

EFFECTS OF TEACHERS' USE OF A CONFERENCING STRATEGY
ON FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

PAULA SHUPING WILLIAMS: Effects of Teachers' Use of a Conferencing Strategy on Family Engagement (Under the direction of DR. KRISTEN D. BEACH)

Family engagement with schools has been shown to be a predictor of student success (Powell et al., 2010) and federal statute supports school/ family relationships through the Family Engagement in Education Act. For students with disabilities (SWD), family engagement may be even more critical. Unfortunately, data has suggested that family engagement may be limited due to barriers families of SWD may face (Van Haren & Fiedler, 2008). Teacher invitation, teacher beliefs about family involvement and quality of communication are factors related to family engagement. The purpose of this study was to investigate an in-service teacher's use of a step-by-step strategy during family/ teacher conferences to increase family engagement during the conference, improve quality teacher communication and positively impact teacher beliefs on family involvement. The step-by-step conferencing strategy was called PIQUE and was developed through a review of prior research and feedback from experts in the field. This case study used both quantitative and qualitative methods to determine the effectiveness of the PIQUE strategy. Within an AB single-case design, I noted an increase in the 5-second intervals of the family speaking during the conference from baseline to post-intervention phase. This increase was immediate and demonstrated an accelerating trend. The teacher and parent completed surveys and interviews, which were analyzed thematically alongside descriptive and inferential field notes recorded by the researcher. Through this analysis, two primary themes were identified as Misunderstanding Communication as Equal to Engagement and Bias as a Barrier to Engagement. A secondary theme of Lack of Confidence When Engaging With Families was also identified. Triangulation was achieved across quantitative and qualitative data sources. Conclusions point to an increase in equity of power during conferences and positive

change in teacher beliefs about family involvement and engagement after the implementation of the intervention. A conclusion that PIQUE implementation led to these changes should be interpreted with caution due to the threats to internal and external validity of case studies. The study concluded with implications for practice, limitations and suggestions for future research.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my son Ty who is my greatest teacher. My persistent quest for knowledge in the area of special education is driven by my desire to be his advocate and the mom he deserves.

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GLOSSARY

Adapted curriculum – Students participating on the adapted curriculum include students in self-contained classrooms participating on the North Carolina Extended Content Standards which is an alternate curriculum in North Carolina designed to meet the needs of students with significant cognitive disabilities.

ESSA - Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)

Extensive Support Needs – students with significant disabilities and both cognitive and adaptive needs.

Family – parents, caregivers, guardians or other adult persons who know, care for, and support a student

IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004)

In-service teacher – A teacher who has experience teaching and is currently employed as a teacher.

Family Collaboration – This paper combines multiple definitions of collaboration found in research and defines collaboration as family working with schools to address large goals that benefit the school and its students (Storey, 2014; Cook & Friend, 1991).

Family Engagement – This paper will define engagement as families working as equal partners with teachers to impact individual student outcomes (Fenton et al., 2017; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Ferlazzo 2011).

Family Involvement – This paper will define family involvement as families participating at the school through school directed activities (Fenton et al., 2017; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Ferlazzo, 2011).

Pre-service teacher – A teacher who has not yet gained any experience teaching but is in a teacher preparation program.

SWD - students with disabilities who are eligible for special education services in the state of North Carolina.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Historically, many students with disabilities (SWD) have consistently scored below their peers as measured through state and local testing (Hurwitz et al., 2020). In 2017-18 the National Center on Educational Outcomes reported an average achievement gap of 34% between SWD and their same-aged peers on standardized testing measures (Albus et al., 2020). This average was across reading and math, and spanned ages of elementary, middle and high school students. The achievement gap noted for SWD has been and continues to be of utmost concern for both schools and families who support SWD. In the introduction to a special issue of *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, Fuchs et al. (2018) go as far as to say that the performance of SWD has been “abysmal” and that SWD have demonstrated “gross underachievement” (p.127). Unfortunately, there are many variables that impact outcomes for students.

Reasons for the Problem

The goals of special education are to educate and provide support for SWD, however, there are many variables related to positive outcomes for these students including teaching methodologies, resources and others. Many of these variables have been evaluated through research and some strategies have been recognized as research-based practices (Cook & Odom, 2013). Research-based practices have a strong scientific base and have been shown to be effective through research methodologies. When effective research-based practices are paired with effective implementation, the result will be outcomes that are more positive for SWD. Some examples of research-based practices for SWD include use of visual strategies, peer assisted strategies, modeling, and more. To address the underachievement experienced by many SWD, the most promising pathway is through the implementation of research-based strategies.

One effective practice identified through research is family-school engagement. Engagement is a specialized partnership with families and can be defined as families working as equal partners with teachers to impact individual student outcomes (Fenton et al., 2017; Ferlazzo, 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Engagement efforts support academic, social and behavioral success for a variety of SWD and other students with diverse needs. Studies suggest that family engagement can be a predictor of student academic success (Arnold et al., 2008; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Williams, 2010; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Ma, et al., 2016; Powell et al., 2010). Outcomes may include students earning higher grades, higher rates of attendance, improved social skills and behavior, higher graduation rates and positive post school outcomes (Fan & Williams, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). For SWD, engagement efforts between families and teachers that focus on planning for SWD can be especially effective (Shultz et al., 2016). In addition to positive student outcomes being a motivation for schools to engage families, family engagement is also an expectation defined throughout the U.S. federal legal statutes.

The U.S. Department of State defines collaboration as a process that “takes place when members of an inclusive learning community work together as equals to assist students to succeed in the classroom” (U.S. Department of State, 2022). In addition, collaboration between families and schools is an expectation of the U.S. Department of Education and schools across the nation. Family engagement has been mandated through federal legislation, especially for all students through the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) and *Family Engagement in Education Act* (2011). Both statutes charge schools with developing a plan to promote family engagement in their schools, evaluate their efforts in engagement, and measure the impact of family engagement on student outcomes. This legislation calls for shared responsibility between schools

and families regarding engagement. This shared responsibility has shifted from only a responsibility of families to active efforts by schools to engage families. In addition to laws that address family engagement for all students, additional laws have been passed that address family engagement in education and supports specific to SWD.

The Individuals with Disability Act (IDEA) is a law that requires that public schools offer a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities that includes special education and related services (IDEA, 2004). IDEA uses twenty indicators to measure school systems' compliance to IDEA and examine effectiveness of the statute. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) receives and summarizes the data in reports. One of the Indicators, Indicator 8, is related to family engagement. Indicator 8 is, "the percent of parents with a child receiving special education services who report that schools facilitated parent involvement as a means of improving services and results for children with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). Data from OSEP in 2015, indicated that only 63% of states were meeting criteria as reported through Indicator 8 (OSEP, 2017). More recent data from the 2018 North Carolina State Performance Plan/ Annual Performance Report indicated that approximately 43% of schools are meeting the criteria for Indicator 8 in N.C. (NC Annual Report). Reflection on this data suggests that schools need to be intentional in their efforts to engage families. Especially noting that the law is clear that families are priority team members in planning for SWD.

IDEA requires that parents be invited to participate in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting (IDEA, 2004). A student's family are central members of the team designing instructional programming through the IEP. IDEA lists the parents/ family first when describing required IEP team members and the law also charges schools with ensuring the families' participation. Unfortunately, families are not always involved in the planning of their

child's education. In a study examining parent's perceptions of IEP meetings, parents indicated that their participation in IEP meetings could be strengthened with increased opportunity for parental involvement and participation (Fish, 2008).

Requirements of the law and documented benefits of positive outcomes for students are two reasons why family engagement is especially important for students who receive special education services. However, with many SWD continuing to demonstrate significant achievement gaps from their non-disabled peers, in addition to evidence that rates of family engagement with schools continue to need improvement, further studies are needed to examine how to promote family engagement through more systematic measures. The first step in this process is to clearly define what is meant by family engagement.

What Is Family Engagement?

Throughout the literature, there are several terms associated with the concept of family engagement, and these terms are often used interchangeably. For example, Harris and Goodall (2007) present a report in which the title includes the words engaging parents for student achievement, but when they define these actions, they refer to the action as parent involvement. To enhance clarity, in this dissertation, *collaboration*, *engagement* and *involvement* will all be defined separately. In addition, the term *family* will be used to describe parents, caregivers or other important persons involved with a student. Since the terms have been used interchangeably in the literature reviewed, there may be times I replace the terms family collaboration or family involvement with family engagement, if it meets the criteria of this study's definition. Using consistent language throughout this study will help to make the purpose and goals of the research clear.

Collaboration

There are many ways to define collaboration, especially as it refers to collaboration between schools, teachers, families and communities. I define collaboration by combining multiple definitions found in research as it relates to collaboration between schools and families.

Collaboration can be defined as people working together to achieve a common goal (Collaboration vs. Engagement - What's the Difference, 2021). Key terms in this definition include “together” and “common.” To collaborate with schools, families must work together with faculty and other families to reach common, overarching goals of the school and students. Storey (2014) defines collaboration as helping the group and not just working to suit one's self. An example of collaboration in schools would be for a family to work on a school committee to plan the school's annual fundraiser or assembly. Cook and Friend (1991) define collaboration as a style that can be considered in a variety of situations. They also identified some characteristics of collaboration including that collaboration is voluntary, collaborators share a common goal, collaborators share responsibility for decisions and accountability for outcomes, and collaborators share resources. The various ways that collaboration has been defined has led to the complexity of the term and varied ways in which the term is used. Ultimately, collaboration with schools can be viewed as “bigger picture” ideas and projects that include multiple people working for large goals of the school or student. Thus, I define collaboration as families working with schools to address large goals that benefit the school and its students.

Engagement vs. Involvement

As with collaboration, family engagement has been defined in various ways in the research literature. In 2002, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) defined family engagement as “the participation of families in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student

academic learning and other school activities" (NCLB, 2002). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines family engagement as “parents and school personnel working together at the classroom, local, and system level to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents” (2015). When defining parental involvement, Harris and Goodall (2007) state that parent involvement can take a variety of definitions and include many parenting activities including communication with schools, participation in school activities and rules parents enforce at home that relate to expectations at school. The researcher concluded by saying that because of the multifaceted nature of parental involvement, there may be many ways to define the term. Finally, in a review of the literature concerning the influence of family engagement on student outcomes, Tran (2014) found that family engagement research suggests that partnerships and engagement with families consistently supports successful school experiences for students.

Understanding the difference between family engagement and family involvement may be challenging and distinction between the two terms is cited throughout the literature (Fenton et al., 2017; Ferlazzo 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Unfortunately, the terms involvement and engagement continue to be used interchangeably therefore it is important that the terms be clearly defined, especially when one of the terms is the research focus. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) noted that engagement implies more than activity, but with “greater ownership” in the activities, than does family involvement (p. 400). Another way to view the distinction is that involvement implies “doing to” whereas engagement implies “doing with” (Ferlazzo, 2011, p.11). I define engagement as families working as equal partners with teachers to impact individual student outcomes.

As the terms involvement and engagement have evolved, families and their partnerships with schools have also been described and viewed as a continuum. This continuum moves the interactions of families with schools from simple participation at the school to a relationship with the school that impacts students' learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Schools have been encouraged to examine if they promote school identified and led activities, which suggests family involvement or work with families as partners to identify and lead activities within the school and community which indicates a more engaging partnership.

What Happens When Families Are Engaged

Direct Impact of Student Outcomes

Family engagement has been found to have positive impacts on academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for all students. Benefits of family engagement for SWD have been researched and published through the past several decades (Arnold et al., 2008; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Williams, 2010; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Ma, X. et al., 2016; Powell et al., 2010). One benefit is in student motivation. In an examination of survey results from the 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study, researchers found that the types and frequency of family engagement has shown to positively impact student motivation in school (Fan et al., 2012). Examples of increased student motivation included greater student confidence in their abilities to complete assignments and greater engagement behaviors in class.

Additionally, family engagement has been effective in positively impacting student academic outcomes, especially for those with disabilities (Arnold et al., 2008; Fan & Williams, 2010; Ma, X. et al., 2016; Powell et al., 2010). Almeda-Lawson (2014) used an approach entitled collective family engagement (CPE) to support student outcomes. Sixteen parents participated in the post hoc quasi-experimental design study. CPE focused on social networks of families to

provide support for students in achieving positive outcomes. The study found that through the CPE design, a significant increase in academic achievement for the students of participating families was demonstrated. In another study, teachers rated family engagement and these ratings were compared to students' pre-literacy skills (Arnold et al., 2008). The researchers found that higher ratings of family engagement corresponded with higher pre-literacy skills for students. Finally, in a meta-analysis which examined the relationship between student outcomes and family engagement, researchers found that when schools emphasize family engagement and support strategies of partnership, stronger relationships between student outcomes and family engagement are seen (Ma et al., 2016).

Another area of support for family engagement is the relationship between engagement and post-school outcomes for SWD. In a review conducted by Mazzotti et al. (2015), researchers identified family engagement as one of the predictors of high school diploma status and other positive post-school outcomes for SWD. In another study conducted with students who had identified extensive support needs, researchers found that when families were engaged with schools and advocated consistently for their children during the transition process, the students were more likely to obtain post-school employment and achieve more independence in their lives after graduation (Rossetti et al., 2016). In an analysis of research conducted in 2018, Boonk et al. examined 75 studies focused on family engagement and student outcomes. Overall, the researchers found that the majority of studies found some relationship and possible correlation between family engagement and positive student outcomes.

Schools who actively engage with families of SWD may see multiple benefits to school outcomes. One area of benefit is the reduction of challenging behavior and a decrease in symptoms of behavioral diagnoses such as ADHD. In 2018, DuPaul et al. conducted a study of

use of behavioral parent training with 26 families across various cohorts. In this study, researchers implemented an approach that would reduce the barriers families may face in being active participants in their child's education. After modifications were made to the training, families were more engaged and student outcomes were improved. In addition to improvement in behavior, Hiatt-Michael (2001) examined learning communities in schools and reported that families and students must be active participants in schools in order to promote engagement. In addition, they report student and family satisfaction with schools and higher graduation rates have been found to be positively aligned with increases in family engagement. The positive aspects of family engagement can be seen through reduction in problem behavior, increases in student motivation and satisfaction with schools.

Indirect Impacts on Student Outcomes

Relationships between families and teachers and schools are important to student success. One benefit of family engagement is that it serves to build trust. In a study examining family engagement and its relationship with student outcomes and mental health, researchers found family engagement to be associated with improved academic success and improved emotional functioning in adolescents (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Researchers found when families are more trusting of schools, students display greater achievement than when families are less trusting. In a related study, Froiland and Davison (2014) examined parental relationships with school to positive outcomes. Through this study, the researchers concluded that trust between families and schools was related to positive school outcomes. Additionally, the researcher noted that this impact did not decrease as the students got older.

In a study conducted by Houri et al. (2019), researchers found that the use of parent-wise communication with families helped to build relational engagement and spark a sense of trust.

This parent-wise communication focused on authentic and positive dialogue with an emphasis on high expectations for students and collaboration between families and teachers. When parent-wise feedback was shared with families, then a sense of trust was established, and families engaged in common goals with teachers. In another study of communication with families, researchers used weekly one-sentence messages from teachers to families to positively impact student outcomes (Kraft & Rogers (2015). As a result of the intervention, students demonstrated better attendance and increased their passing rates. Additionally, researchers concluded that both positive and corrective information should be shared with clear actionable information to have the most positive effects on student outcomes.

Why Families May Not Be Engaged

Despite performance data, some families are not engaged in their child's education, even though research supports benefits to such engagement. This may be due to a variety of barriers for families and/ or barriers for teachers including poor communication, lack of trust, practical issues (Al-Dababneh, 2018; Baker et al., 2016; Crozier, 2001; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Kim, 2009; Murray et al., 2008, 2014; Turney & Kao, 2009). However, schools can employ strategies that may serve as facilitators for family engagement. Some facilitators include teacher invitations, effective two-way communication and positive relationships (Fishman & Nickerson, 2015; Garcia, 2004; Minke et al, 2014).

Barriers to engagement

Despite the research identifying family engagement and its association with positive outcomes for SWD, many barriers may prevent family engagement with schools. Barriers for families may include lack of teacher invitations, limited time, limited resources, perceived lack of self-efficacy, lack of feeling welcome, cultural differences, and others (Al-Dababneh, 2018;

Baker et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2021; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Of these, practical barriers and lack of communication from the school are cited frequently (Baker et al, 2016; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Murray et al., 2014). Understanding and supporting families who experience these barriers can promote an increase in family engagement with schools.

Facilitators to Encourage Family Engagement

Many schools employ strategies to promote and encourage family engagement. Three commonly cited strategies include the facilitation of a welcoming school culture, support to overcome practical barriers for families and employing effective communication strategies when engaging with families. (Al-Dababneh, 2018; Graham et al., 2021; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Pakak & Rasenki, 2010).

General Strategies

Welcoming School Culture. One prerequisite that supports the engagement of families is a school culture that is welcoming to all stakeholders. Pakak & Rasenki (2010) state that when families feel connected to a welcoming school, they are more likely to become active participants within that school. Welcoming schools should respect and celebrate diversity by supporting families who speak a language other than English or have diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, schools can support families by setting up time and spaces for different families to meet so that they may provide support for each other. Modeling the use of inclusive language will also support a welcoming culture in schools (Welcoming Schools, n. d).

Support to Overcome Practical Barriers. Families often face practical barriers that may prevent them from engaging with schools (Al-Dababneh, 2018; Baker et al., 2016; Graham et al., 2021; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Howard & Reynolds, 2008).

In a study conducted by Harris and Goodall (2008), 20 schools and 314 respondents were part of a case study implemented over a year. Researchers found work commitments, time and childcare were cited as frequent practical barriers for families. To address these barriers and support families to have the ability to be engaged, some schools have used a variety of techniques to provide support. These supports may include on-site childcare, flexible times for meetings/conferences, and utilizing a variety of meeting platforms (both in-person and virtually).

Open and Frequent Communication. Communication between schools and families is imperative in promoting engagement. Various forms of communication can be used by schools, but it is important that it is easily accessible to families. Communication must be translated to other languages as necessary and be sent through a variety of media to meet the needs of individual families.

Whole School Strategies to Engage Families

Schools host a variety of events throughout the school year as a way to engage families in the school community. Strategies may include school-based activities such as open house, back to school nights, school festivals and more. Another way that schools communicate with all families is through the use of mass communication efforts such as newsletters, automated calls or emails and school flyers. Report cards are the most common way for schools to formally communicate specific student outcomes to families (Graham-Clay, 2005). Most whole school-based communication efforts are one-way from school to families.

Teacher Strategies

Written communication, through both paper and digital means, has long been a way that teachers communicate with families. In some situations, this may result in two-way communication, such as through communication notebooks or emails (Graham-Clay, 2005).

Another means of creating dialogue between teachers and families is through phone calls home. Unfortunately, historically, many phone calls are made as a result of a student having a problem with a school or classroom rule (Leenders et al., 2019). Even though the communication is two-way, the school is usually the one who initiates the communication.

Family-Teacher Conferences. One method of engaging families is through family-teacher conferences which are usually held approximately once per quarter or 3-4 times a year. Individual teachers may conduct conferences in many ways. Many conferences have traditionally involved teachers in the role of giving information and advice and families in the role of receiving the information and advice (Leenders et al., 2019). The relationship between teachers and families requires planning and hard work by teachers who must be the facilitators of engagement (Simmons, 2002). In a study by Lemmer (2012), the researcher identified four teachers and two parents to participate in individual interviews and focus groups. Lemmer found that family-teacher conferences are mostly held to solve problems, not be proactive, and that teachers are not specifically trained to conduct these conferences.

More recently, researchers have begun to study strategies to promote more effective family-teacher conferences. One example is a study of simulated family-teacher conference conversations aimed to enhance teacher's communication skills and to provide opportunities for teachers to practice integrating information about student progress during family engagement (Walker & Legg, 2018). This study was implemented as a part of preservice teacher courses and explored the advantages of these types of simulations for teachers. In addition to simulated family-teacher conferences, other modes of technology can be used to provide training and practice to teachers. Virtual reality simulations, such as *Mursion*, provide teachers opportunities to use high leverage practices in simulated situations (Bronwell et al., 2019). Other possible

strategies for training teachers include video modeling, bug-in-ear coaching, rehearsals and case learning. Although there has been some research about how to most effectively conduct family-teacher conferences and engage families, more research is needed.

Significance and Contributions

Family engagement has been shown to positively impact student academic outcomes, motivation, and behavioral issues. However, families may face various barriers which may impact their ability to engage with teachers. One strategy that has been shown to be effective in engaging families is the use of family-teacher conferences. Unfortunately, family-teacher conferences have traditionally been led by teachers and not included opportunities or encouragement to engage families as equal partners in supporting student success. This study will examine in-service teachers' use of a conferencing strategy to promote family engagement during family-teacher conferences in order to promote equitable partnerships between families and teachers.

Addressing the Research Gap

Fortunately, studies have shown that low rates of family engagement can be increased through specific teacher actions. Through these teacher actions, teacher beliefs on the value of family input may also be positively impacted. In 2002, Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues implemented an experimental study with in-service teachers to examine the effects of the Teachers Involving Family (TIP) program on enhancing family involvement versus a comparison group who did not receive the TIP program. The TIP program's objectives were to provide support and hopefully strengthen teacher beliefs about the benefit of family engagement. Participants in the study included 30 teacher participants and 22 comparison group participants. The intervention group received training on the TIP program and then both groups were given

questionnaires to complete. Results indicated that the TIP program increased teachers' beliefs regarding family efficacy and the need for invitations for involvement, however, qualitative information indicated that this knowledge did not result in increased family participation. Additionally, in a study conducted by Murray et al. (2008), focus groups were conducted both pre- and post- intervention for preservice teachers. The intervention consisted of the teachers participating in meaningful interactions with families of SWD. As a result of the intervention pre-service teachers tended to change their views of families as partners, however, the researchers identified limitations of their study as having a lack of control groups and therefore, the perceived impact was only for preservice educators.

Researchers also have called for future research on interventions that will increase levels of knowledge and ability to engage families for all teachers and that teachers continue to invite family participation beyond IEP development (Elbaum et al., 2016; Garcia 2004). In addition, researchers have found that quantitative designs to analyze family engagement interventions were rare (Goldman and Burke, 2017). Although many studies show promise for increasing family engagement, overall, the body of research is limited in that the primary method employed involves qualitative or survey measures that focus on preservice teachers.

Potential Contributions of Study

This study aims to contribute to the literature by using a single case design, specifically, a multiple baseline across participants' design, to provide quantitative data regarding the effects of a teacher conferencing strategy on increasing family engagement during family-teacher conferences. The research will focus on in-service teachers to address the research gap that exists for this population of teachers. Additionally, this study aims to provide teachers with a simple strategy that will promote family engagement in conferences. Although not measured in this

study, student outcomes may improve as a result of increased family engagement. As a result of these improvements and an increase in family engagement, teacher and family beliefs as to the benefits of engagement may be more positive. This study will not only focus on the effects of the conferencing strategy but will consider the teachers' opinion as to its ease of use during conferences. Finally, this study will attempt to identify a new quantitative method of measuring family engagement during conferences and meetings with teachers.

Research Purpose & Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of in-service teachers' conferencing strategy implementation on increasing teacher/ family engagement to support SWD through answering the following questions:

1. Does an in-service special education teacher's implementation of a conferencing strategy increase the percentage of 5-second intervals in which the family member is speaking during family/ teacher conferences?
2. Did teacher beliefs regarding family involvement and engagement change after the intervention?
3. Social Validity: Do families' perceptions about the value of family/ teacher conferences change after intervention as compared to before the intervention?
4. Social Validity: Did teachers find the conferencing strategy an efficient and beneficial tool to use to promote engagement with families?

Delimitations

This study will have four delimitations that could impact the results of the study. The first delimitation is the use of a single case design which although does not aim to generalize, includes a small sample size, therefore, any assumptions about generalization will be limited.

Secondly, because of the small size of participants, the study will only be conducted in one urban district in the southeastern U.S., therefore, will not be representative of all geographic areas across the U. S. Similarly, a third delimitation is that the study is only focused on students with extensive support needs who may naturally have more family engagement due to intense needs of student. Finally, the study will focus on in-service teachers who teach self-contained classes so there may be more interaction and stronger relationships with families due to them being the teacher of record for the student.

