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Article abstract

We examine how kindergarten teachers on Prince Edward Island depict both parent involvement in school and its perceived challenges. Data consisted of written responses to two open-ended survey questions completed by 62 participants or 94% of the kindergarten teachers on PEI. Results showed that teachers recognized parent involvement in traditional forms. Barriers included lack of educator time and unproductive school policies. Extending from Epstein's parent involvement model, if increasingly rich forms of parent involvement are to actualize, educators must be attuned to family vibrancy — the diverse gifts each family possesses; family vibrancy includes the belief that every parent, regardless of socioeconomic status, language abilities, ethnicity, religion, etc., can and does support his/her child's education to the best of his/her ability.

KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' NOTIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND PERCEIVED CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT. We examine how kindergarten teachers on Prince Edward Island depict both parent involvement in school and its perceived challenges. Data consisted of written responses to two open-ended survey questions completed by 62 participants or 94% of the kindergarten teachers on PEI. Results showed that teachers recognized parent involvement in traditional forms. Barriers included lack of educator time and unproductive school policies. Extending from Epstein's parent involvement model, if increasingly rich forms of parent involvement are to actualize, educators must be attuned to *family vibrancy* — the diverse gifts each family possesses; family vibrancy includes the belief that *every* parent, regardless of socioeconomic status, language abilities, ethnicity, religion, etc., can and does support his/her child's education to the best of his/her ability.

CONCEPTIONS DES ENSEIGNANTS AU PRÉSCOLAIRE EN LIEN AVEC L'ENGAGEMENT PARENTAL ET DÉFIS PERÇUS

RÉSUMÉ. Dans cet article, nous présentons la manière dont des enseignants au préscolaire de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard (Canada) décrivent l'engagement parental à l'école et les défis perçus en lien avec cet engagement. Les données utilisées sont des réponses écrites à un sondage composé de deux questions ouvertes et complété par 62 participants, soit 94 % des enseignants au préscolaire de l'IPÉ. Les résultats montrent que les enseignants conçoivent l'engagement parental sous ses formes traditionnelles et identifient le manque de temps d'enseignement et les politiques scolaires non productives comme des obstacles. En nous basant sur le modèle d'Epstein de l'engagement parental et dans un contexte où les parents seront amenés à s'impliquer davantage dans des contextes plus riches, il semble nécessaire que les enseignants soient plus ouverts à la vitalité de chaque famille — les talents que chaque famille possède. Ce concept reconnaît que tous les parents, quel que soit leur situation socio-économique, leur maîtrise de la langue, leurs habiletés, leur origine ethnique, leur religion, leur situation d'emploi, leur âge, leur genre, etc. peuvent soutenir et soutiennent l'éducation de leur enfant au meilleur de leurs capacités.

The topic of parent involvement in kindergarten to Grade 12 education has been researched extensively, with the results being somewhat inconclusive. Many studies show that when parents support their child's education, students are prone to have: academic success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2012; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Nunez et al., 2015; Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010), a positive attitude toward school (McNeal, 2014), few behavioral issues in school (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 2005; Dinh, Roosa, Tein, & Lopez, 2002), strong school attendance (Chang & Romero, 2008; Epstein & Sheldon 2002; Sheldon, 2007), and high graduation rates (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). Additional research shows that parent involvement can improve parent-teacher relationships (Winton, Brotherson, & Summers, 2008) and the social networks (aka social capital) between the parents (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Preston, 2009, 2011). Associated with the last point, as social contacts and interactions between parents increase, parents become more aware of outside-of-school academic and social resources including tutoring, youth programs, enrichment opportunities, curriculum supports, and recreational opportunities (see Coleman, 1988). However, some studies indicate there is limited influence between parent involvement in school and student achievement (Desimone, 1999; Domina, 2005; El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Okpala, Okpala, & Smith, 2001). Studies reveal that levels of parent involvement are largely linked to the parents' social statuses (Lareau 1987; Lee & Bowen, 2006), gender (Fleischmann & de Haas, 2016; Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum, & Aubey, 1986; Ressler, Smith, & Crosnoe, 2017), and immigrant status (Fleischmann & de Haas, 2016; Kao, 2004). Desforges' (2003) extensive literature review on parent involvement showed that parent involvement is associated with "social class, poverty, health, and also with parental perception of their role and their levels of confidence in fulfilling it" (p. 5). Desforges concluded that, because the concept of parent involvement is so multifaceted, evidence regarding of the impact of parent involvement on student achievement is unreliable.

