Building Strong Families: The Role of Parent-Educator Partnerships

by

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Abstract

This qualitative project in collaboration with Andrew Fleck Children Services (AFCS) identifies the role of parent/teacher partnerships as a support for family resilience, the characteristics that parents and teachers attribute to strong families and how parents and teachers define what family resilience means. The data stems from semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 parents and 10 early childhood educators for a total of 21 participants from AFCS licensed childcare centers and licensed home childcare centers. Interviews were analyzed using thematic data analysis and a software package called Nvivo. The study is exploratory; but, the data findings add to the literature a diverse and culturally relevant perspective on what family resilience means to Canadian childcare workers and parents as well as how the parent-educator partnership helps facilitate family resilience. Additionally, it provides AFCS with modified and relevant ways of providing support to the families they serve.

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Building Strong Families: The Role of Parent-Educator Partnerships

Families are the building blocks of society. They provide it with new members through procreation, care for those members into adulthood, and give them a sense of values and social belonging (Parra-Cardona et al., 2008). It is within the family where children first learn about the world, how it works and how they can contribute to that world in the future. From this perspective, it is crucial that a family be resilient, that is, capable of bouncing back from adversity. Family resiliency encourages future generations to learn how to adjust and adapt successfully to the social changes they are most likely to encounter when they become active members of their society. Key to that success are other social agents such as educational bodies, health institutions, community organizations designed to support and assist children and their families in times of struggle and misfortune (United Nations General Assembly, 1994).

This interest in families, their ability to be resilient in the face of adversity and their pivotal role in society has led early learning organizations such as Andrew Fleck Children's Services (AFCS) to seek out ways to better understand the families they serve, the challenges they face and how their parent-educator partnership may work together more effectively to enhance child development. The idea of strong parent-educator partnerships is not new. In fact, a considerable body of research exists on the positive effects of engaging families in their children's learning environment as well as why such educator-parent engagement efforts may fail. That research tends, however, to overlook the overall impact of family resilience as a factor in child development and/or educator-family engagement. In other words, an analysis of the role of family resilience factors and coping mechanisms rarely appears in the examination of how educator-parent partnerships can be fostered to support positive child development and social behaviour.

This study explores that relationship. The AFCS expressed interest in understanding how both parents and educators within their organization perceive family resilience and how those perceptions may affect the educational environment of the children under their care. Specifically, the study was designed to explore three main questions: (1) “What challenges do families in the AFCS community face?” (2) “How do AFCS educators and parents perceive family resilience?” and (3) “What is the role of the AFCS educator in facilitating family resilience?” These three questions are important because parents and educators play a major role in a child’s development and their positive functioning. If these adults present the world, its rules and its conventions in opposing ways, a child may become confused and disoriented. A mutual recognition and acceptance of parent-educator perspectives provides consistency and more effective support especially at times when families may be encountering stress.

The study is exploratory and qualitative in its approach. It consists of 10 interviews with AFCS educators and 11 with parents. Both groups provided responses to a series of open-ended interview questions designed to elicit an in-depth understanding of how these members of the AFCS view family resilience, the other’s role in supporting family resilience, and their own ability to form a partnership that leads to enhanced child-development. Data analysis occurred through use of thematic coding techniques, individual examination of the perspectives offered by each group (i.e. parents and educators) and a comparison of those perspectives. The results of that analysis was then compared and contrasted with existing research literature on family resilience.

The following pages are divided into 6 main sections. The first section consists of a literature review on “family resilience” with an emphasis on external sources of support such as schools and early learning contexts (Simon et al., 2005; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; McCubbin

et al., 1988; Walsh 1998). The next two sections discuss the positive effects of family engagement as well the role of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1998) ecological theory of children and their family's interaction with the early learning context. The remaining sections contain examples from past research to identify the meaning of family engagement, especially as it pertains to the educator and parent perspective on where any breakdown of positive relationships occurs, potential factors that may impact parent-educator partnerships and what the literature outlines as the best ways to facilitate positive parent-educator partnerships.

Definitions of Family Resilience

Definitions of resilience in the context of family systems have become increasingly dynamic, multilevel, and process oriented over the past few decades. These changes reflect a broader theoretical shift towards a more relational developmental systems framework which integrates ideas from general systems theory, ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1998), developmental systems theory (Lerner, 2006; Sameroff, 2010), biology (Lickliter, 2013), family systems theory (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004), developmental psychopathology (Cicchetti, 2013; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005), and resilience theory (Cicchetti, 2012; Masten, 2013, 2014b, 2015). According to this new perspective, human development and adaptation emerge through the various and continuous interactions occurring across the many levels of functioning within an individual as well as between the individual and their respective environment (Masten, 2015).¹ The course of this development reflects the innumerable interactions spanning from the molecular level to the societal level of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). This process begins within the family context where the developing

¹ This section relies heavily on a number of articles published by Ann Masten as she is an expert in child and family resilience and has developed a very comprehensive theory of resilience that stems from her work with resilience pioneers such as Norman Garmezy.

individual reflects upon and learns to adapt to the many levels of interactions that occur within the family as well as to the demands created by the many systems the family encounters as its members conduct their everyday lives. The individual also brings their own contribution to their development and interactions within the family context such as temperament and genetics. In this way, contemporary systems models assume that a number of systems interact or “co-act” to shape the trajectory of both a family and an individual’s development (Masten, 2015).

Definitions that have emerged from a systems-oriented conceptual framework talk about resilience as manifesting from the processes and interactions among systems that are interdependent (Masten, 2015). Resilience is not seen as a trait but as the capacity for successfully adapting in the face of adversity and is inferred from evidence of successful adaptations following significant system disturbances or significant challenges (DeHaan, Hawley, & Deal, 2013; Masten, 2013, 2015). According to Masten (2015), resilience itself is observed most directly when an individual or family unit is in the process of adapting to an extenuating circumstance. It can also be inferred based on the resources as pre-existing adaptive capabilities that are readily available to the individual or family system. Often, in an effort to train individuals, families and communities respond to an anticipated challenge and the goal is to build a capacity for positive responses to potential crisis thereby enhancing resilience.

Interest exists presently in the development of a comprehensive definition of resilience that can span across system levels and fields beyond the child and family resilience literature (Masten, 2011; Masten & Obradovic, 2008). This interest is motivated in part by “global challenges” such as war, climate change and disaster that call for more integrated practices, sciences and policies to address and facilitate crisis management (Masten, 2015). One of the most frequently used definitions of resilience is, “the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt

successfully to disturbances that threaten its function, viability, or development” (Masten, 2014a). This definition has been applied across the various sciences and systems including the individual as well as the family system (Masten & Obroadovic, 2008). Thus, for the purposes of this study, I have conceptualized family resilience as the capacity of a family system to be able to adapt to challenges. This resilience is facilitated by the many supports and systems beyond the family unit in the physical environment, culture and community (Masten, 2015).

Resilience, by extension, can be considered as an outcome. In other words, it is a set of characteristics or behaviors that tend to arise when individuals or systems such as families succeed despite extenuating circumstances (Card & Barnett, 2015). It is interesting to note that in the tradition of positive psychology, the word resilience is often interchangeable with the word strength (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and that by harnessing signature strengths every day, individuals adapt to challenges more easily. By extension, similar patterns exist within families. In other words, families that are able to draw upon personal and external resources are likely to be more resilient and manage crisis more effectively than other families.

Many researchers have found family resilience to be a multidimensional construct (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Simon et. al, 2005). Simon, Murphy and Smith (2005) developed a framework that identified three dimensions that are consistent across literature as key components in facilitating family resilience: (1) the length of time involved with the adverse situation faced by the family, (2) the life stage at which the family encounters the challenge or crisis and (3) internal and external sources of support (Buckley, Thorgen, & Kliet ,1997; Cicchetti & Garnezy,1993; H.I. McCubbin & M.A. McCubbin,1988, J. A. McCubbin, Futrell, Thompson & Thompson,1998; Walsh, 1998).

The first dimension is identified as the length of time that an adverse situation affects a family. For example, caring for a child that has the flu versus caring for a child with a chronic illness can have drastically different time lines and therefore different impacts on the family unit. In other words, when a difficult situation spans a long period of time it can lead to a family being in crisis whereas if a situation spans a short period of time, it would merely be identified as a challenge. (Buckley et al., 1997; Golby & Bretherton, 1999; H.I. McCubbin & McCubbin & M.A. McCubbin, 1988; Walsh 1998). Specifically, crises are regarded as chronic situations requiring adjustments or major changes in which the family's normal operations are significantly affected. In comparison, challenges are considered short-term situations requiring adaptations or minor changes to the family's normal operations (H.I. McCubbin & M.A. McCubbin, 1988). The dimension of length of time involved with the adverse situation forms a continuum and a family's position on that continuum can influence family resilience by affecting how family members use their resources to manage the adverse situation.

The second dimension involves the life stage at which the family faces a challenge or crisis. This dimension considers the fact that families tend to encounter different types of crisis and challenges depending upon the particular life stage of the children in the family (H. I. McCubbin & M.A. McCubbin, 1998). For example, families may face certain intra-familial strains, employment strains, financial strains and pregnancy related difficulties depending upon whether they have preschool or school-age children (Simon, Murphy & Smith, 2005). The life-stage of families affects how effectively the family can respond to an extenuating circumstance (Simon, Murphy & Smith, 2005).

According to Walsh (1998), family resilience is an interactive and ongoing process between the characteristics that allow a family to be resilient and the family's life stage.

Strengths that are used effectively to overcome an obstacle or challenge during one life stage may be insufficient when attempting to overcome a challenging situation at a subsequent stage of the family's life (Simon, Murphy & Smith, 2005). High-quality marital communication, satisfaction with quality of life, financial management skills, family celebrations, family hardiness, family time and routines as well as family traditions are some of the more robust coping mechanisms or strengths that are known to ensure families can withstand a crisis or challenge (H.I. McCubbin & M.A. McCubbin, 1998). According to Simon, Murphy and Smith (2005), families that exhibit resilience are able to use a combination of strengths and resources stemming from the individual, familial and community level in order to adapt and adjust to normative transitions and stressful events that are encountered in life's various stages.

The third dimension of resilience is concerned with the internal or external sources of support available to and utilized by the family during a challenge or crisis (J. A. McCubbin, Futrell, Thompson & Thompson, 1998; Walsh, 1998). For instance, some families may rely solely on the strengths inherent to their immediate family unit while others may seek outwards for support from extended family and/or community agencies (Simon, Murphy & Smith, 2005). While empirical evidence of this particular dimension is limited, research suggests that families who reach out to others in the social environment which includes friends, extended family and community members and organizations, exhibit greater resilience (H.I. McCubbin, M.A. McCubbin, Thompson, & Thompson, 1995). Notably, this outward seeking behaviour was more frequently found for individuals and families from cultures that greatly value interdependence and connectedness among the members of their communities (J.A. McCubbin et al., 1998). In addition to the external social support received from community resources such as schools, churches and neighborhood programs, an effective utilization of mental health services and

health care seems to strengthen family resilience (M.A McCubbin, Balling, Possin, Friedrich, & Bryne, 2002; J.A. McCubbin et al., 1998). For the purposes of this present study, the third dimension of internal and external supports is of particular interest.

The intent of this study with AFCS educators and parents is to gain a better understanding of how involvement in and with early learning contexts have the potential to bolster family resilience. Thus, in the following sections, positive effects of family engagement in Early Childhood Education are discussed as well as a bioecological model that offers a theoretical explanation of this phenomenon.

Positive Effects of Family Engagement in Early Childhood Education

Parental involvement within schools has been consistently found to have positive impacts on outcomes for both families and their children. When families are actively involved in their child's education, their children demonstrate healthier learning behaviors, better academic performance and have a more positive attitude towards school (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Aronson, 1996; Epstein et al., 1997; Jeynes, 2003; Jordan et al., 2000). Additionally, positive links have been found between parental engagement and retention rates as well as attendance rates (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999; Trusty, 1999). These positive outcomes are consistent across cultural backgrounds and education levels as well as income levels (Allen & Tracey, 2004; Shaver & Walls, 1998). In the "early years" it is important to note that the nature of parental involvement is a bit different than with public or private schools (Underwood & Killoran, 2010). In this context, early years is conceptualized as the time before children enter the schooling system and families may participate in community offered services such as sports teams, church activities and early learning center programming. This difference in parental involvement arises mainly because parents have the autonomy to decide whether or not their child will participate in these

services. Unlike school, enrollment in these programs is not mandatory. Additionally, a number of factors such as finances, as well as, availability of services influence parents' decision to be involved. However, how involved they and their children are rests ultimately with the parents (Underwood & Killoran, 2012).

Children are not the only ones to benefit from parental involvement in education. For example, Sanders et al. (1999) found that, when families feel good about the relationships they have with their children's school, they have improved attitudes toward education and hold high expectations for their children. Often, this attitude results in improved child outcomes (Fan & Chen, 1999). Additionally, by being involved in their children's education, parents have greater knowledge and access to various resources and supports (Dryfoos, 2002). As Chrispeels & Rivero (2001) note it also has the potential to lead to positive changes in parenting styles as well as family resiliency.

Small et al. (2008) studied the experiences of mothers whose children were enrolled in New York city child care centers. The sample demographic included both low and high-income mothers from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. They found that these child care centers served as a great support to the families, specifically mothers. The centers allowed for the families to feel a sense of belonging to the greater community and fostered meaningful relationships and social connections. In a representative survey conducted later by Small (2013), 60% of mothers in U.S. cities whose children were enrolled in a child care or early learning center formed at least one meaningful relationship through the center. These relationships significantly reduced the probability of the mother's depression and other forms of hardship thereby supporting family resiliency should a crisis arise. These findings are incredibly important as they offer evidence to help support the idea that early learning centers have an impact beyond

just supporting the child's psychosocial and academic growth. They serve as an external source of support to mothers and, in turn, their families during times of isolation and hardship.

Family engagement has been found to improve the overall climate of schools as well as lead to a more open school culture (Bagwell, 2011). As seen in Desimone et al (2000), when families are engaged in non-traditional activities such as holding schools accountable, advocating for change, and participating on school advisory councils, student achievement has improved and schools have been revitalized. Historically, schools have relied on input from families; however, the nature of this relationship has evolved over time. According to Gareau and Sawatzky (as cited in Bagwell, 2011), prior to the 1940s, schools were considered to be an extension of the community. There was a sense of common culture that existed between educators and families. With the onset of World War II came technological advances leading to professionalization of the teaching profession which made educational priorities distinct between home and school (Adams & Christenson, 2000). In other words, responsibility for children's development and learning was split into two separate strands with schools being responsible for formal instruction and families being responsible for informal learning and overall development (Adams & Christenson, 2000). It was in the 1960s and 1970s when a renewed interest of the relationships between educator and families where a sense of shared responsibility for learning emerged (Cairney, 2000). Despite this renewal, however, the focus was mainly on efforts to encourage parents to become involved in schooling in order to support the school's agenda not to assist families undergoing individual crisis or personal strain.

A Bioecological Perspective

Bronfenbrenner (1979) offers a bioecological theoretical framework that is helpful for understanding the inter-contextual nature of home-school relationships especially within

culturally diverse families. This framework permits inclusion of the impact that parental involvement has on both the child's development as well as parent-school relationship practice. Significantly, Bronfenbrenner's model melds perspectives from psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics as well as political science and is used to not only address child development but parenting, family involvement, cross cultural studies as well as the impact of social context on future generations (Ceci, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualized the ecological environment (i.e. the context in which human development occurs) "as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls." He perceived a framework of emerging rings that reflect the various levels of this ecological environment (See Figure 1).

At the very center is the individual person or child and the characteristics they possess that influence their development such as gender, temperament, biology, genetics, age and health. Interactions that occur within this central setting are called the microsystem. For example, the child's family and school, elements that the child interacts with on a daily basis would be included in this microsystem. The next ring or level is called the mesosystem. The mesosystem represents interactions between the micro and exosystem and links the micro and exosystems together.

The exosystem is the level right outside of the mesosystem that is made up of "settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person"

Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory

person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1998). This ring includes factors such as the neighborhood, health care providers, community resources as well as places of family employment, all of which have an impact on the developing child.

The macro-system, the level right outside of the exosystem is made up of things that exist in society and one’s culture as well as the ideologies and belief systems that underlie society and culture. This encompasses government, mass media as well as cultural practices.

The final, outermost ring is called the chronosystem which is the patterning of environmental events and transitions of the course of the individual or child’s life as well as the sociohistorical circumstances that exist within the individual or child’s life span.

According to Bronfenbrenner’s model, human development is dependent on the child’s ability to understand and perceive their ecological environment, their relationship with it and their ability to change within it. This model replaced the commonly used deficit model of society where individual differences such as culture, race, ethnicity and gender were seen as barriers and problems of adjustment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Cardona, 2008). Instead, Bronfenbrenner suggested a new blueprint in which the transformation of society could be studied as a bi-directional model of change and mutual influence through interaction could be envisioned (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner’s model (1979, 1998) acknowledges the influence of support networks in the form of schools and early learning centers especially in the production of strategies by individuals and families that are effective in coping with adverse situations. Recent research has also emphasized the foundational role of significant relationships, good treatment, care and affective and social support for the healthy development of families and their children as well as their reflections in other cycles of life (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009; Bronfenbrenner, 1998;

Rodrigo, Rodriguez & Marrero, 1993, Rodrigo et al., 2008; Rodrigo, Palacios, 1998; Bauman, 2004). The significance of the family system, good teachers, leaders and friends as sources of health in sustaining an individual's life has also been reiterated a number of times (Gutman et al., 2002; Koller, 1999).

Parent vs. Educator Perspective

Despite research and government policies that have emphasized the importance of strong parent and educator relationships, schools and parents still report feeling discontented with how these relationships are curated and maintained (Ontario Ministry of Education, Parent Voice in Education Project Report, 2005; Ontario Early Years Policy Framework, 2010; 2013, How Does Learning Happen, 2014). Six hundred and three (603) public high school teachers and 169 public high school principals in Ontario participated in a national survey conducted by Hart Research and analyzed by Bridgeland et al. (2009). From the responses of these surveys it was found that public high school teachers and principals reported lack of support in the home as the number one reason for why students drop out of school. Specifically, 74% of teachers and 69% of principals felt that the majority of these children were dropping out due to parents' lack of support for schooling. Only 13% of teachers and 22% of principals felt that schools were responsible.

On the other hand, parents reported being ready to help their child and being attentive to their needs; however many found it difficult to find ways to become involved in the school setting (Bridgeland et al, 2008). This was especially true for families whose children attended low-performing schools. In the same study, Bridgeland et al. (2008) facilitated focus groups with more than 1,000 parents of high school students in urban, suburban and rural communities and found that 82% of families with children that attended a high-performing school reported feeling

encouraged by the school to be involved which made them feel welcome. Only 51% of families with children attending low-performing schools reported feeling the same. Additionally, while 51% of families with children attending high-performing schools reported that the school their child attends communicated effectively about academic performance, only 43% of families with children in low-performing schools reported the same sentiments.

Families and schools both agree that family engagement is vital, however, as evidenced in a National Center for Education Statistics (2001) study, their views of each other's efforts are not always consistent. In this study, two surveys were designed to investigate school efforts to involve families in their children's education as well as the response of families to these efforts. It was seen that schools consistently reported offering a variety of opportunities for family engagement at a higher rate than families reported. For example, 89% of parents of 4,900 children reported that their child's school provided information to them regarding their children's academic performance but 100% of the 810 schools surveyed reported employing this practice. Additionally, in providing information to families about the school's overall performance on nation tests, only 57% of families reported that their child's school provided them with this type of information but 96% of schools reported providing the information. Seventy-five percent of families also reported that they were involved in the school's decision-making process compared to the 98% of schools.

These discrepancies were more exaggerated in secondary schools than elementary schools. Additionally, differences were larger in schools with high minority enrollment compared to schools with low minority enrollment (75% vs. 25%). Differences were also greater in large schools in comparison to smaller schools and in urban and city schools versus schools located in rural areas. This research was conducted in the United States of America. Canada and

more specifically Ontario do not currently collect demographics of students and teachers in a way that can be statistically analyzed; but, given the similarity between these two countries, these American surveys support claims that parent and educator views can often differ drastically when it comes to parental involvement in school services and information flow offered to parents.

Galinsky (1989) investigated three aspects of the parent teacher relationship: 1) predictors that are associated with a positive or negative relationship between parents and teachers in child care settings; 2) the impact of parents' jobs on children; and 3) predictors associated with mothers' satisfaction with child care. Using a survey questionnaire in a study of 441 mothers, 53% were found to have a poor experience with the child care provider and the same mothers were found to have entered the child care and school settings with the preconceived notion that they would be ignored and that educators would alienate them from their child's learning experience. This finding is of particular interest for my study of family resilience because it indicates a preconceived attitude that may serve as a barrier between parents and schools that may need to be overcome if effective communication is to occur.

In 1991, Epstein and Dauber conducted a study that examined connections between parent involvement programs, teacher's attitudes, and teacher's practices in inner-city elementary and middle schools. The study focused heavily on identifying patterns of behavior according to the level of support and encouragement parents received in being actively engaged in their child's school. Epstein and Dauber found that, in urban contexts, collaborative connections between learning centers and parents were not evident and the experiences that parents with children attending childcare centers had were not always positive. This outcome matches the findings of a study conducted by Azmita & Cooper in 2002 where teachers reported that Latino

parents were significantly less involved in their children's education than Caucasian parents. Comparably, both Latino and Caucasian parents reported being equally involved especially when both school-based and home-based activities were taken into consideration. Once again, it appears there is a distinction between teacher and parent perspectives that may hinder parental involvement in their children's school. These findings are of particular interest for the purposes of my study because the AFCS context is diverse in terms of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, according to Azmita & Cooper's (2002) data results, I should hope to find vastly different educator/parent perspectives on what parental involvement/engagement entails depending upon their cultural background.

Similarly, in a study on parent involvement in the school system, Walker et al. (2005) found that parents do not feel welcome in learning centers and often perceive themselves as socially and academically incompetent in such settings. This perception may explain why some parents choose not to be heavily involved in their child's education (Griffith, 1998; Walker et al., 2005). In fact, minority parents who experience language and cultural differences may be hampered considerably by these perceptions thereby creating a self-imposed distance between themselves and their children's schools despite teachers' efforts to engage them.

More recently, in a study conducted by Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, & Ice in 2010 on parental involvement in urban school contexts, parents reported wanting to be involved in their children's academic success. However, due to power dynamics between parents and educators as well as a general distrust in the educational system, parents often found themselves unable to do so. Hoover-Dempsey, Whitakey and Ice (2010) suggested that to increase the incidence and effectiveness of parental involvement, schools should use administrative approaches that prioritize relationship building and provide specific involvement opportunities for parents.

While there seems to be an agreement between schools and families on the importance of family involvement and family engagement, considerable challenges exist in developing these relationships. A primary concern is the lack of clarity surrounding the term “family engagement”. Thus, the following section will attempt to understand from both the educator and parent perspective, what family engagement is.

What is “Family Engagement”?

