

School Leader's Perceptions of Family Engagement Practices with Immigrant Preschool

Families in Virginia

Lesley Reshonne Harris

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

In

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Charles Lowery, Chair

Jodie L. Brinkmann,

Ted S. Price

Tinkhani White

Richmond, Virginia

December 13, 2024

Keywords: *Family Engagement, Head Start, Title 1, Preschool, English Language Learner, immigrant populations*

School Leader's Perceptions of Family Engagement Practices with Immigrant Preschool
Families in Virginia

Lesley Reshonne Harris

Abstract

School leaders across the country seek ways to increase family engagement. Children learn and grow when parents, teachers and community collaborate in ways that encourage student development (Epstein & Sheldon, 2014). Current family engagement models do not support families of diverse socio-historical backgrounds and are not differentiated (Coady, 2019). "Every family needs a voice in certain school decisions" (Constantino, 2016). The purpose of this qualitative study, informed by phenomenological case study, was to describe school leaders' perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in central Virginia school divisions. The researcher conducted one-on one interviews with school leaders that support site based preschool programs in public school. The intended outcome of this study was to provide Virginia preschool school leaders with qualitative data to support the engagement of preschool immigrant families in Virginia. Data collected included four preschool leaders. An analysis of the data indicated that all school leaders perceive relationship building, open two way communication, and community partnerships as key components to family engagement with immigrant preschool families in Virginia. It is anticipated that this study's results could help school leaders implement practices that will impact the engagement of immigrant preschool families in Virginia as well as support student academic achievement. The findings will indicate school leaders lived experiences with preschool immigrant families.

School Leader Perceptions of Family Engagement Practices with Immigrant Preschool Families
in Virginia

Lesley Reshonne Harris

General Audience Abstract

School leaders across the country seek ways to increase family engagement. Children learn and grow when parents, teachers and community collaborate in ways that encourage student development (Epstein & Sheldon, 2014). The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe school leaders' perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in central Virginia school divisions. The researcher conducted one-on one interviews with school leaders that support site based preschool programs in public school. The intended outcome of this study was to provide Virginia preschool school leaders with qualitative data to support the engagement of preschool immigrant families in Virginia. Data collected included four preschool leaders. An analysis of the data indicated that all school leaders perceive relationship building, open two way communication, and community partnerships as key components to family engagement with immigrant preschool families in Virginia. It is anticipated that this study's results could help school leaders implement practices that will impact the engagement of immigrant preschool families in Virginia as well as support student academic achievement. The findings indicate school leaders lived experiences with preschool immigrant families.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, especially to the memory of my late mother, father and grandmothers. They were always my biggest supporters and exemplified strength in the midst of adversity. They overcame many life challenges and instilled in me the value of an education. They showed me the importance of helping others and use of my gifts to make the world a better place. My family was my inspiration for obtaining a doctorate.

I hope the completion of my doctorate inspires my grandson to reach for his goals in life. I hope my nieces and nephews see that education truly is the great equalizer and can open doors of opportunity. All things are possible with faith, hard work and dedication.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my chair Dr. Charles Lowery for guidance and support during this process. Your timely feedback was very helpful and I truly appreciate you sharing your perspective and words of encouragement. I want to thank my doctoral cohort members, the “Elite Eleven”. The laughs we shared during this process helped me more than you will ever know. I am honored to have shared this unique experience with you. You are all amazing leaders!

I also wish to express gratitude to Dr. Ted Price, Dr. Carol Cash, Dr. Tinkhani White, and Dr. Jodie Brinkman for their guidance and insightful feedback as my committee members. I appreciate your support during this process. I am grateful for the support of close friends and colleagues. I am especially grateful for Vincent Christian, Neshara Gaston, Vanessa Wright, Robert Bohannon, Pamela Johnson, Dr. Patrice Wilson, Dr. Kenya Batts, Dr. Monique Booth, Pastor Ralph S. Hodge and my Second Baptist Church family. This would not have been possible without your supportive phone calls, texts and words of encouragement. Thank you for your many acts of kindness as I pursued this dream.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
General Audience Abstract.....	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures.....	ix
List of Tables	x
Chapter One Introduction	1
Historical Perspective	2
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Significance of the Study	4
Purpose of the Study.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Overview of the Study	6
Definition of Terms	7
Limitations.....	8
Delimitations.....	8
Organization of the Study	9
Chapter Two Literature Review.....	11
Search Process and Criteria.....	13
Methods Used in Articles Yielded	14
Foundational Scholars and Scholarship Related to Family Engagement.....	15
Salient Studies	16
Role of Educational Leadership in Family Engagement.....	20
Community and External Leadership	21
School Community Relations.....	22

Barriers and Solutions to Family Engagement	24
High Yield Family Engagement Practices	25
Student Outcomes Related to Family Engagement	27
Chapter Three Methodology.....	29
Purpose of the Study.....	29
Research Questions.....	30
Research Design/Methods	30
Approach Justification and Methods.....	31
Case Selection and Participant Recruitment.....	33
Data Collection Procedures.....	34
Instrument Design.....	34
Data Analysis.....	36
<i>Achieve Familiarity with the Data Through Open-Minded Reading.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Search for Meanings and Themes.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Organizing Themes into Meaningful Wholeness</i>	<i>39</i>
Ethical Considerations.....	40
Trustworthiness.....	40
Reflexivity	41
Transferability.....	42
Dependability and Confirmability.....	43
Chapter Four Analysis of Data.....	44
Research Questions.....	44
School Leader Interview Data	45
Description of Participants.....	46
Participant Demographic Information	47
Analysis of Data.....	50
<i>Research Question 1</i>	<i>50</i>
Chapter Five Findings, Summary and Conclusions	71
Phenomenological Aspects of Case Findings.....	71

Summary of Findings	73
<i>Finding 1</i>	73
<i>Finding 2</i>	74
<i>Finding 3</i>	75
<i>Finding 4</i>	77
<i>Finding 5</i>	77
<i>Finding 6</i>	78
Implications of Findings	79
<i>Implication 1</i>	80
<i>Implication 2</i>	80
<i>Implication 3</i>	81
<i>Implication 4</i>	82
<i>Implication 5</i>	82
<i>Implication 6</i>	83
<i>Implication 7</i>	83
Conclusions	84
Suggestions for Future Studies	84
Personal Reflections	84
References	86
Appendix A School Leader Interview Questions	97
Appendix B CITI Certificate	99

List of Figures

Figure 1 <i>Diagram of Six Types of Involvement</i>	6
Figure 2 <i>Summary of Thematic Analysis from Sundler et al. (2018)</i>	37

List of Tables

Table 1	<i>Search Criteria and Results</i>	13
Table 2	<i>Aligned Interview Questions with Research Questions</i>	35
Table 3	<i>Participants Representation of Regional School Settings</i>	46
Table 4	<i>School Leader Participant Description</i>	46
Table 5	<i>Deductive Codes</i>	47
Table 6	<i>Themes and Participant Responses Related to Effective Practices</i>	51
Table 7	<i>Themes and Participant Responses Related to Ineffective Practices</i>	54
Table 8	<i>Themes From School Leader Responses as to What a new Principal Should be Doing to Engage Immigrant Preschool Families</i>	56
Table 9	<i>Role of School-Community and School Family Relations</i>	58
Table 10	<i>Themes and Participant Responses Related to Specific Community Partnerships</i>	60
Table 11	<i>Impact on Students</i>	61
Table 12	<i>Regular Family Engagement Events</i>	64
Table 13	<i>Barriers to Family Engagement</i>	65
Table 14	<i>Future Plans to Decrease Barriers</i>	67
Table 15	<i>Additional Thoughts on Family Engagement</i>	68
Table 16	<i>School Leader Summary of Responses</i>	69
Table 17	<i>Epstein’s Types of Parent Involvement</i>	79

Chapter One

Introduction

Family engagement connects parents and schools in partnership to ensure student success (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2018). The Every Student Succeeds Act 2015 (ESSA) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) which is the nation's commitment to providing equal educational opportunity to all students (U.S. Department of Education, [USDOE], 2018). Partnerships are the shared connection between home and school which contribute to student learning and development (Epstein, 2018) and family engagement is defined as a partnership between teachers and families to meet individual student academic learning needs according to (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). The topic of family engagement has been researched for many years and schools are faced with finding new ways to engage parents as partners in their child's education and public schools are becoming more diverse each year with an increased enrollment of immigrant populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022).

Schools should meet the growing needs of diverse family and student backgrounds as they seek partnership opportunities that will have a positive impact on student achievement. Additionally, parent involvement in their child's early education help support student's early literacy, math and social emotional development (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Powell et al., 2010). This concern for parent involvement grounds the purpose of this qualitative research study to identify school leader's perceptions of family engagement practices for immigrant preschool populations.

The aim of this research is to gain insight from school leaders on the impact that family engagement with immigrant families has within their learning spaces and what outcomes are noted for students. The intended outcome of this study is to provide school leaders with

qualitative data that supports family engagement strategies that appear to have positively impacted the marginalized subgroup of immigrant students and families.

Historical Perspective

Family engagement is a main component of the Head Start Program which is supported by Title I (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Title 1 Part A provides financial support through state educational agencies to public schools with a high percentage of students from low-income families to ensure students meet state achievement standards (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE], 2022). Head Start is a comprehensive early childhood development program established in 1969 which serves low-income preschool students and families (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2023). The Head Start Program was reauthorized in 2007 to deliver comprehensive, high-quality services supporting the school readiness of children and families with low income (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2018).

Head Start Performance Standards and guidelines include requirements for family engagement in an effort to support curriculum and educational policy (Lee & Rispoli, 2019). Head Start serves approximately one million economically disadvantaged young children each year (Lee & Rispoli, 2019). Preschool Development Grants are a component of the Every Child Succeeds Act 2015 (ESSA), and the role of early childhood education is recognized as playing a key role in school success for economically disadvantaged students (National Education Association, 2020). Grants are jointly administered by the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Health and Human Services with award periods of one to three years (National Education Association, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

School leaders face many challenges when engaging immigrant preschool families as demographic changes have impacted school districts (Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018). Demographic changes require school leaders to reflect on how they can meet the changing needs of families. Barriers exist that impact family engagement with diverse preschool populations (Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018). Communication is a common barrier that limits school and family partnership opportunities (Barnes et al., 2016). Schools should use various communication methods to engage families (Barnes et al., 2016). Limited resources also impact schools' ability to engage with immigrant families. School, family and community partnerships are a means to leverage resources and build strong family engagement programs (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

A growing number of educational policy initiatives focus on minimizing these disparities by making preschool programming more available (Magnuson & Duncan, 2016). One-size fits all family engagement practices are not effective (Keys, 2014). Schools should make a special effort to build trust with families and seek to determine which family engagement practices are most beneficial to their school community (Keys, 2014). Better understandings of family engagement practices can inform school intervention and enhance school programming (Nix et al., 2018). Gigliana et al. (2020) found that future research should be conducted with Latino family engagement. Calzada et al. (2014) held that future research will benefit from evaluating family engagement practices with immigrant preschool populations. Lowenhaupt and Montgomery (2018) found research gaps related to how larger school districts address barriers to engaging immigrant families.

Significance of the Study

Teachers, parents and administrators all attest that family engagement benefits students, improves schools, supports teachers, and strengthens families (Epstein, 2018). Equitable family engagement practices must be developed for immigrant populations (Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018). Parent involvement in their child's education is vital in promoting healthy child development and resilience (Barnes et al., 2016) and impacts early literacy, math and social emotional development.

Family engagement in preschool has a positive impact on early literacy skills. Gigiliana et al. (2020) found that 97% of students were able to share narratives from a wordless book due to a family engagement initiative. Exposure to varied early literacy experiences at home has a positive impact on English Language Learner students (Trainin et al., 2016). Students display higher levels of cooperation and positive interactions with others at home and at school due to family engagement (Hindman & Morrison, 2012). Young students whose parents engage in math-related family engagement activities experience higher achievement in math (Berkowitz et al., 2015). Family engagement is a key factor in student achievement and leads to positive academic outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify school leaders' perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia. School, family, and community partnerships promote student well-being and academic success (Epstein et al., 2018). The preschool years directly impact a child's ability to be successful in Kindergarten (VDOE, 2018).

According to the most recent data there are more than 840,000 immigrant students in the United States and more than 4.6 million English Learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Children from Mexican immigrant families are a fast-growing segment of the U.S. population and they have lower school readiness and achievement than their U.S born peers (Crosnoe, 2015). Increased rigor in kindergarten expands the need for quality preschool learning experiences (Ansari et al. 2020). Leveraging family engagement with preschool immigrant families supports student success in school.

Research Questions

The questions for this research study were as follows:

1. What practices do school leaders implement to engage immigrant preschool families in successful school-family-community partnerships?
2. What impact do school leaders perceive immigrant preschool family engagement has on student attendance and achievement?

Conceptual Framework

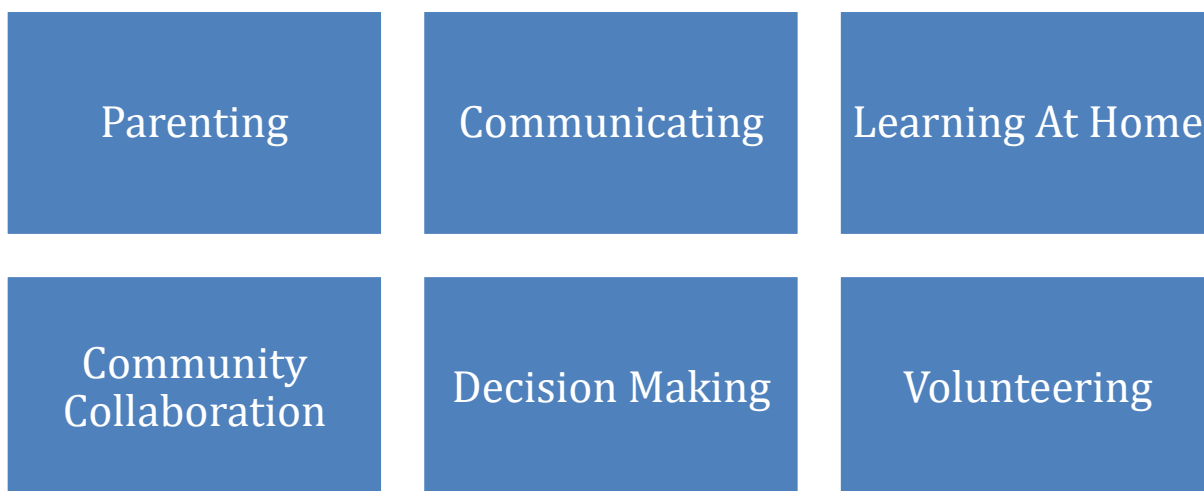
The researcher was guided by Joyce Epstein's Theory of Family and Community Partnerships in which she asserts school, family and community partnerships lead to positive outcomes for students (Epstein, 1995). The keys to successful school, family and community partnerships are linked to six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and community collaboration (Epstein, 1995). Epstein's work is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1977, 1979, 1986). Bronfenbrenner (1979) put forth the idea that child development is impacted by the complex relationships among environment, family, school and cultural experiences. Five systems impact a person's environment: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). According to Bronfenbrenner, the microsystem has a direct impact on the child and includes immediate environments such as family, educators, and peers.

The mesosystem involves those interactions between the child's microsystems; engagement between the child's parents and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The exosystem has indirect influence over the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Epstein (1995) maintains that schools should assist families in understanding student development, build trust and establish open communication, provide opportunities for volunteering at school, maximize learning opportunities at home while involving parents and community members in decision making. The conceptual framework, Figure 1, provides an overview of the factors illustrated in the research that impact family engagement with immigrant preschool populations.