As detailed above, issues pertaining to parent involvement are complex and may be approached in a variety of ways. Herein, we focus on two aspects of parent involvement. First, we explain what kindergarten teachers on Prince Edward Island[1] identified as parent involvement. Second, to better understand how to effectively promote parent involvement, we identify what these teachers perceived to be the challenges associated with it. Then we argue that schools need to approach parent involvement through a lens we have called *family vibrancy*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies show that many teachers promote parent involvement through traditional means such as asking parents to: attend parent-teacher interviews, chaperone for school events, fundraise, and ensure homework completion (Cankar, Deutsch, & Kolar, 2009). Deslandes, Barma, and Morin (2015) found that teachers endorse and promote parent involvement largely through one-way communication to parents (e.g., emails, phone calls, newsletters, etc.), which relays curriculum and school-related information. However, Schaedel et al. (2015) noted teacher-to-parent unidirectional communication, as a dominant mode, disempowers parents. Teachers often have systematic and definitive ideas about the type, frequency, and nature of the involvement they want from parents, and they want parents to work towards the same curriculum goals the teacher promotes (Baker, 2001). Many scholars believe a more effective way to enrich parent involvement is to promote parent-teacher trust (Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Murray, 2009; Strier & Katz, 2016). Studies highlight that a parent's trust of teachers and the school system is linked to the amount and type of involvement that parent has (Dunlap & Fox, 2007; Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011). Parent-teacher trust is associated with shared values and mutual expectations for the child / student (Vickers & Minke, 1995). Repeated positive parent-teacher contact also promotes trust (Hands, 2009). On the part of the parents, trust may be defined as the belief that the teacher and the school will meet parent expectations, while being honest, open, reliable, and benevolent towards them (Santiago, Garbacz, Beattie, & Moore, 2016).

The concept of parent involvement is associated with challenges. To begin, many teacher preparation programs do not include or do not include enough content and experiences for fostering fecund teacher-parent relationships (Brannon, 2014). Also, some teachers are intimidated by the idea of involving parents. According to Baum and Swick (2008), "Teachers (particularly those new to the field), may minimize family involvement opportunities as a strategy to avoid potential conflict" (p. 580). Some teachers view parents through a deficit lens, where family limitations and dysfunctions are emphasized (Hornby, 2011; Lightfoot, 2003). In promoting high levels of parent involvement, some teachers believe they may lose their professional autonomy; they may be judged or fail to be supported by the principal (Grant & Ray, 2013). Some educators hesitate to involve parents with curriculum content, because teachers view themselves as the curriculum experts (Ranson, Martin, & Vincent, 2004). Some teachers become frustrated when dealing with what they view as potentially over-involved helicopter parents — parents who lack confidence in the teacher and regularly question teacher decisions (Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012). Baeck (2015) found that even though many teachers acknowledge the importance of parental involvement and home-school cooperation, they deprioritized parent involvement due to lack of time and lack of resources.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT MODEL

In reviewing the literature, there are various parent involvement models (e.g., Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007; Hornby, 2000, 2011); however, Epstein's (2011) model is one of the most influential. For this study, we use this framework to analyze the findings; thus, an overview of the model is necessary.

The components (ranked in no particular order) of Epstein's parent involvement framework are meant to help educators development rich school-family partnerships. The first component of her model is *parenting*, exemplified by sponsoring professional and parent training events in the school for parents such as positive parenting programs, parenting defiant teens, and parenting children with special needs. The second component is *communication*, reflected in examples such as parent-teacher conferences, language translators, teacher and parent emails, and school newsletters. Third, *volunteering,* is about recruiting parents as chaperones, guest speakers, fundraisers, and playground monitors, for example. Fourth, parents help their child *learn at home* by monitoring homework and ensuring children have a suitable home environment to learn. The fifth component of Epstein's school-family-community partnership model is *decision-making,* demonstrated when parents are members on Parent-Teacher Associations or are represented on school-initiated events. The last feature of the model is parents and children *collaborating within the community* by capitalizing on community services via health organizations, businesses, recreational centers, cultural museums, and other community resources.

