**A Study of the Relationship Between General Education Teachers and the Parents**

**of Children with Disabilities in an Inclusive Classroom.**

by

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**Dedication**

The motivation and inspiration for this project came from my aunt, Michelle Morgan, who completed her PhD, working with persons with Down syndrome, from her hospital bed.

Dr. Jane Lim enabled me to be the best student and author that I could be through her continuous encouragement, understanding and support. I am extremely grateful for her mentorship throughout the completion of this project.

Finally, I dedicate this body of work in the loving memory of my grandfather whom passed away during the fall semester in 2017. Pops' final wish was for me to achieve in my dreams here in America, and to that, I owe him every minute that I have put in to completing this study. May his vibrant personality, and love for those around him, live on through this work.

**Abstract**

This project aims to explore the relationship between general education teachers and the parents of children with disabilities, aged three years or younger, in an inclusive classroom. This was completed through an action research process using survey and field observations. The three research questions being addressed in the study are:

1. What is the relationship between general education teachers and parents of children three years and below with disabilities in an inclusive classroom?

2. How do the effective relationship dimensions support parents and teachers in an inclusive classroom?

3. What implications are needed to build an equitable, responsive and inclusive classroom for children with disabilities aged three years and below?

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**Chapter one**

**Introduction**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was legislated in 1990 (reauthorized 1997, 2004) to ensure that children with disabilities receive equal opportunity to education as their non-disabled peers (American Psychological Association, 2015; US Department of Education, 2010). However, while this vital government legislation makes significant inroads in attempting to provide equitable education for children with disabilities, contentions in both policy and practice with regard to its implementation indicate that it falls short of ensuring equity for all (McLaughlin, 2010). Furthermore, there are limited narratives in the literature about the day-to-day implementation of IDEA in inclusive classrooms that could aid in the resolution of issues of equity and inform future amendments to enable greater equity in education for children with disabilities. In particular, the role of parent-teacher relationships remains a grey area within inclusive educational settings. While parents are consulted with regard to the planning and implementation of their child's Individual Education Program (IEP), there is limited understanding of the day-to-day interactions between general education teachers and parents that occur in inclusive educational settings. Such an understanding is necessary to ensure optimal implementation of equitable education for students with disabilities.

Inclusion is not only a methodology, but a 1997 reform to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), that saw the cohesion between special educators and general education teachers become mandatory. Teacher-directed strategies focused on a framework for planning, including how to deliver instruction to students with a variety of

needs, while student-directed strategies enabled the right of each student to a free and appropriate inclusive education through emphasis on goal setting and self-management. Contrary to this, however, is that while inclusion remains a highly sensitive topic, it has been portrayed as a one size fits all model for all disabilities. It has been noted that children with emotional behavioral disorders and other learning disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, require individualized intervention. In addition, dimensions such as reading ability and academic success that have been researched in this field for children aged four to secondary school age, has yet to be explored at the younger age (Verhult, & Akkerhuis, 1989; Jeynes, 2007). Children aged between zero and three years are developmentally incapable of goal-setting and self-management which could directly affect their behavioral development, learning and reading abilities as well as academic success. Thus, parents and teachers of young children with disabilities are primarily responsible for goal setting and management of their children's development. Research around the role of parents, and specifically parent-teacher relationships, is vital in the early childhood sector to better inform best practice and so benefit the development of young children.

Research demonstrates that the relationship between the teacher and the parents of children with disabilities, is a vital aspect in promoting teacher confidence and willingness to effectively adapt and individualize their curriculum to suit the specific needs of the child. For example, a focus group study investigating parent responses to the transition of their children with disabilities to kindergarten identified four overarching themes of "relationship building, communication, knowledge, and support" (Starr, Martini & Kuo. 2016). Within each of these themes were multiple subthemes that

reflected the importance of parent teacher interactions and relationships in the effective and positive transition to kindergarten of their children with disabilities. Significant subthemes within this study included: building trust between the teacher and parent: the frequency and content of communication between teacher and parent: specific knowledge needs for both teachers and parents, and educational supports. Moreover, Benjamin, Lucas-Thompson, Little, Davies & Khetani (2016) used a mixed methods study comprising multiple research questionnaires and the active participation of young children in specific activities within their environment. This study was used to investigate the participation of preschoolers with and without disabilities. They found that in regard to parent teacher interactions, the accommodations of family were relevant in improving participation outcomes in preschool settings. However, neither of these studies drew on direct observation of parent teacher interactions within an inclusive classroom.

Due to the limitations of existing studies, I aim to explore the interaction and relationship between teachers and parents of children with disabilities aged zero to three years.  This study will identify and provide key insights into the types of interactions between parents and teachers that are conducive and effective in promoting and enhancing the education of the children in their care. I intend to address how the relationships between parents and teachers influence dimensions such as curriculum, environment, and individualized education/family plans. This study was conducted through an action research process, using survey and field observations, to address the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between general education teachers and parents of children three years and below with disabilities in an inclusive classroom?

2. How do the effective relationship dimensions support parents and teachers in an inclusive classroom?

3. What implications are needed to build an equitable, responsive and inclusive classroom for children with disabilities aged three years and below?

**Chapter two**

**Literature review**

**Introduction**

This chapter provides a review of the literature around parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement in children's schooling. It proposed that positive parent-teacher interactions are essential for academic success in children of all ages, and the positive strategies effective in fostering such relationships. In addition, it highlights the necessity of such interactions and positive relationships within inclusive early childhood settings to assist children with disabilities to reach their full personal and educational potentials.

The chapter also highlights the limitations in the literature encompassing this topic for children with disabilities aged zero to three years, despite recognition that early intervention is vital to achieve optimal developmental and educational results. Consequently, the chapter foregrounds the need for further studies in this area.

**Parent-teacher relationships and academic success**

The importance of positive parent-teacher relationships has long been recognized in attaining optimal educational development in children (Blair, 2014; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Wilder, 2014). Parental involvement in children's education has also been associated with increased attendance, improvement in attitude towards schooling, and higher motivation and self-belief in students (Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). Since the onset of the Post-Fordist era, the focus of education has moved towards teamwork, including a delegation of teaching and learning responsibilities, an emphasis on learning for life, and the multi-modal delivery of individualized learning packages (Lonsdale &

McCurry, 2004). Moreover, in the United States, following introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act (Title 1, Part A), administrators and policy makers developed initiatives for involving parents in school communities and encouraging their communication and support in the education of their children (Wilder, 2014). Across the US, parental involvement is now considered a significant and integral role in children's schooling that has demonstrated positive impacts on academic, social, emotional and behavioral outcomes (Chan et al., 2013; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Thus, it is necessary for both teachers and parents to work together to ensure that children achieve their developmental and academic milestones.

Research has a long history of demonstrating the value of family involvement in encouraging students to maximize their full potential (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hegarty, 1993). Nevertheless, the degree and quality of parental involvement have also been found to be significant factors in effective home-school partnerships (Hornby, 2000; Pomerantz, Moorman & Litwack, 2007). In a meta-analysis using measures of academic grades, standardized tests, teacher rating scales, and behaviors towards academics and the school environment, Jeynes (2007) demonstrated that for urban secondary school aged children, degree of parental involvement had a direct correlation with academic success, and this correlation also remained across race. Thus, it was suggested that parental involvement could be one way of bridging the academic gap for minority students.

Involving the family in the education of young children is clearly demonstrated in the literature to be a crucial element for academic success. Hornby (2015) argues for parent-partnerships or co-collaborators who can offer guidance, education and information to parents and families of children with special needs and disabilities.

Nevertheless, questions exist around the concepts of what constitutes involvement, engagement and the role of the family in a child's learning.

**Parental Involvement and engagement**

In 1995, Epstein (1995) demonstrated the impacts of school staff perspectives on the role of the family in the education of their children. This study focused on the different views of the child as student between school staff and family. Findings showed that while school staff viewed the family's role as being separate from the child's education, they also recognized the importance of viewing the child as a child, as well as creating partnerships with the family. Epstein (1995) found that the development of school and family partnerships creates a caring and positive community in which children may learn. The study also showed that through these partnerships, school staff and families worked together to create optimal programs to provide learning opportunities for each student. In addition, it found that communication and interaction were pivotal in achieving strong partnerships among the school staff, teachers and family members. Furthermore, the study demonstrated the importance of mutually viewing the core concept of these partnerships as one of caring.

