

ENGAGING FACTS: PARTNERING WITH MULTILINGUAL FAMILIES

Involucrándose con lo nuevo: El trabajo conjunto con familias multilingües

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Recibido: 30/06/2020

Aprobado: 28/08/2020

ABSTRACT

With pressing emphasis on the quality of early childhood preschool programs for children birth to age five, one quality assurance is for educators and family members to work together to foster the young child's rapid development. Through reciprocal partnerships between educators and families, family members are empowered to continue with their contributions to their child's education after they enter school. Through a U.S. Department of Education grant, pre-kindergarten and pre-service teachers took part in a Summer Institute Program focused on providing professional development on working effectively with multilingual children and their families. This study explored pre-kindergarten and pre-service teachers' perceptions and experiences of implementing family engagement activities during the Summer Institute Program. The qualitative findings reported in this multiple case study were extracted from a larger mixed methods study of effectiveness of the overall professional development provided during the Summer Institute Program. During the program, family engagement opportunities included, though were not limited to, Parent and Child Together Time, family visits, and family engagement workshops. Findings for this study suggested that before the Summer Institute Program, teacher participants did not feel adequately prepared to work with families of multilingual students. Though several participants had previously implemented isolated parent involvement activities, few had authentically collaborated to form reciprocal partnerships with families, particularly those of multilingual students. Participants overcame initial and perceived challenges to partner with multilingual families through family engagement opportunities such as Parent and Child Together Time, which is the focus of this study. Furthermore, participants felt more comfortable in working with families of multilingual students after having participated in professional development on effective family engagement practices.

Keywords: culturally and linguistically diverse - family partnership - family engagement - emergent bilingual - multilingual learners - English Learner- ELL - Parent and Child Together Time - PACT Time - early childhood

RESUMEN

Con un énfasis urgente sobre la calidad de los programas preescolares de primera infancia para niños desde nacer hasta cinco años de edad, una garantía de calidad es cuando los educadores y miembros familiares trabajen conjuntamente con el fin de fomentar el rápido desarrollo del niño pequeño. A través de trabajos conjuntos recíprocos entre educadores y familias, los miembros familiares son empoderados a continuar con sus contribuciones a la formación de sus hijos después de que éstos ingresen a la escuela. Apoyados por una donación del Departamento de Educación de los EE.UU., maestros preescolares y estudiantes de docencia preescolar participaron de un programa de verano dirigido a la capacitación docente en cómo trabajar efectivamente con niños multilingües y sus familias. El actual estudio exploró las percepciones y experiencias de maestros preescolares y estudiantes de docencia preescolar durante este programa de verano respecto a la implementación de actividades para involucrar a las familias. Los resultados cualitativos presentados en este estudio de múltiples casos provinieron de otro estudio más amplio de metodología mixta que examinó la efectividad en general de la capacitación docente proveída durante este programa de verano. Durante este programa, las oportunidades para involucrar a la familia incluyeron, entre otros, el tiempo dedicado en aula para que la madre o el padre venga y trabaje con su hijo (PACT, por su sigla en inglés), visitas al hogar familiar, y talleres para involucrar a la familia.

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Los resultados del estudio señalaron que, antes de haber participado del programa de verano, los participantes docentes no se sintieron adecuadamente preparados para trabajar con las familias de sus alumnos multilingües. Aunque previamente varios participantes docentes habían implementado actividades aisladas para incorporar a los padres de familia, dichas actividades eran aisladas y sin el fin de establecer trabajos conjuntos recíprocos entre educadores y familias, especialmente las familias de los alumnos multilingües. Los participantes docentes vencieron desafíos iniciales y percibidos y así lograron un trabajo conjunto con familias multilingües a través de oportunidades que involucraron a la familia, tales como el tiempo dedicado en aula para que la madre o el padre venga y trabaje con su hijo (PACT, por su sigla en inglés), cuál es el enfoque de este estudio. Además, después de haber participado de una capacitación docente sobre prácticas efectivas para el involucramiento de familias, los participantes docentes se sintieron más cómodos en trabajar conjuntamente con las familias de sus alumnos multilingües.

Palabras Claves: culturalmente y lingüísticamente diversos – trabajo conjunto con la familia - involucramiento de la familia – bilingüe emergente – los que aprenden varias lenguas - los que aprenden inglés (ELL, por su sigla en inglés) – el tiempo dedicado en aula para que la madre o el padre venga y trabaje con su hijo (PACT, por su sigla en inglés- la primera infancia

Parents' support of home learning has important implications for students' later academic success (Center for Public Education, 2011). As the population of multilingual students continues to rise, educators must be equipped to partner with their parents and others who serve in parental capacities including grandparents, siblings, and extended family (Allen, 2010). Family partnerships should be co-constructed and mutually beneficial for all stakeholders. When educators initiate interactions with families at the beginning of the year, it is critical to let family members know that their knowledge of their child is valued (Mapp, Carver & Lander, 2017). As teachers honor families' funds of knowledge and talents to promote learning at school, and families seek advice from educators to enhance home learning, a truly reciprocal partnership is formed (Moll, 2014; Edwards, 2016; Koralek, Nemeth & Ramsey, 2019). By offering multiple family engagement opportunities such as PACT Time, family visits and family workshops, educators leverage families' culture and native language(s) to foster deeper connections for learning at home and at school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994; Epstein, 2011). Hernandez, Zubov, Goddard, Vargas and Hill (2019), asserted that Parent and Child Together (PACT) Time is a high-performing family literacy opportunity for families of multilingual students. In this article, the researchers share findings of teachers' experiences and perceptions of implementing PACT Time with multilingual families.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Informing theories