In the literature, the term “family engagement” is used to describe a variety of activities such as attendance at school events and meetings, homework help, home-school communication and interaction, supportive home environment, parent participation on school-based committees, parent-directed out-of-school activities that promote learning as well as parent involvement in school reform efforts (Cairney, 2000; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Desimone et al., 2000; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000; Mapp, 2003). Parents, teachers, school boards, and policy makers need to be clear about what they mean by family engagement and their expectations concerning how families should be engaged.

A factor that further complicates the lack of clarity of expectations are research findings that demonstrate how particular types of involvement correlate with various outcomes. In a longitudinal study of 1,205 kindergarten through third grade students in an urban New England school district, Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich (1999) investigated correlations between school performance and teacher ratings of parent involvement along the following four dimensions: (1) quality of parent-teacher interaction, (2) participation in educational activities at home, (3) frequency of parent-teacher contact and (4) participation in school activities. Generally, the teacher’s perceptions of positive relationships with parents as well as greater participation in school and home activities were related with higher academic performance.

When looking at individual measures, however, Izzo et. al (1999) found variance between specific types of parental involvement and the child's academic performance. Teacher ratings of participation in education activities at home were the ones strongly predictive of math and reading achievement while ratings of parent participation in activities at school and quality of teacher-parent interaction were associated more with student engagement and student adjustment respectively.

Families differ from teachers because they place more emphasis on the whole child as opposed to the schools' focus on academics (Scribner et al., 1999). In 1999 Scribner et al. conducted a study on high performing schools along the Texas-Mexico border. Specifically, three elementary, three middle and two high schools in the border region were selected based on the following two criteria: 66.6% of the students were Mexican-American and well-above-average standardized test scores with state or national recognition. This study was done in order to emphasize that the current poor condition of education for minority, Hispanic students does not need to exist. There were a number of components in this study, one such component was "Building Collaborative Relationships with Parents". In this portion of the larger study, it was found that families defined parental involvement in terms of fostering values such as responsibility, respect and cooperation. Additionally, families emphasized at-home activities such as monitoring homework, instilling strong values and arranging tutoring services (Scribner et al., 1999).

These differences in outlooks on parental engagement are particularly evident for minority populations when compared to Caucasian families. Studies show that minority families are just as involved with their children's education as Caucasian families, however the type of involvement is different (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Keith & Keith 1993). Minority families, that

is, families that have just immigrated to the country tend to participate in traditional at-school activities such as back to school nights, PTA, school governance committees and other volunteer work less than Caucasian families and instead offer verbal support, involve their children in other supportive out of school activities such as church groups and teach their children to value education (Mapp, 2003). These types of family and parental engagement are not seen nor recognized as forms of family engagement by most educators or schools (Boethel, 2003). The discrepancy between parent and educator perspectives of “family engagement” is a factor that has the potential to impact the overall parent-educator partnership. In the following section a number of factors relating to the impact of the strength of parent-educator partnerships, such as the definition of “family engagement”, will be identified and discussed to elicit a deeper understanding of the dynamic between parents and educators in a school setting.

Factors that Impact Parent-Educator Partnerships

There are a number of factors that affect how relationships between schools/learning centers and families are established. Such efforts have been found to be influenced by differences in prior experiences. In a large study conducted by Epstein and Sheldon (2002) on student attendance as a part of the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University, 12 elementary schools and 6 secondary schools participated and it was found that families’ and teachers’ perceptions regarding school operations were based on previous experiences they had with and in schools. Family perceptions were also based on their interactions with friends and other families as well as the beliefs of their friends and families regarding school. A family’s viewpoint was also significantly influenced by their experiences within the school system. For example, previous negative experiences were seen to be associated

with their present negative views of schools, while positive experiences were associated with present positive perspectives.

In comparison, a teacher's perspective was often influenced by prior positive experiences with schools. However, it only took a few negative experiences with families to result in teachers holding negative views about parental involvement in general. These differences in prior experiences help explain why parents and teachers may hold such different perspectives and ideas about how schools operate and possible friction between the two groups (Dodd & Konzal, 2000).

As reported in Bagwell (2011), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) carried out a literature review in order to better understand the reasoning behind parents' decisions regarding their involvement in their child's education as well as how to strengthen home-school relationships. In this review, they found that a number of factors influence home school relationships and parental involvement. The first factor is that a parent's beliefs about the roles they should play in their child's education is heavily influenced by the groups with whom parents interact. This includes the perspectives of other family members and friends. The second factor that influences parental decisions about their involvement is how well they think they can actually help their children. This includes their knowledge and skill level, their ability to find outside resources and their child's ability. The last factor is invitations to be involved from both their child as well as their child's teacher.

For both educators as well as for parents, time constraints impact efforts to establish relationships between school and home. Schools rarely have resources for the purposes of bolstering family engagement efforts and families' financial circumstances often pose as an obstacle for being actively involved in their child's education (Christenson, 2003). Often, work

schedules cannot accommodate either formal or informal interactions that would allow educators or school personnel and families to build trust and get acquainted (Christenson, 2003). There is little attention devoted to developing structures for routine communication in these circumstances which leads to communication focused solely on problems (Christenson, 2003).

There is also an increasing discrepancy between the demographics of the province of Ontario's student population and the population of teachers. Unlike in the United States of America, Canada and more specifically Ontario do not currently collect demographics of students and teachers in a way that can be statistically analyzed. Demographic information in the context of research studies on parent-educator relationships as well as parent engagement, is vital in understanding cultural dynamics and how they play into the ways in which families and educators relate to each other. Additionally, it informs a variety of perspectives in terms of the roles of educators and families in their children's educational experiences. However, in an article written for New Canadian Media by Tana Turner (2014) who examined the Ontario and the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) for 2014, a Teacher Diversity Gap was calculated. The author states that while there was data in this census on all public and private school teachers, the data on the number of racialized (minority) students was not readily available. Instead, to calculate this diversity information gap, the proportion of racial minorities in the total population had to be used. This data indicates that the divide between teachers and students in Ontario is large. Racial minorities represent twenty-six percent of the population but only make up about ten percent of the 70,520 secondary school teachers and nine percent of the 117,905 elementary and kindergarten teachers. Turner predicts that this diversity gap will only get worse as the population becomes more diverse. Statistics Canada projects that by 2031 racial minorities will likely make up about sixty-three percent of the Toronto CMA population, thus without

significant changes, the Teacher Diversity Gap may continue to widen. These discrepancies between the student and teacher population are associated with linguistic and cultural differences that have the potential to impact communication efforts and lead to misunderstandings for both families and school personnel (Christenson, 2003).

Another factor that impacts home-school relationships is that educators and other various school personnel are rarely adequately prepared for working with families (Bagwell, 2011). In a study conducted by Epstein and Sanders (2006), it was found that while things have progressed in this area, much progress needs to be made in terms of preparing both educators to work with and provide support to a variety of family dynamics as well as understanding the impacts of these dynamics on childhood development.

Epstein and Sanders (2006) surveyed 161 schools, colleges and departments of education in order to evaluate progress in teacher preparation for promoting parent involvement. Most of the respondents reported that class content regarding family engagement was commonly covered as a component of early childhood coursework (89.6%) or special education (93.6%). Of the 350 respondents who completed the survey, 69.8% strongly agreed that teachers should be knowledgeable about working with families, 89.2% felt that administrators and 85.3% felt that counselors should be knowledgeable and competent about working with families. However, a small number of those who responded felt that graduates from their programs were not prepared to work with student's families (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). In fact, only 7.2% of teachers, 19.1% of principals, and 27% of counselors were adequately prepared to engage with families. While some personnel preparation does include coursework that is related to family engagement, these courses are taught using traditional methods that, more often than not, reflect values and practices of the majority (Caucasian) culture (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

Traditional approaches to family engagement have been found to create barriers for families (Ishimaru, 2014; Baker et al., 2016). These methods often attempt to establish norms of parental involvement that are defined by the school system or school personnel. Emphasis is placed on school-based activities such as volunteering, taking part in fundraisers or chaperoning field trips. The responsibility of parental involvement is placed solely on the families and when these expectations are not met, parents and families are labeled as uncaring. Little regard is given to the families' time, educational or financial circumstances (Ishimaru, 2014; Baker et al., 2016).

These traditional methods approaches to family engagement follow a deficit perspective in which the focus is on perceived deficiencies attributed to a lack of certain resources, characteristics or experiences within the family or child rather than school inefficiency or inadequacy (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). This deficit creates an inherent disadvantage that, according to school personnel, must be corrected by using strategies that are designed to help the family overcome the deficit. Often, family strengths are ignored or devalued, out of school experiences are ignored and various patterns of communication that are typical within racial minorities are diminished (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). This approach stunts educational growth within families as opposed to promoting positive changes and healthy parent-educator relationships. In order to move forward it is important to for educators to be trained in a strength-based approach towards both children and their parents. This would allow educators to see and acknowledge the many ways in which parents from various backgrounds attempt to engage with their child's learning experience thus providing for a more compassionate environment for families.

Facilitating Parent-Educator Partnerships

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, interrelations among microsystems as a part of the mesosystem are influenced by perception. As previously discussed above, it is the mesosystem where parent-educator relationships are fostered and cultivated in ways that contribute to children's social, emotional and academic development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As Pianta and Walsh (1996) note, family professionals and educators need to believe and understand that children learn and develop in the context of the family and that the child and family system must be able to interact with the school system positively for the child's development to be optimal.

There are numerous ways to foster parent and educator partnerships. In fact, practices implemented by schools have been shown to have a positive impact on the relationships between home and school. In a research synthesis conducted by Henderson and Mapp (2002) of 51 studies concerning the impact of family and community involvement on student achievement and effective strategies to connect schools, families and community, three key features of school communities that support family engagement were identified: 1) families are welcome; 2) their participation is honored; and 3) connections with families focus on the children and their learning. The families in this comparative study reported that a welcoming process helped them feel a sense of belonging and ownership. This sense motivated parents to more actively participate in their children's schooling. These families felt that their participation was honored and respected when the school recognized their individual strengths, was responsive to the families' concerns and interest and allowed them to be fully involved in decisions about their child's education and the school in general. Relationships between parents and educators were further bolstered when they were provided with a variety of opportunities to engage in personal dialogue that allowed both families and teachers to exchange information and share expertise.

Educator and family beliefs and practices also impact the relationship between school and home. For example, a case study of African American and white students at an ethnically diverse elementary school was conducted by Lareau and Horvat (1999). In this study, families and teachers of these students participated in in-depth interviews which showed that there were significant differences in the way teachers perceived their efforts to encourage family engagement and how those efforts were viewed by African American and white families. After some research, it was found that these teachers defined family engagement very narrowly; thus, while the teachers thought they welcomed family engagement and that these requests were effective, they were in fact very ineffective. Additionally, teachers wanted families to accept their judgment about their children and defer all concerns to them. Lareau and Horvat (1999) discovered, however, that these teacher expectations were extremely difficult for African American families to accept. The African American families already felt and recognized racial tensions at the school and had previously approached school personnel with distrust and suspicion. Thus, the teachers may have believed their school was open to family engagement, but the confusion between family and teacher perceptions created a barrier in achieving this goal.

In a more recent study by Addi-Raccah and Arviv-Elyashiy (2008) it was found that, while teachers understood and recognized the importance of family engagement, they felt that involving families led to situations in which their teaching practices were questioned. In these circumstances, educators believed that the final decision should be made by the professionals and that families needed to acknowledge and accept their expertise. Here again, potential discrepancy between parents and teachers concerning the roles each should play in a child's education may create difficulty for effective family participation within a school.

Given the central role that parents play in both their child's education and their child's development, it is crucial for their perspectives of their children's education through school and early years programs to be understood and taken into account. As demonstrated above, these perceptions, beliefs and practices also have the power to significantly influence how family-educator relationships are facilitated. As Knopf and Swick (2007) suggest, a key element in developing meaningful relationships and partnerships with families is how educators go about curating relationships that are perceived positively by family members. Lightfoot (2003) notes, however, that parents often feel that their voice is either not heard or misunderstood. Furthermore, as discussed previously, definitions of family involvement need to apply to a variety of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and family background is, more often than not, taken into account in negative rather than positive ways, especially in family program development. Specifically, most approaches to family engagement are traditional and use a deficit approach, that influences family professionals and educators to hold various stereotypes regarding uninvolved families. Some of these stereotypes include messages that either parents don't care, or that parents do not have the motivation or time to be involved (Epstein, 1995). These stereotypes fail to recognize the variety of ways for families to be involved that do not align with the traditional definitions of involvement. They also fail to recognize the busy and demanding responsibilities that families have, while at the same time discounting the importance of fostering useful and meaningful relationships in motivating parents to find the time to be involved. For example, based on a questionnaire given to 1,643 parents with young children, it was found that parents do recognize their responsibilities towards their children's education but often feel that they have insufficient support as parents and insufficient information about child development (Oldershaw, 2002). In fact, 62% reported that when their child misbehaves they use

punitive or angry actions to mitigate their child's behaviors. Thirty-four percent reported that they felt they were ineffective in managing their expectations when it comes to their child's behavior and development. These findings indicate that schools and early years services should cater to the needs of parents in providing them with sufficient information, communication and supports that may help them learn how to assist their children's educational needs more effectively.

Rationale for Present Study

How families interact and what they do as a family unit affects society and various social practices influence families. In other words, families are linked to all human development systems (Parra-Cardona et al., 2008). The coming together of educators and families allows greater opportunities to build partnerships and continue to encourage family involvement and resilience. The literature review presented above does not focus on the topic of family resilience because, similar to the neglect of family culture, it seems that the majority of learning environments interested in family engagement tend to focus on educational needs rather than what strengths, assets or supports a family can offer. Additionally, there is no definitive way to study or look at family systems nor is there a definitive way of understanding and talking about what resilience or strength looks like to all families (Black & Lobo, 2008). Still, while ways of concretely conceptualizing family resilience do not exist, researchers such as Simon, Murphy and Smith (2015) have developed a framework of resilience through which we are able to understand the basic foundations each family needs to be resilient regardless of their background. One way is to have access to external sources of support such as friends, extended family, community organizations and schools.

Some researchers have looked at each of these external sources of support as factors that facilitate strength or resilience in families. For example, Dressler (1985) has studied the role of the extended family as a source of social support in fostering strength in families, Helsen et al. (2000) looked at friends as sources of social support in childhood and adolescence and Elias et al. (2003) examined the significance of educational programs and schools in urban districts as sources of social support to the families they served. Significantly, although each of these researchers found that social and emotional learning and supports are an integral part of an educational experience, they did not offer an analysis of the role of family resilience in that process.

Early childhood education services and programs are a crucial component of the broader environment for both families and children (World Health Organization, 2007; Philips & Shonkoff, 2000). In an overview of social protection policies by Gabel and Kamerman (2006), it was argued that investment in early childhood is one of the most significant investments a country can make. Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs build family and individual competencies and skills that are necessary for being a contributing member of society and the work force (Knudsen, James, Cameron & Shonkoff, 2006). It is safe to say that when an ECD program provides quality services to families and children, it is because of quality educators. Without passionate and engaging educators, ECD programs would be horribly unsuccessful. Consequently, educators are vital to the growth and healthy development of families and their children. Hence, research on the relationship that educators have with families and the families who are on the receiving end of their services, is a vital form of investment. For this reason, I examined parent/teacher relationships in the early childhood education sector specifically in the

context of families served by the Andrew Fleck Children's Services (AFCS) with a focus on educator-family perceptions of family resilience AFCS serves.

This study also evolved in response to a request from the director of Andrew Fleck Children's Services (AFCS) regarding how to better support resilience and strength in the families that they serve through parent/teacher partnerships. In 2016, when Dr. Stefania Maggi was serving on the Board of Directors for AFCS, she was approached by Kim Hiscott, the executive director who expressed her wish to better their services to the families they serve. As her graduate student, Dr. Maggi consulted me on the idea. Following a series of meetings with AFCS, we mutually/jointly decided to conduct a study on the partnership between educators and parents from the perspective of the educators and parents/guardians. For this reason, as well as the fact that little research has been conducted with populations that are diverse in socio-economic status and cultural background, I proposed to conduct a qualitative study designed to investigate how parents and educators in the AFCS context exhibit and conceptualize resilience. As part of my analysis, I also investigated how parent-educator partnerships can serve as an external source of social support for families in building family resilience, particularly in the context of Andrew Fleck Child Services. The next section outlines how I conducted that study and the methodological approach I used to analyze my research data.

Purpose of the Study and Philosophical Assumption

A social constructionist methodological approach was used to inform the development of this study. In contrast to the more readily accepted post-positivist view of a single reality or truth, social constructionists believe that multiple and equally valid realities exist and need to be represented (Ponterotto, 2005). This belief is reflected in the overarching purpose of my research. Through this research I wanted to first understand from the perspectives of parents and

early childhood educators (ECE) and learn about their various beliefs on how families cope with difficulties and remain resilient. Secondly, I wanted to understand from the perspective of these same parents and ECE how they believe the parent-educator partnership helps to facilitate family resilience within the context of the Andrew Fleck Children Services community.

As a brief description, the title ‘social constructionism’ is an all-encompassing term for a number of emergent approaches to understanding the human experience. The social constructionist approach is concerned with how knowledge is constructed and emphasizes that knowledge occurs through social processes enacted between individuals and their society (Harper, 2011). Specifically, social constructionists believe the realities, behaviors and ideologies of the individual are formed through an interaction process existing among the various social systems that each individual experiences. This perspective is similar to how Bronfenbrenner views the individual as being the epicenter of society in his Ecological Framework for human development. As such, social constructionism offers theoretical consistency with the Ecological Framework used in many of the research articles appearing in the literature review and thus in this field of study itself. Significantly, social constructionism also offers a methodological approach to data collection that enables the perspectives of one’s research participants to emerge. Similar to most social constructionists, I perceive reality as both a subjective and objective experience that allows for multiple truths. In consequence, I have taken a methodological approach that allows room for a multitude of perspectives and ideologies to be explored and represented. I describe that methodology and my data analysis techniques in this methodological section.

The advantage of adopting a social constructivist stance is that it offers the opportunity to explore the discursive constructions of parents/guardians and ECE staff regarding what they

consider to be family resilience. It also offers an opportunity to explore how parents/guardians and ECE staff perceive ways in which the role of an “authority” figure such as an early childhood educator may support, facilitate or disrupt the family resilience process. This type of data emerges because the methodological techniques used by social constructionists such as ethnography and open-ended interviews provide a form of qualitative data that allows researchers to go beyond the text and extract a range of evidence described from the broader, social, cultural and historical context in which it occurs (Harper, 2011). Specifically, by examining how individuals describe aspects of their everyday life, we are able to abstract more clearly the social world in which those aspects are constructed and the meaning they hold for particular individuals involved in specific activities. The methodological section describes the research design in more detail and provides justification for this particular approach.

The goal of this qualitative study is to understand, from the perspective of both early childhood educators (ECE) and parents, the various challenges experienced by families within the early learning context of Andrew Fleck Children’s Services (AFCS), how families conceptualized and worked towards overcoming these challenges (i.e. how they exhibit resilience) as well as how the relationship between ECE and parents had the potential to support families through times of difficulty in ways that enhance family resilience. This was accomplished through 21 semi-structured interviews conducted with early childhood educators and parents at various AFCS early learning centers. These interviews lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to 90 minutes in which topics pertaining to the research questions outlined in the methodology section below. Due to the numerous meetings with the advisory board members before the interviews were conducted, I expected a number of responses regarding the types of challenges that families in this community face. In particular, I expected to hear about challenges

and difficulties pertaining to finances as well as caring for children with special needs. Additionally, due to the literature outlining a clear divide between parents and educators surrounding expectations and the childcare experience, I expected responses addressing this phenomenon from the participants of this current study. These expectations were maintained and recorded throughout the interview process in both a methodological journal as well as a self-reflexive journal.

Methodology

Research Design

Qualitative approaches allow patterns, themes, cultural nuances and categories of analysis to emerge from the data, and thus are well suited for the analysis of various complex social phenomena such as reaction to trauma, violence and coping mechanisms influenced by family resilience (Ben-David & Lavee, 1996; D'Avanzo et al., 1994). Patton (2002) argues that qualitative methods are particularly useful when the researcher is interested in understanding or gaining the perspective of participants. This is because qualitative data collection techniques such as participant observation or semi-structured interviews extrapolate data directly from participants to address the research question at hand. These techniques also allow researchers to enter the social world in which their research participants exist and to gain knowledge of how their research participants manage their everyday lives. Thus, for example, the process of participant observation may allow a researcher to watch how parents and educators interact under the conversational constraints produced in a school setting where parents are in a rush to pick up or drop off their children and gain a stronger understanding of the significance of parent engagement efforts on the part of the school (Christenson, 2003). Comparably, if work schedules do not appear as a survey category, a researcher might uncover this factor as a barrier inhibiting

parents' ability to devote the time needed to communicate with educators in an interview session on parent engagement.

In this way, qualitative methodology allows for transparency of the phenomenon being studied as that phenomenon is expressed and perceived by the very individuals who have experienced it. For this reason, for the purposes of the present study, I chose data collection techniques that encompassed audio recorded, semi-structured participant interviews, with researcher field notes or post interview comments which supported codes, themes and major themes of importance gleaned from the interview transcripts.

Participants

Participants in this study were parents and early childhood educators who participate in ECE programming offered by the Andrew Fleck Children's Services (AFCS). AFCS is an Ottawa based organization comprised of program directors, facilitators, educators and student volunteers who facilitate collaboration between 8 group childcare centers as well as 8-10 home childcare centers. AFCS serves approximately 7,300 children and 4,200 families every year. Its centers provide licensed child care to children between the ages of 18 months and 12 years of age. These centers are located in various areas throughout Ottawa and serve a culturally diverse population typically of low socioeconomic status. Of the 8-group childcare centers, four centers chose to participate; but, to maintain confidentiality, the names of the participating centers are excluded from this document. From these four participating centers, 10 ECE instructors and 11 parents/guardians agreed to participate in this study, for a total of 21 participants. Exclusion criteria included participants that were unable to understand and converse in English and participants that were not affiliated with AFCS in any way.

The sample size may seem small especially for a psychology project. However, qualitative research studies consist of a wide range of participants depending upon the kind of data being collected (i.e. survey vs in depth interviews), as well as the type of qualitative research being conducted (i.e. thematic analysis vs grounded theory). Some qualitative research projects/thesis consist of a single case study while others have up to 95 participants. In qualitative research, the important issues are theoretical saturation and transferability rather than sample size or generalizability.

Breakwell et al. (2006) describe theoretical saturation as the point at which responses and insights of any particular phenomenon is satisfied and further contributions are unnecessary. They also note theoretical saturation can be achieved with no less than 8 and no more than 15 participants per group. Thus, for example, after an analysis of a project that had 95 participants, it was found that theoretical saturation had been reached after 17 participants (Mason, 2010). In comparison, I found theoretical saturation within my sample of participants after the 21st interview. I stopped my data collection at that point because there were no more potential interviewees in the required timeframe needed to complete this project. I felt comfortable doing so, however, because I found I had reached theoretical saturation within my sample of participants after the 21st interview.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) said, “it is, in summary not the naturalist’s task to provide an index of transferability, it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers.” Transferability in qualitative research is established by giving “thick descriptions” of the research participants and data findings so that the reader can assess if they can apply the research findings to their context (Maxwell, 2012). It is essential for the qualitative researcher, then, to provide a detailed account

of their experiences and interactions during the data collection process as well as make explicit connections to the social and cultural contexts in which the data collection was situated. This process includes talking about where and when interviews took place as well as other important aspects of the data collection that can help the reader gain a deeper understanding of the research setting. Such description enables readers or outside researchers to make transferability judgements themselves.

