June 2023

A Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pre-school: Collaborative Approaches to Curriculum in an Underserved Florida Community

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by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
Department of Language, Literacy, Ed.D., Exceptional Education, and Physical Education
College of Education
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
June 27, 2023

Keywords: Anti-racism, continuous improvement for equity, cooperative learning, culturally sustaining pedagogy in early education, family systems theory.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to teachers – everywhere. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The inspiration for this dissertation is centered in the work of the dedicated staff and researchers at the University of South Florida's Family Study Center at the St. Petersburg Campus. This is where I met and worked with role models like Dr. Lisa Negrini, Jennifer Hughes, Kayla Nembhard, and so many others. First and foremost though, Dr. Anne Hogan stands out as an outstanding professor, mentor, and someone who became not just a critical key informant in this work but also as a friend I could count on to help me get through some of the "tough stuff."

Other inspiring figures stand out in defining my doctoral journey, especially Dr. Howard Johnston and Dr. Rachel Hatten of the David C. Anchin Center for the Advancement of Teaching in USF's College of Education. Howard retired on us and both Rachel and I missed him tremendously but carried on following his example as best we could. He was also the EdD program coordinator in the College until his retirement and our whole cohort gained so much from his guidance.

And finally there is the Florida Home Instruction for Parents of Pre-school Youngsters (HIPPY) program at the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences where I brought my doctoral candidate contributions that were challenged and strengthened by my supervisors Dr. Jack Drobisz and Dr. Tracy Payne. Thank you for the wonderful opportunity to "hang out" and be a HIPPY for a while. I learned so much!

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ABSTRACT

The early childhood education and childcare (ECE&C) sector in America "is a textbook example of a broken market" (Yellen, 2021) that operates as a "non-system" (Berlin, 2021). This manifests itself through the low-quality of its teaching cadre (Cassidy et al., 2019). This failure hits disadvantage families hardest (Chafouleas et al., 2016) - a reality that is particularly apparent in St. Petersburg, Florida's Midtown neighborhoods where one out of every two children attending ECE programs are not meeting State school readiness standards (Florida OEL, 2020). In this study, I propose a culturally-responsive (Gay, 2018), culturally sustaining (Ladson-Billings, 2021c), and equity-based continuous improvement initiative (Bryk, 2010) that may positively impact families and ECE programs in the St. Petersburg Midtown community. I describe deeply competent collaborative processes and asset-based participatory pedagogical practices (Moss, 2019) that teachers can use to develop, implement, and sustain relational ECE&C co-teaching partnerships with their parents (Malaguzzi, 1994; Miller, 2019). Emergent concepts to transform ECE&C teaching praxis through the intentionality of the pedagogy of caring (Noddings, 2013) and the role of "educative play" as a central curriculum focus (Van Hoorn et al., 2015) are also explored. The resulting place-based and adaptive curriculum development framework is then assessed through a computer-aided qualitative analysis of participant dialogue resulting from a recent community ECE workshop for parents, community leaders, and teachers. This evaluation confirmed the usefulness of the adaptive shared home-school early learning curriculum and identified significant relational challenges that parents and

teachers would face in implementing it. Implications for practice and recommendations for a community-led cooperative learning initiative to initiate change and support continuous improvement are discussed as are directions for future research.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther King Jr. railed against the "almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions" (1963). Having thought about it, I am convinced King's statement sums up our Society's efforts towards early childhood education (ECE) pretty well.

Just one indication of this failed quest is exemplified in Florida on St. Petersburg's southside – a predominantly Black community locally known as "Midtown." Looking at the 2019 pre-pandemic data from the Florida Department of Education's Division of Early Learning (DEL) for the 21 Pre-K centers in the socioeconomically stressed Midtown catchment, the school readiness assessments for youngsters entering kindergarten were significantly worse on a one-to-one basis than those of the surrounding areas of the city at the end of the school year (Florida DOE-DEL, 2020. See Appendix A for my related analysis). Indeed, I discovered that this data indicates that fully half of Midtown's Pre-Ks failed to meet Florida's 60 percent readiness rate expectations for their children. What this means in terms of real lives is that of the nine hundred or so youngsters entering a kindergarten classroom in St. Petersburg in September 2019, an out-sized proportion of the 282 children who were not kindergarten-ready were the 128 youngsters who live in Midtown – or nearly ½ of the city's total from an area with less than ¼ of its overall population. These indicators track Pinellas County Schools' more recent pre-pandemic data from their "Bridging the Achievement Gap"[1] program that shows that twice as many Black students in

[1] This biased, racialized and deficit-oriented wording is the School Board's official title of their program.

kindergarten through grade 2 perform at below grade-level for English Language Arts (ELA) and Math expectations as compared to their non-Black peers (Pinellas County Schools, 2021).

Background of the Study

From any vantage point of future chances in life, the above represents Dismal Math as they suggest that for every two Black children at the very beginning of their K-12 school years, one is struggling right from the start. I will examine more closely whether state readiness standards are the correct measure when we talk about toddlers, but for now suffice to say the current situation is causing deep concern in the community (Davis, R., 2015; Davis, R., 2022; Davis, G., 2022), and rightly so. These DEL numbers for Midtown also tell us an even sadder story – that at one early learning center only *one-in-four* children were assessed as "school ready" at the end of the year. At this point I need to make it clear that listing this litany of gloomy outcome indicators is not an effort to blame our ECE practitioners – far from it. What makes this terribly alarming for all of us is that this last school in question is a Nationally funded Head Start program center, and in my mind, this is a very strong indicator that the mechanisms to address the situation extends far beyond the classroom - or any individual teacher - and into the social contract forged by Americans decades ago. Indeed - recalling that Head Start was a central pillar of President Lyndon Johnson's 1960's civil rights era "War on Poverty" that took aim at overcoming such dismal results (DHHS, 2021), I can easily imagine MLK's ghost (and maybe LBJ's too) shouting at us to stop standing around and get to work on solving the problem!

What follows is my effort to go beyond "easy answers" towards some of the "hard, solid thinking" that Dr. King tells us is needed to bring about lasting change (King, 1963). Through a process of qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) I will map out a route of discovery that can form the basis for a community dialogue that engages it towards

what it takes to "fully-bake" an Early Education and Care (ECE&E) Curriculum that is culturally responsive to the lived experience of families and their very young children (i.e. toddlers ages 18 to 36 months) in the underserved neighborhoods of South St. Petersburg. The *adaptive place-based participatory approach* I will outline leans heavily on the collective strengths of community members and intentional collaborative processes (Totikidis & Prilleltensky, 2006) that are integral to emerging innovations to initiate and sustain education system change through Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2021c) that are linked to Continuous Improvement for Equity in education methodologies (Bryk, 2010; Valdez et al., 2020; MAEC, 2022b; Bush-Mecenas, 2022) as central pillars in a new concept of community-led ECE.

Imagine with me a highly localized, collaborative, and holistic process that gets us out of the rote industrial response of "doing education" to very young children in the more-of-same, half-baked, and siloed, one-size-fits-all fashion that has served as an easy out we as a nation have taken up to now. I further ask that you then imagine a community where the collective ways of being of personally embodied skilled learning and capacity grows across the entire age spectrum as a community-asset and accessible source of its future common-good (Levine, 2007) – a community "wealth" of culturally relevant and responsive know-how if you will - especially for our youngest children.

In the study I propose, I will first explore the emerging evidence-base of processes and practices that can then be integrated to transform Early Childhood Education (ECE) within an interdisciplinary, culturally responsive and sustaining, equity-focused, and cross-sector framework. My intention is to inform the community's dialogue around what might help create a neighborhood-based early childhood education *Plus* care (ECE&C) learning environment in

underserved neighborhoods like those in South St. Petersburg. The centrality of a culturally adaptive curriculum that can propel a transformative approach to supporting parents and educators through *intentionally relational ECE&C practices* that keeps the whole-child in mind is based on tackling four highly enmeshed issues in ECE head-on, specifically:

1. Teachers who interact with toddlers every day do not generally understand the depth to which young brains positively respond to and dynamically develop in an intentionally pro-social environment (Chazan-Cohen et al., 2017; Immordino-Yang et al., 2019),
2. ECE Teachers are also not fully aware that emotional wounding due to adverse early experiences impacts early brain development and social-emotional functioning and, worse, they often feel overwhelmed and become harsh when faced with the resulting behaviors of affected children, (Hughes et al., 2018; Bartlett & Smith, 2019; Montgomery, 2020),
3. Many teachers fail to recognize that the quality of their relationships with the other adults in the life of the toddler they are all caring for will strengthen that child's development, wellness, sense of self, and ability to learn and grow through the lifespan (Williams & Mohammed, 2013a; Center on the Developing Child, 2016; Penney et al., 2019), and most critically,
4. Given our society's dominant free-enterprise narrative, parents tend to see themselves as consumers in a "childcare market-place" (Moss, 2019) versus having a vital role in early learning and ECE as the child's "first teacher" (Malaguzzi, 1994; Gay, 2018; Taylor, 2022). Most teachers do not have the skills to counter this entrenched view nor are pre-schools equipped to address the community development task required to address the problems inherent in it (Sheridan et al., 2010; Hughes et al., 2018; Gao et al., 2020).

Confounding this situation, and heaping a lot of challenge to forging a way ahead, is the knock-on impact of this sad reality in a resulting lack of readiness and resilience of the ECE workforce in general (Zigler & Hall, 2000; Horm et al., 2017; Lieberman, 2017). This manifests itself as both a symptom and a barrier to progress that persists - despite the almost universal good intentions of individual teachers and childcare workers - since this issue stems from a wider societal narrative and resultant system weakness that is itself a "wicked problem" that seems to defy effective and lasting solutions (Camillus, 2008).

On top of all these challenges - and indicative of the lack of societal responsiveness of our industrialized and capital enterprise organizational models and mind-sets - Blank (2010) contends that there is no clear agreement on a starting point around preparing and supporting the professional development of our ECE workforce. She also contends that since such a basic question as "what should ECE teachers be able to accomplish in the classroom and one-on-one with children?" yields ambiguous answers - should the focus be "socio-emotional development" or "school readiness" for instance - it is little wonder then that post-secondary and para-professional ECE teacher preparation, education, and certification standards across the US provide ambiguous answers and widely varying program orientations (Blank, 2010). I also agree with Blank's conclusion that we must change the discourse away from our oppositional binaries in ECE program orientations and a specific silo's particular paradigm (i.e., school readiness versus childcare) to a more nuanced one that is based on a holistic and humanistic process of "teaching in context" that is aimed directly at helping the child in front of us (Blank, 2010, p. 402). It is this orientation that will lead to a more situated (and a more responsive, effective, equitable, and just) approach to teacher education, pre-service preparation, and ongoing

professional development that is so sorely lacking (Whitebook et al., 2016; Gay 2018; Penney et al., 2019).

The Current Study in Context

All these issues and their apparent intractability jumped into stark relief for me during my involvement in the University of South Florida's (USF) St. Petersburg's Midtown ECE Collaborative (Hughes et al., 2018). Sparked by the issues outlined at the start of this dissertation, the community-based Concerned Organizations for the Quality Education of Black Students (COQEBS) formed a School Readiness Committee a decade ago. Based on their input, the USF Family Study Center initiated the "Midtown Collaborative" project to address an area of critical importance to learning readiness and school success repeatedly disregarded in early care and education curricular programming: specifically, the impact of trauma, toxic stress, poverty, and social stressors on the developing child's social-emotional and behavioral development (Yoshikawa et al., 2012). Many families with younger children in South St. Petersburg face entrenched social and economic challenges including discrimination, poverty, community violence, and substance use (Davis & McHale, 2012). These and other stressors reverberate from the past and present into the future as inter-generational historical trauma that debilitates parenting capacity and inhibits parental responses to young children's social and emotional developmental needs. According to Davis and McHale (2012) these conditions have contributed to an opportunity gap driving a disturbing cycle of academic failure in the community as the current generation is impacted by the last generation's trauma and so on, generating a downward spiral of functioning that impairs coping, problem solving skills, and educational achievement that ultimately leads to reduced personal well-being, capacity, and success through the lifespan (Williams & Mohammed, 2013a; Hughes et al., 2018). The Midtown Project offered an

opportunity to look for ways to intervene early and change the trajectory for children in the South St. Petersburg community and alter the future for everyone.

The Midtown collaborative was based on partnerships with community organizations that are addressing the education and overall wellness of very young children attending childcare centers, faith-based providers, and the early care and early childhood education sites that were feeder Pre-Kindergartens into what the 2016 Pulitzer Prize winning team of journalists from the Tampa Bay Times (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015) called the five worst performing elementary schools in all of Pinellas County (if not the entire state of Florida) - all which are located in the Midtown/ South St. Petersburg area (Figure 1 on the next page). From my own personal perspective as a recent arrival to the US, the Midtown project also served as an eye-opening entry point into the social justice sphere of America - an area rife with troubling contradictions, malaise, and disparity. The project's aims and methods also spoke to me as an aspiring community-based researcher, and to top things off, the project staff were world-class scholars and educators.

I will go into additional details that situate me and that project experience within the current research endeavor in due course, but the short version is that in the Midtown Collaborative I found a home that spoke to my passion and capacities around developing communities of professional practice that can make a positive difference. I will also talk more about the work I have done to move past biases and ego that may have contributed to a lingering 'white-savior mindset' towards one of centered on humility and service (Yarbrough, 2019), but I was welcomed into the Midtown project because I possessed a range of psycho-social research skills and professional experience in civil sector leadership, community development, learning communities, and community and public health. I will also explain how my experience with Midtown team informed a later program undertaken by USF's David C. Anchin Center for the

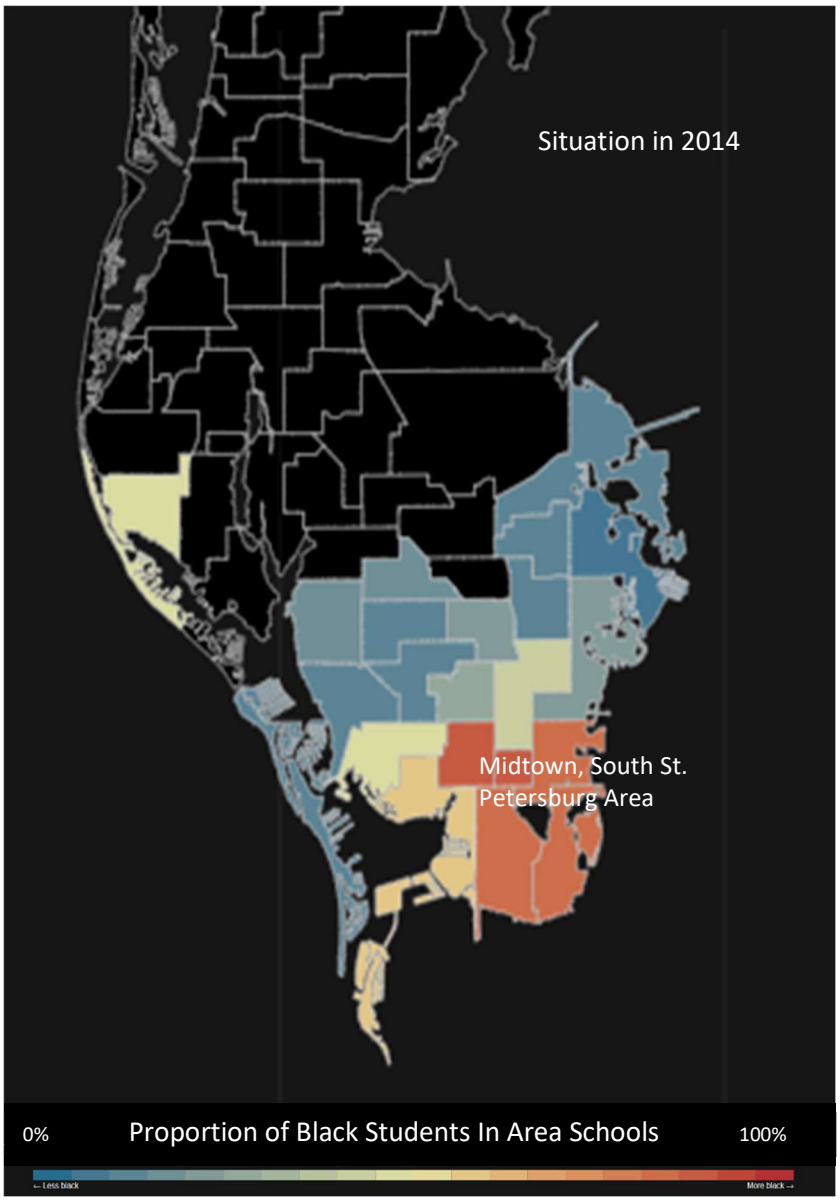

Figure 1

Pinellas County School segregation levels in the City of St. Petersburg (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015)

Advancement of Teaching and my role in helping launch a culturally responsive Place, Space, and Play ECE initiative aimed at exploring an extension of their K-12 focus to include earlier

years' educational praxis and professional development. The current study I will describe is nested within that milieux.

In this broader context then, the Midtown Collaborative forms the launch pad for reframing the narrative about how we must care for and ultimately educate very young children so that they learn to build strengths for school and life success – socially, emotionally, and cognitively. More to the point, the Midtown ECE collaborative reaffirmed my beliefs about the potential of teacher professional development through reflective practice and continuous improvement that is coupled with a community of practice/peer/mentor support framework, as well as the need to address individual and collective historical trauma in our communities to build parent capacity through what are called "wrap-around services" (Williams & Mohammed, 2013b; Chafouleas et al., 2016; Penney, et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2020). To me, and others I talked to at the Anchin Center – as well as the practitioners and community leaders we subsequently engaged with - the Midtown Collaborative was the potential start of an alternative story about ECE (Moss, 2019): one that is something "new, innovative, and hopeful" (p. 68).

The Problem of Practice

Given the situation facing South St. Petersburg – and other similar communities, the problem of practice I will address in this study is a fundamental and urgent one, specifically - to tackle the highly enmeshed issues facing the ECE sector I will build a theoretically grounded collaborative curriculum development framework for an innovative community-led ECE&C initiative that goes beyond traditional approaches. Central to this proposed action are three interconnected core concepts I will explore in the step-by-step development of a conceptual curriculum framework that follows, specifically:

1. That relational processes are key,

2. Play-based learning is the optimal pathway towards social, emotional, and cognitive 'learning readiness' in very young children, and
3. There is an essential need to acknowledge the pervasive impact of adverse emotional experiences on healthy development in the early years and adopt an equity-focused collaborative cross-sector *Family-systems approach* oriented towards wellness and well-being.

These keys to an effective way-ahead – what some ECE thinkers would classify as "competent systems" approaches (Moss, 2019, p. 86) - are supported and enhanced when they are brought into an environment of an Ethic of Caring (Noddings, 2013) and a commitment by everyone to move beyond Cultural Competence to a universal adherence to Cultural Responsiveness (Gay, 2018) and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2021b) that advances and sustains equity (Ladson-Billings, 2021c). All this requires a continual professionalization and renewal of the ECE workforce through community involvement, interdisciplinary connections, reflective practice, and ongoing professional development (Moss, 2019; Penny, et al., 2019). I will be describing these concepts in detail, but they are important considerations in addressing what are essentially issues of *teacher-readiness* in ECE that we are facing locally and nationally. These are encapsulated by the need to change direction away from the *school readiness* of our children – and "half-baked" instrumental (and one-size-fits-all) responses to address it – and towards a broader concept of *learning-readiness* and a relational co-teaching partnership between educators, the community, and – most importantly – parents.

Simply put, the ECE teacher must deeply know and consistently show that the technical aspects of *doing education* to our toddlers is *not the answer* (Moss, 2007, p. 1). It is the ECE teacher who forms a helping and caring relationship with the child and their loved ones who will

inspire and teach them that the real answer is *learning how to learn*. The central question behind all of this in the context of the current study then becomes: is the South St. Petersburg ECE sector and its teachers up to the mark of serving as champions for this vision of a relationally grounded ECE and Care practice especially for toddlers and very young children, and – as short-falls are bound to exist – what can be done to help them continuously improve the current situation and move ahead?

Focusing on Equity – Including Diverse Voices to Ignite Change

I admit that the challenge facing the community and my ideas about how to address them represents a tremendously heavy lift, one that requires the hard, solid collective thinking evoked by King (1963), coupled with the collaborative cross-systems and interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving and strategic acumen described by Camillus (2008) to get us out of the box we are so obviously in. What Freire (1970/1993) derisively called the "Banking Model of Education" – the easy answer of *doing education* using didactic approaches to *fill youngsters' brains* – is what got us here. Dewey's (1963) objection to this top-down 'teacher as technician' process of "Traditional Education" also aligns with this. Simply put – it does not work!

I think that Freire, and other titans such as Dewey and MLK, along with living legends like the Harvard Business School's Dr. John Camillus (as mentioned earlier, a leading figure in how to solve the vicious cycles inherent in "wicked problems" using cross-silo collaboration) would be avid champions of the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium's recent work around Continuous Improvement for Equity (CI4Equity) in Education (MAEC, 2022a). The implications stemming from the Midtown Collaborative project underline the need to bolster and extend the know-how, capabilities, and strengths in families, along with the urgent need to prioritize the social, emotional, and cognitive development opportunities for toddlers (Hughes, et al. 2018).

Furthermore, during that project it became clear to me that this whole-community work should be embedded in teaching practice as a community asset through trauma-sensitive, culturally responsive and sustaining, and deeply relational ECE&C praxis. The resulting equity-based curricular approaches in an underserved "community preschool" milieu represents a paradigm shift: or as Gloria Ladson-Billings advocates – it is Culturally Relevant Pedagogy that serves as "a hard re-set" to traditional ECE education practice (2021b, p. 68). This new approach – forged through an Equity-orientation towards "representation of communities, knowledge, structures, and decision-making processes" (MAEC, 2022a) – requires teachers, school leadership, parents, neighborhoods, and the community to work in close contact together with local, state, and Federal policy makers, regulators, and funders to tap into and strengthen build local community-assets, or – to borrow a term for doing similar work in Latino communities – tapping into "Cultural Wealth" (Yosso, 2005). From a broader equity basis, this is very intentional and place-specific collaborative, coherent, and "orchestrated action" (Bryk, 2010) and bringing in voices that are traditionally excluded as not having the required expertise – or because of persistent disenfranchisement – can begin to shift the biases of the dominant white culture at the center of these systems (Gay, 2018, p. 60). By working to include diverse voices, the CI4Equity model represents a system development approach that is well suited to addressing complex socio-economic and highly (or *wickedly*) enmeshed issues within a local context (Cantin, 2010). This lines up precisely with what Moss (2019) tells us lays at the very heart of stories about deeply competent whole-child early education practices as "local cultural projects" (p. 66). This expansive, culturally responsive, and relevant collective action to improve education within a community's specific social context is what Miller (2019) calls "Participatory Pedagogical Practice".

Using the Networks for School Improvement's "Continuous Improvement for Equity" (CI4Equity) Model to Chart a Possible Way Ahead. Coupled with this change of perspective around the direction early education should take for and by community, and the collaborative effort to drive forward a participatory approach to developing, improving, and sustaining it (Cantin, 2010; Miller, 2019), a good place to better understand the critical underlying processes involved is to build a conceptual adaptive ECE curriculum development framework that can better respond and adapt to the needs of local families and young children in the context of their lives. As introduced above, this is supported by recent work to develop an equity framework for the "Networks for School Improvement" (NSIs) across America, and under this initiative the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC) recently released an *Equity Resource Hub* for educators at *CI4Equity.org* (MAEC, 2022a).

Anthony Bryk (2010) provides us with context around the promise and potential of these *Continuous Improvement for Equity* processes with his description of a 15-year longitudinal study of Chicago-area schools. Bryk highlights the dramatic impact that enhancing equity can have through the interplay of five essential equity-driven educational system supports to improve a school's social context, along with student perceptions of safety, mutual trust, and increased sense of agency. These equity synergies not only advanced student opportunity and achievement in multiple learning outcomes but – importantly – they dramatically strengthened student capacity across other domains including positive and productive relationships with their teachers and peers. The key interacting equity supporting factors were found to be:

1. A coherent approach to teaching practice,
2. Building teacher professional capacity,
3. Strong parent-community-school ties,

4. A student-centered learning environment, and
5. Leadership that drives change. (Bryk, 2010, pp. 24-25)

Inspired by MLK, I will take a *hard, solid look* at all these factors, and to do so I will concentrate primarily on coherence in ECE teaching practice, student-centered learning environments, and especially, the vital importance of strong school-teacher-parent-community ties. Building teacher professional capacity and leadership action to drive change will be addressed somewhat more peripherally but as I will make clear, these two factors undergird the success of the overall improvement process (Bryk, 2010, p. 24). Given the promising lessons from Chicago that Bryk tells us about, and the potential utility of Continuous Improvement actions to shape positive equity outcomes, an important pillar for my inquiry framework in the context of the current study is based on the following key CI4Equity in Education Model processes as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

The Mid-Atlantic Education Consortium's CI4Equity in Education Model processes (MAEC, 2022b).

Process Step	Continuous Improvement for Equity Process Description
1.	Understanding the System
2.	Creating a Collaborative and Diverse Team
3.	Determining an Aim
4.	Theory of Improvement
5.	Testing Interventions
6.	Convening a Network

Note. While the steps outlined above are ordered sequentially, the MAEC indicate that since every community is unique, the precedence and point of entry into the equity process model is not as critical as getting through all the stages.

In this dissertation I will concentrate on the first four steps outlined in the table above, specifically: understanding the system, creating the team, determining an aim, and developing a theory of improvement. As a general approach to inquiry in the context of the current study, the first three of these steps will be outlined in the next chapter and I will discuss my theory of improvement later in the paper.

The Research Question

Using the CI4Equity model and concepts centered on asset-full approaches to change in educational settings such as participatory pedagogical practices (Miller 2019), and culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2021c) as my basic approach to the inquiry I will engage in a qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009) of community member and leader thoughts around improving the quality education for very young black students contained in various publicly available documents and transcripts of workshop discussions between parents and teachers in the spirit of honoring the words of community members as "telling as knowing" (Kim, 2016, p. 6). Given this, "the word" from parents, teachers, school administrators, community organizers, regulators, and education policy makers become the raw material towards building these next steps. Our tellers will be all the good people standing amid the "wicked problem" at hand that plagues the current ECE environment in America - one that is personified by local people and their individual perspectives and needs – those of the children, parents, teachers, and community leaders living in South St. Petersburg.

From my Midtown Collaborative experience - which, according to Mertova and Webster (2020), ranks as a "Critical Event" in my research story (p. 58) – our local tellers have a lot to say about the failures that got us here (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2018). This

collective telling and re-envisioning through building a counter-narrative – as introduced above, has the potential to become an "alternative pedagogical story" (Moss, 2019, p. 87) – and like the story from Chicago that Bryk (2010) retells, the community can initiate and innovate a culturally relevant way forward for parents and teachers to co-create their own *Adaptive Place-based Education and Care Curriculum* for toddlers that maximizes and sustains an ethos of whole-child centered relational co-teaching in South St. Petersburg.

To support the potential of any community-based dialogue towards that alternative story - and to center it on the idea of Miller's (2019) participatory pedagogy to address the problems of practice outlined earlier - especially around collaborative cross-sector Family-systems approaches - a central research question will help contextualize the conceptual place-based toddler ECE&C curriculum development framework I will outline in the next chapter. This will then further inform the analysis of dialogue that arose from a community child development event to assess the framework's utility to enhance the conditions for relational teacher/parent co-teaching partnerships that are aligned with the CI4Equity process of strengthening "parent-community-school ties" (Bryk, 2010, p. 25). Given this, the research question then becomes:

> What perspectives around relational co-teaching practices do parents and teachers bring to moving Midtown/South St. Petersburg towards a participatory Whole-community/Whole-child Adaptive Curriculum Development approach for a new community-school for Toddlers?

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter will provide a detailed overview of the current status and challenges that the ECE sector is currently facing and the resulting impacts on very young children generally, and for Black children specifically in America. As a proposed response to this situation, this chapter will then proceed to build a case for an innovative approach to ECE *and* Care centered on relational practices that extend beyond the classroom and into the home to bolster and extend toddler social, emotional, and cognitive development through a parent-teacher co-teaching partnership and associated conceptual curriculum framework focused on developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive pedagogies and approaches to educative play. To help ensure the curriculum development framework is place-based and fully situated in the local context, a participatory pedagogical practice framework, I will also introduce a roadmap for the Midtown St. Petersburg community to consider in their decision-making towards an adaptive and innovative approach to ECE&C curriculum that is responsive to local needs and aligned with the community's shared vision.

Understanding the ECE "System" Through the CI4Equity Lens

Looking at the broader situation in ECE across America and noting that while reliable national census and play-school attendance data for the target population of toddlers ages 18 to 36 months is not readily available, according to the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2021), in 2016 approximately 85 percent of all American children aged 3 to 6

whose mothers work are enrolled in a non-parental early childhood education or care program. As McMullen et al. (2015) point out, no matter how you look at it, a majority of America's young children spend all or part of their weekdays in an ECE&C program of some form. Given this high need and what is at stake, it is not surprising that the National Association of Educators of Young Children (NAEYC) states categorically that quality early learning curricula is central to effective programming and that it must be planned and implemented in a way that can flexibly adapt to each individual child's skills, interests, and needs in a manner that is developmentally appropriate (NAEYC, 2020, p. 25).

In a review of 2016 National Survey of Children's Health data, Claussen et al. (2021) found that one in five (or 20%) of U.S. children aged 3–5 years were described by their parents as "not on track" with their development of self-regulation. These parents also described various adverse child health and development factors associated with their child's self-regulation difficulties. This tracks well with reports from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that estimate the prevalence of concerning social-emotional and behavioral mental health issues amongst the early childhood population runs is in the range of 17 percent (Cree et al., 2018) to 20 percent (Penney et al., 2019), with boys disproportionately overrepresented in these figures by a factor of two to one (Peacock et al., 2018; Nelson, 2020). These are only the reported clinically diagnosed cases however, and countless other children in this age bracket may have undiagnosed and/or unreported issues such as those stemming from the stress of family break-up due to historic high levels of divorce (Boullier & Blair, 2018). While it is too early to say what the impact of COVID-19 pandemic will have on the situation there are worrying indications (Zhang & Lee, 2020; Sparks, 2022) and this will make it even more difficult to tease out the overlaps between various disorder and risk/adverse impact factor criteria that I have described so far.

Nonetheless, it is clear that a sizeable proportion of the nation's very young children in America's preschool and daycare centers are facing intense stress and the resulting social-emotional, self-regulatory, and behavioral problems that arise from it (Sexauer, 2017). These factors are exacerbated significantly for our most vulnerable children living in poverty in America's underserved areas (Allee-Herndon & Roberts, 2019), and this is especially true for children from predominantly communities of people of African American origin (Williams & Mohammed, 2013a; Cree et al., 2018). From my own experience in Midtown, it is also evident that much of the early education workforce is very ill-prepared to help these troubled children (Raver et al., 2011; Desmangles, 2017; Hughes et al., 2018).

As introduced in the proceeding chapter, a myriad of challenges are confounding efforts to forge a way ahead. Extremely poor compensation and employment benefits, low levels of professional development, burn-out, and high-turnover rates have stymied the ECE workforce's growth in professional practice within the teaching profession (Whitebook et al., 2001). In addition to a wide-spread feeling of being overwhelmed, Lieberman (2017) describes the pervasive sense of feeling of ECE practitioner isolation and lack of support that in turn conspires to prevent the growth of a shared ethos of excellence that is so critical for a specialist workforce to systematically inculcate within each of its members. Worse still, this vicious cycle not only prevents professional growth but also stalls any widespread recognition of that service's value and a resulting increase in stature in the eyes of those who rely on it – parents, the public, policy makers, and elected officials (Whitebook et al., 2001). More importantly, all this leads many of these vital members of our larger early childhood teaching community to feel that they remain voiceless in the process of setting the agenda for their profession's future (Whitebook et al., 2014; Whitebook et al., 2016)

It is clear to me that the hodge-podge nature of the US ECE "system," made up as it is of a collection of siloed activities such as home-based care, non-profit, and for-profit center-based facilities, federally funded needs-based programs, as well as state-funded pre-kindergarten schools, absolutely does not serve parents and children well. Indeed, evidence from recent randomized control studies are pointing towards just how bad it is (Durkin et al., 2022). Berlin (2021) tells us that, in reality, because it is a piecemeal collection of unintegrated silos the ECE system in the US acts as a "non-system", and early in her tenure as US Federal Treasury Secretary, Janet Yellen agreed, telling Americans that "childcare is a textbook example of a broken market" (Yellen, 2021). This is further supported by empirical evidence that presents the dire implication that children from programs such as Head Start are worse off in multiple domains when they arrive at their Grade 6 classrooms in comparison to their peers who do not attend preschool at all (Durkin et al., 2022).

Given this, and as Blank (2010) points out, it is no small wonder that post-secondary institutions are unable to agree on what pre-service ECE educators should know before entering the classroom. This is indicative of the reality of this massive systems failure that ultimately manifests as a deeply troubling issue where the ECE workforce is the least supported sector in the education system (Horm et al., 2017) and that these teachers are looked at by society more as an alternative to the friendly next-door neighbor that doubles as a baby-sitter than as vital contributors to building a strong foundation for their communities and the Nation's future (Patterson, 2019). Furthermore, Whitebook et al. (2001) tell us that unstable early childcare facility staffing is an endemic problem in the ECE sector regardless of an educational program's philosophy or the underlying quality of its methodology.

Research also shows that the quality of in-class delivery is adversely affected by the ECE sector's high teacher turnover as demonstrated by generally low learning environment rating scale scores and increased behavioral difficulties that have been attributed to the lack of consistency of care and instruction due to staff changes that results in disrupted routines for the children (Cassidy et al., 2011; Durkin et al, 2022). Significantly, Zhang and Lee (2020) report that a further indication of the urgent need to address this vicious cycle is presented by the lack of institutional resilience the ECE sector demonstrated during the recent COVID-19 crisis. For decades, underserved racial/ethnic communities have exhibited lower rates of school readiness and early literacy experiences for children (Allee-Herndon & Roberts, 2019). When linked with inadequate access to high-quality ECE, these factors become key markers of developmental delay, and/or risk to the physiological health of very young children, as well as ongoing negative impacts to their social, emotional, and cognitive competence that is needed for later success in the school (Atkins et al., 2012; Yoshikawa et al., 2013; Donoghue et al., 2017; Durkin, et al, 2022).

In response to this sad plethora of issues, early childhood experts have identified critical characteristics of an expanded concept of ECE *and* Care to include well-trained teachers, quality learning environments, developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive curricula, and support to and strong collaboration with families and the local community (Olson et al., 2007; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Karoly et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2020; Reschke, 2021; Mondi et al., 2021). Underscoring the urgent need for transformative action, it saddened me deeply to have learned that Florida currently ranks among the lowest five states in these "ECE plus Care" quality indicators and 43rd out of 50 in the public spending on these programs (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2019).

There is a way out of the morass - a one-step-at-a-time process that must start now (Gay, 2018). As a first step, it is clear to me that we urgently need to develop a set of equity-focused core processes that grow and nurture place-based relational ECE&C curriculum innovation and development that is centered around practices that build robust social, emotional, and cognitive capacity in our youngest children as advocated by Bryk's (2010) *CI4Equity Resource* that stresses the importance of "developing a coherent approach to teaching practice". According to NAEYC (2020), any highly scripted curriculum that does not provide "flexibility for adapting to a child's individual skills and interests is not developmentally appropriate" (p. 25). These whole-child and whole-family centered curricula elements should support the teachers' personal and professional transformation to build the relational capacity and flexibility - the playfulness, if you will - to be "spontaneous, involved, and creative" (Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 25) with children and their parents using a strengths-based and asset-oriented mindset instead of following the set-piece prescriptive same-old/same-old of deficit thinking that demonstrably does not work.

NAEYC outlines the start of a promising approach to how educators can think together about an "adaptive curriculum" that has the flexibility to respond to and reflect the lived situation of each family and their child attending the school, specifically:

1. Educators and the community should use a curriculum framework as a *starting point* in their planning to "make sure there is ample attention to important learning goals and to enhance the coherence of the overall experience for children." The parent is a *partner* in this ongoing and iterative process. [The emphasis is mine.]
2. This framework and evolving plan must be one where each child sees themselves, their family, and their community reflected in the learning environment, the material they choose to interact with, and the activities they participate in.

3. This learning environment should also provide a window to the world so that children learn about other people, other places, and the arts and sciences they would not normally encounter, and
4. The space and classmates collectively form a diverse and inclusive learning community where one child's "mirror" that reflects them is another's "window to the world" in a way that ignites prosocial behavior and collaborative learning. (NAEYC, 2020, pp. 25-26).

This adaptive and flexible approach to ECE&C curriculum revitalization and planning forms the basis for a place-based child and family-centered skills-building approach that is backed by curricular resources that help teachers to best care for and instruct their children in an intentional partnership with the parent in an inclusive, responsive, and equitable manner. It is also totally aligned with Ladson-Billings' (1995) approach to culturally relevant pedagogy that focuses on student learning, valuing their own and other cultures, and the growing consciousness around their own positive agency and as an equal individual in society. Ultimately, this is accomplished by teachers expanding their perspectives and growing their own relational capacities by being "reflective and analytical" (Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 21) and by modeling equity in the classroom *and* with parents (Baker, 2020, p. 59).

Building an Alternative Pedagogical Story: from *'ABCs and 1-2-3s'* to the Relational Processes of an Adaptive Place-based ECE and Care Curriculum

An equally important early step to take is captured in the provocative question that Carla Rinaldi posed in her work to help the State of South Australia reimagine their approach to ECE&C when she asked, "what does it mean to be an educating community?" (Rinaldi, 2013, p. 21). This is very much in line with what Moss (2019) states as a central question now facing ECE practitioners, thought leaders, and society: "what do we want for our children?" (p. 23). I

think the response hinges on the point that Edwards (2017) makes that we can – and should – frame our efforts to transform ECE teaching around the relational dialectic between children's play as learning and the teacher's intentional and caring practice to facilitate optimal developmental conditions for each individual child. The instrumental and technically-oriented nature of the siloed approach that neo-liberal accountability movement adherents advocate (Moss, 2007; Gay, 2018, p. 142) goes to the heart of the stark failure that the dominant standards discourse has led us to the impoverished metrics I provided earlier. It is also why any successful and sustainable approach to getting back on-track must engage the entire community in a culturally responsive way that 'thinks globally and acts locally' (Evers & Ewert, 2021) in the manner of a local cultural project (Moss, 2019, p. 66). The local early childhood school, that school's administration, and especially the individual teacher simply cannot 'go it alone.'

Edwards' (2017) contention around the need for a flexible and adaptive curricula centered on relationships is supported by other researchers (Scales et al., 2012; Humphries et al., 2018; and Bailey et al., 2019, for instance), and as outlined earlier, it is an approach favored by leaders in the early childhood educational sector such as NAEYC. This line of thinking is also very much in keeping with recent scholarly work around culturally responsive teaching theories, research, and evidence-based teaching practices that include teacher-child-parent relationships advocated by Gay (2018). Gay goes on to provide an excellent perspective on Culturally Responsive pedagogy and its power to set the conditions for high-quality academic readiness through increased relational capacities and overall individual well-being of children from minority families. She is also adamant that any effort to improve educational outcomes for students of color is doomed to failure if it does not take the totality of culture, race, and ethnicity

into account (p. 12) in order to move past the "cultural hegemony" of the prevailing dominant culture's view of normality (p. 60).

The essential components of a new holistic approach to ECE curricula are ones that maximize the positive relationships that form a solid foundation for effective learning in my population of interest – toddlers and very young children aged 18- to 36-month-olds (Hedges & Cooper, 2018). Building on Miller's (2019) ideas around "Participatory Pedagogical Practice", my proposed approach takes a step towards it through the adoption of a *Relational Co-Teaching Model* that draws on the interactions, communication and interconnectedness of people, places, and things in the child's individual sociocultural contexts with the key goal of maximizing that child's learning and development in relationship with others (McLaughlin et al., 2016; French, 2019; Liew et al., 2020). This approach stresses building positive collaborative relationships with the child's family (Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Bryan et al., 2020), and as I will explain, its success is predicated on the "Ethics of Caring" given to us by Noddings (2013). This concept is a tremendous shift away from the traditional teacher as technician approaches to ECE practice I described earlier towards one that frames the learning relationship as the vital ingredient to an effective whole-child ECE&C process.