Children are influenced by multiple interacting systems within their ecological environment, all of which affect their growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Systems Theory (1979, 1993, 1994), poses five interconnected systems of influence: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. A child's microsystem contains immediate contacts: family members, teachers, classroom peers, and neighbors. The quality of the relationships formed in the microsystem affects the mesosystem, which is the interaction(s) among those in the microsystem. The exosystem includes influences that do not actively involve, but may affect the child, such as family members' workplace or the local school board. The next layer of influence, the macrosystem, consists of cultural characteristics in the child's environment: language, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religion. Finally, the chronosystem encompasses influences over time, such as historical and current world events. With the child at the center of these nested systems, it is indisputable that all personal and environmental factors play a role in child development, which educators must consider when creating family engagement opportunities.

To guide engagement opportunities, Epstein (1995) described six types of involvement practices: (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) home learning, (5) decision making,

and (6) collaborating with the community. While Epstein's framework (1995) specifically referred to parents, it can encompass all family members who serve in parenting and caregiver roles. Parenting is supported through educational workshops focused on creating supportive home learning environments. Communication through notes, phone calls, weekly folders, texts and emails must occur to create strong two-way partnerships between educators and parents. Volunteering includes parent's attendance at student performances and school events, as well as assisting teachers, administrators and other parents with various pre-determined tasks. Educators must provide information to parents providing home learning opportunities that connects to their child's classwork. Decision making refers to parents having a voice in their child's learning and serving in participatory roles at the school, district, or state level. Lastly, parents must have access to community collaborations. Providing input on support services such as after school programs and community innovations, strengthens home-school-community partnerships.

Benefits of family engagement

Families of all cultural backgrounds, educational experiences and income levels have the capacity to support their children's learning if provided with necessary tools and proper guidance (Henderson & Mapp, 2003). However, not all parents know what constitutes meaningful parent-child interactions nor have time to provide such activities (Jacobs, 2004). Family engagement strategies help prepare families to support learning at home and promote student success (Mapp, Carver, & Lander, 2017; Levesque, 2013). Benefits of family engagement include higher levels of student academic success, positive school behavior, likelihood of graduation, family's high level of educational satisfaction, greater gains on assessments, and increased school safety (Henderson & Mapp, 2003; Grant & Ray, 2019).

Perceived challenges

Though aware of benefits, many educators anticipate challenges when working with multilingual children's families. Research indicated these perceived challenges include: (a) providing communication in the family's home language(s), (b) fear of being judged by families, (c) providing information to families who cannot attend meetings, (d) scheduling, and (e) a lack of self-efficacy in working with families of multilingual learners (Collier & Auerbach, 2011; Epstein, 2011; Bandura, 1989). For culturally and linguistically diverse students, educators should tap into family funds of knowledge by working to understand households, home language, and cultural practices (Moll, 2014).

PACT Time

In the 1980s, the Parent and Child Education (PACE) program in Kentucky and Kenan Trust Family Literacy programs in Kentucky and North Carolina provided initial frameworks for PACT Time (Brizius & Foster, 1993). This effective engagement of diverse parents symbolized a lifelong commitment to learning between parents and children (Jacobs, 2004). PACT Time implementation has been linked to positive outcomes related to parents' knowledge, confidence and enhanced role in their child's learning (Dobbs-Black, Renfro, Panzica, & Ritchie, 2012). As affirmed by Hernandez et al. (2019), PACT Time empowers parents by highlighting the vital role they play as their child's first teacher. For PACT Time, parents visit their child's classroom for regularly scheduled sessions during school hours multiple times weekly. This provides first-hand experiences with classrooms and instruction (Levesque, 2013). During PACT Time, parents observe teachers' instruction, classroom routines, learning activities, and acquire strategies to continue learning at home (Hernandez et al., 2019; Levesque, 2013).

PACT Time typically follows a four-step sequence: pre-brief, observe, interact, and debrief. Teachers often provide parents with a PACT Time journal to take notes and write questions. During the pre-brief, teachers and parents take a few minutes to discuss the upcoming lesson and relate that to the

child's interests and goals, which helps set clear expectations. During the interaction phase, parents observe the teacher implementing a short mini-lesson (Hernandez et al., 2019). After the lesson, the parent and child work together on academic tasks, typically related to the observed lesson. Lastly, the parents and teacher debrief, discussing observations and questions about the lesson. Teachers provide specific suggestions for parents to transfer knowledge and activities to home learning and parents suggest home connections that can enhance classroom instruction. Typically, outcomes of PACT Time include: (1) providing parents with techniques to extend learning into the home, (2) increasing parent-child reading time, (3) improving parent self-efficacy, (4) helping parents understand the classroom setting and (5) parents having a better understanding of school curriculum (Hernandez et al., 2019).