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Data has shown that SWD achieve proficiency in reading and math less frequently than peers without disabilities (Albus et al., 2020; Fuchs et al., 2018; Hurwitz et al., 2020).

Fortunately, researchers have identified research-based practices that promote progress for SWD.

One research-based practice centers on family engagement with schools. When families are engaged in their child's education, the children are more likely to be successful in all aspects of school (Fan & Williams, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine in-service teachers' use of a conferencing strategy and its effects on family engagement. Family engagement will be measured through the amount of time that the parent was speaking during the conferences. Additional research questions include: did teacher beliefs regarding the value of family engagement change after the intervention? Finally social validity will be examined through asking, (a) do families' beliefs about the value of family-teacher conferences change after the intervention, (b) did teachers find the conferencing strategy an efficient and beneficial tool to use to promote engagement with families? This chapter will be a literature review that provides background and rationale for this study and dissertation.

The logic model for this study is included in Figure 1. As represented in the model, family/ school collaboration, through structured conferences, is identified as the input into the purpose of this study. The conferencing strategy is a newly developed strategy, based on research targeting family engagement with schools, called PIQUE. The goal of implementation of the conferencing strategy will be to increase family engagement with special education teachers during the conferences. Distal outcomes of increased communication, improved problem solving

and continuity of support between home and school with an ultimate goal of improved student outcomes are also potential benefits of this study as seen through the logic model.

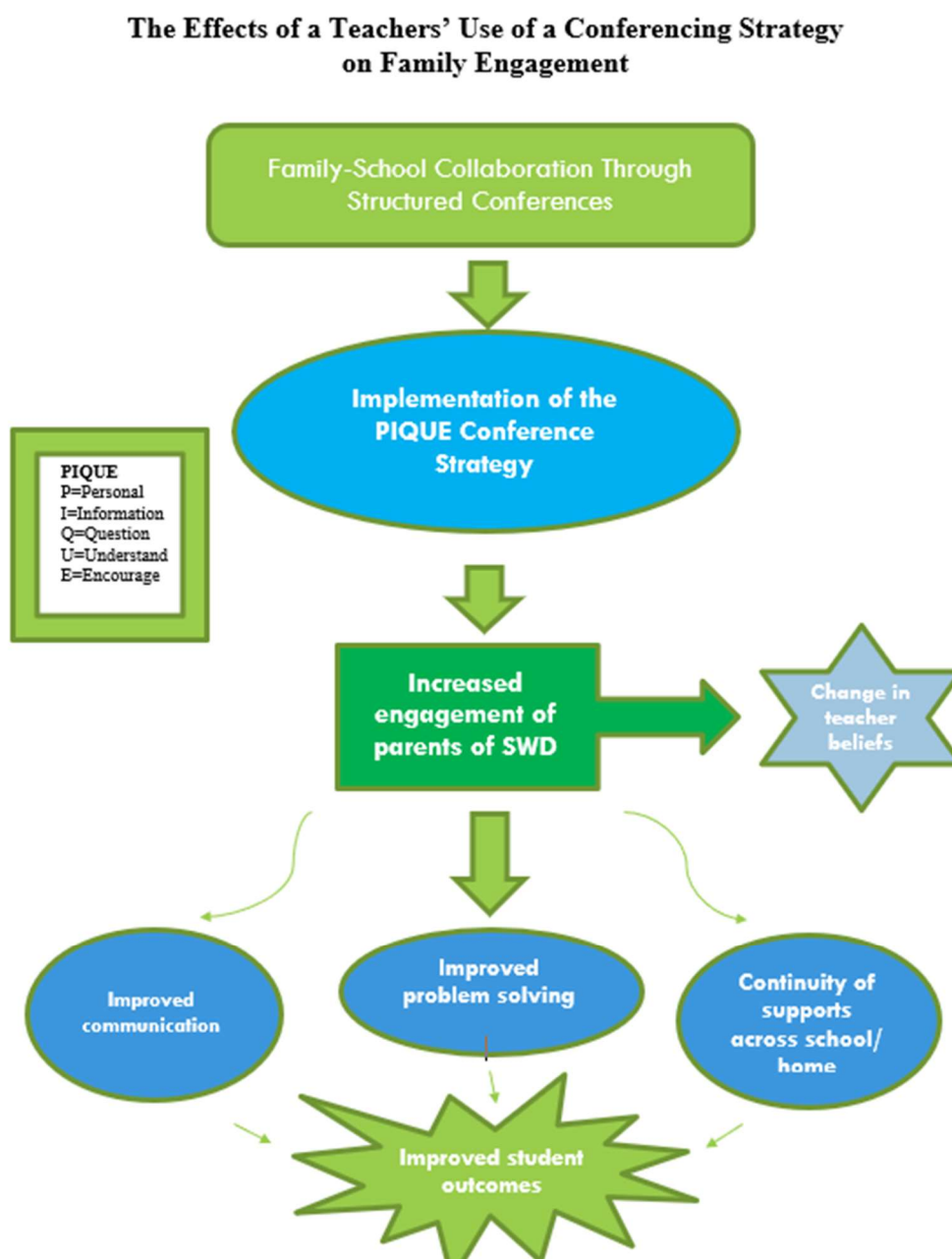


FIGURE 1 – Logic Model

Collaboration & Engagement

History of Special Education and Families

In the 1800's many children with disabilities were treated cruelly and due to the difference in their intellectual abilities, were considered less than human (Spaulding & Pratt, 2016). Between 1900-1940, children with disabilities were not always viewed as contributing members of society. In fact, they were considered carriers of genetic traits that others did not want to obtain. Therefore, many were outcast, placed in institutions and considered by the public to be a burden to their families. Moreover, families did not always play a prominent role in their children's lives (Powell & Diamond, 1995; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015).

After World War II, society began to consider people with disabilities differently and more families began to advocate strongly for their children (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Powell and Diamond stated that between 1940-1960, families of children with disabilities began to form groups including The Association for Retarded Children (the ARC) to share in their frustrations and concerns for their children. However, as schools interacted with families of SWD, many schools continued to see their role as teaching the families parenting type skills rather than engaging with the families in ways that promote positive student outcomes.

During the 1960s and 1970s, several organizations supporting SWD and their families began to make a real difference. The history of special education was primarily one of limited rights for SWD until the 1970s (All Education Schools, n. d.). Additionally, families were not expected or invited to be involved with their children's education until approximately the past 50 years (Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Even though the value of family engagement is still relatively new in the history of special education, special education legislation has encouraged schools and

provided support to increase family engagement with schools. These efforts have resulted in partnerships that have been shown to influence positive outcomes for SWD.

Legislation Supporting Family Engagement

Through social justice reform such as the Civil Right Movement and special education legislation, the rights of SWD and the value of engagement with their families have improved. Legislation supporting family engagement served as a catalyst for schools to focus on the benefits of engagement with families and develop plans to encourage collaborative efforts. These pieces of legislation provided funding which made efforts to support family engagement more widespread.

Early Legislation. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was passed. This bill (also known as P. L. 94-142, was established to provide funding to states to assist them in educating SWD. This bill stated that SWD had the right to, “(a) nondiscriminatory testing, evaluation, and placement procedures; (b) be educated in the least restrictive environment; (c) procedural due process [including parent involvement]; (d) a free education; and (e) an appropriate education” (Yell et al., 1998). EAHCA also implemented the requirement for schools to develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) each school year, which includes goals, evaluation and measurable criteria. Families of SWD were identified as required members of the IEP team. Families know their children best and are consistent members of the IEP team. Finally, by being an integral part of the team that plans goals and services, families can follow up to ensure that their children are receiving the support for which they are entitled.

Vital legislation in the 1990’s and early 2000’s included the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which was passed in 1990 and was the renamed reauthorization of EAHCA (Yell et al., 1998). Within IDEA, families of SWD are afforded procedural safeguards,

which gives them an avenue to enforce their children's rights. Finally, in 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed which confirmed the importance of families as partners in education and failure to engage in equitable partnerships with schools can be an example of denial of a free and appropriate public education (Shephard et al., 2017).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. Like its predecessors, EAHCA and IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) requires that states provide a free, appropriate education for SWD for them to be educated to their greatest potential with their peers. Aligning with NCLB (2001), IDEIA of 2004 identified family involvement as paramount to the success of students with disabilities. This reauthorization of IDEA states, "Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by... strengthening the role and responsibility of families and ensuring that families ... have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home" (IDEA, 2004). Funding for IDEA is designed for the federal government to fund 40% of the additional cost it may require to educate SWD (US Department of Education).

Family Engagement in Education Act. Other legislation that supports family engagement is the Family Engagement in Education Act of 2011. The act provides schools funding to strengthen parent engagement in education. In addition, recommendations are made as to how parent engagement should be measured and include an annual report on how agencies use grant monies designed to support engagement with families in education.

Every Student Succeeds Act. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of 2015 changed the language in legislation from family involvement to family engagement. With this change came the idea that schools should invite families to actively engage in meaningful ways in their

child's school or classroom. In addition, ESSA encouraged schools to engage in two-way communication with families to provide equal opportunity for input into decision-making. The law required local education agencies to provide families with training, materials and supports to assist them in more fully engaging in their children's education (Texas Education Agency, 2018).

More recently, legislation has clarified aspects of earlier laws, such as the right of SWD to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). The case of *Endrew F vs. Douglas County School District* in 2017, had many implications for schools across the country. As a result of the rulings in this case, increased emphasis was placed on engaging families in meaningful ways when developing plans for the education of SWD (Yell & Bateman, 2017). In addition, schools were encouraged to provide support for teachers in understanding and implementing evidenced-based practices, such as promoting family engagement (Dieterich et al., 2019).

Along with changes in legislation have come changes in how schools have stressed the importance of family engagement. Jezierski & Wall (2019) examined how schools' expectations of parent engagement have changed over time by reviewing research conducted between the periods of 1993-1995 and 2013-2015. The researchers found that schools have gone from having to "convince" families that engagement in their child's education is important in the 90's to the last ten years where schools are "taking for granted" that families understand the importance of engagement with schools. As the researchers reviewed the literature, they found that the research has shifted from examining the importance of engagement to examining how to get families engaged in schools. Finally, the research during this time also shifted from families primarily helping students with homework to families being responsible for building self-determination in their children.

Shift in Terminology

Over the years, the language in legislation and the focus of research has moved from promoting family *involvement* to promoting family *engagement*. This change paralleled a shift in focus from building relationships between families and schools, to a focus on how those relationships impact student learning. It is an expectation of the U.S. Department of Education that every public school promotes family engagement, since engagement efforts with families can positively impact student outcomes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). This study's focus is on the concept of family "engagement"; thus, in the sections that follow I will clarify differences between family "involvement" and "engagement".

Definition and Importance of Family Engagement

The distinction between family involvement and family engagement is cited throughout the literature (Fenton et al., 2017; Ferlazzo 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Although the terms refer to distinct concepts, "involvement" and "engagement" continue to be used interchangeably. According to Ferlazzo (2011), parent involvement implies "doing to" whereas parent engagement is "doing with." Researchers have emphasized that engagement implies more than activity, but with "greater ownership" in the activities compared to parent involvement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Others point to issues of power. Ishimaru (2019) states that involvement of families is more passive where engagement indicates a more active role with schools. In addition, Ishimaru says engagement denotes a culture of shared responsibility rather than individual responsibility.

Researchers have also suggested that family involvement and engagement exist along a continuum. de Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto (2019) describe how this continuum relates to actions of teachers and families. For teachers, involvement may include asking questions about a

student's home life and helping families understand how to assist with learning. Conversely, engagement may include teachers seeking to learn from families so that they can make decisions together. For families, involvement includes contributing to their child's school experience. However, engagement places families in a central position to support their child's learning. Importantly, families and teachers require trust of each other in order to truly be engaged together.

Ultimately, engagement requires actions by both families and teachers/ schools.

Researchers describe engagement as such:

It [Engagement] is based on authentic interactions, true acceptance, trust and belief in bringing out the best of each family; it goes beyond interacting as teacher and families – rather, refers to interacting as whole individuals that are sensitive about each other's needs, beliefs, and ideas and instead of competing with each other, unify their strengths for the common goal of the child's success in life (de Oliveira Lima and Kuusisto, 2019, p. 10).

For the purpose of this dissertation, the term family engagement will be defined as families contributing equally as partners with schools in a way that may positively impact student outcomes. This definition incorporates the term “family” and includes the expectation of contribution, equal partnership and the goal of positive student outcomes.

Barriers to Family Engagement

Family engagement is an expectation of the law and although research supports family engagement as an action that may result in increased student outcomes, there are many barriers to family engagement (Graham et al., 2021; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Some barriers to family engagement in schools may include practical barriers for families,

preconceived notions regarding school, and cultural/ societal barriers (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Understanding barriers families may face and having a plan to address the barriers is imperative to facilitating family engagement in schools.

Practical Barriers for Families

First, a common factor that may influence the level of family engagement is practical barriers families may face. Baker and colleagues (2016) described the barriers in a different way when they conducted 20 focus groups across six schools and asked what the barriers were to family involvement and what can be done to encourage involvement. The focus groups yielded a description of barriers that included lack of opportunities and time conflicts.

The practical barriers of time, transportation, and other practical matters for families can be a significant roadblock in their ability to be engaged. Being engaged with schools requires time and energy, and some families may not be available to meet during the workday due to work requirements. In addition, families may have limited resources, such as transportation to school events, or childcare to be able to engage as often as they may want (Murray et al., 2014). These life contexts can prove to be a significant barrier to engaging with schools. Many studies focused on family involvement include these practical barriers as a high-leverage concern for families (Al-Dababneh, 2018; Baker et al., 2016; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

Murray et al. (2014) added to the research base concerning practical barriers by conducting interviews with families to identify barriers to involvement in schools. Forty-four families of sixth and seventh graders from three schools participated in the study. Eighty-seven percent of the participants identified as African American. Through examination of the interviews, researchers found both time and energy of families, and families' perceptions of their

own skills and knowledge were barriers that prevented or limited their engagement with schools, which leads to the second barrier faced by families.

Preconceived Notions about Schools

Another barrier highlighted in research may be a family's own experiences with school which may have created preconceived notions about schools and influenced their beliefs regarding the value of family engagement. In a study conducted in Europe, Al-Dababneh (2018) found families reported the most significant barrier to engagement was their own beliefs that engagement with schools was insignificant in their child's education. The families' beliefs may have been influenced by a lack of opportunities to collaborate in ways that were mutually beneficial. In another study, Hornby & Lafaele (2011) examined what schools identified as perceived barriers of engagement by families and in 2018, Hornby & Blackwell published an update to this same study. They reported that families identified barriers to their engagement in schools that included negative experiences with their own schooling.

Barriers Related to Cultural Differences

Race/ ethnicity, educational level and socioeconomic status may all be factors related to family engagement with schools (Zhang et al., 2011). Families from diverse backgrounds may face barriers unique to various cultural norms. The homogeneous nature of our current teaching force, where most teachers are European-American women with middle class backgrounds, typically does not match the very diverse nature of students in schools. Yamamoto et al. (2016) compared motivation factors of families in the United States and families in Japan and found cultural factors to play a significant role in family engagement. For example, in Japan, when families attend family-teacher conferences, they are expected to listen, but not make suggestions or question teachers. Conversely, the researchers stated that in the U.S. when families engage

with teachers during conferences, families often question the teacher's strategies and work together with the teacher to develop ways to support their children. The cultural differences of non-Euro-American families can be perceived as barriers to family engagement when not fully understood by Euro-American teachers.

Tran (2014) stated that teachers may engage with families as if they have come from the same or similar backgrounds as themselves. By not understanding and/or respecting cultural differences, the teachers may limit communication efforts and engagement with families who may not fully understand expectations or feel comfortable communicating in a different manner than the teacher.

In an article about how schools can engage culturally diverse families, Banks et al. (2023) shared that few teachers, both new and veteran, are adequately prepared to support students and families in a culturally responsive manner. In addition, the researchers state that teachers need specific training to help balance the power between schools and culturally diverse families. Through the development of specific plans, schools can be intentional in their collaboration with families from diverse cultures. This plan should include families as partners in both the planning and the execution of engaging activities. Finally, the researchers share that partnership with culturally diverse families requires new ways of thinking and a balance of power in setting common goals to support engagement and lead to more positive student outcomes.

Summary

Unfortunately, schools have not always facilitated engagement for families who may have barriers preventing families from participating. Schools who take proactive measures to ensure that all families have opportunities to engage may find that unique strengths may exist with families who have the most barriers to overcome. This study will support families in

overcoming practical barriers by making the family/teacher conferences short but more frequent and hopefully minimize any time or childcare barriers by conducting the conferences virtually. Secondly, the conferencing strategy will provide teachers with strategies that will work to make the families comfortable and encourage engagement through questioning and responses.

Promoting and Facilitating Family Engagement

Fortunately, many researchers concluded that even though many barriers for families remain the same, there does seem to be a positive movement towards more family engagement with schools (Murray et al., 2014). Specific to culture, Yamamoto et al. (2016) found that regardless of the role culture plays in motivation for engagement in schools, specific teacher actions such as invitations and communication can motivate families regardless of cultural beliefs. In addition, it was recommended that teachers be intentional in creating invitations that will encourage families to want to be engaged with the school. Howard and Reynolds (2008) recommend addressing cultural barriers by employing critical race theory, and through the voices of African American families, schools can work to increase their engagement. Schools can do this by listening to recommendations from non-majority families and demonstrating consideration of these recommendations when employing methods to build relationships with non-majority families. Understanding barriers to family engagement in schools is just the first step in promoting more engagement. Another important piece to understand is how schools can identify strategies that may predict family engagement that results in greater student impact.

Predictors of Family Engagement

Although various barriers may be present, understanding the predictors of parent engagement can be paramount to its success. Some predictors are specific to families and some to actions of teachers and schools (Fishman & Nickson, 2015; Garcia, 2004; Minke et al., 2014;

Murray et al., 2008). Being aware of and acknowledging parent needs and being intentional in planning for engagement can help schools maximize parent engagement and student success. Predictors include parent/ teacher relationships, teacher efficacy, families' beliefs about engagement, and teacher preparation for engaging and supporting families.

Relationships are an important component of families' engagement with schools. In a study conducted over three years, Minke et al. (2014) compared family-teacher conferences of teachers who had received training on a family-teacher conference model and those who did not. Participants included 15 teachers and 16 target families. The training consisted of helping teachers think differently about families and problems, training teachers to communicate differently with families, and using a structured format for conferences (including involving students as active participants). Family-teacher conferences were recorded and analyzed, families were asked to complete surveys about the conferences, and teachers were interviewed about their experience. Minke et al. found that communication between teachers and families and families' level of self-efficacy skills improve parent-teacher relationships. In addition, families that reported higher-level conferencing between home and school were more likely to report positive relationships with the schools.

Teacher perceptions of their own abilities in working with families can also predict parent engagement. Garcia (2004) explored the relationship between teacher efficacy and family involvement of 110 teachers using the Teacher Efficacy Scale and the Family Involvement Teacher Efficacy Scale. Results showed that the efficacy of teachers was significantly correlated to family involvement. Teachers' perceptions of their ability to work with families also impacted the number of attempts they made at collaboration with families. Recommendations were made

to give preservice teachers the experience and confidence they require to engage families in an effective manner that will result in positive student outcomes.

Additionally, Green et al. (2007) tested a theoretical model to predict parental involvement. The model constructs included families' motivation and beliefs about engagement with schools, families' perceptions of invitations from teachers to be engaged in school and the families' life context variables. The researchers recruited 853 parent participants to complete a scale-based measure (survey with Likert scale response) to examine the theoretical model. Researchers identified invitations by teachers and children, perceived time and energy, and parental self-efficacy as predictors of parental involvement in schools.

Through understanding the predictors of parental engagement, schools can be proactive in their strategies to encourage engagement of families. Employing these strategies can promote the most effective parent engagement and result in positive student outcomes. Additionally, researchers have studied strategies that schools can use to facilitate optimal parental engagement with schools.

Facilitators of Family Engagement

Effective strategies have been identified to facilitate parent engagement in education. These strategies include several different types of models for facilitation. In 2016, Hirano and Rowe wrote an article presenting a new conceptual model to involve families of secondary students. A conceptual model is a model that shows how people, places and things interact. The new conceptual model was developed based on research surrounding prior models. In addition, it addressed the limitations of the prior models. The model they created encouraged special educators to view families as decision makers, collaborators, and co-instructors. Hirano and Rowe also recommended involving families in supporting students in self-determination and

assisting families to learn more about how to advocate for their child as they transition to adulthood. They concluded that a school culture that makes family engagement a priority through planning and initiatives is imperative to promote family engagement. Finally, researchers also stressed that families should be encouraged to participate in roles beyond meetings and assisting with homework (Hirano & Rowe, 2016).

Preconceived notions of teachers can negatively impact family engagement, but changes in these notions can be a facilitator of positive family/ teacher engagement. A pre- and post-intervention focus group was conducted by Murray et al. (2008) to identify barriers to effective parent collaboration as perceived by preservice teachers. The researchers conducted focus groups before and after a class on engaging with families of special needs students. The intervention involved the class being co-taught by a parent of a child with a disability. Before the intervention, preservice teachers viewed themselves as unprepared, inexperienced and families as without care, without understanding and those families who do care, do what teachers ask of them. After the interventions, preservice teacher perceptions were that they were more prepared and understood that families may face barriers to participation. They also found that, contrary to their preconceived notions, families can be partners and are of extensive knowledge about their own children.

One way that school personnel can facilitate family engagement in school activities is by improving communication between home and school (Graham et al., 2021). Schools can be the catalyst to communicative efforts that may prompt family engagement. When schools open clear lines of communication, families may feel more supported in pro-actively advocating for their children. Researchers also reported that families were more likely to be engaged if they were informed and given opportunities to be engaged with schools and their children's education

(Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Researchers conclude that teachers encouraging families to be involved can alter families' beliefs about the importance of their engagement (Al-Dababneh, 2018).

Epstein and Jansorn (2004) shared that schools require common goals and actionable steps to achieve partnerships with families. They indicate that there are six types of involvement with families including: Parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaboration with the community. Within this article, recommendations were made to practitioners including helping teachers have more productive conversations with families to improve the quality of the partnerships.

The quality of parent-teacher communication continues to be highlighted throughout research (Fishman & Nickson, 2015). Developing effective communication models can significantly increase parent engagement. Effective two-way communication is critical during engagement with families especially when working through difficult or challenging topics. Engaging in a true critical conversation is more effective than teachers just giving families their advice (Leenders et al., 2019). Communication initiated by teachers positively impacts parental engagement in education (Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Fishman and Nickerson (2015) highlight the importance of direct and targeted communication with families to increase engagement and point out that special education teachers have historically been encouraged to focus on quality of life for the family as well as students with disabilities. This may be due to the variety of additional needs that families of students may encounter due to the nature of disabilities.

Similarly, specific invitations from teachers were found to be a common predictor of parent engagement in schools. Fishman & Nickerson (2015) conducted a survey study with 137 families of students receiving special education. Researchers found that the strongest predictor of

parental engagement with schools was teacher invitation. Families' engagement was also increased when their children extended the invitations and encouraged their families to be involved. In addition, the parent's perceived responsibility of school-based involvement impacted their engagement. This mainly stemmed from the parent's own experiences in school. Direct and targeted communication by teachers was highlighted as a significant predictor of parent engagement.

In a related study, Carlson et al. (2020) conducted qualitative interviews in which 14 families of teenagers with emotional and behavioral disorders, described teacher characteristics and actions that encourage engagement in their child's education. These included teacher invitations, positive communication, holding high expectations for their child, meetings that were organized, when teachers show concern and when they intentionally seek out parental input. These actions reflect quality teaching practices but can also increase the willingness of families to play a more interactive part in their child's education.

Finally, Baker et al. (2016) recommended when making a move from involvement to engagement, schools should develop multiple ways for families to be engaged. Engagement activities should be provided with support to overcome barriers to access (such as consideration for working families, transportation and childcare). Additionally, communication with families should be clear and direct regarding engagement opportunities. Finally, schools should make efforts to be welcoming and promote a positive school culture of collaboration.

