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Collaboration with Families: Perceptions of Special Education Preservice Teachers and Teacher Preparation

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Collaboration with Families: Perceptions of Special Education Preservice Teachers and Teacher

Preparation

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the integration of family involvement in the courses and field experiences in an undergraduate special education program. This study also explored preservice teachers' perceptions about what they learned in their program and the perceptions, and understandings of pre-service teachers regarding collaboration with families based on their past experiences with their families. This study used qualitative research methods to answer questions about perceptions of pre-service teachers' perceptions of collaborating with families and the extent to which their perceptions are influenced by their own family backgrounds as well as their perceptions about what they learned in their program. In order to address the goals and related research questions of this study, the research design will be a descriptive case study. Interviews with six preservice teachers and two professors and document analysis used in this study as a source of data. Three themes emerged from the data. The themes are as follows: *perceptions of preservice teachers about family-school collaboration, preservice teachers' past experiences when they were at K-12 in terms of family involvement* and *teacher education program experiences of preservice teachers.*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.

-Helen Keller

The purpose of this study is to gain deeper understandings about special education preservice teachers' understandings of family involvement in one special education teacher preparation program at a research one university. Specifically, this study explores the perceptions and understandings of pre-service teachers regarding collaboration with families based on their past experiences with their own families, the nature of the integration of knowledge and skills related to family involvement in the courses and field experiences in the undergraduate special education teacher preparation program, and the perceptions of pre-service teachers about what they learned about family involvement in their program.

Effective teacher preparation is very important for the success of K-12 schools. A key element of learning and positive academic outcomes for K-12 students is having highly qualified teachers (Blanton, McLeskey, & Taylor, 2014). In the U.S. within any given academic setting 13% of students have special need and 35% out of those who has special need has specific learning disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database). Given the multiple learning needs of students with special needs, the mastery of effective pedagogy is of critical importance in the development of quality special education teachers (Blanton, Sindelar, & Correa, 2006).

When teacher candidates receive adequate education for collaborating better with families, they are able to better understand the ways to collaborate with families (Bruine, Willemse, D'Haem, Griswold, Vloebergs & Eynde, 2014). Important to family-school collaboration is understandings of multicultural issues which should be incorporated into the curriculum of teacher education programs. All students, including students with disabilities, will benefit from teachers who are collaborating with families academically and developmentally (Epstein, 2011; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Uludag, 2008; Hattie, 2009; Evans, 2013). Pre-service teachers sometimes lack of understandings about how to improve relationships with families and how to collaborate with families for the betterment of their children's' school outcomes. Flanigan (2007) suggested that traditional teacher preparation programs do not effectively prepare pre-service teachers for parent involvement experiences, nor do they prepare preservice teachers for the influence of experienced teachers who have negative attitudes about parent involvement, especially when pre-service teachers first experience student teaching. Taking courses at the university level relating to collaboration with families would help pre-service teachers to understand the dynamics of family school collaboration better.

Education about family school collaboration is an important component for preparing quality teachers in a teacher education program. When teacher candidates receive appropriate preparation in effective collaboration with families, they are better equipped to involve families in children's education in a way that promotes success (Novak, Murray, Scheuermann, & Curran, 2009). Therefore, family-school collaboration and related issues should be incorporated into the curriculum of teacher education programs.

Preservice teachers sometimes have a lack of understanding about how to build relationships with families and how to collaborate with them with respect to their children's education. For example, Baum and Swick (2008) point out that some teacher education programs are mostly theoretical and lack real life application when it comes to family interactions (Baum & Swick, 2008). Preservice teachers during field experience should be advised on how complex parental involvement affects the school and classroom environment as well as how it impacts partnerships with the collaborating teacher (Zeichner, 2009). Preservice teachers should likewise be reminded of how the nature of parental interaction has changed since they themselves were children (Ferrara, 2009).

Problem Statement

Teacher education programs should incorporate research supported practices related to involving families in their child's education within required special education undergraduate courses and field experiences (Bruine et al., 2014). However, some teacher preparation programs fail to properly address the implementation of family-school collaboration.

