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# Teacher Preparation for Home-School Partnerships in an International School Community

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Teacher Preparation for Home-School Partnerships in an International School Community

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College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Administration

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## **Abstract**

This study at a single, international school in Mozambique with a diverse parent student population from 40 different nationalities and educators from 9 different nationalities used an ethnographic research methodology to investigate teacher perceptions of their preparation to foster the home-school partnership in an international school community. A sample of 21 teachers from nine different countries of origin represented the demographic breakdown of the school, including gender, nationality, years of teaching, years at site, and whether the participant was a parent of a school aged child. Open-ended interviews gathered participants' lived experiences on practices for teacher preparation programs around identifying the world and revealed that preparation for the partnership is absent in the universities for the pre-service teachers. This study was unique in seeking to further understand informal preparation occurring at the school site by administration or through collegial support leading to greater preparation to foster the home-school partnership. The participant responses evidenced that collegial support and a trial-and-error help many teachers learn the systems used at the school. Teachers who are parents have transferable skills with a depth of empathetic information to assist in developing protocols and teacher preparation. Most importantly, novice teachers are not receiving consistent preparation for their experiences with parents and, therefore, lack confidence in their ability to foster the home-school partnership. The findings of this study display the need for explicit teacher preparation for the partnership, especially for parent conferencing, based on the vision and culture of the school. With administration as leaders, the school can adopt a holistic approach to improving structures for teachers to become better prepared to foster the home-school partnership and develop a shared mindset surrounding the home school partnership.

*Keywords:* international schools, parent partnerships, teacher preparation

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Rick Canadine, and my children, Olivia, Elizabeth, and Isabelle. Their support allowed me the time and space to achieve this personal goal and gave me the encouragement to keep going.

My mom and dad never let me stop, they believe in me and challenge me to be the best person I can be and reach for the brass ring. And for that I am thankful. I know my dad would be proud.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction to the Problem

The results of the 1987 MetLife Survey of American teachers focused on *Strengthening Links Between Home and School* (MetLife, 1987). The findings deemed the relationship between the home and the school crucial to educating children. According to the survey, 55% of the teachers responding said they were not comfortable talking to parents about their children. Additionally, one-fifth of the parents said that they have felt awkward or reluctant about approaching a teacher.

The results of the most recent MetLife Survey (2013) indicated that 72% of the principals and 73% of the teachers surveyed indicated that establishing and maintaining a parent partnership was challenging or very challenging. Of the 1,000 teachers surveyed, 32% of the teachers, and, notably, 82% of high school teachers reported that the parent partnership was very challenging. Although there is a consensus surrounding the belief in the critical nature of the home-school partnership, further research finds that schools charged with preparing teacher for their profession have put little effort into preparing teachers for this partnership (Arnett, 2016; Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

Preparation does not support the expectation of teachers to foster the partnership (Epstein & Sanders, 2006) and surveyed teachers rated the home-school partnership as one of their top-rated stressors (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; MetLife, 1987; MetLife, 2013). Evidence deems that championing the two-way dialogue needed between the parent and the school is beneficial at least, and critical at best to foster the parent school partnership (Blase & Blase, 1999; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Mokoena, 2012; Price-Mitchell, 2009; Schultz & McGinn, 2013; Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007; Sheldon, 2005). Teachers and schools bear responsibility for

defining the role of communication and the relationship as schools provide the invitation into the education process (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; MetLife, 1987; MetLife, 2013).

Without university preparation, teachers enter the profession prepared to build teacher-child relationships, but the lack of preparation forces them to dig deep for transferable skills to foster the two-way parent communication and parent relationship. To date, the research leaves to question whether this aspect of a teacher's skill set has been left to chance (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). These educators, prepared to work with children, may have transferable skills for fostering the parent relationship, but according to research, it is not enough to be consistently effective (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

Seemingly, the research on the beneficial effects of the home-school partnership is extensive (Clinton, Hattie, & Dixon, 2007; Epstein, 1995; Mattingly, Prislun, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002; Murray, McFarland-Piazza, & Harrison, 2015). However, while the findings indicate the absence of preparation for teachers at universities (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Willemse, Vloeberghs, de Bruïne, & Van Eynde, 2016), the university may not be the only or best forum for teacher preparation to learn how to foster the home-school partnerships (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). Additionally, little research thoroughly investigates university systems outside of the United States.

This study was based in an international school setting and offered the opportunity to survey teachers from a variety of countries. The teachers employed at this international school represented nine different countries from around the world including the United States. The teachers, who are products of the United States education systems, did not receive preparation at

the university level for fostering the home-school partnership. Some teachers who are the product of university systems beyond the United States and who also comprise this international school setting have completed course work that delved into fostering the home-school partnership in diverse settings, but most teachers who enter this international school are not prepared. Therefore, the study provided an opportunity to explore the need for teacher preparation to support a home-school partnership in an international school setting.

### **Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

In the international school that was the site of this study, the school adopted a strategic planning process focused on the partnership between all stakeholders: students, parents, teachers, and administration based on an outcome focused approach, Outcome Mapping (Earl, Carden, & Smutylo, 2001). Implied in this strategic planning process, was the partnership between the home and the school. In this setting, school leadership determined that the desired partnership defined in the strategic plan was not consistently actuated in practice. The development of this research was to understand the root cause of the inconsistency between planning and practice.

Kester et al. (2007) described the term *ad hoc transient community* as a community within a community that has a shared goal for specific time. Unlike a community which has developed partnerships over time, an international community is ad hoc in nature. Specifically, in international school communities, the school, as the central location of the shared goals, carries the responsibility of becoming the community center for these transient community members (Gellar, 1996). These transient communities are a mixing bowl of cultures, forty or more in number at times. Body language, norms, and nomenclature may differ from culture to culture. In this school, the home-school partnership serves as the foundation for building the shared culture in their ad hoc transient community. This community needs explicit rules of

engagement and the onus is on the faculty, representing the school as the cultural mixing bowl, to create the expectations (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; MetLife, 1987; MetLife, 2013).

Home-school partnerships are the interactions between the caregivers and the educators (Epstein, 1995; Loughran, 2008). To understand the importance of the home-school partnership, researchers can view the partnership through a lens of Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which defines why the home and the school need a partnership for added student success. The relationship between the home and the school effects the child's development. Researchers can view the partnership through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969) to learn more about meaning making that occurs in human interactions. The caregiver and the educator continually define their partnership through interpretation of the interactions they have with one another. Researchers can also look at the partnership through the lens of Systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1967), which addresses the ordered nature of systems. Fisher, Frey, and Hattie (2016) asserted, "every student deserves a great teacher, not by chance, but by design" (p. 2). Just as teaching and learning needs design, the designed and ordered nature of a system can improve consistency in the parent-teacher relationship which impacts student growth. The ordered nature of a system would involve consistent preparation of teachers to foster relationship with parents. The alignment of the three theories underscores the need for an initiator of meaning making in the parent partnership, which in this case is the school through the teacher. By connecting the theories of Ecological Systems theory, Symbolic Interactionism theory and Systems theory, the importance of the home-school partnership becomes evident.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The topic of causal relationship between home-school partnership and student benefits has been widely studied (Henderson, 1987; Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Mattingly et

al., 2002). Similarly, educational policy requires schools to provide opportunities for the home-school partnership (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Goals 2000, 1994; National Parent Teacher Association, 1997; No Child Left Behind, 2002). Notably, universities that train preservice teachers have not offered preparation for the developing and fostering of the home-school partnership (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Epstein, 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Willemse et al., 2016). The disparity between the need for a home-school partnership and a lack of preparation of preservice results in erratic styles of communication to parents (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). The emerging disparity impinges on teacher satisfaction (MetLife, 2013) resulting in reduced benefits to the student from the home-school connection (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

This study's design was to investigate if there is a need to address teacher preparation to establish the home-school partnership in an international school setting. Current research indicates that limited preparation for the home-school partnership exists in the university teacher preparation courses (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Willemse et al., 2016). Since current research does not investigate teacher preparation beyond formal preservice preparation at universities, it remained unclear whether teachers receive preparation through alternative venues. The shared stories and reflection by international school teachers participating in this study provides evidence of the preparation for the home-school partnership; harnessing and implementing systems of preparation for teachers may ensure that preparation is not coincidental.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain information about the experiences of international teachers and their perception of preparedness to foster the home-school partnership. The study

took place in an international school community and examined the experiences and preparation for the home-school partnership of 21 teachers from nine different countries of origin. Although the research indicated that teacher preparation programs in the United States do not provide sufficient course work on how to foster the home-school partnership, research was not clear about preservice training activities in the teacher preparation programs in other countries (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Willemse et al., 2016). Other than one study in Holland and Belgium, related studies occurred only in the United States (Willemse et al., 2016).

Examining the participants' prior experience and identifying commonality between the participants revealed the establishment of themes. The themes indicated an understanding of informal and formal preparation teachers received to prepare for the home-school partnership. This study provided evidence to suggest the best strategies for preparation of participants who work in an international school setting.

### **Research Questions**

Conducting individual interviews to gain an understanding of teacher perception of the home-school partnership at the international school through similarities of the participants' lived experiences provided answers to the research questions designed for this study. Identification of key themes from the actual experiences discussed by participants helped to determine the perception a teacher may have about their level of preparedness. Participants had the opportunity to share their experience fostering the home-school partnership at their previous and current work sites. Three different areas were investigated through the perception of teachers regarding their level of preparedness to foster the partnership: (a) the impact of the school system, (b) experiences leading to preparedness to foster the home-school partnership, and (c)

suggestions to improve processes leading to teacher preparedness in an international school setting. The following research questions guided this study:

R<sub>1</sub>: How do teachers perceive systems in the school to have an impact on the home-school partnership?

R<sub>2</sub>: What is the perception held by teachers about experiences or trainings provided to them that have led to their personal level of preparedness for the home-school partnership at international schools?

R<sub>3</sub>: What is the perception held by teachers on how preparation for the home-school partnership could be improved in international schools?

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

The rationale for this study is based on the premise that an international school is responsible for implementing systems to set parameters for the home-school partnership and for the sustainability of the partnership. Although researchers have investigated formal training in many teacher preparation programs, the study provided evidence about preparation of teachers as well as training that might exist in other countries. Of importance is the information obtained from teachers that may contribute to improved preparation for the home-school partnership in a transient international community.

The relevance of this investigation was to provide an opportunity for the participants to engage in an ethnographic study and reflection process regarding their practice and the processes of the school as it pertains to the home-school partnership. The teachers sought to identify ways to improve the teacher preparation to enhance student learning. The participants had the opportunity to recognize and comprehend that the results of the study could improve school

systems and practices as they pertain the home-school partnership in their lived situations and for the broader international school community.

There is a causal sequence that could result from the research. The results of this study could support improved teacher preparation to foster the home-school partnership. The effects could enhance greater job satisfaction for teachers who were previously unprepared to foster the home-school partnership (Epstein, 2005; Willemse et al., 2016). Additionally, with enhanced teacher preparation leading to improved teacher satisfaction in the partnership, teachers may actualize an improved home-school partnership and, therefore, an improved schooling experience for students.

In the International School environment, teachers come from various countries. This study informs research of teacher preparation practices that take place around the world. The study exposes other formal and informal experiences a teacher may apply to practice. These findings may enable enhancement of teacher preparation with the shared knowledge of international school teachers.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will assist the reader in understanding the context of the ethnographic study which occurred in an international school community.

**Ad hoc transient community.** An ad hoc transient community is a community within a community that has a shared goal for a specific time (Kester et al., 2007). In this study, the international school represents families from over 40 different nationalities.

**Experienced teachers.** Experienced teachers are teachers who have taught for at least five years (Arani, 2017; Michel, 2013; Podsen, 2002). In this study, the teacher specialist or

experienced teacher may be new to the school but have five years of experience in other school settings.

**International schools.** International schools are schools created during the first quarter of the twentieth century to serve this clientele who require an education similar to their home country and different than the local system offered by their host country (Hayden & Thompson, 1998).

**Novice teacher.** A novice teacher has zero to five years teaching experience (Arani, 2017; Michel, 2013). In the current study, the novice teacher may be in their first teaching positions or their first years of teaching in an international school community.

**Parent partnership.** A parent partnership includes parenting skills, communicating, volunteering options, home support, shared decision making, and collaboration (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Additionally, it implies the shared and valued roles in education (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Duncan, 2010).

**School culture.** A school's culture is the school's beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes. Additionally, the school culture includes rules, both written and unwritten, that shape and influence how a school functions (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

**Third culture kids.** Third culture kids refer to internationally mobile children (Bates, 2013; Hayden & Thompson, 1998; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Useem & Downie, 1976). In this study location, 80% of the student clientele are classified as third culture kids and the remaining 20% are students from the local community.

### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

**Assumptions.** The planning of this study began with several assumptions. Based on the prior research, it was anticipated that participant teachers would not have a clear and consistent

understanding of their responsibility as it relates to the home-school partnership. An additional assumption was that the teachers would state that they have not received systemic preparation to foster the home-school partnership. The final assumption was that the teachers practice ineffective communication skills with parents such as one-way emails without the opportunity for two-way communication.

**Delimitations and limitations.** Due the nature and intent of the study, there was purposeful selection of participants to represent the diversity of the teacher population within the school. The intent of this ethnographic study was to underscore the lived or professional experiences of teachers in relation to their preparation to foster the home-school partnership in an international school setting. This study did not include the parental perspective of the partnership. The limitation of the scope provided a depth of information about the targeted population and their specific experiences. The study was delimited to one international school setting. While this is an acceptable sampling method for Ethnographic research, it may not reflect the entire population of international school teachers (Adams & Lawrence, 2014).

The researcher recognized that certain limitations were inherent in conducting this ethnographic research study. First, the limited number of participants (21) and the ethnographic nature of this study are limitations to the transferability of the study beyond the study's setting. Additional limitations are due to the perception of job insecurity at the school and the lack of autonomy for teachers to openly communicate with school administration. As a previous quasi-administrator at the site, this had an impact on the responses, as participants provided false information to create a more positive picture of the school.

The limitations are as follows:

1. Some respondents may have been response bias, as they want to project a positive impression of the school.
2. Some respondents may have been response bias on audio, as they do not trust the confidentiality of the method.
3. Some respondents may have shared responses impacted by their personal relationship with leadership and have greater access to expected cultural behaviors.

The study occurred in the international school where the researcher was a quasi-administrator making the setting one in which the researcher had been fully embedded in the community for four years.

## **Summary**

Despite the importance and benefit of the home-school partnership, teachers receive little preparation for this aspect of their profession. This study included an examination through the perception of teachers of the systems in place to foster the home-school partnership. The study also included data pertaining to formal and informal experiences or trainings that may increase the level of preparedness for the home-school partnership at international schools. Finally, the researcher sought to understand ways to improve teacher preparation for the home-school partnership in international schools.

This study consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic, describes the problem that was addressed, and provides the reader with an overview of the research. The second chapter includes the conceptual framework for this study and a comprehensive literature review of research related to the home-school partnership, relevant educational policies, the role of a school culture in fostering the home-school partnership, and the extent of teacher

preparation for the home-school partnership. The third chapter outlines and describes the methodology utilized. The fourth chapter presents an analysis of findings of the study. Finally, chapter five includes a discussion of the results as well as a conclusion.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Theologian Aurelius Ambrosius (c. 340–397), otherwise known as Saint Ambrose, coined the phrase “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” (c. 340–397). His advice pertained to the Roman custom to fast on Saturdays when in Rome as the Romans did, but not in Milan, where it was not a customary practice. Travelers and settlers worldwide adopt this phrase; it pertains to their willingness to adopt and adapt to the customs of the visited communities. With increased global expansion, more travelers and settlers with military, diplomatic, global commerce, trade, and humanitarian relief interests find themselves together in various countries around the world, placing them within communities with different customs than their own.

These expatriates create their own micro-community within the host community: a community of expatriates (Hayden & Thompson, 1998). The school-aged children of the expatriate parents become global citizens, along with their parents, and have become known as Third Culture Kids (Useem & Downie, 1976), a term used to describe such internationally mobile children (Hayden & Thompson, 1998; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Useem & Downie, 1976). Although time away from their home country and community may vary from family to family, the Third Culture Kids’ and their parents have a need for an education that is conducive to their language, culture, and academic needs (Hayden & Thompson, 2008).

The creation of international schools in the first quarter of the twentieth century served this clientele who require an education similar to their home country and different than the local system offered by their host country (Hayden & Thompson, 1998). With the need for international education, comes a symbiotic need for internationally prepared educators to serve the Third Culture Kids. Together, the Third Culture Kids, the expatriate parents, and

international school educators comprise a new community, referred to as an *ad hoc transient community*, within the broader host country community. Kester et al. (2007) described an ad hoc transient community as a community within a community that has a shared goal for specific time. In international school communities, the school, as the central location of the shared goals, carries the burden of becoming the community center for these transient community members (Gellar, 1996).

### **Study Topic**

Price-Mitchell (2009) defined the partnership between parents and the school as an equitable relationship. In a home-school partnership, both home and school are valued, and the focus is on what both parents and educators can do to enhance student learning (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Price-Mitchell (2009) provided evidence to support the need for home-school partnerships. Additional research by Mattingly et al. (2002) found conclusive correlations that the home-school partnerships have multiple levels of proven benefits for the school community. The integration of a home-school partnership is a prerequisite for children's academic success (Epstein, 2005). Alternatively, the integration of a home-school partnership is the great hope of the future of education (Price-Mitchell, 2009).

Shared-decision making provides a conducive foundation for the home-school partnership by establishing and sharing the rules of engagement through a proactive systematic approach (Blase & Blase, 1999; Earl et al., 2001; Feuerstein, 2000; Gordon & Louis, 2009; Knoff & Raffaele, 1999; Murray et al., 2015; O'Brien, 2004; Powell, 1978). In an international school community, where the school serves as a symbolic Rome to the transient community members, the onus rests with the school to share, proactively, the ethos of the school for others to

adhere (Knoff & Raffaele, 1999). A shared goal could be to develop an intentional and ongoing relationship designed to improve children's learning (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001).

When the school accepts responsibility to create mechanism to identify and systematically address the establishment of such partnerships, the school charges the educators with the responsibility of sustaining the partnership (Pattni-Shah, 2008). Educators will be effectively prepared to foster the expectations of the school community when they receive adequate teacher preparation in building the home-school partnership (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Willemse et al., 2016). Accordingly, an investigation of teacher preparation for the fostering of the home-school partnership in an International School community is necessary.

This chapter presents a review of the literature germane to the subject of fostering a home-school partnership. A comprehensive review of literature related to (a) the benefits of the home-school partnership, (b) legislation enacted to enforce the partnership, (c) shared decision making in school, and (d) preservice teacher preparation for the home-school partnership. A systematic and thorough literature search used the Concordia University electronic databases including EBSCOhost, ProQuest, JSTOR, and Sage. Additionally, searching Google Scholar helped to gather further evidence. Educational books related to international schools, teacher preparation, parent-school communication, and parent partnership provided related and relevant information. A review of academic journals, educational websites and bulletins, and dissertations, furthered this research and understanding.

## **Context**

The research on the benefits of the home-school partnership is conclusive with correlational evidence (Mattingly et al., 2002). The research was compelling enough to result in

educational policies and educational agendas in the United States, which mandate that the home-school partnership have presence in the school community (Act, 2015; Epstein & Salinas, 1992; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Davies, Henderson, Johnson, & Mapp, 2007; National Parent Teacher Association, 1997; Reynolds, Arthur, & Clements, 2005; Van Roekel, 2008; Zinth, 2005). Goals 2000 (1994), written in the Educate America Act of 1994, documented the need to promote parent partnerships in schools (Sec. 102.8, A). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reinforced the need for parent participation in schools with Section 1118, Title 1 as a focus on the parent involvement in schools. NCLB became the first documentation in law as a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which defined parent involvement as requiring opportunities for parents to engage in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication with schools around students (Section 910 (32). EA). The research behind the federal interest in the home-school partnership affirmed the benefit of the involvement by parents and supports the argument that parents are a critical component of a child's educational success (Epstein & Salinas, 1992; Goals 2000, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Davies et al., 2007; Reynolds, Arthur, & Clements, 2005; Van Roekel, 2008; Zinth, 2005).

Hiatt-Michael (2001) and Epstein and Sanders (2006) provided evidence that universities did not adequately prepare educators for their future partnerships with parents. The MetLife Survey of American Teachers (2013) confirmed that educators remain frustrated and challenged with the home-school partnership. Educators enter the field without concrete knowledge and skills about how to establish and facilitate home-school partnerships with them (Broussard, 2003).

Missing from research is evidence of the efforts to prepare the teachers to foster the home-school partnership. The lack of systematic efforts to prepare educators for this evidence-

based benefit to education seems to be a missed opportunity on behalf of teacher preparation and schools (Blase & Blase, 1999; Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Gordon & Louis, 2009; O'Brien, 2004; Price-Mitchell, 2009; Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007). Educators seemingly remain ill prepared (Epstein, 2005; Willemse et al., 2016) to develop the home-school partnerships as they enter the profession.