Supporting this contention that we need to build an overarching counter-narrative to the widely accepted view of the instrumental nature of early education is Durkin's (2022) point that current approaches are demonstrably harming our children. At its core, this way-forward is framed as a Child's Rights imperative (Hart & Brando, 2018), meaning that by its very nature it becomes inherently culturally responsive (Gay, 2018). Moving towards relationally-oriented cultural responsivity also bolsters the community's ability to engage across sectors to begin to address what has proven up until now to be an intransigent (or what I earlier described as

"wicked") problem stemming from too many disengaged players from too many disparate jurisdictions that hold conflicting stakeholder perspectives described by Cantin (2010, p. 10). It is this view that has led me to describe the process outlined below as being a *Community Participatory Approach to the Building an Adaptive Place-based ECE&C Curriculum for Very Young Children*.

Linking Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development to Play: The Relational Key to Healthy Whole-child Early Development

Dodge (2014) posed a particularly good question that helps us think about the ongoing optimal social-emotional development of very young children when he asked: "*how do cognitive skills relate to effective behavior?*" Dodge is talking about behavioral functioning and his early empirical studies built upon the ideas of many of the pioneers in the field such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bandura to give us the social information processing model of "social competence" (Dodge & Tomlin, 1987; Katz & McClellan, 1997). Specifically, Dodge's (2014) conceptualization helps explain the strength of the relationship between the child's social information processing patterns and their social behavior and he describes the resulting behavior as a function of their cognitive and emotional responses to social environmental cues, or as shown in Figure 2 (on the next page), "Social Emotional Learning" (SEL).

The social environments that Campbell's social, emotional, and cognitive domains operate in include the home and family, the extended network of family and friends in the surrounding neighborhood and community, and, for most children as discussed above, in childcare or a pre-school. Campbell and his colleagues' model depicts what Vadeboncoeur and Collie (2013) call an irreducibly unified processes of *thinking and feeling* that are mediated both by social relationships and by social speech. We all take part in social speech – behaviors of

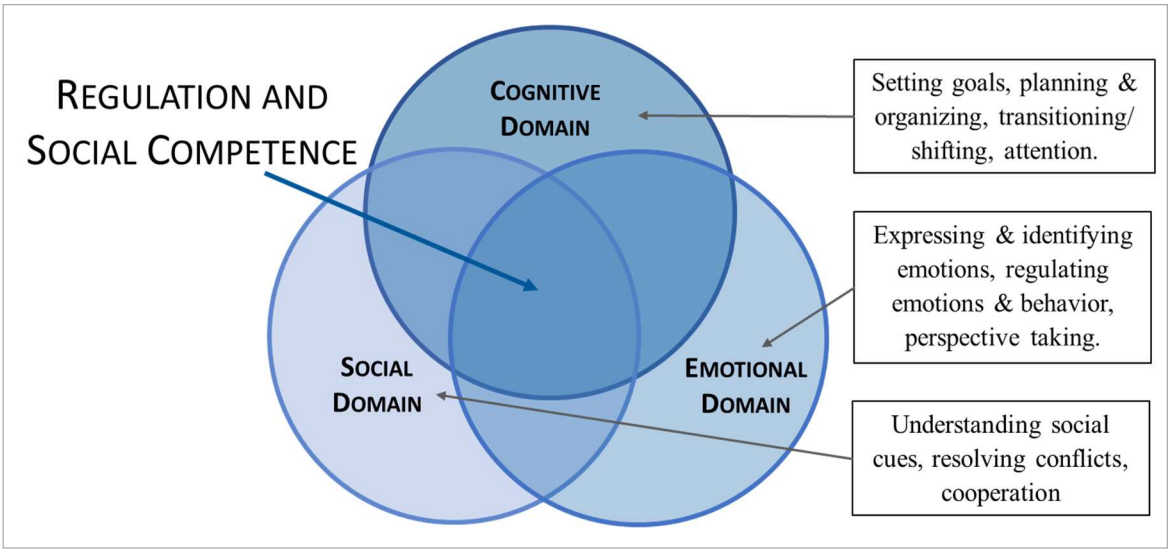

Figure 2

Domains of social-emotional learning (SEL) and examples of component process skills (Campbell et al., 2016).

encouragement, grumpy warnings off, asking questions, telling stories, and the myriad of other verbalizations we are not even totally aware of, but in early childhood are vital cognitive skills to develop and are formed by the talk of mothers, teacher/learner dialogue in the classroom; and, importantly, peer engagement during play (Vallotton & Ayoub, 2011; Golinkoff et al., 2013; Lillard et al., 2013; Fleer & Veresov, 2018). It is this connection between play and how it draws together a young child's "emotions, intellect, and social life" (Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 375) that forms a direct path between the synergistic interplay of early social, emotional, and cognitive growth and language development (Johnson, 2014). This connection also sets the stage for advancing cognition and the symbolic fluency that accrues via the more inner mode of private speech required for literacy, numeracy, and other organized abstract thinking processes (McClelland et al., 2007; Blankson et al., 2017; Morgan et al., 2019). It is these impacts that lead me towards reframing "SEL" more precisely as "Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development" to better represent the vital relationship of their synergistic growth to positive

early learning outcomes that is being diminished through misguided labeling of the term "SEL" in the current societal discourse.

Piaget (1965) pointed to the equally key role of play within this social world of peers in exercising the child's emergent autonomy in a healthy moral direction as they learn perspective taking that is required for symbolic/fantasy play, cooperation, and sharing. Dodge and Rabiner (2004) make the point for Piaget in the context of Dodge's social information processing model: specifically, that perspective taking requires the child to move cognitively from an egocentric paradigm to one that includes consideration of others' thoughts and feelings in a social environment (p. 1004). Edwards (1995) takes the point further when she tells us that socialization takes place within the complex interactive environment of shared human "biobehavioral processes" that underlies development generally, and that in early learning this takes place in relationship with others (p. 3).

Further support for early learning in relationships comes from the concept of "New Behaviorism" that is described as a set of simple, testable processes that can help explain both learned and instinctive adaptive behavior in animals and humans (Stanton-Chapman et al., 2014). Bandura could be described, arguably, as one of those New Behaviorists with his social learning theory's conceptual roots in the mediation of cognitive processes that occur between stimuli and response and the "organism's" resulting behavior that is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning – something we humans are particularly adept at doing (Bandura, 1977). After his early formative work, Bandura later reframed his approach as social cognitive theory, adopting an "agentic perspective" to human cognitive development and psychosocial adaptive behavior (Herrmann et al., 2007). Bandura (2005) maintained that to be

“an agent” is to respond intentionally, and in a plan-full way, with one's behavioral functioning within our life’s circumstances.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) also looked at our functioning within this lived experience, with its dynamic and contingent nature, and concluded that development and personal change is constantly happening, set in motion by thoughts and feelings that arise in response to our physical and social environments. Under Bandura’s view of social cognitive theory, people – including very young children - are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting and he seems to agree not only with Bronfenbrenner, but also with Piaget’s seminal claim that children are “independent discoverers” within their environment (Bodrova & Leong, 2018). Bandura also seems to be seconding Piaget’s later contention that “knowledge is not merely received nor is it innate” and that through the lifespan humans are ongoing and active “constructors” of not only our own intellectual growth as individuals, but that we are responding to our predisposition as a species to make meaning in relationship with others (Wheatley, 2010; David, 2015, p. 91). Apropos of Bronfenbrenner’s thinking about social environments and systems theory, all this is pointing us to what Wheatley (2011) describes generally as dynamic systems change, and that in human development this drives an organic and joyful unfolding of meaning (Wheatley, 2010, p. 128). Given this, as described earlier from Dodge (2014) and as depicted in the Campbell et al. (2016) model of social, emotional, and cognitive development in Figure 2 previously, the opportunities for very young children to adopt, form and re-form, and evolve their own “agentic perspective” in relationship with others through play - to actively “unfold” their potential while actively and joyfully making meaning in their world - is central to successful whole-child developmental action in young children (NAEYC, 2020).

The Philosophical Underpinnings to the Importance of Play in Building Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development. While many theorists built on the ideas of Piaget, Bandura, and others such as Bronfenbrenner, it is the foundational work of Vygotsky regarding sociocultural theory, language acquisition and cognitive development as a social act, with the related concepts of assisted or interactive discovery with a capable other, that are key perspectives in the construction of an adaptive curriculum for young children (Frawley, 1989). Vygotsky's associated ideas of "scaffolding" and the "zone of proximal development" – or "ZPD" - are vital drivers of dynamic development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills (Malaguzzi, 1994). This way of thinking about early childhood development as a relationally supported process of the limitless unfolding of human potential is also central to building the counter-narrative against the traditional instrumental approach to ECE.

I am particularly intrigued by the dialectic nature of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning and how it can be understood as improvisational drama (Fleer & Veresov, 2018). Fleer and Veresov tell us that while Vygotsky's take on this was primarily psychological in nature, he applied the same dialectical logic to development as being not just an internal growth process influenced by social factors, but that it is the social interaction itself – with the child as a participant in the dialectical "drama of life", with all its emotionality - that is *the Prime Driver* of the development of higher mental functions. It is interesting that this idea from the 1930's Stalinist Russia connects directly to later Continental European post-structuralist/post-modernist conceptions of the contingent nature of knowledge (Moss, 2019) that I will revisit under the discussion regarding culture and culturally responsive curriculum. For now though, it is in the context of basic early learning that it is important to note that European thinkers in the 1960's, 70's and 80's like Foucault, Deleuze, and others argued that our knowledge of the world is

entirely contingent as it is negotiated in discourse with others, and that there is no set of bounded universal laws – or some kind of "god-trick" - where the ultimate answers are mysteriously revealed to us somehow (Taylor, 2018). Reminding us of Piaget and his contention that "knowledge is not merely received nor is it innate," meaning-making is just how it sounds – especially for very young children: where, often, it is actively constructed while 'inter'-'acting' with others (Moss, 2019, p. 151).

To me, this cleaves closely to my understanding of children as being in a constant state of "being and becoming" (Lancy et al., 2010; Moss, 2019, p. 144), and "thinking and feeling" (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013, p. 210) – with their social, emotional, and cognitive capacities acting synergistically to propel their overall development. I like to think of it as multiple sets of interlinked three-legged racers, as each individual capacity traverses its own unique but mutually contributing domain to produce an integrated social, emotional, and cognitive growth process given us by Campbell et al. (2016). The interdependent sets of three-legged racers sounds like it would be more than a bit wobbly at times, and this calls forward Malaguzzi (1994) who made the "tangled bowl of spaghetti" analogy of early learning, or as I like to encapsulate it: "messy but amazing!" A child's social, emotional, and cognitive development in relationship with others is happening everywhere and all the time, and it is through educative play where they do the hard work of making this relationship-based learning action happen to construct increasingly complex connections to meaning in their world (Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 390).

Vygotsky's thinking about learning in relationship with others forms the central pillar in my view of a participatory curriculum development process, and this stance is confirmed by Malaguzzi (1994, p. 59). We are fortunate to have Vygotsky's contribution to non-instrumental/anti-interventionist aspects of child developmental as it had been overlooked for

many years by mainstream social and developmental psychology, as well as the early childhood education fields (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993; Bodrova & Leong, 2018). Indeed - in the context of reducing disparities and increasing equity, this neglect may have stood in the way of a counter-narrative about building adaptive, culturally relevant, more effective - and more ethical - solutions to ECE theory and teaching practice.

Pedagogical Theory Supports the Centrality of Play and Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development in ECE Curricula. It is important here to reiterate the point that Vadeboncoeur and Collie (2013) make about social, emotional, and cognitive as an embodiment of thinking and feeling. It is equally important to underscore the contention that the feminist theorist Nel Noddings (2013) makes when she reminds us that the order ought to be reversed as often, particularly with very young children, it is the feelings that proceed the thinking (p.135). Quoting William James in his 1884 work *What is an Emotion*, Noddings tells us that it is the child's perceptions of the social and physical environment that leads first to bodily changes (physiological reactions if you will), and *then* to thinking as an emerging "consciousness of change". She also argues that the desired emotional direction of the classroom environment we teachers should be aiming for is a pervasive sense of "Joy" (p.141).

It is "relatedness" - the growing emotional interconnectedness between the child being "cared for" and the adult as the "one-caring" - that Noddings (2013) tells us should be the foundation of all educational encounters (p. 6). Joy arises when this ideal under her "ethic of caring" model is attained and maintained in a manner that inspires a deep sense of letting go into safety and calm that the child feels as a basic need (or longing) being met - one that manifests for the child as a magical experience (Nodding, 2013, p. 144).

In Noddings' (2013) view, emotions must not only account for the feeling a child experiences in the moment, but it must be because of the activation of the central nervous system

(CNS) that results in an "observable expressive pattern" of affect - "particularly those on the face" (p. 136). When thinking and feeling about their immediate physical and social surroundings, the child is responding based on certain beliefs about what is taking place in the moment and her reaction to this appraisal further contributes to that environment: distress in her (or him) provokes distress in others and joy builds joy. Joy in this conceptualization is almost "magical" for Noddings because while it is ineffable, it works through a progressive process of "opening up" to the learning experience by the child through independent discovery, play, and cooperation with others (p.141).

Nodding's (2013) is clear about how a curriculum and its content can support this opening up to learning by inspiring "delight" in new knowledge that teachers find they are excited to share. Introducing "stories, puzzles, poems, songs…," as well as videos, math and science demonstrations, outdoor activities, games, etc., that the teacher finds delightful has an infectious effect on their children (p. 192). Actively sharing "all sorts of things the educator cherishes" builds on children's natural curiosity and enhances their receptivity to new ideas and concepts, promotes interaction in the classroom, and the joy that begins to manifest itself because of a growing "belief" that this "joy and delight" is always there just waiting to be discovered (p. 146). This modeling around a state of delight is a big part of the magic of the caring relationship formed intentionally by the teacher, with its ability to not only increase relatedness, receptivity, and creativity, but by also modeling and encouraging the child to find the joy of trying and sticking with the learning experience. Noddings tells us that this pervasive sense of joy is the essence of a good classroom (p. 145).

Relational Safety as a Secure Base for Exploration. The learning relationship in the social and emotional context of Nodding's (2013) caring model can be argued as the active

cultivation of a productive interpersonal attachment between the teacher and child. From the perspective of "Attachment Theory" given to us by Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991), the practical implications of the Circle of Security (Hoffman et al., 2006) bears a brief examination. The theoretical underpinning of the Circle of Security (COS) is the consistent interaction between the child and caregiver (parent or trusted adult) in an ever-expanding circle of increasingly independent exploration that will at times feel unsettling to little ones - or is unsettling when misadventures occur. Thus, children's natural need to explore their environment must be balanced by their equally compelling need for the constant assurance that a return to safety is possible. This is the "Secure Base" of attachment theory (Bowlby, 2012).

Current thinking about attachment theory that is based on over 50 years of research evidence underscores its coherence with the intrinsic human need for emotional bonding and the enduring significance of socioemotional development of self-regulation in response to real or perceived threats to safety in early childhood. Simply put, this constant cycling between exploration and safety is essential adaptive behavior needed for ongoing human development and vitality (Groh et al., 2017). In the language of COS thinking I see parallels to Noddings' view of caring - as well as Piaget and Bandura - in its use of terms like "support my exploration", "delight in me", "enjoy with me", "welcome my coming to you", and "help me organize my feelings" (Hoffman et al., 2017). These parallels form a solid bridge from attachment theory and the ethic of caring to the theoretical underpinnings of what Campbell calls "SEL" in social learning, social information processing, and social cognitive theories. They are all different sides to the same multifaceted coin that describes the beneficial aspects of early social, emotional, and cognitive growth.

In the intervening years from the introduction of the Circle of Security in the late 1990's (Hoffman et al., 2006), the promising impact of COS thinking in helping parents and their children has inspired its extension into ECE practice (Cooper et al., 2017). What is particularly attractive about COS-C: "COS in the Classroom" - beyond its salutary impact on relationships and social, emotional, and cognitive development generally, is the utility of the concept as a ready-made foundational source element of the adaptive curriculum development process - it is an important 'recipe card' if you will. More about that later, but for now let us explore Nodding's point regarding children's feelings and behaviors that proceed their thinking and the neurological processes behind positive social, emotional, and cognitive growth in relationship with others that she hints at.

Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Competence as a Relational Process

Science has certainly moved from the days of William James, but, as Nodding's suspected, he was onto something. Proceeding from the view that development takes place within a child's unfolding and ever changing process of feeling and thinking, and acting and reacting within a complex set of biobehavioral processes (Bridgett et al., 2015) are what Dodge (2014) and Campbell et al. (2016) would call "developmental competence", and these grow out of social interactions and in relationships. The dynamic nature of social-emotional regulation and its benefits to brain development is good news since prosocial behavior is also strongly associated with growing a child's sense of self-efficacy (McMullen et al., 2015), and this underscores Bandura's (2005) point about the self-directed "agentic" nature of early development. Thinking about growing agency, self-efficacy and the "experience expectant" nature of the very young brain (Twardosz, 2012), and Campbell, et al.'s (2016) notion of the powerful synergies inherent in the interaction between the child's social, emotional, and

cognitive domains that build higher order learning capacities, means that nothing succeeds like the success of a child *'inter-acting'* in the sensory rich environment of a play-school filled with caring and supportive friends and teachers (Moss, 2019, p. 151). Linking this to Nodding's ideal of the joy-filled classroom, and the growing receptivity of each child in it, every bit of pro-social success propels positive developmental outcomes for everyone (Friedman, 2006; Shonkoff, 2017).

Strengthening Teaching Practice Through a New Empathy. While these realizations allows us begin to understand the complex make-up of the neurological development of social, emotional, and cognitive capacity to guide our approach to our interactions with children in the classroom, they also help us frame our trauma-sensitive responses when social-emotional early learning challenges present themselves (Jennings, 2018). By adopting this perspective, we teachers can move our reactions towards a child's behavior from "*what is wrong with you?(!)*" to a more helpful (and compassionate) one that holds the whole-child in the center of the question of "*what happened to this person?*" (Levine & Kline, 2010; Menschner & Maul, 2016: Jennings, 2018). Noddings (2013) calls this strengths-based "feeling with" mindset the "new empathy" - one that "involves both cognitive and affective processes" that we can extend to all our interactions with others (p. 205). This is what French (2019) calls *Relational Teaching Practice*.

Linking Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development and Trauma-sensitive Care to the Relational Teaching Curriculum

The need for careful, ongoing, interactive, and relational sensitivity by teachers who are helping a child through social-emotional challenges or trauma-induced behavioral dysfunctions informs the conceptual framework's trauma-sensitive strategies (Bunston et al., 2017; Jennings,

2019; Berlin 2021). I introduced attachment theory in the context of its positive impact on social, emotional, and cognitive development in general, and in line with this it is generating an increasingly useful evidence base to help young children with behavioral difficulties due to ongoing emotional distress or trauma injury (Golding, 2008). According to Berlin (2021), teachers must become more aware of the need for warmth and sensitivity, and for nurturing the child's autonomy. At the same time, this intentional stance improves teacher capacity to maintain affirmative and caring behavior, and these trauma-sensitive approaches to teaching practice, such as those of COS-C and other attachment informed techniques, helps not just our most troubled kids, it benefits everyone in the ECE *and Care* classroom. Teaching practice that includes ongoing relationship skills development based on attachment theory will improve learning outcomes for all very young children by lifting the playing field for everyone to high level of increased cognitive development, language skills acquisition, self-regulation, and learning readiness (Fonagy, 2017, p. 133; Leach, 2017, p. 6; Dozier & Bernard, 2019, p. 133-137).

This lends real weight to the need for reflective practice techniques such as those inherent in "Intentional Teaching" (McLaughlin et al., 2016; Edwards, 2017) and to the need for dedicated in-service support systems and mentoring to buffer the emotional toll these caring interactions can often take on our teachers (Virmani et al., 2020). This is 'tough work' so in addition to bolstering of teacher capacity and emotional resilience, reflective practice promotes observation, assessment, and documentation, and it helps teachers connect theory to curriculum content and better individualize (or adapt if you will) learning activities for their children - particularly in play-based preschool classrooms (Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 317).

Incorporating Cultural Responsiveness into Relational Co-Teaching to Address Social-Emotional Challenges. According to Gay (2018) culture is a "dynamic, complex,

interactive, and changing, yet stabilizing force in human life" and has an individualized "expressive nature" (p. 10). This recalls Noddings and her point about "affect" as an indication of our psychological inner-world. Gay (2018) reminds us that it is because of this centering of culture into any single individual's lived experience that teaching and learning can never be "culturally neutral" (p. 8). She also points to Erickson (2010) who explained that our view and use of culture slips in and out of our conscious grasp, and because of this Gay (2018) stresses that - despite the challenges - it is vital that we must constantly, actively, and joyfully reflect on how "culture" impacts *everything* we do as educators: right down to our own affect in 'the moment'.

Earlier, I spoke of the recent shift amongst leaders in the early childhood educational sector, such as NAEYC, towards ensuring culturally "competent" practices. This line of thinking represents "a start" when considered in contrast to culturally responsive teaching theories, research, evidence-based teaching practices that include high-quality teacher-child-parent relationships advocated by Gay (2018). Indeed, Ladson-Billings (2021b) seconds the dynamic connection between place, community, culture, and the curriculum and their vital importance to stabilizing, sustaining, and enhancing African American and BIPOC children's well-being, saying:

> *Instead of a more Western-centered approach to the human as separate and compartmentalized, a significant aspect of African American culture is the need to fully integrate mind, body, and spirit. Thus, social-emotional and mental health and wellness concerns [are central to the] curriculum... [in the face off] the challenges of a world that is increasingly perilous for African Americans* (p. 74).

Given this, it seems that Noddings and Gay are entirely in agreement around the absolute necessity for teachers to move from "caring about" their students to an active and joyful

relational stance of “caring for” them - and the people that matter to them. In line with her point regarding the need for a new empathy, Noddings (2013) is explicit, telling us that “caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into another's”, to consider their objective needs and what is expected of us (p. 24). This is the active perspective-taking that Dodge and Rabiner (2004) tell us is a the ‘big-person’ version of Dodge’s social information processing model. For her part, Gay frames “caring for” as a “practice of action” that has intentionality, and vitality. She also tells us that while it is “purposeful,” this intentionality is tempered by patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and the empowerment (and joyful celebration) of the child as a person (p. 60). Both Noddings and Gay further agree that “Caring For” ignites an emancipatory effect and this is manifest in Gay’s assertion that “teachers who really care for students honor their humanity, hold them in high esteem, expect high performance, and use strategies to fulfill their expectations” (p. 59). While Gay’s work is centered on teaching in the K-12 classroom, the premise is sound in the context of a broad whole-child *Caring For* stance of the ECE teacher - one who deserves the concrete curricular resources to support that “practice of action” beyond simple emotional attachment of “Caring About” our kids (p. 57). Indeed - both Gay and Noddings center their arguments for an ethics of caring that can be summed up as the teacher’s caring and intentional interactions with the child - and everyone in the child’s life - as having the intention of showing each of them that, as a unique individual, “they matter” in the world.

The Culturally Responsive Curriculum’s Potential to Promote and Sustain Positive Interactions in the Classroom. Gay (2018, p. 234) outlines the short and long-term social, emotional, and cognitive developmental *outcomes* that stem from a focused approach to a culturally responsive classroom as follows:

1. Decreased emotional distress,
2. Increased neuro-receptivity and capacity to learn,
3. Enhanced self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, and empathy (p. 214),
4. Positive attitudes and behaviors towards self and others,
5. Language fluency and increased literacy,
6. Increased likelihood of success through K-12 and beyond,
7. Better overall individual mental and physical health and well-being, and
8. Improved Learning Environments for everyone. Gay (2018, p. 234)

While both Noddings and Gay agree that it is the "Caring For" in relationship with the child that is a huge force in propelling positive social, emotional, and cognitive growth, and hence help set the stage for social-emotional injury repair, it is also a vital ingredient for catalyzing the culturally responsive aspects of relational teaching partnership approach required to ensure a consistent and positive impact on children from minority and marginalized families (Gay, 2018, p. 64).

From my experience and my analysis so far, it is clear to me that the positive impact on children of the culturally responsive 'Caring For approach' can be extended to help families in South St. Petersburg, and this contention is supported by Ortega-Williams et al. (2021). They describe promising connections between trauma-sensitive interactions in the classroom and a more expansive, and more recent, holistic family-systems approaches that takes cultural responsiveness to a higher level that extends to emotional healing, increases in creativity, and enhanced personal agency of all members of a family. They make the point that historical trauma cannot be addressed on an individual basis as one would for Post-Traumatic Stress because, for children and their adult family members - people for whom society has said - essentially: you do

not matter - "*there is nothing 'post' about [it]*, it is ongoing [emphasis added]" (Ortega-Williams et al., 2021, p. 226). Thus, Gay's position is totally aligned with this more recent research and Ladson-Billing's (2021b) call to action as Gay is specific in maintaining that an individual's identity includes the dimensions of race, ethnicity, and culture and that these aspects of their being must be taken into account as part of the caring relationship.

From Relational Teaching in the Classroom to Relational Co-teaching. In the face of this challenge then, how do we as ECE educators build our culturally responsive muscle? Again - it takes one-step-at-a-time, and this begins by moving from the passive stance of empathy and kindness that the "caring about" frame allows to an action-oriented new empathy of the "Caring For" mindset (Gay, 2018, p. 65). Given that social and emotional capacities ECE&C teachers reflects their own attachment security and behavioral functioning, a concrete action behind this first step is to urgently work towards increasing teacher capacity for reflective functioning and insightfulness so that they can take healthy actions to improve their responses to child behavior in the classroom (Hughes et al., 2018, Berlin, 2021). This is equally important in building productive relationships with the child's parents (McHale et al., 2019).

While initiating and instituting an attachment-based screening and hiring protocol will help build teaching cadre readiness in the future, ECE&C leaders can move their in-service training/mentoring/reflective supervision activities of today to directly address this need in their current staff. This new in-service orientation must address the deeply interpersonal adult connections provide the relational safety required for trauma-sensitive responsiveness, but through shared meaning-making, new perspectives are developed that enhance overall teaching effectiveness (New, 1994; Hughes et al., 2018). This process is about moving teaching practice towards the reflective stance of "Intentional Teaching" that forms the basis of the "Pedagogy of

Care for Well-being" (PCW) described by McLaughlin et al. (2016) and Edwards (2017). Using Noddings' (2013) ethics of caring as its philosophical direction, the curricular foundation of PCW shows promise in increasing teacher relational capacity, stress buffering, and emotional resilience (Cigala et al., 2019; Virmani et al., 2020).

Supporting Relational Co-teaching and Equity - Creating a Collaborative and Diverse Team. The same argument outlined just above extends to the adults in the child's life and the teacher must be able to intentionally apply a "caring for" perspective to building a productive co-teaching relationship with the child's parent as partners. Parents need some of the same tools and resources the teacher does to address their trauma-sensitive interaction needs and to build resiliency, but to maximize its lasting effectiveness, the focus should be more peer-based than formal client-professional exchanges allow (Sheridan et al., 2010; Gao et al., 2020). When needed, parents should know that non-threatening avenues to further services and help are available and the school should develop those doorways to those important resources – and letting parents know that those supports are there for them (Hughes et al., 2018).

To bring this part of the discussion full circle, Gay (2018) refers to Noddings (1996) and I will quote it here because it encapsulates everything I have covered so far. According to Gay, Noddings tell us that the kind of caring that is needed in today's ECE classroom "accepts, embraces, and leads upwards. It questions, it responds, it sympathizes, it challenges, *it delights* [emphasis added]" (in Gay 2018, p. 65). Furthermore, and I think Noddings, and Gay would agree with me on this - to be a caring and culturally responsive teacher is to answer a call to respond with all our personal capacities of emotionality, intellect, faith, ethics, action, and accountability, and a belief that every child matters beyond our classroom and into their whole-being. This then lands us squarely on the kind of curriculum required to support that calling.

To begin to provoke Caring For action in ourselves and others, Gay (2018) outlines eight characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy and its associated curriculum as being:

1. Validating - all cultures are legitimate and linkages between individuals and cultures, and between the school and the home, are meaningful and are to be affirmed.
2. Comprehensive and Inclusive - we teach the whole-child, and we educate for, about, and through a culturally diverse learning environment.
3. Multidimensional - it spans not only teaching in action, but also curriculum content, learning context and environment, classroom climate, relationships, classroom management, assessment, and support to the parent as the child's first teacher.
4. Empowering - teaching in a manner that each child feels they are succeeding, that they are effective at doing things that are valued.
5. Transformative - culturally responsiveness defies conventions of traditional education. We look to the child's cultural strengths and assets - including their family - and build on top of this solid foundation.
6. Emancipatory - by going beyond conventional ways of knowing, the child is liberated from internalized scripts from the dominant society's discourse around what is normal, acceptable, and what matters.
7. Humanistic - it honors all children and their families by honoring the diversity that is at the core of the human journey and our success as a species. Culturally responsive ways of being lifts all boats - in the classroom and at home, and
8. Normative and Ethical - "cultureless" - or "colorblind" - schools are, in fact, a Eurocentric cultural and classist response. By mainstreaming their western middle-class

> idea of the education experience, the dominant culture devalues everyone - including white children. Again, as there is no such thing as cultural neutrality, the normative and ethical thing to do is embrace diversity, not whitewash it so that we can be at our best for all children (Gay, 2018, pp. 36 - 46).

This last equity-advancing characteristic from Gay is another call to action for all educators – one that is shared and advocated by Ladson-Billings (2021c) as being culturally responsive and sustaining – as it also aligns fully with the CI4Equity processes (Bryk, 2010; MAEC, 2022b) outlined earlier in this dissertation that form a pillar in the inquiry framework of the current study. From the harm that is being done to so many children under the context of historical trauma and given the potential for a place-based adaptive social-emotional growth-oriented Relational Co-Teaching approach to curriculum development to radically confront and begin the shared journey to repair it in our preschools, in the community, and at home, this call is a terribly urgent one. We are called to move beyond neutrality to the personal action that opens our perspectives around what it truly means to teach in relationships so that our Nation can begin a reconciliation process towards a better and equitable future for everyone, starting with our youngest and our most vulnerable – and the people they count on most.

This important step in the process towards the development of an equity-focused relational co-teaching approach that intentionally and comprehensively includes and fully supports both the teacher and the parent, it must extend beyond the classroom and into Bronfenbrenner' broader social ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Ultimately, this is what the MAEC advocates through the creation of a "collaborative and diverse [teaching] team" to support their CI4Equity in Education model (MAEC, 2022b). Bryk (2010) encapsulates this crucial equity-advancing factor as "strong parent-community-school ties" (p. 25).

The Importance of Play in the Adaptive Curriculum

Anthropologists tell us that play is a common element in human development and is central to learning and socialization during childhood in all cultures and throughout human history (Chick, 2010). Indeed, our species' period of immaturity is as long as it is because human culture, its social structures, and the role of the individual in it is so vastly more complex in comparison to other animals (Lancy, 2010). Importantly, anthropologists have consistently observed that learning through "educative play" is a universal foundational social process, and that from the dawn of time, human children have been doing a good deal of their learning as peer-based socialization from a very young age (Hambly, 1926). Another consistency between the biopsychosocial view described earlier and the views on learning held by anthropologists is that development is dynamic and unfolding – that "children are simultaneously being and becoming" (Lancy et al., 2010, p. 6).

Play is embodied learning (recalling Vadeboncoeur and Collie's, 2013 unified processes of thinking and feeling described earlier) that promotes this simultaneous process of being and becoming in ever increasing levels of sophistication when the teacher participates and facilitates a holistic co-construction of new meaning with their children (Loizou, 2017). This holds real promise for whole-child development in the ECE setting – particularly for those facing language, literacy, and numeracy challenges (Nolan & Paatsch, 2018; Liew et al., 2020). As just one example that bolsters Nodding's earlier point about joy in the classroom, as well as Gay's (2018) regarding empowerment, children struggling with learning will more likely persist and later find increasing success in a warm and supportive environment where positive relationships and perceived safety supports complex interactions and reciprocity (Liew, et al., 2020).

According to Nolan and Paatsch (2018), pretend play is a robust vehicle for cognitive development by strengthening the child's ability to manipulate symbols and mental representations through object substitution, taking on roles and imaginary characters, and by performing a logical sequence of actions that make up a story – all in a shifting social milieux of cooperating playmates doing their own hard cognitive work. This recalls Campbell et al. (2016) and their social, emotional, and cognitive domains of early learning, the accompanying component skills; and the growing self-regulating and social competence capacities that accrues to the child in the moment of being – and through all the future moments of becoming a capable learner in the ever-expanding, ever-changing dynamic of the "lived experience" at school (Dewey, 1963, p. 39).

Early childhood is a series of "experience-expectant" periods that impact the orderly development of the brain in the context of the child's social and environmental influences such as those in a loving and supportive household (Kindsvatter & Geroski, 2014; Balbernie, 2017), and – as I have pointed out – in the safe spaces of a quality ECE&C learning environment (Lillard et al., 2013; Noddings, 2013; Gay, 2018). As outlined earlier, Bridgett et al. (2015) seem to agree that "Intentional Teaching Practices", like those outlined by Edwards (2017) in the context of relational safety, has the potential to capitalize on this innate learning readiness in early childhood to maximize social, emotional, and cognitive development in toddler-age children. Unfortunately, McArdle et al (2019) and others such as Blank (2010), and Bubikova-Moan et al. (2019) for instance, tell us that ECE Teacher education and professional development programs consistently overlook the value of active teacher involvement in play-time activities of very young children as a rich educational and developmental activity. This goes to the very heart of the problem of practice described in the introduction to this dissertation.

As implied earlier, this highly evolved human foundational co-learning process is a species-specific function when we look at the role of play in childhood across cultures and societies, and this helps us to generalize this discussion to social, emotional, and cognitive development through self-directed and peer-based "educative" play in the ECE context. As we saw with my story about caring inter-acting between the two little girls in the preschool classroom, this too is an important factor in emergent social, emotional, and cognitive competence from a biopsychosocial perspective – simply because there are more children in any classroom than teachers and this then forms a large volume sensory and socialization input for any individual's social engagement system to act on, practice with, and gain experience from (Hutchins, 2020).

The Social Learning Loop - a Play-based Co-teaching Framework to Transform ECE Practice

From the above then, it is clear that anthropologists, developmental, and ECE experts agree that the "role" of the toddler is to explore autonomy and develop agency (Lancy, 2010; Van Hoorn, et al, 2015; Stavholm et al., 2021). My point is that our role as teachers of toddlers and pre-school children is to facilitate *their practice* (Saraç & Tarhan, 2020) - something the teacher of those two girls I described earlier did so well. Indeed, in his seminal work called *Schools Where Children Learn*, Featherstone (1971) points out that in contrast with what he saw in the US, teachers of very young children in the UK were universally oriented towards facilitating various aspects of play and self-directed activities as the principal means of learning (p. 27). This meta-orientation helps point the way towards the adoption of evidence-based Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) in toddler ECE&C curricula since educative play exercises and strengthens not only their emotional regulation capacities, but uses this to grow their symbolic and imaginative thinking, peer relationships, language, physical development, and

problem-solving skills and do so synergistically across each of the social, emotional, and cognitive domains (Copple et al., 2011; NAEYC, 2020, p. 9).

The Social Learning Loop as Culturally Responsive, and Developmentally Appropriate, Practice. Sanders and Farago (2018) lay-out the trajectory of the NAEYC's DAP guidelines as the organization followed the emerging science and consensus of influential thinkers and doers in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector over the years. I will start where they end their analysis: over the past 30 years since NAEYC's first position statement, the latest versions of DAP reflects a transformative change in focus from looking at a child's developmental achievements as a "product" of the instrumental technically oriented actions of the ECE teacher to one of a relational "process" of development (p. 1395) involving the teacher, the child, and his/her immediate social and cultural environment that includes their school, the classroom, and their peers, their family, their neighborhood, and their community (p. 1386). Under this context, ECE teaching practice moves from the didactic approach of old to one of teacher as child development virtuoso and relational facilitator/cultural interpreter (p. 1392).

Sanders and Farago (2018) describe the twists and turns of the DAP's own developmental process as NAEYC incorporated emerging child development best-thinking into their original formulation of best practices that relied heavily on Piaget's stages model. This evolution passed through many of its own development stages including the incorporation of the Socio-cultural Theories of Vygotsky and his followers, and the ecological perspectives of Bronfenbrenner (Sanders & Farago, 2018, p. 1385). I very much like where NAEYC landed with their 2009 update to their Position Statement. According to Sanders and Farago (2018), NAEYC finally acknowledged a "culture-as-a-system-of-meaning" motif that very young children center their own development on (p. 1386) – and I must point out: we adults should too. A child's

development is rooted in the proximal value system of the family and community, and they argue that development in this environment is far more adaptive (or I dare say – intelligent) than some externally imposed 'optimal universal standard' would allow (Sanders & Farago, 2018, p. 1386). This transformational motif is terrific thinking and that continues to live on in the 2020 NAEYC Position Statement (NAEYC 2020). This is tremendously helpful advice for us adults in preparing ourselves to do a better job than we have done around cultural competency. It challenges us to strengthen our collective efforts to open our perspectives about the context of the child in front of us in order to confront social justice inequities and impose anti-racist modes of thinking into all aspects of our work to move mere competence to fluent cultural responsiveness (Sanders & Farago, 2018, p. 1395) and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

More importantly, this posture lends authority to our efforts as early childhood educators, researchers, and leaders to center the child in our work as a Children's Rights imperative that goes to the heart of challenging the dominant discourse through an evidence-based counter-narrative (Hart & Brando, 2018). To Gay (2018), the dominant discourse is a deliberative act of imposing Eurocentric values and orientations on everyone else in a manner that is un-American and in-humane, as well as coming from outdated and unsound pedagogical foundations (p. 282). For their part, Sanders and Farago (2018) remain critical of NAEYC's DAP in general, and call for a continued review and reform of the DAP best practices approach to better reflect the emerging hybridity of critical multiculturalism in ECE introduced by Chan (2011) – all of which circles me back to "culture-as-a-system-of-meaning".

Parents are the child's first teacher (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 59; Gay, 2018, p. 36). Acknowledging this is the key to progress in relationally-oriented ECE programming. The ECE teacher must

look beyond their silo in the ECE "system" (Moss, 2007, p. 8) and adopt a family-systems approach to teaching their young students (Murphy et al. 2015; McHale et al., 2019; Ortega-Williams et al., 2021), and this means actively partnering with – and knowing how to coach the parent towards a collaborative teaching relationship - to support the developmental needs of the child (Noddings , 2013, p 198; Sawyer et al., 2016; Hoffman et al., 2017, p. 33). Our job as ECE teachers and leaders is to ensure our practice works with our children's collective cultures and continues to 'develop appropriately' so that we learn to better care for the very-young human being in front of us as they move their development forward in ways that are appropriately meaningful to their whole being and what that can become in *their world – not ours*. The synthesis of this thinking can be captured in a manner very much in keeping with the consistent acknowledgement of many of post-humanist theorists who state that development is an organic process unfolding potential that takes place in self-reinforcing cycles and in circling around (Wheatley, 2011; Noddings, 2013; Hoffman et al., 2017; Cooper et al., 2018; Mezirow, 2018; and Moss, 2019 to name just a few) as graphically expressed in Figure 3 on the next page.

