a space that fosters openness to new ideas (York-Barr et al., 2005). In fact, teachers appreciate the time and opportunity to reflect to see how they may implement improvements or changes to their practice (Adams et al., 2019). “Parents want a complete education for their children” (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 6) and, as partners in education, they should be given the opportunity to reflect on their role as partners in education and how they may help improve their children’s learning at home. Hence, sparking or inspiring reflection in two-way communication using generative dialogue can be useful when trying to influence the culture of learning with parents as well. For school leaders, this might mean hosting townhall meetings with parents and starting off the conversation with an open-ended question about parents’ role as partners in education. Maximizing the use of technology can be helpful in situations like this where many parents would have something to share therefore, school leaders should consider that as well. As parents share their responses, school leaders may engage in the generative dialogue process by addressing parents’ responses and posing questions for them to consider in their reflection.

Recommendations for Teachers

While assessing the nature of communication throughout this study, two major aspects stood out: the importance of email (one-way communication) and the effectiveness of using generative dialogue (Adams et al., 2019) in parent-teacher interviews (two-way communication). In conjunction, these avenues for communication were helpful in establishing a solid foundation for clear and successful communication.

In general, effective email correspondence with parents needs to be consistent and informative because communication of this nature usually flows from school to home (Davern, 2004; Graham-Clay, 2005). It is an indispensable form of communication because parents require updates about what is happening at school and in their children's lives as learners. However, Davern (2004) mentioned a significant point of consideration with one-way communication. In multicultural and multilingual school communities like those that exist in Alberta, some families struggle with written communication in English. It is essential to bring attention to the fact that although one-way communication is beneficial, it should be coupled with a form of two-way communication which may be preferable for some of the students' families.

Several recommendations were also revealed through this study that apply specifically to teachers. The TQS (Government of Alberta, 2018b) emphasized the importance of teachers "providing culturally appropriate and meaningful opportunities for students and for parents/guardians as partners in education, to support learning" (p. 4). It is important to invite parents into the world of education if they are going to be engaged partners in education. Parents need to understand why their children are learning what they are learning, and they need to understand how they may attend to their children's learning needs at home. This clear line of communication will facilitate student learning because it holds parents accountable for their children's learning. Parents alter their role as a result of parent engagement as they evolve from

being school clients to active members of the school community (Ferlazzo, 2011). As parent engagement improves, so will student learning (Walsh et al., 2014). As it is beneficial for students to have specific learning goals, it is just as constructive for parents as partners in education to have the same. To prioritize time to set goals with parents will further reinforce the accountability that they hold as partners in education. The reflection that happens as part of goal setting is critical because it provides the opportunity for parents to deepen their understanding of their children's educational needs while evaluating their role as partners in education.

“[D]eepened understandings lead to action” (York-Barr et al., 2005, p. 11). For teachers this might look like using generative dialogue when meeting parents to foster a focused and productive conversation about student learning.

In my practice and for this study, this has been critical for improved and effective communication with parents because it also required parents to seriously consider the role that they play in their children's education. Writing a report before meeting with parents (Appendix H) also allows for room to talk about student needs clearly and succinctly, leaving time during the meetings for parents to explore how they may support their children's learning at home. Another important for teachers to take with parents is having parents write down their children's learning goal and how they will support their children in achieving that goal. Teachers may ask parents at the end of parent-teacher interviews to answer the following question generative dialogue question: what is one thing that you may do between now and the next time we meet to support your child's learning? Teachers may also take note of parents' answers and following up with them to see whether they require assistance with achieving that goal to support their students' learning

Areas for Future Consideration

Approaching parents as adult learners has informed much of this study. It was the lens through which I viewed parents as they undertook the responsibility of becoming more engaged in their children's learning. Although there were many congruencies between the literature on andragogy and how the parents/participants in this study reacted, there are a few incongruencies. One of these was some parents' unwillingness to participate in the self-reflective process of the question of the week may come as a result of multiple influences, I do wonder if it had something to do with the ways in which I approached the parents with the writing process. If it had to do with my approach, how then would andragogy inform the ways in which I may shift it with parents so as to foster more willingness to self-reflect? Would parents who are uncomfortable writing in English be more likely to participate in self-reflection of their role as partners in education if the reflection prompts were presented in their native language? How does a school's culture of learning affect parent engagement? In what ways does school context affect parent engagement? What role do school leaders play in fostering parent engagement? How does a school leader's reflective practice impact parent engagement and student learning? What are some barriers to fostering self-reflection as part of parent engagement? To what extent would face-to-face opportunities for parent self-reflection affect parent engagement in kindergarten? In what ways does communication with parents affect how parents see themselves as partners in education in K-12?

Conclusion

This study has explored the question: in what ways does a teacher's communication with parents influence the nature of parent engagement? This qualitative study investigated *in what ways*, or *how* a teacher's communication with parents influences the nature of parent engagement through asking parents to reflect on and respond to questions that related to their children's

learning and their role as partners in education. The ten volunteer participants in this study were parents of kindergarten students from the 2019-2020 school year.

This study revealed three major findings: parents value an opening and clear line of communication between school and home because it involves them in their children's learning; asking parents reflective questions helps them navigate their role as partners in education although this is better done in person at parent-teacher interviews than virtually; using generative dialogue to frame the conversation at parent-teacher interviews allow parents to set goals and come up with an action plan that is manageable and effective. A critical implication for school leaders is that there is value in changing the school's culture of learning to integrate more reflective practice with teachers and parents because it positively influences parents' support of student learning. Lastly, parents are valuable partners in education and teachers need to establish a clear line of two-way communication that allows room for reflection and engagement for parents as partners in education.

Communication is a key strategy to support effective educational partnerships between home and school. This is encapsulated in the Chinese proverb: *Tell me and I forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I understand*. It is more effective to engage parents in a partnership than it is to tell them about the partnership. Engaging parents in their children's education is most effective with clear and reciprocal communication and expectations. It is important to reach out to parents as partners in education because to educate a child, just like to raise one, it takes a village.

References

- Alberta Education (2016). Guide to education: Ecs to grade 12. Retrieved from https://education.alberta.ca/media/3272731/guide_to_ed_2016.pdf
- Alberta Education (2011). Kindergarten curriculum overview. Retrieved from <https://education.alberta.ca/media/160232/kindergarten-curriculum-overview.pdf>
- Alberta Education (2008). Kindergarten program statement. Retrieved from <https://education.alberta.ca/media/563583/kindprogstate2008.pdf>
- Barth, R. S. (2001). *Learning by heart*. Jossey-Bass.
- Barth, R. S. (2002). The culture. *Educational Leadership*, 59(8), 6-11. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.uleth.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rch&AN=6675187&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Bennis, W. (2013). Leadership in a digital world: embracing transparency and adaptive capacity. *MIS Quarterly*, 37(2), 635-636. Retrieve from https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uleth.ca/stable/43825927?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Brookfield, S. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. Jossey-Bass.
- Calgary Islamic School (2020). About. Retrieved from <https://www.akramjomaa.ca/about>
- Davern, L. (2004). School-to-home notebooks: What parents have to say. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36(5), 22–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990403600503>
- Fantuzzo, J., Gadsden, V., Li, F., Sproul, F., McDermott, P., Hightower, D., & Minney, A. (2013). Multiple dimensions of family engagement in early childhood education: Evidence for a short form of the family involvement questionnaire. *Early Childhood*

Research Quarterly, 28(4), 734-742. Retrieved from

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2013.07.001>

Ferlazzo, L. (2011). Involvement or engagement? *Educational Leadership*, 68(8), 10-

14. Retrieved from

<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.uleth.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ932180&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Fullan, M. (2020). The nature of leadership is changing. *European Journal of Education*, 55(2),

139-142. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12388>

Goodall, J. (2013). Parental engagement to support children's learning: A six point model.