Figure 1

Diagram of Six Types of Involvement



From Epstein's *Models of Six Types of Parent Involvement* (Epstein, 1986).

Overview of the Study

The researcher conducted a qualitative study engaging school leaders in suburban Virginia school divisions. The inquiry, which borrowed elements from both phenomenology and

case study, included interviews with school leaders from early childhood preschool programs with immigrant preschool populations. These school leaders supervise specific site-based preschool programs. School leaders were asked to respond to open-ended questions related to their perceptions of effective family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families. I collected participants' demographic data. Additionally, school leaders were asked to reflect upon family engagement events held each year, how immigrant families are engaged within the school community, and impact on student outcomes.

Definition of Terms

The following are key terms that are used throughout this study. Definitions are listed to help facilitate an understanding of the research.

Center-Based Preschool. *Center-based preschool* refers to a legally operating child day program offered to (i) two or more children under the age of 13 in a facility that is not the residence of the provider or of any of the children in care or (ii) 13 or more children at any location that is neither licensed nor registered and is eligible to participate in the Subsidy program (Virginia Department of Social Services, 2024).

Community Partnerships. *Community partnerships* refers to community resources, business partners, cultural, religious, and educational groups (Epstein, 2018).

English Language Learner. *English Language Learner* refers to children who are in the process of learning two or more languages (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

Family Engagement. *Family engagement* refers to a collaborative and strengths-based process through which early childhood professionals, families, and students build goal-oriented positive relationships (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2023).

Head Start. *Head Start* is a federally funded program designed to promote school readiness for economically disadvantaged children ages birth to five (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2023).

Immigrant Populations. *Immigrant populations* refers to all persons who have migrated from their country of birth to their current country of residence (Camarota et al., 2023).

Preschool. *Preschool* programs provide a foundation for learning and prepares students for success in Kindergarten (VDOE, 2022).

Title I. *Title I* is a federal program designed to provide all children with an opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education while closing achievement gaps (VDOE, 2022).

Limitations

The primary limitations in this study were the scope of recruitment and willingness to participate. This study was initially designed to include more participants. Due to a small participant frame, I was not able to recruit the number of participants desired. Although I reached out to many potential participants, volunteers who fit the participant criteria were limited. This had additional impacts on the scope of the study. The limited geographical scope and researcher resources impacted not only the number of participants but also the potential for follow-up data collection.

Delimitations

Fundamentally, this study served to better understand school-leader perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families. In qualitative studies delimitations describe the intentional scope and boundaries of the study as it is designed. Delimitations are choices that the researcher includes to ensure focus and feasibility. The delimitations of this

study were made to frame a purposeful and informed study of a specific set of educational leaders with specific experiences and perceptions. Participant criteria, geographical scope, and a focus on interactions with immigrant preschool families were taken into consideration.

First, the study was designed to include only public-school leaders of center-based preschools in Virginia school divisions. Additionally, these were public school leaders that have preschool programs in their building and supervise preschool programs will be selected for this study. Finally, as a qualitative researcher I further delimited the design of this study to ensure that school leaders interviewed were able to express informed perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia. This meant the research required further focusing on the family engagement practices of these leaders with immigrant preschool families.

Organization of the Study

School leaders face the challenge of overcoming barriers as they seek solutions to engaging preschool immigrant families. The researcher analyzed literature to identify barriers and solutions to immigrant preschool family engagement, determine high-yield strategies to family engagement with this marginalized population, and identify impact on student achievement. This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction/overview of the study, historical perspective on family engagement, statement of the problem, the significance, purpose and justification of the proposed study, research questions, theoretical framework, the definition of terms, limitations/delimitations and organization of the study. Chapter Two provides a review of current literature related to the proposed topic of study. Chapter Two includes search procedures and background information on foundational scholars on family engagement, role of educational leadership in family engagement, community and external leadership, school/community relations, barriers/solutions to family engagement, high

yield family engagement practices and positive student outcomes. Chapter 3 details the methodology for the researchers proposed study. This chapter includes the study's purpose, description of the research, design/methodology, research design justification, research questions, site/sample selection, data collection and gathering procedures, instrument design and validation data treatment and management, analysis procedures, timeline and summary.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Family engagement is a key factor in student achievement and leads to positive academic outcomes for students (Hall, 2020). Literature on best practices for effective family engagement practices with diverse Title I preschool families were reviewed for this paper. The purpose of this literature review was to identify school leaders' perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia.

Title I was founded in 1965 and according to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), educational institutions in which children from low-socioeconomic families make up at least 40% of enrollment are eligible to use Title I funds to operate schoolwide programs in an effort to raise student academic achievement. The goal of Head Start is to prepare students that are at risk for school failure for academic success, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018. Nearly one million economically disadvantaged students take part in the program (Lee & Rispoli, 2019). This free, federally funded, preschool program is found across the United States and serves as economic relief for parents.

Educational Policy supports the important role family engagement has on student outcomes. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) revised federal language that places families and educators as full partners in a child's education (Garbacz et al., 2016). There has been a focus in recent years to further the reach of school readiness programs. Universal preschool is a growing area of focus at the federal, state, and local levels of government in the United States. As communities become more diverse, there is a growing need to provide students with basic literacy and math skills as they prepare to face the rigor of kindergarten (Garbacz et al., 2016).

These demographic changes have a significant impact on how educators prepare to engage with the families of young children (Guirguis & Plotka, 2019).

Parents are invited to be actively engaged in the development of curriculum and policy within the Head Start Program. Parents play an active role in program decisions as members of the Policy Council. Parents have input on staffing decisions according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018). This practice ensures that programming decisions are parent and child centered. Head Start methods stay relevant, meeting the needs of current students each year as the Policy Council changes based on student enrollment, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018).

Parents are encouraged to partner with school staff to prepare students for school success by attending school events, engaging in home visits, and supporting their child's academic needs (Keys, 2014). Head Start focuses on the whole child. Students' academic, physical, and social emotional growth is fostered via meaningful learning experiences throughout the day, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018).

Children living in poverty can sometimes be presented with literacy challenges, attention issues, and lack of social skills which can negatively impact school readiness (Nix et al., 2018). These concerns can be attributed to parent education level, economic factors, and lack of parenting skills (Nix et al., 2018). Ongoing communication is one way to inform parents of student academic progress and is a key factor in building close trusting relationships (Cohen-Vogel et al., 2010). One way to foster positive relationships is to have open two-way communication (Epstein, 2018). This can be achieved by using various familiar forms of digital communication such as social media, email, and text messages.

Search Process and Criteria

A comprehensive search for pertinent literature about family engagement and diverse preschool populations was conducted through electronic searches in VT Remote Library, Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, and EBSCOHost. The search was conducted using the following keywords: *family engagement, preschool, diverse populations, and Title I*. The comprehensive search garnered various dissertations and research studies. Studies listed in the reference section are included in the literature review.

The majority of the research included in this literature review is within the last 10 years. Landmark studies and key contributors to family engagement research are noted. In this comprehensive literature review 70 articles and two books were reviewed. For this literature review, dissertations, peer-reviewed journal articles and books were reviewed. Full-text scholarly articles and journals were set as parameters. The search terms and findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Search Criteria and Results

Search Criteria	Results
Preschool	61,405
Family engagement	4,503
Family and school partnerships	1,286
Every Students Succeeds Act	1,102
Title 1	841
Diverse populations	373
Family engagement, preschool, full- text scholarly articles 2014-2021	104

Searches were conducted between August 2022 and May 2021 after discussion with a Virginia Tech Online Librarian who assisted me with how to engage in successful literature

searches. Abstracts for each article were reviewed in addition to book summaries in determining which salient sources would be included. Sources were analyzed to determine relevance to the topic. Articles were selected and excluded based on the typology of region in which the study was conducted (rural vs. urban), as well as the impact on student achievement and demographics of study participants based on findings. Works cited by several studies assisted in narrowing search criteria. Themes emerging from the research include the terms preschool, family engagement, and diverse populations. The most relevant and recent articles are included in this literature review regarding diverse preschool family engagement practices.

Methods Used in Articles Yielded

A variety of methods were used in reviewing family engagement practices with diverse preschool families. Most used were qualitative in nature and included surveys to both educators and parents. Research shows that children demonstrate better educational and mental health outcomes when their parents are involved in their education (Jeynes, 2003; Smith et al., 2020). Parents' successful engagement in early childhood programs has a positive impact on a child's wellbeing (Barnes et al., 2016). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015) includes family participation requirements and is the reauthorization of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act 1966 (ESEA).

Parental involvement has been a main element in the Head Start Program since its founding (Keys, 2014). The Head Start Program and its family participation practices have been shown to have a positive impact on student outcomes (Keys, 2014). Building positive relationships, varied opportunities, and trust are key factors in high levels of family engagement (Keys, 2014). Schools must adapt their family engagement practices to ensure access for

culturally diverse family populations (Lowenhaupt, 2018). This review will highlight effective family engagement practices with diverse preschool families.

Foundational Scholars and Scholarship Related to Family Engagement

The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (2018) defines family engagement as a “connected process through which students, school staff, and families build positive goal-oriented relationships”. Head Start staff work with stakeholders and community partners to promote equity and cultural responsiveness (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2023). Some of the leading scholars in the field of family engagement include Susan Auerbach (2007, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012), Andy Garbacz (Garbacz et al., 2016; Garbacz et al., 2017; Garbacz et al., 2018; Santiago et al., 2016; Semke et al., 2010; Sheridan et al., 2012), and Joyce Epstein (1986, 1987, 1995, 2018). Maria Coady’s work (Coady et al., 2015; Coady, 2019a, 2019b; Coady & Ankeny, 2019) have also contributed to the literature on family engagement for English Language Learner students.

Uri Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979, 1986) also serves as a theoretical framework for research. Bronfenbrenner’s theory is cited in numerous publications concerning family engagement (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020; Seitsinger, 2019; Stanley & Kuo, 2022; Yamauchi et al., 2017). In his Ecological Systems Theory he put forth the idea that child development is impacted by the complex relationships among environment, family, school, and cultural experiences. Five systems that impact a person’s environment: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986).

According to Bronfenbrenner, 1979, the microsystem has a direct impact on the child and includes immediate environments such as family, educators and peers. The mesosystem are those interactions between the child’s microsystems; engagement between the child’s parents and

school (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The exosystem has indirect influence over the child. Such influences include the child's neighborhood or parent workplace. The macrosystem focuses on how cultural influence impacts the child and includes socioeconomic status and ethnicity.

Finally, Bronfenbrenner's (1977) chronosystem encompasses all of the environmental changes that a child may experience, including major life transitions. Epstein's theoretical framework on school, family, and community partnerships (Epstein, 2018) was also influenced by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. Epstein found that family engagement is maximized when schools leverage community partnerships to influence outcomes for students (Epstein, 2018).

Salient Studies

Field studies have suggested that effective programs join partnership activities using six types of involvement: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteerism, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) community collaboration (Epstein, 1995). Epstein and Sheldon (2014) surveyed 347 schools in 21 districts and identified variables that impact parental involvement. These were sizable urban, small urban, suburban, and rural areas across the country (Epstein & Sheldon, 2014). This study concluded that policies on parental involvement, principal support, and active facilitation of research-based family engagement structures have a positive impact on family engagement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2014).

This study concluded that home, school and community partnerships support six types of involvement- parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community (Epstein & Sheldon, 2014). Barriers identified to family engagement included communication obstacles for English Language Learners (Epstein & Sheldon, 2014). Students with reading skills, increased attendance, attitudes and health are

positively impacted by parental involvement (Epstein et al. 2009). Student attendance is an indicator of student learning and positively impacts achievement test scores (Balfanz et al., 2007).

Effective family engagement is achieved when school districts promote equitable connections among home, school, and community (Epstein & Sheldon, 2014). Study results showed that school and community partnerships can engage more families and have a positive impact on a child's education (Epstein & Sheldon, 2014). Epstein & Sheldon, found in 2014 that there are implications for education policy and practice. Establishing a leadership structure, professional development, budget, evaluations, and research-based structures can promote equitable and meaningful partnerships with families (Epstein & Sheldon, 2014).

Another salient study that informed this literature review was Keys (2014). This conducted a cross-sectional study that examined Head Start parents' perceived levels of family engagement in different community locations. The study included 419 participants from rural and urban areas in the Midwest. All participants were surveyed using the Parent and School Survey (PASS). Parents surveyed from southwest Missouri had students enrolled in Head Start and received services from Ozarks Area Community Action Corporation (OACAC), which serves low-income families.

Data collection was received from 16 Head Start centers, in 29 classrooms in 10 communities (Keys, 2014). Springfield, Missouri was identified as the urban location with a population of 160,000 (Keys, 2014). Nine communities in southwest Missouri were selected as rural communities and ranged in population from 470 to 1,921 (Keys, 2014). At the time of this study, 848 Head Start students attended 16 OACAC locations, and 419 surveys were returned (Keys, 2014). The demographic characteristics of participants were 309 females and 29 males.

This study surveyed 293 White, 18 Black, five American Indian/Alaska Natives, five Asian, one Native Hawaiian, and 11 other parents. The respondent's ages ranged from 18 to 60 years of age with an average age range of 30. Participant education levels were examined. Sixty-six people had less than a high school degree, 103 were high school graduates, 118 had some college, and no degree and 51 people reported the highest level of educational achievement was an associate's degree.

People reported as being married numbered 132, 93 reported as single, and 2 reported as widows (Key, 2014). The urban Head Start classrooms had a survey return rate of 39% with rural Head Start classroom survey return rate of 43%. Keys (2014) found that on average, urban families exhibited higher levels of perceived family engagement than their rural counterparts and scored higher on the parent involvement survey. More research should move this agenda further by focusing on specific types of family engagement activities and policies that serve to increase family engagement levels to link rural and urban areas. Similar to Keys, Fantuzzo et al. (2004) found that family involvement influences the learning achievement of children from urban low-income backgrounds. Positive and trusting relationships between educators and parents improve student success in school (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

In addition to family engagement in urban and rural Head Start programs, research by Lee and Rispoli (2019) was conducted, investigating father involvement and Black Head Start children's development. This study examined the influence of fathers' participation and Black children's development. Fathers play a significant role in child development. There are links between Black children in Head Start and father involvement. Lee and Rispoli (2019) explored the impact on father involvement and developmental outcomes for preschool students enrolled in the Head Start Program.

The mean age of the students in the study was 3.35, and 1,354 Black students participated in this research study. This study included both Head Start and non-Head Start students. Lee and Rispoli (2019) found that fathers' involvement plays a positive role in child development. Father involvement was measured by a survey that provided scores based on conference attendance, school events, and volunteering at school events. Quantitative methods included student assessments related to cognitive outcomes such as oral comprehension, receptive language, social emotional concepts, and a behavioral index (Lee & Rispoli, 2019).

During this research study, children's oral comprehension scores and early math skills were measured by the WJIII-A (Mather & Woodcock, 2007). Receptive language was measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary test. Social emotional outcomes such as parent child relationships were evaluated by the Child Parent Relationship Scale. This is a self-report system (Lee & Rispoli, 2019). Parents were asked to measure their children's social skills as well as approaches to learning in a survey. This study concluded that fatherhood engagement was not related to significant cognitive, social-emotional, or behavior outcomes for Black children; however, fathers that lived in the home showed higher levels of engagement than those that did not (Lee & Rispoli, 2019).