Anderson-Butcher & Ashton (2004) concludes that teachers perform best when they are willing to fully collaborate with families. Effective preservice teacher training for family interaction would ideally result in new teachers feeling prepared to collaborate with families once they have their own classrooms. The training might possibly also prevent unnecessary challenges related to lack of collaboration with families. Parental involvement is often a blind spot for pre-service teachers, one key reason being that communication with parents is a usually new experience for teacher candidates (Bartels & Eskow, 2010).

Moreover, coursework and field experiences should be relevant to what preservice teachers will encounter as professionals (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Pre-service teachers need

this support from their instructors, university supervisors, and collaborating teachers (mentor teachers). In order to ensure that students are successful in the learning process, teacher educators need to consider how to develop candidates' readiness for applied teaching in the classroom. Additionally, they need to learn about how to implement what they have learned in their coursework, which includes subject matter, instructional strategies, and how to implement these concepts in field experiences (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006).

By focusing on triad models in teacher preparation, we can see that there are multiple systems that impact what preservice teachers learn and think. The triad consists of pre-service teachers, collaborating teachers and partnership resource teachers or University Supervisors. In this study, the phenomenon is special education preservice teachers, and I would like to understand what their experiences within the program and how that relates to their thinking skills relative to family collaboration. Valencia et al (2009) found that the triad model for pre-service training is most beneficial when it comes to high quality internship experiences. A pre-service teacher may for example have excellent and innovative ideas that they could apply to their future teaching, but very few of the mentor teachers give candidates the opportunity to test out their skills. Even in the triad model, mentor teachers provide pre-service teachers opportunities, but they often do not provide productive feedback (Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman, 2009). The structures that have an impact on preservice teachers' learning include: course content within the triad model and conflicting objectives in the preservice field experience. Frequently, there are contradictory and unclear roles of responsibility between those in the triad composed of the university supervisor, the collaborating teacher, and the preservice teacher. (Valencia et al., 2009).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework supporting this research comes from two theoretical

frameworks: Ecological Theory and Family Systems Theory. Ecological Theory focuses on

student development, and according to the founder of Ecological Theory, Urie Bronfenbrenner:

> Human development is the process through which the growing person acquires a more
> extended, differentiated and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes
> motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or
> restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and
> content. (Bronfenbrenner,1979, p. 27)

Ecological Theory is comprised of five major ecological systems: Microsystem,

Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem, and Chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The

Microsystem includes direct personal contact with "significant" individuals in a person's life

(Leonard, 2011). It is within the Microsystem that a child first begins to develop particular

values and beliefs that become the child's core belief system. Usually, "lateral connections"

develop between individuals with whom the child interacts in the microsystem, for example

when child interacts with parents, peers or teachers. These "cross-relationships" constitute the

mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner,1979). The Mesosystem refers to how the individual child relates

to the wider community. Above the level of the mesosystem is the Exosystem, which is

comprised of individuals "indirectly involved in the child's development" including, for

example, if a child is ignored by his or her parents, he might not develop positive attitude

towards his or her teachers (Bronfenbrenner,1979). The Exosystem also comes into play when

the outside experiences of another family member directly affect the child. Going one step

further, the macrosystem is the "the prevailing cultural and economic conditions of the society"

(Leonard 2011, p.6), and relates to the larger social frameworks in which all the above-named

systems are found. The Macrosystem identifies the child's demographic and socioeconomic

status and how those factors build upon the character of the child's up-bringing. Lastly, the