With an understanding of parental barriers to engagement with schools, predictors of parental engagement with schools and ways to facilitate parental engagement in schools, schools are better able to be intentional in their parental engagement efforts. Although these efforts can be seen throughout the school day and through many types of strategies, there are

some behaviors in which teachers can engage that have been consistently shown to improve parental engagement. These include relationship building, communicative efforts, and invitations from teachers. Consideration of how to overcome barriers, implementation of predictive actions and facilitation of engagement with families can be instrumental when planning conferences with families. Parent-teacher conferences can be a way to enact strategies that can lead to increased engagement with families and collaboration between families and schools to support positive student outcomes.

Impact of Family Engagement

The impact of family engagement can be seen across many variables related to students. These outcomes can be in academic achievement, social or emotional development or any other area of student need. Family engagement has been identified as a predictor of improved post school outcomes for students with disabilities (Test et al., 2009). Increases in family engagement may also lead to improved student attendance (Falbo, 2001). Several studies have shown family engagement as an effective intervention to support positive student outcomes (Fan et al., 2011; Jeynes, 2017; Smith et al., 2021). In addition, Tran (2014) conducted a review of the literature concerning the impact of parent engagement on student outcomes and found that research suggests partnerships and engagement with families consistently supports successful school experiences, including academic and social experiences, for students. In addition, Tran explains that in order to encourage and facilitate parent engagement, connections between home and school must be intentional, easy to understand, and ongoing. By being specific and clear in planning engaging activities and making these efforts happen through each school year, schools encourage partnership between families and teachers that supports accountability for quality in all students' education.

Alameda-Lawson (2014) also reported the effects of parent engagement on student outcomes. Researchers conducted a quasi-experimental design study to examine an approach called collective parent engagement (CPE). This approach addressed the needs of individual families through targeted parent social networks to build their education related skills and knowledge to promote positive student outcomes. Instead of just asking families to be engaged, the CPE approach was designed to train families on how to be engaged. This approach is especially beneficial for families who face practical barriers to engagement. Although this study included a sample of only 16 families in the intervention and 16 families in the comparison group, the collective approach evidenced trends that were associated with positive increases in academic achievement for students of families who were involved with CPE. As is seen through the research, many factors influence the engagement of families and these factors may overlap on many occasions.

Overlapping spheres of influence. The theory of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes that schools and communities all have relationships that overlap with the child at the center (Epstein, 1987). There are multiple items that may influence the amount of overlap between these three parties including time, experiences of families and experiences of schools. Epstein stated that families, schools and communities all have influence over a child's development and more importantly, should all share the responsibilities for the child. This partnership can be visualized through the overlapping spheres of influence (Yamauchi et al., 2017).

In another study with a similar view of the overlapping spheres of influence, Gonzalez and Jackson (2013) examined relationships between schools and families. Within that study, they share that the overlapping spheres are controlled by different external forces including

experience in families, experience in schools and time. The spheres also overlap through internal forces. These forces include within and between organizations and interactions that occur either in a standard manner or individually. Through this theory, there is a focus on shared responsibility for engagement by all parties (Epstein, 1990). Epstein (1987) also focused on this shared responsibility and stated that emphasis in this area also supports generalization of skills.

Benefits of overlapping spheres of influence include an increase in communication by teachers, families and students, families gain more information about how to assist their child to make progress, families have more belief in teacher abilities, and students achieve more positive outcomes (Gonzalez & Jackson, 2013). Through this theory, researchers attempt to examine the dynamics between family, school and students and examine all educational environments, including both school and home. Finally, Yamauchi et al. (2017) reviewed theoretical frameworks used when studying family engagement with schools and found that the overlapping spheres of influence were one of the top four theories employed.

Impact of Family Engagement on SWD

Although parent engagement can result in positive student outcomes across ages of students, students with disabilities (SWD) may benefit in different or additional ways than their peers. Decision making within special education relies heavily on collaboration between including school professionals and families. Engagement for families of SWD goes beyond traditional involvement in school activities to the role of active collaborators in development of student goals and evaluators of student data (Hirano et al., 2016). Unfortunately, Musabelliu et al. (2018) found that families of SWD may feel less capable in supporting their children's learning. Through the employment of intentional strategies such as assisting families with problem solving, sharing research-based strategies, and partnering with families to address

student needs, family engagement may be increased and families of SWD may feel more empowered in advocating for and supporting their children.

Invitational theory. Invitational theory focuses on explaining experiences and showing intentionality in inviting people to engage in any activity that is meaningful. Invitational theory includes five basic assumptions:

- “(1) People are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly;
- (2) Educating should be a collaborative, cooperative activity;
- (3) The process is the product in the making;
- (4) People possess untapped potential in all areas of worthwhile human endeavor;
- (5) This potential can best be realized by places, policies, programs, and processes specifically designed to invite development and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally” (Purkey & Novak, 2021).

These assumptions align with the invitational theory’s goals of caring communication that evoke the potential of people who work together (Stanley et al., 2004).

Invitational theory is built upon three foundations including the democratic ethos, self-concept theory and perceptual tradition (Purkey & Novak, 2015). The democratic ethos embodies the notion of a democracy in which respect for persons and their input into decisions is of utmost importance. The perceptual tradition enforces the idea that it is important to understand why people make the decisions they do. Finally, the self-concept theory explains that each person has their own experiences which have driven their beliefs. These foundations of invitational theory align with family engagement in that it acknowledges the skills and strengths that each person brings to a situation. Ultimately, invitational theory invites people to realize their full potential and what they may have to offer the world.

Measurement of Engagement

Research on family and school engagement has been taking place for years. However, in a review of the literature, Moore and Lasky (2001) pointed out that there are concerns with data-gathering techniques. Additionally, the historic use of self-report measures, such as family questionnaires or survey measures rather than direct observations of the family, being used to collect data regarding family engagement may be a result of the difficult nature in defining family engagement. Based on Hanover Research's report on Best Practices in Measuring Parent Engagement, questionnaires and surveys involve researcher interpretation of the results, which may result in biases related to participant history, attrition, method of selection, and maturation (2016). In addition to the inconsistency with the definition of engagement, data collection may be challenging due to the variety of ways the term may be used. An aspect of engagement with schools, such as ensuring a "welcoming environment" may look different to different people when conducting assessments and collecting data (p. 13). Finally, the report indicates that researchers must be very careful in defining any indicators being measured (p. 16).

Schueler et al. (2017) reviewed measures of family engagement, specifically the use of surveys. In their review, they point out aspects that make measuring family engagement more complex. One challenge is that when measuring family engagement, it is difficult to account for barriers families may face. Researchers addressed this challenge by asking survey questions about engagement and barriers separately. Another challenge in measuring family engagement is that families are frequently busy. This may impact the completion of surveys, especially by those families who do not feel they have time to engage frequently with schools. Surveys may be modified to be more efficient and ask questions that address all areas of concern.

Goldman & Burke (2017) conducted a systematic review of family training interventions to increase family engagement. The researchers reviewed difficulties in traditional measurement of parent engagement via survey and/or questionnaire. One main finding of the study was that family engagement interventions studied as part of a quantitative design were very rare. Additionally, the researchers found that most studies focused on students with less extensive support needs, therefore, more focus should be placed on students who have more extensive needs.

Summary

Parent engagement in education has been studied for several decades. Legislation requiring schools to promote parental engagement and measure the results of their efforts has prompted educators and researchers to conduct closer examination into patterns of parental engagement. Parent engagement involves a deep level of interaction between families and schools and may result in positive student academic and social outcomes. Unfortunately, barriers to parental engagement, including practical barriers, negative school experiences by families, and cultural barriers can limit the amount of partnership efforts seen in schools. Understanding teacher biases regarding how families are engaged, and sociocultural factors should be taken into consideration when schools work to engage families (Fenton et al., 2007). To counter barriers, research has identified predictors of parental engagement which schools can utilize to improve engagement by families. Understanding these predictors can assist schools in facilitating parental engagement in their schools.

One of the most important predictors of parental engagement and ways teachers can promote engagement with families is for teachers to facilitate effective communication. The communication is recommended to be direct, targeted and to be two-way with families. Research

supports the idea that teacher actions can impact parental actions and engagement. Teachers are the driving force behind invitations for parental engagement, building relationships with families, encouraging two-way conversations to solve student concerns, and providing feedback that enhances how families choose to be involved with schools and provide support to their children's education. In turn, these efforts by teachers can be an additional way to promote positive student outcomes and engaging families allows them to be in a position of power and have a voice in supporting their child's education.

Interventions and Supports to Increase Family Engagement

Knowledge about barriers, predictors and facilitators has paved the way for intervention studies designed to improve family/ school engagement. The interventions include family-focused interventions and teacher-focused interventions (Goodall, 2018; Houri et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2008; Novak et al., 2009; Yulianti et al., 2022). One of the most common scheduled interactions between families and teachers are family-teacher conferences (Darch et al., 2004; Lemmer, 2012; Markstrom, 2011; Minke & Anderson, 2003; Pillet-Shore, 2015; Price & Marsh, 1985). The conferences typically occur several times a year, but individual teachers may have them more or less often depending on their style of interaction and beliefs in the importance of this communication.

Many factors facing families and teachers may impact family engagement with schools. Two decades ago, Crozier (1999) shared parent perspectives on family relationships with school. He explored barriers and constraints for families and explored how this might impact families' perceptions of their own power. There are also challenges for teachers (Ferrel, 2012). Some factors which may negatively impact teacher efforts in encouraging family engagement include

teachers' lack of time, their beliefs about the usefulness of family engagement, or may feel families do not have the knowledge to understand school processes (Whitbread et al., 2007). Barriers and facilitators of family engagement are plentiful however, research has examined interventions that have proven successful in increasing family engagement.

Family Focused Interventions

Family-school engagement can be strengthened through interventions that are family-focused. In 2018, Goodall conducted a study which examined the use of a toolkit to encourage family engagement with schools. Included in the toolkit were resources for family engagement and tools to assist schools in assessing their current practices and planning new goals to increase family engagement. Thirty-four school leaders were trained and their schools participated over a school year. Data was collected through snapshot response sheets after each training session. The qualitative data was analyzed using grounded theory to identify themes throughout the responses. Goodall found that the most significant benefit of the toolkit was that it promoted reflection within the school teams that supported ongoing examination of family engagement practices. In addition, although the research was not implemented directly with families, schools reported an increase in parent engagement at school and contacts with teachers following training and implementation of resources within the toolkit.

In another study, Houri et al. (2019), examined the use of parent-directed wise feedback on increasing engagement among families. Parent-directed wise feedback was an intervention that included a handwritten letter by a teacher that contained three parts including a positive greeting, the reason for the communication and a “wise statement” which set a goal for the student. The research design was a double-blind randomized controlled design. The study had a total of 51 family participants (25 in the intervention group and 26 in a control group). The

intervention group participated with the parent-wise intervention and the control group had typical communication from the student's teacher. The dependent variable was parental behavioral engagement and parental relational engagement. Results indicated an increase in family trust with the school and also more engagement and communication with school personnel.

Family training interventions have also been the topic of research in improving family engagement. In a study by Reece et al. (2013), an intervention was implemented through combined efforts of the local housing authority and Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams). This intervention, entitled, *The Neighboring Project*, was a curriculum designed by the local Family and Community Engagement Coordinator and included training for families in multiple areas, including building engagement in schools, building the community and building self-esteem. Families were invited to participate in meetings to engage in the *Neighboring Project* curriculum each week through the school year. Following the intervention, focus groups indicated their satisfaction with the training and gained benefits as a result of their participation. Primary themes that emerged from the focus groups reported that participants increased their engagement with schools and communities, were more knowledgeable in supporting their local schools through collaborative projects and were more engaged with their children through understanding how to better assist them at home.

Another example of family training strategies to promote engagement includes a study specific to diverse families (Latunde, 2017). In this multisite study, 123 families participated in a 12-month project which included skills-based training developed to improve the families ability to advocate for their children, understand school and classroom expectations, and assist with learning at home. Findings collected through a survey with the participating families showed an

increase in family engagement as measured through engagement efforts by families that were not seen prior to the intervention. In addition, families indicated an increase in knowledge about their child's school experience and how best assist with their learning.

Teacher Focused Interventions

Pre-service Teachers

Interventions focused on teacher actions to increase family engagement and improve teacher beliefs about family engagement have been documented for several years (Murray et al., 2008; Novak et al., 2009; Yulianti et al., 2022). In 2008, Murray et al. conducted a qualitative study focused on preservice teachers. Participants included nine students enrolled in a course called *Consultation and Collaboration and Colleagues and Families*. This course was developed to give pre-service teachers an opportunity to engage with families of SWD in a meaningful way throughout the semester by having families attend all 16 class sessions. Focus groups, set up to explore how having families be part of the course impacted the students, were conducted with the participants during the first and last weeks of class. Four themes were examined through the focus groups and included self-perceptions, perception of families (x2), and parent/professional roles. Before the intervention (class), the preservice teachers indicated that they felt unprepared and inexperienced when engaging with families, they perceived families as uncaring and felt they did not understand, and to show that families care, they should do what the teacher tells them to do. In contrast, after the intervention, the preservice teachers felt prepared and experienced, understood that families face barriers to participating and that families are knowledgeable and viewed families as partners. This study did not target parent engagement as an outcome, however, did target teacher perceptions of family engagement which has been shown to be a predictor of increased parent engagement (Garcia, 2004).

In 2009, Novak et al. implemented a study using a qualitative phenomenological design, which examined the impact of 40 preservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward SWD and their families. The intervention was embedded as information and experience with SWD and their families in two courses, *Collaboration and Consultation* and *Supported Employment*. The courses included seven families of SWD who attended all 16 weeks of classes and one parent who co-facilitated the class with the instructor including planning and adjustments throughout the class. Students in the class were able to partner with the families who attended and learn through experience in family engagement. Data was collected pre- and post-intervention through focus groups and analyzed using a constant comparative analysis procedure. The study found that pre-service teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards SWD and their families evolved through participation in the courses and like the Murray et al. (2008) study, positively impacted pre-service teacher beliefs regarding family engagement, which is a predictor of family engagement in schools.

In 2021, researchers conducted a participatory qualitative study to gather reflections from 22 pre-service teachers on their participation on a course entitled Family as Faculty (FAF) model (Graff et al., 2021). Within FAF models, families are invited to be a part of the college courses in special education to assist pre-service teachers in developing understanding and empathy for families of SWD. Results of the study found that after the course, some pre-service teachers showed greater value for family contributions and experiences, however, some continue to have a deficit view. Teachers were also found to unintentionally use language which revealed assumptions about families that were not always positive.

In a similar study conducted across three universities in Europe and the U.S., researchers explored the perceptions of teacher candidates in their preparedness to support families in

schools (de Bruine et al., 2014). Specifically, they examined the teacher curriculum about family-school partnerships, opinions of candidates and educators, and if teacher candidates feel prepared for family-school partnerships at the completion of their training. A total of 65 teacher candidates and 32 educators participated. Researchers found that the curriculum included limited information regarding family-school partnerships. In addition, teacher candidates felt most prepared to communicate with families, but requested more experience through role-play and field experiences with families. Finally, researchers recommend more research about how teachers are trained to support families in more meaningful ways.

In-service Teachers

Pushor and Amendt (2018) reviewed the literature surrounding assumptions and beliefs about families [families]. Through this review, researchers report that schools may take family engagement for granted and unintentionally limit family voices in schools. Additionally, the researchers summarized that topics on family engagement are largely absent from the pre-service curriculum which may impact how teachers view the role of families in schools. Finally, the researchers summarize that family engagement should not just be viewed as something schools should do, but as something they need to do.

In a recent study, researchers examined the relationship between teacher invitations and engagement of families (Yulianti et al., 2022). The study was conducted in Indonesia with a total of 90 elementary teachers. In addition, 2,151 families were surveyed regarding parental engagement practices. Questionnaires were used with both teachers and families. Results of the study found that teacher invitations were significantly related to family engagement. The study also noted that schools lack professional development and at times, effort, to encourage engagement with families.

Within the literature, several authors share advice to supporting families during family-teacher conferences. In a 2002 commentary, Simmons stated that there are basic assumptions for families and teachers working together. Both parties should assume good will, competence and share responsibility for next steps. She also advised teachers to value families and help them feel supported. In addition, keeping families informed and making them comfortable during conferences is important to developing partnerships with families.

Family-Teacher Conferences

A review of research has established the importance of teachers' communication efforts with families to promote engagement (Fishman & Nickerson, 2015; Leenders et al., 2019; Smith & Sheridan, 2019). A primary means of this communication in schools is through school conferences. Family-teacher conferences are commonplace in schools across the country and they may be the most important link between families and school (Lemmer, 2012). Schools typically hold conferences to share student progress quarterly and as needs arise. Though teacher preparation courses may discuss family engagement strategies, methods specific to family-teacher conferences may require specific training in order to achieve maximum results. Historically, the basic steps for family-teacher conferences include planning, conducting, ending and following up on the conference (Price & Marsh, 1985). Over the last 35 years, more research has been conducted to examine best practices aligned with family-teacher conferences.

One case study of family-teacher conferences in Sweden examined the use of artifacts called "strength cards" to build the relationship between families and teachers and start the conversation in the conference (Markstrom, 2011). The researchers used this specific strategy to encourage the families to be more active in the conversation about their children as other studies have found that teachers do the majority of the talking in the conferences (Alasuutari & Karila,

2009). The researchers found the strategy of the “strength cards” gave power to the families to lead more of the conversation during the conferences and support teachers in gaining valuable information.

In an earlier study, Minke & Anderson (2003), studied the use of a family-school conference model (FSC model) during family-teacher conferences. The model includes active listening and other communication strategies and solution-oriented counseling. Ten novice teachers participated across a three-year study. Researchers used videotaped conferences and pre-and post-training interviews to gather data on the FSC model. Results indicated that use of the FSC model promoted better communication between families and teachers. As a result, families and teachers were able to learn more about the student and each other. However, the FSC model did take considerably more time than a traditional conference. Ultimately, based on the change in conferencing techniques to the FSC model, both families and teachers engaged in more risk taking during their communication that resulted in greater trust being established.

In another article, researchers developed a model for engaging families of students with learning and behavioral difficulties (Darch et al., 2004). Within the model is a strategy for family-teacher conferences including welcoming families, giving positive examples to families, introducing one or two problems the student may be having, asking for any information the parent may have, the teacher presenting a solution to the problem, and finally, the teacher thanking the parent for attending. The goal of this strategy was to help keep conferences focused and effective. The authors argue that the use of this model will increase family engagement in their child’s education.

In 2015, Pillet-Shore studied video-recorded family/teacher conferences for patterns in the participants’ social interactions. She found that to be what the research describes as a “good

parent”, families will usually share any critical information about the student first as a way of proving that they have prior knowledge of their child’s performance. She concludes that it may be easier for families to mention their child’s areas of concern first in order to appear as a responsible parent. Pillet-Shore suggests that information from this study is important knowledge for teachers as they build engagement with families.

Training and preparing teachers to conduct family/ teacher conferences has been mentioned previously as a facilitator for family engagement. One strategy for training teachers is through simulated conversations. Walker and Legg (2018) established a guide for simulated conversations to encourage family-engagement. They recommend integrating simulated conversations into preservice classes. In a rubric designed to evaluate family-teacher conference simulations, criteria included an opening, sharing information, gathering information, an action plan, empathy, use of a positive tone, and managing the flow of the conversation. Ultimately, although simulations may take more time to plan, when implemented, they help learning to be more personalized for teacher candidates (Kaufman & Ireland, 2016; Kelleci & Aksoy, 2021).

Finally, Kroth and Edge (2007) share their strategies for successful family-teacher conferences in an article adapted from their book, *Communicating with Families and Families of Exceptional Children*. Overall, they suggest strategies for pre-conference, during conference, and post-conference. The authors stress being prepared for the conference through reviewing records and planning for the meeting. During the conference, the authors recommend establishing rapport, reviewing the purpose of the meeting, encouraging participation through questions and information, listening and summarizing the conference. Each part of the conference has meaning and is important in encouraging families to be engaged with schools. Five aspects of engaging family-teacher conferences are building positive partnerships, providing relevant information,

facilitating engagement through questioning, engaging in active listening strategies to promote understanding, and enacting future plans with families to extend engagement.

When considering aspects of family-teacher conferences, existing theories align with motivation behind why families may be engaged. Two of these theories are social capital theory and collaborative theory. Engagement with schools is reliant on relationships between families and teachers, therefore, social capital is a relevant theoretical concept. Along the same lines, collaborative theory can also help us understand why families would engage with teachers and schools. A review of these theories will deepen our understanding of the motivation for family engagement.

Social Capital Theory. Social capital theory is defined as networking resources that support positive student performance (Ream & Palardy, 2008). Additionally, social capital theory typically includes both social networks and group membership resources. Social networks may include parental groups or relationships with school personnel such as teachers. Once families are a part of these groups, they may obtain resources due to those memberships.

Warren et al. (2009) expands on the definition of social capital by highlighting relationships between people and how they can act as partners to achieve agreed upon actions. The researchers also recommend that more intentional and collaborative partnerships (social capital) between families and teachers can be strengthened if families are encouraged to be active partners in their child's education. However, researchers recommended special consideration to families from low-income who may have inequitable resources that impact their social capital when engaging with middle-class educators.

When teachers understand family social capital this information can help schools recognize barriers, inequities, and differences in cultural capital. This information can be helpful

when examining families' experiences with schools. Social capital theory may help us understand how to best build relationships with families (Warren et al., 2009). The main idea behind social capital is that relationships have value, therefore, enhancing the relationships between families and schools can lead to academic success (Acar, 2011).

Some limitations of social capital theory may include the difficulty required to take the theoretical concepts and turn those into family-teacher team practices. In addition, the theory may focus on models of middle-class families and not take diverse families into account. Finally, researchers who use the theory may examine quantitative measures that do not take in account the experiences of families (Yamauchi et al., 2017).

Collaborative Theory. The collaborative theory is a newer theory but is based in the more familiar, grounded theory. Grounded theory examines individuals' experience with a process and creates a theory on how that process works. Through grounded theory, data will evolve throughout studies (Holton, 2008). Colbry et al. (2014) developed a grounded theory of collaboration called collaborative theory. It can be defined as on-going interactions with a balance of power to achieve common goals.

The themes of collaborative theory are either individual first or team first. Individual first includes how an individual perceives they have influenced the team; team first focuses on the team's influence on other members of the team (Colbry et al., 2014). The three causal themes of the individual first category include turn-taking, observing or doing, and status seeking. Turn-taking includes sharing responsibility for information with others. Observing or doing includes understanding that there are times within collaboration that one must observe and other times that one should take action. The final theme in the individual first category is status seeking. Status seeking includes wondering who one will be perceived by others on the team.

Within the team first category, building group cohesion requires the team to make a decision together. The second theme, influencing others, assumes leadership qualities in keeping the group on task. The final theme is organizing work. In this theme, members understand the larger task and do what needs to be done in order to accomplish the task.

Collaborative theory was primarily developed as a theory associated with leadership and followership. However, this theory can also be used when considering engagement between families and teachers or schools. Although Colbry and colleagues identify collaborative theory as being in the beginning stages of development, it does encompass aspects that may be useful when examining collaboration within teams.

Relevant theory and prior research on family/teacher conferences were instrumental in my development of the conferencing strategy, PIQUE. Each step of PIQUE is grounded in prior research. Summarizing the research-based steps through PIQUE is a way to promote engagement with families that is user friendly and easy to implement.

Positive Partnerships

Positive relationships between families and teachers are imperative to promoting family engagement with schools. Communication efforts of both parties require trust to be productive and support partnership. In a study including 212 families of elementary school students, researchers analyzed surveys completed by the participants (Santiago et al., 2016). The surveys were chosen as the method to examine three research questions, one of which was if trust between families and teachers has a relationship with family engagement with the school. Results indicated that when families had a high level of trust in teachers, their educational engagement was significantly increased.

In a study conducted by Symond (2018) recorded phone conversations between families and practitioners were analyzed for quality of interaction. Through this analysis, Symond found that building relationships with families was paramount to encourage engagement and in addition how families feel they are perceived impacts their engagement as well. Calls in which the practitioner asked the family about any challenges they are facing and offered solutions through some of the parenting programs, resulted in longer and more detailed conversations.