While agreeing that parental participation equates to stronger academic outcomes, Goodall and Montgomery (2014), propose a difference between parental *engagement* in a child's learning, and parental *involvement* in schools. They suggest that these concepts of participation in a child's education are found at opposite ends on a continuum, with engagement in their child's learning as the goal. They propose that through this view, the emphasis is shifted "away from the relationship between parents and schools, to a focus on the relationship between parents and their children's learning" (p. 399). They believe

that by viewing parent-teacher-child relationships in this way, parents from minority and vulnerable backgrounds who may have difficulty interacting with their children's schools, are still able to engage in their child's learning. Jeynes (2007) defined parental involvement as "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (p. 83). Thus, no matter how parental involvement is conceptualized, the importance of parental participation in children's learning and consequent academic, socio-emotional and behavioral outcomes is incontrovertible and evident across race and age (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

**Parent teacher relationships and age of children**

In an Australian study, Murray, McFarland-Piazza and Harrison (2014), analyzed two waves of questionnaire data from the *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (N=2010 children) where parent involvement in the early childhood setting was compared to that of the school age setting. The researchers analyzed four predictors of parental involvement; socio-economic background, indigenous status, language, and educational activities used in the home. Findings indicated that parents were more involved at the younger age compared to later in the child's schooling. Furthermore, the researchers found a correlation between engagement in educational activities in the home and increased involvement in both early childhood and school settings. Additionally, engagement at home also correlated with more frequent communication and higher ratings of its effectiveness. The other demographic predictors that were analyzed were found to be less consistent, while indigenous status had no association with any of the measures.

The findings of this study indicate that the quality or dimensions of parental interaction in children's early schooling can be just as important as the participation itself.

**Dimensions in parent-teacher relationships**

The literature around parent-teacher relationships comprises numerous studies investigating those dimensions of parental interaction that promote effective participation in children's learning. Parental involvement factors significantly in positive academic outcomes, yet research demonstrates that it is the quality of the interactions that are of greatest importance (Adams & Christenson, 2000). In recent years, research has begun to investigate and unpack those dimensions of parent-teacher interactions that correlate with positive outcomes for children, together with factors that act as barriers to parental involvement. A host of literature describes methods for improving parent-teacher interactions ranging from school-based meetings, workshops and programs for parents (Boult, 2006; Grant & Ray, 2010) to the development and application of theoretical models (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, 2001; Hornby, 2000).

In a seminal study comprising parents (N=1, 234) and teachers (N=209), Adams and Christenson (2000) found that trust is essential to the development of parent-teacher relationships. Furthermore, their findings demonstrated that the trust within the family-school relationship diminishes as students approach middle and high school age, compared to the trust evident at the elementary level. The perceived quality of interactions was found to be a more reliable indicator of trust compared to the frequency of interactions. Moreover, level of trust was higher in parents than in teachers. Additionally, finding positive ways to increase and improve communication between home and school, correlated with higher levels of trust. Thus, trust together with effective

communication, was shown to be a crucial element for school performance, particularly in younger age groups.

However, in a Norwegian study in which parents described the roles of themselves and the teachers, including their conversations, showed a gap between research findings and reality. Tveit (2009) found that despite parents having legal rights with regard to the education of their children, they had to constantly legitimize their rights within the school system. The results showed that parents believed their role in the education of their children to be passive while the teacher's role was active. Even when the educational perspectives and ideologies of parents and teachers differed, parents were still found to defer to the teacher's beliefs and wishes. Additionally, it was found that parents did not actively attempt to affect parent-teacher communication. Thus, it is argued that realignment of parent-teacher roles is needed to establish equality and validation of parental involvement in children's schooling.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) described a model comprising four barriers to parental involvement in a child's schooling: "individual parent and family factors; child factors; parent-teacher factors, and societal factors" (p. 39). This model and subsequent discussion highlight the complexities of teacher-parent interactions and parental involvement. It is believed that recognition of barriers to parental involvement will lead to a greater ability for parents and teachers to work collaboratively to close the gap between the literature and reality of involvement.

It is suggested that learning difficulties and disabilities can be a facilitating factor in parental involvement and that parental involvement is viewed by special educators as "an essential aspect of effective education" for these children (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011.,

p. 43). However, even with increased involvement from parents of children with disabilities in the implementation of individual education programs (IEPs), there is still the potential for disagreement and ineffective communication that can become barriers for effective participation. So too, "not all children benefit equally from any one approach" (Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin & Laurent, 2003). Thus, it is important for researchers to continue to unravel the complexities of parent-teacher interactions and parental involvement in their children's schooling to achieve optimal practice that closes the gap between rhetoric and reality and seeks to encompass children both with and without disabilities.

**Parent-teacher relationships in inclusive early childhood settings**

Within the US, the enactment of IDEA (1997, 2004) has resulted in more children with disabilities being enrolled in school. However, while this government legislation attempts to provide greater equity in education for children with disabilities, contentions exist between policy and practice with the reality that equity is not achieved for all students (McLaughlin, 2010). Literature around the day-to-day implementation of IDEA in inclusive classrooms is limited and so more research is needed to inform future amendments that may close the gap between policy and practice and enable greater equity for children with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Despite a long history of research around parental involvement in children's schooling, the role of parent-teacher relationships remains a grey area within inclusive educational settings and specifically inclusive early childhood environments. A transactional, family-centered approach model (SCERTS) was developed by Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin and Laurent (2003) following the 1997 amendments to IDEA, in an

effort to address issues of equality in education for all children. Specifically, SCERTS was developed from both theoretical and empirical research foundations to increase communication and socioemotional abilities in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). However, its three primary developmental dimensions of "**S**ocial **C**ommunication, **E**motional **R**egulation and **T**ransactional **S**upport" (p. 296) have relevance to inclusive education and to all children with disabilities. One of the priorities of the SCERTS model, which has relevance to all children with disabilities, is to support children to

> *"be as successful as possible in experiencing a sense of efficacy in*
>
> *communicating their intentions, and in participating in affectively*
>
> *charged and emotionally fulfilling social engagement with a variety of*
>
> *partners"* (p. 309).

The study that I embarked will be adopting SCERTS third dimension of transactional support that highlights the three major goals of interpersonal, educational and family supports. Within the mechanisms for family support are two objectives comprising emotional and educational supports. The latter support mechanism emphasizes family priorities first and supports families with knowledge and skills about their children's disabilities through training, observation and interactive guidance. It is recognized that "a variety of educational supports are typically needed to optimize success in school… [and] significant modifications to support active learning" might be needed for some children (Prizant et al., 2003, p. 310).

One of the most important dimensions of the SCERTS model is the establishment of partnerships between family members and school staff. The model is as much a

developmental model for family members as for children with ASD with "specific efforts directed to development of mutually satisfying and effective social-emotional experiences based on an understanding of a child's and family's needs" (Prizant et al., 2003, p. 313).

In 2004, a small scale ($n$ = 7) qualitative study examined the implementations of the 1997 amendments to IDEA (Frazeur Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi & Shelton, 2004). They identified four elements that were shown to be essential for the successful inclusion of young children with disabilities in typical community early childhood settings; these were attitude of staff and parents, positive parent-teacher relationships, therapeutic interventions and modifications. However, despite these findings and the development and implementation of models used to translate theory and inform practice, research demonstrates that a gap between rhetoric and reality still exists. For example, a recent (2017) large study involving 129 parents within inclusive early childhood contexts showed that parents of young children with disabilities still believed inclusive early childhood school environments, including resources, to be less supportive of their child's participation than parents of children without disabilities (Benjamin, Lucas-Thompson, Little, Davies & Khetani, 2017). In addition, findings showed that when parents were the instigators of change for their children with disabilities, their perceived greatest need was the modification of behavior and/or activities. Furthermore, the strategies used by parents to effect change were essentially those relevant to child care activities such as timing and choice of materials to optimize performance, and peer membership activities that included promoting opportunities for social interaction with peers. So too, Hollingsworth

and Buysse (2009) report the incidental nature of peer interactions rather than a more focused intentional friendship support in inclusive early childhood settings.