Previous research by Baker (2013) found positive influence of fathers' home engagement, such as reading and singing to children at 24 months made an impact on reading and math skills in early childhood. Head Start should continue to seek opportunities for fathers and father figures to directly influence academic development (Lee & Rispoli, 2019). This can be achieved by providing training to parents and school staff modeling how to share stories with children. Community members or school personnel can facilitate these training sessions.

Family literacy programs which support school-based practices are an intervention approach to improving student reading skills and test scores (Auerbach & Collier, 2012). Researchers found that the Family Promoting Success Program made immigrant parents aware of Latino, English learner students' reading skills and built relationships with marginalized families. This multiple case study used qualitative methods to review the Family Promoting Success Program at four low-performing Los Angeles elementary schools. Personalized instruction helps to build relationships among families, and schools should seek out parent voice when planning and implementing parent programs (Auerbach & Collier, 2012). Additionally, Auerbach, 2010 found that authentic school partnerships with Latino parents must be implemented with two-way communication and are linked to social justice and cultural responsiveness.

Coady et al. (2022) examined the 1981 U. S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals legal case *Casteneda v. Pickard* and its impact on educational policies and guidelines for English Learners. This legal case established a three-branched test for bilingual students, including the right for students to have educational programming based on strong educational research, resources and staff to properly execute the program and review program and review its impact. Coady et al. (2022) found that there is a robust desire to challenge dated state policies and negative attitudes towards marginalized students and their families. Efforts to promote multilingualism, education, and access to resources fall under the banner of equity and policy reform.

Role of Educational Leadership in Family Engagement

School leaders spend time engaging with families about behavioral concerns, academic progress, policies, procedures, and school practices. Constantino (2021) affirmed that school leaders are better served to engage with families before implementing policies and procedures

seeking opportunities for parental input. Information related to new policies can be shared via homeowner or neighborhood email lists or parent policy councils to ensure the new guidelines represent the thoughts of the community (Constantino, 2021). Malczyk and Lawson (2019) found that school leaders should promote policies that consider parent work schedules to allow more flexibility with participation in family engagement activities.

Many states require candidates demonstrate preparation and competencies related to engaging with family and community members as part of educational leadership licensure programs (Epstein, 2018). School leadership can build trust with parents by following through with commitments, keeping parents informed of student progress, and leading family driven goal setting and capacity building in mind (Ball et al., 2021). School administrators can provide opportunities for educational staff to evaluate their own personal biases and how they impact opportunities for family engagement (Ball et al., 2021). Schools should take the time to educate staff on cultural competency and ensure two-way communication between the school and families (Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018).

Community and External Leadership

School-family community partnerships provide opportunities for comprehensive services that support student wellbeing and academic success by capitalizing on community and family resources (Epstein et al., 2018). In a family service framework (Ingram et al., 2015) found that engagement, assessment and parental training is critical in family driven planning which allows parents to focus on family inner strengths rather than deficits. The Better Beginnings Program promotes community development to enhance the capacity of parents and neighborhoods to support healthy child development and uses schools as a resource hub (Worton et al., 2014).

Parents that are connected are to community services have the opportunity to participate in home visits, special community events and celebrations (Worton et al., 2014). A continuum of services can be achieved when community-based professionals work alongside children and families (Epstein et al. 2018). Universities in close proximity and school district partnerships can be used to respond to shifting demographics (Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018). District and university partnerships can bridge the gap between immigrant communities, home and school (Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018).

Due to the increasing number of Latinx students entering the U.S. there is a growing need to understand ways Latinx parents participate in and support their child's educational experience (McWayne & Melzi, 2014). McWayne and Melzi (2014) conducted a mixed methods study with 463 Latinx Head Start caregivers to understand the family engagement conceptualizations for this heterogeneous population. Participants completed The Parental Engagement of Families from Latino Backgrounds (PEFL-English and PEFL Spanish) questionnaire.

Participants responded to questions related to recentness of immigration, native speech, trade, education, caregiver age and levels of social support. Among the 463 participants, 370 completed the questionnaire in Spanish. Ages ranged from 18 to 84, 81% were mothers, 10% were fathers and 9% were other family members. Participants completed the questionnaire at the center.

School Community Relations

High quality early childhood programs provide educational experiences to students and provide parental support via education and outreach (Knowles et al., 2016). Academic based family game nights help parents identify their child's learning difficulties and they can see first-hand how to address them by observing educators (Knowles et al., 2016). A six-part family

engagement Family Fun Night series linked to Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports found increased levels of family engagement (Knowles et al., 2016). The preschool in the study developed a six-session series titled Family Fun Nights which was a strength based, collaborative framework connected to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.

The preschool in the study utilized a wraparound family support model which offered parents community resources, housing/rental assistance and wellness support. Family Support Coordinators provided behavioral support designed to address student social skills and behavior management. The family fun nights utilized a preventative approach to parent education and emphasized family partnerships for each 45-minute session. Students ages 2 to 5 participated in the family fun nights with parents and parents completed a pre and post Parenting Skills Ladder self-assessment. 5 out of 27 families participated in all family fun nights and increased options available for preschool family involvement (Knowles et al., 2016).

The Community Action Project of Tulsa County Oklahoma leverages English as a Second Language Services to support Latino immigrant Head Start families (Sommer et al., 2018). This mixed method study investigated the progression of parents in a tuition free ESL program (Sommer et al., 2018). The program offered 35 parents an opportunity to enroll in ESL classes while their child participated in Head Start. Parents were connected with family advocates and community resources. Parent participation reached 83% semester one and 70% semester two. Focus group data included an improved sense of parent agency with student education, design of parent curriculum with whole child development and links between parent/child learning (Sommer et al., 2018).

Barriers and Solutions to Family Engagement

The main barriers identified to family engagement are communication, time, transportation, parent negative perceptions of school, parent work schedule and educator expectation (Almeda & Lawson, 2014). According to Almeda and Lawson (2014), time should be allotted to review communication barriers with families. Those areas should be evaluated and addressed to ensure two-way communication is established. Use of interpreters and translators make families feel respected and supported (Epstein, 1995). Some Latinx parents feel as if they do not have power to help their child succeed in school due to the language barrier (Sommer et al., 2017).

Establishing a positive rapport with families supports building trust and has a positive impact on communication (Ball et al., 2021). Ensuring teachers are trained in culturally responsive teaching practices and are aware of their own biases impact family engagement (Calzada et al., 2015). Reflection on culturally responsive pedagogy and devotion to professional development for teachers related to this area. Teachers that report using more family parent involvement practices were associated with higher parent participation in school-based activities among Afro-Caribbean and Latinx families (Calzada et al., 2015).

Respecting cultural differences is key when engaging with diverse family populations (Epstein, 1997). Parents should be given options regarding the types of family engagement activities they would like to participate in. Varying the times of family engagement events will meet the broader needs of families (Epstein, 1997). This sends a powerful message to parents and also builds trust. Varying the times of family engagement events helps to meet the broader needs of families and can build trust and confidence in developing a partnership where parents' voices matter and their opinions are valued.

Family engagement is essential for establishing positive experiences for immigrant families (Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018). Employment of parents, marital status, education level, income level, race, ethnicity and attitudes towards program goals play a role in family engagement levels (Epstein, 2018). Some parents did not have positive school experiences themselves. This can lead to lack of trust and discomfort with being in the school setting (Epstein, 2018).

Traditional means of communication such as newsletters, phone calls, flyers and emails are still effective tools. Use of texts and social media tap into forms of communication with which many families are more familiar (Fan & Yost, 2019). Social media services and social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs, websites have increased parent communication (Fan & Yost, 2019).

Use of digital and electronic communication tools are gaining popularity. This is in large part due to increased access to the internet and the technological advances of cell phones. Cell phones are widely used by parents. Technology acquisition for low income families has historically been relatively low, new research indicates that their rate of telecommunications use is nearing that of families with higher income measures (Swindle et al., 2014). Trust can be fostered with parents by empowering them and welcoming family involvement (Galindo & Pucino, 2012). Common social barriers to family engagement faced by low-income earners include scheduling challenges, social and cultural isolation and minimal access to financial means (Sommer et al., 2018).

High Yield Family Engagement Practices

Schools are encouraged to conduct a family engagement needs assessment to determine school and parental needs (Lowenhaupt & Nicholl, 2018). A quick parent survey is one way to

get input from parents to determine family engagement needs and interest. Leveraging opportunities for partnerships with local colleges and universities increases access to funds and optional meeting places for events that support family engagement (Lowenhaupt & Nicholl, 2018). Providing childcare and transportation during family engagement events increases parent participation and attendance (Eyring, 2014). Inviting parents into the school to serve as volunteers allows parents to increase their comfort level and build positive relationships. Some parents do not engage in family engagement because of their own personal negative experiences with school (Epstein, 1997).

School staff can share both direct and indirect ways family members can support their child's development. This will support learning across home, school and community settings (Ginsburg-Block et al., 2010). Schools can promote family engagement by supporting families as their children's first teachers and honoring families' unique home experiences (Summer & Summer, 2014). As their child's first teachers, parents know their children better than anyone. Building partnerships with them often serves as an extra layer of student support. According to Summer and Summer (2014), providing children with an opportunity to bring home cultures into the classroom serves as a resource that can be used in their learning and helps build bridges between home and school. This empowers parents and demonstrates all that they have to offer (Summer & Summer, 2014).

School staff should be sensitive to parent concerns and make special effort to connect to families and build positive relationships. Parents can participate in school-based family engagement by volunteering at the school and attending school events (Epstein, 1987). Home based family engagement includes assisting students with homework, reading to students and taking them to museums (Calzada et al., 2014). Parents and schools working together increases

the likelihood that students will be successful in school as school populations have become increasingly diverse in recent years (Sommer et al., 2018).

Family engagement is at its most influential when the areas of impact are maximized (Epstein, 2018). Collaboration between school, family, and community have a positive impact on family engagement along with varied opportunities for family engagement (Epstein, 2018). Offering events at varied times of the day shows respect and consideration for parents. Schools should leverage use of social media and technology to increase family engagement and effective communication (Fan & Yost, 2019). Use of technology was a vital component to keeping families connected with school during the recent pandemic (Gonzalez & Gillanders, 2021). Schools had to find creative ways to leverage use of technology to support and engage families and students. Family engagement has a positive impact on student achievement when positive relationships and trust are established (Epstein, 2018). When parents and schools work together it results in positive outcomes for students (Smith et al., 2020).

Student Outcomes Related to Family Engagement

Family engagement can have long lasting impacts on student achievement and parent interest in being connected with schools (Epstein et al., 2018). School-family community partnerships can promote student success by leveraging community resources (Epstein et al., 2018). Parent involvement as early as pre-kindergarten increases student motivation to learn (Christenson, 2000) and promotes skills necessary for success in later school years (Pianta et al., 1999). Lee and Rispoli (2019) found there is an association between higher levels of early literacy skills and father's involvement in Head Start children's educations versus non-Head Start students.

Parenting practices, style and the parent child relationship and family structure can have

an impact on student academic achievement (Malczyk & Lawson, 2019). Melzi et al. (2020) found that 97% of Head Start students were able to share a narrative from a wordless book and tell a story successfully as a result of parent participation in a family engagement program that promoted early literacy skills. Nix et al. (2018) conducted a study which found a working partnership between home and school was the greatest indicator of growth in Head Start children's language arts skills, attention skills and social adjustment to school through second grade.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology and procedures used to complete this qualitative study on school leader perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia. Methodology refers to the overall research process, in other words, “the science of systematically solving a research problem” (PEDIAA, 2015, para. 2). Another way to state this is it is the study of the methods. However, the methodology includes not only the methods but the paradigms and assumptions of the study as well as the strategies and techniques for conducting the study (McGregor & Murnane, 2010; Urcia, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify school leaders’ perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia. School leaders face many challenges when engaging immigrant preschool families as demographic changes have impacted school districts (Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018). Barriers exist that impact family engagement with diverse preschool populations. Communication is a common barrier that limits school and family partnership opportunities. Schools should use various communication methods to engage families (Barnes et al., 2016). Limited resources also impact schools’ ability to engage with immigrant families. School, family and community partnerships are a means to leverage resources and build strong family engagement programs (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

Lack of resources also impact schools’ ability to engage with immigrant families. School, family and community partnerships are a means to leverage resources and build strong family engagement programs (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). Access to resources that support preschool immigrant families is not equitable. A growing number of educational policy initiatives focus on

minimizing these disparities by making preschool programming more available (Magnuson & Duncan, 2016). One-size fits all family engagement practices are not effective (Keys, 2014). Schools should make a special effort to build trust with families and seek to determine which family engagement practices are most beneficial to their school community.

Better understandings of family engagement practices can inform school intervention and enhance school programming (Nix et al., 2018). Gigliana et al., (2020) found that future research should be conducted with Latino family engagement. Calzada et al., 2014 held that future research will benefit from evaluating family engagement practices with immigrant preschool populations. Lowenhaupt and Montgomery (2018) found research gaps related to how larger school districts address barriers to engaging immigrant families. The purpose of this study is to identify school leaders' perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia.

Research Questions

1. What practices do school leaders implement to engage immigrant preschool families?
2. What impact do school leaders perceive immigrant preschool family engagement has on student attendance and achievement?

Research Design/Methods

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 8). Qualitative researchers study the problem, collect data in a natural setting and use both inductive and deductive reasoning to establish themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher invited school leaders and preschool coordinators to participate in the study via email and will follow up with

phone calls. Upon school leaders' responses, he/she was sent an Information Sheet and Meeting Booking Form to sign up for an interview time and date of their convenience outside of their school hours.

The researcher conducted a qualitative interview study engaging school leaders in four large suburban central Virginia school divisions. The study included interviews with school leaders from public school early childhood preschool programs with immigrant preschool populations. These school leaders supervise specific site based preschool programs. School leaders were asked to respond to open-ended questions related to their perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families. The researcher collected participants school demographic data.

School leaders were asked to reflect upon the number of family engagement events held each year, how immigrant families are engaged within the school community, and the impact on student outcomes. This research method was identified by Creswell (2018) as a phenomenological study which describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences.

Approach Justification and Methods

A qualitative study was selected to gather information from school leaders about their perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families. Qualitative research allows for in-depth exploration of their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs (Anas & Ishaq, 2022; Patton, 2023). In Patton's words,

Qualitative inquiry is personal. The researcher is the instrument of inquiry. What brings you to an inquiry matters. Your background, experience, training, skills, interpersonal competence, capacity for empathy, cross-cultural sensitivity, and how you, as a person,

engage in fieldwork and analysis—these things undergird the credibility of your findings.
(p. 5)

Through methods like interviews or focus groups, researchers can uncover nuanced insights, understand the context, and capture the rich, subjective experiences of school leaders, providing a holistic understanding of the topic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2023; Flick, 2017; Patton, 2023).

Qualitative research is characterized by its exploratory nature, focusing on understanding phenomena in an in-depth way (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Bowen, 2005). Qualitative research emphasizes context, lived experiences of participants (or actors in cases), and the social construction of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2023; Stake, 1995). It allows for flexibility in data collection and analysis, often relying on thick, rich descriptions (Bowen, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2023; Patton, 2023).

Qualitative research is iterative and can be inductive, deductive, and abductive in its approaches to analysis, meaning that findings can inform further exploration and refinement of research questions and further understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2023; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014; Thompson, 2022). Additionally, qualitative research allows for purposeful sampling, which allows researchers to select case sites and practitioner participants who can best inform the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2023).