Essentially, the key components of the social learning loop concept depicted above can be summarized as follows:

1. A Curriculum that promotes and sustains
    - Safe but Challenging Learning Environments that inspire joy,
    - Play-based learning as a key driver towards improved social, emotional, and cognitive functioning, and
    - Meaningful learning content and activities that inspire and delight.
2. Partnering with the child using an "Ethics of Caring" orientation to support their growing agency while maximizing Relational Safety, and

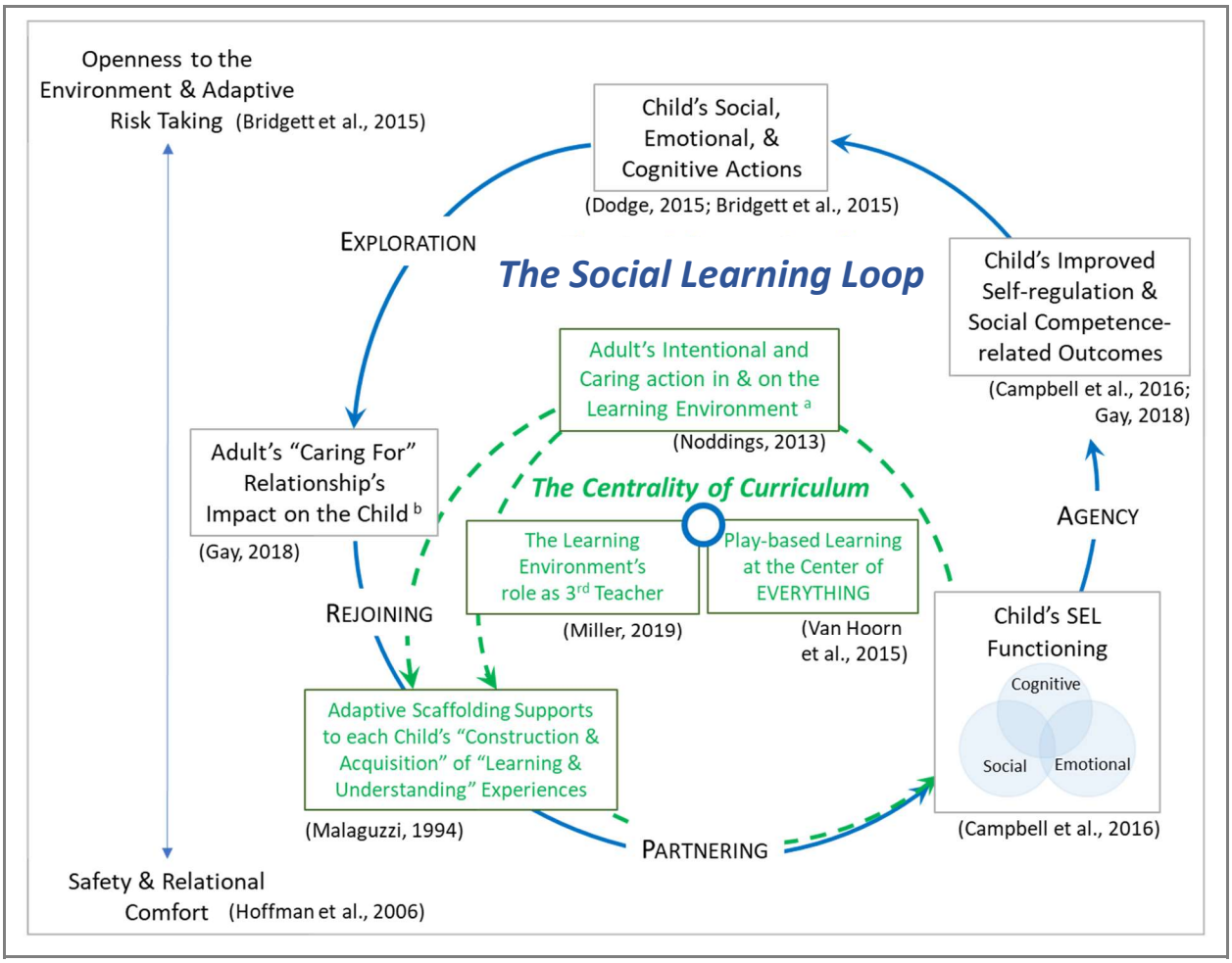

Figure 3

The Social Learning Loop in the Context of a Culturally Responsive ECE&C Curriculum and Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development in Very Young Children.

Note. The "Learning Environment" extends to the home and the language around "Adult" – versus "teacher" and/or "parent" is intentional in recognition of the needed movement towards a co-teaching partnership that encompasses the school and home – hence the "Cardinal Points" of "REJOINING" and "PARTNERING" in the cycle apply to the relationships between the adult co-teaching partners and not just those of the teacher/child dyad.

3. Partnering with the parent - again, by using an Ethics of Caring approach in the adult relationship process - to help them build the skills to support these aspects of exploration, play, and positive social, emotional, and cognitive developmental growth in the home.

This process has particularly good potential to beneficially impact the social emotional, and

cognitive learning domains and functions that I outlined previously (Campbell et al., 2016) that also forms the basis of an easily applied observational key outcomes assessment process that tracks well to various established assessment and tracking tools such as the "Critical Competency Areas" developed by the Zero to Three organization (LeMoine, 2021) and recent developments around kindergarten readiness assessment (Regenstein et al., 2018). Following the lines established in the Social Learning Loop conceptual framework (Figure 3), Campbell et al.'s Domains of social, emotional, and cognitive functional skills introduced on page 27 (shown in Figure 2) of this paper are reiterated in Table 2 on the next page as a set of related competency assessment and developmental indicator criteria.

Table 2

Play-based Competency Observational Assessment Framework based on Campbell et al.'s (2016) Functional Domains.

Competency	Developmental Indicators
Cognitive Functioning	Setting goals, Planning and organizing, Transitioning/shifting, and Attention.
Emotional Functioning	Expressing and identifying emotions, Regulating emotions, and Perspective taking.
Social Functioning	Understanding social cues, Resolving conflicts, and Cooperation.

Assessment of toddler development and learning – or "confirmation" to use Noddings' (2013) term for it – simply cannot be based on standardized expectations (pp. 192-193). There is too much multifaceted change going on in the dynamic nature of the ECE classroom (Van Hoorn

et al., 2015, p. 147) and the doctrine of standardized assessment is based on "expectations" around what is normal that must be "uniformly applied". Whole-child potential and capabilities grow in non-standard and non-uniform ways based on where the child is at in that moment as development in very young children rapidly emergent (Noddings, 2013, p. 193) and constantly unfolds in surprising ways (Foreman, 1994, p. 174). In line with this, Noddings (2013) tell us the onus in helping the younger and less capable individual grow becomes one of constant observation, thoughtful refection, and teacher intentionally around how best to apply the "special relationship" that is mutually arising with the child (p. 194). Van Hoorn and her colleagues (2015) agree and center it in their *Play in the Center of the Curriculum's* "interpretive approach", and this goes to the point that Bodrova and Leong (2018) make about the need for observation-based *Dynamic Assessment* (p. 197). They tell us that for very young children the best learning environment is a Vygotskian mix of "assisted performance" and "independent performance," and that any assessment of development is the *change* in the two (p. 196). This circles us back to Rejoining, Partnering and Agency that lead to Exploration and developmental growth on the Social-Emotional Loop shown in Figure 3 earlier. In concrete terms we can see that this means that a change in level of cooperation in play can be considered an "indicator" of development such as when the child begins follow the lead of an older friend where there was conflict and hard feelings the day before. The key to assessment then becomes capturing this observation and answering the question – "why and why now?"

Building on this, and very much in line with Nodding's (2015) point about creating the special relationship, Van Hoorn et al. (2015) advice to ECE teachers is to frame assessment as much as possible from the child's point of view (p. 152). While acknowledging the challenge inherent in getting to the answer of the above's key 'why and why now' question, Van Hoorn

and her colleagues tell us that it can be met by first and foremost attending as best we can to the child's behavior and verbalizations (or social, emotional, and cognitive "functioning" in Campbell et al.'s, 2016 phraseology). Assessment under this rubric then becomes the intentional, reflective, curious, and caring act of "tuning in" to the child given to us by French (2019) and Bridgett et al., (2015) previously.

The Social Learning Loop's Conceptual Curriculum and Early Learning Success. For toddlers, where our focus must remain on behavioral functioning and how cognition impacts their relationships (Dodge, 2014), and reminding ourselves of what Gay (2018) said about long-term Social, Emotional, and Cognitive developmental outcomes in the context of culturally responsive approaches to education generally, this conceptual curriculum framework, with its focus of enhancing the relational aspects of learning versus "academic skills" (those *A-B-C*'s and *1-2-3*'s I talked about earlier) provides children with an increased likelihood of success through K-12 and beyond. It also has potential to lead to better overall individual mental and physical health and well-being through the lifespan (Gay, 2018, p. 234). These developmental markers also point to the kind of improved capacities for self-regulation and social competence that accrue to very young children when they experience intentionally positive environments (Bridgett et al., 2015). We also see a congruence to attachment theory in practice as shown by the work done to refine the Circle of Security in the context of the ECE&C classroom (Cooper et al., 2017). As depicted earlier in Figure 3, in the circling around by the child between Bridgett et al.'s (2016) developmentally intense adaptive risk taking (aka: Piaget's learning through independent exploration) is optimized by equally important developmental need to feel safe. Assured that a "safe harbor" is close by they develop enhanced capacities for independent (agentic) activity (as described by Bandura, 2005). Furthermore, this continuous and expanding

"Social-Emotional-Cognitive looping" (gently facilitated by the teacher who is actively, mindfully, caringly, and intentionally cycling around in harmony on the inner circle through a process of rejoining and partnering) - maximizes as Malaguzzi's (1994) assisted learning opportunities through adaptive scaffolding, support and partnering. By helping them manage their emotional distress the short-term, the child experiences increased neuro-receptivity and hence capacity to learn, which in turn leads to increased self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, and empathy (Gay, 2018) – and enhanced trauma repair – and so on over the longer term. These increasing capacities then further promote positive attitudes and behaviors towards self and others in the learning environment, as well as in home, and in the community. Furthermore, this positive environment, when coupled with the teacher's continuous introduction and adaptation of learning content from their repertoire of "cherished" curricular content items of "delight", further reiterates the ameliorating impacts that this approach can have on language and literacy development, and growth in abstract/symbolic reasoning needed for math and science learning (McClelland et al., 2007; Immordino-Yang et al., 2019).

From these examples of the connections between the relational teaching model and the play-based approach - we begin to see the hallmarks of a very good ECE&C curriculum generally, and one that could very well be a very positive and effective way-forward in marginalized BIPOC communities facing historical trauma. This concept is further enhanced through support to the parent as a partner/co-teacher in the home learning environment.

Curricular Components to Support Intentional Play-based Relational Co-Teaching Practice

From the science and philosophical perspectives that I have outlined so far, we can see that it is the teacher who is the key to implementing a relational/play-based curriculum (Van Hoorn et al., 2015). Gay (2018) agrees and takes this thinking further saying that children too are

key as they cannot be seen as passive "consumers" of curriculum content and are in fact, active "creators, producers, and directors" of their educational program (p. 142). This takes the early learning we are concerned with out of the exclusive domain of the school and places it squarely into Rindaldi's (2013) educative community - and especially into the home. This then highlights an emerging theme around relational learning "partnering" between the teacher, child, and parents. For now though, it is important to note that we teachers should remember that learning for our children occurs anywhere, and it starts where you and your students are at in-the-moment (Peterson, 2013). As an ideal from the perspective of an adaptive curriculum, one inspired by Nodding's call to joy and delight in the classroom, the teacher's practice, the child's cooperative learning with peers, and the learning space should work together under a concept where space is also a teacher (Robson & Mastrangelo, 2018; Sunday, 2020; Westerberg & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2021), both indoors and outdoors (Lillard et al., 2013; Dietze & Cutler, 2020; Little & Stapleton, 2021).

Taking these considerations into account, and in order to move forward towards helping the community evaluate their options regarding teacher/parent co-teaching partnerships under a *Community Participatory Approach to an Adaptive Place-based Early Education and Care Curriculum framework* I should first define the essential components of any ECE curriculum. In the US context, the National Center for Early Childhood Development, Teaching and Learning (NCECDTL, 2022) indicates that an ECE curriculum can be reduced to a small set of elements, specifically it:

1. Describes its approach to teaching and learning.
2. Addresses learning domains.
3. Defines learning goals.

4. Supports the design and organization of the learning environment and daily schedule.
5. Supports planning and implementing learning experiences, and
6. Supports family engagement.

These six elements thereby become the signposts for the community participatory exploration of what "their" starting curriculum framework for their children looks like and sets the agenda for moving from ideas to action in formalizing an approach to implementing an ECE&C program in their "educating community." We can see from the proceeding that I have covered much of this ground, but what the "curriculum essentials" framework given above allows us to do is begin the process of mapping the theoretical and philosophical aspects of the Social-Emotional-oriented relational teaching approach I have outlined onto potential practical and concrete curricular examples to guide the community's dialogue going forward about what "their" curriculum might look like. The point being is that the selection and implementation of that eventual curriculum will unfold from the outset as a community-led decision-making process not a mandated one. This is where the idea of a community dialogue process begins to emerge that we will cover later in this chapter, but for now let us look at what the NCECDTL (2022) points to as critical "learning domains" for very young children as follows:

1. Approaches to Learning - (i.e., the "how" of skills, behaviors, and capacities children use to engage in learning).
2. Social and Emotional Development.
3. Language and Literacy.
4. Cognitive development - (reasoning, memory, problem-solving, skills, etc.), and
5. Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development.

Again, I have covered much of this in detail above except for the fifth domain of perceptual, motor, and physical development which NCECDTL defines as essential as it "permits children to fully explore and function in their environment." I would argue that, in terms of the context of "play and space" a positive learning space has been assumed as underlying everything in the treatment I have provided so far, and it will absolutely be rich in stimulus to those developmental areas as I have stressed that schools should be intentional about setting up those spaces so that they also act as a teacher (Gandini, 1994; Miller, 2019). For now, what is good about outlining these domains explicitly is that they bring the aspect of "learning goals," as well as planning, implementation, and assessment, into the conceptual curriculum framework more generally.

The Features of an Adaptive Place-based ECE and Care Curriculum

Given the ideals of an adaptive community-led curriculum development process outlined so far, and to begin to look more deeply into how any curriculum format might align itself to those, I first need to extract a few of its framework's defining features. From this starting point, any approach towards an adaptive early childhood curriculum should exhibit the following strengths gathered from the theoretical and philosophical approaches outlined previously and encapsulated below. Specifically, the place-based relational curriculum framework should exhibit the following "Curricular Strengths Criteria" consistent with the NCECDTL learning domains by:

1. Supporting a relational "process" of development in the classroom, the home, the neighborhood, and in the school as a learning community within a place-based "culture-as-a- system-of-meaning" approach (Chan, 2011; Sanders & Farago, 2018).

2. Promoting participatory/child-initiated social-learning process is facilitated by teacher-framed, play-based, exploratory activities through intentional but flexible learning content structures and material that "inspire and delight" (Noddings, 2013).
3. Centering the learning environment as third teacher so that it works synergistically with the material, content, and teacher-framing of activities (Miller, 2019).
4. Igniting a pervasive sense of joy the child will experience from a safe but exciting and challenging learning community (Nodding 2013; Gay, 2018), one that mirrors their world and is a window to others (Bishop, 1990).
5. Ensuring relation safety processes are trauma-informed and growth-oriented (Bunston et al., 2017; Nicholson et al., 2018; Ortega-Williams et al., 2021), and
6. Deepening culturally responsiveness that has the integrity to confront social justice inequities and facilitates anti-racist modes of thinking in all aspects of the teaching praxis and family support and is developed through consensus and implemented as a community-wide Children's Rights initiative (Gay, 2018; Hart & Brando, 2018).

Three Models that Demonstrate the 'Art of the Possible' for a Way Ahead

Given these considerations let us now look at what I consider to be some relevant examples of programs and curricula that meet the spirit of or point towards a place-based adaptive curricula.

Pedagogy of Care for Well-being. McMullen et al. (2015) provide us with a reconceptualization of caregiving practice towards a whole-child "relational pedagogy" that is focused primarily on what teachers do to provide young children with a deepening sense of well-being (French, 2019). The crafters of the Pedagogy of Care for Well-being (PCW) define "well-

being" as an individual's internal sense of not only being well physically in the moment, but also of "feeling well" as a normal psychosocial state (McMullen et al., 2015). This "state of being" is what Seligman (2012) calls "Flourishing".

Well-being can be linked to teaching practice through a pedagogical stance that children can learn that being cared for - and that they are worthy of being cared for because they matter – leads them to explore the role of caring for others, how to be a friend, and how to help others to succeed (McMullen et al., 2015). This intentionality around the centrality of care – what McMullen and her colleagues describe as the teacher's attentive, "holistic view… that is ever mindful" and responsive about how the learning environment, the relationships within it, and the experiences offered, all contribute to helping children develop a sense of well-being by allowing them to flourish. PCW is very "Intentional" teaching – what, according to McMullen et al. (2015), Noddings (2013) would call the need for the teacher's "engrossment" around the individual learning needs of the young child as if they were the teacher's own (p. 261).

This state of engrossment is a deep level of practice (Noddings, 2013, p. 10) and forms the basis of what teachers do in each moment to foster salutary interactions of nine key "senses" – the thoughts and feelings – that arise in each child (McMullen et al., 2015) by:

1. Creating a sense of contentment: of being at ease physically and emotionally, a feeling that comes from spaces that are organized, comfortable and aesthetically appealing.
2. Building a sense of safety and security through predictable and stable routines, while remaining flexible and individually responsive.
3. Growing the sense of affinity that occurs in respectful and inclusive learning environments that promote nurturing, feelings of being loved, being touched, and held, and having friends.

4. Having self-respect: a condition that can be seen when each person's sense of self and personal dignity – feelings of being valued and worthy of love – are those of the individual's family, culture, and community.
5. Clear communication arises from feelings of understanding and being understood in the context of verbal and non-verbal interaction.
6. Engagement that results from fulfilling, satisfying intellectual and physical challenges in work, play, and learning, with sufficient uninterrupted time to complete tasks.
7. Providing a sense of belonging to a group that values contribution and that all individuals have important roles and responsibilities that recognize strengths, talents, and potential.
8. Building a sense of Self-efficacy: the result of feeling confident and competent, that one is good at what one does, and ultimately, feels satisfied with accomplishments; and
9. These all contribute to a dynamic sense of agency as the individual's motivation to support democratic values, empower choice, and include all voices in planning, decision-making, and goal-setting (McMullen et al., 2015, p. 262).

These components and their enabling mechanisms of the caring environments, caring relationships, and caring experiences all "drive" the overall state of well-being in the child as shown in Figure 4 on the next page.

In PCW we hear echoes of the underlying conditions for optimal Social-Emotional-Cognitive growth given to us earlier in this review by Dodge, Campbell, Bridgett, and colleagues. We can also immediately see the centrality of Noddings' (2013) ethics of care and the possibilities suggested by these nine factors and three caregiving practices, when fully realized, to bring about the conditions for children's receptivity to learning in relationships that her ideal of the joy-filled classroom provides.

While relationships, the learning environment, and the resulting experiences are the underlying enabling practices of the PCW approach, less is said about the notion of "Place" and

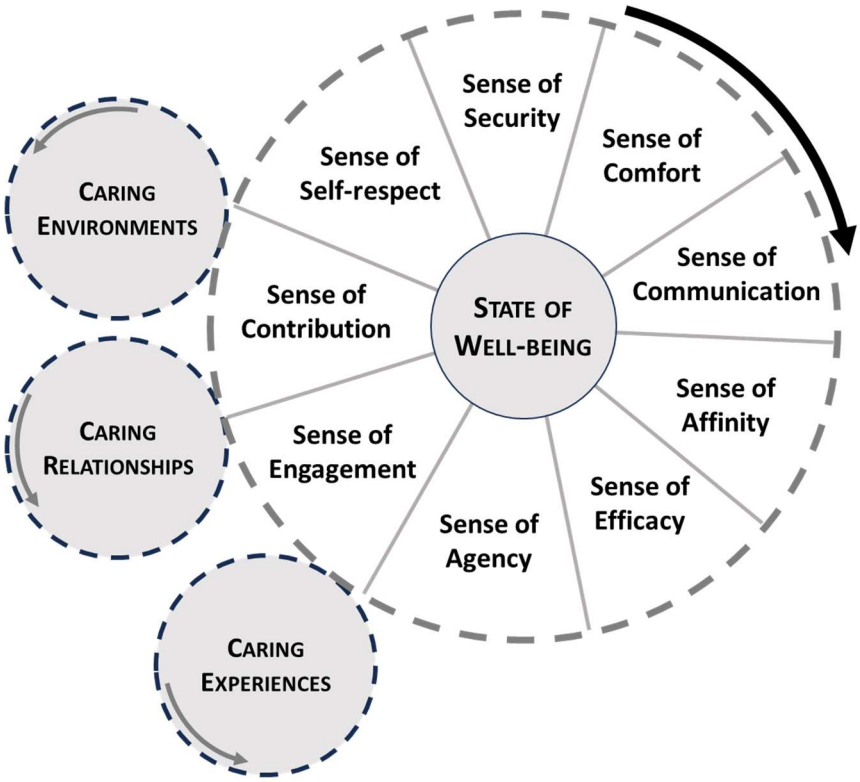

Figure 4

A visual rendering of the nine component senses that are empowered (or driven) by the caregiving practices of the Pedagogy of Care for Well-being (modeled on McMullen et al., 2015).

cultural responsiveness. This is balanced by PCW's concern for reflective practices and ethical approaches to social justice (McMullen et al., 2015, p. 268). As expressed by pedagogists like Hart and Brando (2018) under PCW's overarching concern for child's "critical agency" and "participation rights" – an orientation that strives to give them knowledge and skills to become well-informed and active thinkers who are capable of demanding and exercising their democratic rights as citizens and actively engage in the work of building a better world.

McMullen et al. (2015) do acknowledge that educative play is an important contributor to the child's sense of engagement and openness to experience and make it clear that it generates interaction and reciprocity amongst children, along with challenging intellectual and physical

experiential learning activity that become more complex with time. Again, this too is completely coherent with Noddings' (2013) concepts of "receptivity" and "joy", and the synergistic effects of a positive biopsychosocial environment of Bridgett et al. (2015). Overall, though, the holistic thinking around PCW points to the very focused intentional teaching and caring in action that any curricular approach can be applied as a lever in a developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed and play oriented manner. PCW also sets an excellent tone for any community searching for culturally compatible core concepts and philosophies and pragmatic thinking about next steps for ECE&C innovation because it is "curriculum agonistic" practice. As McMullen and her colleagues (2015) point out, "PCW is independent of any prescribed model, preset curriculum, or set of practice guidelines that may be followed… [but we did draw inspiration] from a number of recognized curricula and frameworks" including Reggio Emilia (p. 259).

Reggio Emilia. In the aftermath of the horrors of World War II a number of communities in Northern Italy committed to a series of collective actions to make deep and lasting positive change for the benefit of current and future generations of their citizens (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 42). Reggio Emilia is a region in north-western Italy and its name has become synonymous with a structured and intentional way that communities can think, plan, and act together to nurture early childhood development through care and education programs (Spaggiari, 1994, p. 91). The "Reggio Approach" – much like PCW – is more of a pedagogical philosophy than a curriculum, but unlike PCW it cannot be characterized as agnostic as it does have a program structure that focuses squarely on the concept of the child as the originator of their own adaptive curriculum of interest that the teacher helps frame and then supports (Murphy et al., 2015, p. 309). This idea of the social construction of a child's specific "emergent curriculum" and the teacher as "translator" (Rinaldi, 1994, p. 102) goes to the heart of the title of the famous poem written by Loris

Malaguzzi, the Reggio school network's founding director, titled "The Hundred Languages of Children" (Edwards et al, 1994, p. vi). Malaguzzi was inspired by the works of many educational thinkers and especially Piaget around children's developmental trajectories, as well as Dewey's stance about schools as a lived experience, Vygotsky regarding social-cultural construction of symbolic language and the social aspects of learning, and Bronfenbrenner regarding the importance of the social and physical ecology of the learning environment (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 52). "For us… the reciprocal trust and work" to create synergies amongst educators, children, and families fell directly out of a synthetization of these theories into Reggio thinking (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 55).

Much like PCW theorists, thinkers in the Reggio "movement" are firm about children's rights and the centrality of children as unique individuals. Children, they affirm, are "not adults in the making" but are engaged, empowered, and gifted human beings who are actively seeking opportunities to discover, learn and grow developmentally in relationship with others to make meaning of and thereby influence the world (Murphy et al., 2015, p. 309).

From these foundational concepts embodied by the Reggio Approach, a number of central principles of profound importance to the conceptual curriculum development framework arise, specifically:

1. Reggio is rigorously child-centered and honors the reality that the child is a competent being (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 55) and that they matter in the world (Katz, 1994, p. 37).
2. Children are social beings that make meaning in and through relationships with parents, teachers, and peers (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 59).
3. Activities, especially for infants and very young children must be child-initiated and teacher-framed (New, 1994, p. 221).

4. The learning environment and space is crucial and serves as another teacher by engaging, inspiring, and providing its own comfort and care to the child (Gandini, 1994, p. 135).
5. Extensive collaborative in-service training for school staff is key to school and child success. This in-service orientation is deeply interpersonal so that adult connections provide not only social support, but they also honor the teacher as a life-long learner to ignite continuous shared-meaning making, and the entry of fresh and exciting contributions to a school's marketplace of teaching ideas (New, 1994, p. 222).
6. The teacher-parent partnership is central to the child growing to know that the school and home are different parts of their extended family environment, and this lets them find comfort because they know they are safe (New, 1994, p. 223), and
7. The school must not only be in the community, but it is also of the community (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 44) through their participation in planning, decision-making about resources, and problem-solving. Parents and teachers interact within this milieu to forge collective responsibility to provide what is best for the children (Spaggiari, 1994, p. 93).

Foreman (1994) tells us that Reggio children repeatedly demonstrate that they can express surprisingly complex symbolic representations that unfold in unpredictable cycles as they experience and construct their world. The teacher must be at their side in this process to help them interpret, clarify, and make connections to knowledge that helps them better communicate their thoughts and ideas to themselves and others in meaningful ways (p. 174). From this, it becomes clear that it is the teacher-child interrelationship to learning embodied by the 'Reggio-way' that serves as the essence of its high-quality ECE&C praxis (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 59).

Play at the Center of the Curriculum. Van Hoorn et al. (2015) provide us with a resource that is very much on point with the conceptual framework, but it also aligns very well with the ideas behind PCW and Reggio. *Play at the Center of the Curriculum* – and I will call it "Play@CC" just to give us a sound-bite term – explores placing educative play at the center of the ECE&C curriculum using evidence-based best practices that are an inclusive, cross-cultural, Social-Emotional-oriented, and developmentally appropriate to teaching the whole-child **(**Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 17). Their curriculum is centered on the authors' experiences as teachers and researchers at the UC Berkley's Harold Jones Child Study Center, and they base the practices they describe on the lessons they learned within an intentional "climate of inquiry" while working to co-construct their Center's curriculum with children, and to bring about an effective "social ecology" that promoted optimal development in early childhood (Scales et al., 2012). As a centerpiece of their research, they outline the concept of the "interpretive approach" to ongoing development of relational teaching practice (Scales et al., 2012; Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 317), which is reminiscent of Rinaldi's (1994) view on the teacher as "translator". The Interpretative Approach uses observation, documentation, reflection, and assessment that fosters that climate of teacher inquiry in the pre-school which, according to Scales et al. (2012):

1. Guides learning through self-directed play from the point of view of the child,
2. Promotes teacher inquiry in action to learn how learning in the child is occurring through play in a developmentally appropriate manner that tracks to accepted DAP standards (i.e., NAEYC, 2020),
3. Guides teachers' reflections on beliefs/behavior to inform action in the learning space.
4. Provides insight into how to intervene in an unobtrusive and relevant way, and
5. Refines and reframes the curriculum in an intentional manner (p. 166).

The Play@CC approach to documenting observations, reflections, and actions also gives each teacher an authentic basis for evaluation and assessment of their children's learning progress as well as the effectiveness of the learning environment all the while pointing them towards the continuous changes that are needed (Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 107). This recalls John Dewey's advice about the need for critical reflection and inquiry in practice to drive the "intelligent action" required for teaching excellence (Dewey, 1916, p. 400).

Van Hoorn et al. (2015) constantly reiterate this critical role for the teacher in bringing life to the curriculum, telling us that it must be constantly evolving "in tune" with the development needs of each individual child (p. 20). Indeed, Van Hoorn et al. (2015) give us the powerful images of the teacher as setting the stage for play and then orchestrating play that is most responsive to the interests and learning needs of each child. In addition to providing developmentally appropriate guidance about setting up the physical learning environment they cover all the learning domains in detail including how play can frame the language and literacy, arts, math, science, and social studies requirements of the curriculum. The authors provide examples throughout their content on how play elements can be observed and mapped to developmental progression and assessment standards.

Van Hoorn et al. (2015) also share their thinking about supporting the parent as the first teacher and, through their ideas about social ecology, the role of space as a teacher as inspired by Reggio Emilia (Robson & Mastrangelo, 2018; Miller, 2019). In the context of being able to describe the rationale and practical aspects that help move any conceptual framework forward, Van Hoorn et al. and her colleagues also provide a rich source of material throughout their book about the ways and means to show teachers, the community, and parents what is meant by "self-directed educative play" and to advocate for it as a central driver of child development and positive

early learning. One very apparent weakness of the Play@CC approach is the lack of the authors' acknowledgement of trauma or any reference to trauma-informed care. Culture is also treated very peripherally and what is said is in the context of cultural diversity, and multiculturalism with no mention being made about anti-racist approaches to education. That said, they do acknowledge that cultural competence and a teacher's awareness of biases and stereotypes is an important issue to address in the school climate (Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 358-359)

Assessing the Three Approaches for Goodness of Fit to the Curricular Strengths Criteria

There is a good degree of compatibility between all three of the above ECE&C models to the high-level curricular considerations that were derived from previous research as essential to developing a curriculum framework that supports the key conceptual components of the teacher/parent co-teaching partnership implicit in the Social Learning Loop described in Figure 3 on page 52 earlier. To help us to assess how well these approaches would support the basic elements of the NCECDTL learning domains described previously, it is a good idea to rigorously evaluate each specifically to a matrix of these required "curricular strengths." Table 3 represents an evaluation of the three models just reviewed for their goodness of fit as supports to the "Curricular Strengths Criteria" that I derived on page 70 from the NCECDTL domains.

It is clear to me that any of the three ECE approaches outlined above – PCW, Reggio, or Play@CC – would be a good starting point for an exploration of an adaptive community-led curriculum development process as each is interesting and valuable thinking all on its own. It is not surprising to me that Reggio fulfills virtually all aspects of the conceptual evaluation matrix and this mostly due to an alignment between Nodding's view on the ethics of caring and the Reggio "movements" centering on the child as the focus of everything including what the community does to support the school. In effect, Reggio people take to the task of meeting the

Table 3

Goodness of Fit of the Three Approaches to the Place-based Relational Curricular Strengths

Supports to the NCECDTL Learning Domains	**Approach**		
	PCW	**Reggio**	**Play@CC**
School/Community Culture-as-a-System-of-Meaning	Yes	Yes	Possible
Play-based/Child-initiated exploratory activities	Possible	Yes	Central
The learning space is also a teacher	Yes	Yes	Yes
Joy lives here	Central	Yes	Yes
Trauma-informed	Yes	Possible	Possible
Culturally competent/Child's Rights supporting	Central	Central	Yes
Supportive of culturally responsive community participatory education initiatives	Yes	Yes	Possible

child's needs as if "they were their own" - the rallying cry for "engrossment" that we heard from Noddings (2013) earlier. But Rinaldi (2013, p. 11) cautions us to be mindful that the Reggio approach has its own cultural origins that acts as a center of gravity that may not stand up well in other cultural milieus and circumstances without extensive thought to "re-invent it" in the image of the child within that specific place-based context. With that in mind, it will be important to keep referring to Reggio as inspiration for a community-led process, but it might not be the best curricular roadmap for a way ahead.

Fortunately, there are very good indications from this cross-talk approach towards mutually supportive linkages from PCW and Play@CC - primarily as a hypothetical conceptual hybrid baseline - one that can serve as a point of departure in any potential community dialogue that may occur in the future. The centrality of joy from the caring relationship inherent in PCW can be used

to inform and bolster Play@CC's weakness in place-based orientation/culture-as-a-system-of-meaning and its lack of direct acknowledgement of the impact of trauma. Conversely - while PCW lacks a play-based curricular toolkit, play and the importance of child-initiated activities is central to Play@CC approach. Another important strength I see in Play@CC is its excellent treatment of multifaceted art of early years' assessment. Van Hoorn et al., (2015) devote an entire chapter to the concept of play as an assessment tool and assessment under this approach is tied to each of the learning domains they cover throughout the Play@CC resource. Their grounded orientation to assessment is also very much in line with the conceptual curricular model's "tuned-in" dynamic assessment theoretical construct I outlined earlier.

Equally interesting is that while Reggio follows an instructive path and tradition of effective community-based action, I see PCW and Play@CC as potentially exceeding Reggio's high standards due to their flexibility/adaptability - or maybe even "portability" if that is the right word - in their application across cultures and communities. In any event, one can imagine an interesting discussion around these similarities and differences as they provide an excellent launching-off point in any participatory exploration of a place-based curriculum development approach required by South St. Petersburg to become an "educating community" for its youngest children.

A Conceptual Hybrid Adaptive Place-based ECE and Care Curriculum Co-teaching Framework

What follows here is a process of distilling the essence of the philosophical and theoretical treatment conducted so far into a set of practical curricular concepts and practices. From the analysis in the proceeding sections, four main curricular guiding principles emerge that support an adaptive and culturally responsive ECE&C co-teaching approach for inner-city

communities in general, and in South St. Petersburg specifically in the context of the current study. In what amounts to an outline of a curriculum development guideline, the first four "Cardinal Points" are taken directly from the Figure 3 Social-Emotional Loop that was introduced earlier on page 52, plus a fifth principal content area specific to helping with the identification of trauma and the means of providing appropriate trauma responses and repair. Specifically these principal content points are:

1. Supports to Independent Exploration,
2. Teacher and Adult "Caring For" Relational Skills,
3. Teacher and Adult Caring and Intentional Actions in and on the Learning Environment,
4. Actions that Promote Agency, and
5. Supports Trauma-sensitive Child/Family/Teacher Interactions.

When linked with the sixth principal content area covering Assessment, the matrix shown in Table 4 forms the outline for a cookbook approach that a community can use to collaborate and develop a "home-grown" menu for developing and implementing an adaptive ECE&C curriculum appropriate to their neighborhood/community that supports both teachers and parents in co-teaching partnerships.

Table 4

Principal Content Elements of the Adaptive Place-based ECE&C Curriculum Framework

Social-Emotional Loop "Cardinal Points"	Curricular Framework/Content Direction	Source Guidance
I. Supports to Independent Exploration	"Openness to the Environment and Adaptive Risk Taking"	Bridgett et al. (2015)
	Teachers create a sense of contentment and joy: Child feels at ease physically and emotionally. 1. This feeling comes from spaces that are organized, comfortable, aesthetically appealing, and that act as another teacher.	PCW & Play@CC

Table 4 (Continued)

I.	Supports to Independent Exploration (continued)	2. Intentional action to guide learning through self-directed play from the point of view of the child.	PCW & Play@CC
		3. Child engagement is enhanced by fulfilling, satisfying intellectual and physical challenges in work, play, and learning; content that delights; and sufficient uninterrupted time to complete tasks.	Play@CC PCW
II.	Adults' "Caring For" Relational Skills	Intentional, Consistent and Relational Care to Provide "Comfort and Safety"	Cooper et al. (2017)
		Builds a sense of safety and security through predictable and stable routines, while remaining flexible and individually responsive by:	
		1. Facilitate rejoining through perspective and insight into how to intervene in an unobtrusive and relevant way.	PCW
		2. Providing Robust Partnering through:	
		▪ Clear communication arising from feelings of understanding and being understood in the context of verbal and non-verbal interaction.	PCW
		▪ Having self-respect - each person's sense of self and personal dignity – feelings of being valued and worthy of love – are those of the individual's family, culture, and community.	PCW
		3. The teacher-parent partnership is central to the child growing to know that the school and home are different parts of their extended family environment, and this lets them find comfort because they know they are safe	Reggio
III.	Adults' "Actions in and on Learning Environment"	Support each Child's "Positive Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Growth."	Campbell et al. (2016)
		Providing a sense of belonging to a group that values contribution and that all individuals have important roles and responsibilities that recognize strengths, talents, and potential by:	
		1. Providing teacher with skills to learn how learning in the child is occurring through play in a manner that tracks to accepted DAP standards	
		▪ Guides teachers' reflections on beliefs/behavior to inform action in the learning space.	PCW Play@CC
		▪ Guides teachers' actions to refine and reframe the curriculum and learning content in an intentional manner for each child.	PCW
		2. Forms a baseline for creating a reflective and supportive climate of inquiry through collaborative in-service training	PCW Reggio
		▪ Adult connections provide not only social support, but they also honor the teacher as a life-long learner to ignite cross- fertilization and continuous improvement	

Table 4 (Continued)

III.	Adults' "Actions in and on the Learning Environment" (Continued)	3. Being and becoming a 'community' pre-school ▪ Building an "educative community" ethos of participative planning, decision-making about resources, and problem-solving.	Penney et al. (2019) Reggio
		Parents and teachers interact within this culturally responsive cross-sector milieu to forge collective responsibility to provide what is best for the children.	Reggio
IV.	Promoting Child "Agency"	"Building Agentic Perspectives" Sense of Self-efficacy	Bandura (2005)
		1. The child develops an expanding feeling of confident and competent as evidenced by: ▪ Developing a sense that one is good at what one does, and ultimately, feels satisfied with accomplishments.	PCW
		2. Adults celebrate the dynamic nature of agency in the child. ▪ Builds the individual's motivation to support democratic values, empowers choice, include all voices in planning, decision-making, and goal setting.	PCW
		3. Growing the child's sense of affinity ▪ Respectful and inclusive spaces that promote nurturing, feelings of being loved, being touched, and held, and having friends.	PCW
V.	Supporting Trauma-sensitive Child/ Family/Teacher Interactions	Culturally Responsive Facilitation of Family Systems Well-being to Promote Child Development	Jennings (2018); Gay (2018)
		1. Creating developmentally appropriate classroom strategies to connect with very young children (and their parents) to support emotional healing.	COS-C
		2. Instituting collaborative in-service training, reflective practice, and peer mentorship to support the teacher in promoting trauma-sensitive child/family-systems relationship growth.	PCW
		3. Creating culturally responsive and sustaining parent peer-support network aimed at promoting family-system growth.	Ortega-Williams et al. (2021)
		4. Working to connect the school to consultative resources. Create non-threatening referral pathways for additional services and support to children and families.	Midtown Collaborative/ Penney, et al. (2019)
VI.	Assessment Framework	Track Each Child's "Positive Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Growth." to Inform Parent/Teacher Co-teaching Strategies and Actions	Campbell et al. (2016)
		1. Employ a "Tuned-in" Dynamic Assessment Approach ▪ Uses play as an assessment tool.	Play@CC

Table 4 (Continued)

VI. Assessment Framework (Continued)	▪ Uses the 'three-domain competency/10 indicator' framework to inform the assessment baseline. ▪ Assesses from the child's viewpoint using an interpretative approach.	
	2. Observation is the primary assessment approach.	Play@CC
	3. Develop a play-based learning/growth tracking documentation process that maps to learning objectives and informs content development action.	Play@CC
	4. Keeping going – using assessment results to re-invigorate the Social Learning Loop's responsivity and impact on practice and outcomes.	It is a loop

The Importance of the Skilled Relational Practitioner in any Model's Success - Enter the "Kindezi" and the "Pedagogista"

In Table 3 earlier, I pointed out the important parallel principles in Reggio, PCW, and Play@CC for improving ECE teacher practice that goes beyond teacher as technician towards a professional and skilled ECE&C holistic practitioner who: 1) sees each child as a unique whole-person, 2) understands that relational caring is key, 3) activates the learning environment and space as a vital component in the practice, and 4) practices teaching and caring in action that is highly intentional, requiring constant reflection, refinement in collaboration with the parent and other caring adults as well as the mentorship, continual professional practice development, and the desire to provide the best possible learning experience for each child.