### **Significance**

Knowledge of the sources of preparation for teachers is significant, as it sheds light on how to establish and maintain the home-school partnerships. Teachers expressed a high dissatisfaction with this aspect of their jobs (MetLife, 2013). Improved teacher preparation resulting from this research could promote greater educator satisfaction. With improved teacher preparation, the teachers may foster improved home-school partnerships, and therefore improved schooling experience for students. In the International School environment, teachers come from diverse teacher preparation programs and educational systems. The knowledge of education systems or other formal and informal experiences that provide teacher preparation for the home-school can help to guide other education systems to improve their preparation processes. Research evidences the causal relationship between home-school partnership and student benefits (Henderson, 1987; Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Mattingly et al., 2002). Educational policy requires schools to provide opportunities for the home-school partnership (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; Goals 2000, 1994; National Parent Teacher Association, 1997; No Child Left Behind, 2002). Educators desire and require preparation to improve their practice in forming the vital home-school partnership (MetLife, 2013), yet universities for the preservice teachers do not offer preparation for the developing and fostering of the home-school partnership (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hiatt-Michael, 2001;

Willemse et al., 2016). Without preparation, (a) teachers engage in inconsistent styles of communication with parents (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013), (b) teacher's express dissatisfaction when they engage with families and rate the home-school partnership as one of their greatest challenges (MetLife, 2013), and c) students do not reap the benefits of the home-school connection. A lack of teacher preparation for the home-school connection could have a greater consequence in the ad hoc transient community developed in International Schools where the core of the community relationship is defined by the school (Gellar, 1996; Kester et al., 2007). The parent perception of boundaries created by the lack of systems in place could lead families to feel like outsiders of the school community (Cunningham, 2014). The framework that follows will provide the reader the opportunity to understand the importance of the integration of Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Symbolic Interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969), and Systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1967). This framework will expose the reader to the confidence instilled by research of the benefits related particularly to the home-school partnership and the need for this partnership in an international school community. A review of research evidences the need for teacher preparation to develop and foster the home-school partnership. A summary of the literature review indicates the need for further investigation into formal and informal teacher preparation around the developing and fostering of the home-school partnership.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Home-School partnerships are the interaction between students' caregivers and the educators. To understand the importance of the home-school partnership, educational practitioners can view the partnership through a lens of Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which addresses why the home and the school need to create a

partnership for added student success. The partnership can be viewed through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism theory to learn more about meaning making that occurs in human interactions (Blumer, 1969). Practitioners can also consider the partnership through the lens of Systems theory, which addresses the impact of the relationship on the school as a whole (Von Bertalanffy, 1967). The interconnection of the three theories exposes the importance of teacher preparation to enhance the home-school partnership. By aligning the Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Symbolic Interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969) and Systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1967), the significance of the home-school connection and the responsibility of the educators and greater school systems is evident.

**Ecological systems theory.** Ecological Systems theory identifies how a child develops from the influences within five levels of the environment: Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The Microsystem is the closest system to the child and relates to the experiences within the home, school, and work. The Mesosystem is the environment created by the interaction between the separate Microsystems. The Exosystem relates to the events that effect the person, but the person does not interact directly with those events. The Macrosystem includes the broader environment surrounding the life of the person, including where the person lives. Of interest to the home-school connection would be the Mesosystem as it involves the interrelationship between the two members of the Microsystem, the home and the school and their impact on the wellbeing of the child-student.

**Symbolic interactionism.** Symbolic Interaction began as a theory by Blumer (1969) to explain how the other person involved in the interaction gives meaning making and how that meaning effects the behavior in the interaction. Symbolic Interaction theory explains how the caregiver of the home and the members of the school make sense of their relationship with one

another based on the meaning of themselves and the meaning of the other in the partnership (Blumer, 1969); it relates the meaning making that continues based on the actions of the other. The caregiver and the educator continually define their partnership through interpretation of the interactions they have with one another.

Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) is a sociological perspective on self and society:

- “Human beings act toward things on the basis of meanings which these things have for them.”
- “The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing.”
- “The use of meanings by the actor occurs through a process of interpretation”

(Blumer, 1969: p. 2–5).

**Systems theory.** People and their practice influence school culture; therefore, systems theory elucidates the need for the benefits reaped from the home-school partnership. External and internal changes can affect systems. A school culture is subject to change in response to current educational movements and other internal and external demands by stakeholders (Byrk & Schneider, 2002).

A system is a “complex of elements in interactions, these interactions being of an ordered (non-random) nature” (Von Bertalanffy 1967, p. 1). Systems theory addresses the components of each system in relation to the “forces” of the components of other systems (Von Bertalanffy, 1967, p. 1). Educators have the responsibility of defining the home-school partnership proactively, and, with a Systems theory approach, educators can work within a systems approach to reduce the haphazard style of communication with parents which could lead to inconsistent messages (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013).

Just as change is ever-present in schools, Wheatley (2006) discovered that so are the webs of relationships. A Systems Theory approach recognizes the need to make visible the causal responses to the change process, both big and small. The Systems theory allows the schools encountering change to reflect, by illuminating the causal relationships of change to the system as a whole. According to Wheatley (2006), Systems Theory is the driving force behind successful change: as it is necessary to understand chaos to find meaning in our interdependent relationship. To create and sustain positive home-school partnerships, there must be systems in place that foster and address barriers that may impede the partnerships (Pattni-Shah, 2008).

The culture of learning that Senge (2006) advocated identified five necessary disciplines: shared vision, mental models, shared learning, personal mastery, and systems thinking. Senge (2006) recognized that it was not possible to understand systems with a top-down approach. Learning organizations need to examine the patterns of interaction within their teams, rather than engaging in fragmented problem solving. Through systems thinking, the responsibility of success is reliant on the whole, not the parts, the people, not solely the leader. Through a shared approach to leading and learning, organizations acquire a shared ownership and commitment to the change process. Senge (2006) considered systems thinking as a way to understand the complexity of schools and the complex situations in which learning communities encounter. The strengths of system thinking are a process that “makes understandable the subtlest aspect of the learning organization— the new way individuals perceive themselves and their world” (Senge, 2006, Part 1, Chapter 1, Para. 39).

Studying the interconnection of a home-school partnership through the lens of Ecological Systems theory, Symbolic Interactionism theory, and Systems theory the need for a proactive approach is apparent. The following review of the literature and research methodologies guides

the argument for a deeper understanding of teacher preparation for the development of the home-school partnership.

### **Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

Extensive research on the home-school partnership revealed the benefits attained by the students when parents are involved in school (Clinton et al., 2007; Fisher et al., 2016; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1994; Hattie, 2009; Murray et al., 2015). Through the years, federal legislation compelled schools to foster the partnership (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; E. S. S. Act, 2015). The legislation did not delineate a school culture most conducive for the partnership to flourish, yet researchers have evidenced that the school culture with a shared decision-making approach offers the systems needed for the sustained partnership (Earl et al., 2001; Gordon & Louis, 2009). The merging of the above research leaves the onus of enacting the partnership on the teachers (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; MetLife, 1987; MetLife, 2013). There is extensive research on the need for teacher preparation to foster this relationship (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Keyes, 2000; Murray et al., 2015; Schechter & Sherri, 2009; Wischnowski & Cianca, 2012).

**Home-school partnership.** Educational practitioners that have consensus that parent involvement in schools provides benefits to the student experience, whether directly or indirectly related to academics (Fisher et al., 2016; Gottfried et al., 1994; Hattie, 2009; Murray et al., 2015). Numerous studies reported a correlation between parent involvement in a home-school partnership and student academic achievement, improved attendance, and positive attitudes about school in both the student and the parent (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson, 1987). In fact, a study by Gottfried et al. (1994) demonstrated a correlation between parent's involvement and increased student outcomes.

Core research on the topic of parent-school relationships and the need for teacher preparation developed by Epstein (1995) remains documented in current research decades later (Murray et al., 2015). Epstein (1995) developed a framework of six types of parent involvement: Type 1-Parenting, Type 2-Communicating, Type 3-Volunteering, Type 4-Learning at home, Type 5-Decision-Making, and Type 6-Collaborating with Communities. This hierarchical framework has provided guidelines for research since its inception. In this research, Epstein (1995) reported the importance of parent involvement and identified ways in which parents can be involved in a school.

The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, through the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, conducted an annual review about family connections in schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) and verified the influence of families on children's achievements. Major findings from their review process stated that engaged families link to higher student achievement and, when schools partner with families and communities, student academic performance improves. Cotton and Wikelund (2001) enhanced these findings about the home-school partnership, finding that the more engaged parents are in the schooling of the children, the greater the benefits in the areas of science and technology. Furthermore, the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA, 2009) position statement elaborated on how parent involvement was crucial to their child's ability to learn science (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Pate & Andrews, 2006).

The Flaxmere Project was an initiative in New Zealand in 2001 that involved five schools in partnership with the community and the Ministry of Education (Clinton et al., 2007). The project involved three approaches to improving student learning involving the home school connection. The study provided multiple ways for parents to become a part of the culture of the

school with the outreach project. The results of the project benefit parent involvement and student behavior, engagement, and achievement.

More recently, Wang and Eccles (2012) found that social support from parents was a stronger predictor to student success than peer support. Wang and Eccles' longitudinal study evidenced that an increase in social support to students from teachers and parents was related to higher school compliance. This study addressed students from 7th to 11th grades.

Beneficial outcomes for students rely on relationships parents and teachers develop around shared commitments to parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Schools amass a variety of benefits by making researched based decisions to enhance the home-school partnership. Some benefits found by Olsen and Fuller (2008) are that children tend to achieve more, have better self-esteem, and increased positive school attitude when parents are partners. For the parents, they benefit by having a better understanding of the school. The school, in turn, then could have a better reputation and the teachers could have improved communication. Parallel to the research is the Educational policy in the United States to secure the role for parents as partners in education (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; E. S. S. Act, 2015).

**Educational policies.** The research documenting the wide range of benefits attributed to the home-school partnership spanned the decades, but the topic did not appear in federal law until No Child Left Behind Act (2002). In this Act, Parent involvement is one of the six targeted areas of focus. Since that time, additional legislation has recognized and adopted the research findings with increased expectations of parent involvement.

Anfara and Mertens (2008) referenced the requirements by current laws to improve and monitor parent involvement in schools. President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (E. S. S. Act, 2015), the United States national education law, which stated that participation of

parents must be regular, two-way, and include communication regarding student academics and school activities. The law included ensuring and encouraging parents to play a role as partners with the school.

The law extends the responsibility of the school to encourage parent participation in shared decision-making and on committees to benefit the education for students. The researchers identified many obstacles parents face when attempting to become involved in schools. The research is clear that children benefit, but despite the value and importance of parent involvement in schooling, research sheds light on the difficulty of achieving the desired partnership.

More recently, in a press release, U.S. Secretary of Education Duncan (2010) addressed the need for increased family involvement. The Secretary announced that the Education Department proposed to double the amount of federal dollars set aside for family involvement. Duncan (2010) proposed to “step up our efforts at the federal level to empower parents to do even more for our students” (p. 1).

Like any mandate in education over time, support for the schools (principals and teachers) is needed to prepare them to abide by the new mandate. Parents and teachers must have a shared perception of parent involvement (Lawson, 2003). Mandates imposed on schools to improve parent involvement has an impact of the culture of the school.

**School culture.** The culture of the school drives or restrains the philosophy of a partnership between the home and the school. The Great Schools partnership (2014) defined school culture as “beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions” (p. 1). According to the 2000

study by the National Center for Family and Community Connections, effective programs to engage families and community embrace a philosophy of partnership.

Teaching for Change (2016) documented their findings of the characteristics of meaningful family engagement. The action research project was conducted 1999–2000. The findings characterized family engagement as active interest by parents and staff in the wellbeing of children, respect for diverse contributions, multifaceted role of the parent, and the respect and recognition of family engagement and shared decision making.

Price-Mitchell (2009) underscored how a home-school partnership hinges on the school culture and defined partnership as an equitable relationship and asserted that each school has its own culture and lens to build the relationship for the partnership to flourish. The researcher also identified the need for guidance by the principals, teachers, and administrators to embrace the role as boundary spanners and advocates for further participatory research on this topic. Further, Price-Mitchell (2009) recognized each school has its own unique dynamic system and “each school’s own social system must be explored through the lens of its own relationships” (p. 15).

The research evidences the complexity of creating a school culture that recognizes the importance of parents as partners in learning. The process involves the building of partnerships around generative conversations, trust, and communication (Blase & Blase, 1999; Mokoena, 2012; Schultz & McGinn, 2013; Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007; Sheldon, 2005). Though the practice of shared decision-making to include parents as partners in learning involves greater commitment by all stakeholders, research evidences improvement in school dynamics (Earl et al., 2001; Gordon & Louis, 2009). Researchers examined the perceptions of leaders, educators, and parents to understand sustainable and shared decision-making (O'Brien, 2004). The impetus

for shared decision-making is the knowledge of and extensive research documenting the benefits of parent involvement in education (Gordon & Louis, 2009).

In 1996, Johns Hopkins University created The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) to improve student success through a collaborative partnership of schools and organizations focused on the inclusion of families and the community. Sheldon (2005) surveyed 565 schools involved in the partnership to identify key characteristics needed to improve home-school partnership. Sheldon hypothesized that the interconnected webbing model, which included (a) school demographic, (b) school organization and processes, (c) partnership program quality, and (d) parent involvement, affected the involvement of the parents, school, and community. The findings indicated that schools with strong parent partnership programs are more likely to have increased parent involvement in school. Sheldon (2005) identified the need for a clear direction of the partnership; systematic effort and support; stronger implementation displaying that the school values and supports of having the partnership; preparation for the partnership; and emphasis on educators understanding the community and their values.

Related to the 1996 research mentioned above (Sheldon, 2005), Epstein and Sheldon (2016) collected data from 347 schools in 21 districts, representing large urban, small urban, suburban, and rural schools across the United States, all of which were members of The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University. The focus of the research was to determine the connection between policies enacted for parental engagement and responses by schools and districts. This study suggested that schools have varied responses to policies, through their own interpretation of how to engage parents. The research evidenced that successful planning and implementation of programs of partnerships by schools and districts can affect and change previous parent behavior. Epstein and Sheldon noted that the policy does not

create the parent engagement, but rather the leadership, systems, and school preparation to promote partnerships.

According to the small-scale correlational study conducted by Mokoena (2012) on the effectiveness of participative management in school, shared decision-making yields salutary results. Questionnaires to 282 respondents had an 81% response rate. The findings showed a positive correlation between participative management, a form of shared decision-making, and the levels of trust in relation to stakeholder. The findings suggested that trust influences principals sharing authority and responsibility with teachers, teacher collaboration and school's relations to parents as it relates to shared decision-making.

Goldring and Shapira (1993) developed an anonymous questionnaire of which 337 (40%) of the parents surveyed responded, to understand the frequency of parental involvement and the level of empowerment that influences parent satisfaction with their school in Israel. The researchers defined the difference between parent involvement and parent empowerment. Specifically, empowerment referred to the role in exercising control through decision-making. The findings indicated that parent participation relates to parent satisfaction. The researchers recommended internal restructuring of the functions of the school for parents to become a part of shared decision-making forums.

Blase and Blase (1999) hypothesized that a collaborative process which included school community representation adopted by management would lead to greater academic success. The researchers noted that, traditionally, parents were not involved in school-wide decision-making. The researchers used data from a qualitative study of principals in nine schools working with Glickman's League of Professional Schools in Georgia utilizing open-ended interview questions. The research included 18 principals to ensure diversity and each of the principals had engaged in

the shared governance process. The researchers conducted a study of principals and documented stories of their process to include the teachers, parents, and students in the democratic process of decision-making. The research identified that decision-making took additional time, was fraught with conflict, and required a release of the perception of the principal's role. The results of the study showed greater engagement by partners, increased openness and expressiveness among educators, encouragement for productive structures for conflict resolution in this process, and the ownership of the decision or change had less resistance or sabotage.

O'Brien (2004) studied the perception of parental involvement in shared decision-making as it relates to the home-school partnership. The researcher conducted a quantitative study by surveying parents, teachers, and principals at 11 elementary schools of a Mid-Atlantic school district. Within the study, O'Brien defined participative management in schools as drawing upon the shared decision-making. organizational productivity and innovations increases as we schools move away from traditional hierarchical structures (O'Brien, 2004). Through individual and collective learning experiences, synergies developed between the internal and external stakeholders. Shared decision-making practices increased participation by the internal and external stakeholders (O'Brien, 2004). The findings identified perceived differences of actual and desired parent participation by principals and parents; principal perceptions were higher than actual parent involvement in planning, curriculum, instruction, and budget.

Shatkin and Gershberg (2007) used an exploratory analysis, drawn from case studies of parent and community participation regarding school governance, to explore their hypothesis that parent and community participation in school governance positively affects the community by fostering improved school performance and school, as well as community relations. Engagement in meaningful decision-making by parents, collaborative style and skills by leaders, and

preparation are among conditions that improve relationships (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007). This level of shared governance by partners has led to educational improvement, increased levels of trust, and many other benefits that shape the space for parent participation (Shatkin & Gershberg, 2007).

Principals with more diverse leadership teams are more open to home-school partnerships (Gordon & Louis, 2009). Gordon and Louis' research, based on the 2005 data derived from Wallace Foundation-funded survey, involved six principals and a teacher survey as a part of a large multiyear, mixed-method study on the relationship between leadership and student achievement and concluded teachers perceive greater parent involvement is associated with increased student achievement. The results evidence the importance of stakeholder involvement and the importance of shared leadership by all stakeholders.

**Teacher preparation.** Vreeland (2016) gathered both quantitative and qualitative data to study the Achievable Dream Parent Involvement Program. The research included 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11 grade families at an Achievable Dream Academy and an Achievable Dream Middle and High School in Newport News, Virginia. The results indicated a high level of parent involvement in the program, but it did not greatly impact the students' success. The study noted the criticality of identifying what factors of a parent partnership impact student success and understanding the factors impacting teacher resistance. The significant gap in the consistency of offerings by the teachers and staff was one reason for the lack of correlational data between parent involvement and student benefit the school did not provide adequate staff development for all teachers and staff on the parent involvement program (Vreeland, 2016).

A qualitative study by Chavkin and Williams (1988) determined a need for teachers to receive preparation through university course offerings. The qualitative study encompassed a

six-year study with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and involved 3,000 parents and 4,000 educators. The researchers provided evidence that 86.6% of the teachers surveyed said they felt working with parents was necessary and suggested a preservice course at education institutions, yet only 4% of the teacher educators surveyed taught this type of course at the time. Chavkin and Williams, citing Epstein (1995), observed that teachers needed better skills for involving parents in the education of their children and shared that adding parent involvement in schools increased learning, improved attendance, reduced the dropout rate, and improved student self-esteem. Chavkin and Williams determined teachers needed better skills for involving parents in the education of their children and that the core of the training for teachers should take place in universities for preservice teachers.

Core research on the topic of parent-school relationships and the need for teacher preparation developed by Epstein (1995) remains documented in current research two decades later (Murray et al., 2015). Epstein (1995) reported the importance of parent involvement and identifies ways in which parents can be involved in a school. Epstein shared how the terms involvement, engagement and partnership are quite different and that educators may not have had the discrete preparation in more than types 1–4. Lower levels on Epstein’s framework can encompass a one-way dialogue from school to home, where the higher levels encompass a two-way dialogue.

Many factors, such as specific diversity, characteristics, and the construction involved in the parent-teacher relationships, affect development of effective relationship between parent and school partnerships (Keyes, 2000). Keyes highlighted the need for schools to be cognizant of these special factors in developing partnerships between parents and schools. Epstein (1995),

cited by Keyes (2000), aligned with Chavkin and Williams (1988) with the belief that the core of the preparation for teachers should take place in universities.

Seventeen years after Chavkin and Williams (1988) and five years after Keyes (2000), Ferrara and Ferrara (2005) analyzed four district-wide home-school involvement groups, catalyzed by the recognition that teachers knew reactive, rather than proactive, strategies surrounding the home-school relationship. The case study analysis demonstrated support for the theory of parent-school relationships and the need for preservice preparation for teachers on this topic. Ferrara and Ferrara noted preservice teachers have very little preparation in building parent relationships and many only know how to react to parents and concluded that the core of the preparation for teachers should take place in universities.

Hiatt-Michael (2001) reviewed two decades of research in conjunction with a current Pepperdine survey on parent involvement and recognized that, although there are documented benefits to parents and teachers working together, universities and school districts offered minimal opportunities to build this understanding. Through survey results, Hiatt-Michael determined that teachers believed it was important to work with parents, yet that teachers received little formal preparation and possessed minimal knowledge and skills to work with parents. The researcher concluded that the core of the preparation for teachers should take place in universities.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002) studied two United States public school districts serving a population of high-risk families and created an eight-week professional development program, Teachers Involving Parents (TIP), with the intention of documenting findings of their intentional professional development around building parent-teacher relationships. Hoover-Dempsey et al., in a mixed methods study, focused on the teacher perception and beliefs surrounding parent

involvement and hypothesized that strengthening the beliefs of teachers in the value of parent engagement would increase parental involvement. Hoover-Dempsey et al. identified many benefits of the professional development modules and noted that the teachers not involved in the study, yet working in the school, benefited from the site-based, or point of instruction preparation; they attributed the benefit to the change in the common dialogue at the school around improving relationships. The researchers theorized that, through diffusion, the school climate might have benefited other teachers by the sheer introduction of the TIP program into the school culture and concluded that preparing teachers for parental involvement was critical to teacher preparation and at the time, preservice teachers received little preparation in building parent-school relationships.

The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement Report made several recommendations regarding supports for teachers to improve the home-school partnership (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The researchers reported that school staff need more support in developing ways of developing and fostering the partnership. Henderson and Mapp found that few teacher preparation programs include instruction on how to partner with parents and community, concluding all staff, from leaders to custodians, would benefit from this training.

Epstein and Sanders (2006) explored preparation of preservice courses for teachers, and noted that preparation is vital, but not offered- there remained a gap in need versus what universities offered. The researchers conducted a survey of 161 schools, colleges, and departments of education in the United States to investigate current courses and content offered in preservice teacher preparation. Using the conceptual framework of overlapping spheres of influence, the researchers reiterated the past research on the impact of home-school partnerships.

The researchers elaborated that the types of preparation that did exist in universities primarily dealt with parent involvement related to early childhood education (89.6%) and special education (93.6%). The researchers concluded that educators needed to become skilled in teamwork, collaboration and effective communication with parents and other stakeholders.

Anderson and Minke (2007) sought to understand the decision-making behind parents becoming involved in schools, based on the premise that parent involvement enhanced student success. Through surveys of parents in elementary schools in urban school districts, the researchers found evidence of correlational and causal relationships. Results of the research indicated that parents may perceive a school invitation as an inauthentic request for involvement. Additionally, Anderson and Minke found teacher preparation is warranted and should include fostering effective communication and resolution skills.

According to Schechter and Sherri (2009), educators' disposition on parent involvement influenced the reality of parent involvement. The researchers used ethnographic data collection from participant observation, sequenced scheduled interviews, and follow-up conversations with three key teacher respondents to conduct the study. The results of the research indicated much potential to inform preservice Bachelor of Education preparation, teacher professional development, community outreach, and educational policy. The researchers determined such initiatives could lead to empowerment of different stakeholder groups, particularly teachers.