In this basic qualitative study, I drew from both phenomenology and case study design, what has been called phenomenological case study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) found that phenomenological research is best suited to study the essence of a subjects' lived phenomenon. Phenomenology is concerned with participants' lived experiences and how they perceive and make meaning of the *essence* of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2016; Williams, 2021; Zahavi, 2019). Phenomenology requires a number of critical characteristics that were not

integral to this study. These qualities include inductive coding, intentionality, and certain philosophical foundations (Moustakas, 1994; Zahavi, 2019). However, this study did include several critical features of phenomenology: focus on lived experiences, participant perception, epoché, rich data, researcher interpretation, and researcher-participant relationships. These were situated within the context of the group of preschool leaders who work with immigrant families in Virginia which form the bounded system or case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Phenomenological case study has been used in a number of educational settings to better get at the lived experiences of individuals with a phenomenon with the bounded system of the case. Nielsen (2006) explained that phenomenological case study aims “to capture the pedagogical transaction of imaginative teaching (its nature and ‘essence’) via narrative, or ‘lived experience’ (See van Manen, 1990), while explaining the context (interaction, classroom conditions) in which it occurred” (p. 249). Sumsion (2002) conducted a phenomenological case study teacher attrition.

Similarly, West (2013) used phenomenological case study “to research the effects of the gap in achievement on the lives of young urban students utilizing the social and political aspects of the educational system, which served to shape their reality of American schooling” (p. 3). Walters (2017) employed a phenomenological case study approach to explore the lived experiences of undergraduate students enrolled in a transition summer bridge program at a historical Black college and university.

Case Selection and Participant Recruitment

The researcher used a purposeful sampling to select the case site (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2023). The researcher reviewed data from the VDOE to identify center based preschool programs. The researcher selected five central Virginia school divisions. The school systems

were chosen due to having early childhood programs within the public-school systems. The researcher selected center-based pre-school principals and early childhood program coordinators for this research study. Four school leaders were invited to participate in individual interviews using the instrument designed by the researcher. The researcher moved on to the next school leader on the list if they did not respond or decline to participate after multiple email and phone call attempts by the researcher. All of the participants had either Head Start, Virginia Preschool Initiative and/or Early Childhood Special Education at their sites.

Data Collection Procedures

Data from individual school leader interviews were used for this qualitative study. Researcher developed interview questions and protocol were used. The researcher conducted in person and virtual interviews via Zoom. These interviews were recorded via Zoom, transcribed and coded by the researcher. Audio recording ensures that everything said is preserved for analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interview sessions were estimated to be on average 60 minutes in length to ensure participants have sufficient time to share their lived experience and will consist of seven questions. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “Respondents enjoy sharing their expertise with an interested and sympathetic listener” (p. 129). To ensure this is the case, the researcher engaged in an approach to interviewing that is a dialog between me and the participant, ensuring that the participant is comfortable and does not feel distressed (Carter et al., 2021).

Instrument Design

The researcher developed interview questions to collect data from school leaders on their perceptions of family engagement practices with preschool immigrant families. By using a semi-structured interview approach, I used this protocol to guide me in asking open-ended (also called

in-depth) questions that elicit meaningful responses from the participants in each case.

According to Merriam (2009), “The key to getting good data from an interview is asking open ended questions” (p. 117).

The semi-structured interview (Patton, 2023) allowed for prompts and probes that gave me as the researcher an opportunity to encourage participants to share more deeply about their lived experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon of family engagement practices with preschool immigrant families. School leaders were asked the School Leader Interview Questions (see Appendix B).

Table 2

Aligned Interview Questions with Research Questions

Interview question	Research question
<p>What practices do school leaders implement to engage immigrant preschool families?</p> <p>In your experience, what do you perceive has had the greatest impact on student learning? Attendance? Behavior?</p> <p>What were some practices may have engaged in that weren't successful or effective?</p>	<p>What impact do school leaders perceive immigrant preschool family's engagement has on students?</p>
<p>What are some of the practices you have engaged in the past that you found most effective? What ways will engage in those again? (Prompts: Any ideas to improve upon those? What have you learned that you may start doing again?)</p> <p>In your perception, based on your experiences, what do consider to be the most effective practices for engaging immigrant preschool families? (Clarifying question-In other words, if a new principal were going to ask you, “What's the one thing I should be doing?” what would you say to them?)</p>	<p>What impact has family engagement with immigrant preschool families had on students? What impact has it had on students' relationships with their families? Student's (or family's) sense of belonging? Student behavior? Student attendance?</p>

(table continued)

Table 2 (*cont.*)

Interview question	Research question
What role does school-community and school-family relations have in engagement and support?	
What are some of the specific community partnerships that you've fostered that support family engagement? How has that partnership impacted students?	
What do you do on a yearly or regular basis to engage immigrant preschool families? (Probing question: Any specific activities or programs? Elaborating question: Can you say a bit more about those?)	
What experiences have you had with obstacles or barriers to family engagement for immigrant preschool families? What strategies have you use to remove family engagement barriers for immigrant preschool families?	
Is there anything you are planning or preparing for that you haven't implemented yet to better help in decreasing barriers?	
Finally, what more could you share with me about engaging immigrant families that maybe I haven't asked?	

Data Analysis

The data collected from the study was used to gain a better understanding of the research questions of the study and reveal emerging themes from school leader interviews. The study involved conducting interviews with school leaders, which were recorded for accuracy and to create verbatim transcriptions. Transcriptions were created from Zoom were first cleaned up for accuracy. I listened to the audio recordings to ensure that transcriptions are verbatim and precisely captured what the participant said. Also, any field notes or memoing I created were compiled.

According to Sundler et al. (2018), phenomenological studies use a qualitative method of analysis that is descriptive. This means that I will be developing themes from my analysis of the

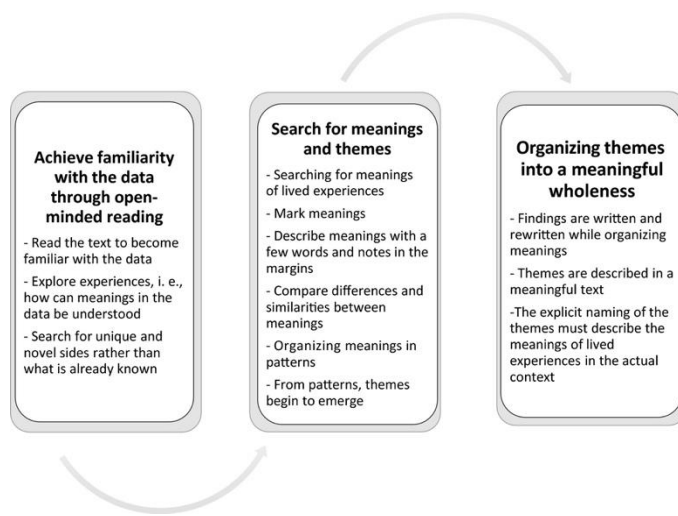
data based on how participants make meaning of their lived experiences with the phenomenon being studied. For this study, the phenomenon is engagement with immigrant preschool families. It is important to understand,

The understanding of lived experiences is closely linked to the idea of the intentionality of consciousness, or how meaning is experienced. Intentionality encompasses the idea that our consciousness is always directed towards something, which means that when we experience something, the “thing” is experienced as “something” that has meaning for us. (Sundler et al., 2018, p. 734)

This means the researcher examined the way that participants consciously or intentionally understand engagement with immigrant preschool families and analyzed how they make meaning of that engagement. To do this type of analysis, the researcher needed to achieve familiarity with the data, search for meanings in the data, and organized the data into themes to express the actual context of the participants’ lived experiences (Sundler et al., 2018).

Figure 2

Summary of Thematic Analysis from Sundler et al. (2018)



Achieve Familiarity with the Data Through Open-Minded Reading

Following data collection, the next step was immersion into the collected material through reading and re-reading. Through repeated engagements with the data, researchers become intimately familiar with the content, allowing for deeper insights into the participants' lived experiences. This not only will help familiarize me with the data but it also will begin the interpretative process of analysis (Chenail, 2012; Craver, 2014; Flick, 2014).

Search for Meanings and Themes

For this step I used coding. Although some scholars, such as van Manen (2016) have argued that coding is not necessarily a part of phenomenological research. Van Manen (2016) offers thematic analysis as an alternative to coding in phenomenological research. Instead of breaking the data into discrete codes, which he argues can fragment the lived experience being studied, thematic analysis allows researchers to reflect holistically on the essence of a phenomenon. Van Manen emphasized focusing on themes that emerge as structures of meaning from the lived experience, using a more interpretive and descriptive approach that stays true to the phenomenon itself. Van Manen (2016) stated, "Phenomenological analysis does not involve coding, sorting, calculating, or searching for patterns, synchronicities, frequencies, resemblances, and/or repetitions in data" (p. 813).

But others, such as Smith et al. (2009) and Moustakas (1994) use methods for coding data. Therefore, as the researcher, I used a two-cycle or two-phase coding system based on open and axial coding. This way of coding aligns with types of coding used in phenomenology, such as exploratory coding (Smith et al., 2009) and invariant constituent coding (Moustakas, 1994). Open codes were assigned to pieces of data, in phase one, and as they were grouped and refined,

axial coding was used for phase two. Approaches to coding for open coding included in vivo coding, process coding, descriptive coding, and others (Saldana, 2013).

Organizing Themes into Meaningful Wholeness

After coding the data, qualitative researchers identify patterns, themes, or concepts that emerge across the dataset (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2023). Themes represent recurring ideas, topics, or phenomena that are significant to the research questions or objectives. As the researcher, I used techniques such as thematic analysis to develop and refine themes. Themes began to emerge, were refined and validated through iterative analysis. This process involved revisiting the data to ensure that the identified themes accurately reflected the participants' lived experiences. Additionally, peer debriefing or member checking was employed to validate the findings and ensure their credibility (Patton, 2023).

Once the themes were established and validated, the researcher engaged in interpretation and synthesis. This involved contextualizing the findings within the broader framework of phenomenology. This was a hermeneutic, or interpretative, process where the researcher used bracketing (also called epoché) to withhold their personal judgement and beliefs about a thing or topic being studied to analyze the context of the participants' lived experiences to make meaning out of their understanding of their experiences (Chan et al., 2013; Patton, 2023). This was a very reflexive process, involving identifying biases and beliefs, recognizing the scope of the literature reviewed, and taking measures for trustworthiness in data analysis (Chan et al., 2013; Patton, 2023; Smith et al., 2009). The goal was to get at insights that contributed to a deeper understanding of the research questions and shed light on the lived experiences of the school leaders as participants.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers must ensure that their study adheres to ethical guidelines and principles, including those outlined in institutional review board (IRB) protocols and professional codes of conduct. This study was submitted to the IRB for consideration. Also, I have completed CITI training and have the certification required for researching human subjects. A *Certificate of Completion* for training in human subject protection was obtained by the researcher and is included by the researcher and will be Appendix B. Other ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, minimizing harm and risk, and ensuring integrity in the data collection and analysis processes. It is also important to consider power dynamics, potential conflicts of interest, and cultural sensitivity throughout the research process. Transparency and honesty in reporting findings, as well as acknowledging and addressing any ethical dilemmas encountered, are essential components of ethical research practice. By prioritizing ethical considerations, researchers can uphold the dignity, rights, and well-being of all individuals involved in the research process. These were addressed using methods for qualitative trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness

The researcher ensured findings were reasonable by adequate engagement in data collection and referential adequacy to capture the participants viewpoints. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) held that adequate engagement is a valid method when trying to document a participants' understanding of a phenomenon and adequate time collecting data should be paired with purposefully looking for variations of the phenomenon. The researcher engaged in critical self-reflection regarding assumptions, biases and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2023).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity in qualitative research refers to the researcher's awareness of their own biases, assumptions, and subjective perspectives that may influence the research process and findings. This is very important when conducting studies grounded in reflexive methods, such as phenomenological case studies. It involves the researcher critically examining how their background, and experiences. It also involves their researcher positionality and how that positionality shapes the research design, data collection, interpretation, and conclusions. Reflexivity ensures trustworthiness in qualitative research because it allows researchers to acknowledge their personal relationship to the research process; it helps to enhance the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2023; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Researcher Positionality Statement

Reflexivity and researcher positionality statements are closely related concepts in qualitative research, as both involve the researcher critically examining their role in the research process and the ways in which their background, beliefs, and experiences influence the study (Berger, 2015; Patton, 2015; Pillow, 2003). A positionality statement is a formal acknowledgment of the researcher's social, cultural, and personal background, as well as their relationship to the topic and participants. It identifies how these factors may influence the research process and outcomes (Rose, 1997). A positionality statement provides transparency about the researcher's potential biases and perspectives, helping readers understand the lens through which the research was conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While reflexivity is an ongoing process throughout a study, a positionality statement is typically written at a specific point in time. It is often in the early stages of a research report or dissertation

(England, 1994); however, I have chosen to place this in my discussion on trustworthiness. Therefore, in this section, I am providing my positionality statement as my epoché.

As an African American female researcher with an immigrant German mother and grandparents, I acknowledge that my perspective is shaped by these experiences and may influence how I interpret data when studying the impact of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families. My mother and grandparents were bilingual and English was their second language. German was the primary language spoken in our home. I have memories of my grandmother and mother needing support with translation when they would engage with the school. These memories have influenced my profession as a preschool leader who works within the scope of this study. My lived experiences drive my desire to ensure that immigrant families are embraced as partners in their child's education. As a bilingual researcher, I bring a unique perspective to this research on family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families.

Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other circumstances (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher provided a thick, rich description which detailed participants responses accurately. Participant's descriptions provided enough information to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situations match the research context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2023). These research findings addressed the gap in research related to school leader perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia. Lowenhaupt and Montgomery (2018) asserted that future research should be done regarding the engagement of immigrant preschool families. Furthermore in 2020, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation that established a unified public-private system for early care and education to

promote early childhood education across the state (VDOE, 2022). It is anticipated that this study's results will help school leaders that have early childhood programs in their buildings further engage preschool immigrant families.

Dependability and Confirmability

Research findings were thorough and consistent. Clear, repeatable methods of data collection, rigorous data analysis and advisor participation in the analysis process were used during this study. The researcher checked and rechecked data throughout the data collection process to ensure results could be repeated by others. The researcher used a coding process and identify patterns. The researcher documented these patterns electronically and kept an audit trail during data analysis. This ensured that data was not being influenced by assumptions and were accurately reflecting participants perspectives. Ethical validation means that all research agendas must question their underlying moral assumptions and ethical implications and equitable treatment of diverse voices (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2023).

Chapter Four

Analysis of Data

This chapter presents the findings of my research regarding school leader perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia. This chapter introduces the themes and findings that were identified while conducting school leader interviews. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify school leader perceptions of family engagement with preschool immigrant families in Virginia. The researcher sought to gain insight specifically from school based public preschool leaders on family engagement practices through their lived experiences. School leaders were interviewed and asked to identify their perceived practices to engage immigrant preschool families and its impact on students. The intended outcome of this study was to provide preschool public school leaders with qualitative data to engage preschool immigrant families in Virginia and add to existing research related to preschool immigrant family engagement in Virginia.

Public preschool sites in Virginia were selected for this study. The researcher contacted fifteen public preschool sites in Virginia. Three public preschools, Principal school leaders, and one Virginia Preschool Initiative Coordinator were interviewed. The interviews conducted during the research study were entrenched in the interview and interview questions were directly linked to the research questions.

Research Questions

The inquiry into school leader perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia was based on the following research questions:

1. What practices do school leaders implement to engage immigrant preschool families?

2. What impact do school leaders perceive immigrant preschool family engagement has on student attendance and achievement?