It is through this dynamic that the Bantu word "Kindezi" comes to mind. In English, the word's meaning needs a whole sentence because it is deeply embedded in African ways of knowing, and in the family, and of placing high value on relationships and with local community cultural assets. It encapsulates timeless wisdom that goes like this – "*holistically schooling other people's children with love and an eye to the future of our village*" (Williams-Johnson, 2016). I learned this term from an African American female colleague during a professional development

workshop for ECE teaching staff she co-led and that I was assisting with during the Midtown Collaborative project. The deep wisdom of this holistic ECE *and* Care approach resonates across cultures when we consider Reggio and another word for a maestro ECE&C educator that does not translate well into English: the "Pedagogista" (Filippini, 1994, p. 117-118). We will learn more about both these terms, but I will note here that Kayla Nembhard (the facilitator at that workshop) embodies these personal characteristics, strengths, and is equally adept in relationship-based work with children, with adults, and with families: to me she is both Kindezi and Pedagogista. As a follow-on to the Midtown project, we worked together to co-create and co-facilitate a community of practice for Midtown ECE educators. Working with her forms another inspirational critical event in my journey.

The Place-based Aspects of the Curriculum Development Framework as a Source of Support to Community Action

In the introductory chapter I discussed the findings from a USF community study called the "Midtown Collaborative" that I served a role in as a graduate research assistant. That experience fired my imagination around what a university with its wealth of knowledge, energy, and know-how (Zygmunt et al., 2018) could do to help the community move forward in their efforts to provide a better future for their children. I also described some of the indications of the serious nature and impacts of the current approach to ECE earlier in this paper and it is time that we focus these impacts into the discussion at a more local level and to evaluate whether the trajectory of progress is going in a positive or negative direction for the children and families in South St. Petersburg.

One thing is clear to me from my earlier South St. Petersburg research experience - I now know the university can make a lasting impact in the community. A legacy of the Midtown

Project is an informal professional practice resource sharing network that now operates as an independent non-profit professional practice support alliance of ECE providers. The Pinellas Early Educators United Association recently celebrated their first-year anniversary by holding a highly successful inaugural annual fund-raising gala (PEEUA, 2022). This is just one indication that there is a significant baseline of readiness to look not only at the problem of practice of playschool learning and care environments generally, but in the context of this study, how a culturally responsive place-based curriculum specifically might "move the needle" in a positive direction that helps South St. Petersburg's children. This is even truer given the mutually productive relationship formed between USF St. Petersburg's Family Study Center and COQEBS (Davis & McHale, 2012) and the introduction over ten years ago of a community-led parent education and capacity building initiative called "Baby Talk" and its associated ECE professional development series called "Listening to Babies" (LTB) that has continued through to the present (COQEBS, 2021).

As previously outlined, state governments and school districts across the US have grappled with the poor school readiness of children entering kindergarten, especially for children from families experiencing socio-economic stress (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Indeed, preschool providers - including many of the members of PEEUA - have been continually pressed by regulators to improve these figures that hovered just below the 50 percent level on average in the 1990's and had only marginally improved a decade later and mostly for Head Start-funded State-lead efforts (Raver, 2005) – a shaky proposition given the Midtown school readiness numbers I identified earlier. I contend that these and a few other troubling indications of a National failure stem from this push and its accompanying cries for accountability on behalf of tax-payers in the phenomena of "Push-down Academics" (Gallo-Fox & Cuccuini-Harmon, 2018). This has

metastasized as the "School Readiness Movement" in governments at all levels - including local school districts - which took-off during the G.W. Bush Administration's roll-out of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) that mandated educators to ensure that all children achieve on-grade reading levels by Grade 3. For Florida's Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) program for instance, average school readiness rates had risen only into the low sixty percentage point level by 2005 (Florida OPPAGA, 2008, p. 2), all this, after several decades of Head Start, and untold billions of dollars investment with the US Government spending almost $10 billion in fiscal year 2007 alone. Indeed, Chambers et al. (2010), Chambers et al. (2016), and Durkin (2022) demonstrate that Head Start's tenuous positive effects are not evident beyond early elementary grades. We are seeing the aftermath of this muddled approach to early childhood education in the St. Petersburg Midtown context, and to put things colloquially – "it's not pretty."

The American experience is not completely unique as similar "Push-down Academics" accountability/expectation-driven programming has other jurisdictions in its death-grip as well. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development; France, Germany, and the UK all languish with similar reading-level achievement as the US, and all are failing their most vulnerable children miserably (OECD, 2014, p. 5). The OECD data further points to the fact that *even the most disadvantaged children* in some similarly highly-developed but smaller countries such as Finland, Canada, and South Korea, score *better* than children from average income-level families in those other prosperous countries – including those in the US. This tells a story all by itself.

Equally alarming is the even more recent findings that the current reading levels for Pinellas County Grade 3 students from poor and marginalized families have slipped back to the abysmal pre-2015 figures (FLDOE, 2021) that triggered the outrage expressed by the public and

in the media that I described in the opening chapter - and that continues almost unabated (Davis, G., 2022). Little wonder that we see direct evidence of the serious wide-spread systemic failure in the situation facing our young children in South St. Petersburg - a situation that is reflected back into the National dialogue because it is frightening enough to have a standard bearer of the dominant market-driven discourse of the stature of Janet Yellen calling on us to rethink our whole approach to ECE. It is clear then, given all this, that we have lost our way - not only Nationally but at every level and every jurisdiction – including Pinellas County.

Centering the Curriculum in ECE&C, Equity, and in the broader Educational System – the Role of Community Schools. Rao (2013) tells us that Community Schools represent an innovative place-based approach to public service that provide integrated – or what I have called "wrap-around" - social services in educational settings to link children and families, community development, and social services with public education. As I mentioned earlier, the current study is nested within a broader milieux of USF's Anchin Center's efforts to re-examine its role of advancing K-12 teaching practice towards the earlier years. As Rao makes clear, the community school concept can become a central conceptual touchstone to guide the dialogue between under-served and marginalized communities and various "systems" around forming an "intentional partnership" that provides "leverage" to increase child and family access not just to supportive services beyond the school but also to connect to local cultural assets or "Cultural Wealth" (from Yosso's 2005 term for it in Latino communities and what he calls "found resources" p. 7). The Coalition for Community Schools at the at the Institute for Educational Leadership points to research that demonstrates these kinds of schools can "accelerate student success" and the concept behind them can be thought of as a highly effective engagement

mechanism for "hyper-local decision-making" that is responsive to the specific (i.e. place-based) needs of the local community (IEL, 2020).

A Community School for Toddlers in Context of the CI4Equity Processes - Determining the Aim. The concept of a community school for toddlers gives a more tangible point of entry into any broader-based community-driven dialogue that potentially arises from the current study about *the what and how* of next steps around the curriculum development framework, with its relational co-teaching elements forming a vital part of the *why* (or aim) of the improvement to be achieved. In effect, this brief discussion around the idea of a *community school for toddlers* demonstrates a comprehensible means to encapsulate the Place-based and Adaptive nature of the conceptual relational curriculum developmental framework and the opportunity to change the narrative about what next steps the community might want to consider as a way-ahead towards better meeting the ECE&C needs of very young children and families of South St. Petersburg. In terms of the MAEC's CI4Equity process, this concept of a community school for toddlers to serve as a motif to shape subsequent collaborative dialogue captures its "Step 3 - "Determining an Aim" of the continuous improvement for equity framework (MAEC, 2022b) and further links it to what could happen to effectively connect to the cultural assets of the community as advocated by Bryk (2010, p. 25). The Coalition for Community Schools echoes that these linkages are a key factor in both the success and the power of community schools to elevate the development of the whole-child as well as their utility in setting the conditions for broader transformational change for families in underserved locales (Melaville et al., 2011, p. 5).

Listening to Community Voices to Ignite Participatory Pedagogical Practice. We must begin the task of building a counter-narrative to a failed agenda, all the while building a

new discourse around the urgency needed to tackle the wicked problem these misguided approaches have caused. As Gay (2018) extols us: the time to act is now, the age of the child to start with is as young as possible, and the place to start is where you are at (p. 284). To me - clearly that means South St. Petersburg.

As part of the proposed study, I will examine documentation be using a qualitative approach to document analysis (Bowen, 2009) of records of the lived experience and understanding of local parents, educators, community members, and others around the kind of early childhood development and preschool education their children deserve. In effect, the process of inquiry I will undertake is akin to an initial high-level community needs assessment/evaluation and the beginnings of a strengths-based asset mapping initiative (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Bryan et al., 2020). The main point of the exercise will be to map out the connections between what the current state of ECE&C is locally, and the conceptual hybrid outlined above that I developed from up-to-date culturally responsive pedagogical practices. This qualitative research method will use the conceptual Social-Emotional Loop's relational teaching model to serve as an exemplar intended to serve in building a community conversation around an adaptive participatory curriculum development process to support transformative social, emotional, and cognitive growth-oriented ECE&C access in the context of place and play in the local underserved settings.

In South St. Petersburg, I believe we can do that through a theoretically grounded orientation towards an inclusive/participatory university-community partnership that the Anchin Center for the Advancement of Teaching could play a supporting role in (Yosso, 2005; Zygmunt et al., 2018). To support this, the study's research approach will be grounded in a culturally adaptive blend of the emancipatory asset-based approaches similar to those in the thinking

around community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016) that are also compatible with the other processes the university can eventually bring to bear such as culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995) as and when it collaborates with the community in any effort towards transformative place-based change in ECE. This is critical as a vast "array of knowledges, skills, abilities, and networks [are] possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (Yosso, & Burciaga, 2016, p. 1) and that by acknowledging this means working to move past deficit thinking (or outright oppressive action) behind the dominant culture's approach to "managing" educational change initiatives through exclusion (hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970/1993). While Cultural Wealth was initially founded on Yosso's work in Latino communities, its close anchoring to Critical Race Theory, and her later work to broaden it to align with the lived experience of people of color (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016) allows this study to cautiously explore its utility in the realm of addressing the historical trauma and the disparities faced in the African-American communities as advocated by Gay (2018) and Ladson-Billings (2021b). Another vital piece is very much in the hearts and minds of the individuals and organizations that make up the Concerned Organizations for the Quality Education of Black Students. "COQEBS" has a long relationship with USF and this history and published COQEBS documentation forms the basis for the analysis effort to support this study's objectives.

While Rinaldi (2013) has urged caution, there are valuable lessons from the rich experience that formed the "Reggio-way" that are fully coherent with identifying place-based needs and facilitating the beginnings of community-led programs that better serve children and their families in a manner that is relevant, effective, and sustainable. Reggio also shows us that the active inclusion of parents in the delivery of the resulting curriculum as one of the child's

teachers immediately points us towards a longer-run focus on family enrichment (Penney et al., 2019) and, from the start, these skills building aspects could be considered for inclusion in the curriculum the community identifies and adopts. In the local context that is informed by African American ways of knowing, the notion of the teaching virtuosity resident in a village's Kindezi practitioners to help build this capacity links nicely to the formative holistic spirit of the Pedagogista who are deeply embedded in and working on behalf of the community for all its children. At its essence though, as mentioned earlier, the intent of the research program is to help community-based researchers and ECE practitioner-leaders engage the community of South St. Petersburg in a conversation that begins to answer Rinaldi' provocative question in the local context: "what does it mean for South St. Petersburg to be an educating community [for their very youngest children]?"

Culturally Responsive/Anti-racist Research Practice to Support Community Action

After the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 I heard the phrase "nothing about us without us" (Yarbrough, 2019) that echoed back to my work with First Nations communities in Canada. My research experiences during the Midtown Collaborative pre-date those more recent events in the aftermath of the George Floyd murder but they underscored the power of that phrase to me as truth in practice. Learning about the lives of Black and other people of color in America has convinced me that the enabling piece of anti-racist action and fluency in cross-cultural practice are crucial elements in our work as teachers for all children. This conclusion is supported by the thinking of Gay (2018), and I now see anti-racist action to reduce systemic injury due to cultural differences within America as a project worth doing (Ladson-Billings, 2021a, p. 225).

I am also reminded of a famous call to action to bring your "feeling and passion" to

social justice projects that matter (Dewey, 1916, p. 400) and this has me thinking about Critical Theory. Up until recently I have seen myself as a follower of the pragmatic humanism of John Ralston Saul who has written eloquently about the driving need for a "dynamic equilibrium in society" (Saul, 2004). Saul argues that the habit of dualistic thinking given to us as a product of the Enlightenment and Modernism is now problematical. Dualism is a sledgehammer way of thinking about issues and challenges. It is about win/lose, north/south, black/white, us/the other. It is about "dissecting the living paradoxes" that surround us that foreclose possible futures (Barrera et al., 2012). Saul's (2004) concept of Equilibrium calls for a more nuanced and pragmatic approach: one of artistry, craft, and science; and a humanistic balance of the qualities of common sense, ethics, imagination, intuition, memory, reason, and I dare say, compassion. To Saul, "rationality" is too blunt an instrument – too simplistic even – to cope with the complexities we now know face us. Simply put – each of us just cannot "know" enough in the complex world of the 21st Century and we have to trust each other to co-construct a collective sense of "informed and balanced judgment" (p. 317). This in turn recalls Camillus' (2008) and Cantin's (2010) holistic ways of thinking required to solve systemic "wicked problems".

From Critical Theory to Action Through Counter Narrative. According to Bailey (2019), Critical Theory provides a procedural and normative basis for social inquiry that aims itself at decreasing the domination of "established thinking" and at increasing freedom in all its forms. It interrogates the "what is" and asks "what can be?" Further, Critical Theory is unflinching in its demand that if "what is" is oppressive, and this forecloses on someone's productive future possibilities, then "the justice that can be" demands that we act without compromise to tear injustice down (Bailey, 2019). That too sounds like a sledgehammer approach but reflecting on it, Bailey's is a call to use Critical Theory to balance the research

endeavor so that it remains as contingent as possible so that it is "open, alive, and loose" - all the while acting in concert with others to maximize positive outcomes (p. 91). It is also an optimistic and helpful way of being that lines up with recent work around culturally informed, and responsive and sustaining practices in education (Chan, 2011; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021a).

There are also certain parallels here with Saul's (2004) "Equilibrium" in its choice of points of research action that are focused on a positive social justice outcome, and Bailey (2019) shares with Saul the call for compromise, synthesis of ideas, and holistic approaches, which is why it too has an intuitive "sense of rightness" to me. This open, curious, helpful, and responsive stance is a crucial undergirding to my anti-racist inquiry not only to enhance the validity of the research, but to increased understanding for everyone through a humanistic, equity advancing, and asset-based research for action approach (Maxwell, 2012). This is essential because, according to Gay (2018), the cultural hegemony of "orthodox" Euro-American ethnocentric normative views about education runs deep and is the greatest obstacle to moving toward more culturally responsive teaching. In what amounts to a collective failure of imagination, Gay goes on to tell us white middle-class, and predominantly, female educators across America are maintaining biases and unconscious attitudes that block the "acquisition and application of new, culturally relevant pedagogical knowledge, skills and will" to teach minority or disadvantaged students beyond what are considered accepted (or conventional) normative practices (p. 282). She also warns us that this continued failure will exacerbate the dire situation facing some students as their potential to flourish is extinguished unless "we" (specifically "me, and more generally "us" white educators) begin to challenge and support each other to work in the classroom in a manner that makes better meaning to all children through appropriate cultural

frameworks (Gay, 2018, p. 283) – the relationally-oriented ECE programming that maximizes a child's culture-as-a-system-of-meaning. Furthermore, Gay makes the point that the need for this mind-opening counter-narrative represents a life-or-death prospect for many Black children.

Anti-racist Research Practices – Mutual Meaning Making and Respectful Action. As advocated by DiAngelo (2011) I have "reflected" over and over again on the concept of "White Fragility" (p. 67), and I came up with: "so what?" While the concept attempts to be awareness raising about the dominant culture's reaction to counter-oppression action in society, it seems to be more about rationalizing and even excuse making on behalf of white people that was not a particularly stirring or helpful call for personal and practical action for permanent positive change. Robinson (2018) has obviously thought hard about this too, and done more, to move beyond and unlearn his "patterns of oppression that are unconscious". I remain a work in progress, and scholarly activity is proving helpful in propelling my thinking towards daily action against the dominance of my mode of "thinking and feeling" inculcated during my white, middle-class, English upbringing in Canada - what can be at the most charitable be described as the "Euro-American Normative Cultural" (ENC) "ways of being" (Barrera et al., 2012).

Robinson (2018) does not specifically put that name *white supremacist culture* onto the tendency of people of Northern European descent to perpetuate the mechanisms of oppression and racist violence, but he does describe the unconscious ways of being that many people who embody white identities act out that bring about the same sad results. Pasque et al (2021) for their part, are unapologetic when they name this tendency as "anti-Blackness" which manifests as implicit and explicit acts of racism – and "systemic hate" - that are deeply "engrained" in Western society's social, political, legal, and economic systems - including education (p. 3). To

me, the virulent consequences of anti-Blackness on Black bodies that Pasque et al. (2021) describe that arise from the "policies of fear" (p. 3) is white supremacist culture in action. Milner (in Pasque et al., 2021) tells us "racial outsider" researchers ("white folk" with "etic perspectives" [2]) who are working in the education sphere in an effort to shift it towards racial equity and justice need to "reflect on and think about their own challenges and deeply ingrained racist worldviews and beliefs" (p. 7). In order to not fall into racialized and faulty habits of thought that might lead to deficit thinking, labeling, or discounting of the value of an-"other's" ideas, Milner urges us understand that to being an effective outsider researcher is "about transforming your very being… who you are … [and] how you engage - and see and interact with the world (p. 6). This reminds me of what Gay (218) stresses in moving our teaching from "empathy and kindness" to an action-oriented new empathy of the "Caring For" mindset (p. 65). Robinson (2018) points to a way forward for us white folk who want to contribute to positive change in a cross-cultural setting that can be summarized as leaving the etic and defensive orientation of "white fragility" behind, and actively grow harmonious and humanistic "white humility" - and to get involved. To paraphrase his main point: he tells us to take a back seat, watch, listen, and reflect on our biases to become more open to otherness, and then - respectfully and with quiet competence - find a way to be of service (2018, p. 18).

This line of thinking reminds me of Sanders and Farago's (2018) "culture-as-a-system-of-meaning" in relationships that very young children center their own development on. This way of knowing, being, and becoming as a person of value in company with other persons of value resonates for me because I wish I had more of it in me when I was working with Indigenous communities. As Robinson (2018) tells us, I was not the only white person facing

[2] An etic perspective according to Websters refers to an "outsider" orientation in Anthropological research.

this chauvinistic “consciousness” deficit and since that time a lot of work has been done to look into the practice of “Learning by Observing and Pitching-in” (LOPI) described by Urrieta (2015). LOPI engages what Urrieta calls Indigenous Systems of Knowing (ISK) “by observing, listening, [and then] participating with a minimum of intervention [through] competent and respectful behavior” (p. 58). This view is very much in agreement with the need for cross-sector collaboration and the imperative of putting Euro-American Normative industrial approaches to ECE behind us, to focus on equity, and to build cultural responsiveness. The interconnected nature of the indigenous worldview that informs the holistic LOPI ways of being is reflected in the words attributed to Chief Seattle, speaking in 1854, who told us "all things are connected… Man did not weave the web of life; he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself" (Kaiser & Swann, 1987, p 527).

This process of respectful inquiry, reflection, and negotiation of our liberation from our white Euro-American Normative Cultural ways of being with its set of unconscious anti-Blackness biases to one of freedom to engage in intelligent culturally informed, equitable, and responsive action is through reflection and our resulting access to fuller knowledge (self-awareness and truthfulness), engagement, and meaning-making with fellow persons of value. This meaning-making is - and will continue to be - inherently contingent (David, 2015; Moss, 2019). Things will change as new “constructors" arrive to make meaning with me and others and help all of us as we co-create new knowledge. Compassionate critics will arrive to thoughtfully expose weaknesses in our understanding and assumptions, and others will suggest improvements in our ways of engagement, dialogue, and thinking. And an important “but” arises here: post-structuralists such as Foucault (2008) told us - the well thought-through and situated idea that emerges and that we co-construct and articulate well will have a power all its own as it has

shaped us and our future actions (Taylor, 2018). In the meantime - the LOPI ways of being described by Urrieta (2015) serves to show me that doing the research, writing it up, and then letting go of it so it can find its own way into a wider meaning-making process 'out in the world' is a viable path of action.

Identifying the Research and Practice Gap and Looking to a Way Ahead

From the start of this discussion I have maintained that our progress as a Nation towards effective ECE approaches for disadvantaged children has been slipshod at best. Indeed, it is only recently that research practice has shifted focus from studies of the effect of preschool compared to no preschool (with its implication that any kind ECE&C experience is good) to evaluations that look at the type of curriculum and theoretical approaches to preschool education that serve children best (Chambers et al., 2016). Nor am I alone in the view that a focus on social, emotional, and cognitive growth should be central to that agenda and that Relational Teaching practices inherent in a play-based curriculum will help us move forward. As Shriver and Buffett (2015) state:

> *the real core of education is the relationship between the teacher and the student, and the extent to which that relationship nurtures the longing of the child to matter in the world, and the longing of the teacher to nurture and fulfill that desire* (p. xv).

The point that Shriver and Buffet are making is completely consistent with both Noddings and Gay: social-emotional functioning is important for the child's capacity to learn – but so too is the teacher's steady and intentional social-emotional caring in action. "We know that when [SEL is] taught and modeled well by adults in schools, [children's] bonding increases, motivation to learn increases, problem behaviors decrease, and test scores go up" (Shriver & Buffet, 2015, p. vx). These scholars all make the point that is at the heart of this paper – as does Bryk (2010) who found exactly the same effects from rigorous and continuous effort to improve

equity in Chicago's schools (p. 24) - that the essence of high-leverage ECE&C teaching practice and its supporting curriculum is *"the social and emotional dimensions of the learning relationship* [emphasis added]" (Shriver & Buffet, 2015, p. xv.).

From this, the Bridgett Self-regulatory growth model's support to Noddings and Gay notions of a "Caring For" relational pedagogy points to the potential for immediate, positive, and lasting effects that come from a focus on relational and intentional teaching curriculum that promotes both development and emotional trauma repair - especially for children from minority and marginalized families. It is my contention that the hybridity inherent in this conceptual adaptive place-based social, emotional, and cognitive growth model points us towards a set of curricular content elements that can help ameliorate the problems of practice. By centering the teacher's focus on how young brains positively respond to and dynamically develop in relationships, all the while giving them the perspective, the tools, and the resources to be very intentional about their teaching in partnership with the parent and to stay emotionally balanced to avoid feelings of being overwhelmed – both teaching and learning is enhanced in the classroom and beyond. These essential factors are brought into tangible focus by centering them on the notion of being embedded in a community-school for Toddlers – with all the supportive and equity-advancing synergies that can accrue to the families that it serves.

I had imagined that these concepts ought to have spawned at least some research interest, somewhere, but I was surprised to find only the very slimmest indication of any related alignment between the concepts of relational pedagogy, Bridgett et al.'s social-emotional competence model, and curricular development in ECE&C generally, nor was I able to find any significant indications of related scholarly activity centering on African American/BIPOC populations or around participatory approaches to the problem in underserved communities in

the US. Particularly concerning is the complete absence of any apparent work to explicitly link foundational and ongoing scholarly work around the pedagogy of caring generally, or the Pedagogy of Care for Well-being specifically, with the practical aspects of the culturally responsive trauma-sensitive interaction strategies in the context of improving ECE&C practice in marginalized communities. Indeed, research into the implications to trauma-sensitive ECE practice and strength-based family-system thinking was extremely slim. Nor could I find any indication of research around the intersection of these concepts and the expansion of thinking around the potential of participatory pedagogy or community schools to affect positive change in ECE in underserved neighborhoods. These cumulative shortfalls in the research landscape form a yawning gap around place-based, culturally responsive and sustaining, and equity-enhancing ECE&C adaptive approaches to curriculum and teaching practice aimed at addressing the wide-spread effects of systemic racism and Historical Trauma. All this is pointing us urgently towards numerous promising research directions.

Shriver and Buffet (2015) are clear about the multi-layered challenges caused by our society's argument about what constitutes a good start for our young children, with its dips and weaves of Federal and/or state program after program, initiative after initiative. Neither are they shy in scolding us – much as MLK Jr. did – about our lack of action in the "fierce urgency of now." Other scholars are telling us that the depth and breadth of the wicked problem at hand is one that we only beginning to grasp as a society (Blank, 2010; Chambers et al., 2016; Came & Griffith, 2018), and while there is some recent evidence around what is needed to better support ECE teachers (Cassidy et al., 2019; LeMoine, 2020), investigations into the methods to implement workable and deployable concepts for developing high-quality curriculum where the community and the parent are seen as co-creators - or around specific strategies that meet the

even more urgent need for highly-local, adaptable, and culturally responsive whole-child social, emotional, and cognitive growth-oriented play-based ECE and Care toddler programming in underserved communities - appears to be an afterthought in education theory and practice. What is more likely from what I have been able to determine: it is mostly unexplored territory.

A Research Question to Design a CI4Equity Theory of Improvement

In my heart-of-hearts I would dearly love the opportunity to describe the research landscape that I have traversed to the community of interest and talk about what I see as a possible next journey we could perhaps take together. To be realistic though, while I believe that the conceptual community-based curriculum and co-teaching practice model I describe is perfectly viable and equity-advancing when you think of the stories surrounding *Reggio Emilia* (Emerson & Linder, 2019 for instance), I do not have the African American ways of knowing to act as a culturally responsive *Kindezi*. While for now I can aspire to become a culturally responsive 'pedagogista,' the LOPI way of being means that I am going to be still in the moment, listen, observe, and then - when (and if) asked - pitch-in.

In the meantime, the research background I have built in the proceeding pages can be interrogated around the *art of the possible* to find instructive points of counter-narrative in South St. Petersburg in terms of answers to this study's problem of practice around advancing equity via the deeply competent practices inherent in developing, implementing and sustaining relational ECE&C co-teaching partnerships between parents and teachers within a community-centered education environment such as that of a Community-school. As I pointed out earlier on in this dissertation – teachers and schools cannot do this on their own, nor is that the best for the children or the community through an equity lens of the CI4Equity model or of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. As introduced in the proceeding chapter, under this orientation I will use a

grand tour research question centered on Rinaldi's (2013) perspective around the "educative community" that is based on the conceptual ECE&C curriculum development framework and its relational praxis of teacher/parent partnerships and ask:

> What perspectives around relational co-teaching practices do parents and teachers bring to moving Midtown/South St. Petersburg towards a participatory *Whole-community/Whole-child Adaptive Curriculum Development approach for a new Community-School for Toddlers*?

This line of inquiry will be applied to relevant documentation that has been generated by COQEBS over its decade long struggle to improve the educational opportunities and remove barriers to achievement for Black Students in South St. Petersburg. In the next chapter I will describe the means by which I can interrogate that wisdom to find some interesting – and perhaps better – answers for our kids.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Background

I begin here with a cautionary tale. Early in the current millennium I conducted a research project that looked at a parent-teacher advisory process for a publicly funded distance education school serving a large part of Canada's Pacific coast. My research design revolved around concepts of participatory action research; collaboration between parents, teachers, and administrators - and the conceit that emerging Internet-Mediated Communication (IMC) technologies such as email, chat, and rapidly improving virtual conferencing applications, could "change everything" (Levine et al., 2009). In Canada, all students are instructed using their province's approved curriculum and must demonstrate their progression through it towards achieving matriculation, but attendance at a brick-and-mortar school is not necessarily mandatory. This is especially true for students in remote and isolated small communities where school access is problematic, like those on and around the northern half of Vancouver Island. For these kids back then, mom and/or dad were the teachers, and staff from the Provincial government's distance education school provided support and worked to resolve learning challenges that eluded the parents. This model, which, for lots of reasons beyond its reliance on parent engagement and skill, telephone discussions with professional staff, and the postal service, was worse than hit and miss for many students.

I will not go into any further detail other than to say that my bright idea was that Internet technologies that were becoming available could better link students and their parents with

teaching expertise from far away. More to the point, parents and teachers could use those same technologies to connect with each other to improve the curriculum, its content/materials, and instructional quality for the students. The lessons: do not fall in love with your methodology, participatory action research is difficult, and virtual collaboration is not a natural tendency in humans. Not much was achieved (Irvine, 2004), and I reflected on some of the personal bias and other factors that lead to this earlier in this paper.

I am older and slightly wiser now and one component of the Carnegie Foundation's project of the Education Doctorate (CPED, 2021) has resonance to me for thinking about methodology: the idea of "Inquiry as Practice." The process of identifying and defining essential questions regarding "complex problems of practice" to be addressed (CPED, 2021) sounds Action 'Researchy' to the social justice warrior in me (Kirby & McKenna, 1989), so I am all in! Meanwhile, that older slightly wiser researcher in me really wants to hedge my bets. Fortunately, Maxwell (2012) provides me with solace when he challenges us to be clear about what motivates us to take up our research agenda and the importance of doing the study in the first place, and "*what you want to accomplish by doing it!* [emphasis added]" (p. 4).

The Researcher Paradigm – Becoming a Radical

In the previous chapter I talked about the work embodied by this this study as being a project worth tackling - a "call to action" - that I could apply my feeling and passion to. These were nice ways of centering myself on the problem of practice but underlying it all is a simmering outrage I feel. My journey from Canada to here in America with their differing social justice landscapes has radicalized me and in academia that is dangerous stuff (Connell, 2019). So - to answer Maxwell's (2012) challenge of what do I want to accomplish through this research? - I want to add to the conversation about how to give young African American children a better

start than many of them have been getting. While this is not a radical thought, given the situation - and the situated context of today - the solution to the problem practice will require radical changes in thinking, doing, and being across multiple domains and across multiple boundaries in our society – action that Ladson-Billings (2021b) calls a radical "hard-reset" in educational practice for Black students.

Earlier I talked about my Midtown Project experiences that were so formative and continue to inspire me. But I can also remember Tamir Rice being gunned down in Cleveland, Ohio by a white police officer as if it were yesterday, as I can Trayvon Martin's death at the hands of George Zimmerman. I also remember earlier days and the Kanehsatà:ke Resistance in Oka, Quebec where the Canadian Army was called in to allow the construction of a golf course on what the Mohawk considered sacred land. As an active member of the military at the time I sided with the Government in that decision. I have come a long way from there intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and - hopefully - karmically.

My Positionality in the Research Endeavor. I say "karmically" primarily from the point of view of firmly grounding my positionality in undertaking the research program as defined by the current study. As a middle-class, white woman raised on military bases in central and western Canada in the 1970s and having joined the "family business", the centrality of my roots are firmly in the Anglo-Canadian establishment and its "settler culture" – and having graduated from my country's equivalent of America's West Point – I had more than a bit of "elitist" sensibilities: attitudes and biases that I find I continue to confront in myself. I began to do so once I committed to my "queerness" as a member of the LGBTQ community beginning in the late 90s and the journey from there has given me a very modest appreciation for the anti-Blackness "policies of fear" and racist brutality of the dominant white culture that Pasque et al.

(2021) describe as pervasive in their oppressive and deadly effects for Black people in America. I have experienced caustic effects of othering, I have marched in Pride parades, and I have seen the same (or at least similar) hatred in the eyes of anti-gay protestors, and I know and have worked with survivors of the Pulse Nightclub massacre. That said, I acknowledge that my whiteness, my education due to my privilege, and the luck I have had in maintaining a decent living and professional work-life – all maintain my outsider status in relationship to the communities of color I wish to serve in the fight to end systemic racism and "raise the spirit level" of equity for everyone (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). This brings me to my change of worldview that empowers my work and why Milner's advice to "white researchers" in the previous chapter about the need to transform our "very being… [and] who you are …" to be effective in our work with Black communities resonates for me.

My fight with myself to become authentic took a toll on my body, mind, and spirit and by the time I acknowledged who I was, old injuries I suffered from the reckless abandon that I played sports to distract myself during my days as an athlete became debilitating. In desperation – and, frankly, in my loneliness - I turned to eastern philosophy and tried mediation, found Qigong and Tai Chi, and, eventually, Taoist modes of thinking (Smith, 1991, pp 196-220). The founder of the Tai Chi organization I joined was a Taoist monk and his teachings grounded us in physical practice to balance the body, mind, and spirit while working to bring harmony in our personal relationships. This inner balance and harmony as a way of being stems from within and (ideally) outwardly manifests itself as embodied ethical "caring action," to use the words of Gay (2018) I described earlier, so that *all cultures move together in harmony* – the motto of the organization. In the context of the current study, this motto is reminiscent of Chan's (2011) call for *critical multiculturalism* in our work in community and Totikidis and Prilleltensky's (2006)

point that intra and intercultural harmony within and across stakeholders, participants and groups is vital to our ultimate collective success (p. 63). This mode of thinking is now central to my reconstructed worldview. I have learned (and continue to relearn) that every person is a "person of value", that cultures different than my own are admirable, and that I must diligently strive to be a person of value who is trustworthy, upholds justice, works towards harmony in all my relationships (Yarbrough, 2019), and - in the words of my Tai Chi master - do what I can to "help people".

It is this motivation that brought me to USF to start work on my master's in psychology to answer my own questions as a scientist around how Tai Chi worked so well on me to change my "biopsychosocial" competence. From there I literally fell in with the Family Study Center Midtown Collaborative team who needed a graduate assistant/data analyst. The rest – as they say – is history. So while I am white, I am by no means a savior. Indeed - I might be the one that is being saved, for as I said above, I may very well owe a huge karmic debt - and that might go to some of the outrage I feel. But, in an effort to remain balanced, and to work diligently towards all cultures in harmony, what I outlined in the proceeding chapter about critical theory and discourse will help me maintain a stance of openness while I grow my understanding of the value of diversity and my cultural responsivity through cheerful persistence – and perhaps come a bit closer to meeting the mark set earlier by Milner.

Certainly, the results of the Midtown Collaborative point towards lots of work to do, so – to borrow the spirit of Robinson's (2018) advice - it is best to get on with it and get involved with heart, respect, humility, quiet competence, and dedication – and do what I can to help people of value. The advice of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is worth keeping in mind: as I will "walking in the midst of other peoples' stories", I must hold those dearly, pass them on

faithfully, and do no harm. Given that, perhaps a little outrage just might be what is needed to help capture the essence of and add power to their retelling. If that retelling helps to make a positive difference - even in a very minor way - that is good too.

The Research Setting

As was introduced in the opening chapter, in 2017 the Family Study Center at USF's St. Petersburg Campus initiated a quality improvement project funded by the Florida state legislature that was aimed at serving very young children (birth to age six) and their families in South St. Petersburg through an investment in teaching quality at their early learning centers. The "Midtown Project" targeted childcare centers in the Midtown area of South St. Petersburg that were already serving the community's most at-risk and under-resourced families (Hughes et al., 2018). As discussed earlier, that project attempted to increase teacher and administrator awareness of the impact of intergenerational historical trauma, toxic stress, poverty, and social stressors on children's social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development. In lots of ways this study is the child of that collaborative ECE quality improvement initiative in the context of a continuing university-community partnership.

Design of the Current Study

Stories underlie the entire human journey. Some are inspiring, some are sad, absurd and/or messy, and many are horrifying. All of them inform our future (Bronowski, 1973, p. 56). As a social scientist and ECE and Care researcher – looking for and listening to stories will inform me and, more importantly, they will inform the research I do – and qualitative document analysis of community dialogue records will inform all of us (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Bowen, 2009).

'Family Systems' Cross-Sector Thinking

When I was a very young social scientist (before I even knew that was the best description of how I roll) I vividly remember the British Broadcasting Corporation's *Ascent of Man* series written and presented by the distinguished mathematician and philosopher Dr. Jacob Bronowski. (My father; a crusty, no-nonsense senior Air Force officer loved it too, so this is a dear memory of mine.) Since then, I have held close to my heart Professor Bronowski's point about the "Long Infancy" of the individual human being (Bronowski, 1973, p. 411) – and this is a vitally important point that undergirds the current research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A successful transition through infancy, and toddlerhood for that matter, is a distinctly human *social act*. Simply put: our species would have become extinct without that evolutionary adaptation – and how wonderful is that? Almost magical according to Bronowski, and the term "Long Infancy" is an interesting double-entendre. Bronowski's other point is that we really have only very recently evolved into the modern form of homo sapiens we are today – that we too are still in our infancy as a species, and we are only beginning to understand how to live in our newly urbanized world. Indeed, we could argue that our emerging concepts of ECE are social responses to the avalanche of change that has upended the balance of our "species specific" family/clan/tribe biopsychosocial system, and that this seismic shift has occurred only very recently in what is a blink of the eye in evolutionary time (Bronowski, 1973, p. 19). The point remains however – and this is key: families and the imprint of their extended kinship relationships continues to exist, *and* this is the source of the wealth of embodied wisdom and cultural ways of knowing as valuable assets in shaping an individual's development we wish to tap – what González et al (2006) call "Funds of Knowledge" (FoK).

While FoK has its roots in the work of educators in the context of Latino family systems and community cultural assets, it has utility here when generalized as a conceptual construct since the other reality that falls out of the line of reasoning above is that any dialogue around the ideas about what works for "early childhood" education is deeply rooted both in culture and in the situated context of individual family systems (McHale et al., 2019). It is this web of past, present, and future experiences that is the source of the collective cultural assets (or "cultural wealth") the community can engage in and with to make the changes they see as vital to their children's future (Yosso, 2005). This cross-cultural and asset-full thinking about our human origins, our collective knowledge, and our past successes (our 'hereditary cultural assets and family know-how' if you will), and the power of stories allows me to delineate a set of guiding principles to my method of research that is implied throughout the reasoning and analysis earlier in Chapter II. While the conceptual roots of FoK and Cultural Wealth stem from work in communities and families, cultural frames that differ from Black experience in America, when viewed through a critical multicultural lens (Chan, 2011) and tempered with the sustaining effects of cultural relevance and responsivity advocated by Ladson-Billings (1995; 2021c) and Gay (2018), these concepts form a point of departure that are aligned with the CI4Equity model (MAEC, 2022a) and are helpful in comprehending stories from families in Midtown and illuminate cross-sector innovations to improve their lives. Table 5 on the next page represents the operationalization of this thinking into concrete steps in implementing a qualitative document analysis research agenda informed in the spirit of Narrative Inquiry (Mertova & Webster, 2020; Kim, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in the context of the study's design.

Table 5

The Study's Guiding Principles as Commitments to the Community of Interest.

Principle	Commitment
First	I will work to provide culturally responsive input to help generate community action.
Second	To do this, I will aim to deconstruct the dominant culture's views about what is right for "our kids."
Third	My mantra is based on Yarbrough's (2020) call for researchers to be mindful of your need for "nothing about us without us": I will first and foremost seek to understand what "you" think is right for "your kids".

Note. This matrix of researcher commitments is inspired by the thinking expressed by Barrera et al. (2012) about how to work towards an "anchored understanding of diversity" that promotes culturally responsive action.

Qualitative Research as 'Social Action'

As I mentioned earlier, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind us of the need to proceed with deep respect when they described Bateson's anthropological work as "walking into the midst of stories" and this then forms a road map to follow in the implementation of the study's design around the concepts of an "anchored understanding of diversity" inherent in Skilled Dialogue (Barrera et al., 2012) to capitalize on the natural outgrowth of people moving from individualistic outlooks of control (and of seeking to maintain their sense of safety) to broader and more inclusive perspectives that allow relationships to form and open up the potential for collaborative "miracles" to happen (p. 24). While the data sources of not full narratives, they do come from individuals in the context of their unique lived experiences and so this approach to analyzing dialogue contained in documentation is completely in line with the guiding principles/commitments in Table 5 above. The centrality of community in the theoretical basis of asset-based thinking in an African American context is somewhat similar to the more generalized

approach to participatory pedagogical practice (Miller, 2019). It can also be generalized – at least as a starting point – through asset-based thinking processes that, while centered on Latino communities (such as Funds of Knowledge from González et al., 2006; and Cultural Wealth – Yosso, 2005, and Rodriguez, 2011), are supplemental to and reinforce the asset-full and strength-based approaches given to us by African American scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995; 2021b) through "culturally relevant pedagogy". This is further bolstered by Yarbrough (2020) who urges us "white folk" (recalling Milner's in Pasque et al., 2021, above) to rigorously maintain *cultural humility* as the central stance in implementing and activating our research methodologies (p. 69).