In 1998, Pruitt et al. conducted a study to investigate what families think special education teachers can do to be more family centered. Seventy-eight families were interviewed by preservice special education teachers. After interviews were completed, researchers analyzed the answers to one of the questions about how teachers can be more sensitive to the needs of families of SWD. As an answer to this question, 70% of the families wanted teachers to understand and respect that they are the experts about their children. Researchers recommended that families and teachers should have more equal roles and work towards true partnership for the benefit of all students.

In 2009, Lamb explored the relationships between teachers and families and the importance of these relationships was presented to the U. S. Secretary of State in the Lamb Inquiry. Throughout his analysis, Lamb indicated that the style of communication reflects the relationship between families and schools, therefore, effective communication is imperative in building these relationships especially for families of SWD.

Information

In a 2016 study, Pillet-Shore examined 41 recorded family-teacher conferences that were collected over three years in the western U. S. The conferences were naturally occurring, and the information covered included a wide range of topics and student performance. Pillet-Shore used

conversational analysis to code and analyze transcripts of the conferences and conducted ethnographic interviews and observations regarding conferencing. Through this analysis, she found that teachers were very comfortable sharing student praise, but less confident when sharing areas for improvement. In addition, when sharing criticisms, teachers were careful to make sure the information did not sound like complaints. She was able to discover two main findings. The first is that when teachers deliver negative news to families about their child, the families mostly share that they had prior knowledge of the negative facts. However, when teachers deliver praise to families, Pillet-Shore found that families appeared as if this was new knowledge. Secondly, analysis of the conferences showed that teachers and families mostly differ in how and when in the conference they share positive and critical information. Knowledge from both of these studies regarding what is shared and when it is shared can be beneficial when strategically planning for family/teacher conferences.

In 2009, the Lamb Inquiry reported on families' need for information about their child's educational performance from teachers and school officials. This report was developed as a result of meetings with families and inquiry into their experiences communicating and engaging with schools. The families indicated they desire information about their child's needs, what to expect from their child's schools, what support to expect from their child's school, wider information on their child's outcomes, and who they can trust to provide them help when it is needed. In addition, Lamb stated:

“The content of information, though crucial, is only part of the story. It is the involvement of the parent in the process of discussion and engagement about their child with the school that creates confidence. Such confidence can sustain working relationships even in situations where there is not always agreement

about provision. Where this is lacking, inevitably trust diminishes and so does the potential for a good working relationship between parent and school:”

When Lendrum et al. (2015) reviewed the Lamb Inquiry, they stated that ongoing dialogue is necessary to develop family-school partnerships. Again, the authors stress the importance of this for SWD.

Through research that included surveys completed by families and teachers, Lemmer (2012) summarized that family-teacher conferences are opportunities for families to learn of any concerns teachers have as to their child’s performance, and receive positive feedback regarding stellar performance. Lemmer also recommends that schools provide training on how to conduct conferences which includes standardized forms to collect and deliver information both before and during the conference.

Finally, providing information during family-teacher conferences is not a new concept, rather it is possibly the most common practice during conferences. In a practitioner’s article published over forty years ago, the author gives examples of the types of information that teachers should provide to families (Rabbitt, 1978). These include examples of student work, anecdotal records, examples of curriculum and examples of grade level performance (exemplars), classroom rules or regulations, and student grades. The author also stated that although these are common forms of information that may be provided in conferences, teachers may have to question families as to the specific types of information they would like.

Questioning

Another aspect of meaningful interactions between families and teachers includes questioning. Using conversational analysis, Symonds (2020) analyzed 28 recorded naturally occurring phone calls between practitioners and families having conversations about available

parenting programs. Finally, the researcher found that families felt comfortable to give detail about personal stories of their child when the practitioners asked questions that were intentional for gaining input from families. Examples of questions included inquiry about difficulties they may be having that prevents them from attending the parent programs and other similar type questions that require the families to risk judgment from practitioners.

In addition, families want to know that teachers understand barriers they may face when trying to engage with schools. Information gathered through questioning may not need to only be during real-time conferences but can be part of the planning process. One study used a parent reflection questionnaire to gain insight from families that would help teachers and schools build engagement and promote partnerships (Brandon et al., 2021). Researchers conclude that through the questions on the survey, families can express the challenges they face and what they need from schools in order to be more engaged in their child's education.

In an article written by Cheatham and Lim-Mullis (2018), research literature about how to engage linguistically diverse families is summarized. The authors define ways to move conferences to more supportive dialogue. These strategies include engaging families through small talk, defining key ideas of the conference or IEP meeting, using signaling strategies throughout the conference and prompting families to engage in the discussion. When reviewing how to prompt families, the authors suggest asking for ideas and suggestions to support problem solving. This type of questioning supports discussion throughout the conference.

Although some "yes/no" questions are useful when engaging with families, the use of open-ended questioning is more effective in gaining specifics about family's experiences (Fraenkel, 2006). In a study about an in-service teaching program on communication between families and teachers in Cyprus, teacher views on engagement were examined both before and

after intervention through a questionnaire (Symeou et al., 2012). The types of questions asked during meetings with parents was an important step of the training for teachers and focused on asking open-ended questions. The researchers found that training teachers on specific communication skills, including types of questions to ask, helped the teachers feel more confident in communicating with families.

Finally, questioning continues to be a recommendation of many researchers. In a review of research findings and implications on why families become engaged with schools, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) summarize strategies to increase capacity in schools. In an attempt to learn more about the goals and perspectives of families for their children, teachers should focus on developing two-way communication. The researchers include steps of asking questions and listening well to responses. The steps of questioning and active listening are often intertwined in family-teacher conferences.

Understanding Through Active Listening

Active listening is an important aspect to promote engaging interactions with families. Active listening strategies promote understanding and empathy for families. Results of a study in which interviews conducted with families were analyzed, 27% of respondents indicated they wished teachers would listen to them more (Pruitt, 1998). Researchers summarized by saying the quality and quantity of communication between families and teachers need to be improved by more frequent and intentional listening to the concerns voiced and information shared by families.

Pruitt et al. (1998) conducted interviews with 78 families of SWD. The families were asked, "How can educators be more sensitive to the needs of your family?". Researchers summarized the responses of families and shared that families have valuable information about

their children and that special education teachers must listen in non-judgmental ways to family concerns and needs. Active listening involves this concept of listening without judgment or prejudice.

In another study that examined factors related to active listening, researchers analyzed questionnaires completed by 3955 teachers (Kourmoussi et al., 2018). Through analysis, the researchers reported that factors such as gender, age, years of teaching, and higher education can impact active listening. Study recommendations included improving undergraduate courses to embed communication and active listening skills and designing and implementing more specialized training for in-service teachers that may help to promote communication and active listening.

In a study conducted with pre-service teachers, McNaughton et al. (2007) examined the effectiveness of active listening strategies on the perception of families on teacher communication skills. The study was a control group design and employed pre- and posttest measures. The intervention group received instruction on active listening strategies before being asked to roleplay a videotaped family-teacher conference. The control group did not receive the instruction and also completed videotaped roleplay conferences. Following the interventions, 30 families were asked to code the videos both before and after the intervention. Results indicated that the teachers who used active listening strategies were perceived by families to have stronger communication skills.

Enacting Future Plans

Engagement through family-teacher conferences include discussing a student's strengths and needs but are just a conversation unless follow-up actions are planned. In an article about what families want out of family-teacher conferences, a former teacher shared her strategies for

conducting conferences (Brandt, 2003). The last step in her strategy was to develop an action plan which included next steps based on the information presented. Families and teachers helped to develop the plan of action. The researcher also asked families to complete surveys at the end of their conferences. Providing a framework for the action plans was reported by families to be helpful and appreciated.

In a study of interviews with families and teachers, researchers found that only four of the teachers reported follow-up activities after family-teacher conferences (Lemmer, 2012). The four teachers set additional dates to meet with the families and created written plans with a plan of action following the conferences. Unfortunately, the researchers also found that most teachers did not set follow up meetings or document a plan of action, which did not make the most of the opportunities that the conferences afforded.

Family-teacher conferences are ideal opportunities to develop partnerships between families and teachers. These partnerships support collaborative efforts to address student challenges. McKenzie et al. (2021) examined interviews and focus groups held with teachers and families of SWD. The interviews focused on family engagement practices. Results found families and teachers agree that mutual partnerships are the best way to solve problems for students.

Summary

Research regarding family-teacher conferences has examined strategies for preservice teachers and college preparation courses including family members assisting with teaching the courses and simulated conversations training. Other researchers shared steps teachers may take to plan and conduct successful conferences. One of the most frequently cited steps in conferences include building rapport with families and creating positive relationships (Santiago

et al., 2016). When building rapport, one of the most important steps includes teachers sharing information including positive feedback and corrective criticism and asking open ended questions to encourage families to share information and help create solutions (Brandon et al., 2021; Lendrum et al, 2015; Pillet-Shore, 2016; Santiago et al., 2016; Symonds, 2020). Teachers are also encouraged to engage in active listening to promote continued input from families and ending the conference with enacting an action plan that includes assignments for both parties and plan for follow up (Brandt, 2003; Kourmoussi et al., 2018; Pruitt et al., 1998).

Summary of the Review of Literature

Students with disabilities have a history of achievement that is below their same aged peers (Albus et al., 2020; Fuchs et al., 2018; Hurwitz et al., 2020). However, researchers have found interventions teachers can put in place which may improve outcomes for SWD. The purpose of this study is to promote family engagement, an evidenced-based practice, which has been shown to help SWD achieve more positive outcomes (Fan & Williams, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

The history of special education and how the history intersects with families of SWD has evolved greatly over the last 100 years (Powell & Diamond, 1995; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). In addition, legislation has called on schools to develop plans to encourage family engagement (ESSA, 2015; Family Engagement in Education Act, 2015; IDEA, 2004). Along with history and legislation supporting family engagement, there are several theories associated with engagement and family collaboration with schools including Overlapping Spheres of Influence, Social Capital Theory, Invitational Theory, and Collaborative Theory (Colbry et al., 2014; Epstein, 1990; Gonzalez & Jackson, 2013; Purkey & Novak, 2021; Ream & Palardy, 2008; Yamauchi, 2017).

Research on family engagement begins with a clear definition of the terms involved including collaboration, involvement and engagement (Fenton et al., 2017; Ferlazzo, 2011; de Oliveira & Kuusisto, 2019; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). In addition, consideration of how engagement is measured must be a priority (Goodman & Burke, 2017; Moore & Lasky, 2001; Schueler et al., 2017).

Although family engagement is a desired practice, families may face multiple barriers to partnership. Barriers may include practical barriers, personal experiences, perceptions of invitations, motivational beliefs and others (Al-Dababneh, 2018; Baker et al., 2016; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Murray et al., 2014; Tran 2014; Yamamoto, 2016). Even though there may be barriers, there are also predictors of family engagement which include relationships, teacher efficacy, families' beliefs, teacher preparation and others (Fishman & Nickson, 2015; Garcia, 2004; Green et al., 2007; Minke et al., 2014; Murray et al., 2008). Finally, facilitators of family engagement can be effective in encouraging partnerships. Some facilitators include specific invitations, direct and targeted communication, a variety of options for engagement, etc. (Baker et al., 2016; Carlson et al., 2020; Fishman & Nickson, 2015; Leenders et al., 2019).

Interventions and support to increase family engagement have been the subject of research for years. Some interventions are family-focused and others more teacher-focused. One teacher-focused strategy to promote engagement is the use of family-teacher conferences. (Darth et al., 2004; Lemmer, 2012; Markstrom, 2011; Minke & Anderson, 2003; Pillet-Shore, 2015; Price & Marsh, 1985). To further this research and include specific interventions for in-service teachers, this study will examine in-service teachers' use of a conferencing strategy and its effects on family engagement.

CHAPTER 3 – METHOD

The original method designed for this study has been modified due to limitations in recruiting despite exhaustive efforts. The unmodified method will be presented first followed by the modified version.

Participants

Participants in the study were family-teacher dyads. The teacher participant implemented the intervention with a family member of a student who receives special education in their classroom. The family member could be a parent, grand parent, other family member or guardian depending on the student's living situation. Although one family member participant is preferred, if two family members participate then the data would be coded as if they are one voice. In the study, only one family member participated, the student's mother.

Recruitment

Following approval by the university and school district's internal review boards, I approached several elementary school principals to ask if their teachers and families can be recruited to participate in the study (Appendix A). Once principals agreed for their teachers to participate, teacher participants were recruited through convenience sampling within elementary schools in a suburban southeastern U.S. school district. Attempts were made to recruit five teacher participants, either in person or via email, with the goal of having at least three teachers complete the study. Over-recruiting was an attempt to control for any attrition of participants over the course of the study. Teachers were asked to sign a consent to participate if they were willing to be part of the study (Appendix B). During teacher recruitment, I was available to answer any questions via email or phone call.

Participants in the study also included families of students receiving special education in the teachers' classes. Once teachers consented to the study, they were asked to help recruit families by sending them information about the study. Teachers were asked to identify families who are involved with the school, but may not be fully engaged. Recruitment of family participants was through participating teachers' referral. Families were sent a consent, which included a description of the study. If families wanted to participate, they returned the consent form to the teacher who sent it to me via email (Appendix B). The consent form provided my email address in the event that families had questions. If there is no response to the initial request for consent, then families were sent a second consent form and follow up phone calls by the teacher. During family recruitment, I was available to answer any questions via email or phone call.

Recruitment for the study began in August, 2023. Recruitment efforts began with the central special education department within Cabarrus County Schools in North Carolina. Cabarrus county is a suburban school district and has a total of 44 schools and serves 33,562 students.

An Exceptional Children's (EC) coach for the county shared the recruitment letters and information during a meeting with the special education staff who teach in self-contained classes during late September. One teacher consented to participate in the study. The teacher is an Exceptional Children's teacher in an elementary school with a total enrollment of 956 students. The teacher participant was able to recruit a family to participate in the study during November.

Additional recruitment efforts included two informational sessions with a drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card for attending. Only one teacher attended one session and no teachers attended the other session. Follow up emails were sent with new flyers highlighting the study and

gauging interest. The EC coach also continued to ask for participants during department meetings and send emails to the teachers. Despite these recruitment efforts, the original teacher/family dyad were the only participants to consent to be part of the study.

Inclusion criteria. Teacher participants included in the study were special education classroom teachers and served as the primary teacher for students in self-contained classes. The targeted family participants were family members of students who receive primary instruction within a self-contained classroom of only students with disabilities. Family participants needed to be available to have weekly conferences via a video conferencing platform with the teacher. Families required access to a computer, Internet and a video platform for the conferences.

Exclusion criteria. Teachers who were preservice or in student teaching were excluded from the study. Any family-teacher conferences which would require translation services were also excluded from this study due to the specific data collection technique and the inability to account for the amount of time translating services may take in the conference.

Participant Demographics. The teacher participant was a white female who was in her second year of teaching. She taught in an elementary school self-contained classroom for students with extensive support needs and who participated on the NC Extended Content Standards. In addition, the teacher had personal experience through living with her brother who has autism.

The family participant had a 9-year-old son with autism in the participating teacher's classroom. He was in 3rd grade and in the teacher's class for the second year. The student's mother was the family participant and was of Indian descent. The student was attending school on a modified schedule due to behavioral challenges. He attended private Applied Behavior Analysis therapy daily for five hours after school.

Setting

The setting for the study was a special education classroom in a large suburban school district in the southeastern United States and included a special education teacher to implement the intervention. Data from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction records which includes school demographics, was used to identify classrooms in schools with diverse populations. The targeted classrooms were for students who are in self-contained classrooms. I selected to implement the study in self-contained classrooms because teachers in these classrooms are responsible for teaching all subject areas to their students. Due to the conferences being held weekly, having a substantial amount of information to share with the families will be important.

During baseline and treatment conditions, a digital platform, in which documents (or a desktop) can be shared with families, was used. Video used in a virtual format will be required for the conference. To limit interruptions, I requested that conferences be held before or after school. The teacher was asked to make any necessary accommodations to limit distractions during the conferences. Only materials used for the conferences were shared with the family participant to limit visual distraction and assist both parties to focus on engagement in the conference.

Materials/ Equipment

During the intervention, the teachers' materials consisted of a reference sheet for the intervention strategy (Appendix C) and their computer which had a video conferencing platform with the ability to video and audio record. The teachers compiled information about the child of the participating family prior to the conference and had reference materials of their choosing available to share with families.

Data Collection

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable was the percent of intervals the family member is speaking during the conference which represents engagement. Family engagement was defined as families speaking and offering information or asking questions about their child during the conference.

Data Collection Procedures

Family engagement during the conference was measured using a momentary time sampling procedure. I recorded (audio and video) the first 15-20 minutes of the conference. If the conference was longer than 20 minutes, data was no longer taken, however, the length of the conference was documented. Subsequently, I divided each recording into 5 s intervals, and then recorded whether a family member was speaking at the end of each interval. I calculated the percent of intervals by dividing the number of intervals in which families were speaking, by the total number of intervals (i.e., 180-240 intervals). Data collection ended at the 20-minute mark of the video, even if the conference went beyond this point. The conferences were described as mini conferences since the goal was more frequent, but shorter conferences. All conferences were audio and video recorded so that the researcher could code after the conference. After each session was coded, family speaking was calculated by taking the intervals of family speaking, dividing by the total intervals (180-240) and multiplying by 100. This gave the percentage of 5-second intervals in which the family was rated as “engaged” during each conference. In addition, the researchers coded the type of speaking that is occurring (comment, question or off-task) during each interval to obtain more information about the content of the conference.

Teachers completed a researcher-designed Teacher Beliefs Questionnaire (Appendix E), both before and after the intervention. The purpose of this questionnaire was to determine if the

intervention had any impact on teachers' beliefs about family engagement. The pre-intervention questionnaire included five questions with multiple choice answers. A sample question was, "In your opinion, how important is family involvement to student success?". Answers to these questions were summarized to explore how teacher beliefs may or may not have changed after the intervention and intentional interaction with families.

Social Validity Measure

The Family Engagement Checklist (Appendix D) was given to participating families both before and after the intervention. The purpose of this checklist was to gauge the family's perception of the importance of engagement and how they are currently engaged with their child's education. This checklist is used by the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) in North Carolina to determine if schools have support in place to ensure meaningful family engagement. Although the checklist is traditionally used by school leadership teams to assess family engagement in their schools, many of the questions can be adapted to ask families about engagement. The checklist was adapted from the Louisiana State Improvement Grant (LaSIG) Indicators of Family Engagement Survey (2009). The LaSIG survey includes four dimensions of support for family engagement including communication, family support, decision making, and partnerships. To support development and reliability of the survey, the creators piloted the survey with approximately 300 respondents and reported the results in 2014. Reliability and validity of this survey are not publicly available. The modified version used by ECAC required survey respondents to answer 27 questions with a response of either "not in place", "partially in place" or "in place". For this study, portions of only domains one (communication) and four (partnerships) will be used and questions were rephrased to be appropriate for families. A sample communication question was, "The communication between

the school and families supports students' learning and growth". Sample partnerships questions included, "There are opportunities for staff to learn about successful approaches to engage families in their child's learning" and "The partnerships that the school has with families support students' learning and growth". This modification from ECAC's version aligned with the goal of PIQUE and targeted these two areas specifically when families and teachers met for conferences.

Teacher participants were asked to complete the Teacher Reflection on PIQUE (Appendix F) checklist at the completion of the study. The researcher-created reflection checklist was designed to get feedback from teachers on the feasibility and ease of use of the PIQUE strategy.

Interrater Reliability

Before study implementation, I trained the research assistant in use of the data recording sheet and timer to obtain accurate measures of engagement. Training included use of online family conferencing videos to practice coding of video for time sampling coding and use of the PIQUE strategy rubric. Criteria for agreement was at 100% across three examples.

Coding of the video recording was conducted by myself and re-coded independently by one assistant on the project for at least 30% of each condition for each participant. Interobserver agreement was required to be at least 90% as calculated by a point-by-point method. Point by point agreement is defined by comparing the code for each interval for both observers to ensure agreement (Ledford & Gast, 2018). The number of agreements (when both coders assign the same code for each interval) was divided by the total number of agreements plus disagreements and multiplied by 100. The use of audio/video recordings assisted me in ensuring the time sampling procedure is rated reliably. If agreement fell below 90%, the research

assistant and I worked together to re-code the videos that were below 90% to reach agreement on coding and implementation.

Interrater reliability was calculated for 100% of the conferences using a point-by-point method. The overall average IRR was found to be 99 % and the range of IRR was 98% to 100%.

Procedural Fidelity

After the baseline phase of the intervention, the teacher engaged in training of the PIQUE strategy. After the training, the teacher was asked to employ the PIQUE strategy when planning for and conducting the remaining conferences. Coaching strategies were employed including collaboration (planning for the conference together), giving specific feedback and modeling (Matsko et al., 2020).

While reviewing the videos of each conference during the intervention phase, a procedural checklist (Appendix G) was completed on the teacher's implementation of the intervention. The researchers coded the implementation as a yes or no and compared their assessment for 100% interobserver agreement. The teacher was required to meet criteria of 100% for the steps of PIQUE during the conference. If the teacher did not meet 100% then the primary investigator coached the teacher on the steps of PIQUE. Coaching was given within the week of the second conference as the teacher did not meet 100% fidelity. The coaching was delivered via email (Appendix N). The feedback was intentionally designed to include positive statements and suggestions for improvement, with specific examples which supports positive conversations and comfort with teachers when receiving coaching (Barton et al., 2011).

Procedural fidelity of the strategy during the intervention phase was overall 95%. During the second conference of the intervention phase, the teacher scored 80% on the procedural fidelity checklist which required the researcher to send her an email to provide some coaching feedback

to use in the subsequent conferences. The email provided a reminder as to the steps of PIQUE and examples of how to use the steps in her conferences. After the coaching session, the teacher was able to meet procedural fidelity of 100% for the remaining conferences.

Experimental Design

The original design was to be a single-case, multiple baseline across participants design. Horner et al. (2012) state that single-case research involves planned and intentional manipulation of an intervention related to change in the target behavior or dependent variable. When predicted change occurs to the target behavior as a result of the intervention in at least three points in the study, then experimental control is shown. For the original design I planned to allow for up to five opportunities to demonstrate an effect of the conferencing strategy on family engagement. The demonstration of effect is when there is a 10-percentage point change in proportion of intervals in which a family is scored as engaged from baseline to intervention.

The multiple baseline across participants design involves baseline and intervention conditions. Intervention was the independent variable and includes teacher training and teacher use of the PIQUE strategy during conferences. I had planned to collect baseline data across all five teacher/ family dyads until at least three data points have been collected and they are stable in their level and trend with an assumption that the data will remain in a similar pattern (Ledford & Gast, 2018). The stability of data was determined by 80% of the data being within a 20-percentage point range. In the original design, the family/ teacher dyads would have been randomly assigned an order for the intervention. Once the first dyad group demonstrated baseline stability, the intervention was implemented. Also in the original design, the second dyad group would have the intervention introduced after an increase for the first participant of at least 10%

across at least three sessions. This would have been repeated for the third, fourth, and fifth family/ teacher dyads.

Baseline

Intervention for the first family-teacher dyad participants began when a minimum of three baseline data points was accumulated, and baseline data were stable in level and trend as defined above. Baseline was planned to continue for the remaining participants until a change in the level or trend of the data for the first participant demonstrates an effect of at least three data points that are a 10% increase from baseline. If a change was noted, then the intervention would have been applied to the second participant and following this same criterion will be applied to the remaining participants one at a time. During baseline, if family participants have high levels of engagement (an average of over 50%), then teachers will still receive the training, but the teacher/ family dyad engagement will cease to be tracked.

During baseline, teachers were not given any instruction regarding conferences other than the following: “Please hold a conference with the family that is approximately 15 minutes in length and follows your typical conference format”. Families were asked to “please participate in this conference as you normally would”. Baseline data was obtained through family/teacher mini conferences weekly for up to 20 minutes. The mini conferences were held every week for the duration of baseline and during intervention (approximately 16 weeks).

Independent Variable

A conferencing strategy, called PIQUE, was developed based on current and relevant research that supports family engagement in schools. Each step of PIQUE was grounded in current literature. As a way to validate PIQUE, the strategy was reviewed informally with multiple family advocates in the community, families of SWD, and teacher leaders for feedback

on development and implementation during the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years.