School Leader Interview Data

The anticipated number of study participants was between 8-10 public preschool leaders from various locations across Virginia. The researcher sent qualifying flyers to 13 public preschool site base school leaders and 2 public school preschool site coordinators. The researcher sent follow up emails and phone calls to 11 potential participants. One willing participant had to withdraw from participation due to health concerns. Another potential participant declined due to a busy work schedule. There were four participants who fit the qualifying criteria and responded to the recruitment email. Consent was obtained from all participants. Once the school leader responded he/she was sent the Doodle Poll link to sign up for an interview time of their convenience. Four school leaders from public preschool sites in Virginia were virtually interviewed for this qualitative research study.

Upon the start of the interview, the researcher reviewed the protocol with each participant. The researcher received verbal consent to record interviews using Zoom from each participant before recording. Participating school leaders had between two and eight years of experience as an administrator. The researcher assigned school leader pseudonyms and they are as follows: SL1, SL2, SL3, SL4. Table 2 summarizes the school leaders' gender, race, years of experience as a school leader and their current school. School leader interview responses reflect their lived experiences and perceptions of their practices to engage immigrant preschool families in Virginia may suggest professional development for school leaders.

Table 3*Participants Representation of Regional School Settings*

Region	Frequency	Percentage
Urban	2	50%
Suburban	2	50%
Total	4	100%

Table 4*School Leader Participant Description*

Participant	Gender	Race	Years of educational leadership experience	Years of experience at current site
SL1	Female	Black	5	3
SL2	Female	Black	5	3
SL3	Male	Black	5	2
SL4	Female	Hispanic	8	8

The school leaders interviewed for this research study included three females and one male. Four participants were Black and one was Hispanic. They have between five and eight years of leadership experience. The researcher is presenting data from the virtual interviews by the research question focusing on the common themes represented in each.

Description of Participants

The 17 prepared interview questions (see Appendix A) were open ended and aligned with the research questions. The interviewer had the flexibility to ask probing questions to extract stronger responses from participants. A spreadsheet was created with a pseudonym for each participant which listed full name, email and interview date. The interview transcript recordings were automatically downloaded using the Zoom program. The researcher downloaded and saved the transcript to the researchers VT One Drive for added security.

Once saved, a copy of the transcript was emailed to participants for member checking to ensure accuracy. Participants were asked to review transcripts and submit concerns or recommendations for needed corrections. None of the participants requested changes or modifications to their interview responses. The researcher placed all interview responses by question in a Google spreadsheet. Six deductive codes that were predetermined from Joyce Epstein’s Framework were utilized. These principles are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and community collaboration. Deductive codes emerged from the a priori themes and interview response data. Keywords and phrases were color coded using a legend created for the six codes identified in Table 5.

Table 5

Deductive Codes

Theme	Deductive Code
Parenting	P
Communicating	C
Volunteering	V
Learning at home	LH
Decision making	DM
Community collaboration	CC

Participant Demographic Information

SL1 has been a school leader for more than five years and has been in her current location for three years. This suburban preschool setting serves over 300 students and includes Head Start and Virginia Preschool Initiative students. This preschool site has 98% minority enrollment. Student demographics include 88% Black, 9% Hispanic/Latino, 2% White, and 1% two or more races.

She became a school leader because she wanted to make an impact on the lives of children. She describes herself as a relational leader. Her shared leadership model leaves room for preschool support staff to find innovative ways to engage immigrant preschool families. This shared leadership style has led to the implementation of software to enhance two-way parent communication, scheduling of family engagement events based on parent interests and staffing models that support the school's ability to communicate with immigrant preschool families. SL1 stated that Spanish is second most used language within her school community. Building positive relationships and trust with families was a recurring theme in her interview responses. SL1 responded, "We have to remember that our parents only want what is best for their children."

SL2 has been an educator for twenty-seven years. Leadership experience includes two years as an assistant principal and three years as principal at her current school. Her preschool site serves over 300 students in Head Start, Virginia Preschool Initiative and Early Childhood Special Education. Student demographics include 87% minority enrollment, 70% Black, 20% White and 10% Hispanic/Latino.

This school leader served as assistant principal in another school within the division and had an opportunity to "expand her expertise by transitioning to preschool". She had previous experience in preschool as a long term substitute teacher while in college. Creating a positive school culture is essential for fostering a spirit of collaboration, motivation and overall well-being. Her goals include establishing a positive school culture by setting clear expectations open communication, building trust and providing opportunities for collaboration. She describes herself as a collaborator who "fully empowers teams working together to achieve a common goal". She surrounds herself with a united team that can be a part of the decision-making process. SL2 leads by example and seeks to build leaders within her building.

SL3 is a school leader in an urban preschool setting. He has a wide range of administrative experience having served as both an elementary and preschool leader. He has more than five years of administrative experience and has been at his current location for two years. This preschool site is 90% minority, 80% Black, 8% Latino and 7% Two or More Races.

Clear expectations, relationship building and administrator visibility has helped to build a positive school culture. He frequently takes advantage of opportunities to speak with parents during student arrival to encourage their support in school by saying “Hey, I haven’t seen you in a couple of days. What’s going on”. He describes his leadership style as relational and one that reflects on the effectiveness of school practices and its impact on students and families. Sharing building practices, procedures and expectations with parents keeps them informed. He is intentional about partnering with parents and holding them accountable as partners with the school.

SL3 also leverages technological and human resources that support open communication with preschool immigrant families. Frequent family engagement events are held based on parent interest. He has learned over time that having student participation during family engagement events leads to higher parental participation rates. Students are often featured at family engagement events singing a song or displaying classroom work.

SL4 started her educational career as a family liaison working closely with immigrant families. She felt a strong desire to “support Spanish speaking families and fill the gap that existed in communication resources”. In this role she spent much of her time informing parents of available community resources and helped them to understand what it means to be part of a school system. In her lived experience, immigrant parents often reported varied school experiences based on their country of origin. She later transitioned to a school counseling role

supporting students at both Elementary and Secondary levels. She worked closely with supporting English Language Learners and their families.

SL4 currently serves the Coordinator of Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) in an urban school division which is 90% Hispanic, 8% Black and 2% other races. Spanish is the most reported language spoken by families. Additional languages include Urdu, Pashto and Arabic. This urban school division in Northern Virginia has 309 three and four year old's enrolled in VPI. The half day program is located in five elementary schools. Each four year old classroom has one teacher and one instructional assistant supporting 18 students. Three year old classrooms include one teacher and one aid supporting 16 students.

She prides herself on being a reflective practitioner and tries to provide voice and choice to teachers. She describes her role as a "balancing act" and she listens to teachers while working to support them. She often invites teachers to view changes from a different lens with a focus on how changes may be best for the program versus staying with a practice that may not be beneficial for students and families. SL4 frequently evaluates the effectiveness of program practices and seeks opportunities to enhance program services for preschool immigrant families. She describes her school culture as one that respects family culture, sensitive to cultural differences and views parents as valued partners.

Analysis of Data

The data are presented by Research Question. Within each Research Question section, the associated interview questions will be presented with identified themes and descriptive data.

Research Question 1

What practices do school leaders implement to engage immigrant preschool families?

School Leader Interview Question 1. What are some of the practices you have engaged in the past that you found most effective? School leaders' responses reflect that relationship building, open two way communication, and community collaboration were the practices most used to engage immigrant preschool families in Virginia. See Table 6 for participant responses within each theme.

Table 6

Themes and Participant Responses Related to Effective Practices

Theme	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Relationship building	X	X	X	X
Open two-way communication	X	X	X	X
Community collaboration		X	X	X

Relationship Building. One hundred percent of school leaders shared that building a positive relationship and establishing trust with families was key to family engagement. This relationship is built by establishing strong family connections. Connections are established early with families via teacher home visits in the fall. The home visit is an opportunity for teachers to meet with parents in a comfortable and familiar setting. SL1 stated that “some parents may have had a negative school experience themselves which may impact how they feel about the school setting”. SL1 stated “the relationships are built early, even through the application process when students are first seeking entrance into the program”. School leaders are available to respond to parent questions, introduce themselves and make the open house and meet and greet experience a positive one. SL3 shared that “open house is an opportunity for families to be introduced to staff”. School leaders report that having many opportunities for parents to participate in family engagement events at the school support building positive relationships.

In addition, student participation or presentations during events yields high parent attendance. SL4 expressed that building a positive relationship with families “starts during the enrollment process”. Many families need support filling out forms and she takes the time to explain the enrollment process to families. In her experience, many families share personal stories about their home country during the enrollment process. SL4 supports families by sharing community resources that are needed for the initial enrollment process such as where families can get required immunizations, physicals and proof of residence documents.

Communication. All four participating school leaders (100%) shared that communication with families was relevant to engaging immigrant preschool families. The theme of communication was listed 42 times during their interviews. Communication is an area that is closely evaluated and refined during the school year. School leaders report using phone messaging, newsletters, monthly calendars and digital software that can translate messages in Spanish and other languages. SL1 reports using a phone messaging system that links access to live translators. SL1 shared that she provides an opportunity for parents to practice using the feature with support of school staff to ensure families are comfortable with using the software. SL3 uses the support of a bilingual family liaison to communicate with parents. SL1 has a translator on staff. This staff member translates and interprets for Spanish speaking families. SL2 does not have bilingual staff on site and relies on division support personnel to assist with translation. She notes this requires scheduling in advance and long term planning for in person translation support. All school leaders utilize digital resources to support communication with immigrant preschool families. SL4 expressed that verbal communication and face to face meetings are best. She reports that she gets more interaction and engagement with families when

the communication is face to face. In her experience face to face interaction helps build relationships with immigrant preschool families.

Community Collaboration. SL2 reports that she collaborates with parents to determine the types of family engagement events that are planned for the year. She leverages school division resources to better meet the needs of immigrant preschool families. All three participants shared that ongoing partnerships with business partnerships assist with family communication. Vendor partnerships with translating apps and software assist with communicating with immigrant preschool families. SL3 actively seeks to engage all stakeholders. He facilitates a “grandparents day luncheon and invites grandparents to come into the school and have lunch with students”. All four participants utilize local businesses and faith based partnerships to meet school wide goals and support family engagement efforts. SL4 reports that connecting families with community resources helps to build trust with families, “It can be scary coming to a new place where you do not speak the language”. Being new to an area, many families do not know what resources are available or where to seek support. Providing families with local community resources help families feel supported, welcomed and assists with the transition to a new community.

School Leader Interview Question 2. What were some practices may have engaged in that weren’t successful or effective? School leaders expressed that shared decision making via Parent Policy Council and family engagement events that are unrelatable to parents were not successful in the past. See Table 7 for school leaders’ responses to ineffective family engagement practices.

Table 7*Themes and Participant Responses Related to Ineffective Practices*

Theme	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Ineffective communication	X	X	X	X
Policy council		X		
Lack of connection			X	
Morning workshops				X

Ineffective Communication. All four participants shared that ineffective communication practices impacted family engagement. SL1 shared that not having a person in place to communicate with Spanish speaking families had a negative impact on family engagement. School leaders implement use of various communication tools, software and programs to ensure open two way communication with immigrant preschool families. School divisions have implemented use of a language selection function on websites which allows families to select various home languages.

Policy Council. The Policy Council is a group of Head Start parents and community members who help make decisions about their program. Policy Council members are elected by the parents of children enrolled in Head Start, meet regularly as a group and can serve for one year at a time, and for up to five years (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2024). They work closely with the program's management team and governing body to provide overall direction for the program (Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2024). SL2 shared low parent participation numbers with Policy Council “right now we are trying to grow our Policy Council”. She is seeking to connect a meeting to a student performance in an effort to increase parent participation.

Lack of Family Connection. SL3 facilitated a military appreciation event that was not well attended by parents. His perception was that parents “were not able to relate to the event”

due to not having a connection to the military. The event was held later in the year and the timing was not the best for his school community. Upon reflection he would have the event again in the future but will be intentional about planning, sharing information with families and securing volunteers.

Morning Parent Workshops. SL4 found that having morning parent workshops was not effective for her families. Many families work and those events were not well attended. She transitioned to having events in the evening after 6:00 p.m. She noticed that more fathers also attended evening events. Many fathers in her school community work in construction or have other types of employment which concludes in the evening, “The sun does not go down in the summer until later in the evening, so dads are still working.” Moving evening events to a later time frame allowed fathers time to get home, shower, change and attend the school event.

Research Question 2 What impact do school leaders perceive immigrant preschool family engagement has on students?

School Leader Interview Question 3. If a new principal were going to ask you, “What’s the one thing I should be doing?” What would you say to them? Themes related to communication, volunteering, parenting and community partnerships were evident in school leader responses. See Table 8 for school leader responses.

Table 8

Themes From School Leader Responses as to What a new Principal Should be Doing to Engage Immigrant Preschool Families

Theme	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Communication with families	X	X	X	X
Volunteering	X	X	X	
Parenting	X	X	X	X
Community partnerships	X	X	X	

Communication with Families. SL1, SL2, SL3 and SL4 site the importance of having staff on hand that can communicate in the parents' home language. SL1 and SL2 stated the importance of having "two way communication with families". Having a bilingual staff member on site supports open communication with families and helps to build a trusting positive relationship. SL1 shares that she engages in the practice of asking parents what form of communication they prefer. Parents can indicate if they want phone calls, newsletters, emails, or various communication platforms. All participants stressed the importance of school leaders seeking ways to communicate with families in their home language. SL1 often has an interpreter seated with families during events to ensure communication is clear. SL3 has Back to School orientation and ensure that parent have an opportunity to ask questions and visit classrooms. Several opportunities should be provided throughout the year to share assessment results with parents. SL4 shared that her program no longer engages in home visits, however she values the home visit experience. In her experience the home visit provided insight into families and helped teachers develop trusting relationships with parents. Students also enjoyed having their teacher visit the home. SL4 shared that some teachers "would not eat dinner before a home visit because many families would prepare a meal as a gesture of hospitality". Teachers enjoyed eating a

traditional meal from the family's home country and gained more insight into the family's culture and traditions.

Volunteer Opportunities. SL2 and SL3 report the importance of school leaders to provide many opportunities for parents to volunteer at the school. Parents are invited to visit classrooms, ask teachers questions and see what their children are learning at school. "We want parents engaged when they are at the school" SL3. Consider hosting some events that are fun and focus on relationship building such as a Sneaker Ball. All participants report inviting parents to volunteer for field trips. SL2, SL3 report high parent participation in an annual pumpkin patch field trip. Parents should also be invited to participate in workshops that support academic goals related to reading and math.

Parenting. During school leader interviews parenting and parent education emerged as a theme eight times. SL1, SL2 and SL3 all report that teachers share information with parents during the home visit about the program, class schedule and provide information to parents about how they can best support their child at school. During the parent teacher conference "parents are given an update on their child's progress and learn how they can help them at home". SL3 shared that his school nurse has provided a parent workshop on student health and provided parents with thermometers to take home. During the holiday season, sessions on financial literacy and social emotional wellness are held to support families with managing emotions, SL3. SL4 seeks opportunities to provide parents with educational resources that can support student academic and social emotional growth throughout the year.

Community Partnerships. All participants expressed the importance of having community partnerships that support school goals. SL1, SL2, SL3, and SL4 shared the importance of community partnerships that support the school community. Hispanic Heritage

Month celebrations that involve community services and faith based partnerships build strong relationships with families. SL1 shares “This an opportunity to celebrate family traditions and culture”. SL3 enlists the help of an academic software vendor to show parents how the application supports students reading, math, science and social studies skills. This same vendor will provide reading materials to families. SL3 also shared that he extends invitations to local high school to play music for large family engagement events. A local parade All participants shared that transition to kindergarten includes a site visit to their future Kindergarten school and/or class. Community partners are often invited to come into the school and read to students and serve as volunteers for school events. SL4 leverages community resources to support families new to the school community. She informs parents of available resources at the start of the year to ensure students have appropriate vaccines and enrollment documents completed. SL4 is sensitive to the unique needs of immigrant preschool families new to the community and is aware that they can sometimes feel overwhelmed with the initial enrollment process. She sees her role as more of a support and resource to families in her school community.