Although prior research has focused on benefits of family engagement and PACT Time, there is a paucity of research on how PACT Time bridges home-school learning for multilinguals and on teachers' related perceptions and experiences. The researchers sought to explore teachers' perceptions of family engagement and experiences with implementing PACT Time and how this connected home-school learning. The overarching research questions were: (1) What are the changes in teachers' perceptions and experiences after professional development (PD) and implementation opportunities for family engagement with families of multilingual learners? And (2) How does PACT Time bridge home-school learning for multilingual learners? Sub-questions were included to better understand experiences and perceptions: (1) What are teachers' perceptions of family engagement with families? (2) What are teachers' perceptions of family engagement with families of multilingual learners? (3) What are teachers' experiences with PACT Time? And (4) What are perceived challenges of PACT Time? These questions guided the researchers' data collection and analysis.

METHODS

For this study, the researchers leveraged bio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and parent involvement framework (Epstein, 1995, 2001). Both were important to study collaborations and types of engagement opportunities between teachers and families. We also applied a Critical Theory lens as, historically, multilinguals students are underserved and their families, under-represented in family engagement opportunities in schools. We employed a qualitative design guided by grounded theory. We utilized participant surveys followed by semi-structured interviews. The qualitative inquiry selected for this study was a multiple case study approach which allowed the researchers to explore multiple perspectives. Yin (2009) defined case as "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the phenomenon and context" (p. 13). The researchers defined the case as pre- and in-service teachers' reported experiences and perceptions of implementing PACT Time with families of multilingual learners. Yin's (2009) definition of case fits this study as the participants planned and implemented PACT Time, but were unsure of how families of multilingual learners would respond. The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' experiences and perceptions of implementing family engagement and PACT Time with families of multilingual learners. The multiple case study reported here was extracted from a larger mixed methods study on the effectiveness of the overall summer PD program.

Context

This study was conducted during a summer institute program (SIP) planned and implemented to enhance teacher effectiveness in working with multilingual learners and families. This university initiative was funded by a National Professional Development (NPD) grant from the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) within the U.S. Department of Education. The SIP included one week of teacher PD followed by four weeks of in-field PD at a local elementary school during which participants provided a summer learning program to about 100 children. About one-third of students in

the summer learning program were multilingual learners. During the SIP, the participants received ongoing PD support to promote effective teaching practices and implement family engagement. The PD included individual coaching for instruction and family engagement. The coaches were in-service teachers who had TESOL certification and had participated in reflective coaching training. As part of the SIP, participants implemented PACT Time for enhanced family engagement.

Setting

The SIP was held in an urban Title 1 school, in which the majority of students experienced low socioeconomic home and community environments. The students were between three and eight years old, entering pre-k-2nd grade. The students were comprised of 4% Caucasian/White, 35% Hispanic/LatinX, and 61% African American/Black. Most of the multilingual learners' native language was Spanish, but a small population spoke the Mayan language, Kanjobal.

Participants

Ten in-service and nine pre-service teachers participated in the SIP and shared their perceptions and experiences engaging English-dominant and multilingual families. All 19 were accepted into the OELA NPD grant program, Improving Preschoolers Acquisition of Language through Coaching Teachers and Professional Development (IMPACT-PD). Five in-service teachers were beginning graduate coursework toward a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) and five were engaged in PD with no additional coursework. The nine pre-service teachers had taken one to four graduate courses in TESOL. Participants had various levels of education, experience teaching multilingual learners, and background knowledge of family engagement. Four of the teachers were Black, 14 were White, and one was multi-racial. The in-service teachers were comprised of three in each age group: 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, and one 60-69 years-old. The pre-service teachers were 21-26 years-old. Of the participants, one was an advanced Spanish-English bilingual, few were emerging English-Spanish bilinguals, but most were mono-lingual English-speakers. The participants selected for the case studies were purposefully selected from the larger to provide more detail about the survey results (Hatch, 2002). Researchers ensured representation of each participant sub-groups for the case studies highlighted. Two participants were in-service pre-k teachers, one was seeking a Master's degree in TESOL and the other participated in PD only. Two participants were pre-service teachers with little to no experience in working with multilingual learners and their families.

Data collection and analysis

Prior to the SIP, participants completed a 49-question survey about family engagement. At the end of the SIP, participants took the survey again. This provided pre- and post-data of teachers' knowledge, experience and perceptions of working with multilingual learners and families. Following post-survey completion, all teachers participated in semi-structured interviews about their perceptions of family engagement. Individual interviews were integral in this grounded theory study. The semi-structured interviews consisted of eight planned questions and additional probing questions to better understanding experiences engaging families of English-dominant and multilingual students.

All interviews were recorded on an iPad and Voice Thread Application and transcribed. Both the survey data and interview transcriptions were analyzed for recurring themes across population groups (in-service pursuing a master's degree in TESOL, in-service in the SIP PD only, and pre-service teachers). Two researchers hand-coded transcripts, discussed coding discrepancies, and agreed upon solutions. The third researcher independently confirmed the themes, which served as another validation source. Triangulation, intercoder agreement and debriefing were used to avoid biases in data analysis (Stake, 1995).

FINDINGS

Summary of findings

The findings represent participants' experiences implementing family engagement and PACT Time. Themes from the pre-survey included: inclusiveness of family engagement, misconceptions, communication challenges and a lack of family participation and administration support. Four themes emerged from the post-survey including: empowerment, supporting multilingual learners, building intentional partnerships with families and creating welcoming environments. From the four representative cases, interview themes were: perception of family engagement, overcoming communication challenges, PACT Time challenges, extension of learning, multilingual family's eagerness to participate and benefits of PACT Time.