To enhance parent-teacher relationships through preservice courses at St. John Fisher College in Rochester New York, a partnership developed between the college and a local disability advocacy center. Wischnowski and Cianca (2012) studied this partnership and identified the need to create a preservice data tool kit for preservice preparation teachers. The preservice preparation involved parents and teachers collaborating around realistic scenarios to

practice the art of building a partnership. The research supported the need for explicit teaching in preservice teacher preparation when developing the skills to build a parent-school relationship.

Teachers need the preparation to develop and foster the home-school partnership (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Keyes, 2000; Murray et al., 2015; Schechter & Sherri, 2009; Wischnowski & Cianca, 2012). Yet little preparation in universities exists (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Broussard (2003) reported educators enter the teaching field without concrete knowledge and skills about how to establish and facilitate home-school partnerships with a diverse community. Notably, without the preparation, teachers are ill prepared to foster the relationship (Anderson & Minke, 2007).

### **Review of Methodological Issue**

The qualitative study conducted by Mattingly et al. (2002) indicated the benefits of home-school partnerships. The study incorporated surveys, case studies and interviews. Research revealed a causal relationship between the involvement of families in the school and the beneficial outcome of a student's education.

Widespread qualitative and mixed-method studies determined whether preservice preparation programs for educators addressed elements of forming the home-school partnership in (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). Little or no preparation was available within university coursework (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Willemsen et al., 2016). As a result, educators are not prepared from preservice preparation to foster the home-school partnership and find the home-school partnership to be a frustration in their profession (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; MetLife, 2013).

Based on the information derived from research (Fisher et al., 2016; Gottfried et al., 1994; Hattie, 2009; Murray et al., 2015), communities, schools, and students benefit from the home-school partnership. Further, teacher preparation for this partnership is limited and there remains a need to conduct further qualitative research in order to gather information on other types of preparation the teacher at international schools may be receiving to harness the knowledge and skills required to build and foster the home-school partnership in an international school community (Lawson, 2003, p. 82).

The use of ethnographic interviews was appropriate for this study to determine the perception of teachers in the cultural setting of the research school site (Fetterman, 1989). The data may help researchers to understand the next steps required to improve the home-school partnerships.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

**Home-school partnerships improve the academic experience.** Home-school partnerships increase student participation, enhance the likelihood of student academic growth, and improve academic outcomes (Henderson, 1987; Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). The annotated bibliography by Henderson (1987) cited 49 studies of the effects of parent involvement in academic achievement and the performance of schools. Following this research, more recently, Jeynes' (2005) drew from the 1992 National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) data set to study the benefits of parental involvement on 12<sup>th</sup> grade African American students. The meta-analysis researched the relationship between parental involvement and urban elementary school student academic achievement. The study involved two years of data on 2,260 African American students and determined that parental involvement through parent self-report questionnaire was associated with higher student achievement outcomes.

Kraft and Dougherty (2013) estimated the causal effects of home-school communication. Their randomized field experiment included sixth- and ninth-grade students and found frequent teacher–family communication had immediate effects on student engagement, homework completion, behavior, and participation. Kraft and Dougherty concluded regular communication leads to increased home-school communication, parent involvement, and student motivation.

Mattingly et al. (2002) challenged the evidence from 41 studies, which claimed correlations between parent participation programs and improved student academics. The research affirmed the lack of empirical evidence drawn from the decades of studies, while identifying a critical weakness in the programs’ goals. The programs’ claims to enhance the parent participation in education was not evident and, while this is important data, Mattingly et al. noted these programs failed to address the changes needed in the attitude and perception of educators to increase parent participation. The programs, and not the focus of the home-school partnership programs, could explain the lack of empirical evidence.

Research findings of studies conducted by Fisher et al., 2016; Gottfried et al., 1994; Hattie, 2009; Murray et al., 2015; Price-Mitchell, 2009 all point to the same directive: include the parents in the child’s education. The aggregation of research displays a divergence of benefits on the home-school partnership. Whether the benefit from the home-school partnership is improved student participation, improved home-school relationships, improved school climate, or improved student academic success the result is beneficial. Hattie (2009) documented 15 years of research that parents can have a major effect on the education of a student.

**Educational policy around home-school partnerships.** Research provides an arguable reason for the enacting of educational policies related to the home-school partnership (Epstein & Salinas, 1992; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Davies et al., 2007;

Reynolds, Arthur, & Clements, 2005; Van Roekel, 2008; Zinth, 2005). Goals 2000 (1994), published in the Educate America Act of 1994, documented the need to promote parent partnerships (Sec. 102.8, A). The National Parent Teacher Association (1997) reaffirmed the importance of home-school partnerships with six National standards. In the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2002, the U.S. Department of Education reinforced that parent participation with Section 1118, Title 1 as a focus on the parent involvement. The Family Engagement in Education Act of 2015, introduced to the House of Representatives, was to strengthen the home-school connection.

**Factors that influence the participation in the home-school partnerships.** Research gathered between 1978 and 2015 focused on determining what influenced parents to participate in schools. Data collected from surveys, interviews and questionnaires distributed to teachers and parents addressed the family involvement in the educational setting. The results showed correlations between the perception and attitudes of both the teachers and the parents about the role of parents in the child's education, with the perceptions and attitudes identified as predictors of the amount of parents' participation in education (Feuerstein, 2000; Murray et al., 2015; Powell, 1978). Powell (1978) surveyed one-half of the parent population and all educators in each of 12 Detroit area preschool childcare programs, yielding a parent sample of 212 subjects and a teacher sample of 89 subjects. Powell observed more conversation and building of relationships by educators with parents yielded more diverse conversations between parents and schools. Feuerstein's (2000) empirical study extracted data from the National Center for Education Statistics, NELS: 88, and focused on 24,599 eighth-grade students, their parents, and principals. The researcher found a relationship between the increased parent contacts with school and parent involvement and participation in parent-teacher organizations. Later research

designed by Anderson and Minke (2007) found evidence of the same correlation. Researchers Kraft and Dougherty (2013) conducted field experiments with students and parents in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade with whom teachers made daily contact. Based on the surveys and interviews with teachers and students, the researchers found frequent home-school communication increased student engagement. The researchers also concluded teacher provision of a haphazard style of communication with parents is unfair to families and ineffective in building a community atmosphere.

**Preparation for educators to foster the home-school partnership.** Over two decades of research from 1988 to 2013 indicates a need to prepare educators for the home-school partnership. Chavkin and Williams (1988) used data from a six-year study conducted by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) in which 3,000 parents and 4,000 educators responded to queries about the inclusion of the home-school partnerships in their coursework. The research concluded a lack of preservice preparation on the topic of home-school relationships for educators. Hiatt-Michael (2001) surveyed higher education heads and deemed a need for legislation to prepare teachers to meet necessary requirements to work effectively with families in the United States.

As leader in the field of research pertaining to the home-school connection, Epstein (2005) drew conclusions using a study conducted with leaders of schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDEs) about their courses on the parent-school connection. Epstein concluded that teachers enter the profession of teaching unprepared to develop and foster the parent-school partnerships (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Epstein, 2005; Willemse et al., 2016). Willemse et al. (2016) replicated Epstein's (2005) study conducted in the United States in Holland and Belgium. The findings were similar, extending the conclusion that, without

preparation, the teachers only know how to react to parents when the expectation is to collaborate. The researchers stated that the core of teacher preparation should take place in universities. Epstein and Sanders (2006) examined preparation of preservice teachers by conducting a survey of 161 schools, colleges, and departments of education in the United States to investigate current courses and content offered to preservice teachers. Most deans surveyed acknowledged their preservice teachers were not well prepared to build and foster a partnership with parents. The surveys noted a widespread belief that courses are vital but not offered in universities.

The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership (2013) evidenced through surveys that both elementary and secondary school teachers view communicating with and involving parents in education as their greatest challenge. New teachers answered parents as their third most common source of stress. While only 3% of new teachers mentioned parents as a source of satisfaction, 20% said parents are among their greatest sources of stress or anxiety. The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership (2013) report stated that 68% of elementary teachers, 72% of principals and 82% of secondary school teachers state that engaging with parents is very challenging and is a significant leadership challenge for teachers and principals. Teachers are not prepared to develop and sustain a home-school partnership at the time they enter the teaching profession.

**Critique of Previous Research - Educator preparation to promote the home-school partnership.** Despite potential benefits of teacher preparation on developing and fostering the home-school partnership, educators remain ill prepared when they enter the profession. Recognizing the gap in pre-teacher preparation on the home-school partnership, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2002) conducted an action research program, TIP, to address the issue during

site based in-service preparation. Chavkin and Williams (1988) began to tap into alternative locations for teacher preparation beyond the university setting. Kraft and Dougherty (2013) also began to identify alternative settings for teacher preparation recognizing that each school must define their desired home-school relationship considering the uniqueness of the site. To fully understand other sources of teacher preparation, further research is needed.

### **Need for Further Research**

The educational research evidences the benefits of the home-school partnership. Research also evidences the educational policy surrounding parent involvement in the school. The review of university coursework evidenced that, although mandates for the home-school partnership exist for educators, preparation is absent. The element and possibility of other avenues or educational systems that may provide preparation for educators for the home-school partnership is missing from the research and needs development and fostering.

### **Summary**

A review of literature demonstrated the following: (a) the benefits of the home-school partnership, (b) legislation enacted to enforce the partnership, (c) shared decision making in school, and (d) pre-service teacher preparation for the home-school partnership. The review of literature reiterated the benefits of the home-school partnership and found a benefit to partnership between the parent and the school from systems in place to train the teachers to foster the partnership. Fostering the partnership would benefit the student experience at school is the significance of this current research. The conceptual framework listed includes the amalgamation of Ecological Systems Theory, Symbolic Interactionism, and Systems Theory. The review of literature begins with the identified benefits of the home-school partnership. The review also connects the research of teacher preparation, which evidences that it does not

provide a focus for the home-school partnership. Based on the literature, it is evident that research about the home-school partnership has been qualitative in nature, as it pertains to the relationships between the home and the school.

This review of the literature develops a conceptual framework using the value of the home-school partnership, and the responsibility to prepare educators for the home-school partnership. Sufficient substantiation exists for an investigation examining educator preparation for the home-school partnership beyond the preservice coursework that may yield significant findings. The literature review indicated support for investigating this research project to answer the following multi-part research question: What is the nature of teacher preparation for developing and sustaining a home-school partnership in the international school community?

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

Teacher preparation for the home-school partnership, a partnership that occurs between the teacher and the family, has received an abundance of interest by researchers. Previous research investigated the formal preservice preparation provided to educators in schools within the North American contexts (Epstein & Sanders, 2006) and in a replicated study conducted in Belgium and the Netherlands (Willemse et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was to add to the existing body of research on formal teacher preparation for the home-school partnership (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013) while exploring informal opportunities experienced by teachers that lead to increased teacher preparedness for the home-school connection. To expand on the existing body of research primarily focused on schools in the United States, the international school in this study comprises nine different nationalities. This study contributes to research by expanding the body of research to include formal and informal teacher acquisition of knowledge leading to increased preparedness in multiple countries of origin. Additionally, the study's design was to evidence experiences beyond the preservice training for teachers as was the limitation addressed in the prior studies and to expand to investigate other formal and informal preparation received by teachers in both pre and post service timeframes.

The intent of this study was to explore the nature of teacher preparation as it relates to the home-school partnership in an international school community. I examined the home-school partnership through a conceptual lens based on (a) the Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) relating to the impact and benefit of the home-school partnership on student learning, (b) Symbolic Interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969) referencing meaning

making given by the teachers to the families in a school setting, and (c) Systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1967) referencing the home-school partnership as having the potential to be an ordered system of interactions in each community. Through this lens, the study is an investigation from the perspective of the teachers and the proactive responsibility of the teacher to define the system of the home-school partnership in an international school.

### **Research Questions**

Three research questions guided this study:

R<sub>1</sub>: How do teachers perceive systems in the school to have an impact on the home-school partnership?

R<sub>2</sub>: What is the perception held by teachers about experiences or trainings provided to them that have led to their personal level of preparedness for the home-school partnership at international schools?

R<sub>3</sub>: What is the perception held by teachers on how preparation for the home-school partnership could be improved in international schools?

Three core interview questions were answered by teacher participants from their perspective for this ethnographic study. Within the ad-hoc community created by the international school, the asked questions provided a deep understanding of the concept of an international school as a unique culture and evidence as to whether systems are in place at the school to foster teacher preparedness within the current ad hoc community. Participants were asked:

1. How do teachers perceive systems such as process and procedures, in the school to have an impact on the home-school partnership?
2. How are teachers informed about the expectations of the home-school partnership?

3. In what ways are the teachers encouraged to foster home-school partnerships?
4. In what ways is the current school culture similar or different to other school cultures?
5. What is the perception held by teachers about preservice or point of instruction experiences or trainings presented that have led to their personal level of preparedness for the home-school partnership at international schools?
6. What preparation has supported the role of teachers to foster the home-school partnership?
7. How comfortable are teachers in fostering the home-school partnership?
8. What is the perception held by teachers of how preparation for the home-school partnership could be improved in international schools?

To gain a vast range of experiences, selection of the participants was because of their diversity in life experiences representing the composition of teachers of the current international school. The international school in this study comprises teachers from nine different countries of origins, with unique teacher preparation backgrounds. The design of the interview was to learn about experiences the participant may have had in current and previous schools to determine if the systems are similar, unique, and transferable.

The interview delved into the formal and informal preparation for the home school partnerships. The open-ended nature of the interview offered each interviewee the opportunity to reflect upon life experiences which may lead to increased levels for preparedness. Accordingly, the interviewees represented diversity in gender and family status, as these elements of diversity may add to teacher preparation.

Finally, participants selected represented novice and experienced teachers at the school to gain varied perspectives on ways in which to support teacher preparation. Data were collected from the narrative account given from the perspective of the teacher to identify ways to support teachers to foster the home-school partnership in an international school community.

### **Purpose and Design of Study**

The central purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and preparation for the home-school partnership of 21 teachers at an international school. Related studies conducted on this topic have been both qualitative and quantitative in nature and pertained to systems in place during university preservice training (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Willemse et al., 2016). Additionally, related studies were limited to the United States, except for Willemse et al. (2016).

The literature review demonstrated far reaching benefits derived from the home-school partnership (Henderson, 1987; Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Mattingly et al., 2002). The literature review also revealed research on teacher preservice preparation is limited to the university setting (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Willemse et al., 2016). Additionally, the literature review documented teachers remain unprepared for the home-school partnership (Epstein, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; MetLife, 2013; Willemse et al., 2016). After extensive review, a gap appeared within the literature on the expansive range of experiences, including formal and informal school preparation and varied life experiences, which may add to teacher preparedness for the home-school partnership.

Other researchers implemented the ethnographic research design to investigate home-school partnerships (Beckett, Glass, & Moreno, 2013; Hasan, 2005; Hicks, 2012; Rodriguez,

2008; Schechter & Sherri, 2009). An ethnography is a time for the researcher to focus attention with “attempts to understand what people do (cultural behavior)” (Spradley & McCurdy, 1980, p. 290). Through employing an ethnographic approach, participants actively assisted the researcher in ascertaining perspectives about obtaining preparation for the home-school partnership. Explicitly, ethnographic research investigates patterns in “the social behaviors of an identifiable group of people” (Creswell, 2012, p. 92).

An ethnographic research design was appropriate for examining this topic as ethnographic research is exploratory. Through the research questions in this study, an ethnographic approach was applied to learn about the intricate nature of and differences in both the formal and informal teacher preparation that may add to teacher preparedness for this partnership. A realist ethnography was employed based on the need to deeply understand the culture formed in part by the perceptions of teachers in an international school and the implication of the international school culture on the home-school partnership.

In summary, the study made “explicit how the group ‘works’” (Creswell, 2012, p. 291). Data were gathered from surveys and interviews. Interviews were scheduled, recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted. An iterative coding and peer debriefing process, described in the data analysis procedures section of this chapter, identified themes and topics.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

This study followed data collection strategies recommended by Creswell (2012). According to Creswell (2012), the first recommendation is to identify the location and for participants to administer a pre-survey to “develop the diversity of the teachers to help give a sample” (p. 146). Particularly, research focused on a single research setting of one international school (see Appendix A).

Following a pre-survey, 21 teachers were selected. Other ethnographies on this topic range from three participants (Schechter & Sherri, 2009) to 15 participants (Rodriguez, 2008). The decision to include at least 20 participant teachers comes from two pieces of information. The first is that at least 20 teachers represent maximum variation (Creswell, 2012). The second recommendation is that at least 20 teachers saturate the categories that the researchers is interested in investigating (Charmaz, 2006).

To explain the rationale for 21 participants, it is necessary to view non-random selection criteria used in this study. Participants included an array of teachers with varied teaching experiences, which is representative of the teacher population at this international school setting. The purposeful sampling employed for this ethnographic research ensured that the interview subjects represent a cross-section of the culture of the school.

The selected participants represent the ratio of gender make-up of the teacher population of the school. The gender make-up of this school in the study is 1:4 males to female. Rationale for this ratio is to determine if preparation for the home-school partnership differed between genders.

Home country nationality represent the teacher make-up of the school. The selected teachers came from nine different countries, representing nine different educational backgrounds: Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, Mozambique, New Zealand, United Kingdom, South Africa, and the United States. The rationale for this distinction is that teacher preparation in different countries may prepare teachers to different degrees for the home-school partnership than others.

Teacher selection was also based on a variety of years of experience as a teacher. The teachers selected have varying levels of experience, from a novice teacher to experienced

teacher. As with other research, the definition of a novice teacher is one with zero to three years teaching experience (Berliner, 1988; Kagan, 1992; Korevaar & Bergen, 1992). Additionally, according to Podsen (2002), teachers who have taught for at least five years are at a point in their careers when they are experienced and considered “teacher specialists” (p. 25). This variance allowed insight into the impact that years of experience on the job has on the preparedness of teachers to foster the home-school partnership.

The teacher selection also aimed to create a balance of years of experience within the school chosen for the study. Rationale for this attribute was to allow the researcher to garner information based on the varying years of experience to assess whether time within the school culture influenced the level of preparedness. As this is an ethnography, being a part of the culture for a longer length of time, may provide increased level of preparedness to foster a partnership.

A final criterion for selection of subjects was based on the teacher having school-age children. Rationale for this criterion is that the research may evidence that being a parent of a school-aged child could add to the level of preparedness to foster the home-school partnership. The exploratory open-ended interview allowed the interviewee to reflect on this attribute.

Purposeful sampling was employed for this research. Creswell (2012) recommended purposeful sampling of respondents as it intentionally creates “a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination” (p. 147). The nature of the interview allowed for exploration into other demographics.

### **Instrumentation**

An interview is a data collection approach instrument used for qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). The application of the germane instrument investigated the research questions

in this ethnographic study, using face-to-face unstructured interviews of 21 teachers. A non-random selection process determined the participants, who also participated voluntarily. The questions posed were open-ended and “few in number intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 190). The audiotaped and transcribed interviews took less than one-hour to conduct.

For this study, in-depth interview questions addressed the research questions. The design of the interview questions was to ascertain an understanding of the formal and informal experiences that lead to teacher preparedness for the home-school partnership. Information obtained from the review of literature provided direction in the creation of the questions and aims to fill the gap in the literature as it pertains to formal and informal preparation that the teacher perceives add to preparedness for the partnership. The research questions (a) established school as a culture, (b) interrogated the unique experiences or trainings of the teachers that prepare for the home-school partnership, and (c) provided an understanding, through the perception of teachers, of ways to improve preparedness for the partnership.

To create questions that would “let the respondent describe his or her experience” (McCracken, 1988, as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 125), the researcher intentionally chose “neutral words and phrases, non-directional language” (Creswell, 2013, p. 124). To establish an understanding of the school as a unique culture, the participants were asked to speak about and compare their experiences within this school and other school systems. The participants were asked to speak about systems they may be aware of which establish an expectation for a home-school partnership. To deeply understand the unique trainings and experiences each subject perceived as adding to their level of preparedness, the participants were asked to speak to questions related to any formal or informal experiences that support their role in fostering the

partnership. As a final set of questions, the interviewees were asked to reflect upon and propose additional systems they perceive could further support teachers in fostering the home-school partnership. The researcher believes the structure and content of the open-ended questions led to a deep understanding of the research questions.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The ethnographic study design applied data collection procedures and protocols as follows: (a) gatekeeper approval, (b) initial survey, (c) expert interview validation, (d) consent from participants, (e) open-ended interviews using the iterative process, (f) transcription, (g) member checking, and (h) coding (Creswell, 2012). As a final analysis, I submitted my findings to a peer debriefer for confirmation of findings (Creswell, 2013).

**Gatekeeper approval.** Data collection began after addressing the gatekeeper. According to Creswell (2012), the gatekeeper is the person the researcher must receive approval from at the cultural site prior to data collection. At the school location, the gatekeeper was the director of the school.

**Initial survey.** Prior to the initial meeting with the participants, data were collected through an initial survey. The initial survey results helped to determine participants for the study. The study employed a non-random selection process (see Appendix A).

**Expert interview validation.** For this ethnographic study, open-ended questions were developed (Creswell, 2012). Research questions were created to add to the body of research about the need for teacher preparation to foster the home-school partnership. The questions were geared to capture the vast array of experiences that may contribute to the preparedness of the international teacher in their effort to foster the home-school partnership and to deeply understand the nature of teacher preparation for developing and sustaining a home-school

partnership in the international school community. Prior to the onset of the interviews, a selected expert panel reviewed and validated the research questions using the tool Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel- (VREP; White & Simon, 2014). The tool was created to measure validity of questions (White & Simon, 2014; Appendix B).

Creswell (2012) suggested the expert panel can provide valuable insight into the wording of questions and assist in revising ensure the desired results. The expert panel included three members of the school community: two holding doctoral degrees and one with expertise in parent-partnerships. One expert was the Director of the school, the gatekeeper as noted above and in the specific community for 10 years. The other experts had experiences at more than 20 different international schools around the world. The experts assisted in refining the interview questions.