School Leader Question 4. What role does school-community and school-family relations have in engagement and support? School leader responses revealed that transition services, school based support and family services are ways in which community partnerships support family engagement. See Table 9 for school leader responses.

Table 9

Role of School-Community and School Family Relations

Theme	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Transition services	X	X	X	X
School-based support	X	X	X	X
Family services	X	X		X

Transition Services. All school leaders perceive school-community and school family relations support student transition to kindergarten. SL1 reports that her school has a steering committee that has input on transition events for students. This work group tackles issues related to children birth through age five. SL2 leverages community resources to support transition by partnering with community businesses to provide instructional materials that support student academic development. SL3 and SL4 partner with local elementary schools and invite students to engage in school tours at their future school. SL3 invites parents to attend transition activities as an introduction to the kindergarten school experience.

School Based Support. One hundred percent of participants utilize community partnership to support students in classrooms. SL2 has invited partners into the classroom to read to students and support with holiday events. Partners have support families with holiday meals as well as toys and clothes for students. SL3 has invited partners to support classroom instruction by hosting guest readers. SL1 and SL4 have links to local community resources that provide books and other resources that support student academic development. These materials may be used in the classroom and at home to support student development.

Family Services. Three out of four participating school leaders share community partnerships are used to share family service information with families. SL1, SL2 and SL4 invite the local library to school events. Parents have an opportunity to get library cards for students and are informed of library offerings. SL4 informs parents of resources that support health and nutrition needs. She often has community partners at school events as a convenience for families.

School Leader Interview Question 5. What are some of the specific community partnerships that you have fostered that support family engagement? Local community

resources, colleges/universities and Ready Region are specific community partnerships identified that support family engagement. See Table 10 for school leader responses.

Table 10

Themes and Participant Responses Related to Specific Community Partnerships

Theme	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Local college/universities	X			
Ready region	X	X	X	X
Local community	X	X	X	X

Local Colleges and Universities. SL1 partners with a local university which facilitates parent workshops. Parents learn how they can support student academic development. Parents are provided with resource bags and have an opportunity to use the materials at the school and engage in literacy and math activities with their child. She feels this is more effective than simply providing parents with educational resources. Providing them with an opportunity to use the materials with their child helps them feel comfortable with using those materials at home. Workshop facilitators model how to use materials for parents.

Ready Region. Ready Region is a partnership with local and state government aligned with Foundations of Early Childhood Education. This organization provides resources, education and training for early childhood education. All participants use this organization to support family engagement. SL4 reports enlisting support of Ready Region to connect parents with resources. Family liaison staff work in collaboration with Ready Region in the facilitation of parent workshops and parent training.

School Leader Interview Question 6. How has family engagement and community partnerships impacted students? School leaders expressed that family engagement and

community partnerships impact student learning, attendance, behavior, basic needs being met and instills sense of belonging. See Table 11 for school leader responses.

Table 11

Impact on Students

Theme	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Student learning	X	X	X	
Attendance	X	X	X	X
Behavior		X	X	
Basic needs met	X	X		X
Sense of belonging	X	X		X

Student Learning. Family engagements positive impact on student learning was a common theme for three out of four school leaders. SL1, SL2 and SL3 report family engagement and partnerships result in increased student academic performance. They attribute this to parent’s awareness of student academic goals and progress. This information is shared with parents during parent teacher conferences. Parents are afforded the opportunity to learn what their child will be learning at school. This information is shared via newsletters and classroom communication. Parents can support student learning at home by reviewing academic skills with their child. SL1 asserts that “our families are our first teachers for our students.”

Attendance. Attendance, together with student learning is impacted by family engagement. All participating school leaders express that student attendance is linked to family engagement. SL2 shared that parents are responsible for getting their preschooler to school. Her experience is that parents are more inclined to send their child to school if they are engaged and have a positive relationship with school staff.

SL3 shares with parents how attendance impacts student academic performance. He informs parents how lack of attendance over time can impact student learning. He monitors

student attendance and meets with parents to find solutions to chronic absenteeism. SL3 stated that he has been told by parents that “it is only preschool and attendance does not really matter. He works with parents to establish positive attendance patterns that can be carried into kindergarten.

SL1 reviews attendance policies with parents during open house and the initial registration process. Family service workers support classroom teachers with attendance monitoring.

SL4 shared that attendance is an ongoing area of improvement in her program. She is conducting parent workshops specifically focused on the importance of attendance this year. Some families take advantage of traveling back to their home countries during off season to avoid high travel costs during peak season. She explained that she noticed one student never attended school when it rained. After speaking with the parent, she learned that in her home country school was closed when it rained due to potential flooding. SL4 explained to the parent that in her current district school is still open and buses run when it rains.

Behavior. SL2 and SL3 explained that family engagement has an impact on student behavior. SL2 shared that having a positive relationship with families helps students to see parents and the school as partners “Families always want what is best for their child.” SL3 shares schoolwide expectations with parents at the beginning of the year. He reports that transparency about expectations and relationship building is key in relation to student discipline. He ensures that he gets to know students and families and builds a positive relationship “It makes it easier to have discussions about discipline if needed.” All school leaders expressed the importance of building a positive relationship with families in advance of any conferences related to discipline

concerns. This allows parents to have trust with school leaders and be open to discussion and problem solving from a team approach.

Basic Needs. Additionally, school leaders list the acquisition of basic needs as an impact to students. SL1, SL2 and SL4 report that community partnerships and family engagement provide opportunities for students to get their basic needs met. SL1 has partnerships that provide families with detergent, car seats, children's coats, shoes and food. SL2 collaborates with community partners in their vegetable garden. Parents and students learn about healthy options and students are invited to take produce home. SL4 reports providing students with coats and providing parents with food resources.

Sense of Belonging. Three out of four school leaders report that family engagement and community partnerships impact students' sense of belonging. Building positive relationships with families helps students feel valued and part of the school community. SL1 places shoes and other items on tables during open house so students and families can freely make a selection of needed items. SL2 reports that having family engagement events makes parents feel valued and helps students feel comfortable in the school setting. She works hard to ensure a family atmosphere in her school. SL4 reports that making students and families feel like part of school community ensures students want to come to school. All parents want to know that the school "cares about their child."

School Leader Interview Question 7. What do you do on a regular basis to engage immigrant preschool families? School leader responses revealed themes related to parent workshops, multicultural/holiday celebrations, and transition events (see Table 12).

Table 12*Regular Family Engagement Events*

Theme	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Parent workshops	X	X	X	X
Multicultural/holiday events	X	X	X	
Transition events			X	X

Parent Workshops. All school leaders report parent workshops as ongoing practices to engage immigrant preschool families in Virginia. Parent workshops are driven by parent interest level. This is obtained via a parent survey and questionnaire completed at the beginning of the year. School leaders provide a wide range of parent workshops throughout the year. SL1 and SL3 have monthly parent workshops focused on supporting student literacy development, and skills aligned with the Virginia Early Learning Developmental Standards (ELDS). SL2 and SL4 report having fall and spring parent workshops focused on Reading, Math and Social Emotional Development. SL4 facilitates a Family Reading Night and provides books in English and Spanish. Books are purchased for students to take home.

Multicultural or Holiday Events. Three out of four school leaders report annual family engagement holiday or multicultural events. SL1 expressed that a Hispanic Heritage Month celebration is an annual event. SL2, SL3 host seasonal holiday events in December. Community partners provide gifts for students. This is an opportunity to ease the financial cost of gift purchases for families that express an interest in support.

SL2 hosts both a Fall and Spring Carnival complete with literacy games. Student work is displayed during the Spring Exhibition. Students lead this activity and show their parents completed work for the year. SL3 hosts a Grandparents Day event. He invites grandparents to visit classrooms and engage in learning activities with students. SL3 facilitates a World

Language Day and seeks to make all school events inclusive for families and students. He feels this further builds positive relationships with families.

Transition Events. SL3 and SL4 shared transition activities take place at their sites. SL3 invites parents to participate in site tours of future Kindergarten locations. He collaborates with school leaders at the home school. Students and parents have an opportunity to be introduced to Kindergarten Standards and school expectations. SL4 facilitates a transition night in April or May. This event “introduces parents to what Kindergarten will look like”. Both school leaders expressed this activity plays an integral part in kindergarten preparedness. Parents are informed of specific activities they can engage in with their child to maintain academic skills during the summer.

School Leader Interview Question 8. What experiences have you had with barriers to family engagement with immigrant preschool families? Communication and transportation were perceived as barriers to family engagement with immigrant preschool families in Virginia (see Table 13).

Table 13

Barriers to Family Engagement

Theme	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Communication	X	X	X	X
Transportation				X

Communication. All participating school leaders interviewed report communication as a perceived barrier to immigrant preschool family engagement. All report the desire to have staff at the building level available to communicate in families home language. SL1 has received feedback from families that they did not feel welcomed during their initial screening process off site. She was informed by parents that they were left waiting for long periods of time while

someone was located that could speak Spanish. In another instance she received reports that English speaking parents were called on first in line ahead of Spanish speaking families in the main office. Office staff called on English speaking families first due to the language barrier. She explained to office staff that all parents need to be waited on in the order of arrival. She invited office staff to learn a few short Spanish phrases and use non-verbal cues like smiles and gestures to acknowledge parents. SL1 stated that she uses translating apps to immediately communicate with parents if needed to ensure all parents feel valued and supported by the school.

SL2, SL3 and SL4 utilize school resources and translation services to communicate with bilingual families. SL3 sends parent communication home in the families' home language and is actively seeking to expand the language material sent home. SL4 reports that parents would not attend school events if an interpreter was not present. She learned that some parents were illiterate in their home language. SL4 incorporates pictures and models with parent communication to ensure parent understanding. SL4 also plans to create a parent handbook to inform parents of policies, procedures and school expectations. SL3 uses communication platforms and apps that allows parents to select their home language.

Transportation. SL4 expressed that transportation was a perceived barrier to family engagement with immigrant preschool families. She shared a parent survey with families inquiring about what impact their participation in family engagement events. Many parents shared transportation was a barrier due to lack of transportation. SL4 arranged for school buses to pick up families and transport them to family engagement events. She records family engagement events via Zoom and uploads them to a Google folder to be viewed by parents at a later date. SL4 shared that she “does not want parents to miss out”. Recordings allow parents to

still get information and complete activities with their child if their work schedule prohibits them from attending the event.

School Leader Interview Question 9. Is there anything that you are planning that you haven't implemented yet to better help in decreasing barriers? Requests for additional bilingual support staff and additional instructional resources and supplies emerged as themes from school leaders (see Table 14).

Table 14

Future Plans to Decrease Barriers

Theme	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Bilingual staff support			X	
Instructional supplies			X	X

Additional Bilingual Support Staff. SL3 reports seeking additional bilingual support staff. He currently has division support staff come in for translation. They are located off site and their support requires advance planning. He leverages school staff such as teachers to communicate with Spanish speaking families. Having additional staff on hand removes the communication barrier in his building.

Instructional Supplies. SL3 and SL4 report acquiring additional instructional bilingual materials and software applications to improve communication with immigrant preschool families. SL3 reports using platforms such as Class Dojo to communicate with families. A settings feature allows parents to select their home language. SL4 wants to create a parent handbook which describes the curriculum. She wants to create a digital newsletter or recorded newsletter which is videotaped and shared with parents. This will allow parents to listen or view the recording at a later date.

School Leader Interview Question 10. What more can you share with me about engaging immigrant preschool families? Common themes about valuing parent engagement, and respecting cultural differences emerged from school leader responses (see Table 15).

Table 15

Additional Thoughts on Family Engagement

Theme	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Valuing parents	X	X	X	X
Respecting cultural differences	X	X	X	X

Valuing Parents. All participating school leaders expressed the importance of valuing parents and their partnership. SL1 reports that parents want to be involved and want what is best for their child. SL3 acknowledges parents during school perfect attendance assemblies and end of year celebrations. Providing opportunities for parents to chaperone school events helps parents feel valued. SL2 shared that she has received positive feedback from parents about being well informed about school events. Frequent parent communication makes parents feel valued and appreciated.

Respecting Cultural Differences. SL1 and SL2 expressed that being mindful to communicate with families in their home language is one way to respect cultural differences. Having books at family engagement events in English and Spanish make parents feel and students feel valued. SL3 tries to have songs with cultural significance performed throughout the year at family engagement events. SL1 invites parents to serve on Policy Council and enlists translators to support families. SL4 provides professional development to teachers on respecting cultural differences and reminds them that it is imperative to know the backgrounds of students in their class. This will allow teachers to relate better to families and will ensure a strong

partnership. SL4 has informed teachers that family engagement can look different. If a parent returns a phone call that is engagement and should be respected and welcomed.

Table 16

School Leader Summary of Responses

Response	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Relationship building	X	X	X	X
Open two-way communication	X	X	X	X
Community collaboration		X	X	X
Ineffective communication	X	X	X	X
Policy council		X		
Lack of connection			X	
Morning workshops				X
Communication with families	X	X	X	X
Volunteering	X	X	X	
Parenting	X	X	X	X
Community partnerships	X	X	X	X
Transition services	X	X	X	X
School-based support	X	X	X	X
Family services	X	X	X	X
Local college/universities	X			
Readiness region	X	X	X	X
Local community	X	X	X	X
Student learning	X	X	X	
Attendance	X	X	X	
Behavior		X	X	
Basic needs met	X	X		X
Sense of belonging	X	X		X
Parent workshops	X	X	X	X
Multicultural events	X	X	X	

(table continued)

Table 16 (cont.)

Response	SL1	SL2	SL3	SL4
Transition events			X	X
Communication	X	X	X	X
Transportation			X	X
Bilingual staff support			X	
Instructional supplies			X	X
Valuing parents	X	X	X	X
Respecting cultural differences	X	X	X	X

The above table 16 summarizes school leader responses. School leaders report relationship building, open two-way communication, parenting, use of transition services, Ready Region, community resources and school based support are utilized to engage immigrant preschool families in Virginia. All school leaders report that ineffective communication is a barrier to family engagement. One hundred percent of school leaders perceive family engagement has an impact on student attendance. Three out of four school leaders expressed that family engagement gives students a sense of belonging, ensure their basic needs are met and impacts student learning.

Chapter Five

Findings, Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to identify school leaders' perceptions of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia. Public school preschool leaders were interviewed and asked to share their perception of family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families in Virginia. An analysis of school leader interview responses on family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families yielded the findings in this chapter. A qualitative research design focused on two research questions.

1. What practices do school leaders implement to engage immigrant preschool families?
2. What impact do school leaders perceive immigrant preschool family engagement has on student attendance and achievement?

Phenomenological Aspects of Case Findings

The findings from this phenomenological case study serve to help scholars and practitioners to understand the lived experiences of public school leaders in center-based preschools as they navigate family engagement with immigrant families. This focus on participants' perspectives and meanings aligns with the phenomenological goal of uncovering the essence of a phenomenon (in this case, leadership in engaging immigrant families). The findings have emphasized detailed, in-depth descriptions of how participants perceive their lived experience and interpret their role, challenges, and practices. This aligns with the phenomenological method of providing a thick, rich analysis that conveys the depth of participants' lived experiences. Additionally, the study findings identify key analytical themes, such as relationship building, communication, and barriers to engagement, that emerge from the

participants' perceptions of their lived experiences. These themes reflect the phenomenological aim of distilling patterns and meanings from subjective experiences.