Epstein's (2011) school-family partnership model exemplifies traditional, contemporary forms of parent involvement, where school authorities define the case and place for parent involvement. That is, school personnel depict what parent involvement is and monitor how and where it happens. Also, through this model, school personnel recognize the type of voice parents have and identify useful parental supports in the home and community. Our research encompasses a more inclusive appreciation for parent involvement. In discussing our findings, first, we assume that every parent supports his/her child to the best of his/her ability. Second, we believe the family's vibrancy — such things as the family's linguistic, cultural, vocational, artistic, social, emotional, spiritual, and ethnic dimensions — are important, valuable resources, which need to be included in parent involvement discourse; this conceptualization ties in with literature pertaining to *funds of knowledge.* Funds of knowledge refers to the knowledge base and cultural propensities embedded in the daily practices, social practices, social history, and routines of families (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992). Both concepts (i.e., family vibrancy and funds of knowledge) affirm that all families have abundant and valuable experiential or lived knowledge that educators can and should use and to support and enrich school-home relationships and parent involvement in school.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

A survey was distributed to the kindergarten English-speaking teachers on Prince Edward Island who were pursuing upgrading to teach in the public school system.[2] The survey, in its entirety, consisted of 50 quantitative questions (5 questions about demographics, 15 questions about teachers' parent involvement beliefs, 15 questions about teacher activities promoting parent involvement in their class, 15 questions about teacher activities to promote parent involvement in the school) and two short answer questions with an open-ended text response. For the focus and word limit of this article, we only communicate the results of the two short-answer survey questions.

In line with survey designs, Rea and Parker (2014) agreed that most researchers find it necessary to use open-answer questions to access information that cannot be fully addressed within the constraints of close-answer questions. In fact, Krosnick (2018) suggested that open-ended questions need to be incorporated more frequently into surveys, because "survey designers can't be sure of the universe of possible answers to a categorical question and the 'other' response does not work [in providing detail]" (p. 99). Andres (2012) added that open-ended questions provide respondents with an opportunity to raise issues not considered by the researcher during the development of the survey questions.

For us, the complexity of parent involvement could not be fully discerned through restrictive, fixed-choice, closed-answer questions. Our intent was to gain a personalized understanding of the participants' reasons for, opinions of, and challenges with parent involvement. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to describe (using their choice of words) their feelings and attitudes. With no word limits to their responses, participants had the freedom and space to answer in as much detail as they deemed appropriate. They could qualify, quantify, and clarify responses, as desired. In turn, answers were contextualized, containing relevant, unique examples and yielding experiential insight about the intricacies of parent involvement. These descriptive, open-ended responses also enabled us to analyze comments via a theoretical framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The two short-answer survey questions were: (a) List the main things you do to promote parent involvement in your classroom and/or in your school? and (b) What challenges are associated with promoting parent involvement in school? Sixty-two of 66 kindergarten English-speaking teachers within the province answered these questions (i.e., response rate = 94%). All participants had considerable teaching experience. More specifically, 23% of participants had 6 to 10 years of teaching experience, 19% had 11 to 15 years of teaching experience, and 58% had 16 years or more teaching experience. Ninety-eight percent of respondents were female, and 2% were male. Forty-eight percent of respondents were kindergarten teachers from rural communities, and 52% of respondents were kindergarten teachers from urban communities. For the

purposes of this research, a rural school was a school located in a community consisting of a population of 9,999 people or less.

Regarding data analysis, Patton (2015) stated, "Without classification, there is chaos and confusion" (p. 553). To create classifications from the data, we used thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting the patterns, themes, or categories threaded across the data (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, we gained familiarity with the data content by reading all answers. Second, each comment was reread to create initial categories of key ideas, phrases, commonalities, differences, and patterns. At this point, we reread the partially analyzed data. The frequency of similar topics and the overlap in common words were of particular interest, because these reoccurring keywords and phrases were the first signs of major themes and sub-themes. We reflected on the common answers that emerged from these lists, and we converged similar categorical information into major themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In what follows, when presenting the thematic data, we included references to and quotes from a broad selection of participants. Also, to present a strong thematic overview of the data and, yet, ensure that diverse voices were heard, we included some outlying comments that did not reflect mainstream answers. Finally, to support a credible, accurate, and representative data analysis, we reread all original answers to ensure that the creation of themes and sub-themes was true to the meaning in the participants' original responses.