The literature unarguably demonstrates that despite its complexities, parental involvement in children's schooling correlates with academic success and that the quality of participation and parent-teacher interaction is equally important. Moreover, inroads have been made from a long history of research and practice to unpack the complexities of parent-teacher relationships and parental involvement in children's schooling to provide guidance and models for implementation. However, it is also evident there exists a gap between theory and practice and despite an increased awareness of, and the resulting headway made in, inclusive practices, education is not yet equal for all children. Specifically, there is a dearth of research around parent-teacher relationships in inclusive settings for children with disabilities under three years of age, despite early intervention being recognized as essential for optimal development and learning opportunities. Thus, research is needed to investigate the nature of relationships between parents and teachers of children under three years of age including parental involvement in inclusive early childhood environments. As a result, this study intends to focus on the limitation described in this chapter by researching:

1. The relationship between general education teachers and parents of children three years and below with disabilities in an inclusive classroom;

2. The effective relationship dimensions that support parents and teachers in an inclusive classroom;

3. The implications needed to build an equitable, responsive and inclusive classroom for children with disabilities aged three years and below.

**Chapter three**

**Methodology**

**Research Methods**

The research for this project primarily took place through action research adopting qualitative methods, collecting data through surveys, and completing field observations. The focus of this study is to investigate the nature of relationships between parents and teachers of children under three years of age. The use of teacher and parental survey, and field observation is to ensure triangulation of data once information is gathered. In order not to taint this research method through contact with the subjects, observations were completed in a quiet room with a one-way mirror where the observer could view and hear the subjects but not vice versa. This technique allowed for data to be collected in a way that reflected the interactions of a normal day.

Research was focused on four key dimensions, derived from the main research questions of the study: interactions between the teacher and parent, curriculum, environment, and Individualized Education Program (IEP). Drawing from the field of special education, the approach to this topic stems from a child-first viewpoint. While the focus is placed on understanding the effect of the relationship between the parent and the teacher, the ultimate goal is to identify how this affects the child's ability to learn and so as to adapt the curriculum for student success. This study refrained from using methodology that was not approved by the IRB and the Director of ACE Learning Center.

**Data Collection**

Prior to commencing observations at ACE Learning Center, the center director and I met in person to discuss goals for the project to ensure they were achievable within the center. As the IRB application was being completed, the center director and I communicated via phone and email to decide the best classroom to observe for this study that would provide a range of disabilities. Once we decided on the participant pool, we were able to discuss the time frame to complete observations based on child attendance trends during the week. It was decided that a shorter time frame, with frequent observations, was best with younger children since their attendance fluctuate and not all attend every day.

Data collection commenced in Fall 2017 at ACE Learning Center on the campus of Middle Tennessee State University. After consent was received, observations of children and a survey was sent out to the parents and teacher over a one-month period. A total of 12-14 observations were conducted during this time frame almost daily to observe for consistency and changes if any. Daily observations validated the child's actions and development stage, and reduced inconsistencies, associated with excess time, between the interactions of parents and the teacher.

A parent and teacher survey was distributed through ACE Learning center following the collection of consent forms (Please refer to Appendix 1-3). This survey served to gather information pertaining to the dimensions derived from the three research questions. The purpose of the survey was to triangulate the observed data and parents and teacher's perspective. This data collection method was only forecasted to take one week; unfortunately, the collection of the survey responses took two full months. While this is

frustrating, it gave me time to reflect on different methods to collect survey responses in the future.

**Participant Composition**

The Ann Campbell Early Learning Center is an inclusive preschool for children ages 13 months through five years. This education center strives to provide a safe and comfortable environment where students who are both typically developing or those who have a disability or delay, can continue to develop appropriately within the means of their education. ACE Learning Center offers four classrooms, each of which have a maximum group size per day (N=10-12), catering for a total of N=41 students for the whole center. As the center offers inclusive education for those with special needs and developmental delays, it is not uncommon for classrooms to include students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, physical disabilities that limit movement and/or vision, as well as other behavioral disabilities. Each classroom is therefore equipped with supplies and tools to offer each student a fair opportunity to learn in an environment and situation that is comfortable and most positive for their needs.

The sample chosen for this study occurs in the two year old classroom aged 24 to 36 months, which has the most prominent ratio of children with a disability, therefore identifying this classroom as appropriate for this study. The classroom chosen for observations accommodated 10 students, with eight consenting to participate in the study. Out of the eight families who provided consent, there is an equal ratio of four girls and four boys. Of the total sample, two are considered typically developing while six children had a variety of disabilities. There are three students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

(ASD), and the remaining three students have a range of physical disabilities with very mild to severe manifestations.

**Ethics and Confidentiality**

Prior to commencing the study, several steps were taken to ensure proper ethical action and considerations were in place. This study involves human subjects and therefore required approval from the IRB (Please refer to Appendix 4). I had to complete the CITI training which focused on social and behavioral research with human subjects, as the first step to meeting ethical guidelines. Prior to the expedited protocol application being submitted to the IRB, an approval notice for observations was obtained from the director of the ACE Learning Center (Please refer to Appendix 5). Following approval for research from the IRB, the approved consent forms were then distributed through ACE Learning Center and IRB approval guidelines were followed accordingly.

In order to maintain confidentiality within ACE Learning center and all participants and their families involved, pseudonyms were used in the collection of all data and results. Pseudonym coding is as follows: "C" represents the child, followed by the number order to which they consented to the study; "P" represents parent, with "1" identifying the mother, "2" identifying the father, and "3" identifying a grandparent; and finally "T1" represents the classroom teacher.

**Chapter four**

**Results**

**Introduction**

The results from this study are used to highlight and understand the relationships between the parents of children with disabilities and their inclusive classroom teacher/s. Two data collection methods were used comprising observation of the interactions between parents and the teacher, and surveys of both parents and the teacher. The purpose is to triangulate the information and ensure validity of the data. The observation results were collected across six weeks and comprised 13 sessions.

Adopting the SCERTS model as a framework, data was analysed, coded and tabulated. This data was then consolidated to highlight key findings in accordance to SCERTS third dimension of transactional support that highlights the three major goals of interpersonal, educational and family supports. This data addresses the study's three research questions.

1. What is the relationship between general education teachers and parents of children three years and below with disabilities in an inclusive classroom?

2. How do the effective relationship dimensions support parents and teachers in an inclusive classroom?

3. What implications are needed to build an equitable, responsive and inclusive classroom for children with disabilities aged three years and below?

**Relationships between teachers and parents**

        Data was gathered from a seven question survey for both parents and teacher. The first four questions focus more on the support given/received for the child, and the roles of the parents, teacher, and the curriculum. The last three questions within the survey are focused more towards the relationships between the parents and the teacher. Results of the survey are presented in the table.

**Table 1**

| Survey Questions | Teacher (N=1) | Parent (N=7) | Analysis Discussion |
|---|---|---|---|
| **How do you view your role in supporting your child in ACE?** | Providing a safe learning environment and social skills. | Behavior (N=3) Trust (N=1) New experience (N=2) Follow through (N=1) | Social skills and behavior |
| **How well does the ACE curriculum support your child's needs/growth?** | The curriculum provides access to an IEP and daily meals. | Happy with curriculum (N=7) | Same views between teacher and parents. |
| **How well does the classroom environment support your child's need/growth?** | Positive environment group and peer to peer interaction. | Very well (N=7) Activity centers; class size and teachers are optimal | Same views between teacher and parents. |
| **How well does the IEP support your child's need/growth?** | Help the child to succeed by individualize the curriculum through IEP | NA (N=5) Satisfied (N=2) | Same views between teacher and parents. |
| **Do you think parent teacher conferences enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship?** | Yes, team work key for success | Yes (N=7) Knowledge on current development; progression and improvement | Same views between teacher and parents. |

| What are some potential barriers to parent-teacher-child relationships? | Environment<br>Time<br>Family dynamics<br>Work<br>Stress | NA (N=1)<br>Communication (N=5)<br>Time (N=1) | The teacher's list of barriers<br>**CONTRAST**<br>The parent's focus specifically on COMMUNICATION |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **How can the school further support and/or engage you, in the development of your child?** | Family group<br>Parent group<br>Resources (books, videos) | NA (N=1)<br>Pictures (N=2)<br>Continue great job of focusing on children (N=4) | The teacher tends to focus on building relationship with parents through resources and family bonding<br>**CONTRAST**<br>Parent focus more on CHILD |

**Similarities in response on survey**

After tabulating responses in accordance to the survey questions, the data showed many variances in the responses from parents in comparison to the teacher. The first four questions are focused more on the support given/received for the child, and the roles of the parents, teacher, and the curriculum. Both parents and teacher had similar response including question five focusing on parent teacher relationship.