As a case study, my research is bounded by specific criteria: public school leaders working in center-based preschools in suburban school divisions of central Virginia. This defines it as a case study, where the focus is on a particular group, context, or phenomenon within a clearly delineated system. It also has a strong contextual focus. That is, the findings are fixed on the unique challenges and strategies faced by these leaders within a particular geographic, institutional, and cultural context. This contextual specificity is characteristic of case study methodology. Finally, the real-world application is typical of case study. The study investigates practical, real-world issues (family engagement with immigrant families) within a specific case, which is a key feature of case studies.

By blending the phenomenological approach of exploring lived experiences with the bounded nature of a case study, it has allowed me to consider both deep exploration of participants' perspectives (phenomenology) and analysis of these perspectives within a specific, real-world context (case study). For example, the findings are developed into themes that reflect participants' subjective realities, such as their feelings about the importance of relationship-building and their struggles with communication barriers. Here in the discussion, I further explore these themes deeply, aiming to uncover the shared meaning of their experiences. This phenomenological focus on individual experiences is integrated with the case study's attention to the broader system (schools, communities, and families). This two-fold focus strengthens the study's contribution by situating personal experiences within their institutional and cultural contexts.

Summary of Findings

Seven findings emerged as a result of review and analysis of the data from school leader interviews. This chapter will detail findings collected from interviews. According to the data presented in Chapter Four, this study's significant findings identify seven themes that emerged from school leader interview responses. Among common factors for engaging immigrant preschool families are relationship building, communication, community partnerships, transition services, barriers and respecting cultural differences.

Finding 1

School leaders assert that relationship building, communication and community partnerships are the most effective practices to engage immigrant preschool families.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory emphasizes the microsystem as a space where direct interactions, such as those between families and schools, shape the child's developmental outcomes. One hundred percent of school leaders interviewed assert that relationship building is a key factor to engage immigrant preschool families. Getting to know families begins with enrolment process. SL4 expressed that she takes time to interview parents and support them during the initial enrollment process. SL3 shared that being visible in the school each day helps parents get to know school Administration. SL2 asserts that getting to know families helps build trust with the school community. SL1 reports ensuring parent communication is the family's home language and asks parents to inform the school how they want to be communicated with.

SL2, SL3 and SL4 utilize translating software and school personnel to communicate with immigrant preschool families. School leaders shared that newsletters, phone calls, in person workshops, and school events keep families connected and informed about school events. The

research by Barnes et al. (2014) found that written communication was the most common type of communication style for early childhood parents. One hundred percent of school leaders leverage community partnerships to support family engagement efforts. These partnerships include church and faith based community partnerships as well as local businesses and local government agencies.

The school leaders' responses align with research. Their responses indicated that communication is an integral part of engaging immigrant preschool families. Epstein (2018), found that communicating is one of the six components of parent involvement. School leaders report communication as the most effective method of immigrant preschool family engagement. This study's data was in alignment with research by Lowenhaupt and Montgomery (2018) which found that community and university partnerships can be leveraged to increase two way communication with immigrant families. These findings align with the literature on family engagement and align with Research Question 1.

Finding 2

School leaders assert use of transition services, school based and community services, and Ready Region as the most utilized community partnerships. Bronfenbrenner's exosystem frames how external structures, such as community organizations, can indirectly support a child's development by influencing the family and school contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). All four school leaders report use of transition services, school based and community services and Ready Region partnerships as the most utilized partnerships to support immigrant preschool family engagement. SL1 ensures that students have an opportunity to engage in kindergarten transition activities each year. SL2 and SL4 report transition activities help prepare

students for success in kindergarten. SL3 invites parents to engage in transition activities to introduce them to kindergarten expectations.

All school leaders shared that they leverage school division resource staff to support family engagement. Epstein and Sheldon (2018) found that principal's support for family and community engagement is critical to a successful family and community engagement program. School leaders interviewed report that support staff members serve as translators and interpreters for immigrant preschool families. Community services partner with school to provide families with needed resources and assist with access to local services. Community partnerships supports school leaders with family engagement. This partnership often fills the gap of school needs. The school serves as a resource to families new to the country that may not be familiar with available resources. School leaders and support staff assist parents with navigating how to access needed resources. One hundred percent of school leaders assert that Ready Region serves a resource to families offering everything from parent training to connection to resources. School leader responses align with research. According to Epstein (2018), school and community partnerships is a vital component to family engagement. These findings align with Research Question 1.

Finding 3

School leaders perceive immigrant preschool family engagement impacts student attendance, student learning and sense of belonging. Both Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem and chronosystem provide a lens for understanding how cultural and temporal factors influence the challenges immigrant families face in engaging with schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). One hundred percent of school leaders report that student attendance is most impacted by immigrant preschool family engagement. School leaders perceive family engagement impacts attendance

due to the many opportunities to discuss attendance with families. SL3 shared that he frequently addresses attendance with parents during conversations, parent conferences or school events.

School leaders perceive communicating with parents about the important role attendance plays is key. All report the installation of positive attendance habits in preschool to ensure the positive attendance trend continues in kindergarten. SL4 reports having to help parents change their mindset about preschool attendance not being important since preschool attendance is not compulsory. SL2 takes time to ensure that parents are welcomed as partners in their child's education.

Three out of four school leaders perceive family engagement as an impact on students' sense of belonging, student learning and plays a role in their basic needs being met. SL1 sites family engagement as having a positive impact on student learning. Parents are informed of early childhood best practices and have an opportunity to engage in academic activities that support student learning. SL2, SL3 and SL4 share information with parents about student progress and provide opportunities for them to engage in literacy, math and social emotional learning experiences (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

All school leaders provide families with learning materials they can use at home to support their child. Family engagement helps students and families feel a sense of belonging (Epstein, 2018). School leaders invite parents to serve as volunteers and attend school based events. Seventy-five percent of school leaders use community resources and partnerships to provide parents with needed resources such as food, toiletries, and health services. These findings align with Research Question 2.

Finding 4

School leaders perceive parent workshops and multicultural events as the types of family engagement activities with the highest participation rates. One hundred percent of school leaders report that parent workshops when linked to a student performance are well attended. During parent workshops, families gain information about how to support their child's learning. Parents also receive information about student health and nutrition. Seventy-five percent of school leaders report facilitation of multicultural and holiday events. This helps to build positive relationships with families and fosters a sense of belonging. Knowles et al. (2016) found that the implementation of family fun nights connected parents to the program wide positive behavioral interventions and supports in a preschool. These findings align with *Research Question 1*.

Finding 5

School leaders perceive ineffective communication as a barrier to immigrant preschool family engagement. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) mesosystem highlights the significance of effective interactions between systems, such as home and school, in promoting consistent and collaborative family engagement. All four school leaders perceive ineffective communication as a barrier to family engagement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2014; Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018).

Each expressed low parent participation in events that did not have a translator present. Scheduling a translator to attend for off-site was reported as a challenge by SL1, SL2, and SL3. One hundred percent of school leaders utilize digital platforms to remove the communication barrier but feel that in person and face to face communication is best. Face-to-face, two-way communication helps build a positive relationship with families, SL4 (Epstein, 1995). Sabol et

al. (2021) asserts that family support services from outside agencies may be utilized due to limited staff resources. These findings align with Research Question 1.

Finding 6

School leaders perceive valuing parents and respecting cultural differences as relevant in immigrant preschool family engagement. SL4 ensures that classroom teachers get to know students. All school leaders report the value of a home visit in building relationships with immigrant preschool families and getting to understand their culture. SL3 shows parents that they are valued and welcomed as partners by facilitating a parent volunteer and appreciation event. One hundred percent of school leaders assert that having translators available to communicate with bilingual families helps build positive relationships, establishes trust and shows they are valued and respected. The research by Teemant et al. (2021) aligns with school leaders' perceptions of valuing and respecting cultural differences. Teemant et al. (2021) asserts that partnerships must be built on mutual respect and democratic participation. These finding align with *Research Question 1* and support the literature.

Finding 7

Only fifty percent of school leaders shared specific practices that support student learning at home and parent input on decision making. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the child's immediate microsystem and the interconnectedness of systems in the mesosystem are critical for fostering positive developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This was implicit in how engagement with parents in decision making how direct impacts on student outcomes. SL1 and SL4 shared facilitating parent workshops in which parents could take home learning materials.

Parents had an opportunity to utilize learning materials during the workshop and could then take them home to extend the learning experience with their child. Fifty percent of school leaders shared how they involve parents in the decision making process. Parent committees provide families with voice and choice and engages them in the decision making process. This creates buy in related to school practices and helps build a positive relationship with families. Ways in which parents can be engaged in decision making include completion of surveys on upcoming parent and family engagement events, time of day of parent workshops, feedback surveys and questionnaires. Teemant et al. (2021) found that democratic participation should ensure power sharing and transparency in decision making. These findings align with Research Question 1.

Table 17

Epstein's Types of Parent Involvement

Parenting	Communicating	Volunteering	Learning at home	Decision making	Collaborating with community
SL1	SL1	SL1	SL1		SL1
SL2	SL2	SL2		SL2	SL2
SL3	SL3	SL3			SL3
SL4	SL4	SL4	SL4	SL4	SL4

Parenting (P)

Communicating (C)

Volunteering (V)

Learning at Home (LH)

Decision Making (DM)

Collaborating with Community (CC)

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study have implication for preschool leaders on the family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families. Due to demographic changes in Virginia, school systems are more culturally diverse. School leaders can use these findings to

further engage preschool immigrant families. The following implications are suggestions based on the findings.

Implication 1

School leaders in Virginia may want to seek opportunities to build relationships with immigrant preschool families, establish open communication and strong community partnerships. The facilitation of open house events, home visits and parent workshops should be scheduled during the school year. Preschool leaders may want to engage parents in the following types of parent involvement: communicating, volunteering and community collaboration. One hundred percent of school leaders report engaging in these forms of parent involvement which yield positive outcomes for student attendance and student learning. Leveraging use of community partners and local resources has a positive impact on immigrant preschool family engagement.

School leaders can ensure they are visible during school hours to build trust with families. Getting to know immigrant preschool families is essential for developing positive relationships. School leaders must foster community partnerships to support immigrant preschool family engagement practices (Sommer et al., 2018). This implication is in response to Findings 1, 2, and 5 which indicate that relationship building, open communication and community partnerships are the most effective family engagement practices (Epstein, 1995).

Implication 2

School leaders may want to consider partnering with transition services, school based and community resources including Ready Region as they engage immigrant preschool families. Community partnerships play an essential role in family engagement

(Sommer et al., 2018). School leaders should leverage community resources at the local and regional level to meet family engagement goals (Constantino, 2016).

School leaders can seek out partnerships within the school division, local government, faith based partnerships and local businesses. These organizations can be invited to events, provide resources, volunteer and engage with immigrant preschool families. Transition activities should be planned during the school year to help students and families prepare for the transition to kindergarten. This implication is in response to Finding 2, which indicates transition services, Ready Region and school based and community resources as the most utilized community partnerships.

Implication 3

School leaders maybe should understand that family engagement has and impact on student attendance, student learning and a sense of belonging. School leaders may want to frequently facilitate family engagement events. During these events school leaders can focus on student interest and the collective needs of the school community. Providing opportunities for students and family to engage promotes a culture of belonging. School attendance and its correlation to student achievement can be shared with parents.

Parents can be invited to partner with the school to support their child's learning. Information can be shared with parents in their home language to make parents feel comfortable and increase engagement opportunities. This implication is in response to Finding 3, which indicates that school leaders perceive family engagement impact student attendance, student learning and a sense of belonging.

Implication 4

School leaders may want to facilitate parent workshops and multicultural events that include student performances. School leaders can host parent events that include student performances such as songs or student work presentations. School leaders can facilitate cultural family events tailored to the school population and interests. Cultural events have deep meaning for immigrant preschool families and provides an opportunity for parents to express pride in their traditions and culture.

Parents can be invited to serve as presenters during these events to further build community and trust. Collaboration with local community organizations and school departments will create a sense of collaboration. Inviting community based partners can inform parents of available resources and meet family needs. This implication is in response to Finding 4 which indicates that school leaders perceive parent workshops and multicultural events have the highest participation rates.

Implication 5

School leaders may want to address communication barriers when engaging immigrant preschool families. School leaders may want to ensure open two way communication with families using translators, interpreters, newsletters, surveys and digital communication tools. School leaders may want to make an investment in software or communication devices to remove a communication barrier with immigrant preschool families. School leaders should be mindful to have bilingual staff available to communicate with families. School leaders should be knowledgeable about what school based support is available to meet communication needs. Having staff members available to engage in face to face communication with families builds trust and keeps the lines of communication open. This implication is in

response to Finding 5, which indicates school leaders perceive communication as a barrier to immigrant preschool family engagement.

Implication 6

School leaders may want to seek opportunities to demonstrate respect of cultural differences when engaging immigrant preschool families. Hosting cultural events demonstrates respect cultural diversity. School leaders can provide many opportunities for parents to give feedback and input on school matters. Actively inviting parents to engage with the school demonstrates the valuable role parents play as partners in their child's education. Facilitating home visits and providing volunteer opportunities helps build a positive relationship with families. School leaders can acknowledge parents by hosting a volunteer appreciation event, or provide appreciation certificates to parents when their child has perfect attendance. This implication is in response to Finding 6 which indicates school leaders perceive valuing parents and respecting cultural differences as relevant to engaging immigrant preschool families.

Implication 7

School leaders may want to seek opportunities to provide family engagement practices with immigrant preschool families that support learning at home and enlist parent partnership in decision making. School leaders should engage families in activities that support learning at home. This can be accomplished during parent workshops and family engagement events. Support specialists can model instructional practices with families so they can assist their child at home. School leaders should make an investment in the purchase of instructional items that be used at home by families to support student academic needs. Special effort should be given to engage parents in decision making opportunities. Encouraging parent group participation, parent policy council group memberships and survey completion, afford

parents with voice and choice opportunities. This implication is in response to Finding 7 which indicates only fifty percent of school leaders shared specific practices that support student learning at home and parent opportunity for decision making

Conclusions

School leaders assert that building positive relationships and open two way communication are the most effective family engagement strategies to engage immigrant preschool families. School and community partnerships have a positive impact on students. School leaders can address the communication barriers by utilizing translators, digital resources and communicating with families in their home language.

Suggestions for Future Studies

The findings of this study have several implications for future research.

1. Future research using a qualitative methodology could include more preschool leaders with a larger sample size.
2. Future research could include only the perceptions of preschool program coordinators and compare those perceptions to school based leaders.

Personal Reflections

This study was interesting and informative. I enjoyed interviewing participants and hearing the implementation of common practices. My interest in family engagement drew me to this research topic. As a school leader I seek to engage all of families and the results of this study will help me to improve family engagement practices within my school community. As school populations become increasingly more diverse, schools must seek opportunities to engage all families.

Family engagement is an area in which parents can serve as partners with school communities. Parents are their child's first teachers and know their children best. School leaders can be proactive in engaging immigrant preschool families by being mindful about school staffing needs, actively seeking out resources to support effective communication and building strong community partnerships. Taking the time to provide families with voice and choice can have a positive impact on family engagement with immigrant preschool families. Strong family and school connections is a bond that can be initially formed in preschool. Establishing trust and strong relationships with families early can reap benefits in the years following preschool.

Families that feel empowered and are inclined to support their child's success in school when given partnership opportunities. My hope is that schools continue to seek opportunities to engage immigrant preschool families and see cultural differences as an asset to building an inclusive school environment for all.