**Consent.** Individual participants reviewed the consent form and rationale for research prior to the interview. Applying a protocol introduced by Creswell (2012), interview subjects selected to participate completed a consent form. The participants were given the choice of a personal interview or receiving the questions by email (Creswell, 2012, p. 146). The participants were informed of the study and the time allotted for the personal interview. With participant permission, interviews were recorded. The purpose of audio recordings was for the ethnographer to listen and record the informants with the intent of generating a cultural portrait (Creswell, 2012). The respondents were protected with pseudonyms and given a participant number for confidentiality.

**Interview.** Individual open-ended iterative interviews were conducted with 21 teachers. "Good interview" procedures were followed, as suggested by Creswell (2012), by "staying to the questions and the time specified" (p. 166). The interviewer utilized interview

guides that contain questions consistently asked of all participants. All interviews were held in the same location and were audio recorded and lasted no longer than one hour. The same interview protocol was used for all participants. The questions allowed open-ended conversations to guide the direction of the interview. The interviews were transcribed verbatim soon after the conclusion of the interviews. Reflective listening and non-directive probes were employed to encourage participants to communicate their deep thinking regarding each question (Creswell, 2013). The individual open-ended guiding questions are in Appendix C.

**Transcription.** A transcriptionist was selected to transcribe the audio versions of the interviews. The transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement. The transcriptionist followed the protocol to transcribe and return the files to the researcher upon completion of the transcription.

**Member checking.** Lincoln and Guba (1985) described member checks as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” in a study (p. 314). Following the interview, subjects were invited to provide member checking to confirm the interviewee’s view of the written analyses and make corrections if information was missing (Creswell, 2012).

**Coding.** Following transcription, the researcher engaged in an iterative coding process using the NVivo coding system (Castleberry, 2014) to garner a holistic view of the group. Creswell (2013) referred to the process as a “data analysis spiral” (p. 182). Following the initial coding, a reevaluation and analysis of the data guided findings of relationships and differences between categories. The spiraling technique continued through several iterations until the research deemed accurately represented. Coding assisted in developing themes in the data to compile “a holistic cultural portrait of the group” (Creswell, 2012, p. 96). The goal of coding was to document knowledge of teacher preparedness for the home-school partnership in the

culture of an international school community. Through coding, the researcher will add to the body of knowledge regarding formal and informal teacher preparation.

**Peer debriefer.** Following the coding process, I submitted my findings to a peer debriefer (Creswell, 2013). Mulvihill and Swaminathan (2016) referred to a peer debriefer as a critical friend. This person was familiar with the context and content of the research and provided critical feedback pertaining to the findings from coding. The peer debriefer served the purpose of questioning and authenticating findings.

The data collection and analysis process aimed to reach saturation. Charmaz (2006) described saturation as when data collection stops, as all categories of interested have been debriefed. Notably, through applying deep interviewing techniques using non-random selection of participants, representation of the cultural makeup of the school in the research, expert evaluation screening of questions, in-depth open-ended interviews, member checking, coding, and the use of a peer debriefer, the researcher believes that saturation was reached. The qualitative data complements the quantitative evidence available while enriching the research on teacher preparation for the home-school partnership.

### **Identification of Attributes**

Attributes defining this study include a definition of the term parents as partners. For this study, the term aligned with the definition used by Every Student Succeeds Act (E.S. S. Act, 2015). The Act stated that participation of parents must be regular, two-way, and include communication regarding student academics and school activities. The law also was created for ensuring and encouraging parents to play a role as partners with the school. Additionally, the law extended the responsibility of the school to encourage parent participation in decision-making and on committees to assist in the education of their child.

## **Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

The researcher recognized that there were certain limitations inherent in conducting this research study. The limitations were due to the feeling of job insecurity at the school and the lack of freedom for teachers to speak their mind with administration. As a previous quasi-administrator at the site, this could have had impact on the responses, as participants could provide false information to create a more positive picture of the school.

The limitations were as follows:

1. Some respondents were response bias, as they wanted to project a positive impression of the school.
2. Some respondents were response bias on audio, as they did not trust the confidentiality of the method.
3. Some respondents shared responses impacted by their personal relationship with leadership and have greater access to expected cultural behaviors.

The study occurred in the international school where the researcher was a quasi-administrator, making the setting one in which the researcher had been fully embedded in the community for four years.

Due to the nature and intent of the study, there was purposeful selection of participants to represent the diversity of the teacher population. Moreover, because of these factors, the following boundaries delimited the study:

1. The study was delimited to one international school setting.
2. It was further delimited to non-random selection.

## **Expected Findings**

The expected findings for the research questions are based on the prior research of home-school partnerships. Three research questions, answered from the perspective of the teacher, guided this ethnographic study. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) documentation in law as a part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act defined parent involvement as requiring opportunities for parents to engage in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication with schools around students (Section 910 (32). EA). Partnerships require two-way communication. The expected findings of the interviews regarding systems and expectations pertaining to the home-school partnership was that the teachers would understand the expectations regarding information disseminated from the school to the home, but the teachers would have limited information as to the systems and expectations of the teacher regarding communication from the home to the school.

Researchers have substantiated that there was not enough preservice preparation focused on parent-school relationships within the preservice teacher training (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005). Kraft and Dougherty (2013) recognized that without consistent and systemic preparation, teachers offer haphazard styles of communication to parents. Sheldon (2005) identified the need for a clear direction of the partnership; systematic effort and support; stronger implementation displaying that the school values and supports of having the partnership; preparation for the partnership; and emphasis on educators understanding the community and their values. Based on the prior research, it was expected that participants would not have a clear and consistent understanding or systemic preparation and provide haphazard style of communication and style of partnerships with the parents.

The parent perception of boundaries could lead families to feel like outsiders of the school community (Cunningham, 2014). Based on this evidence, it was expected teachers whom are also parents of school age children may have had a greater preparedness for the partnership as they serve dual roles in the community. It was expected that these parents, who are also teachers, may have experienced being an insider or an outsider first hand.

### **Ethical Issues**

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) introduced a six key principles framework for research ethics. The six key principles ensured (a) quality and integrity, (b) informed consent, (c) respect for confidentiality and anonymity, (d) voluntary participation and avoidance of harm, and (e) confirmation that the research is independent and impartial. By following this framework (Boddy et al., 2010), the actions by the researcher demonstrates consideration to ethical issues. The steps that follow were taken before, during, and after research.

Ethical issues are present in any form of research. To ensure integrity and quality, the research study was presented to the School Director, as the gatekeeper of the culture, to determine that the study would provide valuable information to the school and the body of research available. Three school-based experts vetted the research questions. After consultation with the experts, edits were made to the questions and the interviews were completed with the improved version. Interviewees were specifically identified for the research to gain an in-depth and comprehensive view and understanding of the culture of the school.

To ensure that participants understand that their participation is confidential and voluntary, they received an invitation to participate. After expressing interest, participants received a consent form with further information about the study, their participation, and the

steps to ensure confidentiality. The participants all signed, returned, and received a copy of consent forms prior to an interview. Once at the interview, time was taken to review their participation expectations and allowed for a change in their participation, if they chose. During the interview, an audio recorder was used, and participants were reminded of their anonymity in the study through the extra measures of deletion of audio following the transcription and replacement of any identifiable answers in the transcript.

Participation in the research study did not put the participants at risk of harm or discomfort. In this study, there was negligible chance of physical harm. Safeguards were put into place to reduce the risk of possible psychological distress, invasion of privacy, protection of confidentiality, or social disadvantages. It was imperative to protect the rights of participants by maintaining privacy and confidentiality. All participants had the freedom to discontinue participation at any time during the study without reprisal. Additionally, their involvement in the study was not related to their placement in position at the school. The participants were reminded that the interview and study is within a peer-to-peer relationship.

For the research, conflicts of interest and partiality to be explicit to the participants, the researcher practiced reflexivity through statements of bias and experience that the researcher brings to the study (Creswell, 2012). Importantly, it was critical to avoid deception or withholding of information during this study. The research study was guided by the new information brought by the participant throughout the open-ended interview.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

An ethnographic study occurred to investigate the perception of teachers and their preparation for the home-school partnership in an international school setting. The premise that an international school is responsible for implementing systems to set parameters for the home-

school partnership and for the sustainability of the partnership provided the basis for the rationale for the methodological decisions for this study. The three broad research questions were presented to further highlight the goal of the ethnographic study. The purpose and design of the study may help expose the various complexities included in this ethnography, including the extant review of literature, which found the need for further investigation into teacher preparation for the home-school partnership. The research population provides an explanation for the decision to focus on one international school setting in which to gather data. The non-random selection procedures were used to determine the participants in the study. Proof of validity for the interview process was explained, as was the validity for data collection and analysis in this chapter. Interview data was gathered concerning factors that influenced teacher preparedness.

This chapter also explains how the interviews were analyzed to determine common themes throughout the school culture. Following the delineation of the research, a consideration of limitations and expected findings of this ethnographic research is stated, as well as how potential ethical issues were addressed for this study. The methodological design and methods described in this chapter, which are grounded in contemporary research techniques derived from extant literature and prior research, were found to be appropriate to the research study. Data analysis and results will be illuminated. Inevitably, this ethnographic study yields constructive information regarding the perspectives of international school teachers about their preparedness to foster home-school partnerships.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of conducting this ethnographic study was to explore and understand the complex phenomena, both of the formal and the informal teacher preparation, that may contribute to teacher preparedness for the home-school partnership. Use of a realist ethnography provided a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of teachers regarding the home-school partnership in an international school and the implication of the international school culture on the home-school partnership. Themes and topics emerged through data gathered from surveys and interviews. This study will contribute to research by expanding the existing body of research to include formal and informal teacher acquisition of knowledge leading to increased preparedness in multiple countries of origin. Additionally, this study was designed to ascertain pre-service experiences and experiences obtained beyond the pre-service training for teachers as was the limitation addressed in the prior studies. This study expands current research to investigate other formal and informal preparation received by teachers in both pre and post service timeframes. The findings from the study may serve to improve teacher preparation for the home-school partnership.

The definition provided by Spradley and McCurdy (1980) guided the selection of an ethnography approach for this research: an ethnography provides a time for the researcher to focus attention with “attempts to understand what people do (cultural behavior)” (p. 290). Through employing an ethnographic approach, participants actively assisted the researcher in ascertaining perspectives about obtaining preparation for the home-school partnership. Explicitly, ethnographic research investigates patterns in “the social behaviors of an identifiable group of people” (Creswell, 2012, p. 92).

This ethnographic approach to research involved open-ended interviews with 21 participant teachers. The researcher engaged in conversations regarding teacher perception of the lived experience of each participant when engaging in the home-school partnership. Open-ended research questions were created to guide the data collection through the lens of Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1989), Symbolic Interactionism theory (Blumer, 1969) and Systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1967). Additionally, the interview format was applied to gain a deeper understanding of the role of the educators and greater school system to foster the home-school partnership. Themes emerged from the interviews using coding. To conduct research on teacher thinking, a qualitative study proved to be the best fit for a study of this nature.

The researcher has been an educator for over 20 years, receiving master's degrees in education in both Texas and Alaska; teaching in schools in California, Texas, and Alaska; as well as teaching and leadership in international schools in three different countries: Lesotho; Mozambique; and Guatemala. Each location presented a different culture within the school and within the host countries of the school. It was these unique experiences and lived experiences that provided the intentional research interest and motivation of the researcher.

An ethnographic research approach served the purpose of allowing the researcher to gain insights into the lived experiences of the variety of teachers who work in these international school sites. The researcher worked as a curriculum coach for 4 years at the research school site. As such, the position of curriculum coach was not a manager or evaluator of any of the participants in the study, yet instead served as a collaborator, providing the researcher the opportunity to develop the trust needed for the ethnographic experience (Råheim et al., 2016). In this position, the participants acknowledged they had nothing to lose or gain from participation. The role of curriculum coach gave the researcher experience working with parents and teachers

in various capacities, such as in the strategic planning process, to form the home-school partnership. It was within this capacity that the researcher met with parents to help develop opportunities for their relationship development with the teachers. Additionally, the researcher had the opportunity to meet with the teachers on a weekly basis. In the capacity of the role as curriculum coach, the researcher was able to take part in conversations with all strategic partners of the school: administration; teachers; parents; and students. Importantly, the conversations and suggestions focused on methods to promote systemic changes to improve teaching for improved students learning. The position as curriculum coach created a collegial dynamic between researcher and participants and fostered an opportunity to engage in this research.

The following problem statement guided the study: the nature of teacher preparation for the home-school partnerships in international school communities is not known. Three research questions were developed to address the problem:

1. How do teachers perceive systems in the school to have an impact on the home-school partnership?
2. What is the perception held by teachers about experiences or trainings provided to them that have led to their personal level of preparedness for the home-school partnership at international schools?
3. What is the perception held by teachers on how preparation for the home-school partnership could be improved in international schools?

Data were collected from open-ended interviews where rich descriptions of lived experiences were garnered to answer the research questions.

Chapter 4 provides the findings of the study completed for this research, including a detailed table of demographics of participants (Table 1) and descriptive data in narrative form.

The researcher then documents interviews following the data collection activities cited by Creswell (2012). Next, the analysis of the data is interpreted with each emergent theme aligned to the research question it answered. A detailed description of the data is presented to display answers to the research questions guiding the study. Finally, each theme is summarized to display the results as it pertained to a particular research question. A summary of the results is provided.

### **Descriptive Data**

In the initial stages of research, all 220 qualified teachers of the school research site were sent a Google survey. Volunteers completed a survey regarding demographics (see Appendix A). The results of the surveys were analyzed to select a representation of the research site population with regards to (a) country of origin, (b) years of experience as a teacher, (c) years at the site, (d) gender, and (e) whether the interviewee had school-aged children.

Purposeful sampling was employed for this ethnographic research to ensure that the interview subjects represented a cross-section of the culture of the school. Using a non-random selection criterion, the final 21 participants are representative of the teacher population at this international school setting. Based on the findings, 21 participants were selected to become a part of the study. Of the 21 candidates, one hundred percent of those selected agreed to participate in the study. All the participants remained as participants from the beginning of the initial survey to the member checking of their personal open-ended interview statements.

The group contained six males and 15 females. The participants represented nine different nationalities. The group contained ten teachers with school-aged children and 11 teachers without school-aged children. The group represented experience at the site ranging

from one year to 15 years. The group also represented novice and experienced teachers in a breakdown of eight novice teachers and 13 expert teachers.

Table 1

*Demographics of Study Participants N = 21.*

Participant	Pseudonym	Gender	Country of Origin	Parent of School Age Children	Years of Teaching at Site	Teaching Level
P1	Andy	M	United States	Yes	3	E
P2	Cate	F	Mozambique	Yes	1	N
P3	Charlotte	F	South Africa	No	2	N
P4	Gwen	F	Brazil	No	1	N
P5	Hayley	F	India	Yes	4	E
P6	Kelly	F	Canada	No	2	E
P7	Karen	F	United Kingdom	No	2	N
P8	Liz	F	New Zealand	Yes	1	E
P9	Louis	M	South Africa	Yes	9	E
P10	Lucy	F	South Africa	No	2	E
P11	Lynn	F	Australia	Yes	7	E
P12	Mark	M	United Kingdom	Yes	3	E
P13	Natalie	F	Mozambique	No	2	N
P14	Nate	M	Australia	Yes	1	N
P15	Paula	F	United States	No	8	E
P16	Penny	F	United States	No	2	N
P17	Peter	M	United Kingdom	No	2	E
P18	Rachel	F	United Kingdom	Yes	2	E
P19	Rebecca	F	South Africa	No	15	E
P20	Sam	M	India	Yes	4	E
P21	Theresa	F	South Africa	No	1	N

*Note.* N = a novice teacher defined as one with zero to three years teaching experience (Berliner, 1988; Kagan, 1992; Korevaar & Bergen, 1992). E = Experienced teachers are teachers who have taught for at least five years (Arani, 2017; Michel, 2013; Podsen, 2002).

To ensure confidentiality, each participant selected a pseudonym and each participant received a participant number. For example, the first participant interviewed chose the pseudonym “Andy,” assigned as P1. Table 1 displays the demographic information of each participant in the final sample.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

This ethnographic design applied data collection procedures and protocols as follows: (a) gatekeeper approval, (b) initial survey, (c) expert interview validation, (d) consent from participants, (e) open-ended interviews using the iterative process, (f) transcription, (g) member checking, and (h) coding (Creswell, 2012). At the research school location, the gatekeeper is the director of the school (Creswell, 2012). The director is the person the researcher must receive approval from at the cultural site prior to data collection. After receiving approval from the director, the researcher began data collection. Demographic data were collected through an initial survey. The initial survey results determined the participants through a non-random selection process. For this ethnographic study, open-ended questions were developed (Creswell, 2012). Research questions were created to contribute to the literature addressing a need for teacher preparation to foster the home-school partnership. The questions were developed to capture the array of formal and informal experiences that may contribute to the preparedness of the international teacher in fostering the home-school partnership and to comprehend the nature of teacher preparation for developing and sustaining a home-school partnership in the international school community.

Prior to the onset of the interviews, a selected expert panel reviewed and validated the research questions using the tool Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel- (VREP) (White & Simon, 2014). The tool “is designed to measure face validity, construct validity, and

content validity” (White & Simon, 2014, p. 1; Appendix B). Creswell (2012) suggested an expert panel can provide valuable insight into the wording of interview questions and assist in revising ensure the desired results. The expert panel included three members of the school community: two holding doctoral degrees and one with expertise in parent-partnerships. One expert is the Director of the school, the gatekeeper, as noted above and a member of the specific community for ten years. The other experts have experiences at more than 20 different international schools around the world. The experts assisted the researcher in refining the interview questions.

Individual participants reviewed the consent form and rationale for research prior to the interview. Following Creswell’s (2012) protocol, interview subjects completed a consent form. The participants chose between a personal interview or receiving the questions by email as suggested by Creswell (2012). Each participant chose to be a part of a personal interview. The subjects were informed of the study and the time allotted of one hour for the personal interview. With participant permission, interviews were recorded. The purpose of audio recordings was for the ethnographer to listen and record the informants with the intent of generating a cultural portrait (Creswell, 2012).

The respondents self-selected pseudonyms to ensure they were protected with confidentiality. Each participant received a participant number. Individual open-ended iterative interviews were conducted with 21 teachers. “Good interview” procedures were followed, “staying to the questions and the time specified” (Creswell, 2012, p. 166). Interviews were performed using an interview guide that contain questions consistently asked of all participants. All interviews were held in the same office location, were audio recorded, and lasted no longer than one hour. The same interview protocol was used for all participants. The questions allowed

for open-ended conversations to guide the direction of the interview (see Appendix C). Use of reflective listening and non-directive probes encouraged participants to communicate their full thinking regarding each question (Creswell, 2013).

The interviews were then transcribed verbatim immediately after the interviews concluded. A transcriptionist transcribed the audio versions of the interviews after signing a confidentiality agreement. Following the interview, subjects were invited to provide member checking to confirm the interviewee's view of the written analyses and make corrections if information is missing (Creswell, 2012). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described member checks as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314) in a study. Each participant provided member checking of their transcripts.

Following transcription, the researcher engaged in an iterative coding process to garner a holistic view of the group. Following the initial coding, a reevaluation and analysis of the data guided findings of relationships and differences between categories. The spiraling technique continued through several iterations until the research was deemed accurately represented. Coding allowed the researcher to develop themes in the data to compile "a holistic cultural portrait of the group" (Creswell, 2012, p. 96). The goal of coding is to document knowledge of teacher preparedness for the home-school partnership in the culture of an international school community. With the results obtained through coding, the researcher intends to add to the body of educational literature regarding formal and informal teacher preparation.

The data collection and analysis process aimed to reach saturation. Charmaz (2006) described saturation as when data collection stops, as all categories of interest have been debriefed. Notably, through applying deep interviewing techniques using non-random selection of participants, representation of the cultural makeup of the school in the research, expert

evaluation screening of questions, in-depth open-ended interviews, member checking and coding, the researcher believes saturation was reached.

**Validation of themes.** An additional process of confirming validity of the data was met using a peer debriefer (Creswell, 2013). The peer debriefer provided an opportunity for the researcher to discuss biases and assumptions as part of the data collection process. The peer debriefer served to share interpretations of the data and add validity to the findings engaging evaluative discussions around the coding process and coding results. With critical feedback the researcher returned to the transcripts and interrogated themes across demographics and participants. The recordings were listened to again and the transcripts were reread multiple times to capture the rich details of the interviews and meanings expressed by the participants. It was from the process of returning to the initial interviews and the insight of the debriefer that the final detailed list of codes and sub codes were created (Table 2). The debriefer acknowledged agreement with the findings reached through coding.

Table 2

*Coding System.*

Code	Sub Code
Expectations	Familiar with the expectations at current school
	Not familiar with expectations
	Familiar with the expectation at previous school
	Learned about expectation from a colleague
	Learned about expectations through trial and error
Systems	No systems in place at current school
	No system in place at previous school
	Systems at current school
	Systems in place at other schools
	Teachers offer the same partnerships to parents
University Training	Learned about expectation from university
	Did not learn about the partnership in university
	Applying university learning to current culture

(Continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

*Coding System.*

Code	Sub Code
Formal and Informal Preparation	Received other formal training
	Informal experiences that led to preparation
	Begin a parent let to informal experiences
	Parents who do not mention that that this lead to experience
	Trial and error led to experience
	Years of teaching led to experience.
	Has not seen another parent conference
Comfort Level	Has seen another parent conference
	Comfortable fostering the partnership
	Not confident fostering the partnership
Improvements	Mentioned first few years of teaching
	Year in teaching that the teacher felt confident
	Improve first years of teaching in practice or at school
	Improve by educating on culture
	Improve through sharing parent conferencing practice
	Improve beginning of each year

**Coding and interpretation of the data.** Following the interviews and transcription of the 21 participant interviews in the study, each interview was encoded using the NVivo coding system (Castleberry, 2014). Codes were identified to delineate responses to questions asked during the open-ended interviews. Additional codes were identified to delineate responses in relation to the demographics of the participants. Demographic coding included (a) country of origin, (b) years of experience as a teacher, (c) years at the site, (d) gender, and (e) whether the interviewee had school-aged children. Questions were coded by: (a) systems and expectations, (b) preparation, (c) level of comfort, and (d) ways to improve the partnership. Themes emerged from the interviews using the Matrix coding. Table 2 displays the coding system utilized.