Question one asked how they viewed their role in supporting the child in ACE, the parents (N=7), had a general consensus that their role was to follow through at home, and the teacher viewed their role as providing a safe and equitable environment that provides learning opportunities. In response to question two, which focused on the ACE Learning Center curriculum, the parents were unanimously happy with the curriculum in place, and the teacher emphasized the inclusion of IEP's and meals within what the center's curriculum offers. Question three addresses how the classroom environment supports the child's needs and growth. The parents were again unanimous in responding that the environment supports their child very well with the teacher providing similar responses with regards to positive environments and class size/peer-to-peer interactions.

With regards to IEP's supporting the child's needs and growth for question four, those with firm IEP's in place were satisfied, while the teacher specified that IEP's help individualize the learning so that each child can succeed.

Pertaining to parent teacher relationship questions, only question five yield similar response. When asked if parent teacher conferences enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship, there was strong agreement with both the parents and teacher that these situations significantly aid in enhancing relationships through being able to stay up to date with the child's development and progression.

**Contrasting responses on survey**

The last three questions within the survey focused more towards the relationships between parents and the teacher. It was interesting to note the difference in response for question six and seven. Question six dealt with potential barriers to these relationships, to which the data showed a strong contrast between the responses from parents and the teacher. The parent responses focused strictly on communication being the major barrier to positive relationships, yet the teacher's response listed several external factors that could potentially play a role in communication. The final question approached the subject of how ACE Learning Center could further support and/or engage the family in their child's development. The response data showed another contrast between parent and teacher responses. The parent responses depict a very child-centered focus, while the teacher seemingly focused on building relationships with the parent through resources and family bonding. This result reinforce the importance to focus on communication regarding the child and not just providing activities to engage parents. This is in line with the findings of Goodall and Montgomery (2014) concept of engagement in their child's

learning as the goal. They propose that through this view, the emphasis is shifted "away from the relationship between parents and schools, to a focus on the relationship between parents and their children's learning" (p. 399).

**Effective relationship dimensions and strategies to support**

A total of 12-14 observations were conducted during fall 2017. Period of observation ranges about an hour each and observations were conducted during morning drop off and evening pick up. Summary of data with the main theme on communication is presented on table two.

**Table 2**

| C1(M) | C2(M) | C4(M) Twins with C3 | C5(M) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Communication<br><br>Build transition to help C1 during drop off time *(educational/learning supports, interpersonal support, family support)* | Communication (Chat with T1) *(interpersonal support)* | T1 disagree with P1 perception of C4 ability *(lack of interpersonal support, lack of family support)*<br><br><br>Limited communication *(lack of interpersonal support)* | Friendly Communication (discuss tantrum and suggestion on ignoring bad behavior) *(family support)*<br><br>C5 model mom's communication style *(educational/learning supports)* |

| C3(F) Twins with C4 | C6(F) Twins with C7 | C7(F) Twins with C6 | C8(F) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Very short conversation *(lack of interpersonal support)* Try to help build nap routine *(interpersonal supports, family support)* T1(sad)- difference between home and school *(lack of educational and learning supports);* (T1) Positive feedback – loves morning activities *(educational/learning supports)* Limited communication *(lack of interpersonal support)* | Limited communication with mom *(lack of interpersonal support)* Initiate communication with grandma *(interpersonal support, family support)* | Limited communication with mom *(lack of interpersonal support)* Initiate communication with grandma *(interpersonal support, family support)* | No communication *(Lack of social communication, emotional regulation, and transactional support)* |

*Legend:*

| T1 = Teacher | F = Female | M = Male |
|---|---|---|
| C1 = Child One | C5 = Child Five | P1 = Mother of child |
| C2 = Child Two | C6 = Child Six | P2 = Father of child |
| C3 = Child Three | C7 = Child Seven | P3 = Grandparent of child |
| C4 = Child Four | C8 = Child Eight | |

Drawing from the SCERTS model outlining priority goals in the areas of social communication, emotional regulation and transactional support, key themes emerged from the data collected. The main theme is communication, with interpersonal support, family support and educational and learning supports, as subthemes. The data showed that amongst these themes, there were several factors that play a role in creating these themes, such as time and trust from both the parents and the teacher. These two findings, from observation analysis, enable the key themes to occur, as without time you cannot communicate and without trust you cannot value support.

These key themes can be identified in the chart below and were constructed based on their prevalence within the data.

**Figure 1**
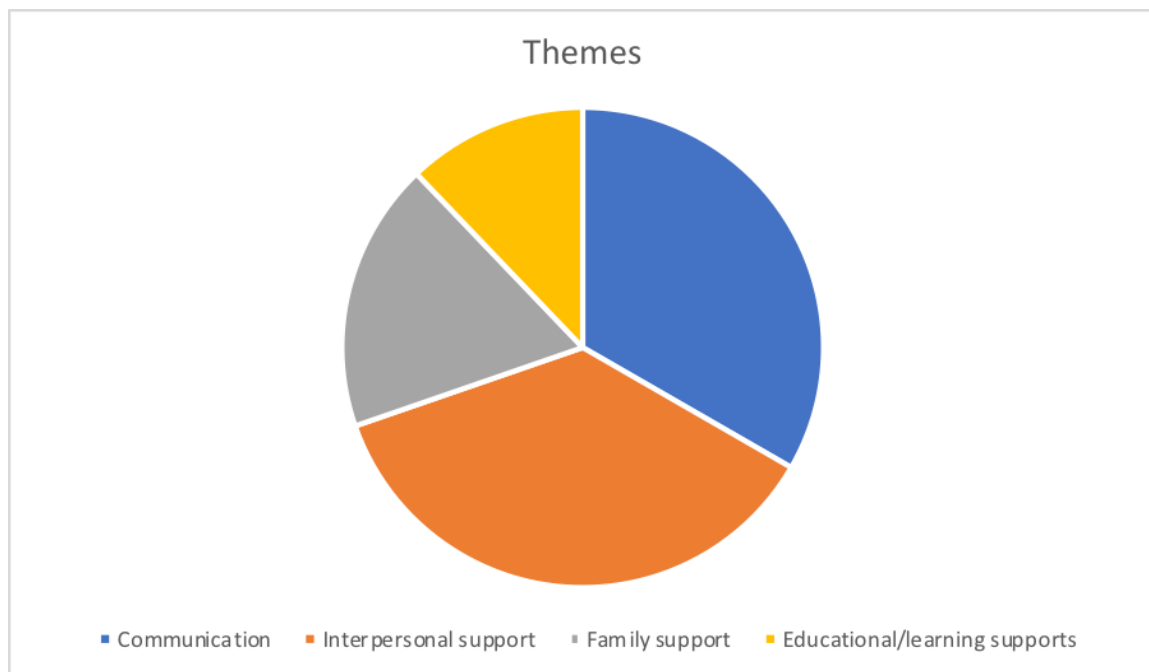
Communication yielded the greatest response as this study was designed to identify themes, and trends in communication patterns. The prevalence of communication responses is supported by the No Child Left Behind Act (Title 1, Part A), which encourages parents to communicate in efforts to support the education of their children (Wilder, 2014). It has also been noted that communication is imperative to develop partnerships and positive interactions between the school staff and family members (Epstein, 1995), which again, supports the high yield of communication within the results of this study. Trust, a finding that enables the key themes, was noted to be the backbone of improving positive communication (Adams & Christenson, 2000). The model that was used to analyze this data, was also created specifically to build platforms to increase communication around children with disabilities, which again, is the underlying motive to this study.