THEMATIC FINDINGS

When explaining how kindergarten teachers promoted parent involvement, most participants said they communicated (in written and oral form) with parents, welcomed parents to their classroom / school, and encouraged parents to support their children's learning at home and within the community. A few participants talked about how some parents were involved in parent-school associations. When explaining the challenges associated with parent involvement, participants spoke of lack of teacher and parent time and the hindering effect of some school policies and procedures. Details of each of these points are explicated below.

Promoting parent involvement

Written communication. The most popular answer pertaining to how kindergarten teachers promoted parent involvement was newsletters. Almost three-quarters of participants spoke about the importance of newsletters. One participant explained,

> I have a monthly newsletter (separate from the one sent out by the school) to inform parents of what we are doing and ask them to...come in or send things from home that might help with our learning.

Participants described what information they included in their newsletter; one participant said:

> I send out a monthly newsletter to all my parents / caregivers in regards to all the important activities, events, and programs that we have been working on during the past month. This newsletter also depicts the important events / activities that will occur in the days to come. The newsletter will also detail what we have been working on in class. Sometimes, I make suggestions on what parents can work on at home with their children.

Other respondents indicated that their newsletters contained "ideas for activities to do at home to support learning in the classroom" and included invitations for parents to be guest speakers in the classroom. Respondents noted that newsletters were sent home weekly or monthly.

In addition to written communication through newsletters, many respondents specified that they created and shared a classroom blog with parents. Respondents said: "[I have] a newly developed blog;" "I update a weekly classroom blog;" "[I have a] classroom blog with weekly updates;" and "I use a classroom blog. I try to up-date it weekly for parents to see pictures of the great things we have done." One respondent explained that she uploaded students' work on the website to share with parents: "[I have a] class webpage with e-portfolios for each child showing their work, accomplishments, and goals I have set for them. It also has a page for parents to communicate with one another and myself." Another respondent shared that he/she "had a blog but discontinued [it] due to lack of views." About a third of participants identified blogs as a medium for communicating with and involving parents.

Other forms of communication included email and handouts. About a third of participants explained that email was a popular way of connecting with parents. One respondent said, "[I] keep contact by email." Other respondents said: "I send a weekly email with notes about the upcoming week," "I often email parents," and "Parents are given my email address and the school phone number to reach me." Two participants provided details about handouts they sent home. One of these participants said he/she sent "information related to topics covered in class," and the other participant explained that he/she sent "handouts containing ideas on ways for the parents to help their children's development at home."

Another written form of communication that one-fifth of participants identified was personal notes or letters to parents. One respondent indicated that he/she wrote notes in the student's agenda; another respondent explained that she created a parent-teacher communication binder. Another respondent indicated that he/she wrote short notes to parents describing their child's posi-

tive behavior for the day. One respondent said, "[I] send home parent notes informing parents of upcoming activities in my classroom and what we have done." Other respondents indicated that he/she sent home "notes to parents, especially in response to parent notes," and "notes to parents about things we are doing in class and ways that they can support their child's learning in school and at home." Participants perceived these types of written communication as an individualized, personalized way to communicate with parents.

Spoken communication. In addition to written communication, teachers interacted with parents by speaking with them. Almost half of the participants said that they phoned parents and/or gave parents their school phone number. Two participants explained, "I try to make phone calls when an issue arises in my classroom," and "I make frequent calls home to touch base with the parents." Another participant said:

> I try to make a concerted effort to maintain regular phone communication with parents / caregivers to discuss positive / negative situations if parents cannot meet after school for face-to-face meetings. These phone conversations have always been well received by all parents whether it has been to discuss positive situations or not.

Three respondents explained that some parents picked up their child from school, and, in these cases, these teachers made time to casually chat with parents and provide details about the day.