**Description of Participants and Demographic Setting**

Brief biographies of each of the participants are presented in this study. The researcher had varying degrees of contact with the participants over the past three years. Each participant

initially met the researcher at the research site. Due to the researchers varying degree of contact with participants, there are varied lengths and details in the biographies. Information regarding the participants' demographic data is in Table 1.

**P1-Andy.** Andy is American and is an experienced teacher having taught in the United States in both rural and urban settings as well as in international schools. The researcher has worked with Andy for three years and had many interactions with him as a teacher. Andy is a parent of older children and brings this experience to his teaching. His strength and contribution to the international school is in his relationships with students and parents. The most memorable experience the researcher has of this teacher is viewing his personal connection with students with special needs. Andy demonstrated a clear understanding of needs of the students and reached out to the parents prior to the onset of the school year. He expressed excitement to engage in the conversation about school systems and the home-school partnership.

**P2-Cate.** Cate is from Mozambique, where this research site is located, but identifies as being from a different African country where she was raised. The researcher worked with Cate for one year. Cate is a primary school teacher. Cate is a very passionate and compassionate teacher, always sharing touching stories about her students with other teachers during break time. She is a teacher who hugs her students at the start and end of the school day and is often seen talking to parents in her classroom and in the halls. Cate speaks the host country language and represents the host culture of the school which allows a greater connection to a broader range of families. While she is connected to other staff, she has been told many times by colleagues that she is too friendly and emotional with the students and parent community and should tone it down. Accordingly, Cate was nervous at first to open up in the interview, but quickly warmed up and divulged her honest feelings.

**P3-Charlotte.** Charlotte is South African, but she has lived in the host country for many years, having been brought there by her parents when she was young. She is multilingual in Afrikaans, English and Portuguese, the language of the host country. The researcher initially met Charlotte four years earlier when Charlotte was new to education. She had served the role as a teacher assistant for many years while she completed her teaching degree and was eager to begin her teaching profession. At the time of the interview, she was newly certified and had her own classroom. Her position at the school is as a support teacher. Due to the school dynamics and systems, Charlotte does not have regular parent contact. She has class size of less than seven students and students typically stay with her for less than a year during their transition to school. At the time of data collection, Charlotte felt she did not have much to offer to the topic and was worried that she was not the right candidate to interview. After reassurance, she expressed interest and willingness to engage in the conversation.

**P4- Gwen.** Gwen is a certified teacher from Brazil. She joined the school the previous year, but she had taught in other settings within the country. This was her first teaching job in a nondenominational school and held lower expectations of her students than her other teammates. Thus, she did not have a positive relationship with her teammates. Gwen preferred the mission and vision of the parochial schools that completely embraced the families in the education process of the students. She was excited to engage in this conversation about the home-school connection as she felt she had a lot to offer to the discussion and ideas to improve the systems at the school.

**P5-Hayley.** Hayley is from India and is a high school teacher. The researcher initially met Hayley when she joined the school four years earlier. Hayley is meek mannered and remains outwardly positive about the school and community, reticent to disclose any negative

feelings about any topic. She had taught in other international schools prior to this posting. She is a parent of students in the school and has experienced frustrations with teachers of her children, but she chose not to confront the issues. Students and staff well love her alike and administrators consider her hard working. Hayley was accepting of being a part of the interview conversation, but explained she was reticence to share due to her fear that if she mentioned anything negative, others would find out. Although she was informed multiple times about the confidentiality involved in the interview, many of her true feelings were only voiced after the recording was turned off. She allowed her truth to be recorded after the fact and while she was member checking her transcript.

**P6-Kelly.** Kelly is from Canada and joined the school two years earlier as the school support teacher. In her position, Kelly has many opportunities to partner with parents and other teachers. She had been in approximately seven other international schools and often shares her knowledge and experiences of these schools with fellow teachers and administration. Kelly has mentioned many times how she sees room for improvement regarding the parent partnership and has offered to work with high level systems at the school to improve practice. For her first year of employment, her offers made to administration were not accepted. In her second year, she was able to collaborate with administration to conduct professional development with staff and parents on the parent partnership. Kelly provided workshops that were well received by administration, parents, and teachers. Parents often recognized Kelly as their advocate. Kelly found the possibility of this research an in-road to making the school better and for improved parent-teacher relationship.

**P7-Karen.** Karen is from the United Kingdom, but identifies as African, having grown up in Africa. The researcher initially met Karen when she joined the school two years earlier.

Karen had taught at other international schools in Africa prior to coming to this site. Karen collaborates less with colleagues than other teachers at the site. When the researcher first approached Karen through a survey, Karen expressed that she had never considered the parent-teacher partnership as something to work on and felt she did not need to make any effort beyond the school requirements. She agreed to the interview, but she was by far the most contentious of participants.

**P8-Liz.** Liz is from New Zealand. The researcher initially met Liz when she interviewed for her position at the school a year earlier. It was evident in her job interview that she would bring to the school a wealth of knowledge about teaching children. Liz had previously taught in both New Zealand and in England. She attributed her strength in teaching to the teacher preparation program in New Zealand which requires teachers to understand the local Maori culture. She has used her understanding of Maori culture as an entry point to understand other cultures. This cultural awareness, she feels, helps her with empathy toward students and families in international schools. Liz is a mother of students at the school and explained how her children have very different relationships with their teachers. She was excited about the interview and the research topic and was very eager to share her formal experiences from the university in New Zealand, since this is where she credits her home-school partnership training.

**P9-Louis.** Louis is from South Africa and had been at the school since 2007. Louis is a parent of students at the school. Prior to the research site, Louis taught science in two other countries in Africa. He also taught in India and brought this breadth of experience to the school. The researcher initially met Louis four years earlier and had multiple opportunities to see his work with students and parents. Parents were active participants in his classroom, on field trips, and his school lessons. He communicated regularly with parents to inform them about what the

students were learning. Louis was excited for the conversation and mentioned that he needed parents support to educate students. He found the topic of parent-teacher relationship and possible improvement intriguing and necessary.

**P10-Lucy.** Lucy is from South Africa. The researcher initially met Lucy when she joined the school two years earlier. Lucy transferred to the research site school from another international school nearby and continued to have strong ties to her previous school. She would often compare the two schools and found her previous school had boundaries with the parents that she appreciated. Lucy was adamant that when the students were in school they were her responsibility and she did not feel it was necessary to involve the parents in issues that she believed she should handle. Lucy stated that she is reserved with information to parents as she does not understand what they want to hear. She considered the host country her permanent home. Lucy was reserved about the interview stating that she did not feel she had anything to offer to the topic beyond what she knows from her own classroom.

**P11-Lynn.** Lynn is from Australia and this current school was her first international school experience. She was considered a local hire at the site, as her spouse was native to the host country. She was the mother of young children who recently joined the school community. The researcher initially met Lynn four years earlier and engaged in consistent collaboration while planning for instruction. Lynn was strongest when she worked as a part of a team of teachers. As a continual learner and a very jovial teacher, she prospered when she was able to follow the lead of another teacher, who tended to be a more experienced teammate. Lynn presented herself as a caring teacher and was admired by parents and students for the connections she made with others. Lynn looked forward to the interview, as she felt she could learn from the conversation and improve her practice.

**P12-Mark.** Mark is from the United Kingdom. The researcher initially met Mark when he joined the school three years earlier. Mark had difficulty when he first arrived in the school and the country as it was his first experience living abroad from the United Kingdom. After intense support by friends, he settled in to the school. Teachers, parents, and students like Mark. He has fun in his class and enjoys collaboration with peers. He is open and candid with his parents when difficulties arise. Notably, he is one of the few male teachers in Primary School, which parents appreciated. Mark believes the school could improve by implementing systems, including new teacher orientation that introduce the new staff to the school mission, vision, and philosophical beliefs.

**P13-Natalie.** Natalie is from Mozambique. The researcher initially met Natalie when she joined the school two years earlier as an elective teacher. This was Natalie's first teaching job. She is one of the youngest members on staff. Teachers and students love her, but as an elective teacher rarely found the opportunity to meet with parents. At the time of data collection, Natalie stated that she was beginning to question ways she could be more involved with the parent community and said she had begun to pose questions to her principal. She believes she still does not clearly understand the systems at the school. Natalie was very excited about the opportunity to be a part of the study and felt the school had so much potential to grow from teacher input.

**P14-Nate.** Nate is from Australia. The researcher initially met Nate when he joined the school a year earlier. Nate is a novice teacher in both the classroom and the local curriculum, but he had been a teacher assistant for years. When he arrived at the site he struggled to fit in to his teaching team. He did not seem to have the knowledge he needed to work independently. Recognizing this, the school provided him a teaching coach to work with him through the week.

Nate admits that he continues to struggle with his relationship with parents. He was eager to participate in the interview to share information about his personal experience. Nate shared that he had many ideas that would have helped in his transition to the school.

**P15-Paula.** Paula is American but identifies as Portuguese. The researcher initially met Paula four years earlier and they had many opportunities to collaborate. Paula joined the school eight years earlier, and this was her first overseas teaching experience. She had a child in the school and often shared both positive and negative feelings about her own parent-teacher relationship from her parent perspective. Paula is very friendly with staff, parents, and students. Paula was happy to engage in the conversation about the home-school connection, as she believed this was her strength as an educator.

**P16-Penny.** Penny is American and new to self-contained classroom teaching. She had taught at two other international schools prior to her arrival to the research site. In her previous posts, she was a teacher assistant and an elective teacher. The researcher initially met Penny when she became a teacher at the school two years earlier. She often expressed concerns about her inability to connect with her teaching team and the parents of her students. She stated that she was shy and that parent meetings were stressful, as she did not know what the parents expected. At the time of data collection, Penny was continuing her teaching contract with the school, but still worried about her abilities as a teacher. She mentioned that she did not feel comfortable asking the principal questions as she thought she should already have the answers and did not want to look incompetent or lose her job. During the interview, Penny cried often as she felt she was revealing many of her insecurities. Penny enjoyed the conversation and mentioned it was the first time she was able to tell someone her story.

**P17-Peter.** Peter is from the United Kingdom. Prior to arriving at the site, he had taught in other international schools in Africa. The researcher initially met Peter when he joined the school two years earlier. The researcher had many opportunities to support Peter when he had parent complaints about his teaching, as well as student complaints about his personality. Peter was very strict in the classroom and found the students to be less than motivated. He compared his current students to the students from the other international schools and found the current parents to pander too much to the students. Peter was often frustrated with the school. While Peter seemed to express more negative feelings about the home-school connection than other participants, he was open to the conversation and interview.

**P18-Rachel.** Rachel is from the United Kingdom. Her only other teaching experience came from the public schools in England. The researcher initially met Rachel when she joined the school two years earlier. She came to the school with her two children. One of the children had continual difficulties in school with his peers and Rachel spent much time speaking to his teacher about ways to support her child. Rachel remained frustrated at the time of this interview, as she found the teachers had pigeonholed her child as a disruptive student. This caused Rachel conflict with others on the teaching staff. In her previous schools, Rachel explained how systems were rigid with a lot of rules to follow. While her previous school did not offer her opportunities to try new ideas in her classroom, she appreciated knowing the expectations of the principal. Rachel was very vocal through the years about not understanding the expectation administration had of her. She was continually trying new practices to engage parents, but found that the school did not appreciate, nor support, her ideas. She often mentioned changing her practice and abandoning ideas when they did not succeed. Rachel spoke frequently about the apathy of other colleagues to connect with parents. Parents in her classroom appreciated her

willingness to reach out to them, and this led to the development of personal relationships with parents. Rachel frequently invited parents into her classroom and in return they invited her to their homes after school hours. Rachel was eager to engage in this research and had hopes that the administration would learn from the ideas and outcomes of the research to change practice at the school.

**P19-Rebecca.** Rebecca is South African, but she identifies as British. She has been at the school for fifteen years. The researcher met Rebecca four years earlier and had numerous opportunities to collaborate with Rebecca on projects. Rebecca retains the history of the school because of the length of time she had been at the site. Although she used her knowledge of the history to change practice in her classroom, she was less than willing to share her knowledge with others.

**P20-Sam.** Sam is from India and came to the school four years earlier with two school-aged children. Sam had taught at other international schools prior to arriving at the research site. Sam is a quiet man and works hard in his classroom to educate and excite his students. While he has the ability to be a leader in the school, he prefers to remain a classroom teacher without extra responsibilities. Students find him to be gentle, but strict and helpful whenever he is approached. Throughout the years, the researcher had many opportunities to have conversations with Sam. Within personal conversations, Sam would express his frustration with school policy as well as with the teachers of his children. When it came to the interview, Sam would only say positive remarks, yet grimaced at the researcher indicating that he may not have voiced his real concerns. When the recording was turned off, Sam shared a difficult story about a time the teacher told him that his child was not a thinker. He expressed his feelings of hurt to the comment, yet he stated that he did not confront the teacher. He explained that he was shocked that anyone, especially a

teacher, would label a child in such a way. At the end of the interview, Sam allowed his story about hurt to be recorded and transcribed. He also provided many ways teachers could be trained to not say the types of comments said to him as a parent.

**P21-Theresa.** Theresa is from South Africa and has two children at the school. The researcher initially met Theresa when she joined the school a year earlier. This was her first international school experience. Theresa was very friendly with teachers, parents, and students. She stated that she treated parents as she expected to be treated as a parent. She believed that she changed as a teacher when she became a parent. She mentioned often how every teacher does something different in the school with regards to developing relationships with parents and that it was hard for her to understand what was expected of her as a parent and as a teacher. Theresa was willing to engage in the interview even though she stated that she would not be around to reap the benefits. Accordingly, Theresa was very open and honest in the interview.

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

Research evidences the causal relationship between home-school partnership and student benefits (Henderson, 1987; Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Mattingly et al., 2002). Educational policy requires schools to provide opportunities for the home-school partnership (Anfara & Mertens, 2008; Goals 2000, 1994; National Parent Teacher Association, 1997; No Child Left Behind, 2002). Educators desire and require preparation to improve their practice in forming the vital home-school partnership (MetLife, 2013), yet universities for the preservice teachers do not offer preparation for developing and fostering of the home-school partnership (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Willemsse et al., 2016). It is critical to gain knowledge of teacher preparation for the home-school partnership to support this area of the profession that has been determined to impact

student learning and teacher satisfaction (Henderson, 1987; Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Mattingly et al., 2002; MetLife, 2013).

A lack of teacher preparation for the home-school connection could have a greater consequence in the ad hoc transient community developed in International Schools where the core of the community relationship is the defined by the school (Gellar, 1996; Kester et al., 2007). In the International School environment teachers come from diverse teacher preparation programs and educational systems. In this study, teachers represent nine different teacher preparation programs. The knowledge of the education systems or other formal and informal experiences that international teachers bring to the international community, can guide systems of improvement to teacher preparation processes. A qualitative ethnography that documents the lived experiences of the diverse teaching population can lead to improvements in the home-school partnership.

**Interpretation of themes from research question one.** The purpose of Research Question one was to understand systems in place at the school and to further understand expectations established by the school for the home-school partnership.

The perception of the teachers regarding the systems in place and expectations of the school fell into five different themes:

- Familiar with the expectations at current school,
- When familiar, cited school to home (not home to school) expectations,
- Not familiar with expectations,
- Familiar with the expectation at previous school, and
- Expectations were part of their professional conduct (Table 3).

Table 3

*Expectations.*

Participant number and Pseudonym	Familiar with the expectations at current school	When familiar, cited school to home expectations only	Not familiar with expectations	Familiar with the expectation at previous school	Implied through Professional conduct expectations
P1: Andy			x		
P2: Cate			x		
P3: Charlotte			x		
P4: Gwen			x	x	
P5: Hayley	x	x			
P6: Kelly			x		
P7: Karen					x
P8: Liz	x	x		x	
P9: Louis			x		
P10: Lucy			x	x	
P11: Lynn					
P12: Mark			x		
P13: Natalie			x		
P14: Nate			x		
P15: Paula					x
P16: Penny			x		
P17: Peter			x		
P18: Rachel			x	x	
P19: Rebecca					x
P20: Sam	x	x			x
P21: Theresa			x		

Three teachers stated they were clear on the expectations. They cited an understanding of practices specific to calendaring, emails, grade book and progress reports, and conferences. The teachers were clear on the expectation to communicate from school to home. This type of communication does not encompass the two-way school-to-home and home-to-school communication needed to form a partnership (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). 14 teachers said they were not clear on the expectations for the partnership; specifically, two teachers stated that they had no idea what the expectations were and wait to be told by administration as the need arises.

Four teachers stated that other international schools had explicit expectations. Four teachers stated it was implicit in their role as a teacher, as if a professional code, to bridge communication with parents and the expectations were not based on the school, but implicit in the teaching profession.

***Familiar with school to home expectations.*** Participants who stated manners by which they communicate with parents solely expressed the systems involving school to home sharing of information. These expectations are set forth in the expectations held by the school. The expectations for communication that the participants referenced included report cards, conferences, newsletters, and emails, which are all one-way communication methods, from the school to the home. The open-ended interviews often led to further conversations regarding the two-way communication opportunities between parent and teacher.

Hayley stated that this school has very clear expectations on the partnership. “Parents should know what we are doing in terms of what are the teaching strategies that we use, how the kids are assessed. That is why we have this online grading for every unit that we cover, everything is uploaded way before the unit begins.”

Similar statements were echoed after a period of reflection during the interview by Sam. He stated that he was “very aware that we have to send parents reports, which is a very effective means of communication with parents. From the feedback for the assessments, at the beginning of every academic year, we have the orientation meetings where we, in a very informal setup, we discuss what our expectations are and what the parent role should be throughout the year. So as far as the orientation meetings, feedback, reporting, email communications, the school is doing pretty well at these communications.” Sam paused during the interview after sharing the multitude of ways that teachers communicate out to parents. When he spoke, he said, “I think

giving is stronger than receiving, that's what I perceive. But as of today, I see receiving is a concern. It's only happening when we start a conversation and then we expect parents to inform us."

Liz shared that "Being seen is important, so I always make sure that I have time for my parents, I'm always there early in the morning, just those daily chats I think is really important, the more they believe in you the more they are going to believe in the school. And the more they see and trust you and have a good relationship with you, the more are they going to want to invest themselves. That's kind of how I feel."

*Not familiar with expectations.* Teachers were asked whether the school had systems or expectations around the home-school partnership. Many teachers replied that they were not familiar with a system or clear expectation in place at the school regarding the home to school communication (Andy, Cate, Charlotte, Gwen, Kelly, Louis, Lucy, Mark, Natalie, Nate, Penny, Peter, Rachel, Theresa). The questions and responses were open-ended and allowed the researcher to continue with follow up questions. Many teachers justified their responses in one of two ways. Participants stated that the expectations that they knew of were to disseminate information to parents is clearly stated on calendars, in emails, or other forms of communication and via report cards and other formal reporting systems. The responses involve various ways the teachers share information with parents and exclude any requirement for two-way communication, or information received from parents.

Charlotte stated, "Unless parents come and see me personally about their child's academic needs or emotional needs, then I don't have any sort of interaction." Charlotte also mentioned that in her role, she has very little contact with parents. She cited that her

communication as an elective teacher is always sent indirectly to parents from her, and via the classroom teacher.

Cate stated, “When I have conferences with parents, the first thing I do is, I let them open up before I ask them any questions, they talk to me about this and that and I’ll be listening and sometimes I’ll take notes and I can always refer back to say listen this is what the parents said about their child because for me it’s all about listening, listening to the parent.” She further explained that her motivation for listening to parents is that “I don’t want it be like it was for me as a kid, the home and the school did not talk.” Cate explained that her childhood schooling experience was disconnected from her home life.

Nate said, “Parents seem to be pretty comfortable with just popping in and asking questions about how their kids are doing.” Nate felt this was the way he communicated with parents. He acknowledged that it was “hit or miss.”

Penny shared what she called an eye-opening experience that affected her. “Last week a parent came into my classroom and said, ‘Oh this is the barometer, my child came home and wanted to build a barometer, so he got all of the equipment and built it.’ I would have had no idea that he was making this connection from what he was learning and bringing it home. But with that information you can see what the students are really interested in and help them take that further. And how useful would that be if something like this was planned.”

Unique responses came from High School teacher Peter when he shared “If I had more information about the students, he could differentiate better.” When the researcher asked whether this information would be beneficial for him as a teacher. He acknowledged that it would be beneficial for the students, but went on to say, “It would put too much stress on me though, as I already feel I could do more for the students.”

When probed to speak further about communication from home to school regarding their children, a few teachers elaborated on their own systems to encourage conversation. Many teachers acknowledged the importance of information from parents. Some also gave reasons why this opportunity does not happen often.

Rachel shared an experience. “I started a homeschool connection, sort of, it was on a piece of paper. I would send observations home about the children and it would not just be negative things it would be positive things and parents could communicate with me. I found that to be very difficult to continue because of time. And I dropped it.”

***Familiar with the expectation at previous school.*** The researcher was interested in determining if prior international school teaching experiences were similar regarding clear administrative expectations of the home-school partnership. When participants were probed (see Appendix C) about their experiences at the different schools they have worked in and how the other schools may have had systems in place, many teachers shared how the expectations were like the ones at the research site school. The purpose of this interview question was to harness the lived experiences by the expert teachers with experiences in at least 50 other schools combined. Many of the expert teachers including, Andy, Hayley, Karen, Louis, and Kelly stated that they did not see any systems different than they found at other schools they worked in, but the practice of reporting to parents varied based on culture. Notably, four teachers shared that they had experienced a greater system to guide their home to school communication at prior schools. Of these schools, one school was a small parochial school with a mission focused on family, two schools were in the UK, and one school was in New Zealand. Three of these teachers attributed the increased partnership expectations to their school leader, as the leader embedded the expectation in protocol and teacher training.