Contrary to the high yield seen throughout the main theme of communication, education and learning supports did not yield high numbers of response. Due to the focus being primarily on communication and strategies for support to increase communication, educational and learning supports is not greatly researched or seen. One of the key involvements with educational and learning supports is the development and use of an IEP, to which we can see that only two children have an IEP in place. However, as a result of data analysis we can see that educational and learning supports create a positive platform for both the teacher and the parents to work together with positive communication, to assist the child. This is the essence of a subtheme, as the theme of educational and learning supports alone does not yield enough significance to develop its

own study, yet it plays a role in identifying strategies to enhance the main theme of

communication.

**Chapter five**

**Discussion**

The SCERTS Model of transactional support goals provided tools to identify themes and subthemes within the data, that ultimately established new findings and data for this field of study. There were three key subthemes: interpersonal support, educational and learning supports, and family support. Interpersonal support was associated with language and communication, interactions between parent and teacher, and creating opportunities for the child to develop through communication and interaction. Educational and learning supports dealt with factors associating with and to, the environment and curriculum that the child developed in. The final subtheme used was family supports which focused on the emotional and educational support towards the parents to assist the child at home. These are all effective strategies that would support a successful parent teacher relationship for working with children with disabilities.

As this study focuses on the relationships between parents and teachers, it is not surprising that communication is a key theme. However, it is surprising to see from the emerged data that teacher regard behaviors and external factors as potential barriers, while parents strictly regard communication as the main concern. Similar to this, the teacher believes that building relationships through resources and family bonding, are key ways to further engage the parent, whereas the parents focus on what can be done specifically for their child. This portrays the idea of child centeredness and the gap between parents wanting this and the teacher achieving this.

This is noted during observation, when the parent is near the child, the teacher relies on the parent's communication, and focuses more on the external factors that could

inhibit communication, rather than working with the parent to form positive communicable interactions and directly talking to the child. When the teacher does this, it shifts the focus away from the child and towards the family, contrasting the parents wish for increased communication and a focus on child centeredness. This finding highlights a disconnect in communication and relationships. As parents are most focused on the child, parents are finding they have to instigate change to make their child the main focus and as a consequence, children with more needs, suffer from lack of communication. This finding regarding the urge to instigate change, is also supported in the results of the finding by (Benjamin et al, 2017) and backed up by the SCERTS model of transactional needs. Furthermore, this disconnect can be further supported by the Norwegian study (Tveit, 2009), which found that parents feel as if their role in the school was more passive and the teacher's role was active. This therefore legitimizes the parents' wish to see an increase in communication as well as a more child centered focus as the teacher is more focused on factors rather than the actual child, and achieving positive, personal communication.

A contrast between already existing literature and the data that has emerged from this study, is evident however when further comparing Benjamin et. al (2017) study. The previous literature describes the thought that parents perceive modification of behavior and/or activities to be needing the greatest change; however, my data shows that parents see communication needing to be modified most, followed by a focus on the child. This compare and contrast both highlights the limitations and gaps in this field of study, and works towards closing them.

Another notable finding that emerged from this research, is the negation of individual identities of the child participants who were twins. It was observed that neither set of twins have individual identity from the parents' perspective, which exerted an automatic influence over the teacher and negated the teacher's ability to individually identify each child. When analyzing the data, it was noted that both responses and observed data were identical for children who were twins, as evidenced by the combination of many responses. While this finding is not strictly pertained to this research topic, it is a finding that requires further investigation.

This study had one major limitation. With younger age groups it is hard to find a sample size with various disabilities that provides the needs of the study, and despite my sample size (N=9) and the reliable data it provided, it did not allow for significant change within the study. Therefore, the sample size of this study was a limitation to the study itself.

Finally, the importance of achieving positive parent-teacher interactions and communication methods, is supported through two studies (Chan et al., 2013; & Stitt and Brooks, 2014) which highlight the necessity for parents and teachers to work together to ensure that the children achieve in both their development and academic endeavors.

**Chapter six**

**Conclusion**

**Introduction**

I see this experience, the body of work that has been created over many months, as my Bora Bora study. The purpose of viewing this body of work as such, is to inform, educate and add on to the already existing knowledge with regards to the relationships between parents and teachers of young children with disabilities. As I have never visited Bora Bora, I would prepare by reading other travelers reviews, or scholarly articles, to best educate myself before departing, just as I did in preparation to add to this field of study. After having visited Bora Bora, a very luxurious location, each and every visitors experience would have been unique to one another, therefore adding new facts, opinions, and thoughts to the already existing body of knowledge that the world has on Bora Bora. Similarly, this study itself is a unique experience that also serves to research the limitations within this field and add new data to reduce these limitations, aiding in future scholarly preparations. In order to do this appropriately, this study had to be created and conducted in a way that could be understood by people outside the realm of this field, as if they were only just being exposed to Bora Bora for the first time, so much so that this new body of knowledge could aid them also.

**Study Summary**

The research completed for this study and the data collected, highlighted key themes that isolated significant data for the field of Early Childhood Education. The data collected showed that while there are positive relationships between the teacher and the parents of each child, the relationship dimension of adequate and necessary

communication provides concern. It can be concluded that for children below three years of age, the teacher relies heavily on communication from the parent rather than directly from the child, and the parent in contrast, expects the teacher to communicate more with the child, causing a lack of communication and support.

The theoretical implications for this conclusion propel more study with a larger participant pool. Practical implications are needed for parents, teachers and the children to ensure an equitable, responsive and inclusive parent-teacher-child relationship focus. Practical strategies to enhance teacher communication that include a child-centered focus are working towards supporting and understanding the child's use of verbal and non-verbal language and behaviors. As communication is a key concern for parents, practical strategies would reflect working with the teacher to identify a method of communication that supports more successful and supportive interactions. As the child is three years or younger, it is hard to implement a strategy that is built on SCERTS Transaction Support Goals, however through stronger partnership between the child's parents and teacher, the child will experience education advantages and benefits with greater outcomes. Results from this study identify contrasting communication trends such as the teacher focusing on external factors and the parent focusing on the child. This study highlights the necessity for strategies to be put in place to build positive, equitable and responsive relationships within an inclusive classroom for children with disabilities aged three years and below.

**Personal growth**

Throughout my journey to complete this study, I was able to reflect and refine in many areas of both my scholarly life, and personal life. When observations first commenced, I found myself making assumptions based on what I was seeing – writing

notes assuming that certain behaviors or words were in particular contexts. However, I quickly learned that this is creating initial bias and that this could have limited my study drastically. So too in life, I find I am quick to make conclusions rather than allowing situations to completely play out and react accordingly once I have all the facts. Reflecting on this enabled me to take my study to heights I never saw imaginable, and taught me that success does not come from educated assumptions, but rather from compiling data and using this data to support your decisions through a broader mindset.

Perhaps the most incredible aspect and reflection of this process, is the maturity of my writing. I have never had any issue with the content or length of my writing, however *how* I now write compared to at the beginning of this journey, is worthy of the most reflection. I started as a writer whom handed my advisor a paper, littered with sentences that consumed half a page on their own. While the content within the sentence was well thought out, I often lost my readers due to the sheer length of wording before they were able to truly take a breath. Instilling a diligent work ethic and with much support from my advisor, we began to focus most on the structure of the writing, knowing that the content would naturally flow. With two months before final submission, I entered my advisor's office with a weight lifted off my shoulders as I *finally* had engrained into my writing, short, concise sentences, and more so I had created a successful method to achieving these. I had realized that the way I used to write, simply deterred people from arriving at the destination with me at the end of my work, yet now I am capable of and able to, present an exact map through my writings that displays not only how I think, but also how other people will perceive my work. It was an important goal for me to be able to write in a way that other readers understood what I had to say, no matter what discipline

they studied in. I therefore believe that the diligent work I put in, to mature my writing style, enabled me to achieve my ultimate goal as a writer.

Like any journey, frustrations are not uncommon to face however it is how we deal with it that reflects growth throughout. The biggest frustration that I faced throughout this process, pertains to collecting half of my data in the form of parent and teacher surveys. This data collection method was distributed at the mid-point of my observations and took two full months to collect. Initially it was thought that the parents had lost the survey or forgotten to return it as Christmas break was approaching; however, I later discovered that the completed surveys had been at ACE Learning Center the whole time. While this was not one specific person's fault, it did show growth in my own communication. I had no choice but to communicate frequently with the director, visit the site regularly and work with the teachers to find a resolution, in efforts to collect the data I needed to finish my research. Although the analysis of my data suffered as a result, I was able to view this frustration as an opportunity to grow in my patience, understanding and ability to flex plans and timelines.