Agreement was made as to the steps of PIQUE based on the research and feedback from experts in the field mentioned above.

Training. At the completion of the baseline condition, the teacher was provided with a one to two-hour face to face or virtual training to include explanation and video examples of each step of the intervention strategy, named PIQUE. The training occurred within one week of the final baseline condition conference so that the next week's conference can include the use of PIQUE. Initial training included a visual presentation which will include opportunities for viewing of video examples and role play activities (Appendix I). After training on the steps of PIQUE, the teacher put the individual steps together and engaged in role-play of an entire conference. In the first practice, I was the implementer and the teacher played the role of the family member and the second practice was a reversal of these roles. After practice, the teachers had an opportunity to ask questions and were administered a short assessment. In the assessment, she used the PIQUE implementation rubric (Appendix E) to score an online example of a family/teacher conference. Each participant needed to demonstrate implementation of PIQUE with a rubric score of 15 or more (out of X possible points) in order to be prepared to implement. If the participant had not demonstrated a score of 15 or more on the implementation rubric, a thirty-minute face to face or virtual follow up training would have occurred one week following the initial training to remediate any concerns with implementation. When the teacher was conducting their conferences, she was given the steps of PIQUE on a reference sheet that she could refer to during each conference.

Each step requires specific training. Training on step one (Positive start) included video examples and non-examples of how to start a conference. These examples were obtained from

public examples that can be found online or created by the researchers. Additionally, the importance of positive non-verbal communication was reviewed at this step. After viewing the examples, the teachers practiced starting a conference with positivity both verbally and non-verbally. Step two (Information) training included examples of how to organize student information to share with families. The examples of organization focused on strengths first, and areas of need second. The teachers used these examples to practice organizing their own student's information that will be shared with families. The third step (Question) focused on how to pre plan before the conference about what types of questions teachers might want answered by the students' families. Questions were open-ended to encourage families to provide more information. The questions were aligned to the information shared from step two and focus on the student's skills related to their school performance. I modeled creating questions and the teacher practiced by examining multiple scenarios of student information and practicing creating questions that were aligned. Step four (Understand) revolved around active listening strategies and techniques such as: looking at the speaker, not interrupting, encouraging through words or gestures, paraphrasing, and summarizing (Kourmoussi et al., 2018). This step intertwined with step three as active listening strategies should be employed during teacher questioning and family responses. I reviewed these strategies with the teacher and then she was able to practice through role play. Finally, training for step five (Enact future plans) included ideas and suggestions for how to encourage future engagement by families such as other opportunities to participate in school activities, strategies to employ at home that support student academic and behavioral goals, and multiple ways to continue conversations with their child's teacher. It also included specific action plans to address any concerns that have arisen during the conference.

Training of the intervention was recorded through the zoom platform. The research assistant reviewed the video using a checklist to check for procedural validity (Appendix M). The checklist included thirteen questions that covered each part of the training including each step of the PIQUE strategy, examples, role play and trainee competency check. The presence of each step of the training was scored as either a “yes” or “no” on the checklist. Procedural fidelity was found to be 100%.

Intervention. During the intervention stage, families and teachers engaged in weekly conferences about the participating families’ children. Teachers were asked to employ the PIQUE strategy. Families were not aware of the teachers’ training and should continue to participate in the conferences as they feel comfortable. The PIQUE strategy consisted of the following steps:

1. **Positive partnerships** - Teacher will begin the conference with an interesting and/or funny story about something that the student has done recently in class, as well as a positive statement about the student. Simmons (2002) states that it is important for families to feel comfortable and know that their child is liked. Although establishing or building on rapport with families may be difficult for a short conference, it is imperative and the teacher’s responsibility to establish the tone of the conference (Kroth & Edge, 2007). Recommended time for this step is approximately two minutes. An example of a positive start might be, “Welcome Ms. Jones! I’m so glad to see you today. I hope you are doing well. Luke really made me proud today. We had a new student and he did a fantastic job serving as her buddy”. This example shows how to set a positive tone to the conference and shows that the teacher sees the good in their student.

2. **Information** – Teacher will share general information about the student’s progress, beginning with strengths and then sharing areas of continued need. (Markstrom, 2011).

Planning what will be shared before the meeting will make the conference run more smoothly. Planning might include a review of records, grades, local assessments and social/ behavioral data (Kroth & Edge, 2007). Recommended time for this step is approximately three minutes. An example of providing information may be to create a graph showing the progress with the student’s words per minute when addressing reading fluency. Providing visuals can help families understand the information more easily.

3. **Question** – Teacher will ask the family an open-ended question about the student’s study or work habits, which could include academic or behavioral queries. Researchers have found that when teachers “set the stage” for families to give information, families will tell their stories with more detail (Symonds, 2017). One way to set the stage is to ask a question that will invite the families to provide in depth information. In order for families to give more information in conferences, a variety of ways should be employed to encourage active engagement (Markstrom, 2011). Recommended time for this step is approximately 1-2 minutes. An example of an open-ended question might include, “What does Luke like to read at home? Tell me how he lets you know he understands your directions.” Questions of these types encourage families to share more information specific to their child’s learning.

4. **Understand** – Teacher will engage in active listening with the goal of understanding the families’ perspective (Bodie, 2011). Researchers emphasize the importance of communication with families, including using active listening strategies and respecting the expertise of families (Barton et al., 2004; Minke & Anderson,

2003). Recommendation for this step is approximately 5-8 minutes. It is important that there be plenty of time in the 15-minute conference to allow for time for the families to engage by offering information. Previous research has shown that teachers dominate much of the talk during family/ teacher conferences (Adelsward et al., 1997). An example of understanding through active listening might be, “What I hear you saying is that Luke reads every night, but he cannot tell you about what he reads. Have you tried having him read aloud to you and discussing the story throughout? How about if we used an organizer to help him keep track of the important parts of the story?” Building off the information families provide helps to promote a partnership with the teacher in which families engage as equals with teachers.

5. Enact future plans – Teacher invites and/or encourage future engagement with families through additional meetings and/ or shared goals (Brandt, 2003).

Typically, follow-up conferences are only held if a problem arises and few teachers have been found to set future meetings with families (Lemmer, 2012). Recommendation for this step is approximately 30-60 seconds. An example of enacting future plans includes setting the next meeting and developing a plan of action with roles for both teacher and family. The plan of action should have a shared goal to obtain before the next meeting. The goal of this activity is to promote ongoing engagement between the teacher and family.

Threats to Internal Validity

One threat to internal validity in the project to be considered was attrition. I asked all participants to commit to be a part of the study for a total of 16 weeks. I tried to recruit at least five teachers and families to address the potential for attrition. Another threat to internal validity

to consider was testing effects. Due to the frequent, repeated conferences, family participants may have possibly become more engaged due to the number of conferences, not the treatment. If this threat was present, the researcher should have seen it during the baseline condition and it would have been observed as covariation. Requiring the baseline condition to become stable helped to control for testing effects.

An additional threat may be through history. This threat may be present as I cannot control other experiences the family may have that impact engagement. However, teachers and families were asked to report any major changes they may be experiencing. Maturation may also impact internal validity of the study. Families may naturally become more engaged just by having more frequent conferences and opportunities to speak with the teacher. Finally, a threat that was addressed is the Hawthorne Effect. This threat may be likely if the family/teacher dyad participants behave differently due to what they perceive as the expectation of the study. Again, requiring stability of the baseline condition before intervention was introduced and using audio/video recordings instead of in person data collection helped me recognize this threat. Also, family participants were not told that the purpose of the intervention was to increase family engagement. For the original study design, experimental control would have been demonstrated through three demonstrations of the effect of the intervention and behavior changes when intervention was introduced across participants.

Data Analysis

Data from single-case research design studies is most commonly analyzed through visual analysis (Ledford & Gast, 2018). I used visual analysis to evaluate data collected on the families' vocal behavior during the family/ teacher conferences. I examined changes in level, trend, and stability within and across conditions. Further, I considered the immediacy of effect

when a new condition is introduced. A separate graph was created for each family and teacher pairing. A presence of a functional relation was determined when there were at least three demonstrations of consistent behavioral change after introducing the treatment. If a teacher required coaching during the intervention, it was indicated on the graph.

Descriptive analysis was used to display changes in teacher beliefs comparing pre- and post-intervention. Answers to each question on the checklist were described for the five teachers in narrative format.

Social validity results were displayed through descriptive analysis. The range and median were displayed comparing pre-intervention to post-intervention in a bar graph. Numerical values were given to each response choice on the Family Engagement Checklist. Results of the Family Engagement Checklist were displayed on a graph that represents all families' responses both pre- and post-intervention.

Finally, teachers were given a post-intervention questionnaire to gauge their impression of the training, the ease in implementation of PIQUE, their perceived effect on building relationships with families and if they will continue to use the strategy with other families. I compiled the data and report range and median for each question on the teacher reflection of PIQUE. This information was summarized in a table that includes each question.

Changes to Planned Methods

The original method for this study was changed due to challenges with recruitment. Despite exhaustive efforts including emails to district leaders, distribution of flyers, doubling of monetary incentive, open meetings with incentives for attendance, follow up informational emails, and recruitment through district personnel spanning across seven months, only one

parent-teacher dyad agreed to participate in the study. These limits in recruitment resulted in a change in the method of the study.

The following elements of the study were not changed: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants (although the number of participants has changed), setting, materials/ equipment, dependent variable, quantitative data collection, social validity, interrater reliability measures, independent variable and procedural fidelity. The majority of the changes were made within the experimental design. Additions were made to the data collection and training aspects of the study as well. These changes impacted the threats to validity and data analysis.

Changes to Experimental Design

The experimental design of multiple baseline across participants was changed to a non-experimental design due to recruitment of only one parent-teacher dyad. Single subject non-experimental design can be applied to one participant or a group that acts as one participant (Mills & Gay, 2019). The baseline phase of the design has become the non-treatment phase of the study. Once stability of the non-treatment phase was noted, the intervention phase began. The stability of data was determined by 80% of the data being within a 20-percentage point range (Ledford & Gast, 2018). After the intervention training, four additional data points were collected. Immediacy and trend of the effect were used to make an inference to the effectiveness of the intervention. The quantitative single subject data were supplemented by interview data and field note observation data, discussed next.

Case Study

Elements of a case study were added to the original methodology. Case studies include qualitative measures used to analyze explanatory questions about a phenomenon (Mills & Gay, 2019). Elements including interviews with the teacher and parent, and field notes were

based on observations. Rich case studies combine both qualitative and quantitative information (Sammur-Bonnici & McGee, 2017; Yin, 2002). Using the information derived from multiple sources can provide richer descriptions and/ or explanations for the phenomenon being studied, parent engagement. Use of the quantitative data and information collected through qualitative measures can be used to triangulate evidence in order to better understand the impact of PIQUE on parent engagement with teachers during conferences. Triangulation occurs when at least three sources all support the same interpretations or outcomes (Yin, 2012). Methodological triangulation for this case study included the following: quantitative single-case graphed data, and qualitative interviews and field notes. Using both qualitative and quantitative data is the most common way to triangulate data (Bhandari, 2022).

Positionality Statement

As the primary investigator in this study, it was important to share my personal demographics and experiences. I am a fifty-four-year-old white female. I have a bachelor's and master's degree in special education and I am currently a PhD candidate in special education. My research interests have a direct relationship to my professional experience in the field of special education and personal experience with my eighteen-year-old son who has autism. I have served as a leader through multiple professional positions for 31 years including as a classroom teacher, peer mentor, coordinating teacher which included teacher coaching, and a school administrator. Through these positions, I have had the privilege of supporting both families of SWD and special education teachers and I believe that a strong partnership between the school and family can have a very positive impact on a child's education. This experience inspired me to develop PIQUE as a way for teachers to be proactive in their engagement with families. I had hoped this

study would provide some data that helped me determine if PIQUE is a successful strategy during family/teacher conferences to promote family engagement.

I was the primary data collector in this study and therefore wanted to share my personal and professional alignment with the study. I made every attempt to be aware of any bias I may have had while analyzing the data through the use of member checks. In addition, my critical friends reviewed the data, especially gathered through qualitative methods to ensure any unintentional bias that may be present during analysis.

Changes to Data Collection and Procedures

Interviews

Following the Teacher Beliefs Checklist, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the teacher. Semi-structured interviews include questions that focus on the research questions but are open-ended in order to gauge the participants' experience and interpretation of a real-world phenomenon (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The semi-structured interview consisted of follow up questions to the teacher's response to the Beliefs questionnaire and gave the teacher an opportunity to expand on his/her answers both pre-intervention and post-study (Appendix J & K). The interviews were conducted virtually and were approximately 30 minutes long. Each interview was video/audio recorded through the Zoom platform.

An open-ended interview was conducted with the family after the completion of the study. Questions were focused on any changes in the parent's response on the parent questionnaire completed after the study as compared to the one conducted before the intervention (Appendix L). The parent was asked to expand on their responses to the questionnaire questions and explain any ways their responses may have changed throughout the study. Providing families with the flexibility to respond to open-ended questions helped them express their feelings about

the interactions they experienced during the parent/ teacher conferences (Yin, 2012). The goal of these interviews was to provide an in-depth understanding of the parent's experience during the conferences and their opinions on engaging with their child's teacher.

Field Notes

Following the coding of each video-recorded parent-teacher conference and each interview, the research summarized the interaction through field notes. Field notes are a qualitative method used to record actions and activities of the research participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Immediately recording any basic information observed during the conferences assisted in noting any changes from prior conferences. The information gathered through field notes reflects observations outside of verbatim text that may speak to the context of the activity, such as the conferences or interviews. After the interview, the researcher was able to reflect on her own skills as an interviewer and any bias present during the interview. Critical reflection of these methodological processes assisted the researcher in improving her role and techniques in the study (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). An example of a change made after reflection on the interview included allowing for more "wait time" during the second interview with the teacher to allow her to answer with less prompting from the researcher.

Both descriptive and inferential fieldnotes were noted by the researcher. Descriptive notes included a summary of the conference and topics discussed therein. Inferential notes included assumptions by the researcher and hypothesis of any changes from prior conferences. Field notes are important in the synthesis of qualitative data and provide information from the interview that may not be available through only transcribing text (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

Changes to Training

Minor changes were made to the PIQUE training in order to customize it for the teacher participant. After the baseline conference and pre-intervention teacher interview, the researcher was able to add examples in the training that spoke specifically to the baseline conferences. The refinement and customization of the training was intended to help the teacher move from hypothetical to actual use of the strategies in PIQUE. One example added to training included giving the teacher examples of open-ended questions that could be used during the conferences such as, “you mentioned your child attends ABA daily and is working on staying seated, can you tell me more about that?”. Using actual examples from the conferences already completed with the parent helped the teacher during role play to practice what she would implement in the next conference.

Impact of Design Changes on Threats to Validity

Internal Validity

Case study research was subjected to some of the original threats to validity including attrition, testing effects, maturation and the Hawthorne effect. Specific to the non-experimental design, experimental control cannot be demonstrated due to an inability to account for and control many threats to internal validity (Byiers, Reichie, & Symons, 2012). In addition, the threat of interpretation bias may be present in the qualitative aspects of the method.

Interpretation bias occurs when the researcher influences the results in favor of their hypothesis, whether intentional or unintentional. Having multiple sources of data and triangulating that data helped to avoid this threat.

External Validity

With the change in quantitative measure from single-case across participants to non-experimental case study design the most significant threat to external validity was the generalization of results. Due to the individual sample of participants, the results cannot demonstrate effect to a larger population. In order for the intervention to demonstrate an effect, replication is required (Cakiroglu, 2012). Replication of the study is possible, however, must be completed with individual teachers, rather than groups, in order to customize the training based on their student.

Changes to Data Analysis

Single Subject Design Analysis

Non-experimental single subject designs employ individual analysis for the participant (Cakiroglu, 2012). Measurement of the behaviors studied were repeated during both baseline and intervention phases. As with the original experimental multiple baseline design, visual analysis was used to make an inference regarding effectiveness of the intervention. Within visual analysis, the researcher looked for the average data, or level, of the data, trends found within the data and variability within the data. In addition, the immediacy of effect on the data was evaluated after introduction of the intervention.

Interview Coding and Analyses

In order to supplement the quantitative data, interviews were conducted and analyzed through qualitative coding. Each interview was audio and video recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcription was then organized into researcher questions and participant responses. In order to examine the interview for thematic elements related to parent

engagement, an inductive analysis with no predetermined framework was employed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

The first round of coding employed open-coding using the in vivo coding technique. In vivo coding is using the participants' exact words as the codes to their experience or point of view. In vivo coding is beneficial when examining data as it is more “action oriented” than descriptive coding (Saldana, 2021). Coding of a word or phrase was applied to every 3-5 sentences of the participants' responses in the interview. The first round of coding resulted in eight codes. Information gleaned from the first round of open coding helped to develop categories or themes to explore in the second round of coding.

During the second round of analysis, thematic and pattern coding was used. This was achieved by examining the data for patterns from the in vivo coding and then finding common themes from the patterns. This may involve categorizing or combining codes from the first round of coding to identify common concepts related to the research questions regarding family engagement. A review round of coding identified any evidence in the transcripts that might be non-conforming to the identified patterns and themes. The second round of coding resulted in two primary themes and one secondary theme.

Field Notes Coding and Analysis

The field notes were evaluated using a first round of descriptive coding. Descriptive coding involves using a word or words to describe portions of the data. This type of coding is commonly used with non-interview data such as with fieldnotes (Saldana, 2021). The goal of gathering data through the fieldnotes was to more deeply explore the experience of the teacher and parent during their interactions in the conferences. Six descriptive codes were derived from

the field notes. Some examples included: Teacher preparedness, parent comfort, and relationship.

Methodological Integrity

Trustworthiness

During analysis of the data for this study, I relied on a process to establish trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is the level of confidence that the researchers have achieved a goal related to the topic of their study (Levitt et al., 2017). Nowell et al. (2017) identified six phases of establishing trustworthiness: Being familiar with your data, initial coding, finding themes within initial codes, reviewing the themes, naming the themes, and producing a report. For each of the six phases, the researchers identified ways to address trustworthiness within the phase. In a similar fashion in the current study, each phase was completed and included many of the same activities to increase trustworthiness of the study. I employed member checks of the transcriptions three days after the post-intervention interview, triangulation, documentation of codes/ themes, peer debriefing, theme vetting by team members and critical friends, and reflexive journaling. All of these strategies helped to support the trustworthiness of this case study thereby making the findings more credible and dependable.

Support for Claims

Triangulation of the data. In order to strengthen the credibility of the study, triangulation techniques were used. Triangulation can be described as comparing the methods and data employed during the study to gather a more complete view of the research targets (Mills & Gay, 2019). During this process, the data from each methodological strategy was compared to the other strategies for overlap or commonality in findings. Both methodological and theoretical triangulation was used when analyzing the findings of this study. Methodological triangulation

included both quantitative and qualitative measures. The findings of the study were compared with theories introduced through the literature review to strengthen the results. By using multiple sources of data, fidelity of the study's goal was strengthened. Through the use of the interviews and field notes, the quantitative data was better supported and the findings were not reliant on only one source of information (Lefitt et al., 2017).

Supplemental checks of data. Throughout the study, double checks of data were completed by various persons to confirm my analysis. The teacher participant completed member checks on the transcription of the teacher interviews and agreed that they were accurately transcribed. Coding of the interview was kept in an electronic codebook and reviewed by a critical friend who provided advice that helped to maintain the integrity of the coding process. Questions that arose throughout the study were discussed with the research assistant in order to maintain consistency within the study.

Demonstration of Consistency and Transparency

Consistency of the data collection was provided by having a second coder of the quantitative data and ensuring interrater reliability throughout the conferences. Additionally, the second coder (research assistant), evaluated the PIQUE training for fidelity through a procedural checklist. Each conference during intervention was also coded for procedural fidelity. All of these steps helped to ensure that the method was implemented with integrity and supported the findings of the study.

Additionally, these methods were also used to review for transparency, which included both methodological, interpretive, and narrative transparency (Trainor & Graue, 2014). Methodological transparency was reviewed by both my dissertation committee in the proposal phase of this study and my critical friends during when changes were made to the methodology.

Interpretive and narrative transparency were supported after each weekly conference through review of the data and discussion regarding analysis with critical friends as well. These reviews took place at different stages of the study and helped to support transparency throughout.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

Research Question 1: Does an in-service special education teacher's implementation of a conferencing strategy increase the percentage of 5-second intervals in which the family member is speaking during family/ teacher conferences?

Baseline

The parent/ teacher conferences began in January 2024. During the baseline period, I asked the teacher to conduct the conferences as she would typically do. I did not provide other directions or support. Baseline data were collected during five separate conferences, each lasting between 13 and 17 minutes, with an average time of 15 minutes per conference. During baseline, the parent was coded as “speaking” for an average of 16% of the intervals (range 9 to 21%). The teacher was coded as “speaking” for an average of 84% of the intervals (range 79 to 91%). For fewer than one percent of intervals, neither the teacher nor the parent were speaking.

Post-Intervention

As can be seen in Figure 1, after the implementation of the PIQUE strategy by the teacher, there was an increase in family member speaking and a decrease in teacher speaking. Post-intervention, the parent was coded as “speaking” for an average of 34% of the intervals (range 30-40%). The teacher was coded as “speaking” for an average of 66% of the intervals (range 60-70%). Again, the intervals that neither the teacher or the parent were speaking was less than one percent. A demonstration of effect was achieved for the single dyad as the parent had an increase in 5-second intervals of speaking of 18% which exceeds the 10% required for an effect.

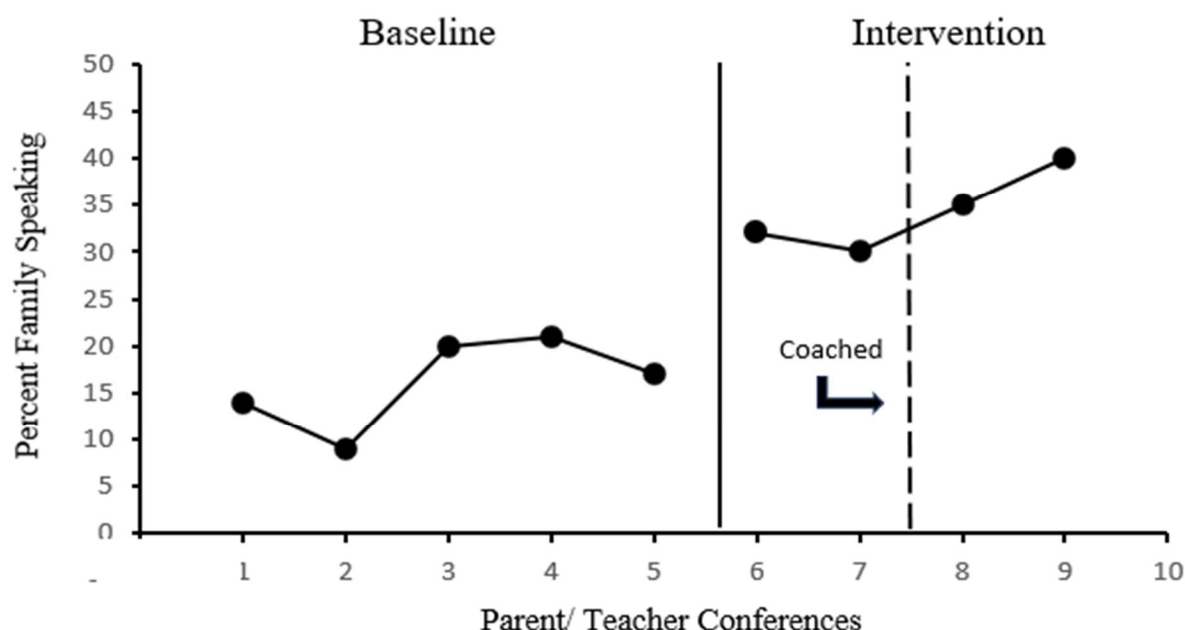


FIGURE 2 - Percentage of Family Speaking

An immediate change in the percentage of 5-second intervals the family member was speaking could be seen after implementation of the PIQUE strategy by the teacher. Within traditional single case designs, the immediate change in dependent variable after the introduction of the independent variable does clearly indicate a change in targeted behavior (Ledford & Gast, 2018). However, since this study had only one participant, these results should be interpreted with caution. In addition to the immediacy of change, no overlap can be seen between baseline and intervention, which lends confidence to the findings. The intervention data has an accelerating trend direction as compared to baseline. Variability within each of the baseline and intervention phases was slight, as the data points all remained within a 12% range for both phases.