Chronosystem tracks positive or negative life changes that occurs in the child's family life, for example, moving to a new home, parental divorce, changes in the number of family members or new siblings. All relationships and interactions in the environment are "nested" within each other and are situated in time. See Figure 1.1 below:
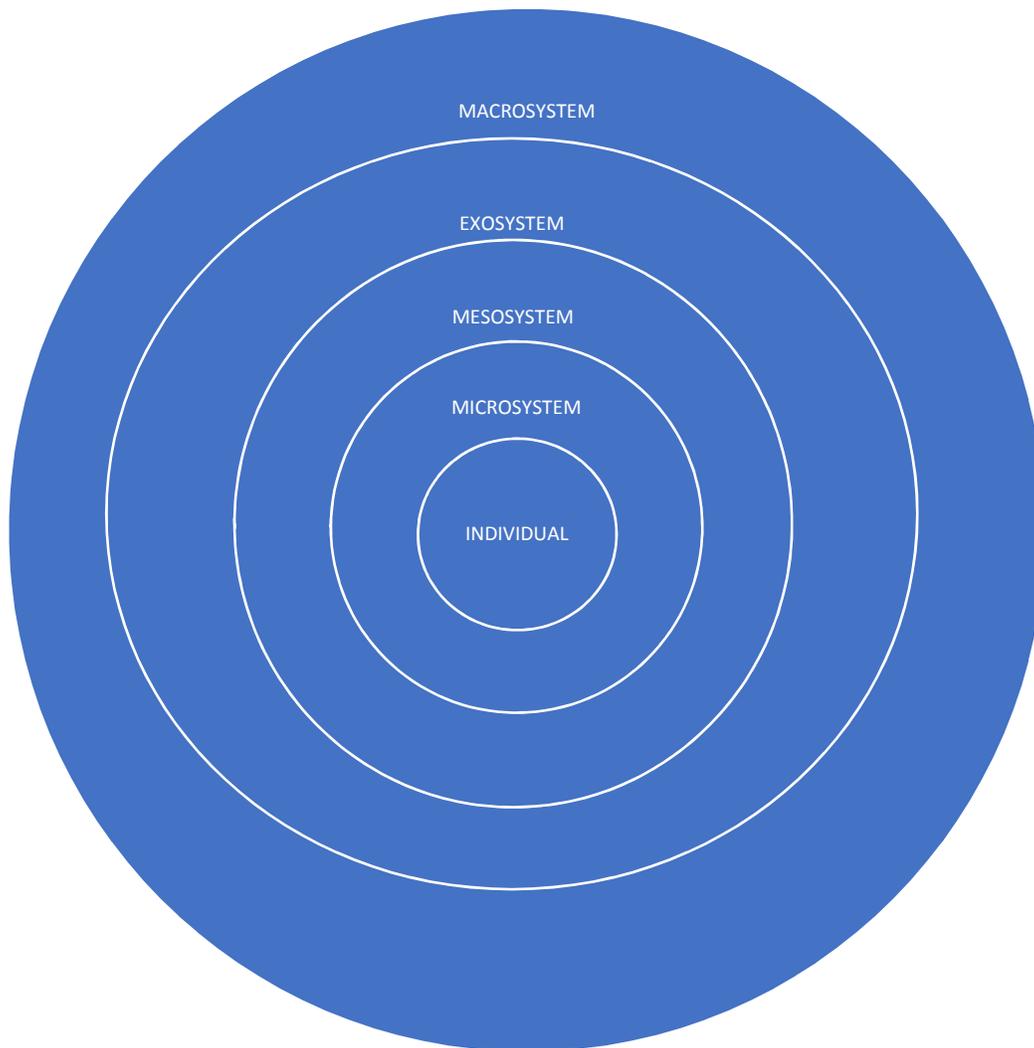
Figure 1.1: Ecological Theory

Ecological theory is a broad theory which represents attitudes within a chronological approach about beyond family-child interactions. Therefore, for making it more specific understanding the perceptions of preservice teachers and understanding the family patterns of preservice teachers, I added a second theory called Family Systems Theory. Family Systems

Theory will also help to investigate about past experiences of preservice teachers' more objectively and without personal bias.

Family Systems Theory comes from the work of scholars such as Ackerman (1959), Jackson (1965), Minuchin (1974), and Bowen (1978). In Family Systems Theory, each member of a family influences the others in anticipated and repeated ways (Van Velsor & Cox, 2000). Individuals learn how to interact socially and culturally from their domestic unit's influences, and learns from how each person interacts socially in formal settings, such as at school and in the workplace. Furthermore, family experiences shape individuals' expectations and predictions about society and how it might or should function (Nieto, 2004). The theory reflects communication and interaction patterns, separateness and connectedness, loyalty and independence, and adaptation to stress in the context of the whole as opposed to the individual in isolation (Christian, 2006). Family Systems Theory can explain why members of a family behave the way they do to each other in a situation (Fingerman & Bermann, 2000).