School Leadership & Management, 33(2), 133-150, doi: [10.1080/13632434.2012.724668](https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2012.724668)

Goodall, J. S. (2016). Technology and school-home communication. *International Journal*

of Pedagogies and Learning, 11(2), 118-131. Retrieved from

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/22040552.2016.1227252>

Government of Alberta (2011). Spotlight on...parent engagement. Retrieved from

<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/28f311a5-5693-441f-a6cd-a82967699865/resource/b7b66818-edfd-46d6-91ce-2a0674636cad/download/2011-09-spotlight-on-parent-engagement-sept-2011.pdf>

Government of Alberta. (2018a). *Leadership quality standard*. Retrieved from

https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739621/standardsdoc-lqs_fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf

Government of Alberta. (2018b). *Teaching quality standard*. Retrieved from

https://education.alberta.ca/media/3739620/standardsdoc-tqs_fa-web-2018-01-17.pdf

Graham-Clay, S. (2005). Communicating with parents: Strategies for teachers. *School*

Community Journal, 15(1), 117-129. Retrieved from [https://search-proquest-](https://search-proquest.com.ezproxy.uleth.ca/docview/195462342?accountid=12063)

[com.ezproxy.uleth.ca/docview/195462342?accountid=12063](https://search-proquest.com.ezproxy.uleth.ca/docview/195462342?accountid=12063)

- Grolnick, W. S., & Slowiaczek, M. L. (1994). Parents' involvement in children's schooling: A multidimensional conceptualization and motivational model. *Child Development*, 65(1), 237-252. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1131378>
- Gruenert, S., & Whitaker, T. (2015). *School culture rewired: How to define, assess, and transform it*. ASCD.
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy*. Cambridge Books.
- Lai, Y., & Ishiyama, F. I. (2004). Involvement of immigrant Chinese Canadian mothers of children with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 71(1), 97-108. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.uleth.ca/docview/201193547/fulltext/DA3EECC276F24A03PQ/1?accountid=12063>
- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. (2004). Building bridges from school to home: Meeting the challenge of the positive, productive parent-teacher relationship. *Instructor (1990)*, 114(1), 24-28 &73. Retrieved from <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A121150475/CPI?u=leth89164&sid=CPI&xid=bf145d3f>
- Ma, X., Shen, J., Krenn, H. Y., Hu, S., & Yuan, J. (2016). A meta-analysis of the relationship between learning outcomes and parental involvement during early childhood education and early elementary education. *Educational Psychology Review*, 28(4), 771-801. doi:10.1007/s10648-015-9351-1
- Mertler, C. A. (2017). *Action research: Improving schools and empowering educators*. SAGE.
- Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. In E. N. Hetherington & P. H. Mussen (Series Eds.), *Handbook of child*

psychology: Socialization, personality, and social development (Vol. 4, pp. 1-102).

Wiley.

Mezirow, J. (1991). Transformative dimensions of adult learning. Jossey-Bass.

Minke, K., & Anderson, K. (2003). Restructuring routine parent-teacher conferences: The family-school conference model. *The Elementary School Journal*, *104*(1), 49-69. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/3203049

Price, B. J., Marsh, G. E. (1985). Practical suggestions for planning and conducting parent conferences. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *17*(4), 274-278. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005998501700405>

Sergiovanni, T. (1984). Leadership and excellence in schooling: Excellent schools need freedom within boundaries. *Educational Leadership*, *41*(5), 4-13. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.uleth.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rch&AN=8517587&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

Saphier, J., & King, M. (1985). Good seeds grow in strong cultures. *Educational Leadership*, *42*(6), 67-74. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_198503_saphier.pdf

Walsh, B. A., Cromer, H., & Weigel, D. (2014). Classroom-to-home connections: Young children's experiences with a technology-based parent involvement tool. *Early Education and Development*, *25*(8), 1142-1161. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2014.904647>

Walsh, A.W., Jeon, H., Dove, M., & Su, S. (2018). Transition to kindergarten videos and their relationship to family engagement. *International Journal of Technology in Teaching and Learning*, *14*(2), 55-64. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1211982.pdf>

York-Barr, J., Sommers, W. A., Ghere, G. S., Montie, J. (2005). *Reflective practice to improve schools: An action guide for educators*. Corwin Press.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT SURVEY

1. Throughout this school year, how satisfied were you with the level of communication with your child's kindergarten homeroom teacher? (The participants will indicate their response in the form of a Likert scale: very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied)

2. Which mode of communication was most helpful and why? (email, videos, in-person meetings, video calls, phone calls, Question of the Week, other -- please indicate)

3. Which mode of communication was least helpful and why? (email, videos, in-person meetings, video calls, phone calls, Question of the Week, other -- please indicate)

4. In what ways did you find the weekly questions useful in supporting your role as a partner in education? (This is an open-ended question.)

5. In what ways did you find setting a goal at parent-teacher interviews useful for guiding how you could support your child's learning at home? (This is an open-ended question.)

6. How has this year's experience with the school-to-home communication process influenced how you see yourself as a partner in your child's education? (This is an open-ended question.)

7. In what ways did you feel that your child's kindergarten homeroom teacher supported you this year as a partner in education? In what ways could this be improved? (This is an open-ended question.)

8. How would you describe your level of engagement with your child's education this year? (The participants will indicate their response in the form of a Likert scale: very engaged, engaged, somewhat engaged, not very engaged.)

9. What are your suggestions for improving parent communication next school year? (This is an open-ended question.)

Additional comments:

APPENDIX B: EMAIL INVITATION

As-Salamu `Alaykum Dear Parents,

You are invited to participate in an anonymous survey of parents/guardians of kindergarten children at Iqra School. This is a research study of the ways in which a teacher's communication with parents/guardians influences the nature of parent engagement in their children's education at the kindergarten level. Please do note that you are under no obligation to complete the survey. The decision to complete the survey is yours. For further information, please read the letter of consent attached.

Here is the link for the survey: <https://forms.gle/jsKCNNLWZoGxyA2r6>

Thank you,

Iqra School

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Anonymous Parent Survey Letter of Consent

Principal Investigator: Umuaiman Flowers Samari, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge

What is this study about?

You are invited to participate in an anonymous survey of parents/guardians of kindergarten children at Iqra School. This is a research study of the ways in which a teacher's communication with parents/guardians influences the nature of parent engagement in their children's education at the kindergarten level. Through your participation, I hope to better understand the ways in which a teacher's approach to communication with parents/guardians influences the nature of parent engagement. This invitation to participate is being extended to all the parents/guardians of kindergarten children at Iqra School.

What is expected of you?

The survey contains 9 questions and will take approximately ten to fifteen minutes to complete. You will be asked to respond to variety questions about your experience this year communicating with your child's kindergarten teacher and about parent engagement. You may choose to skip any question you prefer not to answer.

What are the anticipated uses of the data collected?

The responses to the survey will be aggregated and presented in a report to my Master of Education Project supervisors. The aggregated findings may also be published in scholarly presentations and publications.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

There are no anticipated risks from participating in this study. There are no direct benefits from participating although you may gain some insight into the types of communications that might be beneficial for fostering parent engagement.