Data Generation

The bulk of the data informing this qualitative study comes from the analysis of documentary data generated in part by the USF Research Foundation funded partnership project initiated by USF College of Education. This larger project is intended to identify the essential elements, configuration and programming of a community engaged, high-quality early childhood education and care center with wrap-around health, mental health, and social services in a high-need neighborhood in St. Petersburg, Florida. An early element of that project was the participation of research staff from USF's David C. Anchin Center for the Advancement of Teaching in the Baby Talk Week workshop held in late February 2022. I served as a graduate research assistant in that effort.

Baby Talk/Listening to Babies Week

In early 2011, in response to the plethora of issues outlined earlier in this paper, a newly formed community group called the Concerned Organizations for the Quality Education of Black Students held its inaugural "Baby Talk" parent involvement evening at St. Petersburg College's

Allstate campus (COQEBS, 2021). Within a few years, what had become an annual Thursday-evening parent involvement event was expanded to include a Friday workshop for professionals from agencies serving families of infants and toddlers, and a Saturday continuing education (CE) workshop for area ECE and childcare practitioners so that the last week of February each year became known as "Baby Talk Week" (COQEBS, 2021).

Up until recently Baby Talk Week and its associated "Listening to Babies" (LTB) CE workshop series had looked primarily into the features of developmentally appropriate practice for Black and Brown children ages 'zero to three' (as distinguished from those aimed at older preschoolers) in the St. Petersburg context and more specifically the Midtown area. More recently this orientation was broadened to include older pre-school children and increasingly on their successful transition to kindergarten. The hope for the 2022 Baby Talk-Listening to Babies event (BT-LTB2022) was that a series of planned focus groups would capture the collective wisdom of parents, agency professionals and ECE practitioners regarding the most important ongoing issues related to educational and social supports for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) infants, toddlers, and other young children in the community.

To coordinate this, a team of Black/African American facilitators – including members of the COQEBS School Readiness Committee (SRC), and other associated providers, professionals, and advocates from the private, non-profit, and public sectors – led a series of focus groups on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at Pinellas Technical College located in South St. Petersburg. The Baby Talk Week organizers were also very intentional this past year about gathering and analyzing the views and perspectives of the parents, professionals and ECE providers and I participated in this effort through the winter and spring of 2022 as the convening committee's research coordinator and data analyst. Consistent with the discussions that took place prior to and

after the event, this study will serve as part of the follow-on community research partnership effort that is currently being considered by the COQEBS SRC (COQEBS, 2022b).

BT-LTB2022 Workshop Structure and Dialogue Data Collection. The focus groups over the three-day event were organized around three child age categories – zero to age 3, ages 3 to 4 (i.e. before entering VPK), and children having made the transition to VPK and/or were beginning kindergarten. Each of these break-out sessions was digitally recorded. Most focus group attendees participated live, but a concurrent virtual session was also held during each round of breakouts for those who could not come in person. Over one hundred individuals from the community contributed to the focus group discussions over three days.

***Thursday's Parent Sessions*.** This evening event was what has been traditionally called "Baby Talk Night" and as introduced above, it had centered primarily on infant and toddler early development. Over the years interest had grown to include pre-school aged children with an increasing focus on school readiness. During this year's event, well over thirty parents attended and of these, twenty-nine participants contributed to the dialogue in five different break-out groups. This discussion was captured using iPad voice-recorder technology for later transcription and analysis. An organizing committee member facilitated each group, and they were assisted by a trained recorder from the SRC, or an associated agency, who also took notes to capture main themes and anything of particular interest. The parents participated in either one of the two 0-to-3 groups, the two 3-to-4 Groups, or the kindergarten break-out session. This gave us five session recordings and resulting transcripts.

Friday's Professional Development Day. A total of thirty-three professionals from various agencies participated during Friday's "BT-LTB2022 Pro-D Day" and break-out session dialogue that was captured in the same manner as described above. Ten individuals participated

in two separate virtual sessions (not counting the moderators/recorders), and twenty-three were recorded in-person groups – again distributed amongst a number of 0-to-3, 3-4, or kindergarten groups. Unfortunately, a technical difficulty resulted in no recording of the dialogue being captured during the kindergarten in-person session giving us a total of seven recordings/transcripts for this day.

Saturday's Practitioner Continuing Education Day. Thirty-five ECE teachers and childcare providers took part in this event to gain CEU credit. Again, interest was strong around the 0-3 topic and twenty-three individuals participated in the dialogue that took place in one of three 0-to-3 groups. Two other in-person break-out sessions took place, one for 3-4, and one for kindergarten group.

BT-LTB2022 Dialogue Recording Activity Summary. Over the three days the break-out groups varied in size with between no fewer than four to no more than twelve participants taking part in the dialogue that was captured (not including the moderators/facilitators and recorders). The typical number of "dialoguing participants" in any one group was six. As a result a total of seventeen recordings of about 40 minutes each were captured. This then yields approximately 12 hours of dialogue for analysis. It is interesting to note that the Thursday and Saturday sessions included the participation by some community members who were both ECE practitioners and parents of children in daycare/pre-school. Effort to tease out the input of these "dual-perspective participants" will be undertaken in order to surface their views from their unique position that spans the two sides of the question of the co-teaching partnership that is central interest of the current study.

COQEBS' 2022 Baby Talk/Listening to Babies Research Questions. On the first night's parents' session, a standardized four-question script was used by each break-out session

facilitator with only slight wording changes to align the language to the applicable age of the children who constituted that discussion group's focus. The resulting questions were as follows:

1. *Tell us what are the most important things for your baby [child] to have - both from you at home and during out of home childcare - to meet their needs?*
2. *What supports are your child getting to help meet those needs?*
3. *For the needs that are not being met, what else would be helpful?*
4. *What is missing in our community? - and what can parents do in the meantime, if they encounter situations where their children's needs are not being met?* (COQEBS, 2022b)

The questions for the professionals and providers sessions were similar in intent but were written to try to capture what respondents knew about how their perspective different from parents:

1. *What things do children need most to be ready to thrive in out of home childcare/Pre-K/Kindergarten?*
2. *How does that differ from what you think parents say their children need?*
3. *How can we close the gap between what you think and what parents think?* (COQEBS, 2022b)

LTB2022 Preliminary Findings. An initial analysis of the dialogue was conducted to surface main themes for follow-up by the SRC and COQEBS over the next year and to help with future programming and planning for the next Baby Talk/LTB series. Based on the initial analysis and the ongoing review by the convening committee and members of COQEBS/SRC a set of guiding immediate next steps for follow-up over the balance of 2022 were identified. Per COQEBS (2022b), these were:

1. *More frequent parent support, coping, and educational group meetings (i.e. "mini- Baby-Talk" sessions).*
2. *Peer/parent mentor/navigator (resourceful, relatable, knowledgeable, community-based advocate) to facilitate linkages to wrap-around services.*

3. *Look into Social Media infrastructure to reach families.*
4. *Investigate the status of Pre-K to K transitions and determine if further monitoring and accountability measures are required.* (COQEBS, 2022b)

Data for the Current Study

As part of COQEBS effort to demonstrate transparency and to promote further research, the archive of the anonymized transcripts of the focus group discussions are publicly available (COQEBS, 2022a and are listed in Appendix B) and this will form the main source of the data for the document analysis phase of this study. These and other associated data sources relevant to this study are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

The study's Field Text Descriptions and Data Sources

Data Type	Primary Sources	Secondary Sources
	▪ Emails and associated Field Notes ▪ Conversation Field Notes ▪ Field Observation Notes [a] ▪ Document Review Field Notes [b]	▪ Research Journal entries/ reflections ▪ Researcher Critical Event Field Notes

Notes. Sources and delineations are based on Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 80)
[a] From the BT-LTB2022 planning events I attended as well as the event itself.
[b] Event documentation and data from the BT-LTB2022 Workshop itself (COQEBS, 2022a and Appendix B item 1). The 17 associated transcripts described previously form the key data set for the study.

Data Analysis Plan

The dialogue-based data arising from BT-LTB2022 described above were examined using qualitative approaches to document analysis methodology (Bowen, 2009), and were informed by the spirit of narrative inquiry (Mertova & Webster, 2020; Kim, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To stay true to the "anchored understanding of diversity" commitments

expressed in Table 5, and to increase the effectiveness of this qualitative documentary analysis approach, I also used a constant comparative methodology throughout the analysis process (Boeije, 2002). The heuristic nature of the constant comparative technique was thought to be valuable in confirming and firm up an initial set of codes (Bowen, 2009, p. 37) and to facilitate identification of patterns in the A Priori analysis of the transcripts. Building on this idea of constant comparison during that first pass to generates richer patterns and themes, those could then be applied to the document set as associated post-hoc codes as they arose is also described by Kim (2016, p. 189) as follow-on "paradigmatic analysis." This interactive approach to the data environment (Maxwell, 2012) and the nested (or inter-locking, or inter-woven) nature of participant dialogue is shown as follows:

> Codes. Identifying concepts from raw data through multiple coding processes.
>
> Categories. Linking codes to create a unit or category.
>
> Patterns. Identifying repeated units from categories or inter-relationships amongst coded data; and
>
> Themes. Creating thematic groupings that represent similar patterns. Kim (2016, p. 189)

The above approach is iterative, with each cycle of analysis informing each area in synergistic manner. To provide an level of insight into the data in the early stages of the process, my strategy was to 'swim in the data' (a term I learned from my professors during my time studying for my MA at Royal Roads University in Canada) and I hear echoes of that idea in Bowen's (2009) point that the researcher "is the instrument" (p. 36). In my experience, you soon bump into the 'big stuff' that is on the surface, but it is harder to find and connect to the 'interesting stuff' that requires you to dive 'down deep.' This is Kim's paradigmatic analysis of looking below the surface text of the dialogue to reveal the inherent paradigms they represent. In terms of this study, this 'interesting stuff' is the parent and community member perceptions

about the notion of the collaborative development of a place-centered ECE curriculum and supports to an intentional co-teaching partnership with ECE teachers through a highly intentional, equitable, and culturally responsive and sustaining lens of and for the community (Ladson-Billings, 2021b; 2021c). This also defines the central challenge of a study examining ECE theory and practice (or that of any educational activity) and the usefulness of qualitative techniques as described by Mertova and Webster (2020):

> While education has long acknowledged the contributions of science and cognition to learning research… [we must accept that] …learning involves "something else," beyond science and cognition. (p. 123)

Mertova and Webster's thinking goes to the heart of my theoretical context for the current study. It is that ineffable "something else" that Mertova and Webster talk about that makes up the 'interesting stuff' I was hoping to find and why I choose to focus on qualitative document analysis methodologies. As introduced above, in this early analysis phase special attention was taken to trace and surface the contributions of the dual-perspective participants since that data may form interesting early themes for further investigation throughout the data set. Perspective taking is central not only to conceptual model around parent-teacher partnerships, but it is the 'interesting stuff' that has the potential to form the common ground to move towards the broader cross-sector collaboration required to find meaningful and sustainable solutions (Barrera et al., 2012).

Coding

From my perspective as an education researcher and practitioner, the above process has already produced (and will continue to add to) a proliferation of qualitative data from Field Texts and other sources identified before, during, and after the BT-LTB2022 event that took place (as

described earlier in Table 6). Three distinct phases to the data analysis plan consist of an a Priori/initial analysis phase (which can be thought of a first pass coding effort), a Post-hoc "deeper dive" - the thematic paradigmatic re-analysis - based on emergent patterns/themes and interesting "something else(s)" in the workshop dialogue (as indicated by the inter-linked nature of the codes and categories per Kim, 2016 above), and a Post Hoc analysis phase that, was left somewhat contingent and loose in the spirit of constant comparative approaches to qualitative research more generally (Boeije, 2002; Bowen, 2009). Prior to the formal analysis phases an Ad Hoc data quality checking process was undertaken to exercise the NVIVO application to build added confidence in the analysis output coming from the application.

A Priori Coding and the Initial Analysis Framework. Determining an A Priori approach to start the coding process of the documentation that was available formed an important consideration in beginning to make sense of the data and, according to Saldaña (2013), this needs to be based on the research question and theoretical framework of the study (p. 60). Bandura gave us a useful place to start with his ideas around "reciprocal interactions" and a resulting triadic social cognitive model for building agency (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Figure 5 (shown on the next page) is a rendition of Bandura's Reciprocal Interactions model (Bandura, 1978) modified to parallel the study's setting and the theoretical relational co-teaching model's influence on the conceptual curriculum. This formed the basis of eighteen initial codes grouped in six categories, specifically: the personal/social cognitive processes of adults, their interactive relationship processes, and their external environmental processes, plus their views of these processes in children.

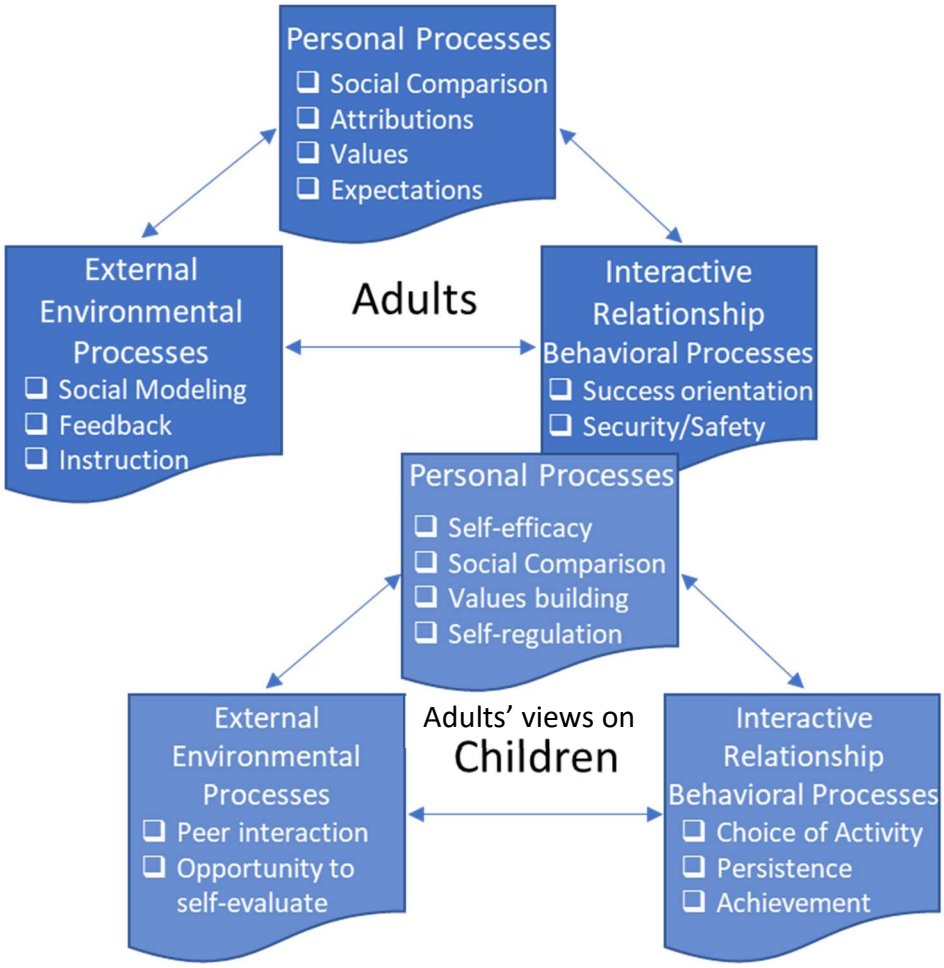

Figure 5

Mapping Data to the Theoretical Framework on Bandura's Reciprocal Interaction Social Cognitive Model for building agency (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Bandura's triadic interaction framework tracks well with the Campbell et al. (2016) domains of social, emotional, and cognitive development and competence that form the basis of the conceptual construct of the Social Learning Loop that was constructed in Chapter II. Table 7 on the next page displays the initial (or A Priory) Category and Code typology.

Table 7

Data Analysis Framework: Categories and Codes

Theoretical Basis	Category	Code
Bandura's Reciprocal Interaction Model		
	Personal Processes of Adults[1]	▪ Social Comparison ▪ Attributions ▪ Values ▪ Expectations
	Adult External Environmental Processes[1]	▪ Social Modeling ▪ Feedback ▪ Instruction
	Adult Interactive Relationship Behavioral Processes	▪ Success orientation ▪ Security/Safety (Concerns)
	Adult's views on Personal Processes of Children	▪ Self-efficacy ▪ Social Comparison ▪ Values building ▪ Self-regulation
	Adult views on Children's External Environmental Processes	▪ Peer interaction ▪ Opportunity to self-evaluate
	Adult views on Children's Interactive Relationship Behavioral Processes	▪ Choice of Activity ▪ Persistence ▪ Achievement

Note. 1. These two areas will be main coding groupings since the research question centers on the perspectives of teacher and parents in the context of a partnership approach.

The approach to the A Priori analysis for this study benefited from the data output from the OTTER digital meeting transcription application's speech-to-text transcription process (www.otter.ai) used after the BT-LTB2022 event. This feature greatly facilitated the immediate post event data analysis process where tight turn-around times were imposed that precluded traditional manual transcription processes and the resulting inventory of breakout session transcripts that arose from the event is listed in Appendix B. This formed the primary source of

documentation for this analysis and this detailed data set was revisited, re-examined, and then coded in the NVIVO application produced by QSR International (www.qsrinternational.com) using the Reciprocal Interactions framework.

As part of the A Priori phase, the results were analyzed to establish patterns and themes (per Kim, 2016), again facilitated by the NVIVO application. Boeije's (2002) constant comparative approach also allowed me to improve the granularity of the follow-on Post Hoc coding and categorization process through the key informant interview sessions that I conducted concurrently with the later stages of the A Priori phase. This helped to confirm themes and patterns and develop new ones in line with the research question and the mutual paradigmatic analysis approach with further input from the key informants as recommended by Kim (2016). A source/event/timestamp critical event tag system supported by NVIVO will also allow the ongoing tracking and retrieval of the dialogue artifacts as the analysis took place.

The Post Hoc Analysis Approach

I conducted the final cycle of analysis in the spirit of the community-partnership that the Anchin Center committed to for the BT-LTB2022 event. On completion of the A Priori analysis, I produced an initial results document that was discussed with my key informants/stakeholders/ critical friends for their feedback and was this informed the construction of the Post Hoc coding structure. This process was repeated with the stakeholders in the later stages of the Post Hoc phase to confirm those results and to address areas of special interest/concern collaboratively. Again, the timestamp codes helped me stay organized for this activity - and showed diligence around transparency and verifiability. This further bolstered the evaluative nature of the study while providing something akin to the comparative and interactive approach per Boeije (2002), Bowen (2009), and Maxwell (2012).

Study Ethics Management

An application for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was submitted for this project as an exempt educational practice quality improvement study. I assessed the research ethics risk to USF to be very low as the study did not involve any experimental inventions, participant interviews, etc., and was intended to highlight educational needs in the community. The departmental screening and subsequent IRB review determined the study did not constitute research involving human subjects. An exemption to the study (IRB ID: STUDY004490) was granted (see Appendix C).

Limitations of the Study

The study is focused on qualitative analysis of dialogue to better understand specific experiences of specific people, and that briefly, highlights both the power of and the limitations to the methodology (Mertova & Webster, 2020). Its power is in the here and the now, and the lessons that can be learned will potentially project themselves into the where-ever of a possible future in South St. Petersburg. The other side of that coin is the difficulties we face in generalizability, transferability, and the reliability of storied individual experience. In the context of this study however, the where-ever is a specific place – Midtown – and the future as Gay (2018) says, starts *Now,* and "with deliberate speed" from where you and your children are at and where you go together (p. 290). Seconding this view in the context of the high stakes involved and the urgency in which we should act, Mayakestan and Sarvanathan (2019) tell us that qualitative research methodologies can propel a study forward in the face of the "Wicked Problems" that defy quantification – such as those in the social justice and equity sphere as this study is so clearly facing, and this then adds power to its broader applicability.

Indeed, while acknowledging the limitations of qualitive research methods, Mertova and Webster (2020) advocate for a rethinking of validity and reliability (p. 78). To them, actual validity and reliability boil down to researchers remaining faithful to the "qualitative data" – i.e. the stories entrusted them – by being rigorous in the record keeping, accounting for, ensuring traceability of, and access to, the research record in way that is comprehensive and comprehensible to those that are interested in – or subject to - the results. The constant comparative methodology (Boeije, 2002; Bowen, 2009) as outlined in the data analysis section with its focus on mutually reinforcing analysis/re-analysis phases rides to the rescue here because that "accounting" and transfer function is central to its operating principle. Attention to the protocols outlined in the data analysis process described above should bolster the validity that the inherent honesty of a 'heartfelt true story' well told that Mertova and Webster (2020) tells us is the real strength of qualitative research in general (p. 85).

Summary

This qualitative research study is grounded in the reciprocal interactive nature of family and community cultural assets. The research design was centered on culturally responsive practices inherent in the respectful listening to meaningful stories generated through dialogue and then analyzed through computer-aided qualitative document analysis techniques - and further bolstered by constant comparative techniques. Guided by the MAEC CI4Equity-oriented approach, this approach contributed to validity of the theory of improvement that community members and ECE leaders can consider and, perhaps, use to look towards a way forward to initiate a participatory pedagogical practice to implement an adaptive Place-based Education and Care Curriculum framework that supports parent/teacher co-teaching partnerships to improve the early learning outcomes of very young children in South St. Petersburg.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

The transcripts of the dialogue from the 2022 Baby Talk/Listening to Babies three-day event were reviewed using a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) approach. The NVIVO application (from QSR International) was employed as the CAQDAS tool for this review using the methodology outlined in the proceeding chapter.

Initial Data Quality Review and Ad Hoc Analysis

As a first step, I conducted a high-level review of the transcripts using the NVIVO application to assess the quality of the 17 transcript files from the various breakout sessions over the three days. To gain an appreciation of the scope, scale, and depth of the dialogue; the application detected approximately 44,000 content meaningful words (excluding pronouns, prepositions, articles, conjunctions, etc.). From that mass of data, I used NVIVO to examine the top 85 percent of these content words which resulted in the profile description shown in Table 8 (on the next page).

Looking at the transcripts further, it became clear that the word “know” - with its frequency of occurrence of 1468 times out of the 37,112 total - tends to skew these results slightly because the participants employ it and other verbal devices as linking phrases (such as,“you know?” and “right?”). Further examination of the data points revealed that “Right” occurred 366 times, as well as other similar verbal ticks (such as “yep” that occurred 9 times).

Table 8

Descriptive Characteristics of the transcripts' Content Meaningful Words[1] *occurring more than twice in the data.*

Words that appear more than twice in the Dataset[2]	Average Word Length[3]	Word Count	Percentage of All Meaningful Words[4] (%)	Word Frequency Range (# of Occurrences)	
				Baseline "Worker"	Ceiling "Know"
1722	6	37,112	85	3	1468

Notes. 1. Pronouns, prepositions, articles, conjunctions, etc. were excluded.
2. This level of acuity was somewhat arbitrary but is in line with the Pareto Principle (80/20 Rule).
3. The minimum word length was set to three characters.
4. Out of 43,682 Content Meaningful Words.

Further inspection revealed a few other anomalies, such as treating numeric and alpha-numeric strings as words, such as "2022", "iPad1185", and "0to3" and others, which are actually artifacts of the transcripts' titles and headings. This particular issue can then be assessed as very minor since the word frequency rate from all 10 instances of this particular set of problem "words" had a frequency range of 3 to 13 occurrences making up a total of less than 0.1 percent of all 37,000 or so top-level results.

Based on the high-level content appreciation outlined above, particularly from the perspective of a qualitative assessment, a good degree of confidence emerged that NVIVO was providing a sufficiently rich return of what it assessed as meaningful content from this initial pass through the transcripts to allow its continued use for more intensive analysis. See Appendix D, Section 1 for the results of this initial top-level data quality review.

High-level Qualitative Content Cluster Analysis. Subsequent to the basic data checking and descriptive effort described above, I re-examined the word count list using NVIVO's cluster analysis tool to see whether any interesting word pairings and word proximity

groupings were present. The results of this Ad Hoc analysis are also included in Appendix D and a representation of a small portion of the application's output is shown in Figure 6.

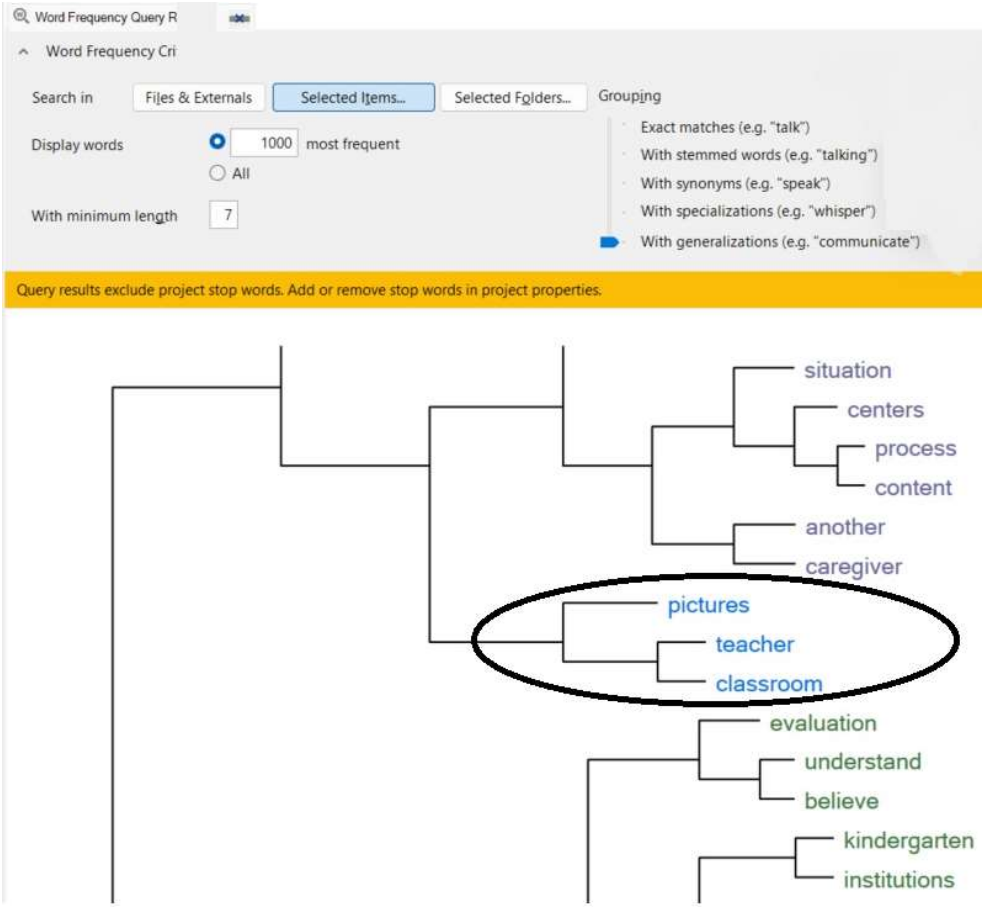

Figure 6

Sample output from NVIVO's cluster analysis tool.

You will note from Figure 6 that I set the NVIVO Word Cluster tool to look for the 1000 most frequent words that occur either in combination or in close proximity to each other and I further defined the word length at a minimum of seven characters long. I also selected the application's settings for moderate word similarity and "with generalizations" as the word grouping criteria to broaden the range of that sorting function as much as possible. Overall, the limbs, branches, and twigs of word cluster tree the application returned were found to be fairly innocuous on my examination. The one exception that immediately stood out was "teachers" paired with

"classroom," with that pair clustered with "pictures" (shown in Figure 6 inside the ellipse). It is interesting that this relatively high-level branch arises where "teacher(s)" occurs 177 times in the transcripts and "classroom(s)" (generalized further as "class" and "classes") appears 76 times. "Picture(s)" on the other hand occurs only 38 times in the data. One can understand the clustering of the word "teacher(s)" with the words "class" or "classroom" occurring relatively often, but the further pairing of that utterance to "pictures" is not a concept that naturally springs to mind.

High-level Qualitative Content Assessment of Dialogue Sentiment

Another initial high-level appreciation that arose Ad Hoc from the initial data review came via the Sentiment analysis feature in NVIVO. Using the application's "Automated Insights" function to examine the occurrence of moderate to strong positive, or moderate to strong negative expressive quality of the words the participants used, the NVIVO application assessed the dialogue from the parent and the teacher sessions as having a generally positive tone. The application assessed that 62 percent of the dialogue with detectable sentiment consisted of words with positive tone compared to 22 percent it assessed as carrying a negative weight.

It should be noted that not included in these Sentiment percentages are the vast majority of the spoken words the application assessed as carrying a neutral tone. Neutral tone – those words used in the dialogue that had little to no positive or negative sentiment attached to them - characterized 79 percent of the approximately 1519 statements overall that NVIVO examined from the eight transcripts from the Thursday Parent and Saturday's Teacher sessions. A further 3 percent of the detected sentiment occurrences overall were rated by NVIVO as containing a mixed tone (a phrase set with one or more positive words and a similar number of equally weighted negative words).

Data Visualization of the Results from the Sentiment Analysis. The sentiment analysis revealed a significant degree of detectable "Positive Tone" was present in the parent and teacher dialogue. Approximately three Positive statements occurred for every one Negative statement in the 270 or so sentiment detected instances found by the NVIVO application (once the Neutral and Mixed results were factored out). These results are depicted graphically in Figure 7 and Appendix D Section 2 contains the details of this analysis.

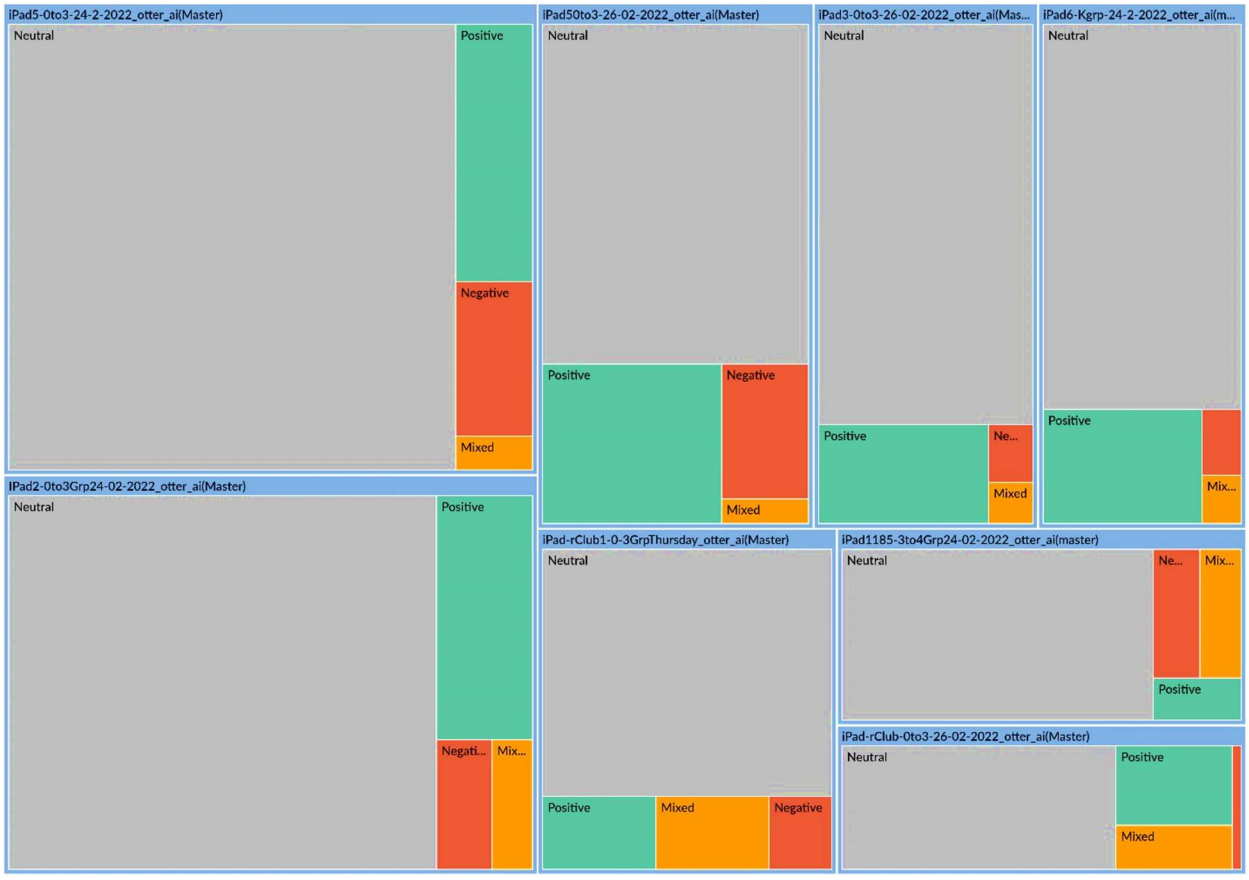

Figure 7

NVIVO Dialogue Sentiment Data Visualization showing comparatively strong degree of Positive Tone in the Parent and Teacher Dialog.

Note. Each of the eight larger boxes surrounded with the blue borders represents a parent or a teacher session transcript. The smaller inside boxes of green (positive), orange (negative) and yellow (mixed tone) are sized proportionally to their word volume in the overall dialog. Positive Tone outweighs Negative Tone in all but one session.

Summary of the Data Quality Review and Initial Ad Hoc Analysis Results

The results from these basic initial data evaluation processes gave me confidence that NVIVO would be useful in extending my qualitative analysis efforts. Even before manual coding of the data, the built-in analysis functions of the NVIVO application was providing valuable insight into the dialogue and was doing so in an understandable manner. An additional benefit accrued as a surprising result surfaced with the discovery of the Positive Tone inherent in the overall dialogue. This result became an opening discussion point for the comparative interview sessions I conducted with key informants as I went along with the subsequent analyses.

This initial review provided a good sense of the relative scoop and scale of the dialogue data elements to be examined. The data quality and high-level qualitative analysis activity prior to launching into the A Priori phase provided me with an increased understanding of the dialogue itself and was a very productive way to "swim in the data" as described in Chapter 3.

A Priori Coding and Related Initial Analysis

From the broad starting baseline established with the initial high-level examination of the dialogue described above, the collection of participant statements from the eight transcripts for the zero-to-three-year-old breakout groups was reviewed and coded in NVIVO using the A Priori "reciprocal interactions" coding framework (per Figure 5 in Chapter 3). In order to help identify the perspectives of the speakers more precisely than just assuming all participants from the Thursday sessions were parents and that Saturday's sessions consisted entirely of teachers, the statements were first analyzed and assigned a speaker's source classifications as either "parent" or "teacher." In line with this, the dialogue elements from the breakout session facilitators and their recording assistants was also classified accordingly to allow their exclusion from the analysis. Friday's session transcripts were also excluded from this early phase as the research

question focused on Parent and Teacher perspectives and those Friday sessions involved ECE agency staff, professionals, researchers, and other specialists. After this classification and sorting process was complete, it was found that while the bulk of the Thursday session dialogue did appear to stem from parents, a number of participants who self-identified as teachers were also present. This was not the case on Saturday where the dialogue did indeed stem exclusively from teachers. The body of participant discussion that remained after the exclusion of the non-participant speakers was designated as the "dialogue of interest."

Coding using the A Priori Framework. Once the transcript data was prepared in the above manner, the A Priori coding framework was applied to the dialogue of interest. This resulted in various statements being eliminated from the collection because no relevant connection with the coding definitions could be identified. As the coding proceeded it was also found that in order to avoid unwarranted complexity involving this first pass analysis, the use of two aggregating codes related to "Perspectives on Relationships" could be employed to denote the complexity inherent in many statements that related to an individual teacher's or parent's personal attitudes and viewpoints and aggregate those under the personal processes category of the reciprocal interactions framework. This approach worked well to draw together related statements across the multiple transcripts for subsequent further review and analysis during the Post Hoc phase.

As I proceeded, I also took advantage of NVIVO's Ad Hoc "code on the fly" function to identify other statements of interest that were not necessarily related to aspects of the reciprocal interactions framework but presented themselves as potentially relevant in proximity to associated dialogue of significance. Examples of codes that occurred frequently in that vein were "Community," "the Village/Support System," and "Family Strengths."

***Special Code Unit – Parents of Young Children who are also Teachers*.** In order to capitalize on the unique perspectives of parents who are also ECE teachers, a special effort was made during the speaker source classification process to identify any statements where the participant self-identified as having both roles. The task was challenging as the transcripts were de-identified and not necessarily traceable through the complete course of a dialogue as coming from a particular person. Nevertheless, various segments of the dialogue were successfully attributed to individuals that matched this case.

Results from the Initial Coding Process. Once the coding was complete, 475 Statements of Interest were identified in the collective dialogue from the breakout sessions. The largest grouping of these statements were associated with the Adult Personal Processes domain of the reciprocal interactions framework (i.e. social comparison, attributions, values, and expectations, and the aggregated Parent, Teacher, or Parent-Teacher Perspectives code that encapsulated those cross-coding instances). The results grouped under these coding units accounted for 45 percent of the overall dialogue of interest. A small proportion of the dialogue was related to the "external environmental process" domain of the framework (social modeling, feedback, etc.), representing a total of approximately 10 percent of the dialogue of interest. Very few statements were identified as stemming from the interactive behavioral processes' domain (less than 3 percent). Only a dozen or so statements of interest were identifiable as stemming from individuals with a dual parent-teacher perspective.

The majority of the remaining 12 A Priori reciprocal interactions framework coding units contained no more than a handful of statements in each area. It was assessed that the statements from these coding units were not significant taken on their own and they were subsequently excluded from further analysis in this phase. The exceptions to this assessment were a handful of

the Ad Hoc coding unit groupings found within the collected dialogue of interest associated with "Family Strengths," "Community," the "Village" that collectively accounted for approximately 12 percent of the dialogue of interest.

Results from three code units rose to significance. All of these groups are associated with the "Adult Personal Processes" domain of the interactions framework, specifically; "Teacher Perspectives" on their relationship with parents (with a weight of 20 percent of the total dialogue of interest), "Parent Perspectives" on their relationship with teachers (12 percent), and Expectations (8 percent). These primary coding units aggregated to account for 40 percent of the dialogue of interest's total volume. Overall, this top-level coding unit categorization process left just over 200 elements out of the starting dialogue of interest that were defined as 'statements of significance' for detailed manual review and analysis. See Appendix D Section 3 for the full output from NVIVO displaying these initial results.

Statements of Significance from the A Priori Phase

The following summary provides an appreciation of the Coding Units identified through the A Priori analysis phase that are representative of the dialogue of significance from the parent and teacher sessions. Also included are the sample statements from the small grouping of the dual perspectives coding unit associated with the participants who were identifiable as Parents who are also Teachers.

"Parent Perspectives" Statements. These examples typify the 58 statements of significance that were identified under the coding unit regarding parents' views and attitudes towards their reciprocal interactions with teachers.

> *...the connection of that communication that happens between the teacher and the parent* [is often missing] *...where we talk about, 'here's some possible*

resources' [for your child, and] *not just handing* [me] *a list with a phone number...*

sometimes it just takes perseverance and serious advocacy from the parent. ...nobody's going to care about your child more than you are ...and I think sometimes when you have teachers… with 20 kids [it's a problem]

Oh, [one child] *likes to bite but* [instead of the teacher] *I'm telling the mom he has a problem. So the mom comes storming* [at me] – *'my son ain't got no problem'. I'm like, Whoa,* [my] *daughter …comes home with a bite mark…* [but that mom] *didn't want to hear* [that] *from the teacher...*

I would say [that when I was] *putting them into school… a lot of* [teachers] *assumed that you know, or… they think that you should know. And so I don't think a lot of information was given to me because it was assumed that 'Oh, you have two children,* [so] *you know' - and I did not.*

...the most important things [that children] *need is your time and attention. And for the teacher, I think it needs to be kind of the same.* [Teachers have to] *give them the attention - and like she says* – [the] *support that they need to ensure that no one slips through the cracks.*

I didn't know how to find time to do things with [my kids]

I didn't understand what my child needed [and] *I didn't understand what should I do or what…* [to] *ask.*

So sometimes [it's] *just going into the school and ask them for the help…*

The statements in this code group unit made up 12% of the dialogue of interest and were often cross-coded with items from the A Priori framework such as "expectations", "attributions", and "values". Statements about the need for connections between parents and teachers, communications to support these inter-relationships, mistaken assumptions, lack of parent knowledge and/or confidence, concerns about teacher capability and capacity, as well as relational dynamics that complicate the resolution of related issues stood out in the analysis.