Despite this chapter of research concluding, I do not wish to cease my work. I am pursuing a career to be a pediatric oncology nurse, to which I aim to use my previous education in the Early Childhood Discipline. It is my aspiration to assist long-term pediatric patients whom are not able to attend regular school, with their studies to provide a sense of normality in their brave lives. This journey has been a long ride full of late nights, joyful moments, but ultimately, this journey has shown me how capable I am to make a difference for those around me. I now set a goal to complete another dissertation in my role as a pediatric nurse in the future, with the ambition of using the data findings

from this research, as a foundation for my next study, to continue building on to what my

aunt inspired me to start.

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# Appendix 1

# Sample consent form

**Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board**
**Informed Consent Document for Research**

**Principal Investigator:** Sophie Toms
**Study Title:** A Study of the Relationship Between General Education Teachers and the Parents of Children with Disabilities in an Inclusive Classroom.
**Institution: Middle Tennessee State University**

Name of participant: _____ Age: _____

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and your questions will be answered. Also, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time. In the event new information becomes available that may affect the risks or benefits associated with this research study or your willingness to participate in it, you will be notified so that you can make an informed decision whether or not to continue your participation in this study.

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918.

1. **Purpose of the study:**
   You are being asked to participate in this research study because the proposed study will investigate relationships between General Education Teachers and the Parents of Children with Disabilities drawn from the Inclusive Classroom environment of the Ann Campbell Early Learning Centre in order to better understand such relationships to promote equality and inclusion.

2. **Description of procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study:**
   This is a qualitative study using both observation and parent/teacher survey. A survey consisting of seven questions on the relationships between parents and teachers influence on curriculum, environment, individualized education/family plans, and parent-teacher conferences will be handed out to you. The survey will take no longer than 20-30 minutes of your time to complete. Once completed, a drop box will be provided within the classroom for teachers and parents to return consent forms and completed survey.

   The parents and teachers survey will be distributed on November 3 and collected back within 2 weeks on November 16.

3. **Expected costs:**
   There are no costs to you for your participation in this study.

4. **Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study:**
   There are no foreseeable discomforts or risks. The survey will take no more than 20-30 minutes to complete. Pseudonyms will be created and used in all collected data that will be stored and securely locked with access only to the researcher and her supervisor. This minimises any risks to confidentiality.

5. **Compensation in case of study-related injury:**
   MTSU will not provide compensation in the case of study related injury.

6. **Anticipated benefits from this study:**
   a) The potential benefits to science and humankind that may result from this study are that the results from this study will help parents and teachers in building an equitable, responsive and inclusive early childhood classroom that will better meet the needs of children with disabilities.

1

**Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board**
**Informed Consent Document for Research**

b) The potential benefits to you from this study are gaining strategies in the development of effective parent teacher relationships to promote equality and inclusion within the classroom of your child.

7. **Alternative treatments available:**
   There are no known alternatives at this time.

8. **Compensation for participation:**
   There will be no compensation for involvement in this study.

9. **Circumstances under which the Principal Investigator may withdraw you from study participation:**
   **NA**

10. **What happens if you choose to withdraw from study participation:**
    Parents and teachers have the right to withdraw themselves without repercussion at any time during the length of the study

11. **Contact Information.**  If you should have any questions about this research study or possible injury, please feel free to contact Sophie Toms at (423) 308-9382 or my Faculty Advisor, Dr. Jane Lim at Jane.Lim@mtsu.edu or (615) 898-5896.

12. **Confidentiality.** All efforts, within reason, will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private but total privacy cannot be promised.  Your information may be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections, if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

13. **STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**
    **I have read this informed consent document and the material contained in it has been explained to me verbally.  I understand each part of the document, all my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.**

_____     _____
Date                                          Signature of patient/volunteer


Consent obtained by:


_____     _____
Date                                          Signature

                                              _____
                                              Printed Name and Title

**Appendix 2**

**Sample parent survey**

1.  How do you view your role in supporting your child in ACE?

2.  How well does ACE curriculum support your child's needs/growth?

3.  How well does the classroom environment support your child's need/growth?

4.  How well does the IEP support your child's need/growth?

5.  Do you think parent teacher conferences enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship?

6.  What are some potential barriers to parent-teacher-child relationships?

7.  How can the school further support and/or engage you, in the development of your child?

## Appendix 3

## Sample teacher survey

1. How do you view your role in supporting the children in the classroom?

2. How well does ACE curriculum support a child's needs/growth?

3. How well does the classroom environment support a child's need/growth?

4. How well does an IEP support a child's need/growth?

5. Do you think parent-teacher conferences enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship?

6. What are some potential barriers to parent-teacher-child relationships?

7. How can the school further support and/or engage the parent's, in the development of their child?

# Appendix 4

# IRB approval letter

**IRB**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

**MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY**

## IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Thursday, November 02, 2017

| | |
|---|---|
| Principal Investigator | **Sophie Toms** (Student) |
| Faculty Advisor | Jane Seok Jeng Lim |
| Co-Investigators | NONE |
| Investigator Email(s) | *slt5e@mtmail.mtsu.edu; jane.lim@mtsu.edu* |
| Department | College of Education |
| | |
| Protocol Title | ***A study of the relationship between general education teachers and the parents of children with disabilities in an inclusive classroom*** |
| Protocol ID | **18-2073** |

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category *(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior* A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

| | |
|---|---|
| IRB Action | APPROVED for one year from the date of this notification |
| Date of expiration | 11/30/2018 |
| Participant Size | 20 (TWENTY) |
| Participant Pool | Minors with disabilities (two-year old students of Ann Campbell Learning Center (ACE)) - Special population applies |
| Exceptions | NONE |
| Restrictions | **1. Mandatory signed informed consent; The PI must provide a signed copy of the informed consent document to each participant.**<br>**2. Participant exclusion criteria MUST be followed as provided in the protocol application.**<br>**3. Additional care must be taken when working with the identified special population.**<br>**4. Identifiable information must be destroyed after data analysis.** |
| Comments | NONE |

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years (11/30/2020) by obtaining a continuation approval prior to 11/30/2018. Refer to the following schedule to plan your annual project reports and be aware that you may not receive a separate reminder to complete your continuing reviews. Failure in obtaining an approval for continuation will automatically result in cancellation of this

protocol. Moreover, the completion of this study MUST be notified to the Office of Compliance by filing a final report in order to close-out the protocol.

Continuing Review Schedule:

| Reporting Period | Requisition Deadline | IRB Comments |
|---|---|---|
| First year report | 10/31/2018 | TO BE COMPLETED |
| Second year report | 10/31/2019 | TO BE COMPLETED |
| Final report | 10/31/2020 | TO BE COMPLETED |

Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

| Date | Amendment(s) | IRB Comments |
|---|---|---|
| NONE | NONE | NONE |

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all of the post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website. Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident. Amendments to this protocol must be approved by the IRB. Inclusion of new researchers must also be approved by the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, investigator information and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:
        Click here for a detailed list of the post-approval responsibilities.
        More information on expedited procedures can be found here.

**Appendix 5**

**Approval letter by ACE director**



October 4, 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

I have approved Sophie Toms to conduct her study, "A Study of the Relationship Between General Education Teachers and the Parents of Children with Disabilities in an Inclusive Classroom" at ACE Learning Center.

Ann Campbell Early Learning Center's mission is to provides a high quality inclusive early learning environment that allows children to learn and explore through developmentally appropriate play activities through a partnership with our families and community members.