Findings suggested that TESOL coursework completion increased the likelihood for teachers to implement family engagement. This held true among all three participant groups. Moreover, prior to the SIP, several in-service teachers perceived communication to be their greatest challenge in engaging families of multilingual learners. After the SIP, in-service teachers indicated overcoming this challenge by learning some of the child's native language, talking with family members during family engagements, using translators and implementing PACT Time.

To better represent the lived experience of all participants, four representative case studies were highlighted. Thick descriptions were used to establish the significance of participants' voices, feelings, actions and meanings related to their experiences and perceptions (Denzin, 1989). All names were pseudonyms. Shirley was an in-service teacher seeking a master's degree in TESOL, Fannie was an in-service teacher only participating in the SIP and Harriet and Sylvia were pre-service teachers. Many participants used the term Emergent Bilingual (EB), which the researchers used synonymously with multilingual learners.

Case Studies

Participant 1: Shirley

Shirley was a monolingual teacher with three years of experience in a state funded pre-k program and 15 years as a special education paraprofessional. Shirley typically taught one to three multilingual students each year. Her bachelor's degree was in early childhood special education and, at the time of this study, she was seeking a master's degree in TESOL. Shirley participated in all PD opportunities provided by IMPACT-PD. She held PACT Time with one English-dominant and one multilingual family four times during the SIP.

In the pre-survey, Shirley stated she engaged families of English-dominant students through "meet the teacher day, school-wide orientation, soup with Santa, family art night, classroom parties, [a] grandparents' day activity, yearly book fair, and end-of-the-year classroom celebrations." She employed parent involvement activities with families of her students but was not building upon family strengths. Due to little experience engaging families of multilingual learners, Shirley admitted, "I am embarrassed about the lack of my ability to build relationships with my EB families." Although she knew there were benefits to family engagement with families of all students, Shirley explained an overall lack of family engagement at her school. She disclosed, "I did very little to engage families of EBs. I only did what the school required me to do." Due to her lack of training in working with families of multilingual learners, Shirley anticipated facing communication challenges but wanted to learn more about family engagement.

In the post-survey, Shirley's perception of family engagement with families of all students had shifted. She explained that through PACT Time, "Strong family rapport with the teacher is built, peer

relationships are strengthened, teacher-child relationships are strengthened and families feel like they belong in the classroom and school.” She asserted, “To successfully implement family engagement in my school, I need my preschool department and administration to understand the value of family engagement. I need for them to participate in more PD for EBs.” Shirley realized teachers needed more PD in working with both multilingual students and their families.

During Shirley’s interview, she explained that families of the multilingual students were engaged and eager to participate in PACT Time. She said, “The [multilingual] child liked seeing the mom come in and getting on the floor to play with us [. . .] Three family members came in for that one child, including the mom, dad, and baby sister.” Shirley gradually overcame her perceived communication challenge by learning some of the students’ home language. She explained, “Yesterday, I used my emerging Spanish to ask for a letter and the EB student’s mother is supposed to send that today.” Overall, Shirley felt more comfortable implementing family engagement opportunities after the SIP. In the following school year, she planned to send bilingual books home with students, extend multiple invitations for family engagement opportunities and translate all family notices sent home to multilingual families.

Participant 2: Fannie

Fannie was a monolingual pre-k teacher with 29 years of teaching experience. At the time of this study, she taught in a state funded pre-k program and typically had one to three multilingual learners each year. She obtained her master’s degree in reading and literacy. Fannie had taken one course on family engagement during her master’s program. Fannie held PACT Time with three English-dominant families and one multilingual family four times during the SIP.

In the pre-survey, Fannie defined family engagement as, “having the family to work along with me, whether it’s in the classroom, having them come to a meeting or sending things home for them to do.” One perceived challenge she described was English-dominant families’ lack of participation in family engagement. She shared, “The only way to get them involved is to make it a requirement and some still don’t participate.” Fannie indicated that multilingual families were always willing to participate but communication was challenging. Before the SIP, she was only implementing parent involvement activities. She explained, “I have parents to come volunteer in the classroom or I send simple little projects home for them to complete with their child”. While these parent involvement activities were important, they were not engaging families in the child’s learning.

After the SIP, Fannie had reconstructed her definition of family engagement as, “activities that you plan to help build relationships with families of your students.” She explained that when working with families of multilingual learners, it was critical to have a translator, present home language materials, use gestures and attempt to speak some of the families’ home language. Though it was clear Fannie was working to overcome communication challenges, she still emphasized a lack of effort from English-dominant families.

During Fannie’s interview, she acknowledged being initially hesitant about implementing PACT Time; however, after integrating it into her instruction, she described it as an opportunity to extend children’s learning to their home environment. Interestingly, she asserted that some of the family members of multilingual students did not understand that they were being welcomed into the classroom to work with their child. She explained, “I had to go to one of the EB parents [who was] just sitting in his car and [. . .] tell him that it was perfectly fine for him to come to the classroom.” The child’s father came into the classroom and engaged in shared reading with his daughter during PACT Time. After the SIP, Fannie planned to implement PACT Time in her classroom to bridge home-school learning.