The primary assumption that could impact validity of these findings is that the implementation of PIQUE by the teacher was the primary reason for change in the 5-second intervals of the family member speaking. However, it is also possible that the number of

conferences and that they happened weekly impacted change in the 5-second intervals of parent speaking. These possible influences may impact the relationship between the teacher and family rather than PIQUE itself. The comfort level of the family member might have influenced the percentage of their speaking intervals as well.

In addition to the percentage of 5-second intervals that the parent was speaking, data were collected on the type of speaking (either question or comment). During the baseline period, the median number of questions the teacher asked of the parent was 4 (range 1-8). However, during the intervention period, the median number of questions the teacher asked the parent was 9.5 (range 4-16) (Figure 3). After conference #7, the teacher received additional coaching by the researcher on their implementation of PIQUE and the next conference resulted in more questions being asked and more speaking by the parent. It is possible that the implementation of PIQUE positively impacted teacher and parent behavior during the conferences, especially asking open-ended questions and engaging in understanding through active listening.

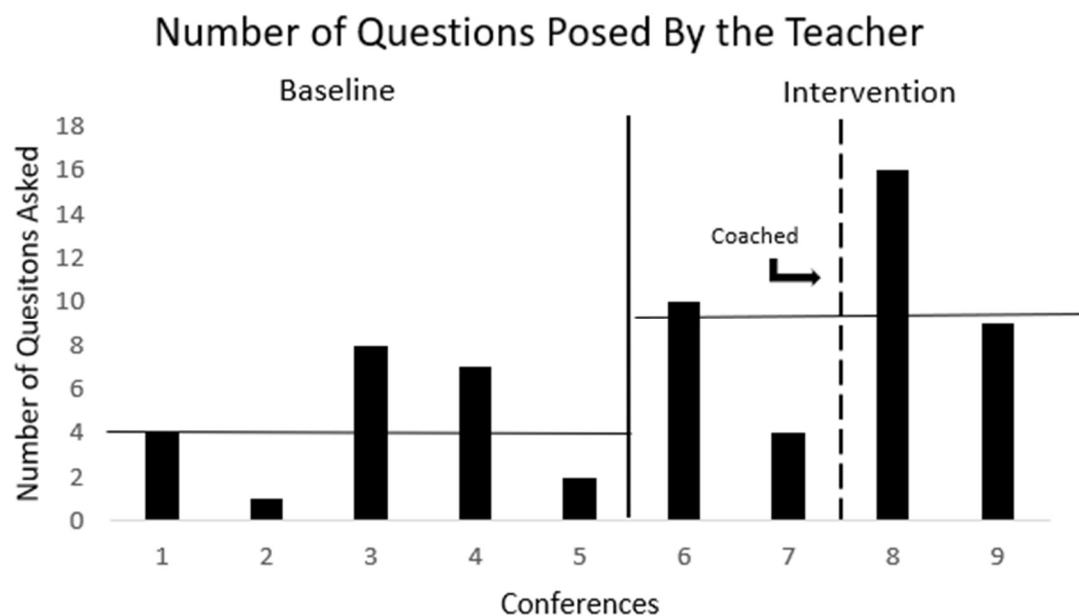


FIGURE 3 - Graph of Number of Questions Asked by Teacher

I also calculated the number of questions asked by the parent during each conference. The parent had asked a median of two questions in the conferences before the intervention and was not noted to ask any questions after the implementation of the intervention. Several assumptions can be made about this reduction in question-asking by the parent. One assumption is that when the teacher implemented the PIQUE strategy, the parent was given more opportunity to share information about her child and therefore, did not need to ask as many questions of the teacher. Another assumption may be that with more structure to the conference, the parent did not feel the need to “fill time” with additional questions, or help guide the conversations with questions about her child. Regardless of the reason, the data does demonstrate that as teacher questions increased, parent questions decreased.

Research Question 2: Did teacher beliefs regarding family involvement/ engagement change after the intervention?

Both before and after the study, the teacher completed a short teacher beliefs survey. The survey consisted of five questions addressing the teacher’s beliefs about family engagement. After the survey was completed, I interviewed the teacher participant and asked her to expand on her answers to the survey. Results for this question involve analysis of the Teacher Beliefs Survey, the interviews and both descriptive and inferential field notes.

Survey Results

The teacher beliefs survey results showed some change in the teacher’s responses after the intervention compared to before the intervention. On two questions, the teacher had the same answer on both the pre-and post-intervention survey. On three questions, her answers changed on the pre- and post- intervention responses (Table 1). The responses that changed included her response to “why” parents may not be involved/ engaged and if involvement and engagement

can be increased. The teacher also shared that after the study, she finds that family involvement/ engagement is “very” important to study success as compared to her response as “moderately” important before the study.

TABLE 1 – Teacher Survey Responses (Pre/ Post Intervention)



Survey Question	Pre-study answer	Post-study answer
In your experience, on average, how frequently do parents participate in classroom or school related activities?	Several times a year	Several times a year
In your opinion, how important is parent involvement/ engagement to student success?	Moderately important	Very important
In your opinion, can parental involvement/ engagement be increased?	No	Yes
In your opinion, what are the reasons that parents may not be involved/ engaged?	Knowledge	Time
How does collaboration with your student’s parents impact your ability to be a good teacher?	Moderate impact	Moderate impact

Interview Results

Thematic analysis of interview results led to two primary themes: “Misunderstanding Communication as Equal to Engagement” and “Bias as a Barrier to Engagement”. A secondary theme of “Lack of Confidence When Engaging with Families” is also reviewed. Qualitative analysis took place over four weeks and themes were developed and refined through repeated review and consultation with critical peers.

Misunderstanding Communication as Equal to Engagement. Each question on the interview focused on the teacher's beliefs towards parental involvement and engagement. Recall that involvement and engagement are related to the family participating in school activities and working as equal partners to support student outcomes, however, the teacher answered questions with responses about how she communicated with families. Her interpretation of parental involvement as likened to "communication" became the first pattern identified through the pre-intervention interview. Communication from teacher to parent was mentioned many times during the interview and even though requested, there appeared to be little response from parents. For example, when asked what types of things parents in her classroom tend to be involved in, she replied:

We have our daily notes home that we complete every day and we really encourage parents to communicate with us in those and then also through email and a lot of parents have my personal number so they will text me or they will email me some parents communicate a lot more and there is a bit of a better relationship with some parents and then some parents don't communicate as much and then you kind of have to really have to dig into questions to get answers from them...

When asked to expand on her response that collaboration with parents has a "moderate" effect on her ability to be a good teacher, she stated:

I think kind of how I interpreted that even if the parents are responding or not responding I'm going to continue communicating on the same level as we have been whether I notice there is not as much communication I'll try and communicate even further, reach out over email several times, reach out, over text if need to just kind of depending on the parent and the question. Writing those notes home, a phone call, and if I'm able to, in-person;

that's kind of how I interpreted it and even if the parents are involved or not, I'm still going to continue the same level of my communication and if I need to, kind of increase some more in different modes.

Given her responses to questions about family involvement and engagement, the teacher may not truly understand how involvement and engagement are defined nor have seen good examples of how this collaboration can be accomplished. The teacher seemed to answer questions about engagement with the family through discussion of her communication efforts. Anecdotal notes taken during the intervention training provides additional evidence. Two things that appeared to be missing from her responses was any focus on a partnership between teachers and parents in which two-way communication and problem solving occurs and there is no mention of how her efforts impact student success. During the PIQUE training, a review of definitions of family involvement and engagement were shared. During the training discussion, the teacher said she found the definitions interesting and she had never before considered the differences in terms.

In addition to providing families with information, the teacher also shared that she asked questions to encourage engagement. When discussing this the teacher stated "...then some parents don't communicate as much and then you kind of have to really have to dig into questions to get answers from them...". An examination of field notes from the baseline conferences indicated that the questions that the teacher asked of parents during baseline mostly required "yes" or "no" answers or were questions to request information about the child's health or personal needs. Examples of questions the teacher asked during baseline included: "Are they (ABA) required to give him a break?", "Does he have other ABA goals?", "Have you ever considered a communication device?", "Does that make sense?", "Any other questions?". There was no evidence during baseline that the teacher was seeking shared decision making or

responsibility for student success, either of which would have supported family engagement. This supports the notion that the teacher may misinterpret engagement as not only sharing information but gathering basic information from families through simple questioning.

During the intervention, the teacher was required to ask open-ended questions of the parent to more completely understand the family's experiences with their child at home and how this information can be incorporated at school to improve student success. During the post-intervention interview, the teacher shared that her knowledge of involvement and engagement has changed through this process. When asked how it had changed, she said through the use of the open-ended questions. I asked the teacher how that had helped and she stated, "it's allowed the parent the opportunity to open up more instead of my just asking yes/ no questions, it allows room for more information." Support of this notion was also seen through the descriptive and inferential field notes and the qualitative data. The parent did speak more during the conference after the intervention had been implemented and the topic of these conversations were mostly about issues the family is having at home and sharing of support the student receives outside of school. The parent also shared that she had tried strategies the teacher had suggested and how they had worked for the student at home. This does indicate a shift in the family's responses as compared to during the baseline period when the parent asked more questions of the teacher but was not given an opportunity to provide more information through two-way communication and problem solving.

Bias as a Barrier to Engagement. The second theme revolved around the teacher's assumptions and possible bias through her description of families and how they respond to their child's disability. During the pre-intervention survey, the teacher indicated that "knowledge" was likely the reason many parents are not involved or engaged. As a follow up to that question,

during the pre-intervention interview, several statements were made by the teacher that may represent a deficit view of the family's knowledge and experience. For example:

...like kids who have disabilities a lot of parents when they are in the process, especially like preschool to kindergarten, they don't know a lot of the information...they just listen to what we are telling them, not always understanding what they are being told whether it's the language or it is the overwhelmingness of it all.

Also:

Parents may or may not know what to do in that sense. So, I think it's just knowing that and knowing their rights and knowledge about autism in general and then also kind of trying to find different ways to accommodate their kid.

Within these examples lies what appears to be an assumption about many families that the lack of knowledge and understanding drives how much the families may engage with schools. While practicing this assumption, teachers may deny themselves the benefit of in-depth knowledge of the family's experiences with their child. Alternately, when this knowledge is drawn upon, it may positively impact student success (Tran, 2014).

The teacher's assumptions move beyond her assumptions of the family's knowledge about their child's disability. During the pre-intervention interview, she expresses an assumption that the family does not understand the breadth of her responsibilities in the classroom. The teacher shared:

I think a lot of it is just not understanding or knowing the setup of the class and knowing I have 13 kids so that's a lot of kids we have to keep up with unfortunately we cannot always cater to one specific kid and what they want.

When making this statement, the teacher infers that families do not consider the needs of others in the classroom, rather, only have concern for their own child. This assumption has a negative connotation and may impact the teacher's willingness to engage in more collaborative efforts with families.

Another important factor within this study and a factor that may have influenced the teacher's opinions as reported within the interview, was the family's culture, which differed from the teacher's culture. In the interview, the teacher mentioned the family culture inferring a negative connotation rather than viewing the difference as a possible strength. Statements in the interview included:

I think a lot of people have said that it could be the culture. My families are from where they kind of keep things tight lipped, if that makes sense, and if there are some culture difference with me being a female teacher and the dads there is some difference with that and just wanting to do things their way...

Another example:

Just because this setting is much more demanding, we are asking them to do a lot more than they typically would be asked to at home especially with non-preferred tasks so we see a lot more behaviors with that so a lot of parents are sometimes are like, oh we don't see that at home and again a lot of parents from the culture that my families are from as well, there is some level of denial they kind of just brush things aside which is kind of upsetting or they blame it on something else and they don't really want to talk more any more about it or brainstorm so sometimes that is disheartening...

Making the assumption that families are in "denial" or just "don't want to talk" about issues concerning their child, may influence teacher actions. During the final interview, the teacher

stated that she was beginning to learn a lot more about the student's home life. I inferred while taking the field notes, that the relationship between the teacher and parent had been strengthened. In addition, the quantitative data supports that the parent is speaking more during the conferences, which in turn, supports that the teacher is listening more. Finally, during the post-survey, the teacher changed her answer about why families may not be involved and engaged from "knowledge" to "time". These reflections throughout the conferences support the notion that the teacher may be seeking to understand more about the student's life outside of the classroom, which may help her be more culturally responsive.

Secondary Theme

Lack of Confidence When Engaging with Families. Throughout the interviews the teacher referenced not always feeling comfortable in meeting with families. She is in her second year of teaching and implied she does not have an extensive amount of experience in collaboration with families. An example of the teacher's self-appraisal when asked if most meetings were in person or virtual the teacher stated, "Most of them choose virtual, which I like because in person makes me very nervous because I started when all the meetings were virtual. I think I've only had like one or two meetings in person". This answer speaks to her inexperience and discomfort in meeting with families in person which became the third theme of the pre-intervention interview.

During the post intervention interview, when asked about her comfort level and how that may have changed throughout the study, the teacher indicated that she does feel more confident in her interactions with the parent. She stated,

I think having a better idea of how to run the meeting has given me more confidence instead of like in the beginning it was like what do I say? What do I do? But now that has

helped the confidence a little because it helps drive the conversations so if we get off topic a little bit, it helps drive the next point.

Through using PIQUE, the teacher was provided with a structure and order to the meeting that appeared to assist her in gaining meaningful information and having direction for supporting student success. The perceived impact of PIQUE on the teacher's confidence increased the parent's during the conferences as measured through parent speaking intervals. Using PIQUE helped the teacher to plan the conference to efficiently give her information, then invite engagement by the parent through open-ended questions and active listening.

Descriptive and inferential field notes supported the notion that the teacher felt more confident after holding multiple conferences with the parent. The field notes contained documentation of the teacher and parent collaborating when enacting a plan between conferences (the last step of PIQUE in each conference), sharing positive stories and experiences with the student, and even through their shared laughter over his sometimes-mischievous acts. The documentation of these actions and the teacher's increasing confidence were noted in the field notes throughout the study, however, most especially after the implementation of PIQUE when the teacher had a specific plan for the conference. Additionally, it was inferred from my notes that the teacher may have been more relaxed and confident when she shared the "information providing" opportunities with the parent through asking open-ended questions and engaging in active listening. Specific notes from the observations included: "the teacher appeared more relaxed", "the teacher had a plan", "the parent spoke for 65-seconds straight and this was the first time that had happened", and "the teacher allowed wait time for the parent to speak". Through this change, the teacher did not seem as nervous about "filling the time" of the conference with information, but seemed more confident and comfortable in allowing the parent to add input.

Research Question 3: Social Validity: Do families' perceptions about the value of family/teacher conferences change after intervention as compared to before the intervention?

Both before and after the study, the parent completed a family questionnaire about engagement with their child's teacher. This questionnaire included twelve statements about engagement with their child's teacher and the parent indicated the statement was "not in place", "partially in place" or "in place". On the pre-study questionnaire, the parent said that all statements were "in place" with the exception of the following statement, "I am a collaborative member of my child's education". For this statement, the parent indicated that this statement was "partially" in place.

After the post-study questionnaire, I conducted an interview with the parent to follow up on her responses. I initially asked her why she indicated that her being a collaborative member of her child's education was only "partially" in place at the beginning of the study. She stated,

Ms. M [teacher] is very good at communicating the progress like how he is doing with the goals we have in his IEP during I would say doing those IEP meetings only we don't regularly have we don't have the opportunity to add any goals. So maybe that's why I put "partially" because we just get one a year usually like IEP meetings unless we have anything we need to discuss.

I inferred from this statement that not only do the parents not have an opportunity to collaborate often, but when they do meet with the teacher, they are not always asked to contribute in a meaningful way.

During this interview, the parent shared that she now considered her role as a collaborative member of her child's education to be "in place". When I asked her what had changed throughout the conferences, she replied,

How, at the beginning I was expecting the questions that come to me that I have to like based on what we have at the school experienced, but it is more we are talking about my son and you are taking the notes from that. From my end, [it's] really good that I am getting another extra opportunity to talk about [the student] and his progress.

Additionally, when asked if she thinks her collaboration with the teacher will continue to be strong after she is not meeting each week, she stated,

Right, yes, I would say because this year, my son has many issues in school because they had to send him in the middle of the day (modified day) because like, they were not able to manage him or keep him in the school but now he is definitely doing a good progress so yeah, I'm also trying to collect the data whenever possible [the teacher] has [shared] on positive behavior so they can try those at home.

From this statement, I concluded that the parent feels more comfortable in her collaboration with the teacher and feels it will continue in the future. The parent also shared that this was a “very positive experience”. At the end of the final conference, the teacher and parent agreed the conferences had been of benefit to them both and that they would like to continue meeting every other week.

Research Question 4: Social Validity: Did teachers find the conferencing strategy an efficient and beneficial tool to use to promote engagement with families?

After the conclusion of the study, the teacher completed a reflection on the conferencing strategy, PIQUE. There were four questions and the teacher could reply with the following: Not really, kind of, mostly, or absolutely. When the teacher was asked if she found PIQUE easy to understand and implement, the teacher replied “absolutely”. The study supports her reflection in

that she was able to implement PIQUE with consistency and responded positively when coaching was supplied.

Another question asked if the teacher found that using the PIQUE strategy helped her to build relationships with her student's family and she also replied "absolutely". During the interview, the teacher also mentioned that this process has strengthened her relationship with the family by encouraging her to ask more open-ended questions that led to the family sharing more information about the student's home life. Finally, the teacher was asked if she plans to continue using PIQUE during conferences with families and she also replied, "absolutely". Also during the interview, she shared that having a strategy helps the conference stay on task and targeted to the needs of the student.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate in-service teachers' use of a step-by-step strategy during parent/ teacher conferences to increase parent engagement during the conference and positively impact teacher beliefs on the value or importance of parent involvement and engagement. Research has repeatedly demonstrated the positive impacts of parent engagement on student outcomes and has identified parent engagement as a best practice in special education (Fan et al., 2011; Jeynes, 2017; Smith et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2011). In this study, parent engagement was measured as “speaking” behavior in the context of parent-teacher conferences. Specifically, this study sought to determine if in-service special education teachers' implementation of a conferencing strategy during parent/ teacher conferences increased the percentage of 5-second intervals in which the parent was speaking, thereby increasing engagement through parents asking questions about their child's educational plan and giving more detail in answering questions posed by the teachers. An additional research question was if teacher beliefs regarding the value of parental involvement and engagement changed after the intervention. Finally, social validity questions included: (a) do parents' beliefs about the value of parent/ teacher conferences change after intervention? and (b) did teachers find the conferencing strategy an efficient and beneficial tool to use to promote engagement with parents?

Primary Research Questions

Research Question 1: Does an in-service special education teacher's implementation of a conferencing strategy increase the percentage of 5-second intervals in which the family member is speaking during family/ teacher conferences?

This study was conducted with one special education teacher and one parent of a student in their self-contained special education classroom. After baseline was taken and shown to be

stable, teachers were trained in implementation of the PIQUE conferencing strategy. Baseline data, prior to the introduction of the PIQUE conferencing intervention, showed the average percentage of 5-second intervals in which the parent was speaking to be 16 percent and the teacher intervals speaking at 84 percent.

Visual analysis of the effects of teachers' use of the PIQUE conferencing strategy on parent engagement showed an immediate increase of the 5-percent intervals of the parent speaking once the intervention was implemented, with an accelerating trend. Intervention data showed an increase in parent speaking to an average of 34% and a decrease of teacher speaking to 66% of 5-second intervals. Although these results should be interpreted with caution given the non-experimental design, there is some evidence that the teacher's use of the PIQUE strategy may have had an impact on the percentage of 5-second intervals in which the parent was speaking. To the extent that "speaking" represents "engagement", this increase supports an increase in parental engagement and potentially more equitable contributions to problem solving during the conference.

Additionally, it was noted that the teacher almost doubled the number of questions asked of the parent in conferences after the intervention training as compared to the baseline; this finding was despite having one fewer post-training conference. Intentionally seeking parent input has been identified through research as a way to encourage engagement by parents (Carlson et al., 2020). By asking questions, the teacher helped to put the parent in a more central position as a support to their child's learning, which aligns with the goal of engagement (de Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto, 2019). Since the parent increased the proportion of intervals in which they were speaking post-PIQUE training, it may be inferred, with caution, that the strategy increased parent engagement with the teacher.

Promoting Partnership with Parents to Enact Engagement. In order to meet the requirements of the law and most importantly, meet the needs of students, schools and teachers are charged with promoting engagement with parents. Tran (2014) found that to effectively communicate with parents, teachers must use open communication skills and help families make connections between home and school. Within this study, there is some evidence to suggest that through use of the conferencing strategy, a more equal partnership and better relationship was developed between the teacher and parents. In the current study this was accomplished through more equitable verbal contributions by both parent and teacher during the conferences, changes in the teacher's beliefs regarding involvement and engagement, and a desire of both the teacher and parent to continue meeting and working together on a more regular basis. This finding aligns with research that identified higher level conferencing [with a structured method] resulted in more positive relationships between parents and teachers (Minke et al., 2014).

According to the theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, a focus on shared responsibility of the teacher and family is priority (Epstein, 1990). When parents and teachers engage in shared responsibility, they may also benefit from a more comfortable relationship with each other. Epstein (1995) also states, "Just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful about trying. This creates a "rhetoric rut," in which educators are stuck, expressing support for partnerships without taking any action" (p.4).

Through research, it has been noted that teachers do the majority of talking during conferences (Alasuutari & Karila, 2009). However, the *Every Student Succeed Act* (2015) encourages two-way communication between the teacher and family, to provide for equal opportunities in decision making. Through the use of PIQUE, the teacher was required to take

action to promote positive involvement and engagement with families, for example, by asking open-ended questions that allowed the family to provide more information about strategies they had found helpful at home. Teachers' abilities in engaging families could be strengthened through focused preparation that includes questioning and listening techniques and additional experience with families.

Research Question 2: Did teacher beliefs regarding family involvement and engagement change after the intervention?

Teachers' beliefs before and after the use of the PIQUE conferencing strategy parent conferences changed in several ways. Post-study, the teacher no longer cited lack of knowledge as a possible barrier to families being engaged, rather, cited that a lack of time may impact family involvement and engagement. Additionally, the teacher went from considering family involvement "moderately" important to being "very" important. This aligns with research which identifies factors which may negatively impact teacher efforts in encouraging family engagement as their beliefs about the usefulness of family engagement and their feeling that families do not have the knowledge to understand school processes (Whitbread et al., 2007). In addition, the teacher's pre-conference survey responses align with prior research in which some teachers have been found to take family engagement for granted or rely on assumptions about families that limit engagement (Pushor & Amendt, 2018; Simmons, 2002). This statement is supported by the changes in the teacher's responses on the post-intervention survey which placed more value on engagement with families through changing her mind about the importance of engagement and changing her assumptions that time, rather than a lack of knowledge, may be why the family was not engaged. This response aligns with prior research that identifies "time" as a possible barrier to family engagement (Al-Dababneh, 2018; Baker et al., 2016; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). By

asking questions, the teacher is better able to understand barriers and challenges the family may face, engage in problem solving and better understand the goal and perspectives of the family (Brandon et al., 2021; Cheatham & Lim-Mullis, 2018; Dempsey et al., 2005; Symonds, 2020).

Importance of Power Balance Between Teachers and Parents. Achieving a balance of power between teachers and families continues to be a discussion in schools and a question within research (Baeck, 2010; Deslandes et. al., 2015). Discussions about decisions made to support students should demonstrate equal balance between teachers and families (Connor & Cavendish, 2018). Many times, these discussions occur within parent/ teacher conferences. The current study explores the impact of PIQUE on parent engagement during conferences. One way that PIQUE may have successfully influenced parent speaking is by encouraging more equitable and shared responsibility and the balance of power. PIQUE was designed, in part, to support balance of power by including actions by the teacher that invited more participation and input from the parent. This aligns with research conducted by Graham et al. (2021) which concludes that schools who have open clear lines of communication support families in pro-actively advocating for their children. Indeed, findings suggested that when the teacher used the PIQUE strategy, families did increase their verbal participation and did provide more input into the discussions of the student's success and challenges.