Thank you,

Christy Davis
Director, ACE Learning Center
Middle Tennessee State University Campus

# Appendix 6

## Children observation data

Child one

| C1<br>Age 2<br>Male | Relationship |
|---|---|
| **T1 (Teacher)** | Child has a lot of independence however:<br>On 12/15/17, T1 worked with P2 to keep autonomy with C1 despite how upset he was. T1 assisted P2 to encourage C1 to take himself into classroom without any adult assistance. |
| **P1 (Mother)** | P1 dropped C1 off on 12/11/17, the only communication was saying goodbye as she left. |
| **P2 (Father)** | P2 worked with T1 to continue normal pattern of drop-off, despite how upset C1 was on 12/15/17. P2 and T1 encourage C1 together, to take himself into the classroom without help.<br><br>When asked how they view their role in supporting their child in ACE, responded, "communicating goals with teachers and reinforcing behaviors at home. Supporting teachers and staff."<br><br>Believes that parent teacher conferences do enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship.<br><br>Stated that "non-communication" could be a potential barrier to parent-teacher-child relationships, however followed with, "not an issue with our relationship with our teacher." |

Child two

| C2<br>Age 2 years<br>Male | Relationship |
|---|---|
| **T1** | 12/6/17 – T1 spoke directly to P1, and the older sibling of C2 for several minutes – general conversation, no specifics. |
| **P1 (Mother)** | 12/6/17 – remained in room for several minutes talking to T1, after dropping off C2<br><br>Believes parents teacher conferences enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship.<br><br>Stated "time" is a potential barrier to parent-teacher-child relationships. |

Child three

| C3<br>Age 3 years<br>Female | Relationship |
|---|---|
| **T1 (Teacher)** | 12/6/17 – no communication to C4 or P1, however said "hello" to C3 as she entered the classroom.<br>12/7/17 – T1 and P1 had a very blunt conversation as P1 updated T1 and T1 continued to say "ok" over and over again while continuing to help C3. P1 does not appear to be concerned with interaction.<br>12/11/17 – T1 makes comments to other teachers regarding parent teacher conversation with C3/C4's P2. (Note: P2 is not primary drop-off or pick up).<br>T1 talks about discussed bedtime routine and how T1 believes they need a better routine. T1 stated she asks parents for suggestions for both C3 and C4 regarding what works/helps at home for bedtime (to aid C3 during naptime).<br>T1 also comments on dietary changes discussed with parent's.<br>T1 commented that it makes her sad hearing differences between classroom and home.<br>T1 mentions that P2 thinks that because T1 was new to C3 at beginning of semester, C3 was more compliant during naptime but now C3's behaviors are normal (relative to home life) since C3 is used to T1.<br>12/13/17 – T1 told P2 that C3 <u>loves</u> the story that the class were about to read.<br>12/14/17 - As C3 arrived for the day, P1 and T1 had a very brief conversation as T1 walked past the door. Minimal eye contact was noted from both T1 and P1. |
| **P1 (Mother)** | 12/7/17 – Very fast drop off. Returned with lunchboxes.<br>12/11/17 – As C3 arrived for the day P1 initiated a <u>very</u> brief conversation about how C3 loves morning activities. P1 does not say goodbye.<br>12/12/17 - P1 was only noted having a small conversation with the director. Even after returning with lunchboxes and diapers, no communication was noted with T1 at all. When P1 picked C3 up, despite the pick-up process taking longer, there was still minimal communication noted between P1 and T1.<br>12/13/17 – P1 picked up C3 <u>after</u> T1 had left for the day. P1 said "see you tomorrow" as they left.<br>12/14/17 - When P1 returned with lunchboxes, she looked at T1 whom was playing cars with C1 and C3, and then left without saying anything.<br>Believes parents teacher conferences do enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship.<br>In regards to potential barriers to parent-teacher-child relationships, "None that I can think of. I am able to reach out to her teacher at any time through email or text, which has been essential in helping my child."<br>"I make sure to notify her teacher of techniques learned in therapy so that the teacher and our family are all on the same page to help C3 succeed."<br>Answered, "They are doing a great job. I would like for them to continue to contact me with any questions about my child's development and to also communicate with her therapists for any additional help they may need in working with my child," when asked how the school can further support and/or engage them. |
| **P2 (Father)** | 12/13/17 – P2 said goodbye to C3 at classroom door but did not say anything to T1 who was welcoming C3. P2 then proceeded to watch for three minutes from the observation booth. |

Child four

| C4<br>Age 3 years<br>Male | Relationship |
|---|---|
| **T1 (Teacher)** | 12/6/17 – no communication to C4 or P1. However, when P1 informed T1 that C4 freaks out with the playdough activity, T1 made no eye contact, kept head down and said, "we will see." P1 said, "Ok." And left the room.<br><br>12/11/17 - T1 makes comments to other teachers regarding parent teacher conversation with C3/C4's P2. (Note: P2 is not primary drop-off or pick up).<br>T1 disagrees with parent's perceptions of C4's abilities (T1 thinks C4's abilities are greater than what parents think).<br>T1 talks about discussed bedtime routine and how T1 believes they need a better routine.<br>T1 stated she asks parents for suggestions for both C3 and C4 regarding what works/helps at home for bedtime (to aid C3 during naptime).<br>T1 also comments on dietary changes discussed with parent's.<br>T1 commented that it makes her sad hearing differences between classroom and home. |
| **P1 (Mother)** | 12/6/17 – P1 informed T1 that C4 freaks out with the playdough activity.<br><br>12/7/17 – Very fast drop off. Returned with lunchboxes.<br>P1 picked up C4 from the front desk in the afternoon – a student worker had to take C4 to P1.<br><br>12/12/17 - P1 was only noted having a small conversation with the director. Even after returning with lunchboxes and diapers, no communication was noted with T1 at all. When P1 picked C4 up, despite the pick-up process taking longer, there was still minimal communication noted between P1 and T1.<br><br>Believes parents teacher conferences do enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship.<br><br>In regards to potential barriers to parent-teacher-child relationships, "None that I can think of. I am able to reach out to her teacher at any time through email or text, which has been essential in helping my child."<br><br>"I make sure to notify his teacher of techniques learned in therapy so that the teacher and our family are all on the same page to help C4 succeed."<br><br>Answered, "They are doing a great job. I would like for them to continue to contact me with any questions about my child's development and to also communicate with his therapists for any additional help they may need in working with my child," when asked how the school can further support and/or engage them. |

Child five

| C5<br>Age 3 years<br>Male | Relationship |
|---|---|
| **T1** | 12/7/17 – T1 Immediately began interacting with P1 upon C5's arrival and discussed supplies for C5.<br><br>12/12/17 – Despite the morning being in full-swing when C5 was dropped off late, T1 was still able to have friendly conversation with P1.<br><br>12/14/17 – T1 and P1 had a full conversation, maintaining eye contact, regarding children's ability to heal quickly, during drop-off. T1 and P1 then made jokes between each other about how much confidence C5 has towards his daily activities.<br>During pick-up, P1 disclosed to T1 that C5 started throwing tantrums a week ago. T1 states that she loves the 'ignoring' technique, however T1 suggests (with emphasis), to ignore bad before but then praise a lot the minute C5 shows a positive behavior, so that C5 associates praise with correct behavior and learns how to respond accordingly. |
| **P1 (Mother)** | 12/7/17 – While P1 was talking to T1, P1 encouraged C5 to settle into an activity. Once C5 was involved in an activity with T1, P1 said goodbye and left.<br><br>12/8/17 – although T1 was absent, P1 immediately began interacting and talking with substitute teachers during drop-off.<br><br>12/12/17 – It appeared as though C5 was mimicking the communication that P1 was having with T1, as he began talking to peers.<br><br>12/14/17 – P1 asked T1 what supplies were needed for C5.<br>As C5 woke up from his afternoon nap, P1 and T1 began talking. P1 discussed with T1 that C5 started throwing tantrums a week ago.<br><br>"We discuss his activities every day. His teacher and I communicate about any issues or things to work on at home."<br><br>When asked if they think parent teacher conferences enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship, answered, "Yes, I love knowing exactly where he is, how much he has progress, and areas of improvement."<br><br>Does not believe there are any potential barriers to parent-teacher-child relationships. |