To protect the identity of each participant, the center each participant was recruited from is not identified; however, it is important to note that both ECE and parent participants were relatively evenly recruited from each of the participating centers. Parents and guardians that chose to participate consisted of 2 males and 9 females, ranged in age from 28-62 and comprised multiple ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Early Childhood Educators that chose to participate were all female, ranged in age from 22-64 and were also diverse in ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The ethnic/cultural backgrounds of these participants included the following: Caucasian, African, Caribbean, Mongolian, Chinese, Filipino, Lebanese and Persian. I will not state which participant identifies with which ethnicity as doing so could result in a breach in confidentiality. A detailed description of participants can be found in Table 1 and Table 2. During the interviews, participants were given the opportunity to choose an alias. If they opted out of this choice, I selected a random alias for them.

Measures

I designed my measuring instruments with the following overarching research questions in mind: (1) “What challenges do families in this community face?” (2) “How is family resilience exhibited from the perspectives of parents and ECE?” and (3) “What is the role of ECE in facilitating family resilience?”

Table 1.
Participant Information – Educators

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Occupation
Amy	F	29	Common Law	B.A. Psychology	Program Facilitator
Aurora	F	28	Married	RECE	ECE
Daniella	F	32	Married	RECE	ECE
Diane	F	64	Married	M.A. Education	Program Coordinator
Elizabeth	F	42	Married	RECE	Program Facilitator
Karen	F	42	Married	RECE	Program Facilitator
Laura	F	24	Single	RECE	ECE
Orange	F	22	Single	B.A. Psychology	Summer Program Facilitator
Stefanie	F	32	Married	RECE	Program Coordinator
Watermelon	F	39	Single	RECE	Supervisor

n = 10

Table 2.

Participant Information – Parents/Guardians

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Occupation
Alexandra	F	36	Married	B.A.	Stay at home Mom
Amanda	F	28	Engaged	B.A.	Nanny/Caregiver
Anna	F	30	Married	H.S.	Restaurant Ass. Manager
Blue Sky	F	39	Married	M.A.	Program Manager
Dan	M	39	Married	B.A.	Policy Analyst
Doanna	F	62	Married	B.A.	Retired
Donna	F	44	Married	College	PSW
May	F	30	Single	Diploma	Stay at home Mom
Molly	F	29	Married	B.A.	Internal Coordinator and Internal Comm.
Thunder	M	38	Married	B.A.	Developmental Supp.
Victoria	F	37	Married	B.A.	Stay at home Mom

n = 11

Given my social constructionist stance, I considered the impact of three major methodological effects on my data collection and data analysis: (1) the researcher as an instrument (2) the qualitative interview approach and semi-structured questionnaires, and (3) researcher field notes. This consideration is consistent with data collection procedures/analysis found in other qualitative investigations (Patton, 2002).²

Researcher as Instrument Statement

My research interests as well as my reasons for pursuing higher education have always been guided by my roots in social activism. When completing my Bachelors' of Science in Psychology, I was deeply involved with a variety of grass roots projects and organizations. The organizations had bases across the United States but most notably in Detroit, Michigan and Bronx, New York. The focus of these organizations was to empower youth from disenfranchised communities through travel, interfaith dialogue, citizen journalism, political and social activism, art and mindfulness. My experience with these organizations gave me access to people and shocking new perspectives. I grew up in the typical middle class suburban household. I was blessed to have been born into circumstances that allowed me to pursue an education, to have a voice and to refine my purpose in life. These organizations introduced me to realities, worlds and universes which unlike my own were riddled with hardship and loss. I met students, who despite

² While it is traditional for researchers using post-positivist quantitative methodological approaches to write a report in the third person to maintain objectivity and distance from the process of data collection and analysis, qualitative researchers have broken this tradition. In qualitative research, due to claims of subjectivity as well as an acknowledgment of the researcher's role in co-constructing the data with the participants, the active, first person voice is appropriate. Thus, in this thesis dissertation, for the description of the research process and data analysis, active, first person voice appears.

their circumstances took control over their lives and thrived in ways that led me to question my own position of privilege and highlighted issues of personal/family resiliency.

The majority of my knowledge on research and data analysis within the field of Psychology has been informed mainly by quantitative, post-positivist research paradigms. In fact, up until I began my Masters at Carleton University I was unaware that there were any other methods of conducting academic research. Ingrained in me however, was this understanding that there is no one all-encompassing truth or reality. I would find myself constantly questioning whether quantitative research was the only way to understand human behavior and social phenomenon. It was when I conducted a thematic analysis for an independent study under the supervision of Dr. Stefania Maggi that I realized there are methodologies that allow for multiple narratives to inform research findings. These methodologies are grouped under the umbrella of qualitative research.

To gain a better understanding of what qualitative research entails, I took a 12-week course titled Qualitative Methods offered by Dr. Connie Kristiansen. In this course, I was introduced to a variety of philosophical paradigms that inform qualitative research as well as their corresponding methodologies. We were also required to conduct and write up a mini qualitative study. It was then that I decided it was time to shift my lens from post-positivist to social constructionist. As stated above, this particular thesis study is conducted with a social constructivist lens and the interviews are analyzed using thematic data analysis techniques.

When conducting research from a social constructionist standpoint, it is crucial for the researcher to participate in reflexivity as a means to facilitate understanding. In other words, the researcher must understand and acknowledge how his or her perspectives, knowledge and experiences in co-creating meaning with the research participants. Specifically, the researcher is

a participant in the creation of data and how it is analyzed. This acknowledgement stands in contrast to post-positivist, quantitative research where the researcher takes measures to remove self from the data and the data analysis and to be as objective as possible. In consequence, I have been vigilant throughout the study to consider how my own stance and personal characteristics affected the construction of my research instruments, my data collection and my data analysis.

As I mentioned previously, I have some experience with qualitative research; but, I am by no means an expert. I do have some previous experience, however, with populations similar to those individuals who participated in my present study because the research I conducted in the past involved educators as well as high school and university students. The topic of family resilience and parent-educator partnerships is still a new endeavor. For this reason, I went into the research and data collection process with an open mind. Naturally, I did had some expectations as to how both parents and educators might respond to questions about their relationships with each other. These expectations were maintained and updated throughout the research process in a self-reflexive journal as well as in my field notes. I believe this process of journaling as well as taking field notes helped me stay cognizant of my thoughts and feelings throughout the project—from formulating the interview questions to writing up the analysis. Thus, for example, on January 25, 2018 after having my final meeting with a few advisory board members in which the interview guide and recruitment process was discussed, I wrote the following:

After going through various revisions of the interview guides with my supervisor as well as (deleted, advisor member's name) and (deleted, director name), I think I have a good idea as to what I should expect to hear from the early childhood educators at the various centers in terms of how they would like their

relationships with parents to improve. According to these meetings, there is a sense that communication between ECE and parents has been a concern. Much work has already been put towards alleviating such concerns however, they want me to figure out where this disconnect is happening. Find the root of the problem so to speak. It is also clear to me that the parent voice is missing. They have an idea of what the ECE perspective is pertaining to this topic but did not say anything as to what the parents might feel is a contributor to the breakdown, besides a few generalizations. I think that because I've already had such close contact with the people running the centers that I should be extremely careful of how I ask questions to parents so that they don't feel as if they are being interrogated or that I've already made up my mind as to what sorts of things they'd like the centers to improve upon.

During this time in my research process I had yet to complete a single interview with early childhood educators or parents. I had spent the past year presenting my research ideas, refining those ideas and research methodology and going through numerous drafts of the interview guides. At the time, this excerpt from my reflexive journal highlighted to me that the language I would use in my interviews would be pertinent to what kind of information both parents and educators would be willing to share with me. If I came into the interview setting acting as if I knew everything there was to know, participants would not be forthcoming nor comfortable to share their truths. In hindsight, I should have been aware that, just because the few individuals who were advising me had ideas as to what sorts of changes would be beneficial to the FACS center, this did not mean their sentiments were shared by all educators. In fact, I should have been more careful about

making generalizations as to what the ECE sentiment would be so early on in the research process.

Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured, qualitative questions formed the basis of the interview guide (See Appendix A and B). This questionnaire format allows a free-flowing conversation while maintaining some consistency of response and managing interview protocols (Madhill & Gough, 2008).

McNamara (2009) notes that the strength of having an open-ended and semi-structured interview approach is established firmly in the researcher's ability to gather information from each of the participants within similar areas of interest while, at the same time, giving them opportunity to add or expand upon details/information they consider relevant. However, I found the challenge in this approach lay in eliciting meaningful responses or data while simultaneously ensuring that both parents and educators felt comfortable enough to share their personal experiences (Knox & Burkard, 2009). To do so often involved inclusion of probing as well as silent periods that allowed participants to gather their thoughts and/or emotions. An example from my interview notes demonstrates this approach:

After asking Amy (alias) the different ways in which parents are able to cope with the challenges or difficulties they face, she asked to have the audio recording paused as she thought about an answer. She expressed feeling as though she was wasting my time by taking so long to think of specific actions parents take in overcoming their struggles. I assured her that she could take as long as she wanted and that if she wished that we could skip the question and come back to it. She insisted on having a moment to think so we sat in silence for a few seconds before she laughed, apologized and indicated that I could once again start recording the

conversation. As the interview progressed and Amy became more comfortable with me and trusted my motives. It was clear that she no longer felt the need to cater her thoughts to fit what she thought I wanted to hear.

While the interview questions differed slightly for ECE and parents, both sets of semi-structured interviews included three types of questions as advised by Rubin and Rubin (1995): (1) an open-ended question, (2) a probe and (3) a follow-up question. These question types were designed to encourage participants to discuss their experiences and how they overcame challenges or adversities, that is, how they exhibited or perceived resilience. In an attempt to encourage each participant to answer the question fully, these main questions differed slightly in how they were phrased for each participant group (See Appendix A and B).

The other two types of questions consisted mainly of probes and follow-up questions. This usage of probes and follow-ups elicited a more detailed response and allowed me to understand the full meaning of a participant's question response. Probes were also used to indicate to the research participant that I was paying attention to his/her story and following it appropriately (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The third interview question type consisted of follow-up questions designed to keep the participants on the topic and were linked directly to the focus of the research questions. For example, when asked to describe a situation in which a family experienced stress, follow up questions such as "*How did you cope with this stressful situation*" and "*What happened in the end?*" were asked. These probative questions often gained a more in-depth understanding of the participant's perspective than the initial response given to the original interview question.

Researcher Field Notes

After each interview, I created descriptive field notes titled “Post-Interview Comments” where I recorded my impressions of the interview (See Appendix C). I wrote down all participant reactions, movements, utterances, and body language that I could remember on this post-interview comments sheet. Additionally, my feelings, insights, and reactions were all included in the notes. These notes were particularly helpful for chronological summarization and reflective content that were used for thematic coding (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). In this way, by taking on the role of an observer, information was gained that was important to the investigation of how resilience is exhibited in this context as well as the nature of parent-educator relationships and how these relationships facilitated family resilience. The following field note excerpt exemplifies this process:

...I asked her, after everything that happened with her family who she was reaching out to for support. She looked at me with a half-smile, half grimace and told me she had great girlfriends. The only problem was that they were so far away. Before I could respond, she apologized and burst into tears. Here she was, a young woman who just a year earlier was starting a new chapter in her life as a newlywed. Her and her husband had just bought a house and were saving up to change it to their liking. But in an instance, with a call from a lawyer, she made the decision to completely change the path her life would take. For the foreseeable future, anyway. She exuded strength in this moment and beyond. It is so interesting to me that people view expression of emotion as a weakness. Her ability to be selfless and empathize with her niece and nephew’s plight makes her a pillar of strength.

The purpose of field notes is to inform the process of data analysis both during and after the interviews have been transcribed. As these notes were taken immediately after the interview took place, they contain insights that may have been lost. One such insight from this particular interview field note was later coded under the theme of “Resilience Factors” as “Compromise/Sacrifice”.

Procedure

Recruitment

The research was approved by the research board at Andrew Fleck Children’s Services (See Appendix D for Organizational Permission) as well as the Carleton University Research Ethics Board (#108779) (See Appendix E for ethical clearance forms). Prior to data collection, AFCS educators assisted in the dissemination of fliers (See Appendix F) and letters (See Appendix G and H) prepared by the researcher to explain the project in simple terms. Participants were informed that if they would like to participate in the research, they needed to contact me either in person or through the contact information provided on fliers and letters. Contact information for the associated center and the research team (i.e. myself, supervisor and AFCS contact) was provided if they had any further questions. Once contacted by the research participant a mutually agreed upon day, time and location for the interview to take place was arranged.

Interview Procedure

I met with each participant at a location of their choice. Before beginning the interview, I thanked the participant, reiterated the purpose of the research study and clarified any misunderstandings on the part of the participant. Following that information process, I went through a consent procedure in which the participant was assured that they could refuse to

answer any question, take a break or withdraw from the study at any time with no consequence. At this time, I asked if the participant was comfortable with being audio recorded for the purposes of accuracy. If the participant verbally indicated that they understood what was being asked of them, I then asked the participant to sign the consent forms (See Appendix I and J) before proceeding with the interview. If a participant was uncomfortable with being audio-recorded, they signed all parts of the consent form except where it indicated giving consent to being audio-recorded. I then took hand written notes of the interview instead. This only happened once. Before going into my interview questions, I asked each participant some basic demographic information such as their age, gender, and marital status (See Appendix K for Face Sheet). Each participant was interviewed for 45-60 minutes after which they given a debriefing letter and thank you card as a token of appreciation (See Appendix L and M for Debriefing Letters)

Following the interview, I wrote field notes or post-interview comments and noted interview highlights or impressions of the interviewee and a brief description of the interview content. These notes were helpful as reflective content applied toward thematic development (Creswell, 2007). As discussed above, my field notes were brief but descriptive in ways that allowed me to recall interview activities and content at a later date. These notes also contained my thoughts regarding the participant's body language, reactions and a description of the interview setting. Notably, I gave special attention to details, bringing personal interpretations and insights into those notes that served as a beginning analyses at the same time as it made me cognizant of preconceptions and pre-judgements made by me or expressed by the interviewee (Patton, 2002).

I and an undergraduate student (See Appendix N for Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement) transcribed the interviews using Microsoft Word for easier access and transferability during data analysis and stored copies on a flash drive that was password secured by Google Drive. I maintain copies of the recorded interviews stored in a secure cabinet in my research office. Once I transcribed all of the interviews, I began analysis and synthesis based on the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) below.

Data Analysis

Data management

In this study, a digital voice recorder was used to tape the interviews. Within one week of the interview being conducted, the interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word using Trint (a computer software tool) and transferred to Nvivo (a computer software program) for data coding and analysis.

Data immersion

The transcripts were read several times before coding to get a good sense of the data and generate initial codes.

General method of analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen as a means of analyzing my data. My main research interest was to explore the perspectives of parents and ECE within the context of AFCS. The research was exploratory and subsequently I sought to obtain rich data. Thematic analysis is an ideal method to deal with rich data sets as it presents a way to organize and structure exploratory data into digestible themes. While it has the reputation of being a simplistic form of qualitative data analysis, it offers a theoretically flexible and widely accessible approach to analysis that has

been employed by social constructionists using a variety of epistemological stances and theoretical approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2006) observe that thematic data analysis has been criticized for not having a clear set of guidelines to steer enquiry. In response, they formed the following six step guide to conducting thematic analysis:

1. Familiarizing yourself with the data.
2. Generating initial codes.
3. Searching for themes.
4. Reviewing themes.
5. Defining and naming themes.
6. Producing the report.

Familiarizing yourself with the data

As previously mentioned, I began with the first step and immersed myself in the data by reading interview transcripts multiple times. This was done so to understand the participant's experiences and needs. After reading the transcripts several times, it became clear that because parents and educators have different roles and responsibilities towards the child and each other, their perspectives were also very different and needed to be represented in my data analysis as such. Immersing myself in the data early in the analysis process allowed me to see themes from both a macro and micro level. For example, the term "communication" came up time and time again for both parents and educators. How they talked about it and how they expected it from each other were where the differences lay.

Generating Codes

I then began to generate initial codes by extracting interesting portions of the interview, key words or phrases and coding them into a table using Nvivo. The coded data was then searched for commonalities of meaning which were developed into themes. These themes were put in a table and all the codes were collapsed within the related, larger themes. Thus, for example, the phrases “keeping it positive” and “focus on the good” or words like, “blessed” kept reappearing. When I examined the context in which the phrases and words appeared, I realize both parents and educators were speaking about an indicator of resilience in the face of adversity which could be labelled as having a positive, “Individual Disposition”.

Data Presentation

In the following Results section, I provide a series of tables that serve as a visual representation of the most frequently reported responses of each major theme that emerged in my data. This present study is explorative and data were analyzed through thematic analysis. As reported by Hannah & Lautsch (2011), it is important in the presentation of thematic codes to be able to create a data set in which patterns of responses can be easily discerned and then scrutinized for each group of participants (i.e. early childhood educators vs. parent responses). To clarify the data in the study, I created tables that serve as a visual representation of the themes provided by the interviewees. The reporting of frequencies in those tables is not meant to serve as a measure of validation but more as a way to prioritize those response themes and to understand visually what topics and themes are the most important to the study participants. As Hannah & Lautsch (2011) note, with the use of thematic analysis it is not uncommon to use frequencies and tables as a way of conveying importance and range of the participant responses.

Methodological Journal

Throughout the research process I kept a methodological journal in which I discussed the details of how I came to this topic of research, how the interview guides were developed, interview schedules, meeting notes as well as justifications for which type of data analysis I used and how I came up with my master code list. This journal is not to be confused with my self-reflexive journal in which I spoke about my personal experiences, thoughts and feelings about the process, the participants and the meetings I had prior to actually carrying out the project. The majority of this journal was dedicated to detailing what my data collection and analysis process looked like.

Memoing

During the coding process, I made memos about the ideas and analytical decisions related to my concepts and codes. In these memos, I explained my analytical reasons for developing new codes or refining codes and I listed characteristics for the codes. For example, after generating my initial codes I wrote the following,

I am realizing that communication is not just primary theme that has been uncovered through the interviews, but also a resilience factor. Parents and educators alike talk about how communication with children, extended family, the early learning center as well as the early learning educators is a way in which many parents cope with the struggles that come their way. Their ability to communicate is not only something that allows for a successful parent-educator relationship but also allows for healthy family functioning. I am going to have to be careful that this distinction is clear when I write up my results section.

Evaluating the Research

An examination of trustworthiness is vital to ensuring reliability in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believed in order to evaluate qualitative research, it is inappropriate to rely on positivist concepts of validity and reliability. Instead they identified four alternative concepts that they felt more accurately reflect the assumptions of the qualitative paradigm: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.300). According to these methodologists, when taken together, these four criteria establish the trustworthiness of qualitative findings.

I took several steps to establish and maintain the trustworthiness of my research findings. Ensuring credibility means to make certain that the description of the particular phenomenon under investigation is accurate thus allowing the researcher to present trustworthy findings (Jackson & Verberg, 2007). To establish credibility, I worked closely with the board of directors at Andrew Fleck Child Care Services. This allowed me to consult program coordinators if need be throughout the research process. I also kept a self-reflexive journal as well as a methodological journal to track the process of sampling, recruitment and the data collection. This was done to remain cognizant of how my world view and experiences could potentially influence the data collection and analysis. Additionally, I made sure to include follow up questions asked during interviews to ensure that I fully understood and later represented the participant's perspectives in my findings.

Dependability refers to the track-ability and stability of changes in the data over conditions and time (Jackson & Verberg, 2007). The dependability of my data analysis was determined by an audit trail in which I checked interview notes and direct quotes by using audio files to ensure there were no obvious mistakes. The preliminary data analysis was shared also

with the organization's board members to ensure my data was appropriate to the research setting. As previously mentioned I kept a log to track the process of the data collection and data analysis. I also kept field notes after each interview. These documents served as a self-audit that supports the dependability of the findings. Additionally, I attended regular meetings with my thesis supervisors regarding data analysis to ensure that another investigator with similar methodological training and knowledge of the field would make similar observations.

The third component, transferability is concerned with whether or not the findings of the study can be generalized to other settings, contexts or populations (Jackson & Verberg, 2007). In qualitative research, transferability is ensured by giving "thick descriptions" of the participant demographics and interview settings so that the reader may make a judgement call of how the findings may be applicable in his or her context. Thus, I generated participant tables and provided sufficient information about the participants as well as the context of AFCS so the reader may discern how the findings of this current study can be generalized to other settings, contexts or populations.

Qualitative research, specifically qualitative research that takes a social constructionist lens, assumes that meaning is co-created through the researcher and participants. Therefore, the last component, confirmability refers to the degree that research findings can be corroborated or confirmed by others. (Jackson & Verber, 2007). To ensure that participant's perspectives were reflected in the findings, notes from various meetings with AFCS and supervisors regarding the direction of the research, the reflexive journal, the methodological journal, the preliminary interview schedules, post-interview comments as well as the memos written during my data analysis process served as an audit trail through which a clear description of the research path exists. An audit trail is meant to be a transparent description of the research steps taken from the

inauguration of the research to the reporting of findings. My audit trail outlines a clear path of the rationale that I, as the researcher, followed in order to reach the findings reported in this thesis.

Results

The research literature presents resilience as the ability to return to normal functioning following a challenge or crisis. Resilience factors are conceptualized as skills, knowledge, resources and coping mechanisms that allow an individual or groups of individuals such as a family, to overcome an extenuating circumstance. For this reason, when conducting the interviews, I asked parents and educators about the various challenges that families in their community faced. Subsequently, I asked them how their families coped with and overcame these challenges as well as if they believed the early learning center and ECE to be a source of support. The following sections describe those interview findings. First, I will discuss the interviewees' perception of the "challenges faced by families". Then, I will talk about the "resilience factors" that they believe have allowed families to overcome various challenges and difficulties in their lives. I will then describe the primary theme of "communication", the types of communication expressed by each group and the barriers to communication existing between educators and parents. Lastly, I will discuss the ways in which parents and educators suggest they might work together more effectively to support family resilience.

As previously discussed, the child is the center point of parent and ECE interactions. However, each respondent group plays a different role in the child's life and has a different impact on child outcome due to their dissimilar concerns and responsibilities toward the child. For instance, it is the ECE's job to take care of and teach the child during the child's time spent at the day care. Therefore, the ECE is concerned about the child's reactions and behaviors within

the immediate school environment and how those actions affect both the individual child and his/her peers. On the other hand, parents have more holistic concerns toward the child's upbringing that may be influenced by outside factors such as the presence of other siblings, home environment, finances and family dynamics. While a priority for both parents and the ECE, children can be treated in inconsistent ways based on these alternate perceptions and dissimilar environmental influences. For this reason, I separated the two types of interviewee responses into two groups labelled "ECE" and "Parents". The organization of the following sections mimics my interview and analysis process in the sense that I completed most of my ECE interviews as well as their analysis before I began interviewing parents and analyzing that subsequent data. Thus, I will first present the results from the perspectives of the early childhood educators in each section. I will then present results from the perspective of parents. Lastly, I will offer a brief comparison of these two perspectives.