Participant 3: Sylvia

Sylvia was a monolingual pre-service teacher who had just graduated prior to the SIP. She earned her bachelor's degree in early childhood and elementary education. Through the IMPACT-PD grant, she completed four graduate courses in TESOL. Sylvia held PACT Time twice with two multilingual families.

In the pre-survey, Sylvia defined family engagement as “authentic and real opportunities to get families involved in their child’s learning at home and at school”. Sylvia explained, “[the] benefits of family engagement activities for EB children are similar to the benefits for all children. They have better school attendance and academic success because the families understand the importance of the partnership between the teacher and home.” Sylvia reported, “[often] families do not understand their own importance in their child’s education and the difference they can make with their students.” It was clear that she valued family engagement.

In the post-survey, Sylvia’s perceptions shifted and she re-defined family engagement as, “creating a partnership between families and the teacher.” Sylvia had implemented multiple family engagement activities such as PACT Time, family education workshops and family visits with multilingual learners. She perceived benefits including gaining deeper understandings of multilingual students’ cultures and family’s expectations of her as the teacher.

During the interview, Sylvia disclosed that before the SIP, she anticipated facing schedule and communication challenges with multilingual families. She revealed, “I’ll say I was a little nervous about communicating because I didn’t know how much English [the family] spoke and I don’t know much Spanish. I didn’t know if I’d be able to have a translator.” However, Sylvia later pointed out that the family engagement activities went well and working with families calmed her apprehension for communicating with multilingual families. She explained, “I know that they are probably just as nervous as you [the teacher] about communication.” Additionally, Sylvia explained that PACT Time allowed her to learn more about how the child interacts with family members. She further expounded:

You learn so much even though you’re not directly talking to the child. You see how the child acts differently when the parent is around or when the parent is not around. You see how interested the parent is in the child [. . .] and you see that when they are invited into the classroom.

Sylvia indicated that she implemented PACT Time to bridge home-school learning. She explained, “I know especially with the [...] curriculum changing in math, families don’t really know how to help their child. I think having PACT Time and the family seeing the lesson and working with their child calms their anxiety.” In her future classroom, she planned to include writing welcome letters, calling frequently, visiting students’ homes, and implementing PACT Time to build relationships with multilingual families.

Participant 4: Harriet

Harriet was a monolingual pre-service teacher working toward a bachelor's degree in early childhood and elementary education. Through the IMPACT-PD grant, she had completed three graduate courses in TESOL. Harriet held PACT Time five times with three multilingual and two English-dominant families.

In the pre-survey, Harriet defined family engagement as, “the teacher and school actively working together to include the family in decisions, projects, and classroom events by pulling on the family’s expertise, strengths, and viewing them as an asset.” She perceived family engagement as an opportunity to further multilingual children’s English language development while supporting their home language. Harriet anticipated facing scheduling challenges and families feeling, “inadequate or self-conscious about helping the student and supporting them in the way they needed.” Furthermore, Harriet believed that differences in language and culture may be a challenge for multilingual families.

In the post-survey, Harriet’s understanding of creating genuine engagement opportunities for families of multilingual learners was evident. She had implemented various family engagement

opportunities including PACT Time, family education workshops and family visits. Harriet stressed, “parents and family members are the child’s first teachers. I believe that I cannot do it alone. If the parents are on board and engaged in their child’s learning, then I can better support the child.” Harriet viewed family engagement as a means to purposefully connect home and school learning.

During the interview, Harriet explained that the only challenge she faced during PACT Time was a lack of time to debrief with the family members. Harriet emphasized how beneficial it was to have family members in the classroom to learn math games using their home language then continue playing the games at home. Harriet was initially surprised at how eager multilingual families were to participate in PACT Time. She explained, “it wasn’t awkward at all and it felt very natural to have the family member there.” At the end of Harriet’s interview, she asserted, “I think PACT Time is a non-negotiable. It has to happen. It benefits the teacher, family, and child.” In her future classroom, she planned to implement PACT Time, family visits, and family workshops. She planned to invite families to teach all children about their culture and send home letters asking families to tell her about their child. Her value of family partnerships was evident.

Cross-case analysis

Cross-case analysis was applied among all participants across the three sub-groups and overarching themes were identified. The most prevalent themes were: teacher’s perception of family engagement, perceived family engagement challenges, and building relationships with families of multilingual learners.

Teacher’s perception of family engagement

In-service master’s degree-seeking teachers initially perceived family engagement to be active participation and involvement from parents in their child’s education. After the SIP, this group’s overall perception had shifted to include all family members’ contributions to a child’s education. In-service teachers who were only involved in the SIP, viewed family engagement as passive participation from parents and communication about what was going on in the classroom. After the SIP, there was little change in their perception. This sub-group viewed family engagement as activities or events that simply required families to attend. This could be attributed to the fact that this group had not taken any previous coursework nor had training on engaging families of multilingual learners prior to the SIP. Pre-service teachers initially defined family engagement as including all family members and viewed family’s funds of knowledge as an asset to their child’s education. It was evident that this group had received PD on engaging families of multilingual learners. After the SIP, their definition of family engagement was further supported by including the benefit of empowering families. It was clear that on-going PD, such as graduate coursework, was important for teachers to fully value and implement family engagement.