"Teacher Perspectives" Statements. Our second set of sample statements of significance typify many of the 94 arisings of teacher views and attitudes towards their reciprocal interactions with parents.

just let them know that interaction is important than them just dropping [their child] *off at the door, and not having anything to say. Okay, 'I've got your kids for 10 hours today, see you when you* [come] *get her – maybe'… …that's a gap* [to] *bridge …for me, with my parents.*

most parents don't have time to …go over all of the curriculum with their children, like somebody said earlier, just providing for them is the most that they do. So that I think would be a big issue that we will run into with the parents.

I know some parents who seek [pre-]*schools that don't give homework.*

…young parents don't know a lot of things.

every parent knows everything [assessed as sarcasm.]

And parents don't always have that [observation skill the teacher has]

I understand parents have expectation[s] *for the child, but …a lot of the things that they want their child to accomplish at a certain age is really not appropriate…*

sometimes parents aren't ready to accept some of the things you may notice about their child.

the parent keeps telling you that's not happening at home, …that song is played in our school [a lot]. *'It's not happening at home.' But it is happening here. And it's not what you say to the parent, but how you say* [it] *…if you find* [the] *wisdom and kindness and grace… you will win that parent. Sooner or later that parent will partner* [with] *you because* [right now, they] *can be in denial.*

Because a lot of the times the parents don't open up to the teachers to say, 'Oh, this has happened…'

...[you need to] *be willing to share ...they* [the parent] *have to feel safe. ...right now they're not sharing because they don't feel safe. ...you have to make sure they feel welcomed and connected.*

[sometimes] *you have to have uncomfortable conversations with parents.*

Statements in this area made up in the order of 20 percent of the overall dialogue of interest. More than a few of these statements were cross-coded as "expectations," "attributions," "values," "feedback," and "social modeling." Some of these perspectives indicated that some teachers do not have a high degree of regard about parent engagement, nor were some teachers particularly impressed with parent knowledge, skills, and their apparent lack of concern about potential developmental issues with their children.

Teachers are also concerned about work/life balance issues that seem to challenge some parents' ability to develop anything more than a transactional relationship with them. Other teachers spoke with apparent authority around the ways and means they had developed through experience to surmount these issues and make meaningful connections with parents for the benefit of the child.

Statements about "Expectations." The next set of statements of significance centered on inter-relationship expectations spanning mostly parent perspectives regarding ECE more generally and not necessarily interactions involving just the teacher. This grouping of statements was the smallest of the three top-level statement areas and this code type occurred 39 times in the dialogue of interest examined (representing 8 percent of the statement volume).

You know, before there was a misconception that daycare was babysitting. And so and it sounds sad, some places, it is just that, you know, they watch TV and [the children are on] *tablets, and they're doing all these other things that aren't educating them...*

I signed my kid up, I filled up the application for a scholarship. [Then they tell me] *'we're sorry, we don't have any more space.' You just opened! How do you not have any availability? Clearly, you need to expand your school!*

when I was looking through the schools I wanted proximity… I didn't want to drive 30 minutes to drop my kids and then drive 30 minutes to work and then another 30 minutes, and then rush to get back. You know, that's two hours of driving. …it was important to have the proximity, the location, the affordability.

we want the best for us and what's best for our child. …we can be a part of that group, [but we need] *somebody can amplify our voice… to* [support/improve] *that.*

While there was a context around these statements that stem from the well-founded desire of parents to find high quality ECE placements for their child, there were also a certain degree of a consumer mentality indicated in some of these expectations. Many of the statements in this code unit also touched on a pervasive lack of local availability in ECE placements and the need for schools to listen to parent voices.

Perspectives of Parents who are Also Teachers. This set of statements of significance made up a small portion of the dialogue of interest and were coded primarily within the personal process areas of the reciprocal interactions framework.

You know, I come to think of it as a parent... [We do] *daycare… for me to go to work. And when they caught something I didn't know. They made me feel so much better. It's like, 'oh, my!'* [when] *they shared it to me. Well, you know, 'did you know she likes this?' Or 'here - I got this for her.' Then* [I'm] *like, 'Oh my gosh, thank you for helping!' It's just a sense of relief that it was caught.*

...I'm grateful to know some of these things now, and especially working [at] *a preschool now, I work in a center where* [they have] *a lot of these resources… So I'm thankful now because I have a lot of friends who are young parents who don't know* [things]. *And so I'm able to say, 'oh, okay, wait, I heard about this.'* [or] *'Try*

this. Try that.' So I just, I was thinking back on when I was a fresh mom, you know, having a one-year-old and a newborn? Like, you know, and I experienced that.

...not all the teachers at different facilities will give out the curriculum. Sometimes you have to ask that teacher 'Hey, can you like to help give me like a good routine or something... [so] I can do something to help my child [not get] so left behind.'

Although they were small in number these statements indicated a level of introspection and insight that brings to light how valuable teacher input to parents can be if there is an openness to accept advice in the spirit it is given. Much of the dialogue could be identified by the speaker offering advice to fellow participants as the conversation went along. Some of these statements appeared to be motivated by a level of gratitude for the opportunity to become an ECE teacher and an apparent desire to give back . The statements also seemed to carry a level of mature outlook that approaches the views expressed by more experienced teachers.

Summary of the A Priori Analysis Phase

The A Priori classification, coding, and analysis processes applied to the parent and teacher dialogue from the Baby Talk/Listening to Babies event resulted in a set of 200 statements of significance. This early analysis activity was helpful in organizing the dialogue elements that arose over the course of the parent and teacher breakout sessions over two separate portions of the BT-LTB2022 event and to contextualize, compare, and contrast the differing perspectives of these participants.

Many of the statements of significance from parents were expressions of frustration or concern around teaching quality and access to schools and daycare, lack of a support system, and inconsistent service provider support. That said, while some parents have high expectations of their child's teacher and want them to have a caring attitude, others have their own ideas about what and how their children should be taught, and it appears that some parents can even be

dismissive of a caring teacher's attempts to recommend supportive developmentally appropriate activities for their children. Other parents lack confidence in their own abilities and see the teacher as an important knowledge resource and source of parenting guidance.

For their part, teachers seemed to be indicating that they are making assumptions about parent capacity, and what they sometimes see as a defensiveness or overreaction from some parents when they raise concerns, might be based more on their own biases and misperceptions. This is exacerbated by a lack of insight and poise in some teachers to be able to build the trust in the relationship needed to connect with parents in meaningful ways to work through undelaying issues. It also appears that many seasoned teachers have an intentionality in their outreach to and engagement with parents as partners for the benefit of the child. While this orientation towards building a partnering/collaborative relationship with parents is seen as essential by many experienced teachers, this may not be the case with newer teachers, nor was it expressed as strongly as an explicit need by parents.

Post Hoc Analysis Phase

As described in Chapter III, this phase was conducted in the spirit of the 'open and loose' nature of qualitative research advocated by Bailey (2019). While the activity generally followed the data analysis plan, the need to engage the key informants in a timely manner imposed an iterative aspect to the Post Hoc analysis activity to maximize their involvement. To support these earlier conversations I conducted an initial Patterns and Themes analysis based on the set of statements of significance provided by the A Priori phase. These early discussions in turn informed the construction of the Post Hoc coding framework that started to quickly come into focus.

Identifying Initial Working Patterns and Themes

The Post Hoc categorization, patterns identification, and thematic analysis process was based on looking more closely at the statements of significance in the two prime A Priori code groupings of Parent and Teacher Perspectives described in the section above and then the process was extended in an iterative fashion into the remaining statement areas until a set of inter-related thematic groupings became increasingly apparent. This initial thematic classification effort quickly collected one quarter of the statements of interest from the A Priori phase described in the section above and these further aggregated into three primary thematic categories based on emerging patterns apparent in the dialogue. These areas were "Supporting Parent/Child Strengths," "Supporting Teacher Strengths," and a cross-cutting theme of "Challenges." These emergent Post Hoc thematic areas are detailed along with their associated reciprocal interactions framework codes from the A Priori analysis in Table 9.

Table 9

Emergent Post Hoc Evidence Groupings

Theme/Category	**Associated Reciprocal Interactions and Thematic Codes**	**Dialogue Count**
"Supporting Parent/Child Strengths"	Parent Perspectives • Teacher Perspectives Self-efficacy • Expectations Social Modeling • Feedback • Instruction Effort • Achievement • Persistence	48
"Supporting Teacher Strengths"	Parent Perspectives • Teacher Perspectives Self-efficacy • Social Modeling • Instruction Feedback • Personal and Collective Agency	58
Cross-Cutting Theme: *"Challenges"*	Parent Perspectives • Teacher Perspectives Self-efficacy • Expectations • Attributions Values • Judgements	11
Total Statements of Significance (Volume of original 475 A Priori Statements of Interest)		**117 (25%)**

No other categories, themes or patterns were identified from the dialogue that aggregated to a level of volume that these three primary evidence areas displayed. This process accounted for one-quarter of dialogue of interest relevant to the study and the following sections provides an appreciation for the themes that grew out of this categorization process.

Supporting Parent/Child Strengths. This thematic area is based on 48 statements from the dialogue that arose from both parents and teachers calling for some form of a basic school-supported home instructional material that is developmentally appropriate and centered on bolstering the child's Social-Emotional capacity and readiness to learn. A number of statements in this category also contained context that shows a level of support for the need for teachers to promote and enhance a school-home connection with parents and to support them through this shared curriculum approach, as well as the need to embrace the concept of the parent and support them as the child's first teacher. This theme is personified in the following sample statements:

> *...they really keep track of like, their milestones* …[and] *sending us things that help* [us] *work on* [it together at home]… *and you do see the progress.*
>
> *I would love to see that along with some ...social emotional development curriculum…*
>
> *Sometimes you have to ask that teacher 'Hey, can you like to help give me like a good routine or something?'*
>
> [We track activities with a] *portfolio of ...what they do and his pictures. It's almost like a scrapbook. And it was like… '* [here's their] *day' ...And then* [the child] *would present it like a homework page for the weekend for the parent, and they're saying: 'This is what we did this week.' Yeah,* [and then I say] '*can you help me* [the teacher] *during the weekend? ...let's foster this new skill that your child has learned. And show me a picture at home and bring it back to me in the portfolio* [on Monday]'.

...I think for me I didn't I didn't understand what my child needed I didn't understand what should I do or what do I ask and I think those are something should be taught [to parents].

I didn't know how to not do that. Because that's what I was taught [growing up]*, and you don't realize that you normally do what you've been taught. And I think that's very important. And that would help us be better parents… whatever the case may be dealing with children is learning how to break certain cycles, so we can be better, because I can't fix my child if I'm not fixed.*

some type of organization that actually looks towards like, teaching people skills instead of …assuming that should come in, like actually building that foundation…

But I'm just gonna say in reference to everything that you say - a village within your village.

Parents also expressed relief when a teacher showed interest and displayed the dedication and caring attitude to point out potential developmental areas of need, filled in gaps in their knowledge and skills, and followed up with material to help the parent work with the child at home to address them. Sending along portfolios and homework is mentioned a number of times in the dialogue. "Partnership" is a term that was used by both parents and teachers to describe a good relationship that is centered on helping the child learn and grow.

Supporting Teacher Strengths. This thematic grouping stems from the significant body of evidence from 58 statements in the dialogue that is centered on the need for teachers to work diligently, respectfully, and skillfully to model and improve interpersonal relational safety for everyone, including the parent. This area also contained evidence regarding the need for teachers to effectively identify and communicate the child's learning and developmental needs to the parent. The contributions behind this theme are demonstrated by the following representative samples from the dialogue:

we have to give [the child's] *the care and the love* [and] *we also try to… have the parents on our level to work with us to do things to let* [the child] *know that everything is safe, they're safe at home and they* [are] *safe* [at] *their school…*

Like she said focus on the parents' positive[s] *…by bringing* [their kid to you] *every day …*[it's] *like kind of building partnerships… realizing that their struggles* [in their] *lives and challenges… that they're doing the best that they can… So if you have a relationship you get accepted.*

I think parents need more info, [and] *direct communication with the teachers. Parents need to know that you are loving their kids and that you have their best interests* [at heart]. *They* [the parent] *need to feel safe… and that when they leave their kids, their kids are gonna be well taken care of…*

my main focus with my parents is just talking to them about their [child's] *development and working with me… I understand parents have expectation*[s] *for the child, but at the same time making sure that it's age appropriate …a lot of the things that they want their child to accomplish at a certain age is really not appropriate…*

[Avoid] *miscommunication* [or misunderstandings and try to establish…] *a direct line to that resource, …whatever source it is, that they're* [their child is] *needing, …as well to have any other needs that aren't being met.*

…[parents] *have to feel safe. …*[and] *they're not sharing because they don't feel safe. …you have to make sure they feel welcomed and connected.*

…building that relationship with those parents is vital because they could get more comfortable with you and share more details that we need to service their child. So I guess, building relationships, communication with those parents as well. Just knowing that, 'hey, we're here for your child, you know, we're here to support [the child] *and support the family as well.'*

Teachers often talked about their desire to have the parent "work with" them to further the development of the child and help catch them up if they were falling behind. Again, the idea of

partnership as the ideal relationship and the need to work toward that is highlighted by teachers. Relational safety and the work teachers need to undertake to create an atmosphere where the parents feels safe enough to open up and share concerns is expressed, as is the skilled approaches that bring that out. Many teachers also know that most - if not all - parents are doing the best they can.

Cross-cutting Theme: Relational Challenges. The two proceeding areas are linked by a set of statements of significance from the dialogue that point to real or potentially problematic relational issues that fall out of the differences in circumstances, knowledge, beliefs, and outlooks of parents and teachers. For instance:

> *We don't really get a lot of time to really build a relationship or connection* [with the parent]. *A trust, you know, something that's more on a regular basis when you get to interact as parents, providers and child together. Because* [it] *probably would also help the child… be a little bit more comfortable knowing that okay, 'my parent does trust this person* […so I can too]'
>
> *...because the schedules of* [a lot of] *parents are so crazy, you know, I've got to work a 12-hour shift, and I got to find a way to make that happen.*
>
> *…just dropping* [their child] *off at the door, and not having anything to say* [is not okay]
>
> *And so a lot of time, when it comes down to the stereotyping… we tend to judge the home environment, but not realizing that maybe the parent just doesn't know how to create that structure within the home to help their kids thrive.*
>
> *...getting rid of that bias… replacing it with something else, you know, replacing it with encouragement, replacing it with positive reinforcement for the things they* [the parent] *are doing* [well]*, replacing it with, like, actually understanding. Cuz most of us here, have, you know, actually dealt with bias. So like, knowing how that felt to you, and making sure you're not projecting that same* [thing]*...*
>
> *I have to catch myself all the time to not judge parents… it's not helpful - that's something I try to keep in mind. It's easy to throw rocks. It's harder to help build that house.*

...it's not what you say to the parent, but how you say [it] *...because* [right now, they] *can be in denial.*

So you will run into the issue of trying to tell a parent what their child needs. And they're like, 'No, I think it's more of this area.'

As these representative samples show, this area is contextualized by indications in the dialogue around contentions about potential developmental issues, bias, stereotyping, and difficulties building trust between parents, as well as the lack of time to build meaningful connections between parents and teachers due to everyone's busy lives.

Summarizing the Top-level Findings from the initial Post Hoc Thematic Analysis

The first thematic category of "Supporting Parent/Child Strengths" that arose from the statements of significance found though the A Prior analysis has a component of mutuality to it as significant indications were evident in the dialogue that both parents and teachers expressed the need for improved synergies between home and school so that a coherent learning environment could be created that supported and enhanced the child's early learning and developmental progress. There were also indications in the dialogue that centered on sending homework (or supportive curriculum processes and material) into the home setting and the parallel need to support and work with the parent to engage with those resources in a consistent manner.

A second thematic category, Supporting Teacher Strengths, is related to the first one and it stems from the teacher dialogue about the need to work skillfully to create a climate of relational safety with the family so as to better communicate the child's learning and developmental needs with the parent. The third theme centered on potentially problematic issues that challenge sustained positive change in the first two areas that arise from differences in the lived experiences, knowledge, perspectives, and outlooks of parents and teachers.

These three related thematic areas of evidence were assessed as significant in identifying needs or issues of direct relevance to the study and its problem of practice. This thematic categorization approach also supported the commencement of the start of a series of Key Informant comparative interviews that took place concurrently with the early stages of the Post Hoc analysis phase.

Initial Comparative Cross-check and Early Phase Key Informant Interviews Results

On completion of the A Priori phase I began a series of one-on-one discussions with key informants to present the interim results and emerging themes. These individuals were former supervisors, practitioner colleagues, and team members of mine who were also present at Baby Talk/Listening to Babies event as either facilitators or conveners. As mentioned above, a few of the earlier interviews ran concurrently with the initial Category/Themes/Patterns identification process described above. At the later stages of the Post Hoc phase, and after a more in-depth analysis, I also held briefings with stakeholders from COQEBS and other community groups such as the Pinellas Early Educators United Association.

See Appendix D Section 4 for the presentation that grew to the final form I provided during the various sessions as this comparative interview process unfolded. As this conversation starter/briefing presentation progressed from its initial basis (one that consisted primarily of the A Priori results along with an early set of working themes, patterns, and categories) to its eventual final Post Hoc analysis-based format, I circled back to a few of my most knowledgeable (and patient and kind) key informants for their continued feedback and insight.

Initial Key Informant Feedback. In general, the responses from these critical friends was enthusiastic, and some expressed their excitement that the research question was being

looked at. There also seemed to be a good match between their experience in the field and the indications that were emerging from the dialogue.

No Surprises. When I reviewed what I have described as the surprising result around the Positive Tone found through the sentiment analysis described in the earlier data quality checking section, a very thoughtful discussion arose. All the key informants agreed that they felt a common purpose was present amongst the participants at the event. They recalled that they had felt a general sense of hope and optimism prevailed in the discussions they witnessed, and while there was lots of "unloading" during the sessions – from both parents and teachers – the key informants were in agreement around this particular finding and that it was not surprising to them. They felt that parents and teachers who attended the sessions were there to learn, share, and contribute towards making positive changes to benefit the child. As one key informant told me: parents are "hungry" to support the potential of their child and teachers are "hungry" for better connections to parents to help achieve that. The participants wanted to be heard - and were glad to be asked. One stakeholder indicated that she felt that parents in particular were feeling empowered because they found a sense of parent voice that was modeled by the parent panelists who laid the foundation for the Thursday night breakout session. These key informants also felt that the participants were probably also relieved by what they heard from their peers, who were saying, in effect - 'you are not alone.'

Relational Challenges and the need to Build Relational Safety. According to many of the key informants, difficult and persistent relational challenges between parents and teachers absolutely do exist. As one noted, only funding and fiscal issues outweigh the sad realities of this issue in her day-to-day management activities. Some of this issue springs from a consumer mentality in parents but most of it arises from a lack of regard in the teachers' eyes to the parents

due to degrees of bias and judgement, and, often, inadequate interpersonal skills – or what one called “lack of skillful means.” There was also strong agreement that the dialogue was pointing towards what they saw as the need to create relational safety, and that relationship-building, maintenance, and repair between teachers and parents is key. The skills development required to do this well is a “huge need” said one – especially for inexperienced ECE staff.

There was also a general acknowledgement that the start/end of day rushing at drop-off and pick-up time gets in the way of relationship-building. Is very difficult to “make the space” for connecting between a teacher and a parent under those circumstances as both of them are at times distracted, and/or overwhelmed - or emotionally stressed - at those points in the day. This effect was a “hugely sad frustration” for one practitioner, saying “it got in the way” of her doing a good job as a teacher.

No major issues with the research approach were identified by the key informants during these early member-checking sessions and they generally confirmed that the analysis was progressing in meaningful direction. The themes of Supporting Parent/Child Strengths through shared curriculum, Supporting Teachers Strengths through professional development and relational skills building and as discussed above, the overarching issue of the challenge in the parent-teacher relational dynamic were generally supported as being consistent with what they felt they heard from the participants during the event. The input from these critical friends was also important in sensitizing me to broader perspectives in ECE and early child development in general and the feedback process was highly valuable in providing added coherence to the ongoing Post Hoc analysis effort.

Detailed Post Hoc Dialogue Analysis

As the initial comparative interview process proceeded, I began to work through a re-

analysis of the results from the A Priori analysis effort. Based on the emerging key informant insights and their broader perspectives - as well as my own increasing familiarity with the themes, patterns, and categories that were emerging - I determined an extensive Post Hoc categorization and coding structure that I grounded on the conceptual model I established in Chapter II. This Post Hoc coding structure was applied to all but one of the 17 transcripts of the dialogue (bringing in for the first time the nine professional development sessions that were held on the Friday). Unfortunately, one of Friday transcripts was rejected after I found that it did not contain a significant amount of sensible data due to the room noise on the recording that had interfered with the automated transcription process.

The final framework of 40 Post Hoc analysis coding elements that emerged was applied to the 16 target transcripts using NVIVO and due to the broadened sample size approximately 1100 statements of interest were identified (Appendix D, Section 3). From this sample, two areas of major coding unit concentration arose. These areas, specifically "Supporting Parent Strengths" and its source Post Hoc coding units that make it up; and "Shared Curriculum," along with its own unique set of sub-element codes, are detailed in Tables 10 and 11 that follow.

Table 10 on the next page shows the sub-element grouping of significance from 14 of the 40 Post Hoc categorization codes. These indications account for well over half of the original 1100 Post Hoc statements of interest and, in line with the perspectives expressed by the key informants during the comparative interviews, these are centered on ways and means to better support parent capacity to partner effectively with the teacher as they work together to extend the early learning environment from the school to the home.

Table 10

Relative Impact of "Supporting Parent Strengths" *and its Sub-elements in the Overall Dialogue*[1]

Categorization Codes	Number of Statements	Sub-category Percentage	Category's Overall percentage[1]
"Supporting Parent Strengths"			
Relational Differences-Challenges	91	8%	
Family Systems	19	2%	
Collaboration *t*	66	6%	
Communications *t*	51	5%	
Parent Voice *t*	22	2%	
Relational Safety	89	8%	
Ethic of Caring	38	3%	
Partnering *t*	30	3%	
Advocate for the child	23	2%	
Mindset	79	7%	
Skills Building	51	7%	
Participatory Pedagogy *t*	31	3%	
Social Modeling	18	2%	
Peer Support	28	2%	
Supporting Parent Strengths Category's Impact	**636**	(Communicate/ partnering/etc. Combined = **19%** *t*)	**58%**[1]

Note. 1. Proportional to the 1100 Post Hoc Statements of Interest. The combining of the related elements around Linkages, Communications, and Collaborative approaches is indicated by the "*t* " symbol.

The second major grouping of significance that arose from the Post Hoc analysis coding framework centers on the collection of participant statements that support the positive impact of parent action on the home learning environment through application of a "shared curriculum" as detailed in Table 11 (on the next page).

Table 11

Relative Impact of "Shared Curriculum" and its Sub-elements in the Overall Dialogue[1]

Categorization Codes	Number of Statements	Sub-category Percentage	Category's Overall percentage[1]
"Shared Curriculum"			
Developmentally Appropriate	44	4%	
Self-Regulation-Coregulation	23	2%	
Follow Childs Lead	21	2%	
Social-Emotional & Cognitive Functioning	26	2%	
Milestones	11	1%	
Play	7	1%	
Shared Curriculum Category's Impact	**132**		**12%**[1]

Note. 1. Proportional to the 1100 Post Hoc Statements of Interest.

While much smaller in number, the contribution of the statement instances associated with the additional 6 codes in the Shared Curriculum area becomes a major success factor when taken together with the linking elements of communication/collaboration/partnering/parent voice elements of the supporting parent strengths area. An additional linkage from that area to Shared Curriculum – again, while small in number - are the statements outlined in Table 10 associated with the participatory pedagogy element.

Data Visualization of the Post Hoc Coding Results and Key Findings. Tables 10 and 11 summarized the impact of 20 of the 40 Post Hoc codes comprising the two top tier statement of significance groupings stemming from the Post Hoc re-examination of the dialogue. Taken together, "Supporting Parent Strengths" and "Shared Curriculum" make up over two thirds of the original 1100 Post Hoc statements of interest, as shown in Figure 8 on the next page.

By far the strongest grouping from the Post Hoc re-analysis are those associated with the Support Parent Strengths area (the left side of the figure). This area centers on addressing the

Figure 8

Data visualization of the relative strength of "Supporting Parent Strengths" impact area in comparison to the Shared Home/School Curriculum and other Post Hoc categories and processes.

Note. " * " denotes a major supporting factor, and " $_t$ " an aggregated grouping related to the supportive linkages between the two major evidence areas and for building productive parent-teacher partnerships.

teacher's challenge of making meaningful connections to the parent in a manner that acknowledges their strengths and in ways that are supportive of their role as the child's first teacher. The other significant Post Hoc code grouping is the supportive elements of the shared curriculum on the top right side of Figure 8). Finally, when combined, the related linking sub-elements of Communication, Parent Voice, Collaboration, Partnership, and Participatory Pedagogy (that were indicated by the " *t* " symbol on their associated lines in Table 10 on page

152 and repeated in Figure 8 for clarity) are in line with Key Stakeholder input based on the initial A Priori results. The remaining dialogue identified for Post Hoc review (as shown in Figure 8 mostly in the lower right quadrant), did not aggregate towards an appreciable level of significance in comparison to those of the two main code unit groupings.

Characterization of the Key Post Hoc Data Analysis Findings

From the framework of 40 Post Hoc coding units developed through the Post Hoc analysis process, well over 750 statements of significance were identified. Two main areas of concentration and five supporting success factors surfaced as a result of the analysis that was informed to a good degree by the key informant comparative interviews. "Supporting Parent Strengths" and "Shared Curriculum" were the top-level Post Hoc code groups of potential positive impact, accounting for over two-thirds of the initial statements in the identified Post Hoc dialogue sample. A sub-set of the Supporting Parent Strengths area consists of enabling actions and states that define relationship building, maintenance, and repair. These relational factors form the keys to success in developing the parent-teacher partnership.

Defining The Key Success Factors. The set of key success factors emerged out of the Parents Strengths grouping as working collectively to address the challenges inherent in the Parent – Teacher interrelationship, specifically: "Relational Safety," "Communication/ collaboration/parent voice/partnerships," "Mindsets," "Family Systems," and "Skills Building." The statements shown in Table 12 (on the next page) typify the evidence area centered on successfully addressing the relational challenges described above. Key Success Factors are represented on the right side of the diagram to show the cross-coding approach as informed by key informants in the early stages of the Post Hoc analysis process.

Table 12

Sample statements of significance around Supporting Parent Strengths and Addressing Challenges in Working in Partnership with the Teacher.

Dialogue Item	Parent ► T*	Teacher ► P*	Relational Safety	Communication/ Collaboration/Parent Voice/Partnering	Skills Building	Mindset	Family Systems
most parents don't have time to the numbers and go over all of the curriculum with their children, like somebody said earlier, just providing for them is the most that they do..		√				√	√
because the schedules of parents are so crazy, you know, I've got to work a 12-hour shift, and I got to find a way to make that happen.	√			√	√	√	√
a lot of parents [especially] *first time parents they don't really have a lot of support…*	√		√			√	√
just let them know that interaction is important than them just dropping them off at the door, and not having anything to say, Okay, I've got your kids for 10 hours today, see you when you get her - maybe… …that's a gap [to] *bridge …with my parents.*		√	√	√	√	√	
…as a young parent …I did not know many things [but] *I don't think a lot of information was given to me because it was assumed that* [because] *'Oh, you have two children,* [so] *you know', and I did not.*	$\surd^{pt}$			√	√	√	
I didn't understand what my child needed. I didn't understand what should I be looking for. What do I ask and I think [that] *should be taught… almost, like* [in] *a parent* [class]		$\surd^{pt}$		√	√	√	
the parents tell [you] something [they observed in their child, but they're] …new parents so they don't know anything.		√		√		√	
…I have to catch myself all the time to not judge parents… it's not helpful - that's something I try to keep in mind. It's easy to throw rocks. It's Harder To Help Build That House.		√	√		√	√	√
We don't always like our parents, right? …but we have to respect [them]…[it's] *easier to respect if you can find something to like about a person. But even if you can't… it would be doing a disservice if you didn't call that out in yourself. …some of my parents are scared…*		√	√		√	√	√
So I do a little too much session where I sit down with a parent and say, What are your successes that you feel your child has had over the last few months? And then what are the challenges that we face [together] *and emphasizing* [that] *it's not just them…*		√	√	√	√	√	√
And trust building is something that takes time [and] *consistency… building that trust back up, I think, is critical.*		√	√		√	√	

Notes. 1. * "Parent ► T" denotes coding of the dialogue as Parent perspectives towards Teachers, and "Teacher ► P" denotes Teacher perspectives towards Parents. Other codes listed emerged out of patterns and categories based on the Ad Hoc/Ab-initio coding in the A Priori analysis phase and confirmed by the Comparative Interview process.

2. $\surd^{pt}$ denotes participants that indicated they were speaking from their experience or current situation as Teachers and who are also Parents of young children.

One of the statements from a teacher shown in Table 12 (second from the bottom: “So I do…”) covers the full range of all five of the Key Success Factor skillset domains described above, and four others cover four out of five – including one from a parent. It can also be seen that some of the statements indicate some level of “social judgement” - or lack of caring insight and perspective taking at the very least – making the point around building interpersonal skills and positive mindsets, hence those statements having been coded in that manner as counter-indicators.

Supplemental Post Hoc Findings

The Use of Technology and Participatory Pedagogy. The Post Hoc line of inquiry was continued by an effort to track down the “teacher-classroom-picture” word cluster phenomena discovered during the initial data quality review. While I was unable to find any instances for all three words appearing together in a single statement, a complementary indication did arise during that search effort when I found a half a dozen or so additional supporting statements related to improving the connection between the teacher and the parent via technology such as:

> *you have to communicate with them. And we have this* [camera] *we use... I'm always taking pictures of the kids. I'm always letting them know what's going on…* [where] *we communicate with them.*

> [I] *…take pictures.* [And] *it's sent to the parent. And they're really happy about that, you know, yeah.* [They’re] *really surprised that their kid is doing the cleaning. They haven't seen that* [at home]*!*

These two statements are just two examples pointing to a potentially significant connecting process inherent in Supporting Parent Strengths and the Shared Curriculum as they serve as indictors of the ideas behind Participatory Pedagogy to serve as a catalyst behind the parent–teacher relationship building process that was apparent in some of the dialogue of significance.

This discovery proved to be fortuitous since in the course of the key-informant interview process and towards the end of the Post Hoc analysis phase, it occurred to me that the challenge of connecting with parents had been talked about in the dialogue in a generally positive manner when technology was used appropriately by the teacher. I reexamined the transcripts and there are numerous signs that point to successful and capable teachers using digital communication tools to create and enhance the partnering connection between the teacher and the parent around maintaining a coherent home/school learning environment for the child (a high-tech/high-touch approach if you will). Dozens of statements were uncovered that firmly indicated that using technology to engage and involve the parent in the children's learning in step with school was seen as a positive contributing factor to forming a bridge back and forth between the school and home. These consisted of references to "email," "emailing," "texts," "texting," and so-on. On analysis in NVIVO these accumulated towards a top-tier frequency result comparable to those of "partnering," "partnership(s)," and other related top-tier code groupings such as "collaboration" that were detailed earlier in the Post Hoc results detailed earlier in Table 10. Typical examples of the potential impacts out of this area and its connection to the main findings of Supporting Parent Strengths and Shared Curriculum, as well as being a form of Participatory Pedagogy, is demonstrated by statements such as:

> *we like to email them actually, like our curriculum that we are doing the books we're doing the songs we're doing the letter we're on, and stuff like that. So they don't get so far behind when they do come back. And we can send home like a schedule so they can see like when we are [scheduling nap-time], and so they can try to follow the same thing when they're at home so that when* [the child] *comes back, it's not like they're confused. They're on the same page.*

> [I] *tell my parents when they come in that I can't teach and be an effective teacher without partnering with them. And they're an important part of what I do. And for their child. And I need their input because I don't live with them at home, I can tell them what I'm doing as a teacher, you know, and I have a lesson plan that I give them every week, every week. And I communicate and keep that line of communication open to emails, and I follow up and I send pictures as well.*
>
> [I ask them] *what's the best way for you all to receive that sort of information? Like pictures* [of your kid doing something they learned]… *Is that through text message? Is that email?*

Both these findings arose during the latter stages of the Post Hoc analysis phase, and they became clearer as key supportive factors to the main findings in discussion with the key informants and stakeholders during the comparative interview sessions.

Final Key Informant Interviews and Comparative Cross-checking

The Use of Technology as a Supportive Conduit. In the final stages of the comparative interview process I introduced the idea of the potential of technology as a possible bridge towards strengthening and maintaining the parent–teacher relationships. This was particularly well received in the PEEUA presentation to the point where the discussion took on a life of its own. Some of the members of that group are owner-operators of "family daycare homes" who do not have the institutional support afforded teachers in larger commercial and agency-based ECE facilities. These individuals were drawn to the PEEUA's mission of being a locally-driven professional practice mutual support network and the discussion began to center on how technology could be very helpful "to connect [PEEUA members and other small daycare operators] with each other." Speaking about the meeting, the facilitator told me later that "they actually kept talking …about parents [and those challenges after you left]" and about how to strengthen their relationships with them. From what the facilitator told me, the PEEUA members

saw the value in the concept of a community-supported information network as potentially practical solution for teacher skills building, mentorship, and professional development, especially for isolated small center practitioners.

Participatory Pedagogy as a Supportive Conduit. As described in Table 10 on page 152, it can be seen that while the statements coded under the Participatory Pedagogy grouping accounted for only 4% of the statements of significance, it too could be a crucial success factor in addressing relational challenges. This was brought into focus by some of the key informants in later stages of the comparative interview series who confirmed the importance of a Family Systems approach and the need to respect Parent Voice's in early education. As one pointed out, in all societies and cultures, parents and the extended family see it as their role to socialize their children. She also made the comment that perhaps we need to think of the parent-teacher relationship as an 'arranged marriage' – a form of social contract for the benefit of the child. Another key informant felt that honoring parent agency was crucial for joining, building, maintaining, and repairing the teacher-parent relationship. Encouraging and facilitating parent empowerment succeeds when teachers' mindsets are centered on the longer-term of continual partnership as a form co-parenting. A related view to this was expressed by another key informant who told me that, for more than a few children, Pre-K is too late to attempt to recover learning readiness for kindergarten and that we must start sooner. She felt that the earlier parent involvement in planning and supporting the educational process for their children started the better, as it builds advocacy as well as serving as a community learning and capacity-building opportunity.

The dialogue supports these views. The connecting effect of the conduit formed by Participatory Pedagogy to strengthen the effectiveness of the parent-teacher partnership is

typified by statements of significance such as the following:

> *you've got that you have to merge that with the parent's education and you're taking those educational pieces and you're working together to create a plan. You can't work independently from it. And what you'll find is that the parents who don't have the book smarts,* [but] *we're doing the practices that the book told them to do.*

> *we have at our center, a thing called 'Family Enrichment.' And I split it mostly for the three and four- and five-year-olds,* …[where] *once a month, they send home a project, and they send them all the parts of the project. So there's nothing* [for the parent to buy. So the school] *…would provide glue* [for instance]*, you know, and clear instructions, and it gets the child and the parents working together and doing something that maybe they wouldn't have time to do. Because* [of their] *busy schedules. But maybe on the weekend, you know, they might be able to do that.*

> [we ask ourselves] *what items do the parents have that we can help support them within their natural environment. So everything that we do is within the natural environment, and you know, where the parents are comfortable, and the child is comfortable. But it is very parent driven. And we are supporting parents where they think they need the support…*

> *So* [how do we bring] *providers and parents together? …we're all striving towards the same goal. So why aren't we learning together as well?* [We both need to] *have a greater awareness, and possibly appreciation, of what each person, or each group of the village… what are they bringing to the table? We are a team… And I just think that can be around more conversations and more collaborative opportunities. With the parents, …if we all were working towards the same goal, why are all the steps as leading up to the goals* [not happening] *more collaboratively?*

Perspective taking, Mindsets, and Reflective Practice. A number of key informants stressed this need and pointed out that these factors are not common practice in ECE (and

anything that resembles reflective parenting is almost unheard of). The need for these capacities to brought into relief by certain realities. First, parents are often stressed and overwhelmed but many teachers are too. As one key informant pointed out, in some cases, the basic living needs of teachers are not being fully met. This spills over into their own emotional balance. Second, the key informants agreed that bias and judgement from teachers towards parents is "a thing." Some of them indicated this could be framed as stemming from a classist versus an ethnic basis.

Professional Development of the teaching cadre. A few of the key informants keyed in on the vital need to move the ECE workforce towards professional recognition to make progress towards positive change. Teachers want to be recognized as Professionals doing the important work of "building the foundation for society" as one key informant stated. This particular aspect of the challenge to Early Learning sector is inadequately addressed or completely disregarded by "the system."

As indicated in the dialogue spanning the BT-LTB2022 event, and as confirmed by comparative member-checking with key informants and stakeholders, the need to bolster the uptake of an inter-related set of equity-based Key Success Factors that teachers require to build a co-teaching relationship with parents became clear. Based on key informant feedback these Key Success Factors can be articulated as guiding principles for a way forward as follows:

1. The need to build relational safety is crucial.
2. Skillful communication must be applied by teachers to invite and honor parent voice, supported by a collaborative partnership orientation, and continued effort to build, maintain, repair interpersonal connections.
3. Positive teacher perspectives and mindsets will positively impact parent mindsets.
4. Teachers need to improve their awareness of the importance of family systems, and
5. Professional Development/Skills Building is needed to address all these areas.

Distillation and Summary of Findings from the Qualitative Analysis Process

A series of CAQDAS-based A Priori and Post Hoc analyses were conducted on the transcripts of the participant dialogue from the Baby Talk-Listening to Babies event held in February 2022 (BT-LTB2022). Three main findings arose from the dialogue, and these were confirmed through the ongoing comparative cross-check discussions with the key informants and stakeholders. The first of these centers on significant evidence arising from the dialogue that both parents and teachers were pointing to the need for improved collaboration between home and school. This finding has a large degree of jointness of it - or at least some expression of a desire for partnership - as the related dialogue often centered on parents asking for homework (or supportive curriculum) along with guidance for its use in the home setting, and the parallel need expressed by teachers for parents accept home-learning material and to effectively engage with their child on it.

The second main finding points to a myriad of ongoing and persistent relational challenges facing parents of very young children and ECE teachers. While these challenges are sometimes driven by parent work/life balance issues and/or a resulting consumer-oriented transactional mentality, much of it arises due to lack of regard in the teachers' eyes towards the parents due to degrees of bias. This situation is exacerbated by inadequate teacher interpersonal skills, and these shortfalls leads to lack of the interpersonal engagement and trust that any deepening relationship requires.

A third, and more promising main result area, stems from evidence regarding a potential way ahead towards how best to address these relational issues. To address these challenges, many seasoned teacher participants spoke of their intentionality in applying a balanced and non-judgmental approach to their outreach to and engagement of parents as partners for the benefit of

the child. Unfortunately, this intentionality around building a productive relationship with parents does not seem to be applied consistently, or as skillfully, by less experienced teachers. This finding points to the need for all teachers to develop a mindset and the skillful means to better connect with the parent in order to build, maintain, and - as necessary - repair their productive interrelationship on behalf of the child.