Family Challenges

One of the main purposes of the interviews was to identify the struggles, challenges and difficulties that families within the Andrew Fleck Children's Services context face as well as whether or not both the early childhood educators and the families they serve perceived these struggles in similar ways. An examination of Table 3 reveals that they do not. When asked what sorts of difficulties families faced in the past two years, early childhood educators most frequently responded with "Problem Behaviors in the Child", "Special Needs", "Financial Difficulties", and "Marital Issues" while parents were much more likely to offer alternate responses such as "Complicated Family Dynamics" or "Work and Childcare".

Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Perspective

Table 3.

Results – Interviewee Perspectives of Challenges Faced by Parents³

Theme	Subtheme	Sub theme of Subtheme	# of ECE Responses	% of Responses	# of Parent Responses	% of Responses	Total
Challenges Faced by Parents							
	Problem Behaviors in Child		9*	23.10%	4*	8.30%	13*
	Special Needs		9*	23.10%	3	6.25%	12
	Financial Difficulties		5*	12.80%	3	6.25%	8
	Complicated Family Dynamics		1	2.56%	7*	14.58%	8
	Marital Issues		4*	10.30%	3	6.25%	7
	Lifestyle Changes		1	2.56%	4*	8.30%	5
	Work and Childcare		0	0.00%	5*	10.42%	5
	Children Close in Age		1	2.56%	3	6.25%	4
	Finding a Balance		2	5.13%	2	4.17%	4
	Transitions into Childcare		2	5.13%	2	4.17%	4
	Illness	Child	1	2.56%	3	6.25%	4
		Family Member	0	0.00%	3	6.25%	3
	Other						
		Immigration	2	5.13%	1	2.08%	3
		Transportation	1	2.56%	1	2.08%	2
		Unsatisfactory Childcare Experiences	0	0.00%	2	4.17%	2
		Lack of Proper Healthcare	0	0.00%	1	2.08%	1
		Racism	0	0.00%	1	2.08%	1
		Substance Abuse	1	2.56%	0	0.00%	1
Total Responses			39		48		87

N = 87

* = Most Frequently Reported

³ As noted in the Methodology section, the tables and the reported frequencies serve as a visual representation that helped me envision thematic patterns. In this particular table, for example, the total number of responses (87) represents the number of times a category or subtheme emerged in the data. This number often resulted in a larger number than the total number of 21 research participants. Thus, the data is divided into two major groups (i.e. ECE vs. parent) in the table and the categories of subthemes are prioritized according to the number of times each sub-theme appeared in the data. It is also important to note that the responses in each category or subtheme are provided by individual respondents. For example, the challenge of “Problem Behaviors in Children” was reported by 9 distinct ECE; one individual ECE did not raise the challenge 9 times.

a) Problem Behaviors in Child

Twenty-three percent of the 39 total responses or almost one quarter of the ECE responses indicated that problem behaviors in children was a challenge parents faced. This response pattern is not unusual as the children that attend childcare programs are usually at the age when they are learning how to act in socially desirable ways.

This is also around the age that many children are diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum disorder which can often be preceded by behavioral issues. Many educators elaborated on this point. As Amy, an early childhood educator said, “I guess like a main thing that we would have is behavioral challenges that we’re often supporting them with and sometimes certain things can lead to a diagnosis of autism or ADHD. Any of those types of things.”

Diane, an educator who is also the program director shared Amy’s thoughts. She replied, “I think for some parents it would be when their child has behaviors that are challenges. Whether it be a medical condition...you know put autism stuff there. We have diabetes. We have anaphylactic. And there are lots of thing like that. Or things that don’t get diagnosed.”

b) Special Needs

As mentioned earlier, when children are entering pre-school around the age of 3 or 4, parents and educators are much more easily able to recognize indicators of a developmental delay. Such symptoms can include delays in speech, social withdrawal, hyperactivity, frequent tantrums and item fixation. The recognition of such symptoms and a following diagnosis can be a very difficult process for both the child and the family. Another 23% of the 39 ECE responses reported special needs as a challenge that families in their community face. For example, Watermelon, a 39-year old RECE supervisor at one of the centers said,

Some of the challenges that our parents are going through is getting support to diagnose children if they see any red flags. You know, we're there to follow steps and give them the tools to get to that but in the end, it's the doctor that gives them the wait list. So, it's a waiting process for them and we start off by referring them and then...Some are in denial too. You know we see some red flags and tell them they should have it looked at. We refer them to First Words sometimes from there they get in. We're here to support any child that is diagnosed and then we have a great children's integration program with Andrew Fleck...they support parents and the children and families and the staff and provide us with amazing strategies and tools to work with the child.

In this way, many ECE like Watermelon, indicated that special needs may present themselves as an ongoing challenge for a family system.

c) Financial Difficulties

Five out of the 39, or nearly 13% of the ECE responses indicated that parents and families were experiencing varying levels of financial difficulties. All of the respondents who replied in this manner noted that parents at their center were struggling with finances. However, Danielle, an ECE recalled the instant when she realized the extent to which one of the children's families was struggling when she noted, "There was this one child a little while ago that I had during the school year. Just looking at him you wouldn't think anything wrong but one day we were just talking. He was like, "Yeah I just sleep on the floor in my room in my apartment. We don't really have much...it made me feel bad."

d) Marital Issues

Four out of the 39 or nearly 10 percent of the ECE responses indicated that marital issues were a challenge faced by parents in the Andrew Fleck community. To quote

Aurora, a RECE: “Some of the stuff we notice is separation. Like the parents are going through separation. A good number of people here seem to have that. Not...of course not all of them but a high percentage do as well.”

e) Other

The category of other (4 or 10.30%) consisted of a variety of different factors such as immigration issues, transportation problems and substance abuse that were given by EDC to explain their sense of why families might be struggling. Thus, for example, Elizabeth a 42-year old ECE noted, “...the biggest challenge is that with new families that are coming in Canada not only is there language difficulties but also the way they see things because they may do things differently and are set in their ways. You have to encourage them and respect them at the same time because you see that they are struggling with how things are different here.”

Parent Perspective

When asked what sorts of challenges or difficulties they had faced within the past two years, parents gave a variety of responses. The most frequently reported challenges were categorized under the following themes, “Complicated Family Dynamics”, “Work and Childcare”, “Lifestyle Changes” and “Problem Behaviors in Child”.

a) Complicated Family Dynamics

For the purposes of coding, I conceptualized family dynamics as the interactions existing between family members and how those interactions affect the various relationships that exist between significant family members such as spouses, parents and siblings. Family dynamics become complicated when there is a breakdown in the interactions between significant family members because such breakdowns disrupt the functioning of the family unit as a whole. Seven

out of the 48 responses or nearly 15% of parent responses indicated “Complicated Family Dynamics” as a challenge that either they faced currently or had faced within the last two years. Thus, for example, May, a 30-year old stay at home Mom described her relationship with her parents, “...When my parents found out I was pregnant, I was 10 weeks pregnant. And we haven’t spoken since. So, I think that was probably more my difficulty...not having your parents there...that was my biggest challenge.”

In a similar fashion, in describing the situation that forced Anna, a 30- year old ‘parent’ respondent, to take guardianship of her niece and nephew she replied, “...the biggest issue for me has been with my family...understanding that something larger happened to these children which is why they’re in this position. I’ve personally been struggling with...their accusations of me taking the kids from their parents, which is obviously not the case at all...I fought to get them out of there (foster care).”

Like May and Anna, a number of parents identified that breakdowns in the interactions between significant family members can present themselves as a challenge. ECE are not privy to such challenges as their focus is normally on the child and its observable behaviors in the early learning context.

b) Work and Childcare

Five or nearly 10 percent of responses given by parents indicated that balancing work and childcare proved to be a challenge at times. Victoria, who is now a 37-year old stay at home Mom, compared her experiences in the United States of America before she and her husband moved to Canada and the challenges that situation had created for her family when she said:

...there is no maternity leave. So, you feel much more secluded. Women are back to work at 6 maybe 12 weeks after they give birth. So, they (the children) go to a

nanny or daycare straight away...it was challenging living there. It is very isolating. I also feel like it is important for children to bond in those first few months. Just so they get an attachment...I can't imagine having to go back to work for six weeks now and worrying about if my baby is starving. Little things like that.

c) Lifestyle Changes

Four (8.30%) of the responses from parents focused on "Lifestyle Changes" and noted events such as moving, difficult pregnancies, immigration and retirement as challenging. For example, Molly a 29-year old working mother described her difficulties during and after pregnancy. She observed,

My experience as a new mother was really bad...as soon as I gave birth the doctor came into my hospital room and told me that she (her daughter) wasn't going to make it...We were all really upset. He (the doctor) said he was going to do some testing as she apparently had jaundice and breathing problems. For a couple of hours, we just didn't know what was going on. I remember it really affected me. I was upset and emotional for days and they kept me in the hospital because I had high blood pressure. It was bad for me to go through that. It could have been fatal.

Instances such as the one described above cause a disruption in a family system's normal functioning regardless of what stage of life the family is in. While this seems common knowledge, often families do not realize the implications of such challenges on their overall wellbeing and on their interactions with the various environments in which they are immersed until a later date when they have had time to adjust and reflect upon their situation.

d) Problem Behaviors in Children

In comparison to ECE, only 4 of the 48 parent responses (8.30%) indicated that “Problem Behaviors in Children” was a challenge. These behaviors ranged from being violent towards other children and adults, tantrums, bad language, and disobedience to difficulties sharing and expressing emotions appropriately. To quote Dan, a 39-year old Policy Analyst and father who described a period of time when his 2-year old was experiencing behavioral issues, “...he went through a bit of a hitting spell. Every day we get to school outside and he was hitting. It was pretty tough because it was hard to talk to a two-year old and explain to them why they can’t do what they are doing.”

e) Other

Similar to ECE responses, the category of other (6 or 12.50%) consisted of a variety of different factors such as immigration issues, transportation problems, racism and previous unsatisfactory childcare experiences that were given by parents to explain where they were experiencing their struggles. For example, when speaking about a previous childcare experience and how it impacted her life, Molly a 29-year old parent described the following,

...there was a center with a lot of kids...I remember a couple of times I went and I saw vomit on the floor...when they’re that young they put everything in their mouth and it’s normal to get sick but there were four outbreaks (of hand foot and mouth) at that center and she (her daughter) got it twice and then gave it to me twice...so they didn’t follow rules and when I approached them asking them to notify us when other kids got sick, they said, “We just don’t do that. Its normal that kids get sick and it is what it is.”. We never had any support or help.

ECE vs Parent Perspective

The one common challenge mentioned by both parents and educators concerned “problem behaviors in child;” however, educators reported this issue more often than parents. Specifically, 23% of 39 responses or almost one quarter of the ECE responses focused on ‘problem behaviors’ and almost another quarter (23%) focused on ‘special needs’ thereby indicating these two factors were the major priority for this interview group. In comparison, only 8.3% of parent responses mentioned problem behavior while 14.5% mentioned “family dynamics.” In fact, parents demonstrated such complexity in their list of concerns that it was difficult to prioritize one over the other and 12.5% (6) of their responses ended up being coded into the category of “Other” (See Table 3). Five of the 48 parent responses (10%) also indicated that work and childcare, whether that be a financial aspect, scheduling conflicts or just finding a suitable daycare was either a difficulty they had faced in the past two years or were currently facing. As discussed in the following section, a similar distinction in perspective can be seen for the responses provided by each group for the interview questions on “Family Resilience” with ECE more likely to form their reply around childhood issues and parents on other aspects of family life.

Family Resilience Factors

All families at some point face a difficulty or challenge, especially when it comes to raising young children. The challenges that the families in this present study face were outlined in the previous section. In this section, I will discuss which coping mechanisms or resilience factors were exhibited by parents as perceived by educators and the parents themselves. During the interviews parents were asked to discuss the most serious challenges they were either experiencing currently or had experienced over the past two years and how they managed those

challenges. By asking how the challenges were managed, I was able to better understand how they coped and what resilience factors they possessed. Comparatively, I asked ECE to describe their perspective of the types of difficulties that the families coming to their center faced. The tools and coping mechanisms that emerged from these interviews are notable indicators of strength and resilience so are categorized in Table 4 as “Family Resilience Factors”. Similar to the previous section, I discuss the ECE perspective on resilience factors exhibited by parents before I describe how parents perceive their own ability to bounce back from a difficult situation.

Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Perspective

The most commonly reported resilience factors by ECE were “Seeking Guidance”, “Individual Disposition” and “Support from Extended Family/Friends”.

a) Individual Disposition

Nearly one-third (9 or 31.03%) of the 29 responses given by early childhood educators identified “individual disposition” as a factor that distinguishes families that overcome an extenuating circumstance from those that remain stuck. This category of responses encompasses what ECE perceive to be either personality traits or parental world views including an ability for parents to accept their circumstances. Interestingly, the ECE comments also focused on the child and the child’s behaviour when describing “individual disposition”. For example, Orange a 22-year old summer facilitator noted, “I would say that yes, some families are better able to work through such stressors and problems than others. The main thing is that there is acceptance of the fact that there is a problem with their child. Other families are willing to work with ECE at home and at the center to help the child.”

In comparison, Daniella, another ECE was unsure if there was a concrete difference between parents who overcame differences or not. She felt that it had more to do with accepting

Table 4.
Results – Family Resilience Factors

Theme	Subtheme	Sub theme of Subtheme	# of ECE Responses	% of Responses	# of Parent Responses	% of Responses	Total
Family Resilience Factors	Seeking Guidance (from)	Educators	8*	27.59%	6*	15.38%	14*
		Community	2	6.90%	3	7.69%	5
		With Child(ren)	1	3.45%	3	7.69%	4
		Work	0	0%	2	5.13%	2
	Support from Extended Family/Friends		3*	10.34%	9*	23.10%	12*
	Individual Disposition		9*	31.03%	4	10%	13*
	Misc. External Supports		2	6.90%	8*	20.51%	10*
	Other	Compromise/Sacrifice	2	6.90%	0	0%	2
		Prioritizing Children	1	3.45%	1	2.56%	2
		Support from Religious Organizations	0	0%	2	5.13%	2
		Parent's Level of Education	1	3.45%	0	0%	1
		Past Experiences with Childcare	0	0%	1	2.56%	1
	Total Responses		29		39		68

N = 68

*= Most Frequently Reported

criticism of the child, both good and bad. As such, she observed, “I’m not too sure. I know some parents will act upon it if we approach them. We can if you would like we can help you we can show you we can show you in the right direction. Some parents will take it in and others will be, “Oh no no they’re just a boy.” or just “They’re going through something.” but not all parents accept the either bad or good criticism.”

b) Seeking Guidance

ECE also viewed seeking guidance from a number of alternate sources such as educators, the community, friends, children and with people’s places of work as a key indicator of successful coping skills in times of struggle. The code response of “seeking guidance” highlights instances where ECE described parents taking it upon themselves to reach out to educators and other forms of supports to help foster better tools for coping as opposed to educators having to extend assistance. Notably, 8 of the 29 ECE responses (27.59%) indicated that communication with educators facilitated strength in the face of challenges. For example, in responding to my questions on family resilience, Elizabeth, an early childhood educator and program facilitator recounted an experience she had with a mother in her play group:

I’ll never forget this woman. She came to my play group and she was like, "Help! Help!" and her son had a behavior issue. And so, and he was going to school and she wanted to work really hard and so was OK. I said Let's do this. And so, she reached out to me...So, we worked that year with him and I gave her all the services she reached out to them and so finally school started. He's thriving right now. He's doing really good.

Karen, another early childhood educator emphasized that evidence of resilience could be seen when parents speak to an ECE or come to the early learning center seeking unsolicited

support. She said, “So, that's how one way she's doing it she's speaking with us so she's you know she's seeking some sort of an understanding from us of the situation and support. How can we help. So, she's reaching out...I have some that are very reflective you know there and they'll discuss it with.”

c) Support from Extended Family/Friends

Three (10.34%) of the 29 total responses given by early childhood educators indicated that support from friends and extended family such as parents, grandparents, uncles and siblings proved to be vital in facilitating a return to normal functioning. For example, Laura an early childhood educator described a time when an extended family member had to step in to help the parents of their grandchildren overcome their struggles. She said, “Eventually things got so bad that the grandmother had to step in and be a mediator between the two parents. The grandmother would do the picking up and dropping off of the child. In this case, the ECE weren't the ones to solve the problem.”

Describing a completely different instance, Amy, another ECE highlighted how having extended family can play an integral role in children and parents being able to access the supports they need to find their way out of a challenging situation. She noted that, “we did have a family who's coming who the grandparents had custody of the grandchild and the father actually had special needs so he lived with them but wasn't able to care for his child on his own. So that's right the grandparents were stepping in and they actually came to us looking for support.”

d) Other

The category of other (2 or 6.90%) consisted of “Prioritizing Children” and the “Parent's Level of Education” to explain their sense of how families seemed to overcome their struggles.

For example, Aurora a 28-year old RECE described a situation in which a family going through a separation was able to cope and remain positive,

From what I could tell during the separation...they really tried to work on the kids and keeping it positive. Their houses are not far apart so that they both stay in the (deleted, location name) range as well as they both really tried to put on a front together. They both go to meetings about the children together, as well as doctors' appointments, everything. Even though they weren't getting along the whole time, they still tried to prioritize the kids and the family first.

Parent Perspective

Parents offered a larger variety of responses than ECE when they were asked how they were able to recover from the challenges and difficulties they had experienced. The most frequently reported responses were coded under the following categories of, "Miscellaneous External Supports", "Support from Extended Family/Friends" and "Seeking Guidance" from educators, community and their children.

a) Support from Extended Family/Friends

A noticeable number of parent responses (9 or 23.10%) focused on how having access to and support from extended family/friends such as parents, grandparents, siblings, uncles, cousins and coworkers proved to be extremely helpful during times of difficulty. For instance, when Alexandra, a stay at home mother got laid off during maternity leave, she reached out to a number of sources which included lawyers, religious organizations but noted the support she gained from her uncle was especially helpful. She said,

So, I reached out to my uncle, he is a part of the union, the head of the union at Canada Post. He's a part of the head. He is. Like a head of. He's the head of one of

the heads of the workers unions at Canada Post. So, he talked to me about because I'm not unionized. He basically said that usually nonprofit sorry nonprofits get away with stuff like that because we're not unionized yeah and they know that like we don't have the money to fight stuff like that. So, they got away with it. Even though he was unable to find a solution for her, Alexandra's uncle helped her process the information and understand what took place thereby also helping her manage any stress or uncertainty she experienced from this challenging situation.

For Blue Sky, having her parents live close to her to help with her children and the functioning of her family would have been a given if she was still living back home in Mongolia. She spoke about the difficulty created by leaving her daughter with "strangers" if she wished to return to enter the paid labour force and remarked that, "I think having grandparents close is... especially for woman you know our mothers can come and help you. It's the best thing they can do. And this challenge we had was my father couldn't get a visa to come to me for the second birth. Now look in terms of child care is like I'm afraid to leave her... Like she's only seven months to someone... A stranger a total stranger."

b) Miscellaneous External Supports

Eight of the 42 responses given by parents (20.51%) indicated that they had received support through organizations outside of Andrew Fleck Children's Services when dealing with various family challenges over the past two years. These agencies included but were not limited to OCTC, Occupational Therapists, First Words, Social Workers, CAS, Counsellors and general health practitioners. For instance, when talking about his marital issues and the steps he was taking to make amends in his marriage, Thunder said, "I reached out to a counsellor...I went in a couple of times and it was nice...it was good. But again...she (wife) was very reluctant to go. I

think she ended up going but we were supposed to go back and never did. You can't force somebody to do that right."

In comparison, May, a 30-year old stay at home Mom, explained that she has access to formal supports outside of the childcare center due to her own medical condition. "So, I also do have a social worker as well like I have a team because I live with a chronic illness so... I was born with cystic fibrosis every three months since I was born I go for a checkup I have a really good supportive team there as well. Yeah. I got to say I have a pretty good like supportive team around me."

c) Individual Disposition

Four or 10% of parent responses highlighted how important it is to have a positive outlook when faced with what appears to be insurmountable life situations. For example, Alexandra, a stay at home mom replied,

I'm in a really tough position right now. It is tough. But at the same time, it's like I'm such a believer as you are that everything happens for a reason and that you could share your testimony with other people. You know I don't believe anything happens by accident. I do believe in that I believe our steps are ordered. We need to always be in faith and believe that you know God is for us as you know as it is written and that whatever we go through is like it is for our good. And so that's sort of like my mantra: keep pushing and praying until something happens. That's my motto: push.

In a similar fashion, when asked what she did to overcome her circumstances and how she deals with having a sick child, Donna, a 44-year old personal support worker and mother said, "I'm not sure...just take it one day at a time."

After Molly went through a difficult and scarring pregnancy, she described her situation as a trickling effect of bad things. She emphasized that focusing on the present and positive is what helped her and her family get through it. She said, “So, over time I just got a little less afraid...She's fine. And that's the important thing right...The bad things the doctor said would happen, didn't happen and that's kind of what I focus on is that she's okay and that's good.”

d) Seeking Guidance (From)

Families that knew when and how to utilize and communicate with social support agents indicated they possessed the ability to be strong in the face of adversity. In this case, 15.38% of parent responses indicated that they reached out to and communicated with “educators” to gain a better understanding of how to overcome a difficulty. For example, when asked if he reached out to the center when dealing with behavioral problems with his youngest son, Dan said,

Yeah, we did. Like we're talking to the AF center because we wanted to have consistent messages. We told them what we were doing and we asked them what do you guys do and what happens when he gets there. What's he supposed to do... So, we worked with them. Finally, what ended up working was we took away his favorite puppy. His stuffy. And we told daycare that and they started doing that as well so if he hit in the morning he wouldn't get his puppy for naptime.

Three of the 39 responses or 7.69% of responses given by parents indicated that having access to community support whether that be their neighborhood, community sports or the community formed inside the early learning space made them feel as if they had a good social support network. As Anna, a 29- year old guardian said,

The kids are...they play sports as well so I mean I guess you know we reached out to have them join in those community sports within our community. And we ended up meeting a few neighbors that we probably wouldn't have because of the kids because they have kids. So, we have strong relationships with various different neighbors and because of them being with us...they understand our situation and they're very supportive.