Classroom participation. Approximately one-third of participants reported that they invited parents to be physically present in the class or interact, in some fashion, with students in the class. For example, they said: "The [parents] are invited to read to our class any day," "I have a parent reading program where the parents can sign up to read at the end of the day for 20 min," and "If a parent has a special talent, I invite them to share it with the class." One participant provided details about this classroom interaction:

> I encourage them to come into their children's classroom and spend some time with us. This can be done in various ways — read a story, help with a craft, share a hobby or skill, tell us about your job, join us for lunch, etc. This invite is encouraged monthly through newsletters and phone calls. When a volunteer does come in, it is mentioned in our newsletter, as well.

Other respondents indicated that they asked parents to volunteer as a chaperone for fieldtrips and to attend theme-based school events such as family literacy activities, talent shows, the Christmas concert / social, Art show display, Dr. Seuss Expo, birthday celebrations, bake sales, fun days, and Scholastic Book Fair days. One participant explained that he/she sent "invitations to the class for special presentations 2x per year." Another participant organized an in-class talent show for the parents and siblings. A couple of participants indicated that they had an "open-door policy," where parents were welcome to visit the

classroom, any time. One participant invited parents and grandparents to "tea time." In these examples, parent involvement was in the form of synchronous interactions between teacher, parent, and students.

Parent interactions with child at home in community. Many responses reflected that teachers encouraged parents to work in the home with their children and to partake in community events. With regard to the child learning at home, common responses included: "[I send] homework activities for parents to work with students." "[I send] family reading activities [and] take-home family activity bags." "Story sacks are sent home with child to encourage parental involvement." Related to the curriculum being taught, one participant asked the parents for "contributions from home of relevant items such as artifacts, books, and pictures." Several participants explained that they encouraged educational parenting skills by promoting parent attendance at literacy nights, math nights, and parent engagement nights, which were aimed to help parents demystify unfamiliar curricular concepts. Related to healthy parenting, one participant said, "[Our] weekly morning yoga is open to parents and staff." On the topic of community involvement, participants explained that parents were welcome to partake in the community fieldtrips with the class. One respondent depicted parent involvement as having impromptu conversations with parents when meeting them in the community. Another participant asked students and their parents to donate mittens, gloves, scarves, and coats to the school, and the school distributed these items to children in need. Another participant asked parents and their children to get involved with a Farmers Helping Farmers Community Capacity project, where her/his class raised money to support farmers in Nigeria. Three participants indicated that some parents were involved in Home-School Association meetings. In these examples, parent involvement encompassed activities outside the boundaries of the school; nonetheless, most of these examples were created, organized, and/or supported by the teachers and/or school.

Challenges to parent involvement

Lack of time. More than half of participants noted that many parents had busy work schedules, and it was difficult for these parents to be involved in their child's education during school hours and/or for school events. Three respondents explained: "Both parents work. For a lot of families, getting away from work is tough." "Many parents work during school hours, and it is a challenge for them to get time off in order to attend the special occasions such as Christmas concerts, graduations and field trips, let alone come into the classroom." "Time is a big challenge for all parents." Also, participants explained that parents who undertake shift work need to sleep in the day and work at night. One participant summed up this point and said, "They [parents] already have many challenges in their life and do not get involved because of what is already happening in their daily family life."

Participants spoke about relationship building and its challenges. One participant said: "First of all, you need to build a relationship with your parents and discover what their interests, talents, etc. are. Time is always a challenge." Several respondents talked about the lack of face-to-face time with parents. For example, one participant said, "One of the greatest challenges associated with promoting parental involvement in school today is that teachers do not have daily face-to-face contact / conversations with parents"; another reiterated: "I don't see them." One participant believed that trustful relationships were about relinquishing control. He/she explained it was a challenge to "[know] what you want from parents, what they want from you, letting go of some control and seeing the benefit to you, the child, parent, and all the other children." In these comments, either directly or indirectly, participants indicated that strong parent involvement is prefaced on trusting relationships, which is created through continuous interactions and time.

School policies and procedures. Another theme related to challenges associated with parent involvement pertained to how school policies, or lack of them, deterred parent involvement. One participant said, "Parents are not welcomed in our school, as a whole. They are encouraged only to drop their child off in the lobby and NOT to go to the classrooms." Similarly, another respondent said, "[There is] a new school policy regarding privacy issues. [It] limits a parent's time in the classroom." Other participants spoke about the mandate that parents must sign in at the office. They explained, "With all that has been happening in the world, it has become a struggle to promote an open-door policy for parents while maintaining a secure and safe environment for the children."