How will your confidentiality and anonymity be protected?

Participation is voluntary and your responses or identity will not be known, as the survey collects no identifying information; however, as with any online survey, neither anonymity nor confidentiality can be completely guaranteed. The survey is being hosted on Google Forms and their privacy policy can be accessed at <https://policies.google.com/privacy>.

Responses to this survey will be kept on a password-protected computer with restricted access, and will be deleted two years after data collection has been completed.

How can a participant withdraw?

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled by simply closing your browser before you submit your responses and they will not be included in the data collection. If you choose to discontinue participation after you have submitted your responses, it will not be possible to withdraw your responses because they will not have identifying information linked to them.

Who is conducting this research?

For more information on this study or for a summary of the findings (available after September 2021), you may contact me at u.flowerssamari@uleth.ca or 403-248-2773. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge (Phone: 403-329-2747 or Email: research.services@uleth.ca).

This research study has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee.

If you wish to participate in the survey, please proceed to the questions now at <https://forms.gle/UthiKkG3Bu33SpWS8>. Submission of your responses will be accepted as implied consent to participate. Thank you in advance for your participation.

APPENDIX D: QUESTIONS OF THE WEEK

Table 2

Week, Questions, and Number of Responses to the Questions of the Week

Week	Questions	Number of responses
1	What are some expectations that you have of me as your child's teacher?	20
2	What may I expect from you as a partner in your child's education?	8
3	As your child practices making play dough snakes and filling the letters of their names, what do you notice about your child's development?	9
4: September Check-In	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How have you been liking the weekly questions? 2. Did you watch the instructional video on homework versus practice? 3. Do you have suggestions on how you would rather I communicate with you? 4. What is one question you have for me? 	10
5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you know what fine motor skills are? (Depending on their answer, parents will go to a different page) 2. What are some things you do at home to help improve your child's fine motor skills? 	9

6	1. As part of the Personal and Social Responsibility	7
	outcomes from the Kindergarten Curriculum, students are required to develop positive relationships with others. How do you teach your child to build positive relationships with others?	
	2. What is one question you have for me this week?	
7	1. How are you preparing your child for his or her first school field trip?	5
	2. What is one question you have for me this week?	
8:	1. Have you had the chance to work with your child on the goal we set at Parent-Teacher interviews yet?	13
Check-In	2. This week was the first week of our home reading program. How did your child respond to this initial experience of using the book baggies at home? Check all that apply.	
	3. What is one question you have for me this week?	
9	1. Assalamualaikum! Thank you for taking the time to answer this week's question. Last week was week 2 of our home reading program with the Book Baggies. It has been nice to see how receptive and excited the students have been about reading. How do you foster a love for reading at home?	7
	2. What is one question you have for me this week?	

10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. While using the patterning cards from your child's patterning practice package, ask your child: how many ways can you make this pattern differently? Your child may use things other than beads to make patterns. While your child is completing this task, what do you notice about your child's thinking? 2. What is one question you have for me this week 	5
11	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are some ways you practice alphabet recognition with your child at home? 2. What is one question you have for me this week? 	7
12: Check-in	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. After seeing what we covered throughout Term 1, what are some thoughts or concerns you have regarding the curriculum? 2. What is one question you have for me this week? 	3
13	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are some things you are planning to do with your child over the Winter break? 2. What is one question you have for me this week? 	14
14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In what ways have you helped your child to prepare for their first Show and Tell presentation this week? 2. What is one question you have for me this week? 	5
15	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How have you been helping your child to memorize and practice the sight words? 	10

	2. What is one question you have for me this week?	
16: Check-in	1. Are you pleased with the quality of education your child has received in Kindergarten so far? 2. If you selected no, please explain why. If you selected yes, please explain why. 3. Do you have suggestions for improvement moving forward? 4. What is one question you have for me this week?	6
17	1. Do you go to the Calgary Public Library with your children? 2. What are some of the programs or activities your child enjoys at the library? 3. What is one question you have for me this week?	6
18: Parent- Teacher Interviews	1. Have you met with me before regarding your child's progress? 2. What were your thoughts about setting a goal to support your child's learning at home? 3. What are your expectations for this upcoming round of Parent-Teacher interviews? 4. As this is the last formal opportunity we will have to meet, what are your thoughts on how we may maximize the time we have to discuss your child's progress?	10

	5. What is one question you have for me this week?	
19	1. What are your plans for spending quality time with your child over the week-long break?	5
	2. What is one question you have for me this week?	
20	1. As it is assessment season, what is one thing you can do to support your child's learning?	5
	2. What is one question you have for me this week?	
21	1. We are talking about healthy habits in class. What are some ways you teach your child about healthy habits at home?	7
	2. What is one question you have for me this week?	
22	1. What are your thoughts on the Women's History Month Project?	2
	2. What is one question you have for me this week?	
23	1. What are some ways that your child expresses himself or herself creatively?	4
	2. What is one question you have for me this week?	
24:	1. Have you set up your child's Google Classroom yet?	11
Check-in	2. How was this first week of distance learning for you and your family?	
	3. What is one thing that could make this upcoming week better?	
	4. What is one question you have for me this week?	

25	1. What is one goal you have this week in regards to helping your child with their learning? 2. What is one question you have for me this week?	11
26	1. How are you finding the workload that I am assigning your child? 2. Is it taking your child longer than an hour to complete the daily learning tasks? 3. How may I support you this week?	8
27	1. Since we have moved to distance learning, what has been something about your child that has surprised you? 2. What is one question you have for me this week?	4
28: Check-in	1. Has your child liked the changes to the workload? 2. With the new changes, is it taking your child one hour a day to complete all the work assigned by Mrs. Chehade and myself? 3. How has distance learning changed how you see yourself as a partner in your child's education? 4. Do you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for me moving forward? 5. How may I support you this week?	12
29	1. Has your child been liking the online sessions? Please check all that apply.	5

	2. Do you have any suggestions about the online sessions moving forward?	
	3. How may I support you this week?	
30	1. What is one thing you would like for us to do as a group to celebrate the children's learning this year?	7
	2. How may I support you this week?	
31	1. What has been your child's most noticeable growth in Early Literacy this year?	3
	2. How may I support you this week?	
32	1. What has been your child's most noticeable growth in Early Numeracy this year?	3
	2. How may I support you this week?	
33	What is one suggestion you have for me for next year?	11

APPENDIX E: VIDEOS FOR PARENTS

Table 3

Explanatory Videos Shared with Parents

Title of the Video	Description
Introduction	Introductory video, welcoming parents to Kindergarten. This video also explains the questions of the week.
Homework vs Practice: What the Difference?	This video explains what at-home practice could look like in Kindergarten
6 Ways to Use Jolly Phonics Practice Cards	The students received letter cards to practice phonics at home. This video explains how they may use the cards to practice.
Book Baggie	This video explains the home reading program and expectations
Patterning Practice	The students received cards and beads to practice patterning at home.
Term 1 Curriculum Overview	This video highlights the curricular outcomes we covered in Term 1
Sight Word Package	The students received a sight word package. This video explains how to go through the package with the students.
I'm an Awesome Kindergartener	This video explains a show-and-tell assignment

Ou, oi, and ue practice	This video explains the sounds that ou, oi, and ue make
Do's and Don'ts Video Conferencing for Students, Families, and Teachers Google Slides	This video goes through a slide show that explains the etiquettes of video conferencing.
April 14-17 Google Slides Explained	This video explains the lesson slides that I share with parents on Google Classroom
Er, ar, Phonics practice	This video explains the sounds that er and make
Numeracy Talks: Counting Out	This video explains how to count
The Letter y Also Sounds like ee	This video explains the letter sounds of the letter y
Numeracy Talks: More, Less, and Same	This video explains how to compare quantities.
Double Letters	This video explains how to read words with the same letter repeating itself side-by-side
Numeracy Talks: Ordinal Numbers	This video explains ordinal numbers
Year in Review 2019-2020	This video is a compilation of pictures from the school year
Kindergarten Graduation Video 2019-2020	This video is a compilation of congratulatory messages for the kindergarteners from their educators.