Lastly, 3 (7.69%) of parent responses indicated that seeking guidance from an older child often served as a tool for tackling a difficult situation. In the case of Doanna, a 62-year old retired grandmother, having open communication with her son allowed her to clear up any hang ups she had regarding how her grandson is being raised. She observed, "...they (the problems) are resolved. I mean he said to trust him. And I do trust him...I mean they have him (the grandchild) in the best interest too right? So, I'm sure they would make the right decision unless I see something that is very very bad then I must speak up. But right now, so far...it is okay."

e) Other

The category of other (4 or 10%) consisted of distinctive responses such as compromise/sacrifice, prioritizing family time, support from religious organizations and past experiences with childcare that were given by parents to explain their sense of how families seemed to overcome their struggles. For example, Anna a 28-year old parent said, "I guess always our concern was with making sure that they were safe. So, at the end of the day like even though we had to change a lot. Our focus and our goal has always been to make sure that they're safe. And that they are loved and taken care of."

ECE vs Parent Perspective

Nine of the 29 responses (31.03%) or almost a third of the ECE responses focused on “Individual Disposition” as something that distinguished one family over another in their ability to overcome adverse situations, nearly another third (8 or 27.59%) focused on “Seeking Guidance from Educators” as a resilience factor and 3 (10.34%) responses focused on “Support from Extended Family/Friends” as something that allows families to overcome difficult circumstances. In comparison, parent responses offered more variation and depth of description. Almost one-quarter (9 or 23.10%) fell within the category of “Support from Extended Family/Friends” while close to another quarter (8 or 20.51%) identified “Miscellaneous External Supports” such as social workers, psychologists, counselors, First Words, OCTC., and another 15.38% focused on “Seeking Guidance from Educators” as sources of support in times of adversity. These numbers compare significantly with the ECE who rarely mentioned “Family/Friends” (3 or 10.34%) or “Miscellaneous External Support” (2 or 6.9%).

The two resilience factors that both parents and educators consistently identified were “Seeking Guidance from Educators” and “Support from Extended Family/Friends”. Notably, educators reported “Seeking Guidance from Educators” more often than parents (27.59% versus 15.38%) thereby giving it more significance as a resilience factor than did the group who actually sought assistance. Comparatively, parents were more than twice as likely to report “Support from Extended Family/Friends” as a resilience factor than did educators (23.10% versus 10.34% respectively). Similar to the previous findings outlined in the section on family challenges, ECE interviewees were much more likely to form their reply around how parents seek guidance for childhood issues and parents on other aspects of family life. (See Table. 3)

While the early childhood educators are an integral part of a child’s life, they are often not privy to everything that happens in that child’s life. This includes not always knowing how a

family is able to return to effective functioning following a crisis or what type of a crisis even exists. Being confined to the classroom setting means educators only know what parents and children are willing to share with them. This environmental constraint may help explain the limited variation of replies provided by this group. As revealed in the section below, this environmental limitation creates difficulty for establishing supportive lines of communication through which ECE can offer family support.

Communication

Throughout the interview process, the theme of communication came up time and time again. Both educators and parents described their experiences in the early learning environment as revolving around their conversations with each other and with the children. Unlike the themes discussed in the sections above, this theme of communication did not emerge in response to specific questions (i.e. What are your challenges and how do you overcome them?). Instead, the theme of communication emerged as an *in vivo* code during my analysis of the interviews and revealed a general understanding of how parents felt best supported by the Center as well as how educators felt they could best support parents during times of crisis. As described in my methods section, *in vivo* codes appear naturally in the data as descriptive words or themes consistently used by the research participants. In this case, I continually found either the word ‘communication’ or descriptions of communication events or occurrences in my data and assessed it as a significant data finding. In fact, my analysis of the *in vivo* code of ‘communication’ clarified for me how the ECE and parent’s ability to communicate effectively shaped their partnership as major influences in child development and facilitated resilience within the families in the Andrew Fleck community. Throughout their interviews, parents and ECE spoke about the modes of communication that they believed offered the best support for

family resilience. Table 5 consists of the subthemes or codes formed from the communication comments I found in the interview data. Adhering to the organization of previous sections, the following presentation begins by outlining the ECE perspective. I will then discuss the parent perspective before offering a comparison of the two perspectives.

Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Perspective

The first subtheme identified under the theme of “Communication” was “Types of Communication”. In this subtheme, successful interactions between parents and educators were categorized as specific actionable items. Of the 48 total statements given by educators regarding types of communication, the top three responses were “providing resources”, “informal interactions” between parents and ECE and “formal meetings” between parents and ECE.

a) Informal Interactions

Fourteen of the 48 total statements (29.17%) given by educators indicated that “Informal Interactions” were one of the main ways in which parents and educators communicated about the child, difficulties at home or just exchanged general pleasantries during times such as pick up or drop off. Unlike formal meetings or parent-teacher mixers, these interactions took place spontaneously and had no official agenda. Watermelon a 39-year old, Registered Early Childhood Educator expressed this sentiment when she was asked how the center is made aware of challenges or difficulties the families that attend their center are facing and replied, “Sometimes they’ll talk it out with a staff member or myself and we’re always open to them saying you know we need time to step out of your program and get a staff and just vent to them. We allow them to depending on how

Table 5.

Results—Types of Communication with Early Childhood Educators (ECE)

Theme	Subtheme	Sub theme of Subtheme	# of ECE Responses	% of Responses	# of Parent Responses	% of Responses	Total
Communication with ECE							
	Types of Communication						
		Informal Interactions	14*	29.17%	10*	35.71%	24*
		Providing Resources	8*	16.67%	6*	21.42%	14*
		Formal Meetings	12*	25.00%	1	3.57%	13*
		ECE Interactions with Child	3	6.25%	5*	17.86%	8*
		E-mails/Fliers/Notices	2	4.17%	4*	14.28%	6*
		Modeling Behaviors for Parents	4	8.33%	1	3.57%	5
		Story Park	3	6.25%	1	3.57%	4
		Body Language of Parents	2	4.17%	0	0%	2
	Total Responses		48		28		76

N = 76

* = Most Frequently Reported

comfortable the relationship is with us. It depends on the family. So, we're always there for a listening ear to them..."

Laura, a 24-year old educator gave a more concrete example of a time where parents needed help disciplining their child and informally came to her during programming to discuss the situation:

We told the parents its normal and the best way to deal with this would be to set expectations with the child and have a reward/punishment system in place. The parents eventually saw slight improvement in their child after implementing this. We kept reminding them the change wasn't going to take place overnight. They also told us they were so concerned that they reached out to other parents and their own parents to understand if this behavior was normal for a child.

b) Formal Meetings

Twelve of the 48 statements or nearly 25% of comments given by educators indicated that "Formal Meetings" with parents provided them with the ideal opportunity to discuss concerns and get updates from parents about how the child was doing at home and what circumstances might be affecting their performance at the day care center. In a formal meeting, a scheduled time and place is set for the ECE and parents to thoroughly discuss a pertinent issue. This formal time slot allows both the parent and ECE to be fully focused on finding a solution to whatever challenge, issue or change is being discussed. Diane, a 64-year old Program Coordinator who has her Masters' in Education described a specific instance in which meeting with parents over the course of several months allowed the parents and ECE to come up with a mutual plan of action when tackling severe behavioral issues in a child.

...the child was having difficulty with socializing appropriately with other children and staff so we (the parents and ECE) had to work it out together...we had to figure out how to get undone and it was a little rocky at moments for us but we did it. You know for a parent to hear anything about their child is really hard. So, we had to play with it a bit in the sense that we had to figure out how to talk to them about it. Luckily the parents were very open to that and we figured out how to help the child behave in more socially desirable ways together. I think that was a good thing because it allowed for very open communication. It took months of meeting with them over and over again... But we did it.

c) Providing Resources

Eight of the 48 total statements (16.67%) given by ECE indicated that communication through “Providing Resources” was a way in which educators could support families during difficulties. Karen a 42-year old early childhood educator spoke about the need to provide ‘extra’ resources in her observation that,

...even if someone has come and they’re opening up about a stressful situation...it might be a new diagnosis such as ASD...they’re coming to you and if you give some sympathetic ear, some resources...as long as you’ve kind of provided them with whatever was appropriate at that stage...you know they came in a state of upset or confusion or concern but they were looking for something. And that’s why we’re here. So even when there is an issue at hand it’s still a positive environment.

Later, she reiterated this point in her interview when she emphasized, “...in terms of connecting families with social services of any sort...we do see that as our role...our

main one is for sure child related services...but if there was a family who had a question about housing or you know safety you know for sure we would connect them in with the appropriate services.”

d) Modeling Behaviors

Lastly, 4 or 8.33% of ECE responses indicated that “Modeling Behaviors” for parents served as a mode of communication between parents and educators. According to the educators interviewed, it was also a way for them to help parents learn more about child development and managing behaviors in their children. When asked what sorts of things ECE do to support parents in overcoming challenges or difficulties, Aurora, an early childhood educator said, “...we show them strategies here that they can do to help at home. We then also try to continue them here whether it is you know toilet training or whatever.”

Diane, another ECE added,

I think sometimes for parents they get caught in what the behaviors is...I think one of the successes for me...is helping them to recognize how their child may feel. Helping them to recognize all the good stuff the child did do...they hit someone out of the way that they didn't want near them but how do we give them some words and model some language so that they can use them instead.

Parent Perspective

The parents provided a smaller number of comments containing communication statements during their interviews than did ECE. Of the 28 total parent statements on this topic, “Providing Resources”, “Informal Interactions” with ECE, communication “With Child” and “E-mail/Fliers/Notices” were the most frequently reported modes of communication.

a) Informal Interactions

Often, parents found the most useful interactions to be those in which the educator served as a casual listening ear. Of the 28 total parent statements on communication, 10 or 35.71% indicated that “Informal Interactions” were an effective and cathartic mode of communication between educators and parents. For example, when describing the early learning centre, Amanda a 28-year old Nanny said, “I feel like it is just such a big thing just being there just having someone there to bounce your stresses off and have that understanding ... just that reassuring person.” Comparably, when asked if she ever talked to anyone at the early learning center about the concerns she was having about her daughter, Blue Sky, a 39- year-old Policy Analyst and Mom noted, “...I ask the same questions like, what did she eat...did she nap. Occasionally I’ll also ask if she played well with the other kids. We’re trying to observe what she is interested in, that way I know what toys to buy...I spoke to (deleted, ECE name) about how she is feeling and for some feedback about how (deleted, daughter’s name) is doing and if she was happy with her progress.”

b) Providing Resources

Similar to the ECE reports, one of the most frequently reported type of communication from the perspective of parents was “Providing Resources” (6 or 21.42% statements). For example, Alexandra 29 -year old stay at home Mom, emphasized that her interactions and communication with the Early Learning Center and the ECE generally concerned her children and how to better support their development. To quote Alexandra:

(deleted, daughter’s name) was underweight when she was born. So, I did contact them in regards to feeding...good nutrition was a big part to understand. She got

to a point where I took her off milk but she is still on the lower end....so I got in contact to ask them about nutrition with infants and the importance of that and how would I...like what type of...because information is always changing about what you should feed kids...I also went to a class at an early learning center, not (deleted, center name), but I went to the one on (deleted, location) where they had a nutritionist there. She is a nurse and she went through everything with me...I actually have a really great resource (that she gave me) ...to help Moms and I still use it. It's a really great resource.

c) ECE Interactions with Child

Five (17.86%) of the 28 comments given by parents indicated that ECE communication “with their child” was a type of communication integral to developing a strong partnership and trust between parents and educators. In these types of instances, parents discussed diffusing situations between different children, trying out new methods of coping and problem solving with the children or helping the children with their speech. Amanda, a 28-year old caregiver and nanny said the following, “I love the way they speak to the children too because like even though I know that you know child development side of it it's really nice to see them interact and speak in maybe a different way or put a question or something a different way than I would. And go like oh right I should word it that way next time.”

Similarly, Victoria a 37-year old stay at home Mom noted how much she appreciated how the Early Childhood Educators were able to connect with her daughter in her comment that, “...they are good with the kids. (deleted, ECE name) is really good with the kids and you know...speaks at their level and respects them and that's nice to

see. Not just from my perspective, but I think it's so important for the kids to have good interactions with them as well."

Donna, a 44-year old parent and personal support worker emphasized that by having ECE communicate with her child, they were helping him have a better grasp of English as a language, "...we noticed that since he has been here...he has the right pronunciations of words. We try at home to have conversations or get him to watch TV, but ever since we came here is when we noticed a difference."

d) E-mails/Fliers/Notices

Lastly, four of the 28 total responses (14.28%) made by parents indicated that receiving "E-mails/Fliers/Notices" represents a more formal type of communication that is helpful to them for understanding the programming service and parent expectations of ECE and the Centre. For example, Amanda, a 28-year old Nanny said,

They do quite a good job. I love the e-mail that they sent out and it sort of you know a quick scan through you know exactly what's coming up and that's a great way to keep everyone informed. Because you don't want to be too invasive right. If they don't want the services you don't want to be you know calling them all the time just like a weekly e-mail they send out. It's perfect and if there's anything I want to do then I just know put it on my calendar and done.

ECE vs Parent Perspective

As many of the educators and parents have emphasized, early learning environments can be a place of community, understanding and support. Open communication between parents, educators and children supports that process. Eight of the 48 or 16.67% comments given by ECE indicated that "Providing Resources" to

parents was how they most frequently communicated with parents, 14 (29.17%) focused on “Informal Interactions”, 12 (25%) focused on “Formal Meetings” and another 4 (8.33%) focused on “Modeling Behaviors” thereby indicating that these three factors were the major forms of communication for this interview group. In comparison, 6 or 21.42% of parent responses mentioned “Providing Resources” and 10 or 35.71% focused on “Informal Interactions” as a mode of communication. Another 5 or 17.86% of parent responses indicated that “ECE Interactions with Child,” that is, how ECE interacted and communicated with their children when challenges arose was recognized and valued. Lastly, 4 or 14.28% of parent responses indicated “Emails/Fliers/Notices were effective in transmitting information regarding Centre activities and expectations. Notably, both parents and educators focused on “Providing Resources” and “Informal Interactions”; however, parents reported both of these factors at a higher rate than educators (35.71% vs. 29.17% and 21.42% vs. 16.67% respectively).

Barriers to Communication

While communication is important for facilitating a positively functioning parent-educator relationship, it is not always an easy thing to foster. During the interviews, if a participant indicated that interactions between parents and educators were strained or lacking, I would probe or ask follow-up questions to understand why that breakdown may have occurred. When interviewing parents, most of this probing took place after asking if they reached out to the early learning center or ECE staff during times of adversity. For ECE, these follow up questions took place after asking if they or any ECE they knew helped a parent or family through a difficulty. Table 6 contains the types of responses given to those probes. The next few paragraphs will closely follow the organization of the previous sections in which I will first

discuss the ECE perspective and then the parent perspective before offering a comparison of the two.

Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Perspective

Of the 16 total comments made by educators the most frequently reported barriers to communication (4 or 25%) were parent's "Lack of Openness to Suggestions". The second most frequently reported barrier to communication from the perspective of ECE was, "Feeling Judged" with 18.75% or 3 out of the 16 comments being offered on this topic.

a) Lack of Openness to Suggestions

The subtheme, "Lack of Openness to Suggestions" highlights what educators felt was a barrier in communicating with parents, especially, when it came to suggestions regarding their children or their lifestyle. For example, when discussing the difference between parents who are able to successfully overcome challenges and those who are not, Daniella a 32-year old registered early childhood educator said, "...the ones that are (successful) will accept that their child has a problem. Some (parents) are in neglect and denial. So, they won't want to act upon it and they won't take your advice or your resources that you are trying to provide them with."

Similarly, when asked about the difference between parents that were able to overcome a difficulty in a successful manner and those who continued to struggle, Stefanie a 32-year old registered early childhood educator explained,

Well from what we see, yes sometimes there are families you see who can adapt really well...and just take what you've given them or ask you for help and then...move on. Sometimes families don't see certain information well. It takes a bit longer to accept

Table 6.

Results—Barriers to Communication with ECE

Theme	Subtheme	Sub theme of Subtheme	# of ECE Responses	% of Responses	# of Parent Responses	% of Responses	Total
Communication with ECE	Barriers to Communication	Not in the Scope of ECE	0	0%	7*	53.80%	7*
		Not Open to Suggestion	4*	25.00%	1	7.69%	5*
		Feelings of Judgement	3*	18.75%	0	0%	3
		Language	2	12.50%	1	7.69%	3
		Not yet Comfortable	2	12.50%	1	7.69%	3
		Parents not on the Same Page as Eachother	2	12.50%	1	7.69%	3
		ECE not seen as Expert	2	12.50%	0	0%	2
		Past Experiences with Childcare	0	0%	2	15.38%	2
		Parent's Lack of Follow Through	1	6.25%	0	0%	1
		Total Responses	16		13		29

N = 17

* = Most Frequently Reported

things or not want the support. So, then we're not seeing the stressor go away where they sort of just linger. So sometimes that can be a challenge when someone is not accepting or you know if their child has a special need or we feel there needs to be an assessment or somethings not going well. If they aren't accepting or open then the stressors don't really leave...

b) Feeling Judged

The subtheme, "feeling judged" speaks to the feelings of unease, apprehensiveness or inadequacy that ECE workers believe parents often experience when bringing children into a child care or academic environment. Interestingly, this feeling was not expressed by any of the interviewed parents. Rather, it was early childhood educators that felt parents may avoid confiding in them due to a fear of being judged. For example, Diane, a 64-year old early childhood educator who has been working in the field for just about two decades expressed, "...they don't know us they don't know what we're thinking of their children. They don't know what to expect."

c) Other

The remaining categories in Table 6 emerged from coding idiosyncratic statements appearing in a very small number of ECE responses that focused on such barriers as "language" (2 or 12.5%), parents "not yet comfortable" (2 or 12.5%), "parents not on the same page as each other" (2 or 12.5%), "ECE not seen as an expert" (2 or 12.5%) and "parents lack of follow-through" (1 or 6.25%). For example, when asked what prevented some parents from being able to work through a difficult circumstance versus other parents, Laura a 24-year old ECE said, "...when I was first starting out...these two parents were common law and they ended up separating. After they separated, Mom

began sharing information with an ECE to make them look at the other parent differently. She did this to make sure that we would always defer to her in any decision making. It got so bad...”

Orange, a 22-year old summer program facilitator discussed how parents often failed to see the ECE as experts in the field of childhood development,

...parents need to understand that ECE are role models for them and their children as we are the ones interacting with their children for the majority of the day. Some kids are here from 7AM to 5PM. We see the children more than their own parents do. Parents need to understand that we also want what is best for them.

This wide variation of comments may be a product of sample size; but it does reveal that, within the context of AFCS, breakdown of communication cannot be attributed to just one or two factors. Like the demographic served by AFCS, the barriers to communication are also diverse and encompass various aspects of the parent or of a family system’s life.

Parent Perspective

a) Not in the Scope of ECE

Of the 13 barriers to communication offered by parents, the subtheme, “Not in the scope of ECE” was the most frequently reported (7 or 53.80%). This barrier dominates the parents’ reports on barriers to communication and contrasts sharply with the lack of comment (0%) made by ECE regarding the issue. It appears from this data that many parents believe their difficulties or challenges are not something for which the early learning center can provide them support. For example, when speaking about her reasons for not reaching out to anyone at the center to talk to about her troubles with work and networking, Alexandra said the following: “...I felt it was out of their scope...you know if

I felt like they were going to be able to help me network or get a job I would have went to them... that is what it comes down to...how good is your network.”

In a similar fashion, Thunder, a 38-year old father and developmental support worker was experiencing difficulties relating to his marriage and felt that the early learning center wasn't an appropriate place to look for support, "...it was personal stress so I was just talking to my friends and family.”

Donna, a 62- year old retired grandmother who is helping her child take care of his son also emphasizes this point in her observation that she felt as if she would be imposing on the center by discussing her struggles with the facilitators or early childhood educators in her statement, “I don't think it's difficult enough to you know...raise an issue or speak to anyone about it.”

b) Other

The remaining comments made by parents covered a variety of topics and were coded as “Not Being Open to Suggestion” (1 or 7.69%), “Language” (1 or 7.69%), “Not yet Comfortable” (1 or 7.69%), “Parents not on the Same Page as Each Other” (1 or 7.69%) and “Past Experiences with Childcare” (2 or 15.38%). The similarity of content between ECE and parent comments led me to code these comments under similar topic categories. Thus, Donna, a parent for whom English is a second language expressed, “...it is hard to speak English...it is hard for them to speak English and it could be one of the reasons why (deleted, child's name) had the baby talk” so her comment was coded under “Language”. In contrast, when asked what stopped him from discussing his difficulties regarding finances with the ECE at the center where his children attend, Dan a 38-year old father said the following, “...my wife isn't open to that kind of thing as I am. So...we

never really addressed it and just kind of like hoped it would go away. Which isn't the best way to deal with it." so his comment was coded as "Parents not on the same page as each other".

ECE vs. Parent Perspective

The willingness of a parent or educator to communicate is affected by numerous factors including how the role of the ECE or parent is viewed by the other. From a parent's perspective, the Early Childhood Educator's purpose is to be there for the children to provide them with structure and to help them overcome negative behaviors and develop socially desirable habits. Given this purpose, it appears parents do not tend to consider the ECE as a family resource unless the child's school behaviour/activities are affected. In consequence, it is not surprising that nearly half or 53.80% of parents in the sample said they did not communicate during certain times of crisis or believed their challenges and difficulties were, "Not in the Scope of the ECE". In comparison, none of the Early Childhood Educators indicated that they felt parent/family challenges or issues were out of their scope of expertise. In fact, many emphasized that parents and families should feel as though the early learning context could provide them with resources beyond just dealing with child-centered issues and 25% of educator responses indicated breakdown in communication took place because parents were just "Not open to Suggestion". Interestingly, while the majority of parent responses claimed their challenges were not in the scope of ECE, only 1 of 13 or 7.69% of parent responses indicated that lack of openness to suggestion might be a barrier to communication.

Relationship Between ECE and Parents

In an attempt to gain a better understanding of how the parent-educator partnership can help bolster family resilience, it was crucial for me to understand how both parents and educators felt about their relationships as they currently stand. This perception of the relationship has implications for how effective or smoothly communications can occur as well as how open both parents and educators are in working towards either maintaining or improving upon their existing relationship. In this section, I will first discuss the educator perspective outlined in Table 7. I will then discuss the parent perspective.

Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Perspective

After discussing with ECE the various challenges and coping mechanisms that parents used to overcome difficulties, I asked them how they perceived their relationships with parents. Of the 16 total responses that educators gave on the nature of their relationship with parents, 50% of responses indicated that their more typical relationships with parents were positive. The other 50% of responses indicated that while unusual, it was not unheard of for some relationships with parents to be distant. Watermelon, an early childhood educator and a supervisor at one of the centers only had glowing words to say:

We're like a little family right? We're all very close. The staff have been in for a while as well. And being there for the children and their families making a difference. It feels great. Seeing them grow up and they even come back to visit us once they leave our school age program...we are close to the families here. We have a great relationship with all families and they are usually pretty comfortable to come in for meetings to talk about any challenges...

Table 7.