Rachel reflected on her experience at her last school in the UK. She stated that her principal “prepped us for the relationship much better. The difference here is that the UK they never assumed we knew what to do, and we needed the information as well. It was a less transient population of teachers. So maybe her strategy would have been better here. It was consistency of information from the right person.”

Liz reiterated that in her experience, the expectation clearly was “being culturally aware.” Liz explained that “This was because of the diversity of cultures in New Zealand. It was also due to the government initiative to engage the Maori families in the education system.

Gwen shared that her previous school leadership in a private parochial school accepted that the responsibility to foster the role of the partnership needed to be taught to teachers. Gwen elaborated that the school leadership provided simulations of parent conferences to the teachers. Gwen expressed that “simulations are big at the school to prepare the teachers.”

Contrary to others, Kelly elaborated that “this is my 7th international school, and I've never been at a school where there are explicit set expectations for communication or partnerships with parents.” Kelly mentioned that she is a proponent of explicit systems of communication with parents. Accordingly, she often offers workshops at her new schools from the perspective of a counselor.

***Professional conduct.*** Multiple participants reported fostering the home school partnership was implicit in their role as a teacher. These participants believed that communicating with parents was an expectation and a part of the job, so much so that a policy or system of expectations could be redundant. The words and experiences from the teachers below elucidate their feelings. Andy mentioned that “Any mandate about this it is just part of my own professional preference.” Other participants, including Hayley, Karen, Natalie, Paula, and

Rebecca, made parallel comments. Natalie clarified, “I don't know if it's an expectation that the school has, but we need to as teachers, to form a relationship with parents.”

**Results, RQ1.** Based on the participants’ responses to question one, it is apparent that teachers have a varied perception of the systems and expectations in the school to foster the home-school partnership. Teacher perception of the systems and expectations vary with the majority of the teachers remaining unclear of systems and expectations at the site school. The systems and expectations that were clear to some teachers were those related to communication from the school to home and not from the home to school. According to teacher perception, the lack of systems at the research site school did not differ from the majority of other schools the teachers have worked in internationally. Due to the varied perceptions of systems and expectations, teachers offered haphazard partnership opportunities to parents, such as ease of access and availability to parents. Teachers perceive that systematic approaches to the home-school partnership are sparse in the international schools and when they exist, expectations can be a direct reflection of the current school leadership or philosophy of the school.

**Interpretation of themes from research question two.** Research question two pertains to the experiences of teachers that lead to the preparation to foster the home-school partnership. The responses regarding the experiences or trainings provided that would support teacher preparation fell in to two themes: formal and informal experiences. A third category consistently discussed related to the perception of preparedness by the teacher.

***Formal preparation in university.*** A direct question in the open-ended interviews regarded how teachers received their preparation for the home-school partnership. The theme of university preparation became a prevalent topic (Table 4). The participants represented 21 different universities from nine different countries. Three teachers shared experiences they had

in university that they perceived as preparation for the parent partnership. Two teachers experienced a module on parent partnerships in their Master of Education program. One teacher received extensive training during her teaching college in New Zealand. The structure of the New Zealand model prepared teachers for their work with the indigenous population of Maori families.

Table 4

*Formal Preparation.*

Participant number and Pseudonym	Preparation in University	Other formal preparation	No formal preparation
P1: Andy			No, coming out of college I was kind of petrified
P2: Cate			No, at University we didn't discuss this
P4: Gwen		It came from the last five years in an educational environment where the school prepared me	
P5: Hayley	MS ED they tell you that you have to develop a very good relationship with the parents.		
P6: Kelly			I don't think anything in my schooling for education talked about this.
P7: Karen			
P8: Liz	Teachers College we learn about the Maori culture		
P9: Louis			Wasn't even thought about
P10: Lucy			X
P11: Lynn			Here is the first thing I think we've ever done to directly address something like that

(Continued)

Table 2 (Cont.)

*Formal Preparation*

Participant number and Pseudonym	Preparation in University	Other formal preparation	No formal preparation
P12: Mark			X
P13: Natalie			X
P14: Nate			X
P15: Paula		My position description	
P16: Penny			No, I studied art education
P17: Peter			No, not at all.
P18: Rachel			I don't think I was taught. I think it was through experience
P19: Rebecca			x
P20: Sam	In my Bachelor of Education degree, I had this one module where communication as a leader and teacher as a leader was part of it		x
P21: Theresa			In South Africa they don't teach you that

During the interviews with Sam and Hayley, both participants spoke about their degree program having a component of parent partnerships. Each participant shared that the training involved a module, lasting a few class sessions. Sam stated “In my one Bachelor of Education degree, I had this one module where communication as a leader and teacher was discussed. We were explained the expectations of the community where we were teaching. This was regarding the community in India where I went to school.” Hayley spoke about a module in her Master of Education program in which “the school leadership, the administration came in to tell us that you have to develop a very good relationship, a very good rapport with the parents.”

Alternatively, Louis was very clear that the home school partnership “wasn't even thought about in my teaching preparation.” This statement was analogous to comments made by

17 other participants including: Andy, Cate, Charlotte, Gabi, Kelly, Karen, Lucy, Lynn, Mark, Natalie, Nate, Paula, Penny, Peter, Rachel, Rebecca, and Theresa. Thus, the majority of participants acknowledged that university did not prepare them for the home-school partnership.

Notably, Liz provided the most unique of home-school partnership experiences discussed. Liz graduated from a teachers' college in New Zealand and stated that "part of what we did at teachers' college was to learn about the Maori culture and we obviously all had to be able to speak the language and understand the culture at a very basic level to understand our parent community. We learned how best to incorporate the culture into our practice of parent communication to draw the parents into the relationship." Her comments underscored the most definitive teaching of the home-school partnership of university teachings mentioned within the 21 interviews.

***Informal preparation.*** Much of the informal trainings teachers spoke about encompassed the simultaneous process by which they learned the systems and expectations of the school. Responses were coded thematically. The responses fell into four categories of codes of informal methods of preparation:

- Site-based experiences,
- trial and error,
- collegial support, or
- parenting school-aged children.

***Site-based experiences.*** Some teachers found that their site-based administrator's style of leadership enhanced the preparation of teachers to foster the home-school partnership. Four teachers shared that they had experienced a greater system to guide their home to school communication at other schools in the form of site-based trainings. Of these schools, one school

was a small parochial school with a mission focused on family, two schools were in the UK, and one school was in New Zealand. Two of those teachers had their experiences in the UK. In these two public schools, the leadership conducted yearly trainings around standards and expectations with teachers surrounding the home to school and school to home communication protocol. One teacher shared her experience in New Zealand. This teacher shared that the principal had a passion to increase parent involvement through the home-school connection. The other teacher obtained training in a parochial school with a mission to include families. She was exposed to simulations of parent meetings and administration support.

***Trial and error.*** During the open-ended interview, participants discussed learning systems and expectations of the school by way of trial and error. Trial and error was often explicitly mentioned in the interviews by the participants. Notably some participants shared stories that revolved around a making a mistake and learning from it.

Trial and error often was described as making a mistake and learning not to make the same mistake twice. Louis explained that “you run into a problem and then you say I shouldn't do that.” This statement was akin to statements made by others including: Andy, Cate, Kelly, Louis, Mark, Natalie, Nate, Penny, Peter, Rebecca, Sam, and Theresa.

Peter added to the conversation with the interviewer regarding trial and error by indicating the ramifications of the mistake. Peter speculated that “Generally, as and when things cropped up, I learned. I would be reprimanded for not dealing with it correctly.” Peter also shared that since he was reprimanded once by his principal, he was sure it would happen if he made a mistake again.

***Collegial support.*** Collegial support was often mentioned by the participants during the interviews. Some participants mentioned seeking help, while others passively received the

information by watching colleagues. Discussing how teachers learned the systems in place at the school brought up shared experiences around asking or watching other colleagues work with parents.

Teachers shared how they learned to communicate with parents from collaborating with or observing their colleagues. This was not a part of a system to provide professional development, but instead an unexpected outcome from collaboration. For example, Cate conveyed that “What I know and the limited information that I have on how to act with parents is through listening to my colleagues and discussing work.” These words were echoed by others including Charlotte, Liz, Lynn, Natalie, Rachel, and Theresa.

Natalie stated that it was her first year as a teacher, she did not know how communicate with parents. Natalie shared that she “saw what other teachers were doing or what they were asking of the parents and negotiated a middle ground and saying okay this is what seems to be the trend at the school and this is what's needed. I never really sat down and had someone say to me this is our philosophy about the home-school partnership here at the school, but I know there has always been a need and a push to get more involvement from the parents.”

Lynn noted that “At first, a colleague and I worked together. She was sort of guiding me when it came to parents. In terms of communicating with parents we did that together. Even our first parent-teacher conference, we actually did it together in the same room. I spoke about English and Humanities and she spoke about Math and Science.” According to Lynn, this was a great experience for her and affected how she deals with parents today.

When conducting the matrix coding of informal learning experiences, none of the male teachers cited other colleagues as their means of learning. At the same time, all the male participants cited trial and error as their means of learning. This finding differs from the female

colleagues who cite the use of colleagues for their means of informal learning much more often than resorting to trial and error.

***Parenting as informal training.*** Data recorded on the coding matrix of those participants who are parents of school-aged children and how they attribute informal training, yielded the following findings (Table 5). Of the teachers interviewed, 12 were parents of school aged children. Of those teachers, eight of the 12 teachers stated that when they became parents of school aged children they developed more empathetic processes in working with parents as partners. The teachers attributed their interactions with parents to what they themselves would want from a teacher of their children. Parenting a school-aged child provided opportunities to look inside the practice of another teacher and empathize as a parent.

Table 5

*Informal preparation.*

Participant number and Pseudonym	Teachers as parents	Site-based	Trial and Error	Collegial Support	Teachers as parents
P1: Andy	x		Literally I had to fly by the seat of my pants and figure out how to do this stuff.		I try to put myself in the place of the parent. What would I as a parent want to know
P2: Cate	x		I even had one teacher who actually came to me and said, the way you relate to parents and to your kids you have to have some sort of boundary.	Listening to my colleagues and discussing work.	I am a parent and I know
P3: Charlotte				As a teacher assistant, parents didn't even see the difference between me and my teacher.	

(Continued)

Table 5 (cont.).

*Informal preparation.*

Participant number and Pseudonym	Teachers as parents	Site-based	Trial and Error	Collegial Support	Teachers as parents
P4: Gwen		x			
P5: Hayley	x				
P6: Kelly			I've never actually discussed with anyone at this school.		
P7: Karen			I'm just doing what I would normally do I discovered this by just watching it.		
P8: Liz	x	x		I had a nursery assistant who would role model.	
P9: Louis	x		You run into a problem and then you say I shouldn't do that.		
P10: Lucy			So, I went online.	Speaking to older, more mature teachers.	
P11: Lynn	x			I did the co-conference with an experienced teacher.	Being a parent as well and having to go to my own parent-teacher conference for my own kids.
P11: Lynn	x			I did the co-conference with an experienced teacher.	Being a parent as well and having to go to my own parent-teacher conference for my own kids.
P12: Mark	x	x	Just knowing through experience and through getting it wrong.		Knowing what I would want as a parent.
P13: Natalie				I saw what other teachers were doing.	

(Continued)

Table 5 (cont.).

*Informal preparation.*

Participant number and Pseudonym	Teachers as parents	Site-based	Trial and Error	Collegial Support	Teachers as parents
P14: Nate	x		I was there for six years and by the end of that I knew what was expected.		I want things to happen for my daughter in her classroom. Yes, you just sit in the hot seat and that's it.
P15: Paula	x				
P16: Penny			I'm still figuring it out I would say, 2 years in.		
P17: Peter			I've picked up as I've gone along.		
P18: Rachel	x	x			I think for me as a parent I like getting information about my child and I like to get in the moment.
P19: Rebecca				We talk to each other as colleagues.	
P20: Sam	x		I only learned throughout my teaching experience.		Makes me think like a parent whenever I communicate with a parent.
P21: Theresa	x				Knowing how a parent actually feels.

Cindy stated, "Knowing what I would want as a parent, I try to put myself in the place of the parent." This statement indicates how being a parent influences how she relates to parents. This response was kindred to those made by the other participants who are also parents including: Andy, Cate, Lynn, Mark, Nate, Rachel, Sam, and Theresa. Each participant except one, who is also a parent of a school aged child, made a similar statement.

Lynn noted, "Being a parent as well and having to go to parent-teacher conferences for my own kids has also been interesting to see." She went on to state, "You don't see conferences

unless you are a parent yourself.” Lynn spoke about this experience of observing teachers interact with her as a parent as good training for how she as a teacher could develop better relationships with parents.

Sam shared an experience that he had with his child’s teachers. This experience he says led him to learn how not to act with other parents. Sam shared, “I learned from a conference I went to of my child’s. I remember my child’s conference a few years ago and the first thing the teacher said was that my child was not a thinker. That disturbed me so much.”

Andy provided a lived experience that has proved formative in how he communicates with parents. Andy stated, “I cannot by any means tell you that I would be anywhere as nearly as prepared as I am now had I not had the experience and the journey as a parent. I learned that each of my children needed different things that were idiosyncratic to them and their educational experience.”

***Feeling of preparedness.*** During the interviews, common and recurrent themes surfaced regarding the level of comfort in handling and fostering the home-school partnership. The researcher coded both the current feelings of the participants as well as the memories of the first years of teaching. The purpose of this action was to identify the need for a systems approach to the preparation of teachers for the home-school partnership, especially in the first years of teaching.

***Current feeling.*** The research involved participants identified as novice teachers and expert teachers based on the years of classroom experience. Eight of the participants were identified as novice, and 13 were identified as experts. When asked to discuss their comfort levels with fostering the home-school partnership, four novice teachers stated that they remained feeling unprepared to foster the home-school partnership while four other novice teachers felt

prepared. Of these novice teachers who felt prepared, two attributed their perception of preparedness to their age or parenthood, with one participant stating she was confident because of her previous profession and the fourth teacher attributing her preparation to years in the role of a teacher assistant. Of the 13 expert teachers, all felt confident and prepared to foster the home-school partnership and attributed their feelings of preparedness to years of experience in the classroom.

***First years of teaching.*** During the open-ended interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their first years of teaching and how they felt when communicating with parents. Half of the teachers used words such as struggled, nervous, stressful, hectic, intimidated, anxious, and petrified to describe their first years of teaching and communicating with parents

Table 6

*Comfort Level.*

Participant number and Pseudonym	Novice/ Expert	Comfortable fostering the partnership	Descriptor of first year of teaching	Year in teaching that the teacher felt confident
P1: Andy	E	x	petrified	3 to 5
P2: Cate	E	x	struggle	5
P3: Charlotte	N			
P4: Gwen	N	x		
P5: Hayley	E	x	intimidated	3 to 5
P6: Kelly	E	x	confident	
P7: Karen	N	x	confident	
P8: Liz	E	x		3 to 5
P9: Louis	E	x		9
P10: Lucy	E	x	anxious	10
P11: Lynn	E	x	not equipped	9
P12: Mark	E	x		5
P13: Natalie	N		pressured	
P14: Nate	N		scared	6
P15: Paula	E	x	nervous	3 to 5
P16: Penny	N		terrified	7
P17: Peter	E	x	confident	
P18: Rachel	E	x	terrified	15
P19: Rebecca	E	x		10
P20: Sam	E	x	stressful	3
P21: Theresa	N	x	hectic	

The researcher applied educational research to identify a novice teacher as one with zero to three years teaching experience (Berliner, 1988; Kagan, 1992; Korevaar & Bergen, 1992).

Additionally, an experienced teacher is one who has taught for at least five years (Arani, 2017; Michel, 2013; Podsen, 2002). Notably, findings from interviews showed that expert teachers did not gain their confidence to foster the home-school partnership until they had between three to 15 years of experience in the classroom (Table 6).

**Results, RQ<sub>2</sub>.** Based on these findings it is evident that consistent, formal preparation is not occurring in the universities for the pre-service teachers. The informal preparation can take place at the school site by administration or through collegial support. Collegial support is not systemic and was randomly offered. Trial and error is an approach to learning that is used to a greater extent among male teachers. Teachers who are parents have a depth of empathetic information to assist in developing protocols and teacher preparation. Most importantly, novice teachers are not receiving consistent preparation for their experiences with parents, and they therefore lack confidence in their ability to foster the home-school partnership.

**Interpretation of themes from research question three.** When participants were asked to speak to improving the preparation of the teachers for the home-school partnership, participants readily shared areas they felt needed attention. Data collected was coded into five themes:

- Improving the first years of teaching,
- Improve by educating on culture,
- Explicitly prepare teachers for parent conferences,
  - Improve beginning of each year structures, and
  - Develop a shared mindset (Table 7).

Table 7

*Improvements.*

Participant number and Pseudonym	Improve first years of teaching in practice or at school	Improve by educating on culture	Explicitly prepare teachers for parent conferencing	Improve beginning of each year	Develop a shared mindset
P1: Andy			Use real modeling		I need to improve my practice
P2: Cate	Teach us how the school runs			Plan time school wide for one to one parent meetings to hear about their kids	Need for consistent expectations
P3: Charlotte			Have some workshops		I need to improve my practice
P4: Gwen	Institutionalize the philosophy				I need to improve my practice
P5: Hayley	Make the teachers understand why this partnership is so, so important				Need for consistent expectations
P6: Kelly				Develop that proactive relationship	I need to improve my practice
P7: Karen				Give us time to learn about the parent's child.	There is no need to change
P8: Liz				There needs to be expectations	Need for consistent expectations
P9: Louis	Take new teachers through some scenarios				Need for consistent expectations
P10: Lucy				Have a meet and greet	No need to change

(Continued)

Table 7 (cont.).

*Improvements.*

Participant number and Pseudonym	Improve first years of teaching in practice or at school	Improve by educating on culture	Explicitly prepare teachers for parent conferencing	Improve beginning of each year	Develop a shared mindset
P11: Lynn	Use expert teacher to help				Need for consistent expectations
P12: Mark	Role play those difficult questions			Develop understanding of what home-school partnership actually looks like	Administration needs consistent expectations, so teachers can be clear
P13: Natalie		Once a month remind the teachers			Need for consistent expectations
P14: Nate			Share the experience of what a parent conference is like somehow		Need for consistent expectations
P15: Paula				Sit down with each parent at the beginning of each year individually	Need for consistent expectations
P16: Penny	Be observed and receive feedback				administration needs consistent expectations
P17: Peter		Send letters out to the parents who didn't come			There is no need to change

(Continued)

Table 7 (cont.).

*Improvements.*

Participant number and Pseudonym	Improve first years of teaching in practice or at school	Improve by educating on culture	Explicitly prepare teachers for parent conferencing	Improve beginning of each year	Develop a shared mindset
P18: Rachel				Offer training for staff and each year consistently each year	Need for consistent expectations
P19: Rebecca	Mainly just touching base and saying how are you doing				Need for consistent expectations
P20: Sam				If more time can be arranged at the beginning of the year where I'll get to know the first-hand experience of the parent directly	I need to improve my practice
P21: Theresa				I want one to one parent meetings	Need for consistent expectations

***First years of teaching.*** During the open-ended interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their first years of teaching and how they felt when meeting with parents. The goal of the question was to investigate participants' perceptions of what it is like to enter the profession without the formal preparation to foster the home-school connection. The aggregate of answers

led to the theme of being unprepared and anxious. Of the 21 teachers, 19 teachers indicated that there is a need to further support teachers in their first years of teaching.

Cate acknowledged that she is still getting better each year “I think it was like five years into teaching before I started feeling comfortable. Actually, after five years, that's when I was taking the steps to improve my practice with parents.”

Mark explained that “The first five years you're still kind of finding your feet. First few years of teaching involve anxiety with parents.” Mark stated that he feels comfortable now meeting with parents of his students.

Andy remarked that “coming out of college I was kind of petrified of that part of things as I didn't know what to do with parents.” Andy shared his experience as one a novice teacher should not have to experience. He now thinks we can help novice teachers.

Hayley admitted that she “was actually intimidated by the parents. Whenever the parents came, I always thought I must have done something wrong.” Hayley stated that she is now confident.

Lynn referenced the divergent academic language that exists between parents and teachers. “I guess I didn't feel equipped to be a good parent communicator of education language. I lacked confidence to speak about kids in that way because I hadn't ever had to before.” Lynn clarified to explain that she was speaking about the difference between communicating with other educators about a student and communicating with the parents.

Nate echoed Lynn’s comments regarding the language of the parent, by clarifying “I used to feel intimidated by the parents and some parents can be intimidating, especially the ones who read about the curriculum and think they know exactly where the kids should be at.” In this instance, Nate was acknowledging the issues when parents have greater curriculum knowledge

than the teacher may have.

Rachel touched on the inconsistent nature of preparation for parent relationships in her remark: “I was terrified. I did not know what I was doing. My school in England did not train me for anything. We had ten months of schooling of which eleven weeks included one week in one school and then another week in another school. Even with that, it depended on the teacher who trained you what you got from the experience.” For Rachel, she recognized that even within the same teaching preparation program, other students may have received a more comprehensive training based on the mentor teacher.

Liz shared that although she had university preparation, it was three to five years before she felt confident with the parent connection. When asked to explain further, Liz clarified that she “felt confident in New Zealand, as that was what I was prepared for. But when I moved to England, my experience did not directly relate to the families in England.” She stated that she continually applies what she learned in New Zealand, with adjustments to the new locations.

***Culture.*** A subsection of participants identified as being comfortable with parents emerged from coding. The emerging pattern involved how culture played a part in teacher comfort to foster the home-school partnership. The participants were not directly asked to speak on cultures, but during a few interviews teachers elaborated on the role culture played. Cultural connections mentioned in the interviews dealt with age of the teacher, the academic language of the school and the culture of the parents. The participants expressed that the culture of the school, the leadership, the teachers, and parents have an implication on the approach the school takes regarding having partnership with parents.