APPENDIX F: UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF HUMAN PARTICIPANT RESEARCH

The Human Participant Research Committee is mandated by University policy to examine and approve research proposals to ensure that ethical principles and standards respecting the personal welfare and rights of participants have been recognized and accommodated. The Committee follows the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. This Policy Statement is available at: <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/resources-ressources/news-nouvelles/nr-cp/2010-12-07/>. Other guidelines may be used when appropriate to the research in question.

You are encouraged to speak with the Office of Research Ethics about any outstanding issues, and seek the advice of the Committee when appropriate.

You are asked to respond to the following items and **to submit your application and all supporting documents electronically to Susan Entz, Office of Research Ethics (susan.entz@uleth.ca)**. If possible, please use a different font for your responses, and submit your application as one document including the supporting documentation (e.g., letters of introduction, interview questions, questionnaires, telephone survey scripts, letters of consent, etc.). Please note that this form is meant to accommodate many different types of research and thus some questions may not be applicable in your case. If a question clearly does not apply to your research, please simply mark it with a N/A or explain why it is not relevant/appropriate. If you are not sure if it applies, please feel free to ask.

The Committee deals with applications as expeditiously as possible. **Please allow up to one month from the date of receipt for Committee review.**

Following approval of your protocol, any changes in procedures relevant to the ethical issues involved in the treatment of human participants are to be reported immediately to the Office of Research Ethics.

_____ If the research involves invasive procedures, a Hazard Assessment Report (available from Risk and Safety Services or on-line at: <http://www.uleth.ca/risk-and-safety-services/hazard-management>) must be completed and submitted to Risk and Safety Services for review. Review and approval by the Biosafety Committee may also be required.

SECTION A: GENERAL - *This information is collected under the authority of the Alberta Post-secondary Learning Act and will be used for administrative purposes associated with the ethical review of your human participant research protocol. It will be treated in accordance with the privacy protection provisions of Part 2 of the Alberta Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (<http://foip.alberta.ca/legislation/act/index.cfm>).*

Questions about the collection, use or disclosure of your personal information collected on this form can be directed to Susan Entz, Ethics Officer, Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 3M4, Phone: (403) 329-2747 and Email: susan.entz@uleth.ca.

A1. Researcher/Applicant Information

Name: Umuaiman Flowers Samari

Department: University of Lethbridge, Faculty of Education

Telephone Number: (403) 383-2882

Email address: u.flowerssamari@uleth.ca

Are you: Faculty Staff Doctoral Student
 Graduate Student Undergraduate Student
 Other:

A2. Co-Investigator's Information

Name:

Department:

Telephone Number

Email address:

Are you: Faculty Staff Graduate Student
 Graduate Student Undergraduate Student
 Other:

The protection of human participants will be assured in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement or with other guidelines if these have been agreed upon as more appropriate.



2020 _____ July 10,

Signature of Researcher/Applicant

Date

When the Researcher/Applicant is a student, the supervisor must sign the following statement:

“I have reviewed this application and I deem it ready to submit to the Human Participant Research Committee for review.”



Signature of Supervisor _____ July 10, 2020 _____
Date

A3. Student Thesis/Project Committee

Note: If this study will involve schools within Zone 6, once HPRC approval has been granted, district/school approval will be coordinated through Research and Placement Services in the Faculty of Education prior to the start of the study. You will be notified upon receipt of district/school approval. If the study involves schools outside of Zone 6, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the appropriate district/school approval is obtained prior to the start of the research; a copy of the approval must be submitted to the Office of Research Ethics.

- d) Is this a class project (i.e., not an applied or independent study)? Yes
 No

If so, specify the course number and title:

Note: A class project application is normally submitted by an instructor who is teaching a research course and whose students will be conducting a mini-research project for the course.

A6. Start/End Dates of Research Involving Human Participants

Please state the proposed start and end dates of the research involving human participants.

NOTE: Research involving human participants cannot begin until Human Participant Research Committee approval has been received.

Start date: As soon as permission is granted

End date: June 30, 2021

A7. Scholarly Review

Some research projects may require scholarly review. What type of scholarly review has this research undergone?

- None
 - External Peer Review (e.g., granting agency)
 - Supervisory Committee (e.g., student research projects)
 - Special Review (please provide details)
-

A8. Funding

- a) Is the project funded? Yes No

Funding approved – please specify source(s):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Funding pending – please specify source(s):

- 1.
- 2.

- 3.

A9. Conflict of Interest

- a) Are any of the investigators or their immediate family receiving any personal remuneration (including investigator payments and recruitment incentives but excluding trainee remuneration or graduate student stipends from the funding of this study that is not accounted for in the study budget?

Yes No

- b) Do any of the investigators or their immediate family have any proprietary interests in the product under study or the outcome of the research including patents, trademarks, copyrights, and licensing agreements?

Yes No

- c) Is there any compensation for this study that is affected by the study outcome?

Yes No

d) Do any of the investigators or their immediate family receive payments of other sorts from the funder for this study (i.e., grants, compensation in the form of equipment or supplies, retainers for ongoing consultation and honoraria)?

Yes No

e) Are any of the investigators or their immediate family, members of the funder's Board of Directors, Scientific Advisory Panel or comparable body?

Yes No

f) Do you have any other relationship, financial or non-financial, that, if not disclosed, could be construed as a conflict of interest?

Yes No

Please explain if the answer to any of the above questions is Yes.

SECTION B: DETAILS ABOUT THE PROJECT

B1. Purpose of Project

Provide a brief and clear statement of the context and objectives of the project, including the key questions and/or hypotheses of the project (in two pages or less).

This research project is based on the assumption that it takes numerous partners to educate a child and that parents are a vital part of this process. I am seeking to understand what strategies a kindergarten classroom teacher could implement that would encourage parents to assume a more active role in their children's education. I hypothesized that through their involvement in issues and conversations regarding their children's education, parents will build an understanding of educational priorities and, as a result, increase their capacity to support their

children's educational journey. In embarking on this exploration, I am making two assumptions. The first is that explaining to parents the purpose behind educational practices will equip them to provide academic support that may be of benefit to their children's learning. The second assumption is that if parents understand their role as educational partners, they may be more likely to become involved in their children's education. These assumptions are validated by Alberta Education's (2008) contention that "close partnership between schools, families and communities can strengthen the connections between children's learning and experiences, within these various contexts, and make them more meaningful" (p. 3).