Results – Relationship with Parents (ECE Perspective)

Theme	Subtheme	Sub theme of Subtheme	# of ECE Responses	% of Responses
Relationship with Parents				
	More Typical	Positive	8*	50.00%
	Less Typical	Distant	8*	50.00%
Total Responses			16	
	Desired Changes			
		More Time for Communication with Parents	5*	55.55%
		More Communication with Parents	3	33.33%
		Not being the Police	1	11.11%
Total Responses			9	
	Pre-existing Workshops		12	100%
Total Responses			12	

N = 25

* = Most Frequently Reported

Stefanie reiterated this perspective in her response that, “I think for the most part the relationship is extremely positive. The staff work really well together and are able to communicate with the families, ask about their day. That kind of stuff.”

On the other hand, Aurora a 28-year old ECE spoke about the less typical relationships that educators had with parents and gave an example when she said, “They literally run in the door they yell the kid's name and they walk out. We have a few parents like that. They're either very shy or very busy. We do have parents come in literally talking on their phone grab their kid, nod at us and leave. It's not the typical parent.”

a) Desired Changes

When talking about their relationship with parents, many ECE discussed changes they would make to enhance the relationship if they could. Stefanie touched on the most frequently reported desired change “More time for Communication with Parents” when she said:

I think it's just having more opportunity to get to know them in not such a quick setting so they're picking up and you're giving information and that's sort of the end of it. Or having them volunteer, volunteering is extremely hard in an early child care program because there is a lot of... you need a police record check and you have to read other documentation and you need to sign. So, I think it's just having more opportunities to actually see them interact with their child and see have the child see us interact with their families. Parents are always rushed to do things and we don't get that.

b) Pre-existing Workshops

Twelve of the responses given by educators indicated that positive relationships with parents could also be attributed to “pre-existing workshops” and training sessions provided by AFCS. For instance, in our discussions about her relationship with parents, Diane a 64-year old program coordinator said, “...another part of that to me is that the agency (AFCS) is one that does a lot of work in that area to support staff. A lot of professional development training...our big one is about promoting community which I know our agency promotes to all parents and educators...we have had a lot of work with that.”

Elizabeth a 42-year old ECE reiterated this point in her notation that, “...we (the childcare center) have a connection with AFCS too...so I see some of my co-workers going there and offer workshops to the providers and how they should be working with parents and kids. We kind of work together like a community.”

Parent Perspective

Unlike the Early Childhood Educator interviews, I did not ask parents a specific question about their relationship with ECE. Instead, throughout the interview I asked parents to describe the sorts of interactions they had with educators as well as if they had found such interactions to be useful in times of difficulty or if they saw a need for improvement. I did this probing because I did not want the parents to feel forced to label interactions with ECE as either positive or negative. Based on their voluntary descriptions of these interactions, I was able to determine if they were speaking about positive or negative experiences (See Table 8). According to the responses, a noticeable majority of parents (83.33%) reported a positive relationship with educators. Anna emphasized this point when she said,

Table 8.

Results—Relationship with ECE (Parent Perspective)

Theme	Subtheme	# of Parent Responses	% of Responses
Relationship with ECE	Positive	10*	83.33%
	Distant	1	8.33%
	Learned from Them	1	8.33%
Total Responses		12	

N = 12

*= Most Frequently Reported

You know I guess they've always been very approachable. I mean in my personal experience they've been very approachable. And um they never pried or made you feel pressured to explain what situation you're going through or why they've (her niece and nephew) had to be where they are. They never apply any sort of pressure in needing to know more or wanting to know more or having to know more. They have specific questions that need to be answered. But you don't have to go into full detail which is nice but you do end up just building relationships with these people because you see them every day. You know and so it's a nice facility. At least this...these people here are great.

Victoria revealed a similar sentiment in her expression that, given the current socio-political climate, she would be upset if the center no longer existed, “I’ve just had really positive experiences. I would be really sad if this center was cut or you know I was telling my husband, “If Doug Ford cuts the early learning sector I am going to be so mad!”.

Suggestions

During the last portion of the interview, I asked both parents and early childhood educators what the Andrew Fleck Children’s Services as an organization might do to better serve the community as a whole. There were a total of 39 responses to this question with 15 responses from early childhood educators (ECE) and 24 responses provided by parents. I categorized these responses as “Overall Suggestions” (See Table 9).

Early Childhood Educator (ECE) Perspective

a) Overall Suggestions

Table 9.

Results—Suggestions from Perspective of ECE and Parents

Theme	Subtheme	# of ECE Responses	% of Responses	# of Parent Responses	% of Responses	Total
Overall Suggestions						
	Workshops	5*	33.33%	8*	33.33%	13
	Notices to Engage Parents	3*	20.00%	2	8.33%	5
	Parent Teacher Mixers	4*	26.67%	1	4.17%	5
	List of All the Resources and Programming	1	6.67%	2	8.33%	3
	Progress Updates	0	0.00%	2	8.33%	2
	On Site Counsellor	0	0.00%	2	8.33%	2
	More Volunteer Opportunities for Parents	0	0.00%	2	8.33%	2
	More Communication	0	0.00%	2	8.33%	2
	Use of Unscented Soap	0	0.00%	1	4.17%	1
	Surveys	1	6.67%	0	0.00%	1
	Meetings	1	6.67%	0	0.00%	1
	Longer Hours	0	0.00%	1	4.17%	1
	Improve Story Park	0	0.00%	1	4.17%	1
		15		24		39
Suggestions for Parents (from Educators)						
	Develop Communication Skills	3*	37.50%	0	0.00%	3
	Do your Research	2	25.00%	0	0.00%	2
	Foster Autonomy in Children	1	12.50%	0	0.00%	1
	Know your Social Supports	1	12.50%	0	0.00%	1
	Patience	1	12.50%	0	0.00%	1
		8		0		8
Total Responses						47

N = 47

* = Most Frequently Reported

The three most reported responses from the perspective of ECE were, “Workshops”, “Notices to Engage Parents” and “Parent Teacher Mixers”. Of the 15 ECE responses given, approximately one-third (5 or 33.33%) indicated they would like to see more “Workshops” on time management, nutrition, communication and child development for parents. Aurora, an ECE expressed this sentiment in her comment that,

I think at this center for parents... time management like a workshop about that or at a workshop about nutrition like nutritious lunches and how to make them like fast easy nutritious lunches because I find a lot of parents either go way like under where they're like just throwing like processed food in it because they don't have time or there's the parents that like have cut up their things into stars and things which is great if you have the time but not every parent has the time.

Educators who offered comments on workshops also reported that they would like to personally attend workshops on better understanding parent and family dynamics, behavioral interventions, new and safe ways of communicating with parents and how to better utilize StoryPark their online communication data base. For example, Stefanie, an early childhood educator as well as a program supervisor said the following,

...I think honestly that there may be some benefits to having the staff be more aware of family and parent dynamics. We are very knowledgeable and have a lot of resources on supporting children but not necessarily families as well and their struggles because I mean we're not necessarily dealing with those things... but to have a better understanding maybe would be nice.

Four of the 15 total (26.67%) responses given by ECE indicated there was a need for more opportunities to have “Parent Teacher Mixers” that would provide spaces for

informal communication and getting to know each other better. Orange, a summer facilitator said, "...it would be nice to have a breakfast where parents come in. It would be interactive to improve the parent educator relationship. I think it would help them feel more involved and comfortable asking about their child's experience."

Laura, another early childhood educator expressed similar sentiments when she said,

...if we can have activities with children and their parents...like parent projects or just a single activity or a day to motivate them to come and be engaged. It would have to be something that the child themselves are excited about so that parents feel more motivated to come. This would allow parents to connect to what their child is doing and then have the educators around to discuss any concerns.

Three (20%) of the 15 responses given by educators indicated that having physical "notices to engage parents" whether that be in the form of fliers or notes on white boards in general play areas would be incredibly helpful. For example, Karen, a 42-year old RECE and program facilitator said,

...one suggestion that we had was to put up signs in different areas of the room that would say things like, "Did you know that when your child is doing this activity they're working on these types of skills.". And then at the bottom say, 'ask the program facilitator for more information' just things like that...that are kind of provoking them to come and talk to us or ask us a question...like a whiteboard with you know a question or and not always serious sometimes you know because keeping it light too but a mix.

b) Suggestions for Parents

In addition to having suggestions for AFCS as a unit, ECE made suggestions regarding how parents might facilitate a stronger parent-educator partnership. Of the 8 responses made by ECE on how parents might take such action, 3 ECE (37.50%) indicated that parents need to better “Develop their Communication Skills”. For example, Daniella, an early childhood educator said, “...they should be trying to develop their communication skills. Definitely because there are some parents that you actually have to walk down with while they are exiting to tell them, this happened and I want to tell you...they just don’t want to hear it and they just want to go home.”

Two ECE noted that parents need to do their own research about various concerns in the sense of how to parent and deal with various issues related to their children and families. To quote Laura, an early childhood educator and facilitator:

Families and specifically parents can gain knowledge of what they are going through by accessing various online blogs and reading up on parenting or psychology articles. The internet is a great resource. Parents can also develop better communication skills with other parents and educators. Oh, and books, we often forget about books in this age of the internet. But books are great resources. The remainder discussed “fostering the autonomy in children (1 or 12.5%), “knowing your social supports (1 or 12.5%) and “patience” (1 or 12.5%), however, these represent single responses and provided little understanding of the perspectives of the ECE sample.

Parent Perspective

a) Overall Suggestions

When parents were asked what they would like to see from Andrew Fleck Children’s Services as an organization, parents expressed such a variety in their list of

suggestions that it was difficult to prioritize one over the other. In fact, only one suggestion, creating more “Workshops” was indicated more saliently and produced 8 or 33.33% of parent suggestions. In addition to the topics suggested by ECE, parents indicated that workshops related to breastfeeding and new-born weighing sessions were incredibly well received and that they hoped that AFCS would continue to provide such services. As Victoria, a stay at home Mom said, “I know they help with breastfeeding and stuff like that. I think they should keep that and have some lactation consultants. They used to do like a weighing session free weighing session if you just wanted to bring the baby. Or ask questions.”

Nearly half of the parent responses indicated that “notices to engage parents”, “list of all the resources and programming”, “progress updates”, an “on-site counsellor”, “more volunteer opportunities for parents” and “more communication” were all things that would be helpful to not only facilitating the parent-educator relationship but also to providing parents with access to the supports and develop the relationships they need in times of adversity. Again, the limited discussion offered by parents on these topics made it difficult to assess the significance of these issues for the larger population of parents who use AFCS.

ECE vs. Parent Perspective

Both ECE and parents agree that they would like to see a number of workshops being developed in the future. The topics of these workshops appear to differ, however. Parents wanted “child centric” workshops focused on such topics as understanding child development, how to handle tantrums, special needs, and breast feeding. This orientation matches the data found in response to other interview questions where parents appear to

view the early learning environment mainly as a place to benefit their children, not as a space in which they can reach out for support for family or personal issues outside of their child's welfare. Comparably, although the ECE also suggested workshops in which the child's best interests should be a major topic, ECE interviewees spoke about more concrete issues and topics from which they felt parents could benefit such as nutrition and time management. They also discussed a personal desire for educator workshops where they might learn how to navigate or support different family dynamics more effectively as a third party. Based on these responses, there is a clear difference between what the parents perceive the ECE role to be and what the ECE believe their role to encompass. The next section discusses the significance of these different perspectives for family support and enhancing family resilience at AFCS.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to understand, from the perspective of both early childhood educators (ECE) and parents, the various challenges experienced by families within the early learning context of Andrew Fleck Children's Services (AFCS), how families conceptualized and worked towards overcoming these challenges (i.e. how they exhibit resilience) as well as how the relationship between ECE and parents had the potential to support families through times of difficulty in ways that enhance family resilience.

The Model of Parent-Educator Relationships appearing in Figure 2 was created after the analysis of 21 interviews. During the creation of this Model it became evident that the child and his/her positive functioning were at the epicenter of interactions between ECE and parents, specifically within the AFCS context. These interactions were coded as "Communication" and represents the primary conceptual theme that emerged from the interview process. Additionally,

data analysis showed that the ECE's ability to effectively communicate relied heavily upon the following two factors: relationship with parents and preexisting workshops. On the other hand, although a parent's ability to communicate effectively within the AFCS environment was influenced by their "relationship with ECE", the nature of the "challenges faced" by parents and their family system, pre-existing "resilience factors" or skills guided the way in which they overcame those challenges.

Figure 2. Model of Parent-Educator Relationship

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Analysis of the interviews conducted with both ECE and parents revealed the fact that, while their perspectives converged at some points, the two groups had very different outlooks on the challenges faced by families and the family resilience factors exhibited in times of crisis as well as on what forms of communication created an ideal parent-educator partnership. Consideration must be given to the position held by each interviewee group as well as their relationship to the child if we are to understand the support that the AFCS can provide for the families under their care. The following section provides an analysis and synthesis of the major findings of this present study as they reflect upon the research literature on family resilience

Major Findings and Connections to Past Research

a) Challenges Faced by Families

From the perspective of ECE, the most frequently reported challenges that families face are, “Problem Behaviors in Child”, “Special Needs”, “Financial Difficulties” and “Marital Issues”. Parents also report “Problem Behaviors in Child” as a challenge; however, “Complicated Family Dynamics”, balancing “Work and Childcare” and general “Lifestyle Changes” represent the most frequent challenges faced. These results are not surprising for, as Christenson (2003) and Bagwell (2011) note, even though the early childhood educator plays a vital role in a child’s life, especially in the early years, ECE are not always privy to, nor adequately prepared to handle all of the circumstances that impact a family and a child. The ECE workers’ interactions are limited to the childcare environment and, as such, their focus remains on observable behaviors and situations that are explicitly brought to their attention within the childcare setting. In contrast, parents tend to view both their family circumstances and their child more holistically because they are privy to all aspects of their family and child’s life and may observe how each environment has the potential to impact the family system and its

members. Similar to Scribner et al.'s (1999) study on building collaborative relationships with parents, the interviewees in my study exhibited distinct perspectives on what constituted a family challenge and what was needed to resolve those challenges.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework (1979, 1998) asserts that child development is dependent on the various bioecological frameworks that interact and co-act upon the child. In other words, problems with the child and the child's successful behaviours are rooted in the environments to which it is exposed and each environment needs to be considered as a factor in child development. This theoretical framework served as the basis of my analysis when attempting to understand the motivations and concerns of both parents and educators. When asked about the kinds of challenges faced by the families in the AFCS community, it was clear that the child was at the center of interactions between parents and educators. The majority of responses given by the interviewees concerned family difficulties and the potential impact those difficulties might have on the child (i.e. Problem Behaviors, Special Needs, Marital Issues and Complicated Family Dynamics). Parents and ECE revealed equal concern over how both the home and school environment impacted the child's emotional, physical and mental development. From this perspective, they welcomed opportunities to communicate with each other, to increase their knowledge of child development, and to learn how to proceed more effectively to support both the childcare and family environment.

An underlying assumption of the research literature is that external supports are crucial to success and resilience. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework presents an understanding of how various systems may intersect and co-act to create a resiliency network within which children and their families can thrive and children can learn how to develop cohesive relationships of support for themselves. In other words, families need to be able to have access

to functional relationships with supportive external contexts such as the early learning center who model what resilience looks like to their children in times of adversity. As the data in my study reveals, although improvement in communication is required, ECE and parents are working together to create this type of supportive environment for the children under their care.

b) Family Resilience Factors

When asked about how families overcame difficult periods in which family resilience might be exhibited, ECE reported that “Seeking Guidance” from educators, “Individual Disposition” and “Support from Extended Family/Friends” allowed families to cope with difficulties more successfully. When asked similar questions, parents also reported that “Seeking Guidance” from educators, “Support from Extended Family/Friends” and “Individual Disposition” were factors that allowed them to facilitate strength in times of adversity. However, parents also spoke about how “Miscellaneous External Supports” such as access to OCTC, Occupational Therapists, Social Workers, and Counsellors aided their ability to overcome adverse circumstances. Thus, although both ECE and parents reported that the families at AFCS relied on external sources of support in times of adversity to recover and return to normal functioning, parents appeared to more aware of additional means of support than the AFCS and drew upon those agencies in times of family crisis.

In this way, the data findings align with the frameworks set out by McCubbin and McCubbin (1998), Walsh (1998) and Simon, Murphy and Smith (2005) who emphasized that the ability to bounce back from a difficult situation is closely connected with external supports available to and utilized by the family unit. For example, Simon, Murphy and Smith (2005) found that families who reach out to, and seek guidance from, others in their social environment such as friends, extended family, community members and organizations, exhibit greater

resilience. McCubbin and McCubbin (1998) also reported such patterns of reaching out are stronger for individuals and families that come from cultural backgrounds that value interdependence like those parents who participated in this present study. Additionally, access to supports such as mental health services, health care and other social services seem to bolster a family's ability to bounce back after a crisis or, in other words, strengthen family resilience (M.A. McCubbin, Balling, Possin, Friedich, & Bryne, 2002; J.A. McCubbin et al., 1998). As found in my study data, AFCS families appear to seek out and use the support services available to them and ECE workers are eager to offer them knowledge of alternate support systems. As such, the ability to reinforce and enhance family resilience seems to be strong in this community.

The ways in which the families in the AFCS context have exhibited strength in times of adversity was described better by parents than ECE workers in the study data. Exceptions to this finding occur in the case where a child is displaying "red flags" in terms of development or when parents come to the ECE for advice for how to tackle a situation they feel is within ECE expertise. Both parents and ECE recognize, however, that having some sort of network, in this case a network of family support and/or community services serves as a buffer in times of hardship or family difficulty. They also both agree that having a certain mindset, whether that be a positive outlook or just acceptance of what may be going on during the challenge or issue is crucial for an eventual recovery from an extenuating circumstance. Lastly, the data indicate both ECE and parents agree that communication with educators at the early learning center or the school is incredibly helpful in ensuring that children get the support they need in times of difficulty. By keeping lines of communication open, AFCS parents and educators are able to create an environment of continuity for the child when it comes to a number of things such as fixing problem behaviors, toilet training, the creation of safe spaces for the children and the

child's overall development. For the participants in this study, the major crux was how to create and maintain open communication between two very diverse groups who have only been brought together through their common interest in the care of a particular child.

c) Communication

The study participants' recognition of the need for open communication is exhibited through their constant discussion of this issue throughout the interview process. In fact, the *in vivo* code of "communication" emerged as a major analytical theme in the interview data. Further analysis of this theme highlighted the most effective "types of communication" from the perspectives of both parents and educators and the "barriers to communication" existing in the AFCS early learning environment. ECE reported that "Providing Resources" to parents, "Informal Interactions" with parents and "Formal Meetings" were the most effective modes of communication used to support parents in times of difficulty and to enhance family resilience. Comparatively, parents viewed "Informal Interactions", "Providing Resources", "ECE Interactions with Child" and "E-mails/Notices/Fliers" as the most effective modes of communication in which they felt best supported by the early childhood educators.

These findings differ slightly from those of past research presented by Christenson in 2003 where educators felt as though their schedules could not accommodate either formal or informal interactions and experienced difficulty in building trusting relationships with families. Instead, the ECE in my study emphasized that it was both their duty and a privilege to support parents with whatever means necessary whether informally or formally. In fact, they highlighted how informal communication during pick up and drop off times provided them with opportunities to offer support to parents despite time constraints. Similar to Christensen's (2003) study findings, however, ECE interviewees did mention that time constraints hindered effective discussion of

family dynamics and often inhibited them from developing structures for routine communication other than communication focused solely on problem behaviors. Still, unlike Christensen's research participants, the ECE in my study appeared willing to make the effort to open up and enhance communication with family members.

My data findings show that parents agreed with ECE about the importance of communication in that they felt most supported when ECE were "Providing Resources" and through "Informal Interactions". Additionally, parents indicated that the educator's ability to "communicate" with their child as well as the various "E-mails/Fliers/Notices" they received from AFCS helped them understand what to expect from a childcare standpoint as well as different programming or parent expectations. Given the central role that parents play in both their child's development and education, it is crucial for their perspectives of their children's education through the early years program to be understood and taken into account. This point was emphasized in a study conducted by Knopf & Swick in 2007 in which the researchers suggested that a key element in fostering strong relationships with families has more to do with the parent's perceptions of how educators actually go about curating the relationship than the relationship itself. Through forms of communication such as the ones reported by the interviewees in my study (e.g. resource requests and flyers), parents and educators are able to develop meaningful relationships that may serve as the basis for an external support system for families in their times of need.

The data findings in this study echo the analysis of Henderson's and Mapp's (2002) research synthesis of the impact that school, family and community connections have on student achievement. In particular, Henderson and Mapp's study emphasized that, if parents were to engage willingly in a learning context they needed to feel welcome, their participation needed to

be honored and connections with families needed to be recognized as playing a major role in their children's learning and development. The data in my study reveal this process takes place at the AFCS. Throughout the interview process, it became evident that parents and ECE have established clear routines and methods of communication that enable them to foster support and understanding based on concern for the child and its overall development.

From the ECE perspective, the most frequently reported barrier to communication was, "lack of openness to suggestions" and an assumption that parents may be "feeling judged" and therefore uncomfortable about disclosing family problems. Additionally, ECE discussed the various social advantages for parents in being a part of the early learning community. These findings reflect the traditional methods approach to family engagement outlined and identified in a study conducted by Souto-Manning and Swick in 2006 on teacher beliefs about parent and family involvement. The traditional-methods approach follows a deficit perspective in which the focus is on perceived deficiencies in families as opposed to a school inefficiency or inadequacy. Thus, in saying that parents are not open to suggestions, ECE may ignore family strengths as well as out of school experiences and various patterns of communication that are typical within racial minorities similar to the ones exhibited by parents at the AFCS (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Specifically, by placing the blame on parents for not being open to suggestions, some ECE at the Centre may contribute to the breakdown of communication and weaken the supportive environment needed for AFCS families to seek support for any difficulties or challenges they may encounter.

On the other hand, while some ECE hold the view that breakdowns in communication are rooted in the parents themselves, they are also aware that parents may be entering the early learning context with feelings of inadequacy or incompetence fueled by previous experiences.

These data results are reflected in studies conducted by Walker et al. (2005) and Galinsky (1989) on parent involvement in the school system. However, those studies found that parents, not educators, reported feeling unwelcome in learning centers because they perceived themselves as socially and academically incompetent in such settings. Thus, many parents may opt out of engaging with the school environment and eliminate themselves and their families from the supports offered. This elimination process may help explain why the interview data revealed ECE speculations that notions of feeling judged may serve as a barrier to parental engagement within the AFCS early learning context and data from the parent interviews did not contain similar reports. In other words, the voluntary nature of my sample may have eliminated those parents who have a sense of alienation from the school system and the ECE reports of parents “feeling judged” may be accurate. In consequence, although the parent interviewees reported feeling supported and comfortable with both the educators as well as the early learning center as a whole, more attempts to communicate resources and family problem-solving strategies may be needed between ECE and parents than indicated by the study data.