Other studies have examined positions of power within a school setting and the unique role of parents in that hierarchy. Some research suggests that schools use parents' knowledge of their children in order to gain some access to their power and give them more power within schools (Fenton et al., 2017). This is not possible, however, if there is not a context set up to allow for such sharing of information. As noted, traditional teacher conferences primarily consist of the teacher sharing information and doing the majority of the talking (Alasuutari & Karila,

2009; Lemmer, 2012). However, the PIQUE structure allows for specific invitation from teachers for the family's input of information and the opportunity to engage in shared problem solving through the open-ended questioning, active listening strategies and development of a plan of action. Additionally, parents may not share their knowledge when they do not realize that they have valuable knowledge to share, or when they (and/or the teacher) views the teacher or the school as the holder of knowledge. Social Capital Theory states that resources, which may include an exchange of information or knowledge from both teacher and parents can be networked to support student success (Ferrara, 2015; Ream & Palardy, 2008). Unfortunately, teachers may not recognize the value of the social capital that families possess and how this can promote student success.

Cultural Differences. Cultural differences have been cited in the literature as a factor, and at times a barrier, impacting parent engagement (Tran, 2014; Zhang et al., 2011). Through this study, the teacher shared some assumptions about the family's culture that may have been impacting her engagement efforts before the study. The family's culture was mentioned by the teacher in the pre-interview as a reason that the family may not be engaged with her. These statements implied some bias towards the family although also implied the bias was unintentional. Tran (2014) stated that teachers may limit their communication efforts and engagement with families when they do not understand or feel comfortable interacting with families with a different cultural background than their own. Demonstrating respect for and attempting to better understand cultural differences should be a priority when promoting true collaboration in which families and teachers are viewed as an equal partner (Zhang et al., 2011). Through exploring more thoroughly the value of cultural capital and understanding how to use this capital with the family and student may be of potential benefit to the teacher when engaging

with this family and others. In addition, being aware of potential bias towards those with different cultures than our own can lead to learning to examine interactions through a different lens that may help to lead to more effective engagement (Dray & Wisneski, 2011; Garcia et al., 2016).

Considerations from Findings

Continued Teacher Preparation and Practice in Promoting Engagement

Although many teacher-preparation programs have now included content related to parent engagement as part of their coursework, many in-service teachers may not have had initial or continuing professional development opportunities focused on facilitation of effective communication with families (Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Training may be necessary to encourage parent engagement to support more favorable outcomes for students. Continued training for in-service teachers has been recommended as an important next step to creating teacher self-efficacy through research focusing on parental involvement (Green et al., 2007; Garcia, 2004; Tran, 2014). In this study, once the teacher had received training on how to invite parent engagement, the parent's engagement, via speaking, increased. The resulting increase in parent speaking represented more contribution by the parent and promoted a greater partnership in solving problems by both the parent and teacher. This finding supports prior research findings that teachers need to be trained to engage in critical and targeted conversations with families which has been found to increase family engagement (Fishman & Nickson, 2015; Leenders et al., 2019).

More focus on teacher preparation programs may also positively impact teacher comfort in supporting and engaging with families. During reflection on her use of PIQUE during the conferences, the teacher stated that the strategy had made her feel more comfortable because it

provided a structure on which she could rely during the conferences. The teacher's perception of her abilities is important and has been seen to predict parent engagement (Garcia, 2004). Specifically, teachers who display self-efficacy and intentionally seek out parental input tend to facilitate more engagement from families (Carlson et al., 2020; Garcia, 2004). Through teacher preparation programs having a greater emphasis on predictors of family involvement and strategies to increase engagement, teachers will have the tools necessary to facilitate engagement with the families of the students in their classrooms. This supports prior research about increased family engagement when teachers are provided with tools to facilitate their collaboration with families (Goodall, 2018; Houry et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2008; Novak et al., 2009; Yulianti et al., 2022).

Teachers' levels of confidence are important drivers of parent engagement. The Invitational Theory builds upon three foundations including democratic ethos, self-concept theory and perceptual tradition (Purkey & Novak, 2021). This theory highlights understanding of the important contributions of others to collaborative efforts. It also focuses on the validity of other's experiences and how one should seek this information when collaborating (Purkey & Novak, 2015). As noted, one of the foundations of Invitation Theory is self-concept theory which includes components of self-image and self-esteem, which when positive, may lead to greater confidence in many educational areas (Yeung et al., 2014). Without comfort and confidence in engaging with families, the teacher may not invite participation as often. The practical implication of this finding is that development of teacher self-concept, through provision of training, tools, and experience, may support increased family engagement from teachers for both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Social Validity

Research Question 3: Do families' perceptions about the value of family/ teacher conferences change after intervention as compared to before the intervention?

The results of the parents' questionnaire and follow-up interview regarding engagement with their child's teacher showed that the parent found collaborative efforts to be in place with the teacher after the intervention, whereas before the study, the parent found efforts to be only partially in place. In addition, after the final conference, the parent specifically requested to continue meeting more regularly with the teacher and stated that participation in the conferences had been a very positive experience. Finally, the parent shared that through the meetings with the teacher, she was learning a lot of strategies she could incorporate at home.

In this study, the teacher played a leading role in the encouragement of the families to engage-- that is, she *invited* the engagement through holding repeated conferences, and within those conferences, through enacting each of the PIQUE elements. Notably, through the strategies outlined in PIQUE, parents are asked open ended questions with follow up exploration of details through active listening. PIQUE supports the teacher to encourage the parent to speak more during the conference, therefore, engaging with more information and detail. When teachers create an inviting atmosphere that is more conducive for parent engagement, it has been shown to enhance a parent's sense of comfort in being a part of their child's education (Arnold et al., 2008). As could be seen through the sentiments of the parent after the conclusion of the study, the teacher and parent were able to work to develop strategies to more effectively and fully support the student, especially with his behavior at home and school. Positive results of this collaboration included increased time for the student at school (he had been on a modified day due to behavior) and more manageable behavior at home with his family.

Collaboration between families of children with disabilities and their teachers is critical for supporting positive student outcomes (Arnold et al., 2008; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Fan & Williams, 2010; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Ma, X. et al., 2016; Powell et al., 2010). According to Collaborative Theory (Colbry et al., 2014). It is primarily the teacher's responsibility to develop pathways for engagement of families in their child's education. Collaborative Theory's focus is sharing responsibility and seeking to understand other's perceptions. Sharing of responsibility and consideration of others perceptions are important parts of partnerships between teachers and families which have been noted to positively impact student outcomes (Ma et al, 2016). Evidence from the quantitative results and information from the teacher and parent interviews, suggest that PIQUE may have supported teachers in developing opportunities and pathways for family engagement, and that the parent involved in work toward a common goal for student success. This engagement is paramount in meeting the demands of IDEA (2004) and especially important when supporting SWD as decision making in special education is built upon the team concept (Hirano et al., 2016).

Research Question 4: Did teachers find the conferencing strategy an efficient and beneficial tool to use to promote engagement with families?

The results of the teachers' questionnaires about the PIQUE conferencing strategy showed that the teacher found the strategy to be beneficial in the conferences by providing the conference structure. She also shared that the strategy supported her to ask more open-ended questions which led to learning more about the family's home life and community support. Finally, the teacher had a very positive view of the PIQUE strategy and indicated that she found it very helpful during the conference and plans to use it during future conferences and other meetings with families. PIQUE provides a structure for conferences which aligns with

recommendations from prior research related to keeping conferences focused and effective (Darch et al., 2004).

Specific Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to research by presenting a case study on parent engagement with teachers with both quantitative, although non-experimental, and qualitative evidence. An existing gap in prior research is that the research rarely focuses on strategies for in-service teachers to use when promoting engagement for parents of students with disabilities. Most research is targeted to pre-service teachers. In this study, an in-service teacher successfully learned and implemented a parent engagement strategy with fidelity and success. Therefore, the strategy could be incorporated into ongoing professional development for in-service teachers as a way to support their efforts with family engagement as required by law (IDEA, 2004). Training on the PIQUE strategy is time efficient and potentially can be transferred and used throughout a variety of meetings with families.

Existing research has a strong database supporting parental engagement as one predictor of student success in school (Arnold et al., 2008; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Fan & Williams, 2010; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Ma, X. et al., 2016; Powell et al., 2010). With a strategy, such as PIQUE, teachers are supported to truly collaborate with families, and support family engagement in educational decision making for their child. PIQUE encourages teachers to ask open-ended questions and engage in understanding parental viewpoints by engaging in active listening. These strategies serve to invite the family to be a partner in their child's education rather than primarily an observer with a goal of positive impact on student success. Research on actionable strategies that in-service teachers can use to increase parental engagement is limited, however, this study provides some preliminary evidence that such strategies can be effective.

Another contribution of the study is that using the PIQUE strategy may support teachers in reconsidering any non-constructive beliefs they hold about parental engagement. Through the pre- and post-study interviews with the teacher, several changes were seen in her beliefs towards engagement. Most notably were the changes in her understanding of the definition of engagement, the increased value she placed on collaboration with families and her comfort in participating in these conversations. Understanding the facilitators of family engagement, such as teacher self-efficacy and perceptions, direct and targeted two-way discussions, and intentionally seeking family engagement will support teachers in engaging families (Baker et al., 2016; Fishman & Nickson, 2015; Leenders et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2008). Through the training and use of PIQUE, the teacher's beliefs about parental engagement were changed in some significant ways that helped her more fully understand the facilitators and importance of family engagement. Thus, this study contributes to the literature by providing an actionable strategy that may not only increase family engagement, but through the process, move teachers towards a more positive opinion of the value of partnerships with families.

Finally, some evidence supports that the use of the PIQUE strategy during conferences can positively impact parent beliefs regarding engagement with their child's teacher. In this study, the parent's beliefs about engagement only changed in one area, but it was meaningful. At the end of the study the parent felt that collaboration with her child's teacher was in place fully, rather than partially. The parent requested to continue meeting more frequently and collaborating on her child's successes and challenges. Through this research and the use of PIQUE, the teacher's self-efficacy was inferred to have been increased, the family and teacher relationship has shown signs of positivity and the teacher was more prepared engaging the family which are all predictors of family engagement (Fishman & Nickson, 2015; Garcia, 2004; Minke et al.,

2014; Murray et al., 2008). This finding contributes to the literature by adding to the body of research regarding predictors and facilitators of parental engagement.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Methodological Limitations

Study findings should be considered in light of several limitations. First, the study focused on one parent of a student with extensive support needs. Parents of this population of students may be more involved in their child's education naturally due to the amount of special education they receive as a result of the significance of their disability, therefore potentially receiving support across multiple areas. Due to the frequency and level of support that may be required, parents may naturally have more questions and/ or concerns for teachers. Likewise, teachers may have more information to share with the parents as well. Therefore, it is possible that teachers are naturally more engaged with families. This limitation can be addressed by replicating this study with SWD across all settings.

Another focus of future research that would address the limitation of the sample size, would be to recruit larger groups of participants and implement the original single case design. Obviously, research involving more participants will strengthen the external validity of the study. This change in research method would lend confidence to the results and potentially contribute to causal claims found through the study.

The use of a quantitative, yet non-experimental AB design limits this study, primarily the fact that no causal claims can be made about the impact of PIQUE on parent engagement. The AB design has weak external validity due to threats of history and confounding effects. One alternative interpretation of findings could be that parent engagement increased as a result of the frequency of conferences. That is, that meeting with the teacher more frequently improved

engagement and PIQUE was unrelated. Nevertheless, the immediacy of the data change and accelerating trend in intervals speaking by the parent after the introduction of the PIQUE strategy during the conferences by the teacher point to a very possible impact of the strategy. Additionally, information from both the teacher and parent indicated a greater sense of collaboration and engagement during the intervention period of the study. Although frequency of the conferences may have impacted the results, the data would support that the teacher's use of the PIQUE strategy added quality to the conferences. Future research should focus on the use of the PIQUE strategy during longer, but less frequent, parent/teacher conferences to determine if the strategy helped to increase parent engagement, rather than sheer the number of conferences. Evaluation of the use of PIQUE during different types of conferences (such as IEP meetings) would also yield some interesting information in future research.

Collecting data on maintenance of the strategy after the study would also provide important data to this research to determine if the strategy continues to be used and become a more standard part of the teacher's interactions with families. This might include investigating the teacher's use of PIQUE throughout the year and during subsequent years. Determining the amount of time, it requires for teachers to embed the PIQUE strategy into their partnerships with families, without additional prompts or coaching, would provide an interesting aspect to the effectiveness of the PIQUE strategy over time.

Additional Limitations

There are some questions regarding the feasibility of frequent parent-teacher conferences to support parent engagement. Recruitment of participants was difficult in this study, often due to the frequency of conferences required. Although the total amount of time required of teacher participants was less than six hours, many teachers indicated they did not want to take on

anything extra. Recruitment of families was also difficult as in a couple of cases, teachers were willing, but could not find a family participant. Future research should investigate the frequency of parent conferences using PIQUE needed to maximize effectiveness of improving parent engagement, while also maintaining feasibility for busy teachers and families. Additionally, special attention should be made to recruitment efforts, with consideration of ways to encourage participation. Consideration of a presentation on the benefits of engagement, which includes research-based studies to provide evidence of effectiveness, given to teachers and families may help motivate more participation.

A study examining the content of what is shared during the conferences should be an area to be explored more fully. Rather than only examining intervals that ended in speaking and if it was a question or comment, could be expanded into more fully studying what was said during the conferences and how this might impact student success. Since a causal relationship could not be clearly established as to the reason behind coinciding increase in teacher asking of questions to a decrease in the parent asking questions, future research centering on the content of the conferences would yield some useful information about engagement and the possible effects of PIQUE. Additionally, this study examined the PIQUE strategy as a whole, but future research could focus on which steps of PIQUE made the largest impact on family engagement.

Finally, longitudinal studies could be conducted to determine if the teacher's use of the strategy naturally generalized to other conferences or to determine if parent participants increased their overall engagement with their child's school after the study. Research specifically focused on the families and how they generalized their experiences during PIQUE conferences to their child's next teacher would shed light on the question of the value families place on and

the expectations they have of engagement after participating with a teacher in an equal partnership.

Implications for Practice

The PIQUE conferencing strategy is a method, created from recommendations in research, used to promote family engagement with teachers during any type of meeting related to student progress and areas of need. Positive aspects of PIQUE include that teachers can be trained and demonstrate fidelity rather quickly. In addition, PIQUE is an acronym that makes the strategy easy to remember during those times that teachers are engaging with parents. Through use of the strategy, teachers can encourage parents to engage to become more equal collaborative partners with teachers.

Although this strategy was developed for in-service teachers, it would be an easy strategy to incorporate into teacher preparation programs. Newer teachers would benefit from the ease of the training and use of PIQUE, however, would most likely require role play activities and ongoing coaching until mastered and maintained (Matsko et al., 2020). The use of this strategy may be useful in teacher preparation programs as a way to support teachers in their confidence when engaging with families and teaching them a way to encourage engagement by the family as well. These findings align and reinforce Garcia's (2004) study about teacher efficacy and family involvement in which the recommendations included giving pre-service teachers the experience and confidence they need to effectively engage families

Importance of Common Definitions and Goals

Although special education law requires schools to strengthen engagement with families through IDEA (2004), the definition of engagement is not always clear. The confusion over related terms such as collaboration, participation and involvement is frequently cited in literature

(Fenton et al., 2017; Ferlazzo, 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). This study adds more support to the notion of teachers confusing engagement with other actions. Through the teacher interview prior to the intervention, she consistently answered questions about involvement and engagement by talking about how she communicated with families and how families did not always communicate back with her. The communication was primarily one-way; this can also be seen through the data during baseline of the family/ teacher conferences before the implementation of PIQUE. Further explanation about what constitutes effective engagement merits continued research. Teachers (both pre-service and in-service) may benefit from examples of how engagement can look and how it can benefit teachers, parents and most especially students. This information could be shared during teacher preparation classes and through continuing professional development in the field. Within practice, teachers would gain knowledge and confidence to support parents in engagement with more information about how to make their conferences meaningful for all parties. In addition, finding ways to reduce the research to practice gap regarding parent engagement would potentially strengthen teacher skills in this area.

When promoting engagement with families, schools need to be specific as to what they are asking teachers to do and the goals of such engagement. Using these strategies may not only lead to more engagement with families but with more meaningful engagement with families. Through a conceptual model for special education secondary students and transition that Hirano & Rowe (2016) created, they encouraged teachers to view parents as decision-makers, collaborators and co-instructors. In order to do this, teachers must invite this interaction through their actions when meeting with families. Although PIQUE is a five-step strategy, the primary emphasis in the strategy is the teacher's use of open-ended questions and follow up with active

listening techniques. It is through these actions, that parents are invited to speak more during the conferences and share personal experiences and information about their child. Using PIQUE during interactions with families may assist teachers in more fully understanding the possibilities of family engagement so that they might set goals, designed to supplement student success, to accomplish during collaboration with the family.

Summary

This study was designed to explore the impact of the PIQUE strategy on family engagement during family/ teacher conferences and if teachers found PIQUE to be a feasible strategy to use. In addition, teacher and parent beliefs were examined both before and after the study. Findings supported the use of PIQUE as a potentially effective in increasing 5-second intervals of the family speaking during the conferences which led to problem-solving discussions between the teacher and parent. Both teacher and parent beliefs changed after the implementation of PIQUE in ways that further supported the notion that PIQUE may have had a positive impact on their beliefs towards collaboration with each other. The teacher found the PIQUE strategy to be easy to learn, understand and use. Although several limitations were noted due to the nature of the case study, this study contributes to the research with an example of a strategy that could potentially be used by teachers to increase engagement with families which may positively impact their beliefs in the value of collaborative partnerships.

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APPENDIX A – FAMILY RECRUITMENT

We are excited to invite you to participate in a study that is being conducted in partnership with UNC Charlotte. Your child's school principal is informed of and supportive of this study.

You were selected as a possible participant due to your child's teacher agreeing to participate in the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary, but I would love to take a moment to explain it to you so you can then decide if you would be a good candidate for participation in the study. If you decide to participate, I will provide a detailed consent form that contains additional information that you will sign and receive a copy of for future reference.

In this study, UNC Charlotte researchers are interested in learning more about Special Education teachers' use of a conferencing strategy. As you know, parent engagement is a part of the Family Engagement in Education Act (2015). This federal statute supports the importance of collaboration and calls for shared responsibility between schools and families to promote engagement. School board policy supports family engagement with schools as one of their core beliefs.

We are asking for four (4) special education teachers and four (4) family members of students in their classrooms to implement one parent/teacher virtual conference (maximum of 15 minutes) via the Zoom platform each week for 12-15 weeks. Participating teachers will conduct conferences as usual for a period of baseline and then be given professional development on a conferencing strategy and asked to conduct the remaining conferences using the strategy. Each conference will be video/ audio recorded for analysis after the conference.

Parent participants will be asked to participate in the conferences with their child's teacher each week and complete a questionnaire before and after the study. Each conference will be video/ audio recorded to analyze after the conference. We might share the video recordings with future teachers and researchers during research conferences, but we will not use your name or your child's name, teacher names, or the name of your school in the recordings. All recordings and identifying documents or information will be kept in a secured office at UNC Charlotte or through the UNC Charlotte secured Dropbox.

We are looking for parents of children receiving special education. Participation in the study will be 12-15 weeks. Parent participants will receive a \$50 gift card as incentive for participation and completion of the study (one gift card per family). Participating in the study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be a part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. Participants do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Paula Williams

UNC Charlotte PhD in Special Education Candidate

APPENDIX A – PRINCIPAL RECRUITMENT

We are excited to invite your school to participate in a study that is being conducted in partnership with UNC Charlotte. Participation in this study is voluntary, but I would love to take a moment to explain it to you. You can then decide if your school would be a good candidate for participation in the study. If teachers decide to participate, I will provide a detailed consent form that contains additional information that you will sign and receive a copy of for future reference. Teachers and family consent forms will also be made available.

Title of the Project: The Effects of Teachers' Use of a Conferencing Strategy on Family Engagement

In this study, UNC Charlotte researchers are interested in learning more about Special Education teachers' use of a conferencing strategy on parent engagement. As you know, parent engagement is a part of the Family Engagement in Education Act (2015). This federal statute supports the importance of collaboration and calls for shared responsibility between schools and families to promote engagement. School board policy supports family engagement with schools as one of their core beliefs.

We are asking for four (4) special education teachers and four (4) parents/ caregivers of students from their classrooms to implement one family/teacher virtual conference (maximum of 15 minutes) via Zoom each week for 12-15 weeks. Participating teachers will conduct conferences as usual for a period of baseline and then be given professional development on a conferencing strategy and asked to conduct the remaining conferences using the strategy. Each conference will be video/ audio recorded via zoom for analysis after the conference and stored in a secure UNC Charlotte Dropbox.

Teacher participants will receive virtual training on the conferencing strategy. Training will take approximately 1.5 hours on one day and will occur virtually. Video recordings of conferences will be coded to measure the amount of family engagement in the conference. The videos will also be analyzed for quality of teacher interaction and use of the strategy. Teachers will be asked to complete a "beliefs survey" about family engagement before and after the study. They will also be asked to complete a social validity questionnaire after the study. We might share the video recordings with future teachers and researchers during research conferences, but we will not use your name, teacher or parent names, or the name of your school in the recordings.

We are looking for special education teachers and families of students with an IEP. Participation in the study will be 12-20 weeks. Teacher and parent participants will receive a \$50 incentive for participation, plus any materials required. Participating in the study is voluntary. Even if teachers decide to be a part of the study now, they may change their mind and stop at any time. Participants do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Paula Williams
UNC Charlotte PhD in Special Education Candidate

APPENDIX A – TEACHER RECRUITMENT

We are excited to invite you to participate in a study that is being conducted in partnership with UNC Charlotte. Your school principal is informed of and supportive of this study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, but I would love to take a moment to explain it to you so you can then decide if you would be a good candidate for participation in the study. If you decide to participate, I will provide a detailed consent form that contains additional information that you will sign and receive a copy of for future reference. If you choose not to participate, your decision will in no way affect your employment status, your job, or your relationship with UNC Charlotte.

Title: The Effects of Teachers' Use of a Conferencing Strategy on Family Engagement.

In this study, UNC Charlotte researchers are interested in learning more about Special Education teachers' use of a conferencing strategy. As you know, parent engagement is a part of the Family Engagement in Education Act (2015). This federal statute supports the importance of collaboration and calls for shared responsibility between schools and families to promote engagement. School board policy supports family engagement with schools as one of their core beliefs.

We are asking for four (4) special education teachers and four (4) families of students in their classrooms to implement one parent/teacher virtual conference (maximum of 15 minutes) via a Zoom platform each week for 12-15 weeks. Participating teachers will conduct conferences as usual for a period of baseline and then be given professional development on a conferencing strategy and asked to conduct the remaining conferences using the strategy. Each conference will be video recorded via Zoom for analysis after the conference.

Teacher participants will receive virtual training on the conferencing strategy. Training will take approximately 1.5 hours and will be virtual. Video recordings of conferences will be coded to measure the amount of parent engagement in the conference. The videos will also be analyzed for quality of teacher interaction and use of the strategy. Teachers will be asked to complete a "beliefs survey" about parent engagement before and after the study. They will also be asked to complete a social validity questionnaire after the study. With specific consent, we might share the video recordings with future teachers and researchers during research conferences, but we will not use your name, parent names, or the name of your school in the recordings.

We are looking for special education teachers. Teacher and parent participants will receive a \$50 gift card incentive for participation, plus any materials required. Participating in the study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be a part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. Participants do not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Paula Williams

UNC Charlotte PhD in Special Education Candidate

APPENDIX B – FAMILY CONSENT

Family Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of the Project: The Effects of Teachers' Use of a Conferencing Strategy on Family Engagement

Principal Investigator: Paula Williams, MEd, University of North Carolina Charlotte

Faculty Advisor: Kristen Beach, PhD, University of North Carolina Charlotte

Co-PI: Ashley Anderson, MEd, University of North Carolina Charlotte

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you decide whether to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

The researchers are interested in the relationship between teachers and parents and measuring engagement during parent/ teacher conferences.