The Government of Alberta (2018b) contended that quality teaching requires teachers in the province to appropriately communicate with parents. In the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) the Government of Alberta (2018b) highlighted the importance of involving parents in children's education. In the document, the "fostering effective relationships" indicator of "providing culturally appropriate and meaningful opportunities for students and for parents/guardians, as partners in education, to support student learning" (Government of Alberta, 2018b, p. 4) provides direction to teachers. Principals are encouraged to also attend to the needs of parents as partners in education. In the LQS (Government of Alberta, 2018a), principals are mandated to model a commitment to professional learning by "engaging members of the school community to build a shared understanding of current trends and priorities in the Education system" (p. 4). The assertions made in both the TQS and LQS lead to my main research question: In what ways does a teacher's communication with parents influence the nature of parent engagement? Through the limited scope of this research question, I plan to explore the ways in which the use of generative dialogue (Adams et al., 2019) serves as a means of communication that may influence parent engagement.

B2. Description of Participants

a) Indicate who you will recruit as potential participants in this study (e.g., undergraduates, school children, seniors) including any inclusion or exclusion criteria (e.g., over 65 years of age, self-identified as gay, speaks Blackfoot, speaks English), and the number of participants required.

The participants of this study are competent adults who are parents/guardians of the 36 Kindergarten A students at Iqra School. All parents/guardians who respond to the invitation to participate will be included in this study.

b) If the participants or facilities will be offered compensation or incentive for participating in the research, provide details. Specify the amount, what the compensation/incentive is for, and how payment will be determined for participants who do not complete the study.

No compensation or incentive for participating in the research will be provided.

B3. Recruitment of Participants

a) Briefly describe how participants will be recruited (e.g., letter, phone, poster, third party) and who will do the recruiting. Describe any existing position of authority or power between the recruiter and the participant. Researchers should avoid recruiting their own students. If this is unavoidable, researchers should provide the name of a research assistant, not associated with the course, who will do the recruiting and obtain consent when the researcher is not present.

If posters, newspaper advertisements, radio announcements or letters of invitation are being used, append these to this application. If recruiting through a third party, attach confirmation of permission from the organization if available.

The school secretary will send out the invitation to participate in an email (see Appendix C) which will include the consent form (see Appendix A). The survey will be hosted on Google Forms (see Appendix B) where parents will be asked to respond to key questions connected to the types of communication between the Kindergarten teacher and the home. The invitation will originate from the school secretary to ensure that participants' identity remains anonymous to the student researcher. Google Forms provides for participants to complete the survey anonymously.

b) When and how will people be informed of the right to withdraw from the study? What procedures will be followed for people who wish to withdraw at any point during the study? What happens to the information contributed to the point of withdrawal?

This is explicitly attended to in the letter of consent that will be sent out to parents, which will state:

“Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled by simply closing your browser before you submit your responses and they will not be included. If you choose to discontinue participation after you have submitted your responses, it will not be possible to withdraw your responses because they will not have identifying information linked to them.”

- c) Indicate how participants can obtain feedback on the research findings.

This is explicitly attended to in the letter of consent that will be sent out to parents, which will state:

“For more information on this study or for a summary of the findings (available after September 2021), you may contact me at u.flowerssamari@uleth.ca or 403-248-2773. Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge (Phone: 403-329-2747 or Email: research.services@uleth.ca).”

- Does the research specifically involve Aboriginal groups or communities?* Yes
 No

If the answer was Yes, please complete section B3d to B3j.

- d) If you will be obtaining consent from Elders, leaders, or other community representatives, provide details:
- e) If leaders of the community will be involved in the identification of potential participants, provide details:

- f) Provide details if:
- Property or private information belonging to the community as a whole is studied or used;
 - The research is designed to analyze or describe characteristics of the community; or
 - Individuals are selected to speak on behalf of, or otherwise represent the community
- g) Provide information regarding consent agreements, including access, ownership and sharing of research data with communities.
- h) Provide information on how final results of the study will be shared with the participating community (e.g., via band office, special presentation, deposit in community school, etc.).
- i) Describe how you have engaged the community. For additional information on research involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada, please refer to [Chapter 9 of the TCPS2](#).
- j) Is there a formal research agreement with the community? Yes No
- Provide details about the agreement or why an agreement is not in place, not required, etc.

B4. Description of Research Procedures

Provide a summary of the design and procedures of the research. Provide details of data collection (instrument, location, use of recording, etc.), and time commitment for the participants,

etc. If applicable, identify any special training or qualifications that may be required for data gatherers. *NOTE: all study measures (e.g., questionnaires, interview guides, surveys, rating scales, etc.) must be appended to this application. If the procedures include a blind, indicate under what conditions the code will be broken, what provisions have been made for this occurrence, and who will have the code.*

Throughout this past school year (2019-2020), I taught Kindergarten A class at Iqra School where I had a morning group and an afternoon group of students. I engaged parents from both the of Kindergarten A groups in an active inquiry in which I asked weekly questions to parents/guardians that pertained to their children's learning and parents'/guardians' roles as partners in education via email and through Google Forms. The inquiry question that guided this process was: in what ways does a teacher's communication with parents influence the nature of parent engagement? I used the parents' weekly responses to engage with parents one-on-one in conversations regarding their children's education and to respond to their needs as partners in education. Some examples of questions that I asked parents include: *how do you foster a love for reading at home? How was this first week of distance learning for you and your family and what is one thing you can do to make this upcoming week better? How may I support you this week?* Now, I would like to come to know the ways in which this two way communication impacted parent/guardian perception of their roles as partners in the process of education. Data collection for this research will entail a nine-question online survey on Google Forms that will take 10 to 15 minutes to complete. This survey will be sent to parents/guardians by the school secretary. Please find the Participant Survey in Appendix B.

B5. Privacy Protection

The next set of questions deals with anonymity and confidentiality. Refer to the brief descriptions below to assist you in answering these questions.

*a) **Anonymity** refers to the protection of the identity of participants. **Anonymity protection can be provided along a continuum, from “complete” to “no” protection, where complete protection means that no identifying information will be collected and there is no direct interaction between the researcher and the participant.** We remind applicants that university researchers should treat any personal information in accordance with the privacy protection provisions of Part 2 of the Alberta Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (<http://foip.alberta.ca/legislation/act/index.cfm>). If you have any questions about the collection, use, or disclosure of personal information under the Act, please contact the FOIP Coordinator, The University of Lethbridge, 4401 University Drive, Lethbridge, Alberta T1K 3M4, Email: foip@uleth.ca.*

1. Will the anonymity of the participants be protected?

Yes (completely) Yes (partially) No

2. If “yes”, explain how anonymity will be protected, and describe how this will be explained in the consent process.

This is explicitly attended to in the letter of consent that will be sent out to parents, which will state:

“Participation is voluntary and your responses will not be identified with you personally as the survey collects no identifying information; however, as with any online survey, neither anonymity nor confidentiality can be completely guaranteed. The survey is being hosted on Google Forms and their privacy policy can be accessed at <https://policies.google.com/privacy>.”

3. If “no”, justify why loss of anonymity is appropriate, and describe how this will be explained in the consent process.

b) *Confidentiality refers to the protection, access, control and security of the data and personal information. Confidentiality or non-disclosure agreements are recommended for all the individuals involved with the project (e.g., transcriptionists, research assistants, co-investigators, etc.). Append a copy of the confidentiality template if available.*

1. How will confidentiality be protected and how will this be explained in the consent process? Specify which personnel will have access to the listing of names and study ID numbers as well as other study information collected (use job titles rather than individual names.) Provide details on the location, manner of storage, and the proposed retention period of the information collected.

This is explicitly attended to in the letter of consent that will be sent out to parents, which will state:

“The responses to this survey will be kept on a password-protected computer with restricted access, and will be deleted two years after data collection has been completed.”