On the topic of student safety and policies, another respondent talked about driver restrictions for fieldtrips and said, "Parents must have the proper amount of insurance on their vehicle." Another policy identified as a deterrent to parent involvement was reflected in the comment, "Parents / grandparents are required to have a police check for volunteers." It is important to note that participants did not indicate that these safety policies were wrong; they simply stated that such policies deterred parent involvement in school.

Other challenges. Although not numerous enough to form a theme or subtheme, there were comments that identified to additional challenges of parent involvement. Five participants identified lack of parent transportation. Four participants explained that lack of teacher time was an issue. On this note, one participant said, "I would love to plan family event nights in my classroom but have been so busy balancing family / work / school...that I haven't been able to even think about it." Two respondents indicated that kindergarten students tend to "act up" when their parents visit the classroom, and "Having a parent volunteer in your classroom should be an enjoyable experience [and] not bring added workload or stress to the teacher." Associated with this topic, a participant stated, "For some children, having their parents come into school can be stressful and/or overwhelming." Another respondent indicated that

English was not well understood by some parents, making communication with them difficult. Other comments were: "[Parents] did not have a good school experience," "lack of childcare," "parents don't always read the weekly notes," and "incomplete parent [contact] information or no response (i.e., changed phone numbers)."

In summary, our initial research questions was: what do kindergarten teachers on Prince Edward Island identify as parent involvement, and what do teachers perceived to be the challenges associated with it? Below, Table 1 provides an overview of thematic answers.

TABLE 1. *Overview of the thematic findings*

Promoting parent involvement	Challenges to parent involvement
Written communication	The busy lives of parents
Spoken communication	Lack of teacher-parent time to develop trust
Classroom participation	School policies and procedures
Parent interactions with child at home and in the community	Other issues (e.g., transportation, teacher workload, stress, parents' school experiences, English as an Additional Language, lack of childcare, etc.)

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Promoting parent involvement

Aligned with previous research (e.g., Cankar et al., 2009), this study showed that teachers endorsed traditional forms of parent involvement by promoting school-related, school-initiated activities. Such parent involvement activities included parents reading teacher newsletters, blogs, emails, and handouts; parents being guest speakers, classroom volunteers, fieldtrip chaperones, and fieldtrip drivers; parents, with the child, completing activity packs sent home by the teacher; parents attending school information night; parents supporting Home-School associations; and parents supporting teacher-identified community needs. Analyzing these examples, teachers attended to all six (i.e., parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration within community) of Epstein's layers of parent involvement.

Although these examples are important aspects of parent involvement, the activities were school-authorized; teachers in our study did not openly recognize or use the *family's vibrancy* as a part of parent involvement. As mentioned above, for us, family vibrancy encompasses the belief that every parent, regardless of socioeconomic status, language abilities, ethnicity, religion, employment status, status in life, etc., supports his/her child's education to the best of his/her ability. This term reflects the linguistic, cultural, vocational, artistic, social, emotional, spiritual, and ethnic dimensions of the family. It is a term grounded the notion of acceptance and inclusiveness. In a somewhat similar description, the term, *funds of knowledge*, coined by Moll et al. (1992), are the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and

skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133). Both family vibrancy and funds of knowledge recognize that every family is uniquely energized with historical, lifestyle, and cultural resources that need to be recognized within parent involvement discourse. Although both concepts are related, family vibrancy is meant to be a more encompassing term, because in its simplicity, the family's vibrancy is, in and of itself, parent involvement. One of the most fundamental examples of family vibrancy is having educators merely acknowledge that an involved parent is one who does his/her best to raise a child.