Perceived family engagement challenges

Prior to the SIP, participants held perceptions of challenges to engage all families. The in-service master’s degree-seeking teachers reported perceived challenges as: (1) family’s lack of resources, (2) teacher’s lack of time and (3) family’s conflicting work schedule. There was little change in their perceived challenges after the SIP, but they were able to overcome the challenges after the SIP. The in-service teachers involved in the SIP only reported multiple challenges: (1) parent’s not prioritizing education, (2) teachers lacking training/PD, (3) families’ conflicting work schedules and (4) teachers lacking time to engage all families. After the SIP, there was little change in their perceptions. It was evident this group still believed the challenges resulted in barriers to family engagement. Pre-service teachers reported perceived challenges including: (1) families’ lack of time to engage in their child’s learning and (2) families conflicting work schedules. After the SIP, there was

little change in the pre-service group's perceived challenges. But, like the degree-seeking in-service teachers, they engaged families despite the perceived challenges.

Although participants revealed perceived challenges with families of all students, they anticipated additional challenges with families of multilingual learners. The in-service master's degree-seeking teachers held several perceived challenges including: (1) communication, (2) cultural practices, (3) conflicting work schedules, and (4) parent's lack of motivation. After the SIP, they only perceived family's conflicting work schedules as a challenge. It was evident this group demonstrated growth. The in-service teachers only involved in the SIP reported multiple perceived challenges such as: (1) parent's lack of understanding the school system, (2) parent's motivation and (3) transportation. After the SIP, this group exhibited little growth and were unable to overcome their perceived challenges. Pre-service participants anticipated facing challenges of: (1) cultural differences and (2) communication. After the SIP, pre-service participants shared that families that had come to the classroom to participate in their child's learning actually provided valuable support and assurance that learning was being extended in the home. It was clear that both groups participating in coursework had more positive perceptions and practices of engagement with multilingual families.

Building relationships with families of multilingual learners

The in-service master's degree-seeking teachers initially shared that they used home surveys and a translator to build relationships with families of multilingual learners. On the post-survey, they indicated plans to move towards supporting multilingual families but were not specific about what activities or family engagement opportunities would build that relationship. Similarly, the in-service teachers who were only involved in the SIP reported passive activities such as utilizing a home survey to build relationships. After the SIP, this group indicated they would build relationships by inviting families to participate in classroom activities. It was evident the pre-service teachers were taking the most initiative to actively build relationships and involve family members of multilingual learners. In the initial survey, the pre-service group described ways to build relationships with families of multilingual learners including: going on family visits, distributing a home interest survey, getting to know students' backgrounds, and finding ways to communicate in their home language. The post-survey revealed similar strategies as the pre-survey but also emphasized utilizing PACT Time and family engagement workshops to build relationships.

To further understand participants' perspectives and experiences, the researchers gather data on their level of comfort engaging all families. Figure 1 illustrated the participants' (n=19) level of comfort working with English-dominant students before and after the SIP. Before the training took place, 58% (n=11) felt somewhat comfortable in working with families of English-dominant students and 42% (n=8) felt extremely comfortable. After the SIP, there was a significant shift, 79% (n=15) felt extremely comfortable working with families of English-dominant students and 21% (n=4) felt somewhat comfortable.

Figure 1. Teachers' Level of Comfort Working with Families of English-Dominant Students

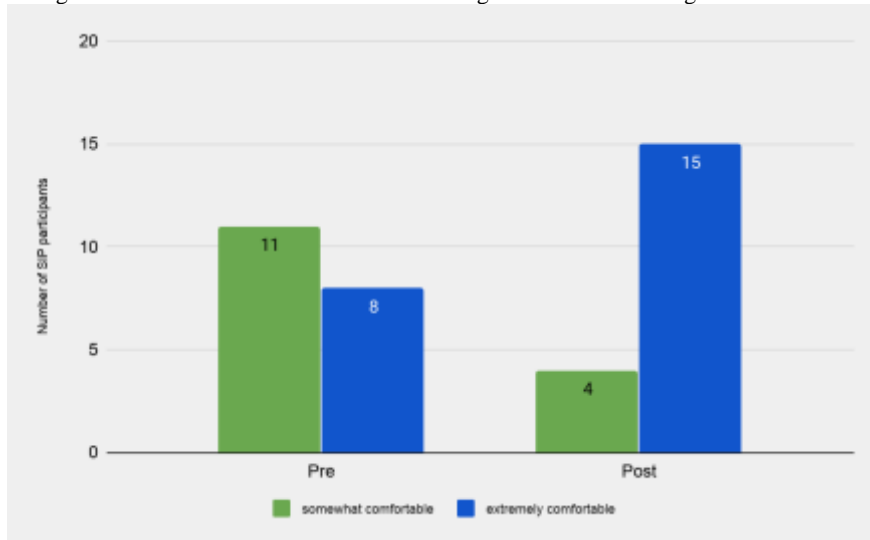
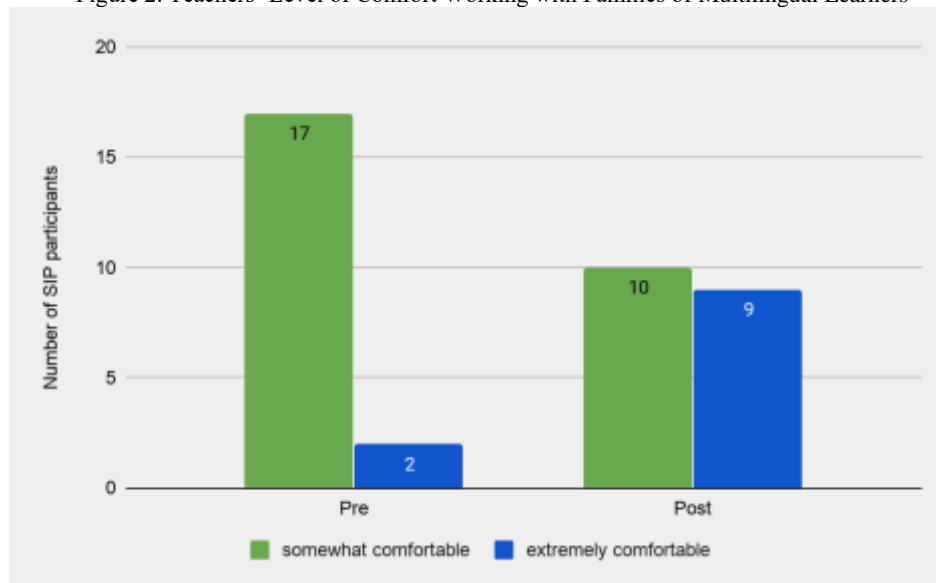