B6. Potential Risks and Benefits

<p>To facilitate Human Participant Research Committee review and to determine whether the study involves more than minimal risk, please respond to the following questions. Does this project involve...</p>	<p>Check those that apply</p>
<p>1. Collection of data through invasive clinical procedures that are not required for normal patient care.</p>	
<p>2. Collection of data through noninvasive clinical procedures involving imaging or microwaves that are not required for normal patient care.</p>	
<p>3. Any other non-therapeutic risks that arise from procedures not directly related to patient care.</p>	
<p>4. Collection, use, or disclosure of health information or biological samples where the researcher is requesting that the requirement for informed consent be waived.</p>	
<p>5. Any procedures involving deception or incomplete disclosure of the nature of the research for purposes of informed consent.</p>	
<p>6. Any possibility that a breach of confidentiality could place participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to participants' financial standing, employability or reputation.</p>	

7. Research questions or procedures that might be expected to cause participant psychological distress, discomfort or anxiety beyond what a reasonable person might expect in day to day social interactions (e.g., questions that raise painful memories or unresolved emotional issues).	
8. Investigations in which there is a previous or existing relationship between the investigator and participants (e.g., manager/employee, therapist/client, teacher/parent or guardian of student). See details in a) below.	X

a) Outline any risks of potential physical or emotional harm or discomfort to the participants, and describe the measures that will be put in place to mitigate these risks. Explain why the research is important and the benefits of participating (compensation paid to participants is not considered a benefit).

The participants of this investigation will be the parents of my 36 kindergarten students from the 2019-2020 school year and to mitigate any discomfort or pressure to participate, the school’s secretary will be the one to email the survey to parents. Should parents be unwilling to participate, they would simply not fill out their survey. This information is included in the letter of consent (see Appendix A). There are no known risks of potential physical or emotional harm or discomfort to the participants. This is explicitly attended to in the letter of consent that will be sent out to parents, which will state:

“There are no anticipated risks from participating in this study. There are no direct benefits from participating although you may gain some insight into the types of communications that might be beneficial for fostering parent engagement.”

b) Describe the anticipated dissemination of the study findings.

I will use the findings in my project that will be submitted as a requirement in fulfillment of my Master of Education in Educational Leadership. The aggregated findings may also be published in scholarly presentations and publications.

c) Indicate the steps taken to inform participants of the possible consequences of releasing information in the public domain, and describe how participants will be given an opportunity to review material where appropriate.

As this is an anonymous survey, participants will not be given an opportunity to review material. There are no anticipated consequences as findings will be reported in aggregate.

d) Outline the exit strategy for termination of the study. Some types of research involve intense or lengthy contact between a researcher and the study participant(s), which may result in a close personal relationship, especially if the research itself involves matters close to the heart of participants. For this section, applicants should consider the possibility that a strategy may be required for participants who have difficulty in disengaging from the project after their role is completed or the project has terminated. If this does not apply to your research, please

indicate N/A. If the research involves vulnerable populations, carefully clarify the boundaries between the researcher and participants.

N/A

B7. Obtaining Consent

Advise the Committee how informed consent will be obtained. The Tri-Council Policy Statement ensures that informed consent be obtained in writing from all participants or, when appropriate from parents or legal guardians, unless there is a good reason for not doing so. If a consent form will be used, attach copies for the Committee. The Human Participant Research - Sample Letter of consent is available at: <http://www.uleth.ca/research/human-participant-research-guidelines-forms>. Please ensure that the reading level of the consent form is appropriate to the population involved.

a) Clearly detail who will be obtaining consent and the procedures for doing so. If appropriate, specify whether participants will be randomly assigned to groups before or after consent has been attained.

The school secretary will send an email containing the letter of consent, which is appended to this application as Appendix A. The letter of consent that will be emailed to parents explicitly states:

“If you wish to participate in the survey, please proceed to the questions now at <https://forms.gle/UthiKkG3Bu33SpWS8>. Submission of your responses will be accepted as implied consent to participate. Thank you in advance for your participation.”

b) If the participants are not able/competent to give fully informed consent (cognitive impairment, age, etc.), or if there are significant power differences in operation (professor/student, employer/employee, political or economic minorities, etc.), please specify, and describe steps you will take to obtain free and informed consent. If participants are not competent to consent, specify who will consent on their behalf.

N/A

c) Do any of the procedures include the use of deception or partial disclosure of information to participants? If yes, provide a rationale for the deception or partial disclosure. Describe the procedures for debriefing the participants.

N/A

d) **For the letter of consent /consent form:**

1. Extend an invitation to participate in the research project.
2. Provide a brief description of the project, including the purpose of the research, and a description of what is expected of the participant (e.g, the time commitment and the frequency of contact).
3. Describe the risks and discomforts (e.g., distress, inconvenience, psychological or social discomforts, fatigue, or physical safety issues). If the research project has the potential to identify upset, distressed or disturbed individuals, describe what arrangements will be made to assist these individuals, if need be.

4. Describe the benefits, including an explicit statement if there are no potential benefits to the participants (e.g., “You will not benefit directly from participation in this research”).
5. Provide assurance of anonymity and confidentiality – this statement should describe the steps taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, and should include information regarding who will have access to the data collected. **NOTE: Participants should be advised that their privacy cannot be guaranteed when electronic surveys are used.**
6. Outline compensation for participation in the research project, if applicable.
7. Provide a non-coercive disclaimer – this statement should indicate that participation is voluntary, and that refusal to participate will not initiate prejudice, penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled.
8. Provide an option to withdraw – this statement should indicate that participants may discontinue participation at any time without prejudice, penalty or loss of benefits. The process for withdrawal, in addition to information on the participant’s right to request the withdrawal of data, should be clearly explained along with an explanation of the conditions under which researchers would not be able to remove a participant’s data from the study. Where appropriate, participants who choose to withdraw should be consulted on the fate of their data.

9. Indicate the instances when the researcher may be obligated by law to report, to law enforcement or another agency, information revealed as a result of the research. **NOTE: Questions likely to result in reportable activities must be flagged for the respondent, and the respondent must be given the option to skip these questions.**

10. Provide a brief description of the anticipated use of the data.

11. Provide information on how participants will be informed of the results of the research.

12. Provide the name of the researcher, along with their institutional affiliation, and contact information for questions/clarification about the research project. Also include the following statement: “Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics, University of Lethbridge (Phone: 403-329-2747 or Email: research.services@uleth.ca).”

e) **For telephone surveys**, informed consent should take place in the form of a verbal explanation of the above points. Append the script for this explanation to this application.

f) **For anonymous questionnaires**, include a cover letter that includes all the information normally provided in a consent form. Append a copy of this cover letter to this application.