References

- Anas, N., & Ishaq, K. U. (2022). Qualitative research method in social and behavioral science research. *International journal of management, social sciences, peace and conflict studies*, 5(1), 89–93.
- Ansari, A., Pianta, R. C., Whittaker, J. V., Vitiello, V. E., & Ruzek, E. A. (2020). Persistence and convergence: The end of kindergarten outcomes of pre-K graduates and their nonattending peers. *Developmental Psychology*, 56(11), 2027–2039.
- Auerbach, S. (2007). From moral supporters to struggling advocates: Reconceptualizing parent roles in education through the experience of working-class families of color. *Urban Education*, 42(3), 250–283.
- Auerbach, S. (2009). Walking the walk: Portraits in leadership for family engagement in urban schools. *The School Community Journal*, 19(1), 9–31.
- Auerbach, S. (2010). Beyond coffee with the principal: Toward leadership for authentic school-family partnerships. *Journal of School Leadership*, 20(6), 728–757.
- Auerbach, S. (2011). Learning from Latino families. *Learning*, 68(8), 16–21.
- Auerbach, S. (Ed.). (2012). *School leadership for authentic family and community partnerships: Research perspectives for transforming practice*. Routledge.
- Auerbach, S., & Collier, S. (2012). Bringing high stakes from the classroom to the parent center: Lessons from an intervention program for immigrant families. *Teachers College Record*, 114(3).
- Baker, C. E. (2013). Fathers' and mothers' home literacy involvement and children's cognitive and social emotional development: Implications for family literacy. *Applied Developmental Science*, 17(4), 184–197.

- Ball, A., Skrzypek, C., Lynch, M., (2021). The family engagement practice framework: A comprehensive framework developed from the voices of school based practitioners. *Family Relations Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Science, 70*, 1190-1205.
- Barnes, J., Guin, A., Allen, K., Jolly, C. (2016). Engaging parents in early childhood education: Perspectives of childcare providers. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 44*, 360–374.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report, 13*(4), 544–559.
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 15*(2), 219–234.
- Bowen, G. A. (2005). Preparing a qualitative research-based dissertation: Lessons learned. *The Qualitative Report, 10*(2), 208–222.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*(7), 513–531.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development. *American Psychologist, 32*, 513–531.
- Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2003). Trust in schools: A core resource for school reform. *Educational Leadership, 60*, 40–44.
- Calzada, E., Huang, K., Hernandez, M., Soriano, E., Acra, C., Francoise, McClure-Dawson, S., Kamboukos, D, & Brotman, L. (2014). Family and teacher characteristics as predictors of

- parent Involvement in education during early childhood among afro-Caribbean and Latino immigrant families. *Urban Education*, 50.
- Carter, S. M., Shih, P., Williams, J., Degeling, C., & Mooney-Somers, J. (2021). Conducting qualitative research online: challenges and solutions. *The Patient-Patient-Centered Outcomes Research*, 14(6), 711–718.
- Chan, Z. C., Fung, Y., & Chien, W. (2013). Bracketing in phenomenology: Only undertaken in the data collection and analysis process. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(30), 1–9.
- Chenail, R. J. (2012). Conducting qualitative data analysis: Reading line-by-line, but analyzing by meaningful qualitative units. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(1), 266–269.
- Coady, M. R., Coady, T. J., & Nelson, A. (2015). Assessing the needs of immigrant, Latino families and teachers in rural settings: Building home-school partnerships. *NABE Journal of Research and Practice*, 6(1), 122–157.
- Coady, M. (2019a). Rural multilingual family engagement: Review of research and model of engagement. *The Rural Educator*, 40(3), 1–13.
- Coady, M. (2019b). *Connecting school and the multilingual home: Theory and practice for rural educators*. Multilingual Matters.
- Coady, M., & Ankeny, R. (2019). Engaging multilingual families in the US: Research and practice for educators. *Learn: The Journal of the Irish Learning Support Association*, 41, 56-69.
- Constantino, S. (2016). *Engage every family: Five simple principles workbook*. Corwin.
- Constantino, S. (2021). *Engage every family: Five simple principles*. Corwin.
- Craver, G. A. (2014). Not just for beginners - A review of successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(48), 1–4.

- Creswell, J. & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2023). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage.
- Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center. (2023) *Head Start Approach*.
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/programs/article/head-start-approach>
- Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center. (2024) *Head Start Approach*.
<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/organizational-leadership/article/what-policy-council>
- England, K. V. L. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), 80–89.
- Epstein, J. (1986). Parents' reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement. *The Elementary School Journal*, 86(3), 277–294.
- Epstein, J. (1987). Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teacher practices and parent involvement. In K. Hurrelmann, F. X. Kaufmann, & F. Losel (Eds.), *Social intervention: Potential and constraints* (pp. 121–136). De Gruyter.
- Epstein, J. (1995). School/family/community partnerships. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701–712.
- Epstein, J., & Salinas, K. (2004). Partnering with families and communities. *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 12–18.
- Epstein, J., & Sheldon, S. (2014). Necessary but not sufficient: The role of policy for advancing programs of school, family and community partnerships. *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 2 (5) 202–219. <https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2016.2.5.10>
- Epstein, J. L. (2018). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Routledge.

- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Sheldon, S. B., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Jansorn, N. R. & Williams, K. J. (2018). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. Corwin Press.
- Every Student Succeeds Act, Pub. L. No.114-95 (2015). <https://govinfo.gov/app/details/PLAW-114pub.95>.
- Fan, S., & Yost H. (2019). Keeping Connected: Exploring the Potential of Social Media as a New Avenue for Communication and Collaboration in Early Childhood Education. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 27, 132–142.
- Fantuzzo, J., McWayne, C., & Perry, M., A. (2004). Multiple dimensions of family involvement and their relations to behavioral and learning competencies for urban, low-income children. *School Psychology Review*, 33, 467–480.
- Flick, U. (2014). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis*. Sage.
- Flick, U. (2017). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection*. Sage.
- Garbacz, S. A., McIntosh, K., Eagle, J. W., Dowd-Eagle, S. E., Hirano, K. A., & Rupert, T. (2016). Family engagement within schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 60(1), 60–69.
- Garbacz, S. A., Herman, K. C., Thompson, A. M., & Reinke, W. M. (2017). Family engagement in education and intervention: Implementation and evaluation to maximize family, school, and student outcomes. *Journal of School Psychology*, 62, 1–10.
- Garbacz, S. A., Zerr, A. A., Dishion, T. J., Seeley, J. R., & Stormshak, E. (2018). Parent educational involvement in middle school: Longitudinal influences on student outcomes. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 38(5), 629–660.

- Ginsburg-Block, M., Manz, P., & Mcwayne, C. (2010). *Partnering with families to foster early achievements in math*. Routledge.
- Guirguis, R., & Plotka, R. (2019). Engaging Latino families in early childhood education programs: Barriers and misconceptions. *Dimensions of Early Childhood, 47*(2).
- Hall, C. (2020). The impact of family engagement on student achievement. *Networks: An Online Journal for Teacher Research, 22*(2).
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002) *A new wave of evidence: The impact of community connections on student achievement. Annual synthesis 2002*. Austin, TX; National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools.
- Hindman, A. H., & Morrison, F. J. (2012). Differential contributions of three parenting dimensions to preschool literacy and social skills in a middle-income sample. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 58*(2), 191–223. <https://doi.org/10.1353/mpq.2012.0012>
- Kelty, N. E., & Wakabayashi, T. (2020). Family engagement in schools: Parent, educator, and community perspectives. *Sage Open, 10*(4), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020973024>
- Keys. (2014). Family Engagement in rural and Urban Head Start Families: An Exploratory Study. *Early Childhood Education J (2015) 43:69–76*. Published.
- Knowles, C., Harris, A., & Van Norman, R. (2016). Family fun nights: Collaborative parent education accessible for diverse learning abilities. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 45*, 393–401.
- Lee, K., & Rispoli, K. (2019). Head Start impact on father's involvement and Black children's development. *Journal of Social Work, 554*(4), 777–797.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.

- Lowenhaupt, R., & Montgomery, N. (2018). Family engagement practices as sites of possibility: Supporting immigrant families through a district university partnership. *Theory into Practice, 57*(2) 99–108.
- Magnuson, K., & Duncan, G., (2016). Can early childhood interventions decrease inequality of economic opportunity? *The Russell Sage Foundation of the Social Sciences, 2*(2), 123–141. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/rsf.2016.2.2.05>
- Mapp,
- McGregor, S. L., & Murnane, J. A. (2010). Paradigm, methodology and method: Intellectual integrity in consumer scholarship. *International journal of consumer studies, 34*(4), 419–427.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.
- Melzi, G., McWayne, C. & Ochoa, W. (2020). Family engagement and Latine children’s early narrative skills. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 50*, 83–95.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01132-7>
- Merriam, S., & Tisdell, E. (2016). *Qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 101, Stat. 1425 (2002).
- National Education Association. (2020). <https://www.nea.org>
- Nielsen, T. W. (2006). Towards a pedagogy of imagination: A phenomenological case study of holistic education. *Ethnography and Education, 1*(2), 247–264.
- Nix, R., Bierman, K., , M., Henrichs, B., & Gill, S. (2018). Parent engagement in Head Start home visiting program predicts sustained growth in children’s school readiness. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 45*, 106–114.
- Patton, M. Q. (2023). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.

- Pillow, W. S. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(2), 175–196.
- Powell, D. R., Son, S., File, N., & San Juan, R., R. (2010). Parent-school relationships and children's academic and social outcomes in public school pre-kindergarten. *Journal of School Psychology*, 48(4), 269–292. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2010.03.002
- Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3), 305–320.
- Sabol, T., Sommer, T., Sanchez, A., Busby, A. (2018). A new approach to defining and measuring family engagement in early childhood education programs. *AERA Open*, 4(3), 1–12.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE.
- Santiago, R. T., Garbacz, S. A., Beattie, T., & Moore, C. L. (2016). Parent-teacher relationships in elementary school: An examination of parent-teacher trust. *Psychology in the Schools*, 53(10), 1003–1017.
- Savory, I., & Timmermans, S. (2014). *Abductive analysis: Theorizing qualitative research*. University of Chicago.
- Semke, C. A., Garbacz, S. A., Kwon, K., Sheridan, S. & Woods, K. E. (2010). Family involvement for children with disruptive behaviors: The role of parenting stress and motivational beliefs. *Journal of School Psychology*, 48(4), 293–312.
- Sheridan, S. M., Bovaird, J. A., Glover, T. A., Garbacz, S. A., Witte, A., & Kwon, K. (2012). A randomized trial examining the effects of conjoint behavioral consultation and the

- mediating role of the parent-teacher relationship. *School Psychology Review*, 41(1), 23–46.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method, and research*. Sage.
- Stanley, K., & Kuo, N. C. (2022). It takes a village: Approaching the development of school-family-community partnerships through Bronfenbrenner’s socio-ecological perspectives. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, 10(1), 13. Vol. 69, No. 4, September 2014 of *YC Young Children on JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/ycyoungchildren.69.issue-4.
- Sumsion, J. (2002). Becoming, being and unbecoming an early childhood educator: A phenomenological case study of teacher attrition. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(7), 869–885.
- Teemant, A., Yoder, G., Sherman, B., Graff, C. (2021). An equity framework for family, community and school partnerships. *Theory into Practice*, 60(1), 28–38.
- Thompson, J. (2022). A guide to abductive thematic analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(5), 1410–1421.
- Urcia, I. A. (2021). Comparisons of adaptations in grounded theory and phenomenology: Selecting the specific qualitative research methodology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, 16094069211045474.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2018, October 24). *Improving basic programs operated by local educational agencies (Title I, Part A)*. <https://www2ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Office of Head Start. (2018). *The Head Start program performance standards*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/policy>

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Office of Head Start. (2023). *Defining family and community engagement*. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/parent-family-community-engagement-pfcea-framework>
- U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.) U.S. Department of Commerce. Retrieved February 17, 2022, from <https://data.census.gov/>
- Van Manen, M. (2016). *Researching lived experiences: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Van Manen, M. (2017). Phenomenology in its original sense. *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(6), 810–825.
- Virginia Department of Education. (2022). <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/early-childhood-care-education/building-a-unified-early-childhood-system>.
- Virginia Department of Social Services. *Search for child day care*.
<https://www.dss.virginia.gov/facility/search/cc.cgi>
- Walters, R. T. (2017). *A phenomenological case study: Exploring lived experiences of undergraduate students enrolled in a transition summer bridge program at one historical black college and university* (Dissertation). Keiser University.
- West, E. T. (2013). A phenomenological case study of the experiences of African American high school students. *Sage Open*, 3(2), 2158244013486788
- Williams, H. (2021). The meaning of “phenomenology”: Qualitative and philosophical phenomenological research methods. *The Qualitative Report*, 26(2), 366–385.
- Woodcock, M. (2001). *Woodcock-Johnson III tests of achievement. Examiners manual*. Riverside.

Woodcock, R. W., Schrank, F. A., McGrew, K. S., & Mather, N. (2007). *Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement, Form C/Brief Battery*. Rolling Meadows, IL: Riverside.

Yamauchi, L. A., Ponte, E., Ratliffe, K. T., & Traynor, K. (2017). Theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in research on family-school partnerships. *School Community Journal*, 27(2), 9–34.

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage.

Zahavi, D. (2019). *Phenomenology: The basics*. Routledge.

Appendix A

School Leader Interview Questions

Demographic questions:

1. Can you share a little about your career as an educator? How many years have you been principal? (All here?)
2. Please share a little about the demographics of your school?
3. What led you to become a principal here at _____ School?
4. How would you characterize the culture and climate here?
5. How would you characterize your leadership style?

Icebreaking questions:

6. Tell me about your basic philosophy on engaging families? (Example of elaborating question: In what ways does that differ with immigrant preschool families?)
7. In what ways has that philosophy influenced your experiences with immigrant families? (Example of a probing question: What do you think that is?)

Main interview questions:

8. What are some of the practices you have engaged in the past that you found most effective? What ways will engage in those again? (Prompts: Any ideas to improve upon those? What have you learned that you may start doing again?)
9. What were some practices may have engaged in that weren't successful or effective?
10. In your perception, based on your experiences, what do consider to be the most effective practices for engaging immigrant preschool families? (Clarifying question In other words, if a new principal were going to ask you, "What's the one thing I should be doing?" what would you say to them?)

11. What role does school-community and school-family relations have in engagement and support?
12. What are some of the specific community partnerships that you've fostered that support family engagement?
13. How has that partnership impacted students? What impact has family engagement with immigrant preschool families had on students? What impact has it had on students' relationships with their families? Student's (or family's) sense of belonging? Student behavior? Student attendance?
14. What do you do on a yearly or regular basis to engage immigrant preschool families? (Probing question: Any specific activities or programs? Elaborating question: Can you say a bit more about those?)
15. What experiences have you had with obstacles or barriers to family engagement for immigrant preschool families? What strategies have you use to remove family engagement barriers for immigrant preschool families?
16. Is there anything you are planning or preparing for that you haven't implemented yet to better help in decreasing barriers?
17. Finally, what more could you share with me about engaging immigrant families that maybe I haven't asked?

Appendix B

CITI Certificate

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM) COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2 COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* Scores on this [Requirements Report](#) (Part 1) reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. The Transcript Report (Part 2) lists more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Lesley Harris (ID: 10482099)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech) (ID: 1684)
- **Institution Email:** lesleyrh9130@vt.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
- **Phone:** 804-943-6762

- **Curriculum Group:** Social & Behavioral Research
- **Course Learner Group:** Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Investigators and staff involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

- **Record ID:** 45918020
- **Completion Date:** 06-Feb-2023
- **Expiration Date:** 06-Feb-2026
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 86