Figure 2 illustrated the participants' (n=19) level of comfort in working with families of multilingual learners before and after the SIP. Before the SIP, 89% (n=17) felt somewhat comfortable working with families of multilingual students and 11% (n=2) felt extremely comfortable. After the SIP, there was a considerable shift, 53% (n=10) felt somewhat comfortable and 47% (n=9) felt extremely comfortable working with families of multilingual students.

Figure 2. Teachers' Level of Comfort Working with Families of Multilingual Learners



DISCUSSION

It was clear that after the SIP teachers felt more comfortable engaging all families. Through case-study analysis, we were able to capture specific changes in perspectives and experiences among all three sub-groups. This helped researchers answer the initial study questions. The overarching research questions included: (1) What are the changes in teachers' perceptions and experiences after PD and implementation opportunities for family engagement with diverse families? (2) How does

PACT Time bridge home and school learning for diverse learners? Sub-questions were also included to deepen the understanding of teachers' experiences and perceptions: (1) What are teachers' perceptions of family engagement with families? (2) What are teachers' perceptions of family engagement with families of multilingual learners? (3) What are teachers' experiences with PACT Time? And (4) What are perceived challenges of PACT Time with families? Below we report the summary of results for each research question.

Summary of results

What are the changes in teachers' perceptions and experiences after PD and implementation opportunities for family engagement with diverse families?

To answer this question, participants were asked about their comfort level in working with English-dominant and multilingual families. Before the SIP, both groups of in-service participants were implementing parent involvement activities but were not forming true partnerships with all families and family members, especially families of multilingual students. After the SIP, the participants felt more comfortable in working with families of multilingual students and had employed a variety of family engagement activities to build deeper relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Many participants who were engaged in coursework in addition to the SIP redefined perceptions of engagement to include all family members and overcame perceived challenges.

How does PACT Time bridge home and school learning for diverse learners?

Through PACT TIME, family members engaged in the child's classroom curriculum and discussed how to continue learning at home, consistent with Epstein's framework (2011). Most participants shared materials, including books and games, with families to extend learning in the family's home. The participants' experiences revealed how PACT Time overcame communication challenges. PACT Time was also an opportunity for family members to encourage home language in the classroom. During PACT Time, teachers saw how children interacted with family members, deepening understanding of students and families. By welcoming families into the classroom, teachers got to know the child through the eyes of all family members. All participants admitted they were initially nervous about employing PACT Time in their classroom; however, after implementation, participants planned to continue to implement PACT Time in their regular classrooms. Not all families participated in PACT Time even with multiple invitations. Some families have flexible schedules allowing them to spend time in the classroom, whereas others may support their child in other ways. It is important for educators to remember that there is no one-size fits all approach to family engagement (Koralek et al., 2019).

What are teachers' perceptions of family engagement with families?

Many of the in-service participants initially held misconceptions about family engagement with all students' families. Some believed family engagement consisted of sending a monthly newsletter describing class plans and events. One believed family engagement was not scheduled unless the parent requested it. Several pre-service participants described family engagement as being more inclusive of all contributors to the child's education and working together to include families in decisions, projects and school events. Also, these participants shared that family engagement activities were an opportunity to focus on the family's expertise, strengths, and assets. In the post-survey, the in-service master's degree-seeking participants demonstrated the most growth. Their beliefs shifted to viewing family engagement as a partnership between the home with family member's having an active role in the child's learning.

What are teachers' perceptions of family engagement with families of multilingual learners?

Before the SIP, in-service teachers described unsuccessful experiences engaging families inside and outside of the classroom. One of the greatest challenges was lack of participation from multilingual learners' families. After the SIP, many participants felt more equipped with several family engagement strategies that would result in stronger partnerships with families of multilingual learners. They planned on integrating family engagement activities including: PACT Time, family engagement workshops, family visits and letter writing to build relationships with families of multilingual learners. Most in-service degree-seeking teachers and pre-service teachers' perceptions had shifted from family engagement as passive to later understanding it as an active, on-going and reciprocal partnership.

What are teachers' experiences with PACT Time?