B8. Reporting Requirements

Research is subject to continuing research ethics review from the date of initial ethics approval, throughout the life of the project by submission of the required report. Continuing research ethics review shall consist of an annual progress report (multi-year research projects), and an end-of-study report (projects lasting less than one year). Select the appropriate reporting requirement for the study:

- Annual renewal report (due on or before annual term date)
- End-of-study report (for projects shorter than one year in duration)

APPENDIX G: THEMATIC DATA ANALYSIS

Figure 1

The Use of Weekly Questions Thematic Analysis

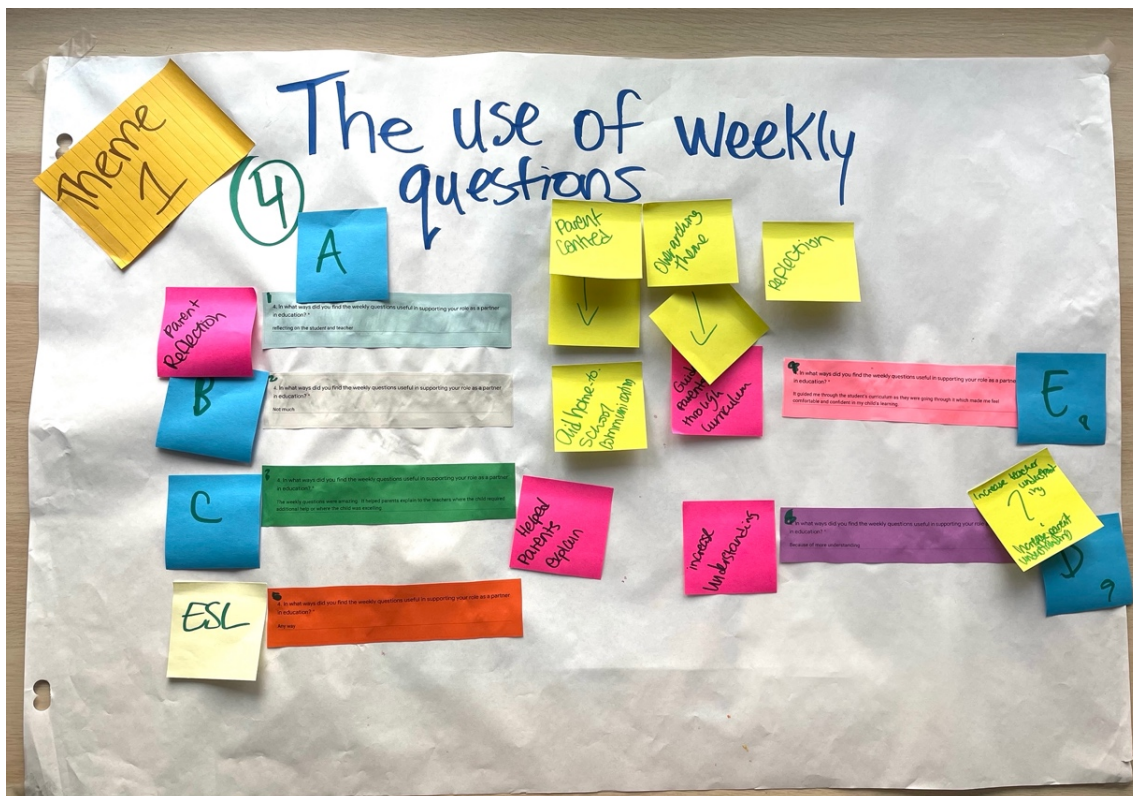


Figure 3

The Influence of School-to-Home Communication Thematic Analysis