Two other key supportive findings arose that can undergird and support a way forward in the face of the challenges the main findings raise, specifically, the role of technology as a collaborative tool, and the asset-full practices inherent in participatory pedagogy in the implementation of any ECE process improvements to address the barriers outlined above. These supportive factors that were identified in the data during the Post Hoc analysis phase were also confirmed through the comparative interview process. While both of these ranked at a relatively low level of volume of statements of significance they appear to be nested amongst the dialogue in a manner that suggests an oversized contribution they could potentially play in creating the conditions for positive outcomes in addressing relational challenges facing teachers and parents and towards creating the climate required to support and enhance an extended home/school collaborative environment.

These two facilitative findings area personified by statements from two experienced teachers at the 2022 Baby Talk – LTB event:

> *"*[I] *tell my parents when they come in that I can't teach and be an effective teacher without partnering with them. And they're an important part of what I do… for their child. And I need their input because I don't live with them at home, I can tell them what I'm doing as a teacher, you know, and I have a lesson plan that I give them every week. And I communicate and keep that line of communication open* [through] *emails, and I follow up and I send pictures as well.*

> *I sit down with a parent and say, 'What are your successes that you feel your child has had over the last few months?' And then* [I ask] *what are the challenges that we face* [together] *and emphasizing* [that] *it's not just them…*

A third statement is from an agency ECE specialist at one of the Friday Professional Development sessions brings together all the elements the main and supportive findings suggest. This one statement of significance clearly supports the importance of a participatory framing of the work needed for the equity-based improvement journey envisioned by this study. In it you hear echoes of Rinaldi's call for the educative community:

> *So* [how do we bring] *providers and parents together? …we're all striving towards the same goal. So why aren't we learning together as well?* [We both need to] *have a greater awareness, and possibly appreciation, of what each person, or each group of the village…* [are] *bringing to the table? We are a team… And I just think that can be around more conversations and more collaborative opportunities* [with] *…parents.*

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In the proceeding I articulated this study's problem of practice as one of teacher capacity to advance the learning-readiness of very young children. As a way forward to address this in the context of a local community – and specifically in the case of South St. Petersburg, I proposed an equity-based continuous improvement initiative made up of deeply competent collaborative processes teachers can employ to develop, implement, and sustain relational ECE&C co-teaching partnerships with their parents. I also maintained the position that ECE teachers and schools cannot do this on their own, nor would that be in the best interest for children, families, or the community when viewed through the equity lens that a culturally relevant, responsive, and asset-based participatory pedagogy provides.

Another central aspect of the problem of practice is the concern about whether the teachers in the ECE sector are able to serve effectively as champions for this vision of a relationally-grounded ECE and Care participatory practice approach. More importantly – since the relational co-teaching partnership model developed under this study is a departure from common ECE practice, and given that major challenges will be present - what can be done to help teachers develop their skills and for parents and the community to work together to continuously improve the current situation and move ahead? In the context of the current study this was placed under the rubric of a place-based adaptive curriculum development approach. This orientation brought us to my grand tour research question centered on Rinaldi's (2013)

provocation around what it means to be an "educative community" and that asks:

> *What perspectives around relational co-teaching practices do parents, teachers, and community members embody that promote or detract from moving towards a participatory Whole-community/Whole-child Adaptive Curriculum Development approach for a new Community-School for toddlers and very young children?*

The proceeding chapter outlined how this line of inquiry was pursued through the application of a computer-aided qualitative analysis process to examine the dialogue that took place in February 2022 at the BT-LTB2022 community workshop series for parents, teachers, and ECE professionals in Midtown/South St. Petersburg, Florida. In line with the methodology outlined in Chapter 3, the analysis was approached in three phases. In preparation for the overall analysis, a data quality check/Ad Hoc analysis on the data set was conducted and, once complete, the A Priori phase commenced using a coding structure based on Bandura's Reciprocal Interactions model (Bandura, 1978). The second phase was a linking activity that was structured as a concurrent categorization/themes and patterns identification activity (Kim, 2016) informed by a series of comparative/member checking interviews (Boeije, 2002) to help formulate the approach to the final Post Hoc analysis phase. The final framing of the analysis was a Post Hoc process that was also informed by the continued input of some of the key informants and stakeholders who had participated as organizers and facilitators of the BT-LTB2022 event.

Main Findings

The qualitative analysis of the dialogue revealed a number of impacts to parent–teacher partnerships in the context of a place-based participatory ECE developmental approach. We will look first at the main findings that arose over the entire sweep of the analytic process, specifically: shared curriculum, relational challenges, and skills building in the teaching cadre. We will also review a number of supporting findings that were discovered along the way.

Before proceeding further - and in terms of joyful happenstance and discovery - it needs to be said that an underlying cross-current of positivity and hopefulness ran through the dialogue. This undercurrent helps shape our understanding of the aspirational nature behind the discussion at hand - as well as the dire consequences facing us - as we collective look for answers to another central question: "what do we want for our children?" (Moss, 2019, p. 23). The spirited engagement of the event's participants and their implicit commitment to 'show up' on behalf of their children and their futures represents some of that answer.

The Need for a Shared Curriculum and Support to Parent as First Teacher

Early in the A Prior analysis, indications arose from the dialogue of both parents and teachers that pointed to the need for improved synergies between home and school so that a coherent learning environment could be created that supported and enhanced the child's early learning and developmental progress. This was generally described as a basic school-supported home curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and centered on bolstering the child's Social-Emotional capacity and readiness to learn. A number of statements also pointed towards the need for teachers to promote and strengthen a school-home reciprocal connection with parents to better support a shared curriculum approach.

This was confirmed both through the comparative interviews with the key informants and in the broader Post Hoc analytic dialogue review. These indications centered on the teacher responding to parent request for "homework" or the proactive provision of supportive curriculum processes and material to the parent for follow-up with the child at home. These instances also highlighted an equally important parallel need for teachers to support and work with the parent as the child's "first teacher" (Taylor, 2022) to effectively engage with these at-home instructional materials in a sustained and meaningly manner.

Both Malaguzzi (1994, p. 62-63) and Gay (2018, p. 37) tell us about the importance of family systems in the learning development of children and they too imply that parents are the child's first teacher. This is the essential key to success in relationally-oriented and culturally responsive ECE programming. The ECE teacher must look beyond their own little silo in the ECE "system" (Malaguzzi,1994, p. 62; Moss, 2019, p. 80), honor parent voice (Sill, 2022), and adopt a family-systems approach to teaching their young students (Murphy et al. 2015; McHale et al., 2019; Ortega-Williams et al., 2021). To do this effectively means actively partnering with the parent – and knowing how to coach them towards a collaborative co-teaching relationship – in order to better support the developmental needs of the child (Noddings, 2013, p 198; Sawyer et al., 2016, p. 160-161; Hoffman et al., 2017, p. 33). Our job as ECE teachers and leaders is to ensure our practice works with each child's collective culture as systems-of-knowing (Gay, 1994; Sanders and Farago, 2018, p. 1386) to ensure they continue to 'develop appropriately' in ways that are meaningful to their whole being.

This links the need for a shared curriculum expressed in the dialogue towards the conceptual model's rendering of an "adaptive curriculum" described in Chapter II with its flexibility to reflect the lived situation of each family more closely in order to appropriately respond to what the child is actively being and becoming in his or her world (Lancy, 2010; Moss, 2019, p. 144; NAEYC, 2020, pp. 25-26). Parents and teachers both have to step back and acknowledge that this world is not one we impose on the child, but one that is co-constructed by all of us together – and with the child in the lead (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 75; New, 1994, p. 221). This child-directed and adult-framed pedagogical thinking is also expressed by theorists who characterize development as an organic process unfolding potential – or "flourishing" as Seligman (2012) describes it - that takes place in relationships (Malaguzzi, 1994, pp. 59-62;

Mezirow, 2000; Rinaldi, 2006, p. 67) and in continuous, self-reinforcing, and ever expanding cycles (Wheatley, 2010, p. 128; Noddings, 2013, p. 146; and Moss, 2019, p. 151).

Difficult and Persistent Relational Challenges Exist Between Parents and Teachers

To gain an idea of the significance of this second key finding in the dialogue, one key informant told me that only funding and fiscal issues exceeds this challenge in her day-to-day management concerns. Adding a layer of complexity to efforts to address relational challenges was also brought forward by some of the dialogue around the relational distress caused by upsets to many parents' work-life balance. The point was made by some key informants that while many parents are stressed and overwhelmed, some teachers are as well since at times their own basic living needs are not being fully met. This challenges the emotional balance of these vulnerable teachers and negatively impacts their ability to respond in a consistently positive manner during their interactions with upset parents. More to the point, regardless of a teacher's cultural background, bias and judgement towards parents does exist and there was general agreement in the data – and confirmed in the comparative interviews - that relationship-building, maintenance, and repair between teachers and parents is key. While experienced teachers appeared to be better able to cope with and productively respond to these relational challenges, newer and less well-trained teachers struggle to connect with parents effectively and sometimes their lack of insight and respect result in unproductive interactions.

This tracks well to evidence in the literature that consistently stresses the need for all teachers to critically reflect on their perceptions of encounters with all aspects of diversity and factor in an increasing awareness of our own social position and cultural contexts can come with biases and stereotypes so that we can begin the inner-work required to overcome them (Dweck, 2006, p. 173; Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 210-216; Barrera et al., 2012, p. 23; Gay, 2018 p. 28;

Sanders and Farago, 2018, p. 1394). Gay (2018) and Ladson-Billings (2021b) both tell us about the pervasive effects of the prevailing Euro-American culture's view of normality that permeates teaching (p. 45), and according to one mixed-race key informant, this view is not confined to the white women that Gay is referring to, and can be thought of as more of a classist tendency that transcends ethnicity (Barrera et al., 2012, p. 115).

In Chapter II, I pointed out that Noddings (2013) states unequivocally that the way forward is realizing that equitable and ethical "caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference [and] into another's" so that we are better able to consider their objective needs and what is expected of us (p. 24). This generalization of her views on the ethics of caring in the context of overcoming relational challenges is fully coherent with the intentionality that embodies Gay's (2018) advocacy around a culturally responsive "practice of action" that is tempered by patience, persistence, facilitation, validation, and the empowerment of the person we are interacting with (p. 60). This points us very clearly towards the reflective stance of "Intentional Teaching" advocated by McLaughlin et al. (2016) and Edwards (2017) that forms the basis of the "Pedagogy of Care for Well-being" (PCW). Using Noddings' (2013) ethics of caring as its philosophical direction, the curricular foundation of PCW shows promise in increasing teacher relational capacity as well as their biopsychosocial strengths to augment their own stress buffering, and emotional resilience (Cigala et al., 2019; Virmani et al., 2020). This translates very strongly towards building the relational safety skills required by teachers in their interactions with parents and the demands of the family-system approach called for to support culturally sustaining and sensitive interactions for everyone that is inherent in the adaptive curriculum framework (per Item V in Table 4 on page 73).

I think both Noddings and Gay would agree that by vigorously maintaining a "Caring For" stance, teachers can ignite the same emancipatory effect in parents that they saw occurring when they became fully engrossed in the child's learning journey. Substituting "student" with "partner" in Gay's (2018) assertations makes the point: "teachers who really care for [the parent as a co-teaching partner] honor their humanity, hold them in high esteem, expect high performance, and use strategies to fulfill their expectations" and these teachers make it clear to parents that as co-teaching partners, and - more importantly – as individuals, "they matter" (p. 57-59). As I pointed out earlier, Gay's work is situated in improving the cultural responsivity of teachers in the K-12 sphere – and as stressed earlier – it easily lends itself to enhancing the relational safety impact of the culturally responsive characteristics of our curriculum development framework's potential to address issues stemming from day-to-day stressors, and hence spur conditions for enhancing well-being for everyone. Her advice to K-12 teaching community is completely supportive of the continuous equity-enhancing process centered on cohesive and useful ECE home-school curricular resources required for a collaborative home-school "practice of action" that parents and teachers can use work together to improve young children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Gay, 2018, p. 57) *and* their own.

The Need for Teacher Professional Development to Build Partnerships with Parents

The third major finding is directly linked to the two that proceed it and to other significant indications in the dialogue that demonstrate the need to move the ECE workforce towards a more professional approach to building parent and family relationships. This finding also struck a chord with key informants, one of whom commented that skillfully (and artfully) addressing fraught relational interactions with parents is a lot to expect from a newly graduated Child Development Assistant or even a 2-year associate graduate from a Community College. It

was also acknowledged that while some level of competency can be acquired by some teachers through experience, relying on the passage of time to mitigate an ongoing serious problem is not a viable option.

As indicated in the dialogue spanning the BT-LTB2022 event, and as confirmed by comparative member-checking with key informants and key stakeholders, the need to systematically bolster the uptake by teachers of an inter-related set of culturally responsive and sustaining equity-based Key Success Factors to employ in managing their interactions with parents became clear, specifically those of:

1. Building a climate of relational safety.
2. Skillful communication and a collaborative partnership orientation that invites and honors parent voice and that is maximized by consistent and intentional effort to build, maintain, and repair interpersonal connections.
3. Adopting and modeling positive mindsets and perspectives.
4. Better awareness of the impacts of family systems through culturally responsive and sustaining reflective practices, and
5. A Continuous Professional Development/Skills Building environment to address all these areas.

In the area of skillful communication and mindsets, a number of key informants highlighted this as the general need for an increased emphasis on teacher perspective-taking and reflective practice, pointing out that in their experience these factors are not common practice in ECE. By far the greatest source of resonance for the key informants stems from the related initial finding centered on the need to work towards a climate of relational safety between parents and teachers. As discussed above, this was evidenced by a very significant volume of statements related to the adverse impact on relationships due to bias, judgement, and injuries to mutual trust.

Collaborative teacher perspectives is critical in this area and the need for reflective practice was seen by many key informants as a crucial element in improving the situation.

Van Hoorn et al., 2015 tell us that teachers can expand their perspectives and grow their relational capacities with their students and – by extension – with parents, by being "reflective and analytical" (p. 21) and by modeling equity in their interactions with others (Baker, 2020, p. 59). The development of an equity-focused relational co-teaching approach holds the key to process improvement because it through the intentionality of fully supporting both the teacher and the parent in what Bronfenbrenner calls the social ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) that is characterized in the MAEC CI4Equity in Education model as action to build a "collaborative and diverse [teaching] team" (MAEC, 2022b). The creation and modeling of a growth-oriented teaching "mindset" (Dweck, 2006, pp. 193-202) – here defined as that of developing a grounded, or an "anchored understanding" to use Barrera et al.'s (2012) terminology, of all forms of diversity - is called forward in support of this. Echoing Noddings (2013) and Gay (2018), Dweck reminds us that establishing an atmosphere of "genuine affection and concern" and demanding high standards leads to impressive results in achievement (p. 196). Great teachers, she tells us "care about every single student" while fellow teachers who do not have that orientation tend to "create an atmosphere of judging" and give up on children they assess as problems (p. 197). For their part, Barrera et al. (2012) tell us that the culturally-responsive relational techniques of Skilled Dialogue help us go about "dissecting the living paradoxes" that surround us that foreclose possible futures and grow the space that help to "set the stage for miracles" [of connection] to happen in relationships.

These orientations to equity-focused relational co-teaching approaches reminds us of another form of "Intentional Teaching" - the "Pedagogy of Care for Well-being" – or PWC as

noted previously (McMullen et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2016). The adoption of a positive, open, and less self-centered point of view becomes a constant guiding touchstone for the intentional action by teachers when they move from a focus on instruction to one of learning and inquiry (Dweck, 2006, p. 202; Scales et al., 2012) and - even more importantly - a professional growth orientation that is firmly grounded in learning in relationships (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 59; Barrera et al., 2012; McLaughlin et al., 2016; Hedges & Cooper, 2018; French, 2019; Liew et al., 2020; Bryan et al., 2020). This aligns directly with Nodding's (2013) stressing the need to shift from our own "personal frame of reference" and work towards seeing things from someone else's perspective.

Building the Co-teaching Framework. Clearly, the literature points towards the critical need for professional development across the ECE sector generally (Whitebook et al., 2001; Whitebook et al., 2016; Gay 2016, p. 292-294; Hughes et al., 2018), and, more specifically, for the enhanced relational competence of its teaching workforce (Williams & Mohammed, 2013a; Gay 2016, p. 22; Penney et al., 2019). Of immediate concern in the context of the current study, this third major finding area is supportive of the need for an ECE & Care co-teaching partnership approach as not only a desirable and viable means towards the objective of improving ECE & Care quality (Moss, 2019, p. 83) – but that is achievable and magnifies its impact when it is facilitated within an community environment as an equity-based and democratically co-constructed "local cultural project" (pp. 66-67). Looking at the aims and objectives of the PCW (McMullen et al., 2015) it can be seen as a pragmatic holistic practice to guide and positively impact parent and teacher collaboration through its foundational elements of empowering individual and collective agency to motivate and support democratic values, choice, and the inclusion of all voices in planning, decision-making, and goal-setting (p. 262). Bryk (2010) tells

us that these equity-advancing factors can be characterized as "strong parent-community-school ties" (p. 25).

Key Supporting Findings

Two other key contributing areas were also identified in the data: participatory pedagogy and use of technology to support the parent–teacher relationship. Discussions with key informants during the comparative interviews indicate that these two supportive factors could potentially play an outsized role in creating the conditions for positive outcomes in addressing relational challenges facing teacher and parents.

Participatory Pedagogy. Reggio Emilia's view of ECE as an interactive and co-constructed lived experience involving parents, teachers, and children is at the center of my understanding of Participatory Pedagogy. In the Post Hoc phase I included a coding unit specifically to see whether there was any signs of this phenomena in action in South St. Petersburg. I was not disappointed. Indeed – while the indications are not lavish, they are present in more than a few elements of the statements of significance and they were situated in the dialogue within the context of teachers' calls for parent-teacher collaboration and cooperation, and more meaningful school-to-home connections. In later stages of the comparative interview series, key informants confirmed the importance of connecting with families and the need for a Family Systems approach that fully respects Parent Voice in early education. It was the view of one key informant that honoring parent agency was crucial for joining, building, maintaining, and repairing the teacher-parent relationship. She also made it clear that encouraging and facilitating parent empowerment succeeds in making a lasting positive impact on the child's development when the teacher's perspective and attitude is centered on the longer-term inter-relationship with the family as a form of non-kin "coparenting" (McHale et al., 2019).

The connecting effect of Participatory Pedagogy to strengthen the effectiveness of the parent-teacher partnership is supported in the literature. Miller (2019) for one, demonstrates that "Participatory Pedagogical Practice" is a culturally responsive means to organize collective action to improve children's learning and development within a community's specific social context. This is achieved by drawing on the interactions, communication and interconnectedness of people, places, and things in the child's individual sociocultural contexts – and especially the family and their school (McLaughlin et al., 2016; French, 2019; Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Liew et al., 2020; Bryan et al., 2020). We also see evidence of this potential in Spaggiari's (1994) contention that the participation of families allows the "integration of different wisdoms" (p. 97), as well Malaguzzi's (1994) insight around the promotion of " affective ties" between teachers and parents that support the child's learning and development (p. 59).

More importantly, participatory pedagogy can be viewed as a "pedagogy of relationships and listening" (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 67) and through that lens it has the potential of becoming a deeply competent place-based system that is pragmatic and practical (Moss, p. 86). While Rinaldi was specifically pointing to the Reggio approach to early learning in relationships, Moss (2019) generalizes it to take in the broad sweep of what adhering to that process means in terms of interaction, dialogue, and mutual respect throughout the entire education enterprise of the school – where teachers, parents, children, and the wider community are all learning together and from each other (p. 73). For Moss – and for South St. Petersburg, participatory pedagogical practice that is initiated as a competent community-based system meets his test of desirability, viability, and achievability required for new and hopeful place-based ECE innovations to take root and thrive (p. 83-84).

Using Technology to Strengthen the Parent–Teacher Co-teaching Partnership.

There was a good level of evidence in the dialogue that points to the use of digital technology to initiate, strengthen, and maintain parent–teacher relationships. The use of email, text messaging, digital photography, and video media were all mentioned as a means to form a bridge from the classroom into the home to support teachers' efforts to engage and involve the parent in enriching their child's learning. While some teachers used technology as another general communications tool, others were explicit in using information communications technology (ICT) not only as an outreach mechanism, but as partnership development tool that supported the distribution of learning material and curriculum resources as an extension of the in-class activities into the home environment.

This finding was particularly well received during the stakeholder comparative discussions with the PEEUA. This stakeholder group voiced their support the potential for a community-based ECE teacher information network as a practical solution for teacher skills building, mentorship, and professional development, especially for small center solo practitioners who often feel isolated and unsupported within the ECE sector.

As this finding emerged organically out of the Post Hoc analysis, I had not delved into the role and use of internet communication technologies (ICTs) as a specific technique or collaborative tool in the literature I had reviewed up to that point. However, in *Play at the Center of the Curriculum*, Van Hoorn, et al. (2015, p. 348-360) cover "computer technology" in the context of Games and Toys. While they are enthusiastic about the application of digital resources for use as a learning experience documentation tool using digital image recording and replay, they treat technology as a collaborative tool for working with parents very peripherally, and mostly for email communication.

I can also point to Reggio Emilia's reliance on digital photography and videography as important activating instruments teachers use to continually document the emergent curriculum created by children during their self-directed learning project work (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 59; Rinaldi, 1994, p. 108). Malaguzzi also points to the way parents' curiosity about their child's achievements is ignited by the constant "flow of documentation" back to them, and they "see how the teachers… document their [child's] work with patience and care, and how skillfully they [do it]" (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 64). Malaguzzi is adamant that this makes a significant positive impact on parents' perspectives:

> *They re-examine their assumptions about their parenting role and their views about the experience their children are living and take a new and more inquisitive approach toward the whole school experience. (p. 63-64)*

An outgrowth of this emergent parent-teacher interactivity that is seen in Reggio schools from the constant flow of information is that "it helps teachers to view participation of families not as a threat but as an intrinsic element of collegiality and as the integration of different wisdoms" (Spaggiari, 1994, p. 97). This is what Malaguzzi (1994) points to as establishing "affective ties" between teachers and parents and these come from the "wider awareness" that arises from "two-way processes of communication" and the co-constructing of "growth of adult educational competencies" (p. 59).

All that said, the concept of the use of ICT as an intentional and pedagogically framed parent collaboration tool appears to be next to non-existent in the literature – especially viewed through the lenses of equity and culturally responsive ECE teaching practice. While there is some evidence of the practicality and benefit of the use of "ePortfolios" over traditional paper-based versions as a learning documentation approach in ECE (Hooker, 2019 for instance), other recent research points to lack of rigor in framing studies using evidence-based teaching

methodologies and pedagogical frameworks, and these studies were generally plagued by poor research design that called into question much of their findings (Zhao et al., 2022, p. 26).

For its part, NAEYC is cautious about the use of digital technologies in the classroom and have expressed concerns about issues of equity of access (NAEYC, 2012, p. 4). They do recommend the use of technology as means of establishing and strengthening the home-school connection and they touch upon its use to engage the parent as teachers to extend classroom learning activities into the home setting through "co-viewing, co-participation, and joint media engagement" of learning material (p. 8). They are also supportive of technology's capacity to enhance the ongoing professional development activities for teachers (p. 10). Significantly, this joint position statement from NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media was released over a decade ago (Parikh, 2012) and I was unable to find any more current statements from NAEYC regarding the role, efficacy, and challenges regarding ICTs in general or its use as a collaborative tool for building parent-teacher relationships.

Limitations

The qualitative analysis focus of this study was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of parents of young children and ECE teachers around home-school collaboration and relational co-teaching approaches. This specific field of inquiry is further focused on the early learning sector in the South St. Peterburg area of Florida as represented by the voices of participants at a community-led learning event. This last factor leads to a small risk of diminished reliability of the source data as the participants represented in the dialogue were self-selected individuals. There is the additional potential confounding element of the current public discourse around "parent rights" that could have resulted in the loudest voice in the room narrowing inclusive "parent voice."

Related to the above problem is the structure of the event itself and its own set of dialogue provoking questions that facilitators posed to the participants as described in Chapter III. The questions to parents were generally oriented around "needs" for their very young children – and this was initiated by an opening question regarding *"the most important things for your child to have - both from you at home and during out of home childcare.*" On the other hand, the first question the teachers were presented asked: *"What things do children need most to be ready to thrive in out of home childcare* [or at an ECE center]*?"* We can see effect of this inconsistency in the data with dialogue identified as being of interest or significance to this study's research question tending to be of a lower volume coming from parents than from teachers. From the outset of their breakout discussions teachers would tend to be much more focused around early learning success and naturally that would lead to a higher incidence of their thinking orienting itself on parent-teacher interactions. Parents on the other hand would have been less likely to have this inter-relationship at top of their minds in the face of all the other pressing needs they and their children face on a daily basis. Despite this issue, a reasonable degree of dialogue from the parents did arise that indicates the degree of importance they hold for the ECE experience of their children.

Given the above, and in an effort to enhance the reliability of the results, I triangulated the data through a comparative interview process (Boeije, 2002) that involved key informants who were at the event. Using the same qualitative analysis technique, research implications and emergent findings were further validated in discussion with stakeholders. For instance – nothing in these encounters raised any concerns regarding the unrepresentative nature of the participants and it is assessed that the facilitators in the various breakout sessions did work towards inclusive contributions from all individuals. However, under the context of evaluating place-based ECE,

pedagogical approaches, and determining continuous improvement action, the generalizability of the findings to other settings must be interpreted with care.

An additional confounding element driven by the venue and the structure of the BT-LTB2022 event is the lack of dialogue from the participants around the need for culturally responsive trauma-sensitive approaches to teaching practice and care. Again – the original prompting questions from the breakout sessions did not make that area of focus, nor did this study's research question seek to highlight that as an A-Priori factor in the investigation. For its part, Bandura's reciprocal interaction framework does not explicitly confront the notion that early adverse experience and trauma can adversely impact relational interactions, and this is acknowledged as a weakness in the research design. That said, there was sufficient awareness of relational trauma impacts in the discussions with the key informants – particularly around the effects of stressed parents interacting with stressed teachers and vice versa - although the question was not explored fully in those comparative analysis encounters due to time constraints. In retrospect, this was a missed opportunity.

A final limitation that became apparent was the quality of the transcripts provided by the artificial intelligence-driven speech-to-text application and interference due to room noise. This appears to have distorted a few of the transcripts to a small degree and forced the abandonment of one in its entirety. Fortunately, this particular transcribed document was associated with a professional development break-out session that did not involve parents or front-line teachers. As a result, I assess this specific limitation as being minor in nature.

Implications for Practice

The major findings all point towards the challenges, opportunities, and promise of ECE & Care teachers improving the level of support they give to the parent as their child's first

teacher. These and other supportive findings also indicate the way forward through a broader engagement of parents as partners in the co-creation of the school as a competent early learning system rooted in the lived experience of families in the local context of the community. Indeed – from the proceeding we hear what Loris Malaguzzi, Carla Rinaldi, Peter Moss, Venessa Miller, and Geneva Gay would all say – why would you not want your parents as true partners in creating a better school and a better future for their children?

The general positive tone of the discussions between participants at the BT-LTB2022 event signals an amiable readiness to try to work towards becoming Rinaldi's (2013) "educative community". This is further supported by indications of an incipient level of individual action amongst community members that is presently taking place in South St. Petersburg towards the objective of building a co-teaching partnership between parents and teachers. However, as the findings make clear, this action is not unified nor is it consistently - or skillfully - applied. *"So,"* as one of the participants asked: *"*[how do we bring] *providers and parents together?*" This then defines this study's theory of change in the context of equity-based continuous quality improvement (Bandura, 2005, p. 15; Bryk, 2010, p. 27; Douglas, et al., 2019; MAEC, 2022b).

So where to start? Geneva Gay (2018) would say, in effect: *everywhere* – "and with deliberate speed" since "the underachievement of marginalized [students] is too pervasive to do anything else" (p. 290). I agree, and I think we can start now at the doorway of each early learning classroom with a simple request to each of our parents like: 'Good to see you! Do you have one minute for a quick question?' The doorway is Gay's symbol of the promise that education represents for our children's future (p. 294), but it is also a symbol of opening up, of inviting in, and of moving beyond - and it is in this context that we can define a small but achievable start in the next steps for improving our teaching practice.

Theory of Improvement – Cooperative Parent-Teacher Adult Learning Groups as a Doorway to ECE & Care Co-teaching Partnerships

> *"It's not what you say to the parent, but how you say [it] …if you find [the] wisdom and kindness and grace… you will win that parent."*
>
> BT-LBT2022 Participant

In the *Hundred Languages of Childhood,* Sergio Spaggiari (1994) states that the participation of families allows the "integration of different wisdoms" that help schools develop (p. 97), and Loris Malaguzzi (1994) talks about the "affective ties" between teachers and parents that support the child's learning and development (p. 59). Wisdom flows both ways according to the participant speaking above, and this underlies folk models of learning (Lancy, 2010) that humans use to organize our experiences into stories that help us to "establish bridges across [our differences] and create feelings of kindredness" (Gay, 2018, p. 2-3). Kindness and grace, different wisdoms, affective ties, establishing bridges, kindredness. To these I will add "caring."

Noddings (2013) and Gay (2018) are empathic in their call for society to move education and teaching onto a reflective stance, and towards an equity-based "Intentional Teaching" practice (McLaughlin et al., 2016). Both Noddings and Gay center their arguments on an ethic of caring. Gay for her part tells us that "caring is action-provoking" and inherently culturally responsive (p. 65). For her part, Noddings (1996) speaks to the importance of the caring ethic because it "leads upward" (p. 29) towards fulfilling our "moral imperative" of meeting an individual's needs as if they were our own (in McMullen et al., 2015, p. 261). You will note that these statements are written as generalities and not necessarily specific to ECE or even teaching practice. The intentionality behind this is firmly rooted on the universality of an "ethic of caring" as a principle with powerful universal application to creating, building, maintaining, and

repairing relationships. Indeed, Noddings changed the title of her 1996 seminal work to *Caring – A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* with the addition of "relational" to the title when the second edition was released in 2013.

This is where Gay's metaphor of the doorway is apt. When we hold open a door out of kindness for a person that has arrived at it at the same time as we do, we enter a momentary relationship with them as the "one caring," to use Noddings' (2013) terminology as I introduced in Chapter II. The two of us will go our separate ways after we pass through (after the "after you!" that is said one to the other), but right there - in that moment - we are joined in a cooperative enterprise. As mundane as this example is, it defines a very basic human Inter-Action. Recall in Chapter II, that Noddings (2013) tells us about the child's "observable expressive pattern" of affect - "particularly those on the face" (p. 136) when thinking, feeling, and moving through their immediate physical and social surroundings. And this is the important point: whether it is the child in the playgroup, or the adult at the doorway, both are responding to what is happening in the moment and those responses are based on certain beliefs about that situation. Am I smiling as I hold the door? What is my tone of voice? The other's reaction to this appraisal further contributes to that environment: my smile will more than likely evoke a smile and the cheerful "after you" will more than likely elicit a pleasant verbal acknowledgement in return. In the playgroup, joy builds joy in the progressive process of "opening up" and receptivity of the child to the social experience and the relationships within it (Noddings,2013, p. 141). As we transition through the doorway in a cooperative fashion, my day and that of my fellow traveler has had a moment of pleasantness in interaction and we are both ever so slightly better for it. Perhaps each of us will be a bit more receptive to our experiences and relationships we encounter through the rest of the day that follows.

It is this "opening up" that Malaguzzi is keying into when he tells us why it is so important to pay attention to adult "cognitive activity within social interactions [while we work to] establish affective ties" in building parent-teacher cooperation and broader collaborations. He is talking about parents joining in relationship with the teacher at the doorway to the school and why it is important to hold that door open through the "action-provoking" effects of caring (Gay, 2018, p.65). And: this action can start "with deliberate speed," and in many small ways.

These joining activities are also fully consistent with and serve as an entry into a deepening understanding of the conceptual curriculum defined in Chapter II (Table 4, Item II, on page 73) that sets a cardinal aim of providing robust partnering through:

> *clear communication arising from feelings of understanding and being understood in the context of verbal and non-verbal interaction,* [and of] *having self-respect - each person's sense of self and personal dignity and feelings of being valued and worthy of love – are those of the individual's family, culture, and community.* (McMullen, et al. 2015)

These are grounded in this dissertation's emphasis on growing social, emotional, and cognitive functioning and that intentional and consistent, caring relational interactions result in "Comfort and Safety" (Bridget et al., 2015; Cooper, et al., 2017). Whether you are an adult interacting with a child, or with another adult: building your interactional competence builds your relational teaching competence.

The First Small Step Towards Forming Strong Co-Teaching Partnerships. The major findings of the current study point to a caring and "action-provoking" invitation from teachers to parents where we can imagine another doorway that we can pass through together towards cooperative interaction: "I'm really interested in knowing what learning material and resources you and your child need at home," the teacher can say. Or: "What will help you help them with their social, emotional and cognitive development?" A follow-on question to those

might be: “would you like to join me and some other parents sometime later this month to discuss that and learn from each other?” This is holding the door open. Some parents will smile back and say “thank you – tell me more” as they walk through that doorway. This becomes the “small start.”

The Doorway to Learning Project - Initiating and Enhancing Parent-Teacher Dialogue. Barrera et al. (2012) tells us that a great deal of preparation proceeds the invitation to join in an intentional dialogue initiative, which entails acquiring the skillset they call “interactional competency” (p. 38) and – as described just above - it is fully consistent with Cardinal Item II in the conceptual curriculum show in Table 4 on page 73. They provide an excellent resource to help guide teachers in that preparatory work. *Skilled Dialogue* is the title of and a brief description for a process for communicating across diversity and mindsets in a culturally responsive manner (Barrera et al., 2012, p. xxi***).*** What follows here is not prescriptive. It is intended simply as a possible point of departure around a dialogue within the community regarding a possible future for ECE & Care teaching practice in South St. Petersburg.

The Skilled Dialogue process model is based on individual reflective work for developing and internalizing a set of values we can use to understand differences and improve our working relationships and raise our interactional competency. According to its authors, we can think of Skilled Dialogue as a technology (Barrera et al., 2012,p. xxii) and one that employs a matrix of intentional strategies that involve “Welcoming,” “Sense-making,” and “Joining” among group members that leads towards “Respect, Reciprocity and Responsiveness” in relationships (p. 41-48). These last three states are qualities that result from honoring identity, voice, and connection once cultural and other differences are better understood and embraced. This in turn results in an increased appreciation of the value that our diversity and different perspectives bring to

improving the work we do together (p. 55). These objectives are reminiscent of the key findings from this study and form a supportive framework to guide our thinking about a way forward.

This brief outline of the Skilled Dialogue framework is provided as an example of how "action-provoking" invitations can start an intentional focus on improving the individual parent–teacher relationship and - with time and after more intentional and competent caring interaction - move it into a partnership process. That said, it is clear that the "small start" of the doorway invitation from the ECE teacher to the parent needs to be framed and proceeded by a skills-building professional development initiative around reflective practice. This must be backed by a modest amount of support and mentorship of more experienced practitioners along the lines of the in-service teaching development approaches advocated by Malaguzzi (1994, p. 64; New, 1994, p. 222) – people we can think of as experienced "Kindezi" (Williams-Johnson, 2016), or to mix multicultural terminology, our culturally responsive and sustaining "Pedagogistas" (Filippini, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2021c). This brings us to Cooperative Learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1999) and another technology pointed to by the findings.

The Community-based 'Doorway to Cooperative Learning System.' According to Gay (2018), cooperative learning is a culturally responsive approach with particular benefits for African-Americans and other people of color (p. 227). To effectively structure a cooperative learning project, Gay advises us to frame the activity in the following way:

1. Start small. Work together to define the problem.
2. Take the time to co-construct group performance agreements, project objectives, and criteria for success.
3. Above all, create and maintain a climate of relational safety amongst the participants.
4. To do this, allow time to grow comfort with the cooperative learning process and the tasks, and

5. Work intentionally to break projects into individual, small group, and whole group activities [to promote collective and individual agency and efficacy: join, partner, and explore]. (p. 228)

Again – the intention behind this is a very brief overview of cooperative learning is to place another piece into the context of a potential community initiative as a first step in a continuous improvement process – a journey if you will - and the key to setting the direction is to start the dialogue. Perhaps that small start takes the format and adopts a set of principles such as those of Skilled Dialogue – but it does not matter so long as we co-construct how we proceed for us in the here and now using whatever framework we collectively see will work best. Doing this through a cooperative learning project as a culturally responsive community venture makes sense in the context of this study when you focus on the words "agency," "join," "partner," and "explore" in Step 5 above. These relate directly to the cardinal points from the conceptual curriculum framework provided in Chapter II (i.e. Table 4 on page 73, and from the Social Learning Loop in Figure 3 on page 52). Figure 9 (on the next page) is a rendition of that same process generalized somewhat to consider the terminology from the thinking of Gay, Noddings, Malaguzzi, and Barrera et al. outlined immediately above.

Recalling that in Chapter II's Figure 3 (p. 53), the inner-loop is the adult's caring-for action on the learning environment, and in the Figure 9 process it is the learning group's collective "leading upward" from Noddings' (1996) call to meet the individual's learning needs as if they were our own. In this example however, we determine that mutual need together through the cooperative learning process advocated by Gay (2018, p. 227-228) – perhaps guided by the Skilled Dialogue process introduced above. This then becomes the objective of the preparatory work ahead of the teacher's doorway 'ask' that potentially creates the opportunity

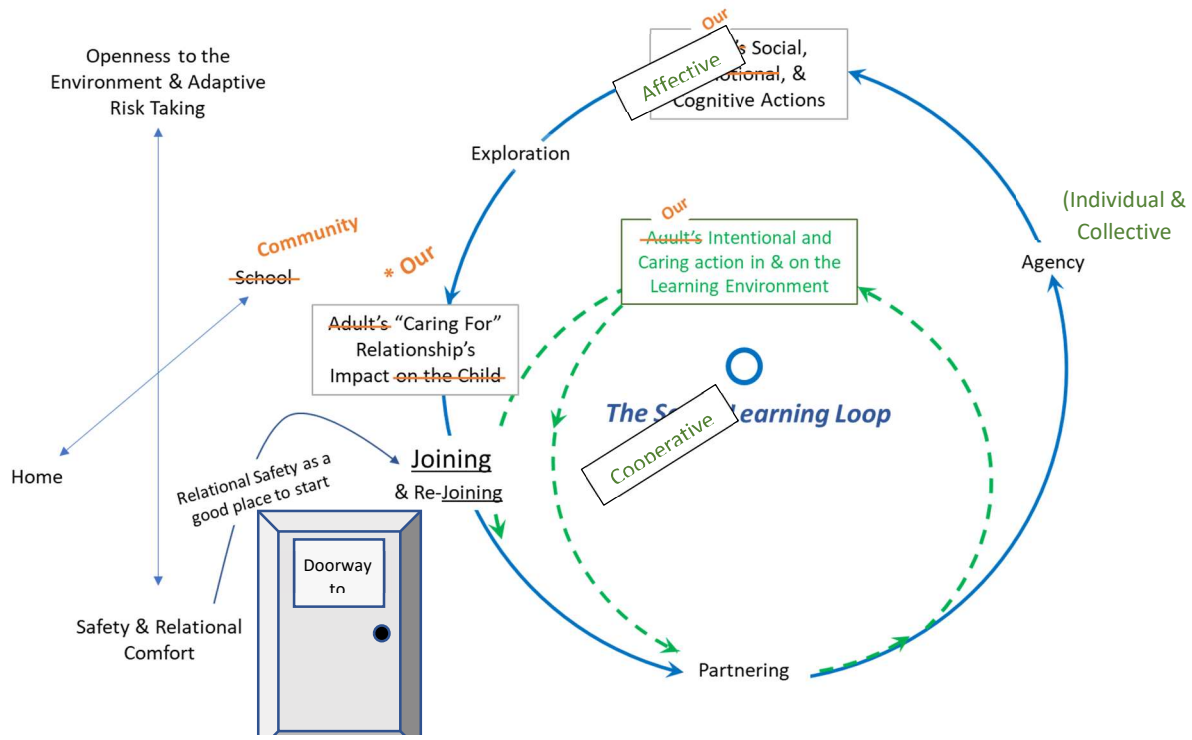

Figure 9

The Social Learning Loop Rendered as a Cooperative Learning Model.

for the parent to take their own "Joining" step in the wider process of creating the parent–teacher partnership using the same Cooperative Learning Loop shown in Figure 9. I have symbolized this conceptually with the Doorway to Learning symbol in the diagram. To make it clear - the process can be tailored to help the teacher teach in a relational and caring manner in the classroom since teachers would be able to use the same process for their own Profession Development cooperative learning and reflective practice work. The same learning process can then also be used to engage the parent. As introduced earlier in this paper: step by small step teachers expanding their perspectives and growing their own relational capacities by being "reflective and analytical" (Van Hoorn et al., 2015, p. 21) and by better modeling equity in the classroom *and* with parents (Baker, 2020, p. 59).