The parent interviews revealed that the main reason they didn’t communicate their problems or difficulties was because they felt that it was “not in the scope of ECE”. This finding aligns with other research in which school or learning environments are described by research respondents as places where educators are trained to work only with the children (Cairney, 2000; Adams & Chrisenson, 2000). Today’s early learning environments are designed to provide a place where educators respond to challenges that families may be facing as a whole as well as to issues pertaining to the individual child (Underwood & Killoran, 2010; World Health Organization, 2007; Crispeels & Rivero, 2001; Philips and Shonkoff, 2000). This perspective was emphasized in the interviews with ECE; however, it appears that parent interviewees do not

recognize the distinction between early learning environments and a traditional school setting and interact with the ECE mainly in terms of their child's situation and children's behaviour. They tend to view most of their family issues to be outside the scope of the AFCS mandate and neglect to see the ECE as a support in times of family crisis.

As outlined in a study by Adams and Christenson (2000), it was not until the 1960's and 1970's when a renewed interest in sharing the responsibility of raising and teaching the developing child emerged. At that time, emphasis began to focus on trying to get parents to participate rather than on how learning contexts might help families manage individual crisis or personal strain. The parent interview data indicates that parents still hold this perspective. This separation of school and family issues by parents can be understood given the contexts of how school culture has evolved historically and many may be lagging behind in changing their outlooks, especially immigrant parents who have raised within traditional school environments (Epstein and Sanders, 2006).

Still, from the perspective of the early childhood educator interviewees, their job remains incomplete unless they can engage meaningfully with the parents of the children in their care. Their years of schooling, training and personal development workshops have emphasized the importance of family engagement to them and they view it as a part of their role as an effective child care educator. As a result, when parents show little inclination of establishing a communicative relationship, a sense of professional dissatisfaction is likely to occur from unmet expectations. They may begin to engage in a form of cognitive dissonance and claim parents' "lack of openness to suggestion" or a "feeling judged" to be the cause or request more professional workshops to help them learn how to make more effective ECE-parent connections. It became apparent through the interviews and analysis of the interview data that ECE had

difficulty recognizing that communication is multi-complex and there are a number of factors such as culture, previous experience, historical contexts and time constraints that impact the ability of parents to devote the energy needed to establish communicative relationships.

Additionally, in these educator conversations, it was unclear if, or how, ECE would find the time and/or resources to address the issue of managing communication with all of the families they serve. Further examination of this topic through more directed questions and probes is needed to address this issue effectively.

d) Relationship between ECE and Parents

The ECE and parent's ability to communicate is heavily influenced by the nature of their perceived relationship. When asked specifically how they viewed their relationship, the majority said that, for the most part, interactions and relationships were positive. These findings were not surprising for a number of reasons. Similar to many early learning contexts such as Headstart, AFCS has made it their mission to make families feel welcome, respected and appreciated. This attitude towards family engagement was also outlined in the 2014 policy released by the Ministry of Education in Ontario titled, "An Introduction to How Does Learning Happen?" That policy emphasized how important parent and educator relationships are to the development of healthy and strong children. It also outlined exactly how early learning centers and schools are to behave to ensure that families and children feel as though school settings are a safe space in every sense of the word. In line with this goal, AFCS has made it a point to employ a diverse range of individuals so the communities they serve feel represented and comfortable. Thus, for example, at each of the centers I visited, I saw pages and quotes from the 2014 Policy taped on the walls for both parents and educators to read. Educators also emphasized in their interviews that they received training from AFCS that enabled them to work with a variety of family types and foster

positive relationships. These efforts are reflected in the findings of this present study and, for the most part, parents and educators had extremely positive things to say about one another. As mentioned previously, however, it may contribute to a sense of personal alienation or positive dissonance for educators if communication attempts are not reciprocated or communication breakdown occurs.

These findings are inconsistent with much of the past research done by Epstein & Dauber (1991) and Azmita & Cooper (2002) in learning contexts, especially when it comes to minority groups and their experiences in such contexts. In those studies, it was found that parent's experiences with educators and with the schools that their children attended were largely negative. Educator and parents' perceived roles differed drastically from one another in ways that negatively impacted their perceived relationships. Both of these studies were completed within an inner-city United States context in which families were from African American or Latino backgrounds. In contrast, the findings of my Canadian study indicate that both parents and educators who exhibit a variety of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds were happy with the services they were provided/providing as well as with each other. This positive finding may be a product of either volunteer sampling bias or the 2014 Policy, however, and further examination of these relationships at AFCS needs to be conducted on the topic. The interviewees in this study report being engaged in positive relationships with each other and it is clear they have a good understanding of how the early learning Centre works and the types of support it can provide.

While parents and educators claim to have positive, trusting relationships that allow for different types of communication, the most frequently reported challenge centered around problems that impacted the family system and children's problem behavior. This finding

indicates that the educators are speaking to the larger issues of time and role expectations. As reflected in my findings, due to time constraints and expectations of roles it is very difficult to cultivate a relationship where there is routine communication about both negative and positive events that take place with the child or family. Often communication with parents is limited to problems behaviors exhibited in the child or things of concern to both the educator and parent.

Educators also talked about the less typical relationships they had with parents. They described some parents as being distant and disinterested in how their child was doing in the childcare setting. ECE expressed their desire for a number of changes in their relationship with some parents such as, “more time to communicate with parents”. For both educators and parents, it has been repeatedly reported and recognized that time constraints impact efforts to establish meaningful relationships (Christenson, 2003; Bridgeland, 2008; Bagwell, 2011). Schools as well as early learning centers don’t always have the resources to bolster family engagement efforts and often families’ financial circumstances pose as a hurdle for being actively involved in their child’s early learning context. Due to work schedules and out- of- school commitments, parents and educators often don’t have the time to build trust and get acquainted so communication focused either on problem behaviors in general or the child. Again, the perceived demand to establish communication with parents as a part of their job may cause ECE to question their professional performance and look to parents as the source of communication breakdown. Alternatively, parents may carry a perception of family issues being out of the range of ECE because they don’t have enough time or energy to strengthen ties with ECE.

e) Suggestions

Parents and educators were asked if they would like to add anything or if they could think of anything that Andrew Fleck Children Services (AFCS) could do to make their experiences

with each other and in the early learning setting better. ECE expressed that they would like more “Workshops”, “Notices to Engage Parents” and “Parent Teacher Mixers”. Comparatively, parents had such a wide variety of responses, it was difficult to prioritize one over the other.

Both ECE and parents agreed they would like to see a number of workshops being developed in the future. The topics of these workshops differed for each group, however. Parents wanted “child centric” workshops with such topics as understanding child development, how to handle tantrums, special needs, and breast feeding. This topic choice matches parent perspectives on the early learning environment being solely a place to benefit their children, not a space in which they can reach out for support for family issues. The ECE also suggested workshops where the child’s best interests were highlighted; but, they spoke about issues and topics that they felt parents could benefit from such as nutrition and time management. Notably, ECE discussed needing more workshops that might help them learn how to navigate different family dynamics as a third party. Based on these responses, there is a clear dissonance between what the parents perceive the ECE role to encompass and what the ECE know their role to encompass.

The early childhood educators and facilitators also spoke about wanting to create more structured opportunities to engage parents. This could occur at a time and place where parents and educators could interact such as parent-teacher conferences or mixers. While this type of activity was something that many desired, they also acknowledged it as a difficult activity to organize in the early learning setting because it differs quite a bit from a school setting where separate rooms and privacy are more available. Because of this, many educators suggested having an open forum in the form of messages on a white board or something interactive on the online communication data base StoryPark. Parents agreed with wanting more opportunities to

interact, but the group of parents that were interviewed had such a wide variety of suggestions that it was difficult to prioritize one over the other.

It was clear, however, that the ECE's goal was to ensure that families were able to make the most of their services and that interviewed parents sought them out. As previously discussed, Henderson and Mapp (2002) outlined three key features of school communities that support family engagement: 1) families are welcome; 2) their participation is respected and honored; and 3) connections with families focus on the children and learning. All of the interview data indicates that the educators, facilitators and interns at the AFCS learning centers have adhered and promoted Henderson's and Mapp's features. The suggestions that ECE had to improve the AFCS environment discussed spaces in which parents felt comfortable and safe to engage in personal dialogue with the educators and centers. Proposed workshops spoke to helping families learn more about child development, food and nutrition as well as more child or problem specific workshops. Their desire for continued and increased communication reinforces data findings that the AFCS serves as a source of support for family resiliency.

Knopf and Swick (2007) suggest that, when a parent's perceptions, beliefs and practices are taken into account, family-educator partnerships are positively impacted. This issue emerged strongly during the parent interviews, when parents were asked what they would suggest AFCS do to ensure family resilience and strong parent-educator partnerships. Although the initial response pattern was to talk about how AFCS and the educators already offer a lot of programming and services, further probing revealed a tentative list of items such as the need for more workshops. However, it was evident that they felt heard and understood. The interviewed parents clearly perceived AFCS as a source of support if needed.

Implications

This present study sought to understand what family resilience looked like in the context of AFCS. The AFCS organization not only serves a diverse population but it employs a diverse range of individuals. In my time at the centers and getting to know the communities, it was obvious to me that both the parents and educators I interacted with and interviewed felt represented and welcome. This sense of acceptance is important given the current social climate of a multicultural Canada where the early learning context needs to be representative in terms of the beliefs and values of the wider population.

While the findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond the demographics and descriptions of the participants in this present study, the data offer a perspective that aligns with past research conducted with individuals of various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. As such, it gives us, as researchers, a glimpse into the complexities of different cultural interpretations of family resilience, coping and support and responds to many of the theoretical research questions offered by those studies, especially, in terms of a more diverse demographic. Significantly, the study found that institutional mandates may not align with the everyday setting in which those rules need to be applied. Thus, for example, in their desire to assist with family issues and possibly contribute to family resilience, the ECE experienced disillusionment either from parents who defined them as dealing only with child development/behaviour issues or those who did not have the time to interact. More open identification and acknowledgement of these factors may provide a setting for opening up more lines of communication between parents and educators in more effective ways that achieve professional/institutional goals to support families in times of success as well as in times of stress.

As outlined in a report for the World Health Organization's Commission (Siddiqi et al, 2007), by conducting research on, and implementing quality programming and services in an early learning context, both resource rich and poor societies can reasonably expect positive outcomes such as an effective route to reduce poverty, foster health, strength, productivity and overall well-being. Early childhood programming such as early learning centers and elementary schools have programs and services that are designed to benefit not only the child but the family as a whole. Research on types of programming and the quality of services provided in any context is a vital investment even if the research itself serves to provide justification for pre-existing paradigms.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Similar to any research studies, there are a number of limitations that need to be addressed. This present study relied on data collected in the span of three months over the Summer. The reason I make this distinction is that the parents and families who chose to participate in the summer programming at AFCS may not reflect the demographic that attends during the Fall or Winter programming. In other words, their attitudes, perspectives and suggestions may vary from those parents and children that attend AFCS programs on a more regular basis.

Additionally, participants chose to be a part of this study after being told what the goals and motivations of the study were. Choosing to participate based on knowledge of the research goals may point either to an individual disposition that speaks to the natural tendencies of the parents or educators to be actively involved in the child's learning experience or to the fact that they already had positive relationships with the center and organization. In other words, parents who chose to take part in this study may be representative of those parents who already make it a

point to have positive relationships with the ECE and the educators who participated may represent those educators who actively try to create safe and welcoming learning spaces. This factor has the potential of skewing the data gathered as well as my own interpretation of the data in a more positive light because those individuals who have issues with the center may not have felt comfortable enough to come forward and participate.

The sample is also a small sample consisting of 21 interviewees (11 parents and 10 ECE). In consequence, the data findings are limited in scope. The richness of perspective offered by the qualitative quotes makes it meaningful, however, and captures a strong image of the everyday world of the AFCE Centre and how parents and ECE communicate. As my comparison of the data with the findings of other research studies show, that data is also transferrable to other educational settings and situations.

In the future, it would be interesting to see a series of research studies consisting of larger samples dedicated to specific cultural and socioeconomic groups and designed to tease out the cultural nuances for how resilience and external supports are perceived and enacted. It is impossible to make claims about a group of people based solely on one or two individuals from that specific group whether it be ethnic group or socioeconomic class. There are numerous sub-cultures and interpretations that exist in one group of people and each one deserves an in-depth analysis. I would also be interested in seeing how the children from each distinct group end up conceptualizing ideas about resilience and strength given the cultural bi-pluralism that surrounds their development.

As a suggestion to educators and parents themselves—instead of looking to create opportunities such as workshops and training designed to address problems and barriers to communication, a more insightful focus might be to consider creating an environment where

informal interactions become viewed as a feasible and sufficient mode of communication where family problems could be discussed and family support elicited. By requesting formal events such as training exercises or workshops, communication becomes forced and ineffective. From the findings of my study, it is clear that parents and educators greatly benefit from being able to speak to each other without constraint or formality.

Conclusion

The findings of this present study were consistent with past research as well as with the original study goals. Data analysis uncovered the various challenges that families in the Andrew Fleck Children's Services community face and how those challenges were perceived by the early childhood educators that serve these families. It also provided a deeper understanding of how families in the diverse context of AFCS overcome adversity and revealed that various types of effective communication and with a variety of sources is one of the main ways in which families facilitate their own resilience. Additionally, the nature of the parent-educator relationship was crucial in understanding whether the early learning center and its occupants served as a facilitator of family resilience. Most importantly, I was able to understand the struggles and perspectives of families and educators who both want the best for the future of their children.

The social context in which we presently exist contains individuals and families coming from richly diverse backgrounds and understandings of the world. This study served as a confirmation that the literature and research on family resilience and the literature on the importance of strong parent-educator partnerships can be applicable to a diverse sample. These findings have the potential to inform programming, professional development and workshops in early learning contexts such as AFCS and beyond. The findings also revealed the innate tendency of individuals to often bypass simple solutions, such as creating opportunities for

informal interactions, to seemingly complex issues such as lack of effective and feasible communication. It would be fascinating to see more in depth qualitative research conducted on larger samples of individual ethnic groups to see if the understandings of family resilience and the role of the early learning context found in this study hold true. Ultimately, it is hoped that strength within the various family systems found to exist at the AFCS result in strong, capable children. Additionally, it would be interesting to see research on the impacts of parental exhibitions of resilience factors on the child's perception of resilience and strength given their own social contexts.

Appendices

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview with a Parent

Introduction, Consent & Face Sheet

Introduction: Thanks so much for meeting with me. My name is Alina Raza and I am a graduate student at Carleton University. This study is motivated by research indicating that children's early development depends on their family's well-being, including the extent to which their family is struggling with the various challenges that inevitably occur in day-to-day family life. As you may know, these difficulties can include all sorts of things, like parental or child health problems, the death of a loved one, and financial strains, right through to the problems posed by language barriers, racism, and poverty. Because children's development and their ability to learn is strongly affected by their family's well-being, I'm doing this research to learn about the problems or challenges that families face and how early learning centres and teachers can help families deal with these difficulties. So, during this interview I'd like to ask you about a few of the challenges your own family has faced in the past couple of years, how your family dealt with these challenges, and how your child's early learning centre and your child's teachers may have helped you, or could have helped you, deal with these challenges. To help us identify ways of getting parents more involved with their child's education, I'll also ask you some questions about the nature of your interactions with the staff at this centre and any other learning centre your child has attended.

Consent procedure: Go through & answer any questions (see Appendix C).

Face sheet: Go through Face Sheet questions (see Appendix H).

- Warming up Questions
- How did you learn about Andrew Fleck Children's Services?
- What made you decide to bring your child/children here?
- How long have you been bringing your child/children here?
- I'd like to understand the nature of your relationship with the staff at the centre, so I wonder if you could tell me about the sort of interactions you've had with them. Perhaps you could tell me about the last time you interacted with someone here.

Possible probes: What was it about? Was it useful to you? Anything to improve?

Can you tell me about some of the other interactions you've had?

Is there anything else that you'd like to tell me about your relationship with the staff at the centre and/or your child's teachers?

Family Challenges in Past Two Years

As I said earlier, having a family is very challenging, and virtually every family encounters some problems or difficulties at some point. Sometimes these challenges or problems may be relatively minor or small, such as finding someone to take a child to a medical appointment or finding a way to make an older child stop teasing a younger child. But sometimes these challenges can be quite complex and difficult to deal with, such as dealing with ongoing financial problems, marital problems, or dealing with the challenges of taking care of a child who has a chronic illness.

1st Problem or Difficulty. Can you tell me about a relatively small challenge or difficulty your family has faced in the past couple of years?

- What/who was involved?
- In what ways was this a challenge or difficulty for your family?
- What sorts of things did you do to deal with it? Possible probes:
 - Did you do anything else?
 - Did you ask any people for help or advice? If so, who? What did they do? Did it help?
 - Did you ask any other people for help or advice?
 - Did you ask any group like a religious group or school or community service for help? Which group? What did they do? Did it help? Did you ask any other groups for help or advice with this problem?
- Was there anything that got in the way of your family being able to resolve this problem?
 - What was it?
 - How did this get in the way?
- What happened in the end? How did things work out?
 - Did your family bounce back to normal relatively quickly or did it take a long time to work through this and get back to normal?
- Were there any ongoing or lingering problems or issues that were never really or completely resolved? Can you tell me about them?

2nd Problem or Difficulty. Can you tell me about another, more difficult, problem or concern

that your family has faced in the past few years?

- Ditto questions above

3rd Problem or Difficulty. If you're willing, can you tell me about one more difficult problem your family has faced in the past few years?

- Ditto questions above

Getting Help from the Andrew Fleck Centre or Other Learning Centres

Okay, I'd now like to ask about how the staff here at the Andrew Fleck centre or any other child learning centre helped, or could have helped, your family with deal with each of these problems.

- For each of the 3 problems: Did you ever tell anyone here (or at another early learning centre) about any of these problems?

If yes:

- What did you tell them?
- What did they say or do?
- Was this helpful or useful in any way?
- Could they have done anything else to help?

If not:

- Do you think the people at Andrew Fleck (or other learning centre) might have been able to help with any of these problems?
 - ⇒ If yes
 - * How so? ...
 - * Any other ways they might have helped?
 - * What stopped you from asking for their advice or help?
 - * Is there anything that would make it more likely that you would have asked for their help then?
 - * Is there anything that might make you more likely to ask for their help in the future?
- Have the people here at the Andrew Fleck (or any other centre) ever helped your family deal with any other family problems or concerns about your child, ones that you haven't mentioned yet?

If yes:

- Can you tell me about that concern or problem?

- Who did you tell?
- What did they do to help?
- Was it useful?
- Is there anything else they could have done to help?

If no:

- Is that because you never had any other concerns or family-related problems or because you didn't tell them about a family problem or concern you had?

If no other concerns → go to next section.

If didn't ask for help → What stopped you from asking for their advice or help?

- * Is there anything that would make it more likely that you would have asked for their help then?
- * Is there anything that might make you more likely to ask for their help in the future?

Feelings of Inclusion

I'd like to end with a few more general questions about your relationship with the centre.

- Do you feel like the Centre keeps you sufficiently informed about how well your child is doing?
 - Can you think of any things the Centre might do to keep you better informed? (e.g., Any additional types of information you'd like to get? A different distribution method?)
- Do you feel the Centre includes you enough when it comes to making decisions about your child's education.
 - Are there any things the Centre could that would make you feel more included in decisions about your child?
- More generally, can you think of any events, activities or programs that the Centre might develop to let you be more actively involved with both the Centre and your child's education?

Wrapping Up

- Is there anything else you'd like to say about how much you are included in your child's education or the things that child learning centres might do to let you be more involved?
- Any other thoughts about how your child's learning centre might help you and other families

work through the various difficulties or problems they face?

- Is there anything you'd like to ask me about?
- Go through debriefing, drawing attention to how they can contact me, advisor, & ethics.
- Remind parent that I may contact them within the next 7 days to clarify any information given in the interview.
- Ask for pseudonym and thank.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview with Educators

Introduction, Consent & Face Sheet

Introduction: Thanks so much for meeting with me. My name is Alina Raza and I am a graduate student at Carleton University. Because children's development and their ability to learn is strongly affected by their family's well-being, I'm doing this research to learn about the problems or challenges that families face and how early learning centres and teachers can help families deal with these difficulties. So, during this interview I'd like to ask you about a few of the challenges that you have faced as a teacher as well as the challenges encountered by the families of children you work with. Perhaps its best to start by having you read this consent form.

Go through consent procedure: Answer any questions (see Appendix F)

Ask Face sheet Questions: (see Appendix H)

Warming Up Questions

- What is your role here at Andrew Fleck?
- How long have worked here?
- What's it like working with children and their families?

Challenges Families Face

- I wonder if you could tell me about some of the problems or difficulties encountered by the families of the children you work with?
- What sorts of things do families or parents do to overcome the difficulties they face?
- Are some families better able to work thru such stressors and problems than others?
 - Can you tell me about a family that managed to work through a difficulty successfully? (i.e., What was the problem? What did the family do? Did they need any help? What was the outcome?)
 - Can you tell me about a family that didn't work through a difficulty as successfully? (ditto above).
 - What made the one family able to work through the challenge they faced and the other continue to struggle? Any other things?
 - Can you give me another example of a family that dealt with a difficulty or challenge successfully and another family that wasn't as successful? (For each: What was the

problem? What did the family do? Did they have or get any help? What was the outcome?)

- Can you tell me about a time when you, as an educator, tried to help a family work through a difficulty they were dealing with?
 - What was the problem?
 - How did you become aware of it?
 - What did you do?
 - Did it help?
 - Looking back, can you think of any other things you might have done then? (If so, what stopped you then? Would anything have made it easier for you to do it?)
- Can you tell me about another time when you, or even another child educator, tried to help a family work through some challenges they were facing?
 - Ditto above
- Based on your knowledge of the sorts of problems families struggle with and how they deal with them, do you think there's anything families can learn or skills they can develop to make them better able to deal with the challenges they encounter?
 - If yes:
 - What do they need to learn? What skills do they need to develop?
 - Where and how could they learn these things?
 - Can you think of any things that you as an educator, or the AFCS, could do to help families learn or develop the skills that would make them better able to deal with their difficulties?
 - If no: What makes you feel that way?

Questions on Parent/Teacher Partnership

Over the past 5 years or so the Ontario Ministry of Education has stressed how essential strong parent-educator partnerships are to children's biopsychosocial development and academic growth.

- How would you describe the "ideal parent-educator partnership," that is, the relationship between parents and educators that would be most conducive a child's development, well-being and learning? (i.e., What are its ingredients in terms of the frequency & duration of interactions, the purposes or topics of contact, or the nature of the info exchanged?)\

- Can you describe the “average” or “typical” relationship that parents have with the Centre and the educators here? (i.e., frequency, topics or concerns involved, quality [warm, close vs. cold distant; trust issues])
- And what do the less “typical” relationships look like?
- If you could change anything about the relationships you have with children’s parents, what would it be?
 - What would that change do for you, the parents, and the child?
 - What would you or could you do to make this happen?
- Is there anything else you’d like to change about the relationships you have with the parents and families of the children you work with?
- Can you think of any things that you or the Centre should or could do to help all parents and educators have the ideal parent-educator partnership you described? Any ways to make parents and educators feel more connected and engaged with each other?