Hayley shared a story about an Indian community where the school was located. She stated that the parent’s view of the teachers was clearly “if parents don't feel that the teacher was

doing a good job they would come and just accuse the teacher. There been incidents where I've seen teachers and parents involved in some sort of verbal confrontation and it really gets ugly because then after that there were demonstrations in front of the school and it was in the newspaper.”

Liz shared, “I think it all lumps together, because in my last school my principal was very, very big on seeing our parents as our customers and you always had to walk through the eyes of the parent. So, he was also a parent of four children that were scattered across the school. So, he would know what it felt like to be a parent and I think that’s actually really, really important. He set very clear expectations on everything. For example, if you get an email from a parent, this is how long you have to respond.”

Louis laughed when he talked about how culture played a role in how he handles the home-school partnership. He stated, “Well, you must understand I've taught in a South African context, a Kenyan context, a South Korean context, a Malagasy context and now in Mozambican context and for every one of those you have variables that are unfathomable. The differences in cultures and what people expect is extreme, so you learn afresh every time. And if you're not adaptable then you're not an international school teacher and you cannot survive as one.”

Lucy referenced her previous work environment. Her previous school is in the same city as her current school, the research site. While the culture in the neighboring school involved the similar clientele, the internal cultural was “starting to change because we had helicopter parents. Parents were coming in and interfering too much. The school put a stop to that.”

Rachel spoke about the school culture and how the school was responding to the parent demands. “Parents felt they did not receive enough communication or they felt that what was communicated was not something that they understood. They did not speak the teacher

language. So, I know it's been an area of growth and development this year. Our culture is changing.”

Theresa pontificated that in her first years, she was a young teacher. She stated that this factor may have affected her feelings toward parents and that the meetings with parents “were quite hectic. The parents in South Africa are quite intense and you were never taught how to deal with situations and I was young, so I think they used to take advantage of that.”

To further understand the experiences of the participants, follow up interview questions were presented to understand the reasoning for the trepidation with parent communication. Beyond not experiencing formal university training, first year teachers had much to convey regarding formal meetings with parents in settings such as parent conferences.

In each school, participants discussed encountering a unique community culture, parent culture, and school culture. As stated by Louis “Each international school is vastly different, it would be hard to train a person to understand this unless they are at the school site.” Other participants echoed this statement and suggestions were to:

- “Provide scheduled time for intentional home to school communication to get to know the students from the perspective of the family. The school could start off with no after school activities for the first two weeks, still having staff meetings but offer the teacher an hour a day for the first two weeks of school where they could have that one on one with every parent in the classroom” (Kelly).
- “Take new teachers through some scenarios and also tell them about the cultures of our community and of our school right from the start” (Gwen).
- “Include expert teachers who have been here for a long period of time and have a sharing session talking about how it is” (Lynn).

- “Just again role playing those difficult questions, those common things. What do you do when a parent comes in and says I am trying this and I don't think that my student is making enough progress, well what do we say? I'm not happy with this, what do we say? I think it would help, but I've never had any of that. It was find out for yourself and get on with it” (Mark).
- “Send letters out to the parents who didn't come to the parent opportunities, with the information that they missed” (Peter).
- “Get to know the first-hand experience of the parent directly. Like how I should perceive his or her child, to get complete background information of the academic performance so far. I think that would be very helpful, that is a place where I would like to improve” (Sam).

***Parent conference.*** Parent conferences proved to be a crucial event for teachers and provided a first opportunity to meet one on one with parents in partnership pertaining to the child. Most of the participants did not have an opportunity to observe an actual parent conference prior to leading a conference independently. Additionally, many participants, even after many years of teaching, still had not seen another parent conference.

Lynn spoke about a colleague who decided to support her as a learner. She discussed how the colleague organized to have their first parent conferences together in the same room. Lynn said “I learned so much. I spoke about English and Humanities and she spoke about math and science. Not only was it more efficient and quicker for us and the parent, we talked about the same student, and parents and teachers began seeing connections. It worked better for parents to have one meeting and getting four subjects and having a better overview.”

Andy reflected, “The only time I ever saw another conference besides what I saw for my children was in Secondary School. Since conferences in the Secondary School was an arena conference, all teachers were in the same room, I was able to look across at a different table and see the handouts or the conversations. I heard a little bit how other teachers run their student-teacher conferences. After that I made a lot of changes to my practice.”

Charlotte was able to participate in conferences with a teacher when she worked as a teacher assistant. Charlotte described her experience. “She would invite me to conferences and then ask me if I would like to add anything to that, so I had that option to add, to give my perspective of the students and how I see it. Parents didn't even see the difference between me and her. I learned that parents are very nervous to come in to conferences too, because you're talking about their child and they don't know what to expect and they are just going to sit there and sweat it out until you sit down, and you set the tone.”

Most participants have never had the opportunity to see another parent teacher conference. Parents of school aged children noted seeing their child's conference was formative to their practice. Participants shared ideas to support teachers with this aspect of preparation would be to run through scenarios, watch videos of conferences and engage in conversations around the experience. Ideas shared by participants to improve teacher preparation include:

- “Run through scenarios, at the beginning of the year, and throughout the year, you know, because there is a challenging parent in every single class in this school. I can almost guarantee. And the only way you going to get better is if there's someone to help you” (Liz).

- “I think it would be interesting if new teachers could experience what a parent conference was like somehow. Observing somebody else running one or role play one” (Charlotte).
- “I would love to see real modeling or videos of good conferencing and conversations with parents at the start of the year that we can all have conversations around good conference techniques that people believe are valuable and from both the parent and the teacher perspective this would be incredible” (Andy).
- “Touching base with new teachers in saying ‘how are you doing’ as we are heading towards parent-teacher conferences” (Rebecca).
- “Include the single subject teachers in on conferences” (Charlotte).

*Mindset.* When discussing whether participants provide a consistent approach to parent partnerships from classroom to classroom within the same school, the theme of mindset became prevalent. To deeply understand the participant’s mindset, interviewees were asked to discuss their views on the parent-teacher partnership. The responses fell into three categories. Some participants had the mindset that they as teachers needed to improve their practice at fostering a partnership (Andy, Charlotte, Gwen, Kelly, Sam). Several participants had the mindset that the school administration needed a consistent expectation to share with teachers (Cate, Hayley, Liz, Louis, Lynn, Mark, Natalie, Nate, Paula, Penny, Rachel, Rebecca, Theresa). Additionally, a few participants noted a mindset indicating that there was no need to change the practice (Karen, Lucy, Peter).

The participants interviewed mentioned the different approaches they have practiced regarding the home-school partnership. Participants shared ideas related to a shared mindset is to establish systems and expectations school wide. Ideas that surfaced as a corrective measure

included responsibility of teachers improving as partners, the teacher perspective on why they are not proficient in this domain of teaching, and the limitations teachers perceive as needed regarding partnerships.

Speaking about how teachers need to improve as partners, Andy elaborated, “I don't think we do a good job or anything or much and I don't think we enforce it. It is not a part of our school platform through which we build up in training teachers. We don't build capacity with these teachers and I think teachers are not adequately prepared about how to build a partnership with the parents.”

Cate stated, “I think there is inconsistency with how we communicate, most definitely. My thinking is that this school lets the teacher be the teacher, either with parents or students that's what I believe. Every teacher is different, but there still needs to be consistency.”

Hayley also noted, that “I think we are inconsistent because teachers are not adequately prepared about how to build a partnership with the parents.” Hayley believes she never considered this before. She stated there was a need for protocol. Gwen echoed a similar perception stating that there is a need for “institutionalizing and systemizing the philosophy and the belief that will eventually become institutional memory.”

Karen shared her beliefs about whether parents should be partners, which Peter and Lucy also underscored. She stated “I don't feel that I've even entertained the idea of creating something more than what we just blatantly see as, we are the teachers, you are the parents, we've both got something in common with this one child. I'm going to feed back to you about this child.”

During their respective interviews, Peter and Karen shared similar opinions. Notably, Peter reiterated that he does not need to increase his knowledge of students. Peter felt he already “could do more” but does not have the time.

Although Lucy shared similar views with Karen and Peter, she added, “I think parent partnerships are valuable, but I think that specific boundaries need to be set. Parents need to know what they can and know what they can’t really comment on or be involved in.” Lucy labelled these parents as “helicopter parents.”

The implications of divergent mindsets in the same school was discussed during the interview with Cate. Cate shared a lived experience that she described as hurtful. She explained “I had one teacher who actually came to me and said, the way you relate to parents and to your kids, you have to have some sort of boundary. I was like what, but what are you talking about, I have not crossed a parent, or no parent has complained, and no student has gone home and said well you know Miss Cate. This is who I am, and I should not change for other people.” She went on to state “I think it is important to sit with the teachers and explain how the school runs when it comes to parent-teacher communication. Provide guidelines on how we become partners.”

Additional statements around the concept of shared mindset were:

- “Make the teachers understand why this partnership is so, so important” (Hayley).
- “There needs to be expectations clearly taught” (Liz).
- “Make the parents more of a priority. Prioritize it and remind teachers regularly. Develop an understanding of what home-school partnership actually looks like” (Mark).

- “Offer training for staff and each year consistently each year. Sharing the philosophy and the expectations each year. Not just through email. Face to face. Tell us what is going on” (Rachel).

**Results, RQ3.** During interviews participants responded that the first years of teaching were very difficult when it came to teacher partnerships with parents. They expressed the need to support new teachers. In each school, the community culture, the parent culture, and the school culture come together. Participants conveyed that they would benefit from front loaded information on the culture when they arrive in a new school community. Additionally, parent conferences create negative feelings for teachers and they would benefit from explicit learning opportunities around the conferences. The mindset of the teachers plays a role in how they create the parent partnership. Participants believe a shared mindset voiced by the school administration would lead to greater clarity and consistency school wide.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

The goals of this research ethnographic qualitative study were to: (a) Determine how teachers perceive systems in the school to have an impact on the home-school partnership, (b) Understand the perception held by teachers about experiences or trainings provided to them that have led to their personal level of preparedness for the home-school partnership at international schools and (c) Hear the perception held by teachers on how preparation for the home-school partnership could be improved in international schools. In this chapter, demographic data about characteristics of the international teaching participants in this study were presented.

Demographics identified included: (a) gender, (b) nationality, (c) years of teaching, (d) years at site, and (e) whether the participant was a parent of a school-aged child. The purpose of identifying these characteristics was to determine if any attribute led to greater teacher

preparation for the home school partnership in an international school. The demographics roughly paralleled the greater school site demographics. This chapter displayed results of the data analyzed. The data were collected and then processed through a coding protocol in response to the research problems presented in Chapter 1. Applying the process of coding within a matrix, the findings presented in this chapter demonstrate the potential for merging theory and practice. The identified objectives of the research were accomplished; the results demonstrated findings that may be beneficial to teachers, parents, and students in preparing teachers for this element of their profession regarding the home-school partnership. After a review of the summary of the responses for each research question, several themes that emerged from the results were presented.

Research Question 1 focused on the systems and expectations of international schools. The data collected demonstrated that teachers possess varied perceptions of the systems and expectations in the school regarding the home-school partnership. School-to-home communication expectations were found in documents such as calendars and school guidelines. The varied perceptions and lack of systems and expectations for home-to-school communication led to teachers offering random and inconsistent opportunities to parents. While the participants perceived the site school as lacking the systems and expectations regarding the home-school partnership, they stated that, from their experience, the research site school did not differ from the majority of other international schools.

Research Question 2 focused on the formal and informal preparation opportunities offered to teachers to prepare for the home-school partnership. The data obtained from the open-ended interviews evidenced a lack of systematic formal preparation for preservice teachers. Nor did there exist a systematic process for informal preparation at the school site. Thus, teachers

seek to understand the systems at the school through collegial support and through trial and error. This approach led to greater inconsistency due to the varied perspectives of the colleague and experiences of the teachers. Trial and error approach to learning is greater among male participants, followed by negative experiences in the first few years of teaching for these teachers and the families they encounter. Importantly, it is critical to prepare the novice teachers for interactions with parents, so they are confident and able to foster the home-school partnership upon arrival to the profession. Teachers at the school who are expert teachers or who are parents can be used as mentors and trainers in providing school-based learning.

Research Question 3 addressed the perception held by participants of how preparation for the home-school partnership could be improved in international schools. Teachers perceived that, by improving the practice of sharing cultural information, improving preparation and systems for parent conferences, and developing a shared mindset on school values, they would have improved preparation. Data evidenced that a shared mindset voiced by the school administration would lead to greater clarity and consistency school wide.

The qualitative data garnered during this project provided the basis for a rich and thick description of the findings. I described the qualitative coding process that I used to analyze the data collected. Importantly, data from this ethnographic study can lead to improved school-wide decision making focused on enhancing teacher preparation for the home-school partnership. This study yielded results that were consistent with educator's desire for preparation to improve their practice in forming the vital home-school partnership (MetLife, 2013). The study also yielded results that extended many of findings identified during the review of extant literature that universities for the preservice teachers do not offer preparation for the developing and

fostering of the home-school partnership (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Willemse et al., 2016).

From the participants' perspectives, there were no negative ramifications related to their professional practice associated with these research findings. Specifically, participants reflected on their own lived experiences and methods for improvement. Moving forward, a collaborative, systemic approach to teacher preparation for the home-school partnership should be introduced and reinforced. Without a collective consciousness around the home-school partnership, the offerings by teachers could remain varied and unsystematic.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This study addressed the topic of teacher preparation as it pertains to the home-school partnership in an international school community. The research was designed to understand the nature of teacher preparation for developing and sustaining a home-school partnership. The literature noted that the home-school partnership leads to an improved schooling experience for students (Clinton et al., 2007; Epstein, 1995; Henderson, 1987; Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Mattingly et al., 2002; Murray et al., 2015). The literature also noted that teachers experience frustration for the lack of preparation on their behalf and struggle in this domain of teaching (Markow & Pieters, 2012; MetLife, 2013). Because of this, teachers offer unequal levels of output regarding the partnership to families (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). Since student achievement and teacher satisfaction are important to the integrity of quality teacher preparation, it was essential to explore how teachers perceive the preparation they received to foster the home-school partnership based on their lived experiences. To deeply understand the school and its teachers as a culture, this ethnography sought to interrogate the processes teachers bring to the school research site and the processes provided by the school site to strengthen the shared mindset around teacher preparation. The results of this qualitative ethnographic study may assist school leadership decision-making as it pertains to teacher preparation within their unique school culture and community. University educators as well as school leaders may realize a need to modify their current teacher preparation methods by incorporating explicit systems of preparation for new teachers of their school, as well as providing support to the seasoned teachers who have missed this preparation opportunity.

This study was constructed to explore the nature of teacher preparation as it relates to the home-school partnership between the parents or home and the teachers. The home-school partnership is more than a desired relationship to build community. Research has shown that the partnership has positive effects for students (Clinton et al., 2007; Epstein, 1995; Henderson, 1987; Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Mattingly et al., 2002; Murray et al., 2015). While an integral partnership in many schools, teacher preparation programs in the United States offer limited preparation and instruction on how to foster the home-school partnership (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2001). International schools face challenges to acquire this partnership, unique to the transient community. This study focused on the expansive range of experiences, both formal and informal, that may lead to teacher preparation to foster the home-school partnership in an international school community. The study addressed the following research questions:

- How do teachers perceive systems in the school to have an impact on the home-school partnership?
- What is the perception held by teachers about experiences or trainings provided to them that have led to their personal level of preparedness for the home-school partnership in international schools?
- What is the perception held by teachers on how preparation for the home-school partnership could be improved in international schools?

The rationale for this study was based on the belief that an international school is responsible for enacting systems to set parameters for the partnership and for the sustainability of the partnership (Gellar, 1996). Additionally, although research has investigated formal training in many teacher preparation programs in the United States (Anderson & Minke, 2007;

Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2001), this study extends research by providing findings of preparation of teachers as well as training that may exist in other countries. Of paramount importance is evidence from teachers leading to improved preparation for the home-school partnership in a transient international community.

The qualitative method with ethnographical design was chosen as the best way to explore for deep understanding the lived experiences and the perceptions of teachers of their own preparation, whether formal or informal. The researcher preferred descriptive evidence of the lived experiences rather than measurable, correlated, or categorized data (Vagle, 2016). For with the lived experiences, the researcher could capture conversations around the informal life experiences that may have contributed to preparation, otherwise missed in data. Current research did not investigate teacher preparation beyond formal preservice preparation at universities in the United States, Belgium, and Holland (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Epstein, 2005; Willemse et al., 2016), and it remains unclear whether teachers receive preparation through alternative venues or life experiences that may be replicated. From the results of the data, I will expound on conclusions, and draw upon experiences offered beyond United States, Belgium, and Holland universities and beyond the classroom experience. If the evidence of the preparation for the home-school partnership can be demonstrated through shared stories and reflection by international school teachers participating in this study, systems of preparation for teachers can be harnessed, replicated, and implemented to ensure the preparation is not left to chance.

The conclusion formed from the evidence will be summarized in Chapter 5. From the coding process, six themes emerged from the data collected to answer the research questions. From the findings within these themes, I established conclusions, realized implications for communities and the need for further research. Hence, this chapter will include extensive

findings documented in the study and offer recommendations for theoretical, practical, and future research around teacher preparation for the home-school partnership.

### **Summary of the Results**

Extensive research documents the benefits to student learning when a community fosters the home-school partnership (Fisher et al., 2016; Gottfried et al., 1994; Hattie, 2009; Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; Mattingly et al., 2002; Murray et al., 2015; Pate & Andrews, 2006; Wang & Eccles, 2012). Teacher preparation to foster the home-school partnership is not a part of the curriculum during formal university teacher preparation (Epstein, 2005; Willemse et al., 2016). This lack of preparation can lead to the explanation of why teachers remain frustrated with this domain of their profession (MetLife, 2013), and why teachers offer inconsistent and haphazard methods to foster the partnership in their schools (Epstein, 2005; Kraft & Dougherty, 2013; MetLife, 2013; Willemse et al., 2016). While much is written about the need for United States university training of teachers to prepare teachers for the partnerships, not much is known about teacher preparation in universities outside of the United States (Epstein, 2005; Willemse et al., 2016). While a systems approach to preparation offered by the universities could build a foundation for teacher preparation, this approach may not benefit teachers within the international school community as they encounter diverse cultures at their school sites. In an international school community, where teachers come from all over the world, the teachers bring with them their trainings from varied teacher preparation programs. It is unclear whether colleagues prepared in a variety of countries receive equivalent preparations course. The incongruity of preparation could accentuate the disconnect in the community mindset at the school site.

Chapter 1 of this study revealed that despite the importance and benefit of the home-school partnership; little has been done to prepare teachers for this aspect of their profession (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Keyes, 2000; Murray et al., 2015; Schechter & Sherri, 2009; Wischnowski & Cianca, 2012). The chapter further explains that the disparity between the need for a home-school partnership and a lack of preparation of preservice, results in erratic styles of communication to parents (Kraft & Dougherty, 2013). In chapter 1, the researcher identified the location of the study as an international school with a community of teachers representing nine different nationalities. The location and teacher sampling provided the opportunity to gain insights to the perception of teachers regarding their preparation for the home-school partnership in an international school.

Chapter 2 provided a background of the existing literature on the pertinent topics surrounding the study. The literature search included an overview of the home-school partnership and an overview of educational policies in the United States surrounding the need to deepen and require the partnership for the community, including student benefit as well as research surrounding the interrogation of teacher preparation. The review of university preparation evidences that although mandates for the home-school partnership exist for educators, findings from extensive research deem that formal preparation is absent. Missing from the research is the element and possibility of other avenues or educational systems that may provide educators their preparation for the home-school partnership to be developed, replicated, and fostered.

In Chapter 3, the research was described according the method and design of the study (Blumer, 1969; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Von Bertalanffy, 1967). The researcher conducted the

study qualitatively using an ethnographic approach and design. A realist ethnography was employed based on the need to deeply understand the culture formed in part by the perceptions of teachers in an international school and the implication of the international school culture on the home-school partnership. The purposeful sampling of the respondents assisted in an intentional creation of a broad spectrum and representation of the demographics of the school within the 21 selected teacher participants. The open-ended interviews guided the researcher to other demographics not purposefully delineated in the selection process. The open-ended nature of the interview offered the interviewee the opportunity arose to reflect upon life experiences which may lead to an increased level for preparedness. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, member checked, and coded using an iterative coding process.

Chapter 4 presented the analysis and interpretation of the results from 21 open-ended participant interviews. From the interviews, six themes emerged from the data collected to answer the research questions. The themes reflected the systems and expectations of international schools surrounding the partnership, the formal training teachers received to prepare them for the partnership, informal experiences that led them to feel better prepared to foster the partnership, the current and previous levels of comfort surround the home-school partnership, and the perception from teachers of how the systems of preparation can be improved.

### **Discussion of Results in Relation to Literature**

The study was designed to answer three research questions formulated to explore formal and informal teacher preparation for the home-school partnership from a sampling of internationally trained teachers. The following problem statement guided the study: the nature of teacher preparation for the home-school partnerships in international school communities is not

known (Epstein & Sheldon, 2016). Three research questions were developed to address the problem: (a) How do teachers perceive systems in the school to have an impact on the home-school partnership? (b) What is the perception held by teachers about experiences or trainings provided to them that have led to their personal level of preparedness for the home-school partnership at international schools? and (c) What is the perception held by teachers on how preparation for the home-school partnership could be improved in international schools? Data was collected from open-ended interviews where rich descriptions of lived learning experiences were obtained to answer the research questions. Research question and corresponding themes organize the findings and conclusions of the study.

The methodology of the study allowed the researcher to understand the school culture surrounding the home-school partnership. Open-ended interviews of 21 teacher participants who were a part of a non-random selection process provided answers to the research questions. A summary of the results and the themes reflected the systems and expectations of international schools surrounding the partnership, the formal training teachers received to prepare them for the partnership, informal experiences that led them to feel better prepared to foster the partnership, the current and previous levels of comfort surround the home-school partnership, and the perception from teachers of how the systems of preparation can be improved.