Teachers who support the notion of family vibrancy believe that welcoming, celebrating, and utilizing the family's diversity is key to nurturing the educational success of the child. Doing so promotes strong relationships (aka trust) between the school and parent, while simultaneously promoting the educational success and wellbeing of child / student. A central feature of promoting family vibrancy is educators getting to know parents, for example, instead of sponsoring Meet the Teacher Night, why not sponsoring Meet the Family Night, where teachers spend an entire evening / multiple evenings listening to the backgrounds of parents and their children (Pushor, 2010)? Parents need to be liberated to share their personal knowledge about their child, and educators need to view this information as valuable and useful, perhaps even more so than any test result. Other aspects of family vibrancy include allowing parents to share (on their terms) aspects of their home environment, including, for instance, food and meal preparation, holiday traditions, and religious, spiritual, and/or cultural beliefs. These examples of family vibrancy / parent involvement could (and should) inspire and inform curriculum content, student assignments, classroom activities, and/or school events. By adding the component of family vibrancy to parent involvement models, the educational richness that every parent offers his/her children would be more fully validated.

Teachers in this study promoted and recognized traditional forms of parent involvement, as recognized by Epstein. Epstein's model refers to parent-school-community partnerships, but there is limited strength in the word, *partnership,* when one side of the party (i.e., the school) has authority and control within the relationship. To embody an authentic parent-school-community partnership, parents must be empowered to communicate what parent involvement in their child's education means to them. Parents must be given the opportunity to explain what they believe the school needs to do to more effectively educate their child. In such a fashion, honoring the family's lived knowledge and vibrancy is a base for parent involvement in school.

Pushor (2017) called on the need for "familycentric schools" (p. 17) where home-school relationships reflect an equal distribution of power between the school and parents (see also Auerbach, 2007; Hong, 2011; Pushor, 2010, 2013). For a number of reasons, a school-home power balance is not the norm.

For example, many parents have learned, either from their own childhood experiences or past parent-school interactions, that the school's interests do not always align with child and family needs. When speaking with teachers, parents are always at a disadvantage when teachers use jargon-based language to discuss school curriculum, student assignments, and school events. During difficult school meetings, parents may feel they are being judged by the teachers as possessing ineffective parenting skills. At times, parents may be struggling with home responsibilities and do not need the added pressure that school-centric philosophies impose on them. At the same time, many teachers may be unfamiliar and uncomfortable with balancing teacher and family collaboration. Teacher-parent trust may be difficult to develop, because teachers are trained to be the experts and sharing academic authority with families may be inconsistent not only with their postsecondary education, but with school policy. Gonzales and Gabel (2017) argued that school systems and universities need to do more to support educators who are largely underprepared to work effectively with culturally diverse families. As well, both parents and teachers may be unable to dedicate the time that is needed to form a trusting relationship. For these and other reasons, parent-teacher candor and trust is often difficult to obtain.

Is parent-teacher trust even possible? We believe that promoting family vibrancy and nurturing trusting parent-school relationships are not only attainable, but these concepts lie at the epicenter of authentic parent involvement models. Thus, as well as adding a seventh layer to Epstein's model (i.e., family vibrancy), we believe each aspect of the model (parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, collaborating with community, and family vibrancy) needs to be transposed upon a foundation of trust. To establish and grow such trust, new school structures and policies need to be created. First, school systems might establish a true open-door policy for parents, where educators and parents collaborate to have parents teach some classes, attend any class, and attend any school meeting. To nurture teacher-parent trust, teachers must have repeated contact with parents, such as opportunities to visit families in their home, participate in social, cultural, and linguistic activities in family communities, research family cultures, and ask parents to share their views and listen to their responses. To learn about the vibrancy of families in such a fashion, teachers need preparation time, which the educational system would need to finance and organize.

Addressing challenges related to parent involvement

The second aspect of this research was about identifying challenges associated with parent involvement in school. Participants identified the main challenges to be the busy lifestyles of parents, the time needed to establish parent-teacher relationships, and certain school policies and procedures. These challenges are the areas schools need to focus upon in order to be more successful in promoting parent involvement in diverse ways. In analyzing popular school

events, such as open house days / nights and school carnivals, the timing of these activities might not fit into the schedule of working, traveling, and/or single parents. Participants explained that many parents are busy and have difficulty finding the time to attend parent-teacher meetings and school events. Perhaps schools need to change schedules so that activities are more welcoming of modern-day, busy lifestyles. Parent-teacher conferences might be offered on weekends, and/or a pair of teachers might meet with parents in the child's home (or at another convenient location) at a convenient time for parents. Could meetings be done online, by Skype, or by phone? Or, are parent-teacher meetings even necessary for every student? Edwards (2011) argued that educators differentiate their teaching to meet student need. A similar idea could be extended to the concept of parent involvement — could it be differentiated to meet the diverse needs of vibrant families? Davis-Kean and Eccles (2005) stated that schools need to dedicate effort toward the creation of a welcoming, interactive school environment, because such a culture is essential for establishing trust, which, in turn, nurtures school-home communication and parent involvement, in general.