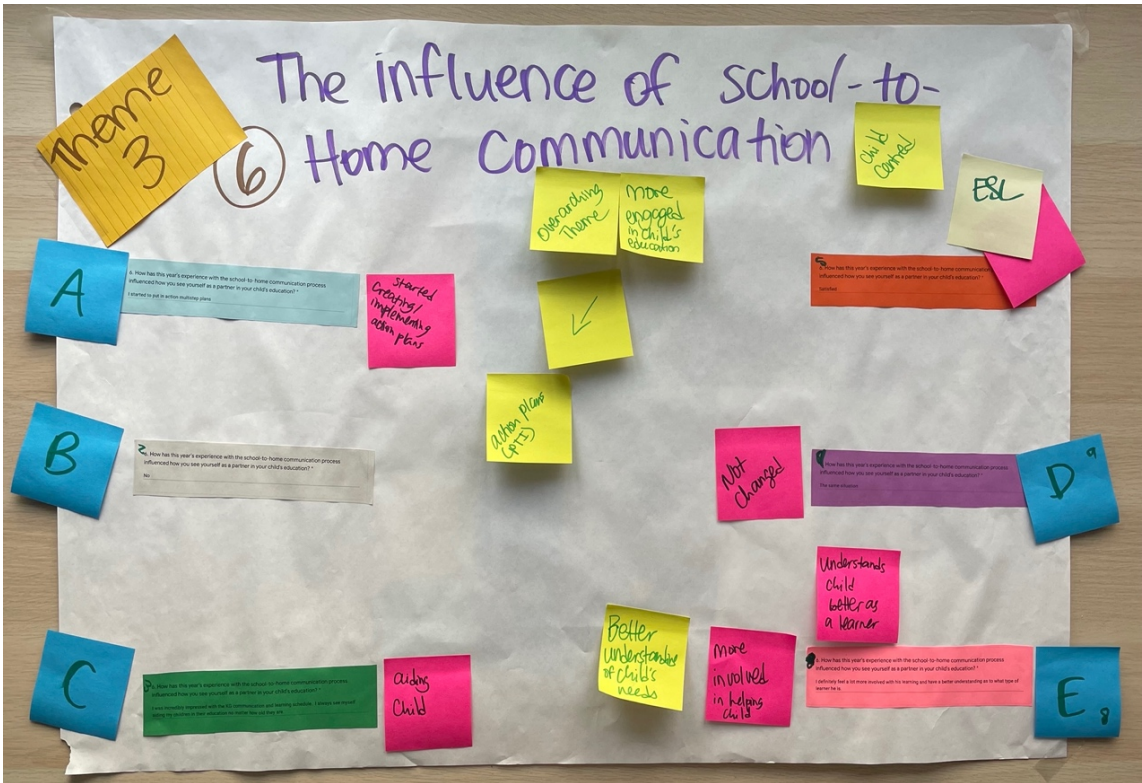


Figure 4

Strategies for Support Thematic Analysis

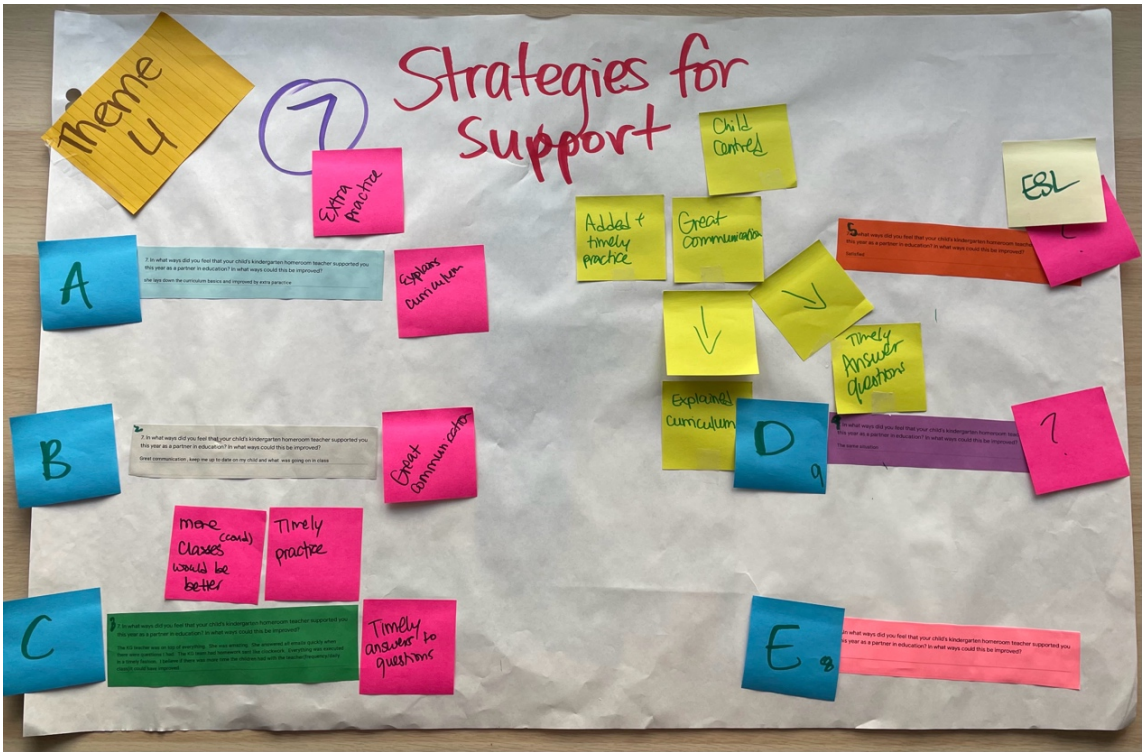


Figure 5

Recommendation for Communication Thematic Analysis

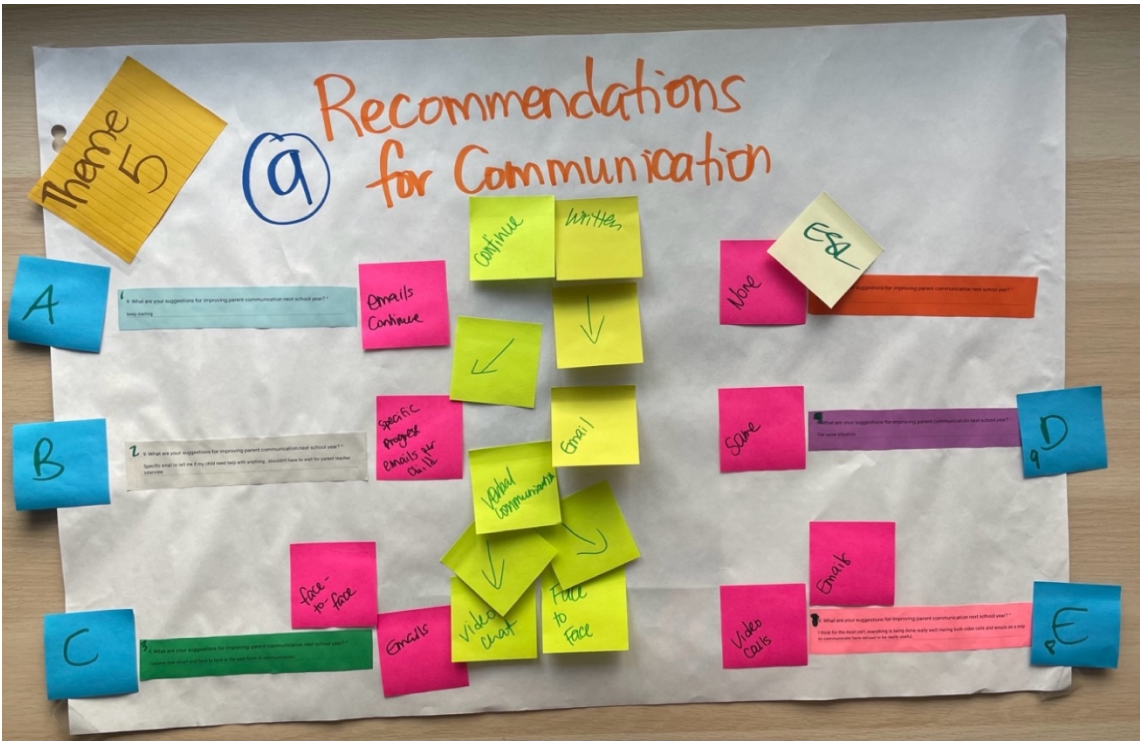
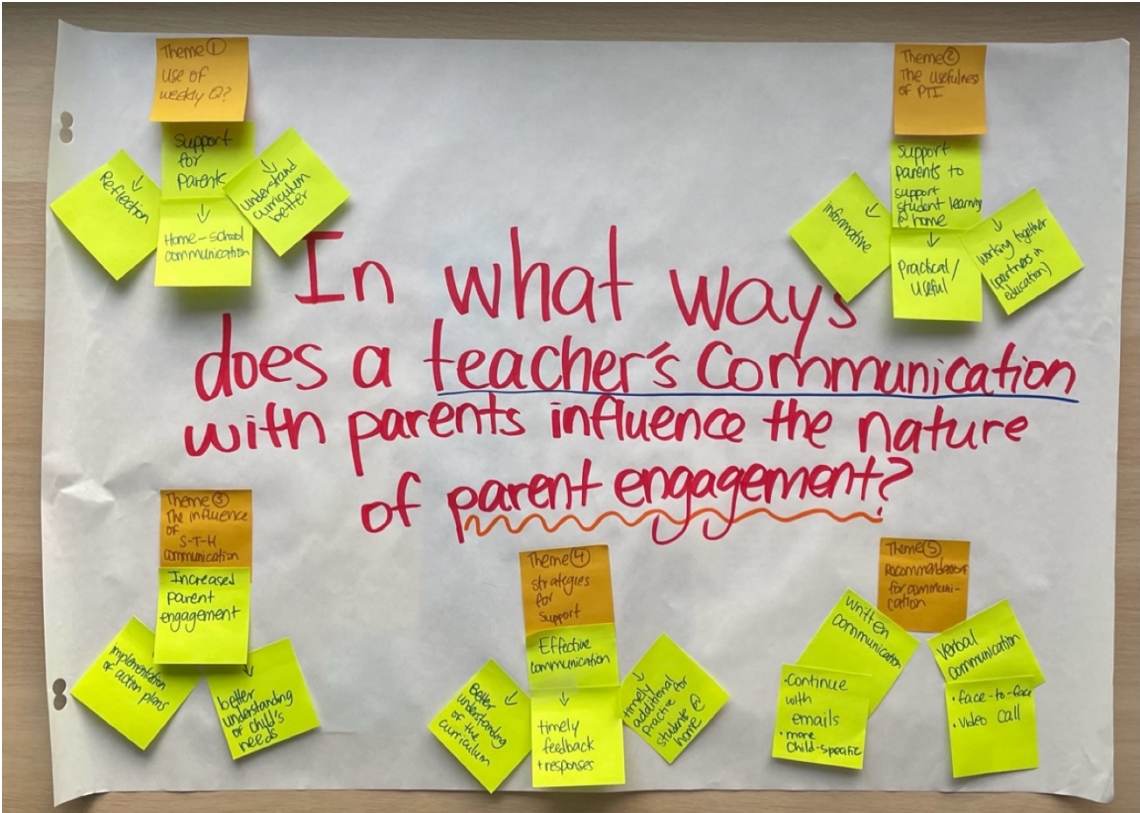


Figure 6

Research Question Thematic Analysis



APPENDIX H: SAMPLE PARENT-TEACHER INTERVIEW REPORT

Student Name

Date of Interview



Points of Excellence

Points for Improvement

[Empty dotted box for Points of Excellence]

[Empty dotted box for Points for Improvement]

Multiple suggestions for how parents may support their children at home to help them reach their learning goals



What is one thing that you may do between now and the next time we meet to support your child's learning?