We are asking five (5) special education teachers and five (5) parents of students with disabilities (SWD) to schedule and engage in short (maximum of 15 minutes) conferences, before or after school, once per week for 12-20 weeks. Parents will be asked to attend the weekly conference (maximum of 15 minutes) virtually through a Zoom meeting. Each conference will be audio/video recorded through Zoom for analysis at the completion of each conference. Parents will complete a questionnaire before and after the study and participate in a short interview with the researcher after the study.

There are no significant risks to being involved in this study. Researchers will not use your name, the teacher's name, or school's name in any presentation. Data will be maintained in a secure/ locked location at UNC Charlotte.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to participate because you were identified as a parent of a student in a teacher's class, who has agreed to participate in the study. The researchers are interested in learning more about parent/ teacher conferences focused on students with disabilities.

What will happen if I take part in the study?

Participation will include attending a virtual parent/ teacher conference once a week before or after school for a total of 12-20 weeks. Each conference will be a maximum of 15 minutes and will be held virtually and will be video recorded. During the conference, teachers will update you on your child's performance and give you an opportunity to ask questions. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire before and after the study. You will also be asked to participate in a video/audio recorded interview with the researcher after the study to expand on your answers on the questionnaire and reflect on the conferences. The interview will occur on the UNCC Zoom platform and recorded for transcription and analysis by the researcher.

The parent/ teacher conferences will be recorded via the Zoom platform (both video and audio recording) and coded after the conference. The teacher will be asked to upload the video to the UNCC Dropbox location immediately after the conference and then delete the video from their electronic device. The research team will provide feedback, via email, if required, as to the use of the strategy. In addition, researchers may ask to use videos in future professional development or research presentations.

Your total commitment if you participate in this study will involve: (a) attending virtual parent/teacher conferences (maximum of 15 minutes) once a week for 12-20 weeks (b)

completion of questionnaire before and after study, (c) participate in a post study interview with the researcher (approximately 30 minutes)

After the study is completed, you may be asked to participate in two more virtual conferences during the remainder of the year that will be recorded and uploaded to the UNCC Dropbox location. These videos will be coded to ensure maintenance of the intervention.

Results of the study will be shared with you via email or virtual meeting with the research team if preferred.

What are the risks and benefits might I experience?

Any risk to participants is minimal as parent/ teacher conferences in schools are common practice.

Will I receive an incentive for participating in this study?

Benefits you might experience is more frequent information about your child's performance and more opportunity to engage with your child's teacher. Parents who participate in the study, **through completion**, will receive a \$100 gift card at the end of the study.

How will my information be protected?

You are asked to provide your email address as part of this study. Your email address will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team without your additional written consent. All recordings and data, including those from the interview, will be stored on a secure UNC Charlotte secured Dropbox with password protection; hard copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office on UNC Charlotte's main campus. While the study is active, all data will be stored in a password-protected database that can be accessed by the research team. Only the research team, listed above, will have routine access to the study data. Identifiers will be stripped from the data following publication of results.

How will my information be used after the study is over?

After the study is complete, study de-identification data may be shared with other researchers for use in other studies without asking for your consent again or as may be needed as part of publishing our results. The written data we share will NOT include information that could identify you, however, the videos may be used in future professional development and research presentations. If videos are used, faces will not be blurred (unless requested on consent by the parent) and although unlikely, it is possible that the parent could be identified.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

It is up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participation in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

If you decide to withdraw at any time, your individual electronic data will be deleted, and hard copy data will be cross-shredded. Post-editing tools will be used to blur your likeness from any video in which you appear.

Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?

For questions about this research, you may contact the primary researcher, Paula Williams, pwilli75@uncc.edu or Dr. Kristen Beach, kbeach4@uncc.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu

Voluntary Consent (Please return to your child's teacher)

Read each statement and check "yes" or "no" to the right	Yes	Or	No
I consent to participating in parent/teacher conferences as described in this consent document			
I agree to complete questionnaires before and after the study			
I agree to have conferences video recorded			
I agree to have conferences audio recorded			
I agree to participate in an interview with the researcher that will be video/ audio recorded.			
I permit researchers to video tape conferences and use videos during professional development and research presentations.			
I permit researchers to use video recordings as stated in #5 WITHOUT blurring of faces.			

By signing this document, you are agreeing to the aspects of the study marked "yes" above. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I am at least 18 years of age and volunteer to participate in this research project. I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to participate in this study in accordance with my responses to the questions above.

Parent Name (PRINT)

Child's Teacher Name (PRINT)

Parent Signature

Date

Name & Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

APPENDIX B – PRINCIPAL CONSENT

Principal Consent

The research study, “The Effects of Teachers’ Use of a Conferencing Strategy on Family Engagement” has been approved by the Cabarrus County Schools Office of Accountability. The researcher, Paula Williams, has requested to conduct the study in your school. As the principal, you may choose to allow or not allow the study to be conducted at your school. The researcher should provide you with the following information and you may ask for additional information as needed:

- Purpose of the study
- Study timeline
- Research questions
- List of schools being recruited to participate in the study
- Number and type of participants (teachers, parents, etc.)
- Expected time commitment of each participant
- Copies of any of the following that will be used in the study: surveys, questionnaires, observation tools, etc.
- Copies of any new strategies or practices that will be implemented (if applicable)
- Recruitment plan
- Consent form for participants

Please note that the researcher may need to work with you to identify which teachers meet the study criteria – e.g. special education teachers – and to get in contact with the teachers. In addition, teachers may be asked to assist in recruitment of families to participate. Neither teachers or families may be required to participate.

If you agree to allow the study to be conducted in your school, each participant will be required to sign a consent form provided by the researcher (teacher and families) and participation of everyone is voluntary. Please indicate below whether you will allow the research to be conducted in your school by selecting and signing below:

_____ I agree to allow Paula Williams to conduct the research study “The Effects of Teachers’ Use of a Conferencing Strategy on Family Engagement” in my school during the 2022-2023 school year.

_____ I do not agree to allow my school to participate.

Principal Name

School Name

Principal Signature

Date

APPENDIX B – TEACHER CONSENT

Teacher Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of the Project: The Effects of Teachers' Use of a Conferencing Strategy on Family Engagement

Principal Investigator: Paula Williams, MEd, University of North Carolina Charlotte

Faculty Advisor: Kristen Beach, PhD, University of North Carolina Charlotte

Research Assistant: Ashley Anderson, MEd, University of North Carolina Charlotte

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participation in this research study is voluntary. The information provided is to help you decide whether to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Important Information You Need to Know

The researchers are interested in learning about the effects of teachers' use of a conferencing strategy on engagement for families of students with disabilities (SWD).

We are asking four (4) special education teachers and four (4) parents of SWD to schedule and engage in short (maximum of 15 minutes) virtual conferences once per week for 12-16 weeks.

Teacher contact: 15-minute initial contact regarding consent and answering questions, 90-120 minutes professional development.

Teachers will conduct 12-16 parent/ teacher conferences, 15 minutes each for a total of 180-225 minutes (3-4 hours).

Teachers will complete questionnaires/ surveys - approximately 40 minutes to complete.

Teachers will complete two interviews with the researcher - approximately 20-30 minutes each (40-60 min).

There are no identifiable risks associated with this study, but benefits will include training on a conferencing strategy and a potential increase in engagement of families of students in your classroom.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether to participate in this research study.

Why are we doing this study?

Parent engagement can be pivotal to a child's success in school. The Family Engagement in Education Act (2015) highlights the importance of family/ school relationships. Unfortunately, data from the 2018 North Carolina State Performance Plan/ Annual Performance Report indicates that only 43% of schools are meeting the criteria for Indicator 8 which is related to parental involvement. Although there are courses regarding how to engage parents in many university programs for pre-service teachers and qualitative research on parental engagement, there is limited quantitative research around strategies for in-service teachers to increase parental engagement.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to participate because you are a special education teacher.

What will happen if I take part in the study?

Teachers will be asked to conduct the weekly parent/teacher conference once a week before or after school. After a period of baseline, participating teachers will be given professional development (on-line) on a conferencing strategy and asked to conduct remaining conferences using the taught strategy. Each conference will be held virtually via Zoom and will be recorded through the Zoom platform. Parent engagement will be coded at the completion of each conference. A rubric will be used to analyze how teachers use the conferencing strategy.

Teachers will also be asked to complete a "belief's survey" before and after the study and complete a questionnaire after the study about their perceptions of the training and instruction. Teachers will be asked

to participate in a follow up interview after completing the “beliefs survey”, in order to expand on their answers to the survey. The interview will be with the researcher and recorded through the UNCC Zoom platform. The researcher will transcribe the interview and code for themes related to family engagement. Parents will also complete a questionnaire before and after the study.

Participation will include attending online professional development (PD), planning for and conducting parent/teacher conferences (maximum of 15 minutes) once a week for 12-16 weeks, completing survey before and after the study, completing a questionnaire after the study, and meeting virtually with the researchers after the study for follow up regarding the results.

After the baseline period, teachers will participate in virtual PD sessions designed to last a total of 1-2 hours. Following PD, teachers will implement the conferencing strategy in their parent/ teacher conferences. The research team will provide a hard copy of conferencing steps to each teacher. Commitment to the project is approximately 12-16 weeks.

The parent/ teacher conferences will be recorded via the Zoom platform (both video and audio recording) and coded after the conference. The researcher will set up the Zoom conference and make the teacher a co-host. The teacher will record the conference and upload to the UNCC cloud so that only the researcher has access. The research team will provide feedback, via email, if required, as to the use of the strategy. In addition, researchers may ask to use videos in future professional development or research presentations.

Your total commitment if you participate in this study will involve: (a) planning and conducting parent/teacher conferences (maximum of 15 minutes) for 12-16 weeks (b) 1-2 hours of PD (c) completion of survey before and after study (d) completion of social validity questionnaire at completion of study (e) two interviews with the primary investigator.

After the study is completed, you will be asked to hold two more virtual conferences during the remainder of the year that will be recorded and uploaded to the UNCC Dropbox location. These videos will be coded to ensure maintenance of the intervention.

What benefits might I experience?

Participating teachers will benefit from the study by receiving PD on the conferencing strategy, as well as coaching feedback.

What risks might I experience?

Any risk to participants is minimal. Teachers in the district regularly conduct parent/ teacher conferences. Data collected will be kept in a secure location and will in no way be tied to job evaluation, performance reports, or any documentation tied to your employment.

How will my information be protected?

You are asked to provide your email address as part of this study. Your email address will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team without your additional written consent. All recordings and data will be stored on a secure UNC Charlotte secured Dropbox with password protection; hard copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the principal investigator's office on UNC Charlotte's main campus. While the study is active, all data will be stored in a password-protected database that can be accessed by the research team. Only the research team, listed above, will have routine access to the study data. Identifiers will be stripped from the data following publication of results. Any data collected, including recordings, surveys, questionnaires, or observation protocols will in no way be tied to job evaluation, performance reports, or any documentation tied to employment. Other people with approval from the Investigator, may need to see the information we collect about you

including people who work for UNC Charlotte and other agencies as required by law or allowed by federal regulations.

How will my information be used after the study is over?

The data/information collected will not be used or distributed for future research studies even if identifiers are removed.

Will I receive an incentive for taking part in this study?

Participants will receive incentives commensurate with the number and nature of tasks: \$100 gift card for each teacher participant and \$100 gift card for each family participant (one per family), plus materials for teacher participants. Incentives will be given to teacher and family participants who **complete** the study. All incentives are payable in the form of a Walmart gift card. **Completion** is defined as conducting 12-16 mini-conferences (15-20 minutes each) with your student's family via a virtual platform. If you withdraw before completion of the study, then you will not be eligible for the incentive.

Payments to subjects are considered taxable income. Therefore, we are required to give the University's Financial Services division a log/ tracking sheet with the names of all individuals who received a payment. This log is for tax purposes only and is separate from the research data, which means the names will not be limited to your study data. If your total payments from UNC Charlotte are greater than \$600 in a calendar year, this information will be submitted to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for tax reporting purposes.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

It is up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participation in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

If you decide to withdraw at any time, your individual electronic data will be deleted and hard copy data will be cross-shredded.

Who can answer my questions about this study and my rights as a participant?

For questions about this research, you may contact Paula Williams, pwilli75@uncc.edu, the primary investigator or Dr. Kristen Beach (kbeach4@uncc.edu).

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Office of Research Protections and Integrity at 704-687-1871 or uncc-irb@uncc.edu

NOTE: Parent participants must also provide consent for audio and video recording.

Consent to Participate

Read each statement and check “yes” or “no” to the right	Yes	Or	No
I consent to using a conferencing strategy during parent/teacher conferences as described in this consent document			
I agree to have conference audio recorded			
I agree to have conference video recorded			
I agree to have interviews audio/video recorded.			
I permit researchers to video tape conferences and use videos during professional development and research presentations.			
I permit researchers to use video recordings as stated in #4 WITHOUT blurring of faces.			

By signing this document, you are agreeing to the aspects of the study marked “yes” above. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will receive a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I am at least 18 years of age and volunteer to participate in this research project.

Name (PRINT)

Signature

Date

Name & Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

APPENDIX C – PIQUE REFERENCE SHEET

PIQUE

- ✓ **Positive partnership/ start** - Begin the conference with an interesting and/or funny story about something that the student has done recently in class, as well as a positive statement about the student. Remember, smile, monitor body language and **BE POSITIVE** 😊 (about 2 min)
- ✓ **Information** – Share general and specific information about the student’s progress, beginning with strengths and then sharing areas of continued need. (about 3 min)
- ✓ **Question** – Ask the parent an open-ended question about the student’s study or work habits, which could include academic or behavioral queries. (about 1-2 min)
- ✓ **Understand** – Teacher will engage in **ACTIVE** listening to understand family input. (about 5-8 min)
- ✓ **Enact future plans** – Invite and/ or encourage future engagement with family. Review when you will meet again and the role of each party before the next meeting. (approximately 30 seconds)

APPENDIX D – FAMILY ENGAGEMENT CHECKLIST

Family Engagement Checklist (Pre-/ post-study)

Please select a choice for each statement.

	Not in Place	Partially	In Place
I am asked my opinion about my child's education			
I speak to my child's teacher frequently			
My child's teacher listens to me when I share information			
I am a collaborative member of my child's education			
My child's teacher uses a variety of methods to communicate with me			
I am informed of my child's academic progress			
Teachers share clear information about academic expectations for my child			
I am informed of my child's progress			
Communication with my child's school supports my child's learning and growth			
My child's teacher is welcoming and inviting to me			
Teachers have opportunity to learn about how to engage families in my child's learning			
I feel I am in partnership with my child's teacher when it comes to my child's learning			

APPENDIX E – TEACHER BELIEFS SURVEY**Teacher Beliefs Survey (Pre/ post-study)**

1. In your experience, on average, how frequently do parents participate in classroom or school related activities?
 - a. Weekly
 - b. Monthly
 - c. Several Times a Year
 - d. Once a Year
 - e. Never
2. In your opinion, how important is parent involvement/ engagement to student success?
 - a. Very Important
 - b. Moderately Important
 - c. Not very important
3. In your opinion, can parental involvement/ engagement be increased?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. In your opinion, what are the reasons that parents may not be involved/ engaged?
 - a. Time
 - b. Knowledge
 - c. Lack of invitations
 - d. Not interested in being involved
 - e. Other: _____
5. How does collaboration with your students' parents impact your ability to be a good teacher?
 - a. No impact
 - b. Moderate impact
 - c. Significant impact

APPENDIX F – TEACHER REFLECTION ON PIQUE

Teacher Reflection on PIQUE

Please rate questions based on the following scale:

- 1 Not really
- 2 Kind of
- 3 Mostly
- 4 Absolutely

1. Did you find the training for the PIQUE strategy easy to understand?

1 2 3 4

2. Was PIQUE easy to implement?

1 2 3 4

3. Did you find the use of the PIQUE strategy helped you build relationships with your students' families?

1 2 3 4

4. Do you think you will continue to use the PIQUE strategy when conferencing with parents?

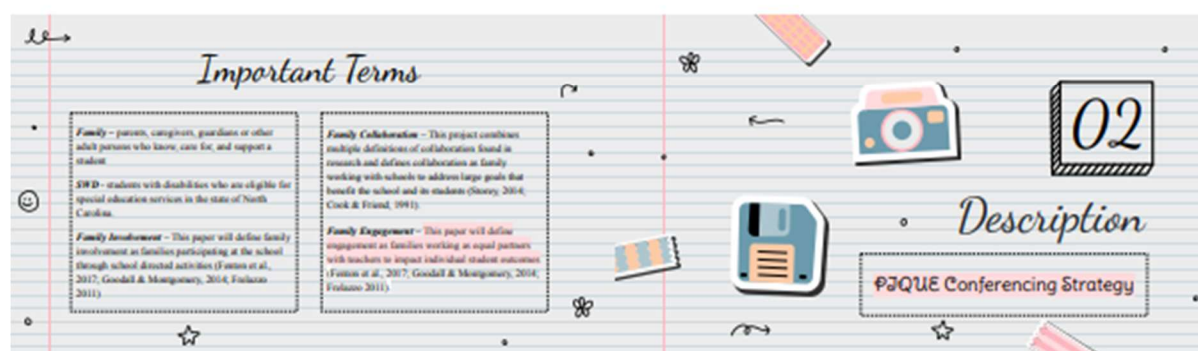
1 2 3 4

APPENDIX G – PIQUE IMPLEMENTATION RUBRIC

PIQUE Implementation Rubric

	Meets Criteria
Step 1: Positive	Teacher begins the conference with a personal and positive statement about student participation in class or relationships with others
Step 2: Information	Teacher provides student information in an organized and succinct way
Step 3: Question	Teacher asks open ended question to parent
Step 4: Understand	Teacher listens and uses techniques such as restating and summarizing
Step 5: Encourage	Teacher gives ideas to parents on future engagement with class/ school

APPENDIX I – PIQUE TRAINING PRESENTATION

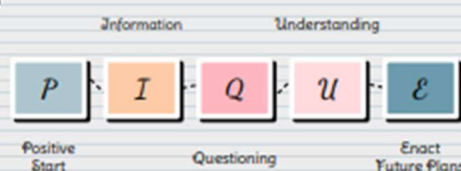


What is PIQUE?

PIQUE is a conferencing strategy designed to assist in-service teachers to encourage family engagement during family/ teacher conferences.



Steps of PIQUE



Positive Start

Teacher will begin the conference with an interesting and/or funny story about something that the student has done recently in class, as well as, a positive statement about the student.



Information

Teacher will share general information about the student's progress, beginning with strengths and then sharing areas of continued need.



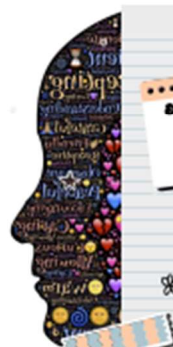
Questioning

Teacher will ask parent an open-ended question about the student's study or work habits, which could include academic or behavioral queries.



Understanding

Teacher will engage in active listening with the goal of understanding the families' perspective.



Enact Future Plans

Teacher will invite and/or encourage future engagement with parent through additional meetings and/or shared goals



PIQUE Reference Sheet



PIQUE

- ✓ *Positive start* - Begin the conference with an interesting and/or funny story about something that the student has done recently in class, as well as a positive statement about the student. Remember, smile, maintain body language and **BE POSITIVE** 😊 (about 1 min)
- ✓ *Information* - Share general and specific information about the student's progress, beginning with strengths and then sharing areas of continued need. (about 3 min)
- ✓ *Questions* - Ask the parent an **open-ended** question about the student's study or work habits, which could include academic or behavioral queries. (about 1-2 min)
- ✓ *Unobtrusional* - Teacher will engage in **ACTIVE** listening to understand family input. (about 3-4 min)
- ✓ *Enact future plans* - Invite and/or encourage future engagement with family. Review when you will meet again and the role of each party before the next meeting. (approximately 30 seconds)

03 Activities




Family/teacher conference example




Conference Example #2

Don't forget



Role Play



04 Check Out

Please use the PIQUE rubric to score this video

[Checkout Example](#)

Next Steps

Important tasks

- Continue with weekly conferences
- Employ the PIQUE strategy in each conference
- Remember to video each conference and send to Paula within one day

Don't forget
Call with any questions!

Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

psall75@uncr.edu
704-281-9205

[Facebook](#) [Instagram](#) [LinkedIn](#)

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APPENDIX J – TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – PRE-INTERVENTION**Interview Questions – Pre Intervention**

1. In the pre-study survey, you indicated that parents participate in classroom or school related activities several times a year. Can you tell me more about that?
2. In the pre-study survey, you stated that parent involvement is moderately important to student success. Can you tell me more about that?
3. In the pre-study survey, you stated that you do not think parental involvement can be increased. Can you tell me more about that?
4. In the pre-study survey, you stated that “knowledge” is a reason that parents may not be involved. Can you tell me more about that?
5. In the pre-study survey, you stated that collaboration with parents has a moderate impact on your ability to be a good teacher. Can you tell me more about that?

APPENDIX K – TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – POST-INTERVENTION

Interview Questions - Post Study

1. In the post-study survey, you indicated that parents participate in classroom or school related activities (*updated based on response*). Can you tell me more about that?
2. In the post-study survey, you stated that parent involvement is (*updated based on response*) to student success. Can you tell me more about that?
3. In the post-study survey, you stated that you (*updated based on response*) think parental involvement can be increased. Can you tell me more about that?
4. In the post-study survey, you stated that (*updated based on response*) is a reason that parents may not be involved. Can you tell me more about that?
5. In the post-study survey, you stated that collaboration with parents has a (*updated based on response*) impact on your ability to be a good teacher. Can you tell me more about that?

APPENDIX L – FAMILY INTERVIEW

Family Interview – Post Study

1. On your pre-study questionnaire, you stated that collaboration with your child's teacher is only "partially" in place. Can you tell me more about that?
2. Throughout the study, did you experience any changes in how the conferences were conducted? If so, can you describe these changes?
3. Any other questions directly from the questionnaire that have changed from the initial responses (to be determined after completion at post study). Family will only be asked to "tell me more about that".

APPENDIX M – PIQUE TRAINING FIDELITY CHECKLIST

Checklist for Training Fidelity

Steps of Training	Completed (Y or N)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coverage of important terms (especially the difference between family involvement, collaboration and engagement) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall description of PIQUE 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steps of PIQUE 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step #1 – Positive Start <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explanation of step Examples from presenter and teacher 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step #2 – Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explanation of step Examples from presenter and teacher 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step #3 – Questioning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explanation of step Examples from presenter and teacher 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step #4 – Understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explanation of step Examples from presenter and teacher 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Step #5 – Enacting Future Plans <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explanation of step Examples from presenter and teacher 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review reference sheet 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and discuss example #1 & #2 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in brief role play of steps 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher completes check out activity (scores video) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review next steps 	

APPENDIX N – EMAILED COACHING FEEDBACK

Conference Coaching - 3/11/24

Positive start - great job in this area! I like how easily this comes to you and I can see the parent enjoys you sharing this information.

Information - nice work giving the parent information about how the student has been doing in class since the last conference. Consider touching on one behavioral thing and maybe one piece of academic information.

Questioning - Great job getting the parent to answer questions. Remember it is always easier to have some questions prepared before the conference. Think about what the student may be struggling with in the classroom or an area you would like to see improve and base your open-ended questions off of this. For example, "in the classroom, (student) is having some difficulty playing cooperatively with peers. How do you help him interact with other kids or adults at home? What types of things have you noticed about his interaction?"

Understanding - You are doing a wonderful job with giving the parent recommendations of things you have found that work in class that she might use at home. Consider asking her about things that work at home that you might try in the classroom. You can engage in active listening by asking her to expand on how this strategy works at home and brainstorm ways to integrate this strategy in the classroom. This collaborative gesture would hopefully help build your relationship and partnership with the family.

Engage future plans - Don't forget to agree with the parent on something you will try before the next conference. Discuss what each of you will do (she may try something you recommend and you may try something she has found that works).

Overall, terrific job [teacher]! We are on the home stretch! Thank you so much!