In this study, participants perceived that certain school policies deterred parent involvement; participants referred to an unwelcoming feeling or aura emitted by the school. Pushor (2013) provided an example of this point when referring to common signage that parents encounter upon entering a school. Such signs read: *staff parking only*, *remove all wet footwear*, *staff only*, and *visitors must report to the office* (p. 39). Pushor explained that these brusque signs can tacitly position parents as trespasser, unwelcomed guests, and/or intruders. She continued by saying:

> They send a message that the school is only a place to be when they [parents] have an official role to play, when they have been invited, when they remain in designated spaces, and when they follow the rules that the school has set out for them. (p. 40)

In most schools, when parents drop off their children, they are discouraged from walking the child to the classroom. Could this policy be reviewed to address the inhospitable feeling and environment it indirectly (and directly) emits? When the policies and school norms signal to parents that their roles are meant to be restricted and limited, teachers receive distorted messages about how they are to nurture meaningful parent involvement.

Having stated the above, participants in this study also recognized that student safety is a top priority. Consequently, the question surfaces: How can schools be both safe and welcoming? Together, educators, parents, and community members need to brainstorm to answer this question, because the answer will be different based on school context. Having a series of community meetings that gives voice to teachers, administrators, and vibrant school families is a way to expose positive, creative, diverse, collaborative ideas about what inclusive

forms of parent involvement could look like. Potential solutions might be the incorporation a coffee or community room in the school for *all* community members. Maybe the school could enact a procedure where every person in the school would essentially be trained to become a greeter for anyone entering the school door (see Pushor, 2013). Could a parent volunteer be a greeter? A warm, personal greeting would be beneficial for all who enter the school, but it would be especially positive, for example, for kindergarten parents and parents for whom language barriers may present challenges.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This research supports Canadian provincial and territorial government mandates (e.g., Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, *Prince Edward Island School Act*, 2016) to provide quality public education to all students by promoting parent involvement into school environments, a common educational strategy used worldwide. However, this study only documented the perceptions of kindergarten teachers in one Canadian province. There are many unanswered questions. The parameters of this study could be extended to other provinces and territories in Canada and beyond. A similar study could be conducted with teachers at each grade-level. How do elementary, middle school, and high school teachers define and promote parent involvement? What does each group of teachers identify as effective parent involvement and barriers to parent involvement? These same questions could be asked to school administrators. How do teacher and administrator views about parent involvement compare and contrast? As well, a study could be done on the overall effectiveness of school policies and procedures and how they influence / dissuade parent involvement. Also, more information needs to be gathered from parents. How do parents define parent involvement in school? What do parents perceive as their responsibility related to the formal and informal education of their children? To what degree and in what forms do parents want to be involved in schools? What do parents who have children with special needs want from the school, and how is parent involvement potentially unique for them? How do Parent-Teacher Associations and similar school councils influence parent involvement in school? Also, because trust is a key ingredient for effective home-school interactions, another important question is to find out how rich forms of school-home trust can be developed, nurtured, and maintained. The concept and practice of family vibrancy, as associated with trust, needs to be further researched. What aspects of family life are overlooked in mainstream parent-school partnerships? How could a child's school experience be improved through recognition and inclusion of the linguistic, cultural, vocational, artistic, social, emotional, spiritual, and ethnic dimensions of the family? Examples of family vibrancy need to be documented, including through narrative inquiry research. Reflecting on these questions, the topic of parent involvement is diverse, dynamic, and in need of more research.

NOTES

1. With a population of about 146,000, Prince Edward Island is the smallest province in Canada (Prince Edward Island Statistics Bureau, 2015).
2. Kindergarten transitioned into the public school system in Prince Edward Island in 2010 (Public Kindergarten Commissioner Report, 2009); this survey was distributed to them three years after kindergarten became part of the public school system.

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