Prior to the SIP, participants had not engaged in PACT time. Participants who employed PACT Time had enriching experiences. Several participants shared that they were nervous in the beginning but quickly overcame their fear when family members began to engage with their child and participate in the lessons. One pre-service participant even declared it was a non-negotiable in her future classroom. Another participant said she was surprised at how much she learned about students by seeing the child use their home language with family members. Many in-service participants pointed out that debriefing gave them a chance to discuss transferring activities to home learning experiences. Overall, the participants who were receptive to PACT Time expressed that it was an effective way to empower families to engage in their child's education.

What are perceived challenges of PACT time?

Initially, participants felt uneasy about families of their multilingual students coming into the classroom because they anticipated criticism or judgement of their teaching. Participants doubted the receptiveness of family members. Although many teacher's felt anxious about communicating with families of multilingual learners, one pre-service teacher observed the multilingual child's family member being equally as nervous as she about communicating. Some families of multilingual learners felt reluctant to come to school due to their lack of English fluency or lack of understanding school expectations (Hernandez et al., 2019). It is also common for family members of multilingual students to require affirmation from the teacher that they do, in fact, play a significant role in their child's education and need to participate in learning activities, goal setting and decision making in their child's schooling (Koralek et al., 2019, Epstein, 2011). Participants also shared facing scheduling challenges with families. Many families have work schedules that do not allow them to participate in day-time activities such as PACT Time. However, educators were responsive to families' needs and offered multiple family engagement opportunities during convenient times, thus allowing all families to engage. After implementing PACT Time, several participants expressed how rewarding it was to see how much the family members cared about their child's education. Many participants successfully overcame their initial perceived challenges.

Educators and programs that include family members in decision making, goal setting, two-way communication and build truly reciprocal partnership are more likely to bridge home-school learning, similar to that reported of many study participants (Epstein, 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Koralek et al., 2019). Epstein explained that "observing a teacher's techniques for presenting material, handling questions, and analyzing mistakes may help parents to be more effective in conducting school-related learning activities at home" (2011). In this study, participants noted the debriefing as an important time to discuss such instructional activities. Levesque (2013) explained, "[A] long-term impact of family literacy engagement is that parents understand how to advocate for their children

with the school” (p.11). PACT Time was a strengths-based strategy that promoted more equitable opportunities for all families.

Our findings were consistent with existing literature pointing to the obvious benefits of family engagement and positive outcomes of PACT Time with multilingual families. In this study, teachers who engaged in PACT Time with families during the SIP had more positive outlooks on family engagement and spoke to the benefits of including families within the classroom. What became evident across our analysis was the recurring theme of teachers emphasizing the importance of *families* in children’s education, not just parents. This called researchers to reevaluate the term “PACT Time”.

Though the outcomes and premises of PACT Time are indeed positive, we recognized the need for representation of all family members. The authors pose “FACT Time” (Family and Child Together Time) as a more inclusive term in engaging all family members within classroom learning. The use of FACT Time as the identifying term for this practice acknowledges that a child’s immediate family unit may not consist of parents alone but other family members as well (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It also recognizes the importance of all family members’ influence in the child’s learning. If we are to implement culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogy, then we must also understand and value the cultural unit of the family and the support they provide for each child.

Throughout the SIP and multiple family engagement opportunities, it was recognized by both the teachers and researchers that those who participated in family engagement went far beyond the term “parent”. Across all family engagement opportunities, FACT Time, family visits and family engagement workshops, there were a range of individuals within the child’s family who were an important part of the learning process. This included siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. FACT Time promotes the inclusivity of the entire family unit in the role of the child’s development and education and builds upon the asset-based contributions of all family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Moll, 2014).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

For scholarly research, it is important to identify study limitations. One limitation of this research was the narrow focus on teachers’ reflections and experiences. Though this supported the initial research question, observations and artifacts from PACT Time implementation would provide more evidence for triangulation. In addition, we cannot fully determine the bridging of home-school learning as we only interviewed teachers. Another study limitation was the sample size. Although the purposive sampling composition afforded investigation of both pre- and in-service teachers, an increased sample size could have allowed researchers to experience data and thematic saturation (Hatch, 2002). The length of and involvement in the SIP program, could also be construed as limitations. Longer duration of implementation and involving participants who were not in the SIP may have yielded additional data and further informed researchers. Finally, as consistent with qualitative research, the presented findings cannot be generalized to a larger population.

As a result of this study, researchers identified several implications for future research. First, as the current study only focused on teachers’ perspectives and experiences, insights from other stakeholders are needed. Both students and family members would add varying perspectives that could help future researchers create more holistic understandings of FACT Time. In addition, as the participants in this study self-selected into the SIP, which revealed an underlying desire to work with multilingual students and their families, additional studies involving pre- and in-service teachers’ who are not in SIP would be insightful.

CONCLUSION

Through focused professional development opportunities, such as the SIP, educators can receive the support and preparation needed to transform their family engagement practices. Teachers also embraced more inclusive understandings of engagement to include all family members. To

perpetuate the inclusion of all family members' contributions, we encourage teacher educators, PD providers, school administration, and policy makers to adopt FACT Time practices to bridge home-school learning. By intentionally incorporating these types of family engagement activities into our teaching, we form more equitable learning opportunities for multilingual learners and their families.

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