As I also noted earlier, joy brings joy as the child opens up to the social experience of the playgroup, and pleasantness arises as I hold the door open for the stranger. So does the opening up and increasing comfort in the process of the parent joining others in talking about how we can work together to help their child. Holding this intention in mind for a moment, we need to first appreciate how the teacher can prepare for this journey and start to think about a way to increase their own comfort in the hard 'inner work' of developing relational and reflective practice.

For teachers, as outlined above this work can happen through participation in intentional cooperative learning sessions with each other as reflective practice peer support and learning partners under the caring for guidance of "their mentor-Kindezi." As noted in the findings, there is evidence of a level of positive aspiration behind some of the teacher statements regarding what they think works in building relationships with parents and what that means for improving the learning process for children. To explore this further, imagine a group of teachers who choose to form a cooperative learning team to compare and contrast the culturally-responsive relational basis of the adult-oriented Skilled Dialogue process and the Circle of Security that is aimed at children and its impact on the relational safety of the child in the learning environment (Hoffman et al., 2006). Or perhaps they could create a cooperative learning project to explore the various aspects of the caring-in-action impacts that can be achieved through the Pedagogy of Care for Well-being (McMullen et al., 2015). Again – the aim is to start the dialogue and build on the aspirations that are already present. Teachers can join, partner, develop individual and collective agency to explore these or other worthwhile teaching approaches and do that in company with peers in a non-judgmental and caring cooperative learning environment. In effect, they are practicing the adult-version of the adaptive curriculum development framework in company with other adults in a culturally responsive and sustaining manner "with love and an eye to the future

of our village" (Williams-Johnson, 2016). Joining together as aspiring Kindezi they also move the adaptive place-based curriculum forward in collaboration with the overall initiative's leadership team on behalf of the whole community.

From the above we can begin to imagine a supportive community-based process where teachers can learn from one-another and begin to collect individual and group successes. We can share these success stories and from there begin the process of opening that potential up and spread it to the wider teaching community – or at least make a *small start towards that future*. For its part, the ECE practitioner community can support that process to help more early learning teachers to open up a feeling of hopefulness and mutual support by joining a cooperative learning group lead by an experienced teacher who has demonstrated success in building relationships with her families. We heard the wisdom, commonsense, and caring-for orientations of these teachers in the dialogue – and I could see them as forming a potential cadre of Kindezi-Pedagogistas working in the spirit of participatory practice. But in any event, this envisioned cooperative learning process can form the start of the skills-building exchange in the ECE teaching community itself in a way that leads to better more productive and culturally sustaining inter-actions with parents in the spirit of Ladson-Billings (2021b). Given time and cheerful persistence, better parent-teacher partnerships become possible. To take this aspiration to reality in meeting the needs identified through this study's findings will require structural and institutional support and that is where a university-community partnership initiative can serve a beneficial role through a supported ICT platform such as the one depicted in Figure 10 (on the next page).

In addition to supporting the professional development, reflective practice, and peer support needs of South St. Petersburg's ECE teachers envisioned in the proceeding, this

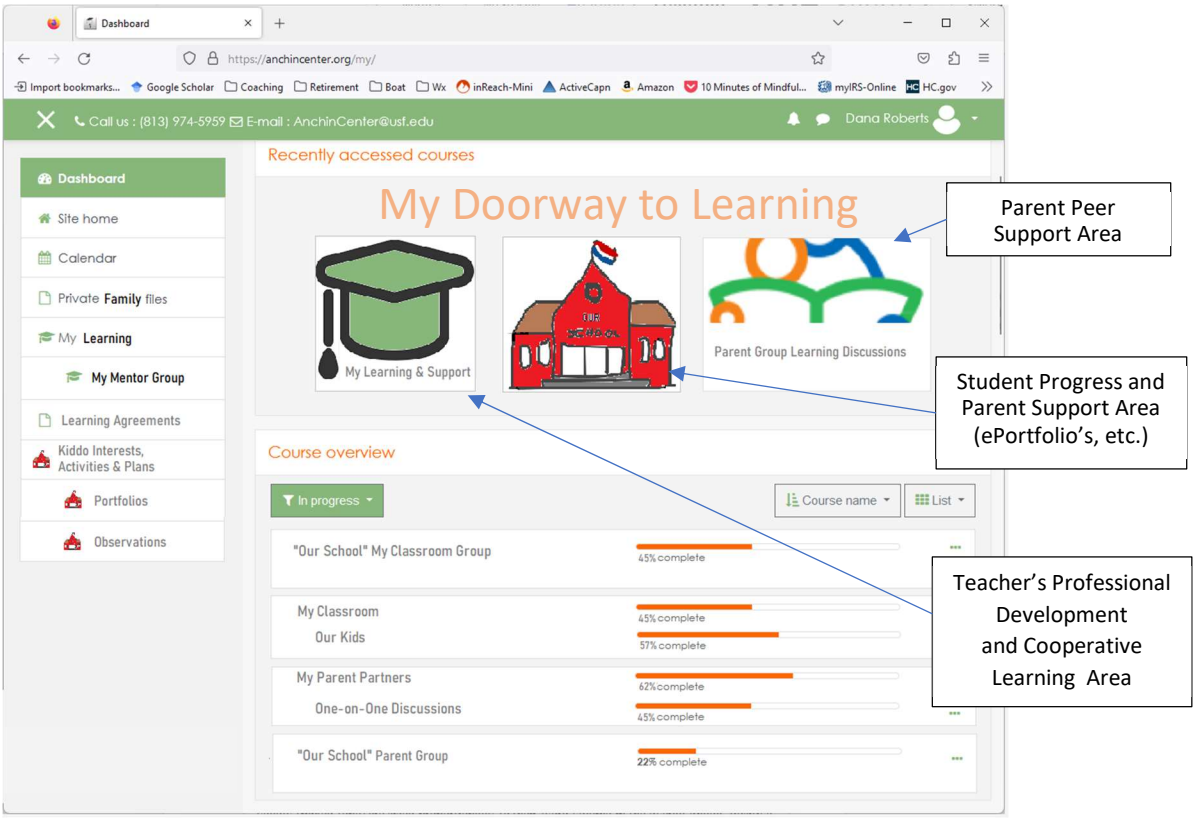

Figure 10

Conceptual View of the Doorway to Learning Community ECE Support System Showing the Teacher View

'Doorway to Learning' ICT environment could also serve as a basis for a parent outreach, engagement, and as a co-teaching support platform to facilitate teacher relationship building efforts. Not coincidentally, a similar infrastructure need was identified by COQEBS as part of their immediate after-event analysis of the same BT-LTB2022 dialogue data. Their finding, however, was constrained to parent outreach versus broader community learning support and was expressed as a recommendation to *"look into Social Media infrastructure to reach families"* Interestingly, this agenda setting recommendation was proceeded by the identification of a need to conduct "mini- Baby-Talk" sessions to increase community-based organizing, advocacy, as well as peer-support and parent educational efforts (such as workshops to promote trauma-

sensitive responsiveness in teaching practice for instance), amongst other important connecting activities (COQEBS, 2022b). While COQEBS was envisioning face-to-face gatherings in this particular area, one can see the utility of the Doorway system to support these activities through its Asynchronous Online Discussion Group features that removes the tyranny of time that busy lives imposes on everyone and promotes equity of inclusion through wider access.

The system envisioned above is based on community-oriented open-source architecture (such as the "MOODLE" learning management system from moodle.org as just one example) and would be much more capable than commercial Internet-based social media platforms and applications typically available to individuals. What distinguishes the conceptual 'Doorway' system from common social media applications such as Facebook is its flexibility as it would be customizable and scalable while remaining relatively easy to support – potentially through volunteer system administrators in the community. A similar system currently serves the professional development instructional delivery needs of the David C. Anchin Center for the Advancement of Teaching at USF. But again, the intention for outlining these ideas is to initiate the dialogue and its sole purpose is to serve as an avatar of a concrete example of a community-supported learning environment within which parents, teachers, and community members can come together, join, partner, explore, and enhance their collective agency in improving Early Learning conditions in South St. Petersburg. It is a potential virtual equivalent of a brick-and-mortar "competent system" approach to what communities can achieve as local cultural projects worth doing (Malaguzzi, 1994, p. 58; Moss, 2019, p. 66-67; Ladson-Billings, 2021a, p. 225).

Maximizing the Equity-enhancing Aspects of the Doorway to Learning Project

The outline of the systematic steps towards the initiation of the Doorway Project lines up with the framework of keys to success given to us from the Mid-Atlantic the Mid-Atlantic Equity

Consortium's "CI4Equity initiative" (MAEC, 2022b). At a high level, this conceptual cooperative learning project is aimed at building a coherent and collaborative approach to teaching practice and teacher professional capacity under the umbrella vision of forging strong parent-community-school ties that advance equity in education program change and improvement efforts (Bryk, 2010, pp. 24-25). To maximize the continuous improvements to the child-centered learning environment, Bryk (2010) tells us that the project planning needs to be focused around building a leadership team that drives change (p. 25).

As introduced earlier, Rao (2013) points out that a community school approach can help guide the dialogue between under-served and marginalized communities and various systems and silos by forming an "intentional partnership" to increase child and family access not just to supportive services beyond the school but also to connect to the community itself. This too, is equity-based thinking as underscored by The Coalition for Community Schools at the at the Institute for Educational Leadership (Melaville et al., 2011; IEL, 2020). The community-school concept is very supportive of "hyper-local decision-making" that is responsive to the specific (i.e. place-based) needs of the local community (IEL, 2020) such as those identified by the BT-LTB2022 conveners in their post event agenda setting report (COQEBS, 2022b). This sets the baseline for leadership dialogue around community-based participatory processes to develop a "Collaborative, Culturally Responsive, and Sustaining Toddler Pre-school Curriculum" in Midtown St. Petersburg, Florida.

Next Steps – From Theory of Improvement to a Model for Change. As I mentioned previously, the current study is nested within a broader milieux of USF's Anchin Center's efforts to re-examine its role of advancing K-12 teaching practice towards the earlier years and it is under the rubric of "*community-school thinking*" that the sketch of a "*cooperative learning*

system" for ECE teacher professional development discussed above leaps into focus as a university-community partnership. In discussions with key stakeholder representatives from COQEBS, PEEUA, and other community leaders, interest was expressed in investigating the feasibility of this approach to community-based ECE and Care practice improvement. Following up on these ideas in dialogue with COQEBS, their SRC, the School District, and other interested supportive agencies forms an immediate (and small but urgent) next step to set the other early small steps in motion.

Future Research

One of the interesting implications from the findings of this study is the connection between aspirations and outlook to the future and resulting real change. Future research is needed around implementing mixed-methods research designs that capture parent and teacher perspectives about quality ECE programming at the outset of change initiatives. These designs should also have the means to measure changes in those views as the process unfolds. Baby Talk and Listening to Babies has been ongoing for over 10 years and it would be interesting to see what changes in parent and teacher sentiment and perspectives have taken place through the intervening years since their children entered the early learning environment and continued through to elementary school and beyond. Yet, no longitudinal work that I am aware of is being conducted in this space and the urgency of the problem lends a great deal of weight to the consideration of concentrated research effort to examine what I suspect are very powerful and hopeful lessons for the child development, early learning, and education sectors.

In line with the above, another related consideration for future research is centered on the parent-teacher relationship and how to positively impact it. The findings point to a promising field of research around equity-based approaches to ECE and the role of community-school

approaches in addressing the highly enmeshed issues facing communities of color. Significantly, the Pinellas County Schools have recently designated one of the South St. Petersburg elementary schools as a community school, so this provides for the possibility for rich action-research mixed-methods design studies to measure resulting impacts.

Another fruitful area for future research that falls out of the current study's findings is the idea of the adaptive curriculum. The conceptual framing of this study is centered on the co-construction by the community of a responsive early learning environment that better meets the needs of individual children and their families. It is based on a set of principles that, to quote Bailey (2019) one more time: is left intentionally loose so as to be "open, and alive" to better attack the "what is" and to replace it with the "what can be." In that spirit and wishing for some act of providence that manifests itself in some measure of a project the comes into being, we must find ways to ensure it becomes that "alternative story" that Moss (2019) tells us defies the current dominate narrative of markets and neoliberal accountability-driven, instrumental and technically-oriented jurisdictional silos that are not culturally relevant or responsive to the lived-lives of children and families who matter.

A final consideration that weighed heavily on me was the ethics of the research practice as an outsider who was mindful of Yarbrough's (2020) "nothing about us without us" credo and Milner's point about etic perspectives. This too points to a rich area of need for research on operationalizing culturally responsive qualitive research design, particularly around participatory ECE program development research by "racial outsiders." That know-how would have been highly valuable.

Conclusion

This dissertation represents a small step beyond the "easy answers" that seem to plague the ECE sector at all jurisdictional levels and have directly and negatively impacted countless

lives in South St. Petersburg. This is stark language intended to confront a stark reality that challenges us to undertake the "hard, solid thinking" called for by Dr. Martin Luther King (1963) and the caring action with "deliberate speed" that Geneva Gay (2018) urges us to take to bring about lasting change. Through a process of qualitative analysis of parent and teacher dialogue from a recent community learning and needs assessment event three major findings arose around the challenges and opportunities to advance equity in early learning, specifically: 1) children's early learning and development can be positively impacted through a school-home shared curriculum and related support to parents as their children's 'First Teacher'. 2) Difficult and persistent relational challenges between parents and teachers confound the effectiveness of any related school-to-home collaboration. 3) As a result, teacher professional development needs to be undertaken to equip them with the requisite skills, perspectives, and open mindsets to build better relationships with parents and effectively initiate the partnership process.

These are formidable challenges to advancing equity in education for South St. Petersburg's young children. Fortunately, South St. Petersburg has a number of keys to success in place to begin to successfully address these obstacles in line with the continuous improvement for equity processes advocated by the Mid-Atlantic Education Consortium and articulated in their Continuous Improvement for Equity in Education Model (MAEC, 2022b). First and foremost, strong leadership is present. The School Readiness Committee of the Concerned Organizations for the Quality Education of Black Students (COQEBS) has put a change agenda in place and this strong and diverse team is made up of early education practitioners, community advocates, representatives from the Early Learning Coalition, and membership from the Pinellas County School District. Second, a level of commitment to initiate ECE teacher professional development activities is already beginning to take shape through the efforts of the Pinellas Early

Educators United Association. Third, an incipient level of engagement to some form of participatory pedagogy is already present in the community as indicated by the continued attendance and spirited contribution of parents and frontline teachers to the Baby Talk – Listening to Babies dialogue and related emergent COQEBS's School Readiness Committee initiatives stemming from it around creating better conditions for early learning and early development of young children.

Over and above all this is "something else" - that ineffable ingredient that Mertova and Webster (2020, p. 123) talk about that makes the difference in early learning and teaching practice. The families and community members of the Reggio Emilia municipal region in northern Italy built a world-class early childhood learning system literally out of the ruble of years of Fascist rule, Nazi occupation, sustained aerial bombardment, and the entrenched opposition of the dominant narrative from the Church and secular education authorities of the day. Schools in Chicago recreated themselves as places where learning returned to the center of everyone's motivation because the community, parents, teachers, principals, *and* students aspired to make that positive future possible. It is that ineffable aspirational spirit that is behind the reasoning in this dissertation that ECE teachers in South St. Petersburg can come together to learn from each other about growth mindsets, and through cooperative learning processes, develop the reflective caring-in-action know-how needed to use culturally responsive relational teaching practice to build strong partnerships with parents for the benefit of very young children.

Ladson-Billings (2021b) is calling for a "hard reset" in education to address disparities in learning outcomes for Black and BIPOC children. This urgent call challenges communities to examine equity-based Early Education and Care (ECE&E) continuous improvement initiatives that are centered on *adaptive place-based participatory pedagogy processes.* In the local context

of South St. Petersburg, this can be achieved by taking steps towards creating a parent-teacher ECE and Care co-teaching framework through the application of a community-based Doorway to Learning process that supports community-wide cooperative learning and teaching practice continuous improvement. In reality, the first step towards success is to continue the dialogue heard at the Baby Talk/Listening to Babies early learning and child development workshop held in St. Petersburg in February 2022 and continue the good work started there. By linking those aspirations strongly to a structured equity-focused continuous improvement process to provoke sustained community-wide caring-in-action and participatory pedagogical ECE and Care practices a wonderful "re-set" can take place. Indeed, this study confirms that the journey in South St. Petersburg towards becoming an equity-advancing educative community to strengthen parent-teacher relationships and improve early learning for young children has already begun.

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APPENDIX A: AN ANALYSIS OF FLORIDA OFFICE OF EARLY LEARNING (OEL) SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENTS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN FROM ST. PETERSBURG EARLY LEARNING CENTER ON ENTERING KINDERGARTEN

The following six pages are a PDF print to file that I have inserted here to show the analysis of school readiness rate disparities in the Midtown catchment of St. Petersburg, Florida in comparison to other areas of the City. Data was accessed from the Florida Early Learning Coalition representing state mandated reporting from the Pinellas County School Board as at the end of the 2018-19 school year (Florida OEL, 2020). A high-level aggregation of the Midtown results is shown at the top of the third page of the series (page 224 of this document) and the aggregation of the data from the remaining St. Petersburg ECE centers follows from that page through to its tabulation on page 224. The last page is a basic statistical analysis showing the Midtown catchment's schools significant deviation from the overall expected baseline.

These pages are presented in landscape format for clarity. The Excel spreadsheet with associated data that these results were rendered from can be downloaded from the Supplemental files associated with this dissertation's file on ProQuest.

Appendix A

Analysis of FL OLE School Readiness Rates

St. Petersburg Area of Pinellas County

Search Initiated at 19:47 EDT 3/27/2021	https://vpkrates.floridaearlylearning.com/home/search?name=&city=&zip=&fromyr=2018&toyr=2019&displayStyle=table&pgtypes=1&prtypes=3,2&counties=52&coalitions=24&searchRadius=5&searchOriginLatitude=27.75287&searchOriginLongitude=-82.65419&searchType=Advanced&sort=a-z
Search Radius	This indicates a search filter of 5 miles from 1750 16th St S, St. Petersburg, FL 33705
Program Type	by School-Year (see Search Parameter Tab)
Program Year	2018-19
County	County
Florida EL Coalition	Pinellas

*This is "Midtown's" USPS Station. Note: could not refine data for radius less than 5 miles thus results were sorted manually based on street addresses.

Provider Name	Address	Midtown Catchment (Y/N)	Provider Type	Readiness Rate	Children Served	Children in Readiness Rate Calculation	School Readiness Provider	Faith Based	Top/Worse Performer
PERKINS ELEMENTARY	2205 18TH AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Public School	100	25	18	N	N	T
JAMES B SANDERLIN ELEMENTARY	2350 22 AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Public School	93	27	27	N	N	T
BAYFRONT CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER	800 6TH AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33701	Y	Private Center	84	23	21	Y	N	N
LAD'N'LASS OF LAKEWOOD UMC	5995 MLK Jr. ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33705	Y	Private Center	80	5	4	Y	N	N
R CLUB EARLY LEARNING ACADEMY HAPPY WORKERS	920 19TH ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Private Center	80	9	7	Y	N	N
INFINITE POTENTIAL LEARNING CENTER	2250 62ND AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Private Center	79	18	11	Y	N	N
ANGELS AT PLAY LEARNING CENTER INC	South St. Petersburg, FL 33712	Y	Private Center	75	5	4	Y	N	N
STARLING SCHOOL 1 & STAR CAMP	615 28TH ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Private Center	73	18	12	Y	N	N

BAY POINT ELEMENTARY	5800 22 St. S. St. Petersburg, FL 33712	Y	Public School	72	13	9	N	N	N
UMCM EARLY LEARNING CENTER AT MCCABE	2800 26th Avenue South St. Petersburg, FL 33712	Y	Private Center	64	10	7	Y	N	N
MAGNOLIA DAY SCHOOL OF SOUTH ST PETE	2701 54 AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Private Center	61	48	30	Y	N	N
SPEER YMCA PRESCHOOL ACADEMY	2100 26 AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Private Center	60	37	30	Y	N	N
MAXIMO ELEMENTARY	4850 31 ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Public School	58	29	26	N	N	N
MCMANNIS PRE SCHOOL AND CHILD CARE CTR	1901 62ND AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Private Center	58	10	6	Y	N	N
MELROSE ELEMENTARY	1752 13TH AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Public School	53	8	6	N	N	N
LAKEWOOD ELEMENTARY	4151 6 ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33705	Y	Public School	45	8	8	N	N	W
CAMPBELL PARK ELEMENTARY	1051 7 AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33705	Y	Public School	43	28	18	N	N	W
LSF INC., MIDTOWN ACADEMY CENTER	1701 10TH ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33705	Y	Private Center	37	28	21	N	N	W
LSF INC FILLMORE CENTER	1900 12 ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33705	Y	Private Center	43	82	53	N	N	W
CELEBRITY KIDS CLUB TOO	3000 22nd Ave S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Private Center	38	11	10	Y	N	W

Appendix A

Analysis of FL OLE School Readiness Rates

St. Petersburg Area of Pinellas County

LSF INC HEAD START JORDAN PARK	2390 9 AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	Y	Private Center		24	33	19	N	N		Total Kids Not Ready	Number of Centers	Mean Readiness Rate	Std Dev
				MidTown Kiddos			347	= # Kids in sample			37% 128	21	62.9	19.5
ALLENDALE CHILDREN'S CENTER	3803 HAINES RD N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33703	N	Private Center		100	20	14	N	N	T				
ARGONAUTA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL	6632 1ST AVE S (physical) 6646 1st Ave S (mailing) ST PETERSBURG, FL 33707	N	Private Center		100	5	4	N	N	T				
DOUGLAS JAMERSON ELEMENTARY	1200 37 ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33711	N	Public School		100	9	8	N	N	T				
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH DAY SCHOOL	716 N SHORE DR NE ST PETERSBURG, FL 33701	N	Private Center		100	26	16	N	N	T				
KIDS ZONE ACADEMY	3551 42ND AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33711	N	Private Center		100	9	6	Y	N	T				
TEMPLE BETH-EL OF ST. PETERSBURG EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER	400 PASADENA AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33707	N	Private Center		100	15	7	N	N	T				
MOUNT VERNON ELEMENTARY	4629 13TH AVE N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33713	N	Public School		98	9	8	N	N	T				
PAULINE RIVKIND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDU CTR	300 58TH ST N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33710	N	Private Center		98	9	9	Y	N	T				
SONRISE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING CENT	100 Pasadena Avenue North St. Petersburg, FL	N	Private Center		95	47	34	N	N	T				

LEARNING ADVENTURES PRESCHOOL LLC	4401 38TH AVE N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33713	N	Private Center	79	45	28	Y	N	N
PRECIOUS ANGELS PRESCHOOL	3747 34TH ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33711	N	Private Center	79	10	7	Y	N	N
FAIRMOUNT PARK ELEMENTARY	575 41 ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33711	N	Public School	76	28	25	N	N	N
JOHN M SEXTON ELEMENTARY	1997 54 AVE N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33714	N	Public School	76	27	22	N	N	N
ELIM CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER	4824 2ND AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33711	N	Private Center	75	11	10	Y	N	N
WOODLAWN ELEMENTARY	1600 16 ST N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33704	N	Public School	73	10	6	N	N	N
ROSIES PLAYSCHOOL III	2869 54TH AVE N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33714	N	Private Center	69	23	17	Y	N	N
LEW WILLIAMS CENTER FOR EARLY LEARNING	901 34 ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33711	N	Private Center	61	27	19	Y	N	N
IMAGINATION STATION	2200 33RD ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	N	Private Center	60	20	12	Y	N	N
COMMUNITY PRESCHOOL	1665 25TH AVE N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33713	N	Private Center	57	17	10	Y	N	N
ACADEMY OF LEARNING INC	555 40TH ST N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33713	N	Private Center	56	21	17	Y	N	N
BEAR CREEK ELEMENTARY	350 61ST ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33707	N	Public School	56	12	12	N	N	N

CELEBRITY KIDS CLUB OF PINELLAS	2511 5 AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	N	Private Center	55	20	12	Y	N	N
NEW HEIGHTS ELEMENTARY	3901 37 ST N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33714	N	Public School	52	29	23	N	N	N
ACADEMY FOR LOVE AND LEARNING INC	2901 54TH AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	N	Private Center	50	6	4	Y	N	N
LEAP OF FAITH CHRISTIAN PRESCHOOL II	6315 CENTRAL AVE ST PETERSBURG, FL 33710	N	Private Center	50	10	7	Y	N	N
CONNIE L MARMARO CENTER LSF, INC	3600 FAIRFIELD AVE S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33711	N	Private Center	49	61	49	N	N	N
A CHILD'S PLACE	4025 49TH ST N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33709	N	Private Center	40	19	8	Y	N	W
ROSIES PLAYSCHOOL II INC	501 39TH ST N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33713	N	Private Center	35	7	6	Y	N	W
ROSIES PLAYSCHOOL I	4500 38TH AVE N ST PETERSBURG, FL 33713	N	Private Center	34	13	7	Y	N	W
A CIRCLE OF CHILDREN INC	530 31ST ST S ST PETERSBURG, FL 33712	N	Private Center	33	11	7	Y	N	W
GULFPORT ELEMENTARY	2014 52 ST S GULFPORT, FL 33707	N	Public School	2	8	5	N	N	

	Kids Not Ready		Number of Centers	Mean Readiness Rate	Std Dev
588 = # Kids in sample	27%	156	42	73.4	23.5

Cross Check of Manual Analysi	Total Number of Schools	66
(Conducted by D. Roberts)	Schools Excluded from Analysis[1]	3

St. Pete Kids Outside MidTown

Total overall not ready: 285 45%

<-Midtown contribution from 37% of all chil

Analysis of FL OLE School Readiness Rates

St. Petersburg Area of Pinellas County

	Number of Schools in Sample (n)	63		
		%		
Overall	Mean Readiness Rate	69.9		
		%		
Pooled	Standard Deviation	22.2	Top Performers > Overall Mean Readiness + Pooled Std Dev% >	92.0
	Median Readiness	%		
	Rate	79.0	Worst Performers < Overall Mean Readiness - Pooled Std Dev% <	47.7
	Range	2% to 100 %	Under Performers: Readiness < 69.9 > 60 (State Expectation)	52.8
	Total Children Calculation	935		
	Children School Ready	653		
	Children Not School Ready Overall	282		
	Statistically Significant group differences		t (61) = 1.295, p < .05	
	2-sample t Test	Next Excel Tab		

APPENDIX B: LISTING OF RELEVANT DOCUMENTATION FROM THE CONCERNED ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE QUALITY EDUCATION OF BLACK STUDENTS (COQEBS)

1. BabyTalk-Listening to Babies (BT-LTB) Workshop Page (COQEBS, 2022b).

www.journalismanddesign.com/babies (transcripts listed via link below https://usf.app.box.com/s/3ic8jf2a0nls3g75a5bobwm1iy02miyn)

ARCHIVES FROM PRIOR YEARS

- 2013
- 2014
- 2015
- 2016
- 2017
- 2018
- 2019
- 2020
- 2021

LINKS OF INTEREST

- What might the future of universal pre-K look like? As researchers, we have some concerns - Opinion piece, March, 2022
- School suspensions are an adult behavior - TEDX Presentation by Rosemarie Allen
- Kids Use Play To Communicate. Here's Why Adults Need To Pay Attention. - Opinion Piece, January, 2022
- Babies Are Saying Less Since the Pandemic: Why That's Concerning. - Opinion Piece, April, 2022

SPONSORS

jwb Juvenile Welfare Board
Investing in children. Strengthening our community.

COQEBS

UNIVERSITY of SOUTH FLORIDA
ST. PETERSBURG CAMPUS

PARTNERS

- Infinite Potential Learning Center
- Imagination Station
- Thrive by Five
- Early Learning Coalition
- City of St. Petersburg
- Healthy Start Federal Project at Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital
- United Way
- Healthy Start Coalition
- Pinellas County Licensing Board

2. The seventeen raw transcripts of the recordings from the three-day BT-LTB2022 event (as discussed in Chapter III (COQEBS, 2022b; and are housed in USF Family Study Center Box Drive archive per the previous page). These transcripts consist of the following:

Thursday – Parent Sessions:

Transcript of 0 to 3 Parent Group #1 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of the 0 to 3 Parent Group #2 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of 3 to 4 Parent Group #1 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of 3 to 4 Parent Group #2 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of the Kindergarten Parent Group #6 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Friday – Professional Development Sessions:

Transcript of 0 to 3 Professionals Group #1 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of 0 to 3 Professionals Group #2 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of 0 to 3 Professionals Group #3 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of 0 to 3 Professionals Group #4 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of 0 to 3 Professionals Virtual Session #1 (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of 0 to 3 Professionals Virtual Session #2 (No Recorder Notes were available.)

Transcript of 3 to 4 Professionals Group #1 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Saturday – ECE Practitioner Day:

Transcript of 0 to 3 Practitioner Group #1 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of 0 to 3 Practitioner Group #2 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of 0 to 3 Practitioner Group #3 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of 3 to 4 Practitioner Group #1 Recording (plus Record Keeper Notes)

Transcript of Kindergarten Practitioner Group #1 Recording (No Recorder Notes were available.)

APPENDIX C: SUBMISSION PACKAGE TO THE USF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AND EXEMPTION DETERMINATION: STUDY 004490

UNIVERSITY of SOUTH FLORIDA

NOT HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH DETERMINATION

September 26, 2022

Dana Roberts
[redacted]
St Petersburg, FL 33701

Dear Ms. Dana Roberts:

On 9/24/2022, the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

IRB ID:	STUDY004490
Title:	Qualitative Document Review to Assess the Feasibility of a University-Community-Partnership to Improve Early Childhood Education and Care (ECE&C) Curriculum in South St. Petersburg, FL

The IRB determined that the proposed activity does not constitute research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations.

IRB review and approval is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities constitute human subjects research, please submit a new application to the IRB for a determination.

While not requiring IRB approval and oversight, your project activities should be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the ethical principles of your profession. If this project is program evaluation or quality improvement, do not refer to the project as research and do not include the assigned IRB ID or IRB contact information in the consent document or any resulting publications or presentations.

This application falls under the Not Human Subjects Research (NHSR) category as it is focused on program evaluation of existing practices, quality improvement, and/or needs analysis.

Sincerely,

Myah Luna
IRB Research Compliance Administrator

Institutional Review Boards / Research Integrity & Compliance
FWA No. 00001669
University of South Florida / 3702 Spectrum Blvd., Suite 165 / Tampa, FL 33612 / 813-974-5638

APPENDIX D: DATA ANALYSIS DETAILED RESULTS

Section 1: Initial Data Review: Word Frequency and Word Cluster Analysis, p. 118.

A sample of this data is provided below. This page is presented in landscape format for clarity. The complete Excel file can be downloaded from the Supplemental files associated with this dissertation's file on ProQuest.

Word	Word Length	Detected Count	Weighted %	hit count > 2														
1722 Most Frequently Detected Words Averages	6	37,112	85	Order														
know	4	1468	3.32	1		Scope and scale of the dialog												
like	4	1120	2.53	2		43,919.53												
just	4	754	1.70	3		approx 45,000 "meaningfull" words												
think	5	617	1.39	4		not including pronouns, prepositions, articles, conjunctions, etc.												
parents	7	559	1.26	5		understand	72			know	1468							
need	4	428	0.97	6		gap	71			together		80						
child	5	417	0.94	7						family(ies)		88		home	219			
get	3	389	0.88	8		denial	7					86						
want	4	373	0.84	9		relationship	36							learning		83		
right	5	366	0.83	10		village	34			think(ing, s)		617		learn	5	49		
okay	4	330	0.75	11						thinking		57		learned	7	22		
yeah	4	334	0.75	12		partner	6					674					154	
children	8	321	0.73	13		partnering	3			thought		41						
one	3	325	0.73	14		partners	3			thoughts		41						
things	6	307	0.69	15		partnerships	4					756	<2%					
going	5	303	0.68	16				16										
lot	3	280	0.63	17						help		200						
see	3	238	0.54	18		development		15		helped		13						
time	4	236	0.53	19		developmental		12		helps		15						
really	6	224	0.51	20		developing		4		helping		30						
home	4	219	0.49	21		develop		10				258						
now	3	217	0.49	22				37										
kids	4	210	0.47	23		collaboration		3			related	relational			7			
something	9	207	0.47	24							relationships		10					
well	4	209	0.47	25	23.59	collaborative		7			relationship		36					
parent	6	203	0.46	26				10										
people	6	205	0.46	27		behavior	15	8										
help	4	200	0.45	28														

Section 2: Raw Data from Computer-aided Qualitative Sentiment Analysis, p. 120

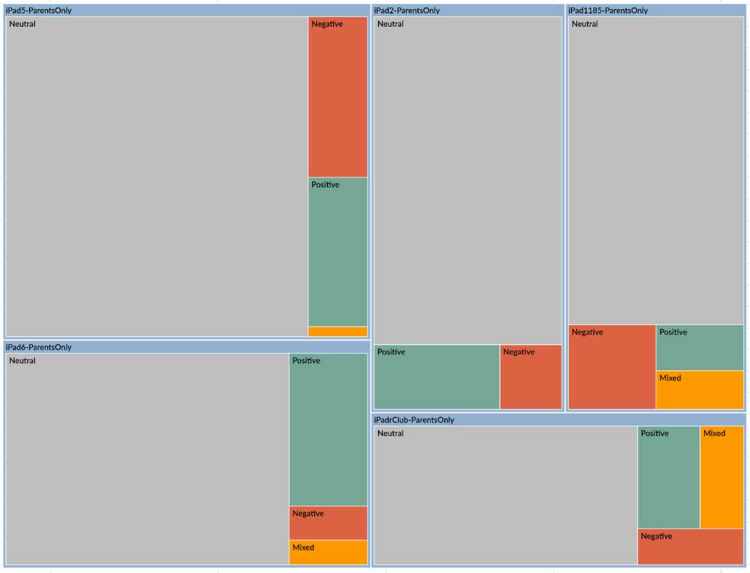
A sample of this data is provided below. This page is presented in landscape format for clarity. The complete Excel file can be downloaded from the Supplemental files associated with this dissertation's file on ProQuest.

Overall.

	A : Very negative	B : Moderately negative	C : Moderately positive	D : Very positive
1 : Files\\0-3-Fri20220225_134019-VirtualMeeting_otter_ai(PostHoc)	4	11	27	7
2 : Files\\0-3-Fri20220225_193205- Virtual Meeting_otter.ai (PostHoc)	7	21	53	16
3 : Files\\0to3-25-02-2022iPad6_otter_ai(PostHoc)	12	17	30	10
4 : Files\\iPad1-0to325022022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	12	12	37	12
5 : Files\\iPad1185-0to3-25-02-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	12	19	48	9
6 : Files\\iPad1185-3to4Grp24-02-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	8	11	11	9
7 : Files\\iPad2-0to3-25022022_otter_ai(-PostHoc)	14	20	17	6
8 : Files\\IPad2-0to3Grp24-02-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	12	14	29	8
9 : Files\\iPad3-0to3-26-02-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	5	3	24	8
10 : Files\\iPad4-3to4-26-02-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	3	18	14	4
11 : Files\\iPad5-0to3-24-2-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	6	17	33	2
12 : Files\\iPad50to3-26-02-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	6	9	36	7
13 : Files\\iPad6-Kgrp-24-2-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	2	5	21	5
14 : Files\\iPad-rClub-0to3-26-02-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	5	8	25	7
15 : Files\\iPad-rClub1-Thursday_otter_ai(PostHoc)	8	19	35	13
16 : Files\\KGrp-26-02-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	2	10	43	9
17 : Files\\rClub-3to4Grp25-02-2022_otter_ai(PostHoc)	8	11	11	9
	126	225	494	141
		351		635
		1	to	1.8
			Approx 1 to 2 in favor of	Positive Sentiment

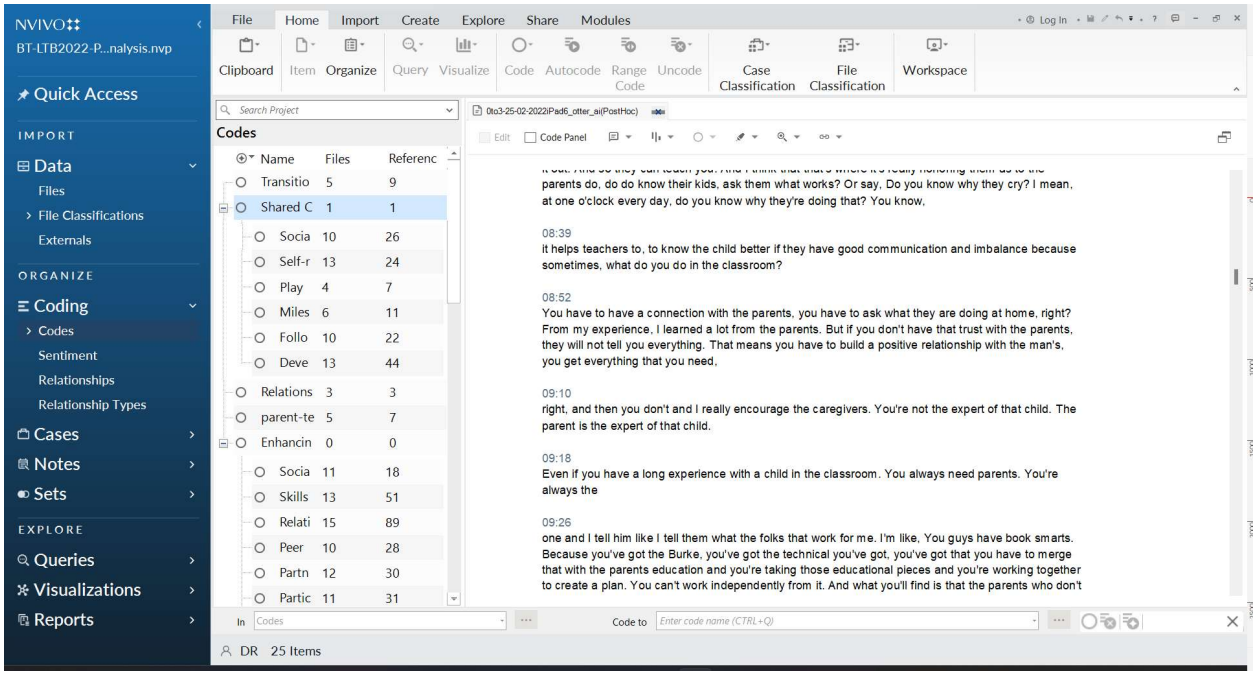
Thursday Parent Groups.

	A : Very negative	B : Moderately negative	C : Moderately positive	D : Very positive
1 : Files\\iPad1185-ParentsOnly	6	11	6	7
2 : Files\\iPad2-ParentsOnly	2	2	6	2
3 : Files\\iPad5-ParentsOnly	2	10	17	1
4 : Files\\iPad6-ParentsOnly	2	5	16	5
5 : Files\\iPadrClub-ParentsOnly	5	13	15	5
	17	41	60	20
	58		**80**	
		to		
	1	**1.4**		



Section 3: Computer-aided Qualitative Dialogue Analysis Documentation.

The complete collection of the numerous Word and NVIVO output files can be downloaded from the Supplemental files associated with this dissertation's file on ProQuest. A snapshot example is displayed here.



Section 4: Key Informant/Key Stakeholder Comparative Analysis Documentation.

The complete collection of the numerous Word PowerPoint output files are available can be downloaded from the Supplemental files associated with this dissertation's file on ProQuest. A snapshot example is displayed here.