Wrapping Up

- Is there anything else you’d like to tell me? Do you have any other thoughts about ways of strengthening parent-educator relationships or what educators can do to help families work through the challenges they face?
- Is there anything that you think I should know in order to better understand your experiences?
- Is there anything you’d like to ask me about?
- Go through debriefing form.
- Remind educator that I may contact them within the next 7 days to clarify any information given in the interview.
- Ask for pseudonym, explain why.
- Thank you again for your contribution, and please feel welcome to contact me if you have any questions about the study or interview. My e-mail address is on the written form that I gave you and it is also in the copy of the consent form that I gave you at the beginning of the interview.

Appendix C: Post-Interview Comment Sheet

Mood/Tone of the Interview

Strengths of the Interview

Weaknesses of the Interview

Additional Comments/Notable Features of the Interview

Appendix D: Organizational Permission

January 26, 2018

To whom it may concern,

Please accept this letter as a statement of our interest in the research Alina Raza is proposing on Strong Families.

She has been collaborating with several of us on the development of this research project and if it receives Carleton University Ethics approval and is endorsed by our Research and Evaluation Committee we will support her to recruit families.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Kim Hiscott, RECE
Executive Director
khiscott@afchildrensservices.ca

Licensed Child Care Programs
Licensed Home Child Care
Ontario Early Years Centre
Centre de la petite enfance de l'Ontario

Children's Inclusion Support Services
Services d'inclusion pour jeunes enfants
Short Term Child Care
Programme de garde d'enfants à court terme

Making Connections Nursery School
Child Care Consulting Services

Appendix E: Ethics Clearance Certificate

Office of Research Ethics and Compliance
5110 Human Computer Interaction Bldg | 1125 Colonel By Drive
| Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6
613-520-2600 Ext: 4085
ethics@carleton.ca

CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE

The Carleton University Research Ethics Board-B (CUREB-B) has granted ethics clearance for the research project described below and research may now proceed. CUREB-B is constituted and operates in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2).

Ethics Protocol Clearance ID: Project # 108779

Research Team: Alina Raza (Primary Investigator)
Dr. Connie M. Kristiansen (Research Supervisor)

Project Title: Building Strong Families: The Role of Parent-Educator Partnerships [Alina Raza]

Funding Source (if applicable):

Effective: May 02, 2018

Expires: May 31, 2019.

Restrictions:

This certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Clearance is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to CUREB-B via a Change to Protocol Form. All changes must be cleared prior to the continuance of the research.
3. An Annual Status Report for the renewal of ethics clearance must be submitted and cleared by the renewal date listed above. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the closure of the file. If funding is associated, funds will be frozen.
4. A closure request must be sent to CUREB-B when the research is complete or terminated.
5. Should any participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to CUREB-B.

Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* 2nd edition and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Upon reasonable request, it is the policy of CUREB, for cleared protocols, to release the name of the PI, the title of the project, and the date of clearance and any renewal(s).

CLEARED BY:

Date: May 02, 2018

Andy Adler, PhD, Chair, CUREB-B

Bernadette Campbell, PhD, Vice-Chair, CUREB-B

Appendix F: Fliers

An Invitation for Parents!

How can families be strong and healthy even when times are tough?

We want to learn about your thoughts and experiences.

If so, we would like your participation in a 45-60 minute interview.

We want to know about the challenges your family has faced
and how partnerships between parents and educators might
help overcome such difficulties.

- ✓ Help others by sharing your experiences
- ✓ Convenient interview locations
- ✓ Confidentiality assured

For more information, please contact the researcher,

Alina Raza, at alinaraza@cmail.carleton.ca

This study has been approved by the
Carleton University Research Ethics Board and assigned Number #108779

Appendix G: Written Invitation to Parents

Dear Parent,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study entitled “*Building Strong Families: The Role of Parent-Educator Partnerships*.” With the support and interest of the Andrew Fleck Children’s Services, we are conducting this study to learn about the challenges and hardships that come up in day-to-day family life, including ones that may be relatively easy to work through (e.g., managing your child’s schedule) and those that may be more complex and stressful (e.g., the death of a family member or financial strains). Because we believe early learning centres and educators can play a key role in helping families deal successfully with such challenges, we also want to learn about the ways early learning centres and teachers have helped, or could help, families work through the difficulties they face. Our hope is that the findings of this research will usefully inform the design of programs, workshops and training seminars for both the teachers and the parents of the children attending the early learning centres associated with Andrew Fleck Children’s Services and other early learning centres.

Before you decide whether you would like to participate in this study, you should know that it would involve taking part in a 45 to 60 minute interview during which you would be asked to describe a few of the challenges or difficulties your family has encountered in the past couple of years, how you dealt with these challenges, and how the people at your child’s learning centre helped you, or could have helped you, with these difficulties. To help us identify ways of building strong *Parent-Educator Partnerships*, you will also be asked about your perceptions and interactions with the staff at the Andrew Fleck centre and any other early learning centre your child has attended. This interview would take place at a mutually convenient time at the center and, with your permission, be audio-recorded. Your participation would be entirely voluntary and you would have the right to stop participating at any time, for any reason and without the need to explain. You would also be able to withdraw from the study until two weeks after the interview (i.e., before your data is analyzed). If you decided to withdraw from the study, all of the information you provided would be destroyed.

You should also know that your participation in this study and any information you provide will in no way affect your relationship with the staff and educators at Andrew Fleck Children’s Services because your identity will not be revealed to them. In addition, any information that might identify you and the names of anyone or any organization you mention will be removed or disguised when the audio recording is transcribed. The audio recording will then be destroyed. All of the information you provide, including any other notes, will be confidential and ultimately anonymous, unless you indicate that a child is experiencing psychological and/or physical harm,

in which case I am legally required to inform the authorities. In addition, the hard copies of the anonymized data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet at Carleton University.

Last but not least, I appreciate that some people may find it emotionally difficult or draining to discuss some of the challenges their family has faced. In view of this, you will be given the names of organizations where you can get help for any distress that you might experience as a result of your participation in this study.

If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions, please contact me, Alina Raza, via e-mail at alina.raza@carleton.ca. If you have any questions you may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Karen March (karen.march@carleton.ca). Should you have any ethical concerns about this study, please contact Dr. Andy Adler (Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-B, 520-2600, ext. 4085) or the Carleton University Research Office (ethics@carleton.ca).

Thank you so much for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Alina Raza, MA Candidate
Department of Psychology
Carleton University
e-mail: alina.raza@carleton.ca

This study has been approved by the
Carleton University Research Ethics Board and assigned Number #108779

Appendix H: Written Invitation to Educators

Dear Educator,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study entitled “*Building Strong Families: The Role of Parent-Educator Partnerships*,”. With the support and interest of the Andrew Fleck Children’s Services, we are conducting this study because we believe early learning centres and educators can play a key role in helping families deal successfully with the challenges they face. This can include challenges that may be relatively easy to work through (e.g., managing a child’s schedule or minor parenting concerns) as well as those that may be more complex and stressful (e.g., the death of a family member or financial strains). To this end, we want to learn about the ways early learning centres and educators have helped, or could help, families work through the difficulties they face. Our hope is that the findings of this research will usefully inform the design of programs, workshops and training seminars for both the teachers and the parents of the children attending the learning centres associated with Andrew Fleck Children’s Services and other learning centres.

Before you decide whether you would like to participate in this study, you should know that your participation would involve taking part in a 45 to 60-minute interview during which you would be asked to describe some of the challenges or difficulties encountered by the families you have met in your role as an educator and how you and the child learning centre helped, or could have helped, these families work through these difficulties. To help us identify ways of building strong *Parent-Educator Partnerships*, you will also be asked about your perceptions and interactions with the parents and families of the children you have worked with. This interview would take place at a mutually convenient time at the center where you work and, with your permission, be audio-recorded.

You should also know that your participation would be entirely voluntary and not affect your relationship with Andrew Fleck Children’s Services in any way because your identity will not be revealed to them. You would have the right to stop participating at any time, for any reason and without the need to explain. You would also be able to withdraw from the study until two weeks after the interview (i.e., before your data is analyzed) and, if you did so, all of the information you provided would be destroyed.

In addition, any information that might identify you and the names of anyone or any organization you mention will be removed or disguised when the audio recording is transcribed. The audio recording will then be destroyed and the hard copies of the anonymized data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet at Carleton University. All of the information you provide, including any other notes, will be confidential and ultimately

anonymous, unless you indicate that a child is experiencing psychological and/or physical harm, in which case I am legally required to inform the authorities.

Last but not least, I appreciate that some people may find it emotionally difficult or draining to discuss some of the challenges the families they work with have faced. In view of this, you will be given the names of organizations where you can get help for any distress that you might experience as a result of your participation in this study.

If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions, please contact me, Alina Raza, via e-mail at alina.raza@carleton.ca. If you have any questions you may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Karen March (karen.march@carleton.ca). Should you have any ethical concerns about this study, please contact Dr. Andy Adler (Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-B, 520-2600, ext. 4085) or the Carleton University Research Office (ethics@carleton.ca).

Sincerely,

Alina Raza, MA Student
Department of Psychology
Carleton University
e-mail: alina.raza@carleton.ca

This study has been approved by the
Carleton University Research Ethics Board and assigned Number #108779

Appendix I: Parent Informed Consent

This study has been approved by the
Carleton University Research Ethics Board and assigned Number #108779

The purpose of this informed consent is to make sure that you, the participant, understand all aspects of this study. It will enable you to make an informed decision as to whether or not you wish to participate in this study. The form contains information about both the purpose of the study and your role in the study, if you choose to participate.

Study Name: Building Strong Families: The Role of Parent-Educator Partnerships

Principal investigators: Alina Raza (alinaraza@cmail.carleton.ca)

Faculty advisor: Dr. Karen March (karen.march@carleton.ca).

What is the Purpose of this Research?

This research project is being conducted with the support of the Andrew Fleck Children's Services to identify the challenges and hardships that inevitably come up in day-to-day family life. We believe early learning centres and educators play a key role in helping families deal successfully with such challenges. To this end, we want to learn about the ways early learning centres and teachers have helped, or could help, families work through the difficulties they face. We also want to identify ways of building stronger parent-educator partnerships.

How will this Research Benefit Me?

Our hope is that the findings of this research will usefully inform the design of programs, workshops and training seminars for both the educators and the parents of the children attending the early learning centres associated with Andrew Fleck Children's Services, as well as other centres.

What do I have to Do?

You will be asked to take part in a 45-60 minute audio-recorded interview in which you will be asked to describe some of the challenges or difficulties your family has encountered in the past couple of years and how you dealt with these challenges. You will also be asked how the people at your child's early learning centre helped you, or could have helped you, with these difficulties. You will also be asked about your perceptions and interactions with the staff at the Andrew

Fleck centre and any other learning centres your child has attended. *Please note that if you do not want to have the interview audio-recorded, hand written notes will be taken instead.*

Are there any Risks to Participating?

Because the interview will be done at an Andrew Fleck learning centre, some of the staff and educators may be aware that you participated in this study. Exactly what you say, however, will remain entirely confidential between you and the interviewer. When the interview is transcribed all information that might reveal your identity or that of anyone you mention will be deleted or disguised. Your identity will also not be revealed in any reports of the findings of this research. In view of this, what you say is unlikely to have any effect on the nature of your relationships with the staff and educators at the Andrew Fleck centre. *If you would like to choose an alternative location in order to mitigate this risk, please feel free to inform the researcher and an alternative public location will be mutually agreed upon.* Some participants may experience some discomfort or distress discussing some of the challenges their family has faced. If you experience any distress or discomfort as a result of your participation, you can ask to take a break or you can stop your participation entirely. You may wish to contact the Ottawa & Region Distress Centre at 613-238-1089 or the Ottawa Mental Health Crisis Line at 613-722-6914 (24-hour toll-free line: 1-866-996-0991). A copy of this information will be provided to you after the interview.

Will I be Compensated for my Participation?

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Can I Withdraw from this Study?

You have the right to refuse to answer any question for any reason without explanation. You also have the right to withdraw and remove your data from the study until *two weeks after* the interview has been conducted, by which time the data will have been analyzed.

Anonymity/Confidentiality

All of the information you provide will be confidential and ultimately anonymous, *unless you indicate that a child is experiencing psychological and/or physical harm, in which case I am legally required to inform the authorities.* To protect your identity in any written accounts based on this interview, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym that we can use. In addition, the

audio-recording of the interview will be destroyed once it has been typed up. Further, the typed interview and other research materials will not have your name on it. Anonymized transcriptions of the interviews will however be kept for future teaching and research purposes. Anything linking your name to the research materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet accessible to only those associated with the project and will be destroyed upon completion of the project (i.e., within the next year).

Who can I Contact about Questions and Concerns?

If you have any ethical concerns about how this study was conducted, please contact: Dr. Andy Adler, Chair of the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, (613)520-2600, ext. 4085 or the Carleton University Research Office (ethics@carleton.ca).

Signatures

My signature indicates that I understand the above description of the study and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Consent to Audiotape

I hereby consent to the audio recording of this interview. I understand that it is being audiotaped to ensure the accuracy of the data and that the tape will be destroyed upon completion of this study. If you do not want the interview to be audiotaped, do not sign below. Instead, ask the interviewer to take hand written notes.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Consent for Follow-Up Contact

I hereby grant the researcher permission to contact me in within 7 days after the interview so I can add or delete comments from my interview and for the purposes of clarification, if needed.

Contact Information: _____

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix J: Educator Informed Consent

This study has been approved by the
Carleton University Research Ethics Board and assigned Number #108779

The purpose of this informed consent is to make sure that you, the participant, understand all aspects of this study. It will enable you to make an informed decision as to whether or not you wish to participate in this study. The form contains information about both the purpose of the study and your role in the study, if you choose to participate.

Study Name: Building Strong Families: The Role of Parent-Educator Partnerships

Principal investigator: Alina Raza (alinaraza@cmail.carleton.ca)

Faculty advisor: Dr. Karen March (karen.march@carleton.ca).

What is the Purpose of this Research?

This research project is being conducted with the support of the Andrew Fleck Children's Services. It is being done to identify a) the ways early learning centres and educators have helped, or could help, families work through the difficulties they face, and b) ways of building stronger educator-parent partnerships.

How will this Research Benefit Me?

Our hope is that the findings of this research will usefully inform the design of programs, workshops and training seminars for both the educators and the parents of the children attending the early learning centres associated with Andrew Fleck Children's Services, as well as other learning centres.

What do I have to do?

You will be asked to take part in a 45-60 minute audio recorded interview in which you will be asked about challenges or difficulties the families you work with have encountered in the past couple of years, how they dealt with these challenges, and how you and your early learning centre helped, or could have helped, families deal with these difficulties. This interview will take place in at the center you currently work at. *Please note that if you do not want to have the interview audio-recorded, hand written notes will be taken instead.*

Are there any Risks to Participating?

Due to the location of the interview, your participation may be known to other staff and educators. As such, there are some potential professional risks to you if your statements are critical of your employer. While this risk is expected to be minimal, measures will be taken to ensure that any information you provide cannot be linked back to your person. All forms of identification will be removed from the data as soon as the interviews have been transcribed. *If you would like to choose an alternative location in order to mitigate this risk, please feel free to inform the researcher and an alternative public location will be mutually agreed upon.*

Additionally, some participants may experience some discomfort or distress discussing the challenges families have faced. If you experience any distress or discomfort as a result of your participation, you may wish to contact the Ottawa & Region Distress Centre at 613-238-1089 or the Ottawa Mental Health Crisis Line at 613-722-6914 (24-hour toll-free line: 1-866-996-0991). A copy of this information will be provided to you after the interview.

Will I be Compensated for my Participation?

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Can I Withdraw from this Study?

You have the right to refuse to answer any question and to withdraw from this study at any time for any reason without explanation. You also have the right to remove your data from the study until *2 weeks after* the interview (by which time the data will have been analyzed).

Anonymity/Confidentiality

All of the information you provide will be confidential and ultimately anonymous, *unless you indicate that a child is experiencing psychological and/or physical harm, in which case I am legally required to inform the authorities.* To protect your identity in any written accounts based on this interview, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym that we can use. In addition, the tape recording of the interview will be destroyed upon completion of the study and the typed interview and other research materials will not have your name on it. Anonymized transcriptions of the interviews will be kept for future research and teaching purposes. Anything linking your name to the research materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet accessible to only those associated with the project and will be destroyed within the next year.

Who can I Contact about Questions and Concerns?

If you have any ethical concerns about how this study was conducted, please contact: Dr. Andy Adler, Chair of the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, (613)520-2600, ext. 4085 or the Carleton University Research Office (ethics@carleton.ca).

Signatures

My signature indicates that I understand the above description of the study and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Consent to Audiotape

I hereby consent to the audio recording of this interview. I understand that it is being audiotaped to ensure the accuracy of the data and that the tape will be destroyed upon completion of this study. If you do not want the interview to be audiotaped, do not sign below. Instead, ask the interviewer to take hand written notes.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Consent for Follow-Up Contact

I hereby grant the researcher permission to contact me within 7 days to give me the opportunity to add or delete comments from my interview and for the purposes of clarification, if needed.

Contact information: _____

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix K: Interview Face-Sheet

Participant Pseudonym:

Interviewer's Name:

Date of Interview:

Length of interview:

Location of Interview:

Participant's Demographic Characteristics:

Age:

Gender:

Marital Status:

Place of Birth & Ethnicity:

Education:

Occupation:

How many children do you have?

Age of children?

How many children attend an AF center?

Would like a summary of final results? Yes / No

 If yes, was the summary sent? Yes / No

Appendix L: Parental Debriefing

Dear Parent,

Thank you so much for participating in the *Building Strong Families: The Role of Parent-Educator Partnerships Study*.

We are doing this study to learn about the challenges and hardships that inevitably come up in day-to-day family life, including ones that may be relatively easy to work through (e.g., managing your child's schedule) and those that may be more complex and stressful (e.g., the death of a family member or financial strains). Because we believe early learning centres and educators can play a key role in helping families deal successfully with such challenges, we also want to learn about the ways early learning centres and teachers have helped, or could help, families work through the difficulties they face. We also hope to identify ways of building stronger relationships between parents and educators. Our hope is that the findings of this research will usefully inform the design of programs, workshops and training seminars for both the parents and teachers of the children attending the child learning centres associated with Andrew Fleck Children's Services, as well as other learning centres.

Researchers have found that families are better able deal with the daily stressors of family life if they receive the support of their extended family members and friends. Researchers have also found that families are better able deal with the daily challenges of family life if they are connected with and receive the support of the educators at their child's learning center. This is because learning centres can provide families with additional information and access to a range of resources that help families develop a better understanding of the challenges they face and ways of overcoming them. If you would like to learn more about research regarding ways of making families stronger, you might want to read an article by Robert G. Blair (2003), *Understanding and Fostering Family Resilience*. You can obtain a copy of this article by going to: <http://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1189&context=jfs>

If you have any questions regarding this study and/or concerns about your participation in this study please feel welcome to contact me via e-mail at (alina.raza@carleton.ca) or my faculty advisor, Dr. Karen March (karen.march@carleton.ca). Should you have any ethical concerns about this study, please contact Dr. Andy Adler (Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-B, 520-2600, ext. 4085) or the Carleton University Research Office (ethics@carleton.ca).

Some people may feel emotionally drained or distressed after talking about the challenges their family has encountered over the past few years. If you feel any distress after participating in this

study, you can contact the Ottawa Distress Centre at (613) 238-3311 or the Ottawa Mental Health Crisis Line at 613-722-6914 (toll-free line: 1-866-996-0991). These confidential services, which are available 24-hours 7 days a week, are staffed by people trained to help people deal with a variety of life events and distress.

Again, thank you so much for your participation. It is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Alina Raza, MA Student
Department of Psychology
Carleton University
e-mail: alina.raza@carleton.ca

This study has been approved by the
Carleton University Research Ethics Board and assigned Number #108779

Appendix M: Educator Debriefing

Dear Educator,

Thank you so much for participating in the *Building Strong Families: The Role of Parent-Educator Partnerships Study*.

We are doing this study to learn about the challenges and hardships experienced by the families of the children you work with, including ones that may be relatively easy to work through (e.g., managing a child's schedule or minor parenting concerns) and those that may be more complex and stressful (e.g., the death of a family member or financial strains). Because we believe early learning centres and educators can play a key role in helping families deal successfully with such challenges, we also want to learn about the ways early learning centres and educators have helped, or could help, families work through the difficulties they face. By speaking with both educators and parents, we also hope to identify ways of developing strong parent-educator partnerships. Ultimately, we hope that the findings of this research will usefully inform the design of programs, workshops and training seminars for both the teachers and the parents of the children attending the early learning centres associated with Andrew Fleck Children's Services, as well as other learning centres.

Researchers have found that families are better able deal with the daily stressors of family life if they receive the support of their extended family members and friends. Researchers have also found that families are better able deal with the challenges of family life if they are connected with and receive the support of the educators at their child's learning center. This is because learning centres can provide families with additional information and access to a range of resources that help families develop a better understanding of the challenges they face and ways of overcoming them. If you would like to learn more about research on how family strength is supported, you might want to read an article written by Robert G. Blair (2003), *Understanding and Fostering Family Resilience*. You can obtain a copy of this article by going to:

<http://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1189&context=jfs>

We will e-mail you with a summary of our findings when they become available.

If you have any questions regarding this study and/or concerns about your participation in this study please feel free to contact me directly via e-mail at: alina.raza@carleton.ca) or my faculty advisor, Dr. Karen March (karen.march@carleton.ca). Should you have any ethical concerns about this study, please contact Dr. Andy Adler (Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-B, 520-2600, ext. 4085) or the Carleton University Research Office (ethics@carleton.ca).

Some people may feel emotionally drained or distressed after talking about the challenges their families are dealing with. If you feel any distress after participating in this study, you can

contact the Ottawa Distress Centre at (613) 238-3311. This is a confidential 24-hour service staffed by people trained to help people dealing with a wide variety of life events and distress. You can also contact the Ottawa Mental Health Crisis Line at 613-722-6914 (24-hour toll-free line: 1-866-996-0991).

Again, thank you so much for your participation. It is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Alina Raza, MA Student
Department of Psychology
Carleton University
e-mail: alina.raza@carleton.ca

This study has been approved by the
Carleton University Research Ethics Board and assigned Number #108779

Appendix N: Confidentiality Agreement with Transcribers

Project Title: Building Strong Families: The Role of Parent-Educator Partnerships

Principal Investigator: Alina Raza, MA candidate

- ☐ I understand that all the material I will be asked to record and/or transcribe is confidential and cannot be revealed to anyone.
- ☐ I understand that the contents of the consent forms, interview tapes, sound files or interview notes can only be discussed with the researcher.
- ☐ I will not keep any copies of the information nor allow third parties to access them.
- ☐ I will delete all interview and other relevant files from my computer after transcription.

Transcribers signature: _____

Transcribers name: _____

Date: _____

References

- Addi-Raccah, A., & Arviv-Elyashiv, R. (2008). Parent empowerment and teacher professionalism. *Urban Education, 43*(3), 394-415. doi:10.1177/0042085907305037
- Adams, K. S., & Christenson, S. L. (2000). Trust and the family-school relationship: Examination of parent-teacher differences in elementary and secondary grades. *Journal of School Psychology, 38*(5), 477-497. doi:10.1016/S0022-4405(00)00048-0
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