Child six

| C6<br>Age 3 years<br>Female | Relationship |
|---|---|
| T1 (Teacher) | 12/6/17 – Never directly spoke to P1 other than acknowledging her conversation through body language.<br>After P1 left, T1 continued talking about C6 being premature and still having a binky - stated it is important to develop a sucking sensation but that their binky has turned into a sense of security, and that they do not need it yet still arrived with one.<br>12/7/17 – T1 assisted P3 in distracting C6 with an activity so that P3 could finish putting C6's belongings in her cubby. T1 then communicated with P3 regarding supplies for C6. T1 also commented that C6 likes seeing P3 all the time.<br>12/12/17 - When P1 said goodbye to T1 during drop-off, T1 had a brief conversation with P1 about how C6 was tricking her to think that C7 had an eye patch on the wrong eye yesterday.<br>P1 leaves and conversation ends somewhat abruptly.<br>Although T1 was trying to calm the class during story time, she still managed to say goodbye to P3 during pick-up.<br>12/13/17 – during pick-up, T1 initiates interaction with P3. Talks about the box house that the girl's made and painted during the day, and then personally hands daily report to P3. T1 states she is curious about the girl's birthdays and suggested they should bring a change of clothes for painting. P3 followed up by asking T1 how the girls did during the morning drop-off. T1 responded exuberantly, "they did well! Two mornings in a row!" T1 then said goodbye to P3 and girl's at the door.<br>12/14/17 – T1 meets C6 at classroom door to assist P3 with a smooth, happy transition into classroom. T1 appeared to be talking to P3 during transition as if to distract the girls from saying goodbye. |
| P1 (Mother) | 12/11/17 - P1 informs T1 what she is putting in the girl's cubbies. Because C6 was crying at drop-off, P1 made time in classroom and conversation with T1 very quick. When P1 arrived for pick-up, minimal conversation occurred with T1. Some general discussion occurred however anything specific regarding C6 was discussed in a child-like voice, and P1's eye contact was with C6 rather than T1.<br><br>Believes parents teacher conferences do enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship.<br><br>When asked what some potential barriers are to parent-teacher-child relationships, stated "We (parents) need to work on more consistent communication. Because I rely on grandparents to transport, I miss the direct daily conversations. However T1 is great about communicating with me via text during the day."<br><br>The only suggestion stated for further support and/or engagement of the family in their child's development, was supplying pictures. |
| P3 (Grandmother) | 12/7/17 – C6 was very upset with detachment from P3 during drop-off, and remained upset for quite some time after P3 had left.<br>12/13/17 – P3 interacts and has friendly general conversation with T1 during pick-up. |

Child seven

| C7<br>Age 3 years<br>Female | Relationship |
|---|---|
| **T1 (Teacher)** | 12/6/17 – Never directly spoke to P1 other than acknowledging her conversation through body language.<br>After P1 left, T1 continued talking about C7 being premature and still having a binky - stated it is important to develop a sucking sensation but that their binky has turned into a sense of security, and that they do not need it yet still arrived with one.<br>12/7/17 – T1 assisted P3 in distracting C7 with an activity so that P3 could finish putting C7's belongings in her cubby. T1 then communicated with P3 regarding supplies for C7. T1 also commented that C7 likes seeing P3 all the time.<br>12/13/17 – during pick-up, T1 initiates interaction with P3. Talks about the box house that the girl's made and painted during the day, and then personally hands daily report to P3. T1 states she is curious about the girl's birthdays and suggested they should bring a change of clothes for painting. P3 followed up by asking T1 how the girls did during the morning drop-off. T1 responded exuberantly, "they did well! Two mornings in a row!" T1 then said goodbye to P3 and girl's at the door.<br>12/14/17 – T1 meets C7 at classroom door to assist P3 with a smooth, happy transition into classroom. T1 appeared to be talking to P3 during transition as if to distract the girls from saying goodbye. |
| **P1 (Mother)** | 12/6/17 – P1 briefly spoke to T1 but used a child-like language in front of C7. P1 left within 2 minutes of drop-off.<br><br>12/11/17 - P1 informs T1 what she is putting in the girl's cubbies. Because C7 was crying at drop-off, P1 made time in classroom and conversation with T1 very quick. When P1 arrived for pick-up, minimal conversation occurred with T1. Some general discussion occurred however anything specific regarding C7 was discussed in a child-like voice, and P1's eye contact was with C7 rather than T1.<br><br>Believes parents teacher conferences do enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship.<br><br>When asked what some potential barriers are to parent-teacher-child relationships, stated "We (parents) need to work on more consistent communication. Because I rely on grandparents to transport, I miss the direct daily conversations. However T1 is great about communicating with me via text during the day."<br><br>The only suggestion stated for further support and/or engagement of the family in their child's development, was supplying pictures. |
| **P3 (Grandmother)** | 12/7/17 – C7 was very upset with saying goodbye to P3.<br><br>12/13/17 – P3 interacts and has friendly general conversation with T1 during pick-up. |

Child eight

| C8<br>**Age 2.5 years**<br>**Female** | Relationship |
|---|---|
| **T1** | 12/6/17 – C8 arrived later into the morning and T1 made no communication towards P1 during drop-off. |
| **P1 (Mother)** | 12/6/17 – Arrived very late into story time. P1 settled child into story time and made no attempt to communicate. |

**Appendix 7**

**Teacher survey**

| TEACHER SURVEY | T1 |
|---|---|
| How do you view your role in supporting the children in the classroom? | My role would be to create a safe learning environment, I role model and teach social skills while building their self-esteem and confidence. |
| How well does ACE curriculum support a child's needs/growth? | • Individualize according to personality and developmental levels/disability.<br>• Nutritious snack and lunch policy. |
| How well does the classroom environment support a child's needs/growth? | Classroom provides a positive learning environment in a group setting. Peers and Peer interaction are important in development. |
| How well does an IEP support a child's needs/growth? | IEP individualized to the child's specific areas that need improvement. This is very beneficial to assist the child in becoming successful. |
| Do you think parent-teacher conferences enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship? | Yes. Team work is the key for success. |
| What are some potential barriers to parent-teacher-child relationships? | • The child's goals are the same but the environments are different.<br>• Time<br>• Family dynamics<br>• Work<br>• Stress |
| How can the school further support and/or engage the parent's, in the development of their child? | • Family groups<br>• Parent groups<br>• A library of information that includes resources (books, DVDs) about children, child development, and disabilities. |

# Appendix 8

## Parent survey

| PARENT SURVEY | **C1** | **C2** | **C3** and **C4** | **C5** | **C6** | **C7** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How do you view your role in supporting your child in ACE? | Communicating goals with teachers and reinforcing behaviors at home. Supporting teachers and staff. | Take him to a school I trust. | I make sure to notify her/his teacher of techniques learned in therapy so that the teacher and our family are all on the same page to help Natalie and James succeed. | We discuss his activities every day. His teacher and I communicate about any issues or things to work on at home. | Reading, talking, introducing new things. | Working at home by reading, asking questions, and experiencing new things. |
| How well does the ACE curriculum support your child's needs/growth? | Very well. | Great. | ACE has done a wonderful job with helping my children succeed. | Very well! I'm very pleased with the level of education he is receiving. | Very well. | Very well. We are very fortunate that the girls attend ACE. |
| How well does the classroom environment support your child's need/growth? | Very well. | Great. | The classroom teachers have been a good support in helping C3 and C4. | Very well. All toys and centers, class size, and teachers seem to be optimal for him. | Very well. | Very well. The girls have really enjoyed ACE. |
| How well does the IEP support your child's need/growth? | May not apply to our child. | N/A. | I am satisfied with the goals we have outlined for my children. | N/A. | N/A. | N/A. |

| Do you think parent teacher conferences enhance the parent-teacher-child relationship? | Yes | Yes. | Yes. | Yes, I love knowing exactly where he is, how much he has progressed, and areas of improvement. | Yes. | Yes. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| What are some potential barriers to parent-teacher-child relationships? | Non-communication (Not an issue with our relationship with our teacher) | Time. | None that I can think of. I am able to reach out to their teacher at any time through email or text which has been essential in helping my children. | N/A. | We (parents) need to work on more consistent communication. | We have multiple family help pick-up and drop-off girls. Consistent communication. |
| How can the school further support and/or engage you, in the development of your child? | Keep doing what we're doing. | Continue loving them! | They are doing a great job. I would like them to continue to contact me with any questions about my children's development and to also communicate with their therapists for any additional help they may need in working with C3 and C4. | N/A. | Pictures | Pictures |