**Research question 1.** Research question 1 was designed to determine teacher perception of systems in the school that have an impact on the home-school partnership. From the interviews, five themes emerged to address this research question:

- Familiar with the expectations at current school,
- When familiar, cited school to home (not home to school) expectations,
- Not familiar with expectations,

- Familiar with the expectation at previous school, and
- Expectations were part of their professional conduct.

It became abundantly clear from the interviews that participants did not have a clear understanding of the expectations around fostering the home-school partnership. While two-way communication is a known requirement in creating partnerships, this was an area that teachers perceived as needed, yet neglected as an expectation shared by administration. Specifically, teachers expressed that administration at the school did not make evident the expectations for two-way communication needed for the home-school partnership. Additionally, I discovered that while the teachers had an expansive range of international school experience, the finding at this site remained consistent with their other school experiences.

These findings are not new. The findings by Gordon and Louis (2009) echo the findings in this study when it evidences the importance of stakeholder involvement and the importance of shared leadership by all stakeholders. This finding is also consistent to findings by Sheldon (2005) where the researcher stated the need for a clear direction of the partnership, systematic effort and support, stronger implementation displaying that the school values and supports of having the partnership, preparation for the partnership, and emphasis on educators understanding the community and their values. The findings from this study are also congruous to the finding identified by Teaching for Change (2016), where they evidence the need for administrators to shape the partnership through policies (p. 14). Epstein and Sanders (2006) shared this finding and noted that knowledgeable leaders were needed to promote equitable and meaningful partnerships. This finding parallels the findings by Kraft and Dougherty (2013) who deemed this aspect of the profession as left to chance and therefore is not enough to be consistently effective.

Correlations can also be seen in research by Epstein and Sheldon (2016) where they stated the need for two-way for partnership.

Based on participant responses to question one, it is apparent that teachers have a varied perception of the systems and expectations of the school to foster the home-school partnership. Teachers perceive that systematic approaches to the home-school partnership are sparse in the international schools in which they have experience. The findings also make clear that when expectations in an international school exists, it can be a direct reflection of the current school leadership or the philosophy of the school. Leadership needs to articulate the expectation to all stakeholders to reduce misconceptions and build a clear, systematic approach to the partnership.

**Research question 2.** Research question 2 was designed to determine teacher perception of preparation that led to their preparedness to foster the home-school partnership. From the interviews, three main themes emerged to address this research question. Within the three main themes, further sub themes emerged:

- Formal experiences
- Informal experiences
  - Site-based experiences
  - trial and error
  - collegial support
  - parenting school-aged children
- Perception of preparedness by the teacher
  - Current perception of preparedness
  - First years of teaching

This study examines the formal teacher preparation programs in nine different countries to learn about teacher preparation for the home school partnership. This study extends the findings that teacher preparation for the partnership is not consistently offered (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). This study additionally extends the research by Willemse et al., (2016), which mirrored Epstein (2005) and investigated preservice formal preparation in Holland and Belgium. Data from this study and previous studies provide evidence that little or no preparation was available within the university coursework (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Willemse et al., 2016), even though it was determined nearly 30 years ago by Chavkin and Williams (1988) that there was a need for preservice teacher preparation to foster the home school partnership.

The findings sufficiently elucidate that teacher preparation for the partnership is not occurring in the universities for the pre-service teachers. This extends the findings of current research to eight other countries where teachers received preparation. To learn more about the broad range of preparation available to teachers, I found it necessary to extend the questions on preparation to learn about the informal experiences teachers may receive that have transferability to increase teacher preparedness to foster the partnership.

This area of the question exposed themes of site-based experiences offered by administration, as well as impromptu learning through trial and error and collegial support. The findings also display the transferable skills from teachers who are also parents of school-aged children. Critical to understand is the approach taken by the male participants interviewed. Through conversation and reflection, all the male participants stated that trial and error became a commonly occurring theme in the open-ended interviews, while only some female participants

also included trial and error as an approach to learning. Participants often stated that this was the method of learning that frequently occurred.

Collegial support was another reoccurring theme in the interviews regarding informal preparation. This method was described when teachers sought support as needed from their colleagues to learn about the home school partnership. This supports research by Vreeland (2016) who wrote that the teaching practice in this domain could be improved by tapping into the knowledge of teachers who are successful in developing positive relationships with parents.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, this study aimed to mirror the demographics of the school regarding parent school-aged children. Parents of school-aged children stated that they developed empathetic processes in working with parents as partners. The teachers attributed their interactions with parents to what they themselves would want from a teacher of their children. Parenting a school-aged child provided opportunities to look inside the practice of another teacher and empathize as a parent. Teachers who are parents perceive that they have a depth of empathetic information to assist in developing protocols and teacher preparation.

The final themes derived from the findings about informal preparation in question two pertained to the current perception of preparedness by the teachers. The topic drew on two distinct themes. The first theme dealt with reflection on their first years of teaching. The second theme focused on their current feelings. Teacher participants spoke about their first years of teaching with negative descriptors. Notably, I found that some teachers can take between three and 15 years to feel comfortable with the parent-teacher partnership. This finding is aligned with the extant research compiled by MetLife (1987) and MetLife (2013) which displayed 55% of the teachers responding said they were not comfortable talking to parents about their children. Additionally, one-fifth of the parents said that they have felt awkward or reluctant about

approaching a teacher. In their most recent study (MetLife, 2013), 72% of the principals and 73% of the teachers surveyed stated that establishing and maintaining parent partnership was challenging or very challenging.

Based on these findings it is evident that consistent, formal preparation is not occurring in the universities for the pre-service teachers. The informal preparation can take place at the school site by administration or through collegial support. Collegial support is not systemic and was randomly offered. Trial and error is an approach to learning that is used to a greater extent among male teachers. Teachers who are parents have transferable skills with a depth of empathetic information to assist in developing protocols and teacher preparation. Most importantly, novice teachers are not receiving consistent preparation for their experiences with parents, and they therefore lack confidence in their ability to foster the home-school partnership.

It is imperative to provide support to teachers, in the absence of formal preparation. The methods schools could tap into may include the expertise of experienced teachers or teachers who are parents to serve as the mentors to less skilled teachers. Leaving the skills development to chance will only highlight the gap in training leading to stakeholder dissatisfaction and diminished returns.

**Research question 3.** Research question three focused on ways in which teachers could be supported in the profession and resulted in five core themes which surfaced from the data gathered to answer this question:

- Improving the first years of teaching,
- Cultural understanding,
- Explicitly prepare teachers for parent conferences,
- Improve beginning of each year structures, and

- Develop a shared mindset.

During interviews, participants responded that the first years of teaching were very difficult when it came to teacher partnerships with parents. They expressed the need to support new teachers. Findings from extant research evidences that teachers need the preparation to develop and foster the home-school partnership (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Keyes, 2000; Murray et al., 2015; Schechter & Sherri, 2009; Wischnowski & Cianca, 2012). Aligned with the findings, Wischnowski and Cianca (2012) identified that teachers need a preservice data tool kit for preservice preparation teachers. This supports the findings in extant literature that teachers need the preparation to develop and foster the home-school partnership (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Keyes, 2000; Murray et al., 2015; Schechter & Sherri, 2009; Wischnowski & Cianca, 2012). Without the preparation, teachers are ill prepared to foster the relationship (Anderson & Minke, 2007).

The findings of this study display the need for a cultural understanding of the school, the staff, and the parents to improve the homeschool partnership. Teaching for Change (2016) provided research evidence that school administrators and support staff shape families' commitment to schools through their attitudes, policies, and actions. This finding also aligned with Kraft and Dougherty (2013), who began to identify alternative settings to teacher preparation recognizing that each school must define their desired home-school relationship, considering the uniqueness of the site.

The findings of this study display the need to explicitly prepare teachers for parent conferencing. To my surprise, most of the participants in this study, even after years of teaching, had not had an opportunity to observe an actual parent conference prior to leading a conference

independently. According to recent revisions to studies by Teaching for Change (2016), parent-teacher conferences (or other meetings) are planned as caring exchanges of how to help each child learn best and where families are given the opportunity to ask questions, make suggestions, and share insights (p. 13). Based on the findings in the study, the researcher found that there was a significant gap in the consistency of the conference implementation among all teachers and staff. A simple modification in teacher orientation whether in the University setting, or in absence of this, at the school site, would be the use of video representation of successful conferencing methods, or the bridging of partnerships for hands-on training in parent conferencing. Due to the gap in this training, the offering of support should be extended to both novice and expert teachers to develop a systemic approach consistent with school expectations and values.

Adopting a holistic approach to improving beginning of each year structures for teachers is an easy adaptation for administration; this finding correlates with Wischnowski and Cianca's (2012) asserted need to create a preservice data tool kit for preservice preparation teachers. It may be helpful for international schools to initiate seminars to cross-educate and share best practice in the future, as it pertains to teacher preparation. With multiple venues available to international school administration and teachers, this option is viable.

And lastly, in closure to the findings from question three, participants perceive the need for administration to develop a shared mindset surrounding the home school partnership. These findings align with O'Brien (2004), that evidence through collaborative experiences, a shared mindset can develop between the internal and external stakeholders. One recommendation is for administration to explore with staff what it means to have a partnership. Through this

exploration, administration can share while teachers contribute to the development of a shared mindset and shared practice.

### **Limitations**

I, the researcher, recognized certain limitations inherent in conducting this research study. Limitations to this study include a fear to speak openly, purposeful selection of participants, and a single geographic location. I speculated these limitations prior to the onset of the research.

Knowing my teacher participants, I believed a fear to speak openly would arise in in the interviews. To reduce this limitation, confidentiality processes were reviewed at multiple stages throughout the process. My speculation of this limitation was due to the feeling of job insecurity at the school and the lack of freedom for teachers to speak their mind with administration. I thought that certain respondents may be response bias on audio, as they did not trust the confidentiality of the method. This speculation was validated by more than one participant who stated off the record that they felt they did not feel they were experts in this area to speak for this research. One participant shared on the record that she feared others would learn that she spoke negatively. This limitation also pointed to cultural apprehension based on prior experiences the participants were exposed to in their own countries. She spoke about a time when teachers lost their jobs after teachers voiced discontent with administrative policies and procedures. She also referenced public strikes that ensued in her country following teachers speaking openly. This would explain her reticence to speak. Other limitations included the desire to instill a positive impression of the school. This limitation was validated by teachers who have school leadership responding with reservations about topics.

Due to the nature and intent of the study, I applied a method of purposeful selection of participants representing the diversity of the teacher population. Moreover, because of these

factors, the study was delimited to one international school setting. In future research, this limitation could be avoided by including multiple international school settings. Geographic location was delimited in this study as participants belonged to one school site in one location. Research would be enhanced in the future by extending the participant base to a broad selection of international school communities. International schools offer multiple opportunities to collaborate through publications and conferences. These opportunities can be used to reduce this limitation in future research.

### **Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy and Theory**

As with most educational research, the implication should inevitably lead to student improvement. Educational research is saturated with perspectives on the home-school partnership. Several implications were gleaned from the data collected in this study. The findings from this research, on the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers of the preparation for the home-school partnership, could lead to increased teacher satisfaction with the profession leading to improved student benefits. This study could additionally improve parent partnership, which in turn could lead to improved student benefits.

The intention of this qualitative ethnographic study was to assist in filling the gap identified in the existing literature regarding teacher preparation for the home-school partnership (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Markow & Pieters, 2012; Vreeland, 2016). It was designed specifically to explore and understand how international school teachers perceive their preparation from the nine different home countries of origin. Knowing more about the lived experiences of international teachers may contain transferability for teachers worldwide, whether teaching abroad or situated in their home country.

While the teaching community prepares its teachers, it has continually neglected this area of the profession. For schools to retain good teachers, it is imperative that the systems effectively prepare teachers for the element of the career requiring teachers to partner with parents. In the current study, multiple opportunities were presented as solutions to the lack of teacher preparation. Teachers, both novice and expert, expressed the need for support in this domain, and teacher who are parents of school-aged children expressed a source of expertise in this area. Therefore, sites can utilize more experienced teachers as mentors to other teachers. The recommendations are linked directly to the interview data and analysis. The recommendations are not listed in order of priority, but as possible strategies to enhance teacher preparation.

Based on the results, several other recommendations are offered to International School leadership:

1. Leadership needs to articulate the expectation to all stakeholders to reduce misconceptions and build a clear, systematic approach to the partnership.
2. Share the philosophy and expectations of the home-school partnership with the teachers upon arrival at the school.
3. Explore as a staff what it means to be in partnership with parents.
4. Without the university preparation, schools must accept responsibility for the preparation.
5. Utilize site-based experts as mentors.
6. Improve the first years of teaching experience.
7. Develop and share a cultural understanding of the stakeholders.
8. Explicitly prepare teachers for parent conferences.

9. Improve beginning of each year structures for new and returning teachers.

Ideally, if the findings from this study are applied to a school site, extended research on the benefits of the home-school partnership on the school community would provide valuable evidence to the research community. It is recommended that research continue for the transfer of theory to practice in teacher preparation education.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study focused on international teachers representing nine different countries of origin. The purpose of including the expansive range of teachers was to extend the research beyond teacher preparation in the United States. While the findings of the research may benefit international schools, it may also benefit schools and teacher preparation programs regardless of location.

Based on the results of this research, there is a vast array of opportunities for further studies. The far-reaching benefits from this study warrant future research to gather data from multiple stakeholders in a broad range of geographic locations.

Further research could focus on:

- Obtaining university buy-in to add teacher preparation for the home-school partnership for pre-service teachers.
- Interrogating the systems in place at the school site to share the philosophy and expectations of the home-school partnership with the teachers upon arrival at the school.
- Measuring through qualitative or quantitative data value added to the teachers, the parents, and the students when a teacher preparation exists.
- Evaluating teacher perspective following the mentorship relationships with expert teachers in a longitudinal study.

- Establishing formal and informal teacher preparation at the school site.
- Identifying the extent to which trained teachers affect the home-school partnership.

## **Conclusion**

I ventured into this study to uncover the personal experiences of teachers that lead to their preparation for fostering the home-school partnership. By capturing the voices of teachers who practice at an international school, and represent nine different nationalities, I sought to present rich, thick details of those formal and informal experiences. Three research questions guided the research study. The first question to address systems and expectation of the school, the second question to address formal and informal experiences which may enhance levels of preparation and the third question to identify perceived ideas to improve preparation. By engaging in an open-ended interview around current and previous systems, the findings revealed systems and expectations are needed in international schools for consistent preparation of teachers. This finding affirms the findings by Epstein and Sheldon (2016) that schools and districts need leadership to plan and implement programs of partnerships for sustained improvements. By inquiring about the formal and informal training the teachers have received to better prepare them for this domain of their profession, the study revealed that while the formal preparation for the partnership is lacking in the universities in the nine countries represented in this study, there exists variables at school sites that can enhance the preparation. What emerged from the interviews was that experienced teachers, as well as teachers with school-aged children can be utilized as site-based resources and the knowledge can be harnessed as a part of a formal preparation with systems developed by leadership. Finally, by asking teachers questions about ways to improve teacher preparation, what emerged was the desire by teachers to receive preparation alongside their colleagues for the home-school partnership that incorporates the

unique school culture at the site. In this way, the school can offer a unified approach to the home-school partnership that honors the school culture and needs of the community.

The goal of the research was to capture the perception of teachers about their preparation to foster the home-school partnership, to align the findings with theory, and to offer suggestions to practice. Each of the 21 teacher participants shared personal stories about their experiences with the parent community. Overwhelmingly, it became clear that teachers possess the desire to work in partnership with parents. It became evident that their preparation in this domain of their profession was left to chance, and while many have overcome this obstacle, and can celebrate their efforts, they would not choose to repeat the experience they encountered their first years as a teacher. The researcher began to recognize through conversations that novice teachers need to be provided clear and explicit structures to become successful with the home-school partnership. The study left me hopeful of site based changes spurred on by the teacher participants having awakened to this concern. My additional hope is to see theory applied to practice in international schools world-wide.

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## Appendix A: Pre-Survey

The teachers who agreed to participate were sent an online google survey. The results of a survey sent to all members of the school community led to a selection of 21 participants using a non-random selection process. The goal in the selection criteria was to identify interviewees to include an array of teachers with diverse experiences. As the researcher, I have selected the location, as I am a part of the school community and culture.

### Sharon Canadine Study Survey

Thank you so much for participating in my study. \* Required

1. **Name \***
2. **Role at AISM \* Mark only one oval.** Administrator Classroom Teacher Specialist
3. **Gender \* Mark only one oval.** Male Female Other
4. **Race \* How do you define your race?**
5. **Nationality \* Mark only one oval.** American Australian Brazilian British Canadian German Indian Mozambican New Zealander South African Other: **If you selected "other" for Nationality, please tell me your nationality**
6. **Where is your teaching license from? \* Mark only one oval.** America Australia Brazil UK Canada Germany India Mozambique New Zealand South Africa Other
7. **If you selected "other", for where your teaching license is from, please tell me here where the license is from.**
8. **Approximately how many years of teaching experience do you have in International schools compared to your home country? \* Mark only one oval.** Less than 10% 10–50% 50% or more 100%

9. **Number of years at our school (select 10 if 10 or more)** \* *Mark only one oval.*

10. **Are you a parent?** \* *Mark only one oval.* Yes No

## **Appendix B: Interview Questions and Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert**

### **Panel - VREP<sup>®</sup>**

#### **Interview Questions**

1. How do teachers perceive systems such as process and procedures, in the school to have an impact on the home-school partnership?
2. How are teachers informed about the expectations of the home-school partnership?
3. In what ways are the teachers encouraged to foster home-school partnerships?
4. In what ways is the current school culture similar or different to other school cultures?
5. What is the perception held by teachers about preservice or point of instruction experiences or trainings presented that have led to their personal level of preparedness for the home-school partnership at international schools?
6. What preparation has supported the role of teachers to foster the home-school partnership?
7. How comfortable are teachers in fostering the home-school partnership?
8. What is the perception held by teachers of how preparation for the home-school partnership could be improved in international schools?

Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel - VREP®

By Marilyn K. Simon with input from Jacquelyn White <http://dissertationrecipes.com/>

Criteria	Operational Definitions	Score				Questions NOT meeting standard (List page and question number) and need to be revised. Please use the comments and suggestions section to recommend revisions.
		1=Not Acceptable (major modifications needed)	2=Below Expectations (some modifications needed)	3=Meets Expectations (no modifications needed but could be improved with minor changes)	4=Exceeds Expectations (no modifications needed)	
		1	2	3	4	
<b>Clarity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The questions are direct and specific.</li> <li>Only one question is asked at a time.</li> <li>The participants can understand what is being asked.</li> <li>There are no <i>double-barreled</i> questions (two questions in one).</li> </ul>					
<b>Wordiness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions are concise.</li> <li>There are no unnecessary words</li> </ul>					
<b>Negative Wording</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions are asked using the affirmative (e.g., Instead of asking, “Which methods are not used?,” the researcher asks, “Which methods <i>are</i> used?”)</li> </ul>					
<b>Overlapping Responses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No response covers more than one choice.</li> <li>All possibilities are considered.</li> <li>There are no ambiguous questions.</li> </ul>					
<b>Balance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The questions are unbiased and do not lead the participants</li> </ul>					

	to a response. The questions are asked using a neutral tone.					
<b>Use of Jargon</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The terms used are understandable by the target population.</li> <li>There are no clichés or hyperbole in the wording of the questions.</li> </ul>					
<b>Appropriateness of Responses Listed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The choices listed allow participants to respond appropriately.</li> <li>The responses apply to all situations or offer a way for those to respond with unique situations.</li> </ul>					
<b>Use of Technical Language</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The use of technical language is minimal and appropriate.</li> <li>All acronyms are defined.</li> </ul>					
<b>Application to Praxis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The questions asked relate to the daily practices or expertise of the potential participants.</li> </ul>					
<b>Relationship to Problem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The questions are sufficient to resolve the problem in the study</li> <li>The questions are sufficient to answer the research questions.</li> <li>The questions are sufficient to obtain the purpose of the study.</li> </ul>					
<b>Measure of Construct: A: Teachers know the school's shared belief about the Home-School partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The survey adequately measures this construct.</li> </ul>					
<b>Measure of Construct: B: Systems are in place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The survey adequately measures this construct.</li> </ul>					

to ensure the Home-School partnership						
Measure of Construct: C: Schools differ on their approach to the Home-School partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>					
Measure of Construct: D: Preparation and experiences support the teacher's role in fostering the Home-School partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The survey adequately measures this construct.</li> </ul>					
Measure of Construct: D: Teachers recognize their strengths and weaknesses regarding their role in fostering the Home-School partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The survey adequately measures this construct.</li> </ul>					

*Permission to use this survey and include in the dissertation manuscript was granted by the author, Marilyn K. Simon, and Jacquelyn White. All rights are reserved by the authors. Any other use or reproduction of this material is prohibited.*

## Types of Validity

### References

- Carmines, E. G. & Zeller, R. A. (1991). *Reliability and validity assessment*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Fink, A., ed. (1995). *How to measure survey reliability and validity v. 7*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## **Appendix C: Open-Ended Guiding Questions**

Establish expectation for Home-School Partnership

1. Are you familiar with the expectations of AISM concerning Home-School Partnership?
2. Can you tell me what they are?
3. How did you come to learn about it?

### **Establish the systems**

4. How does AISM ensure its teachers are honoring the HSP?
5. In what ways does AISM encourage HSP among its teachers?
6. How do the expectations of AISM influence you as teacher on a daily basis?

Establish the impact of school culture

7. How does the HSP at AISM compare to those at other schools with which you are familiar?

### **Establish prior preparation**

8. What preparation have you received, or experiences do you have, whether formal or informal, that support your role in fostering the home-school partnership?
9. When did this happen in scope of your years of teaching
10. How comfortable are you with implementing the HSP at AISM?

### **Establish need for preparation and support**

11. What are your strengths and weaknesses concerning the HSP?
12. How might AISM help you to honor and implement the HSP?
13. Are you familiar with the expectations of AISM concerning Home-School Partnership?

## Appendix D: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### ***What does “fraudulent” mean?***

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### ***What is “unauthorized” assistance?***

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

## Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

Digital Signature  \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Typed) Sharon Canadine

Date April 3, 2018