One common thread between the Ecological Theory and Family Systems Theory is they are both systems based. Both theories emphasize that relationships and behaviors cannot be related to one single element. There are multiple layers that impact what a person thinks. These theories have importance to my study because they address the multi-layered nature of experiences and understandings about the roles of pre-service teachers and how they relate to understanding working with families. On the one hand, the whole nature of PK-12 students bring to table is of a complex nature because these multi-layered aspects that relate to families' understanding who he or she is as a person. On the other hand, another ecological pieces are not only families but is also school, peers, community, church, health services etc. Within that, I am interested in learning how teacher education programs prepare pre-service teachers for family-

school collaboration. Additionally, I am interested in learning about the experiences of preservice teachers related to working with families in relationship to the curriculum and activities they engage in during their teacher preparation program, particularly families of students with special needs. The preservice teachers' understandings are based on the layers of family interaction they have experienced. These two theories have potential for understanding pre-service teachers' experiential learning as well as the existing knowledge and established ideas they arrive to their programs with, including ideas about families, the teaching profession, and special education. Within this context, in a teacher preparation program in special education these theories can help inform researchers about what preservice teachers understand and what they learn by centering around the connection between child's teacher and his or her parents. Preservice teachers need to understand that when parents take an active role in their child's school, such as attending parent/teacher conferences and volunteering in their classrooms, it has a positive impact on children's development. This can inform how we understand what pre-service teachers come to their programs where they might be consistent with best practices. Because of that, this should be applied to teacher education in coursework and field experiences for developing preservice teachers understanding around being able to collaborate with families.

Educational Significance of the Study

Family involvement in the education of students with special needs is a critical aspect to their educational success. The partnership between the families of students with disabilities and a school is very important in the special education process, because a supportive family partnership contributes positively to the education and progress of students with disabilities (Hess, Molina & Kozleski, 2006). Families, and specifically parents/guardians, will often have detailed and intimate knowledge of some of their child's needs and therefore are positioned to

assert their child's interests and help make decisions as to what might be educationally appropriate for their child (Lo, 2010). Parents are able to provide educators with insight on how their children function and what the best approach is for their children to succeed, as they know about their own children's strengths and challenges from raising them from infancy (Wang, Mannan, Poston, Turnbull, Summers, 2004); however, they may lack certain areas and levels of knowledge related to the particular disability and effective instruction, etc., which is why educators and families need to collaborate to share each other's expertise (Barnhill, Polloway, & Sumutka, 2010).

Definition of Terms

Based on the purpose of the study some of the key terms such as pre-service teachers and collaboration.

Preservice Techer: a pre-service teacher is a college (undergraduate level) student involved in a school-based field experience. Under the supervision of a cooperating teacher, the pre-service teacher gradually takes on more classroom management and instructional responsibilities.

Collaboration: Collaboration is a form of partnership but it is a partnership of working together two parties. Collaboration is key to educational collaboration and setting objectives within collegial partnerships (Friend & Cook, 2007).

Triad Model: The Triad Model requires a unique relationship between three varying roles of practice to create a highly productive and knowledgeable preservice teacher. In the triad, there are pre-service teachers, collaborating teachers (mentor teachers) and partnership resource teachers (university supervisors).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following literature review, there are three main sections: Perceptions of Preservice Teachers About Families, Factors That Effect Family-School Collaboration, and Practices That Will Improve Family Schools Collaboration. Figure 2.1 shows this chapter's organization including areas addressed in each section.

Perceptions of Preservice Teachers	Factors that effect Family School Collaboration	Practices that will Improve Family School Collaboration
	• Importance of collaboration Between Sp. Ed. And Gn. Ed. • Lack of Family Involvement Related to decisions about Sp. Ed. Services	• Culturally Relevant Practices • Clinically Rich Experiences • Wraparound Services • Communication

Figure 2.1 Structure of the literature review

Perceptions of Pre-service Teachers About Families

When teacher candidates receive adequate preparation around strategies for collaborating better with families, it is logical to think that they will better understand effective ways to collaborate with families. All students, including students with disabilities, benefit from teachers

who can effectively collaborate with their families (Epstein, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Uludag, 2006; Hattie, 2009; Evans, 2013) Unfortunately, preservice teachers often lack understandings about how to improve relationships and how to collaborate with families (Epstein, 2011). Many teacher education programs are generally theoretical in nature and lack real life application when it comes to family interactions (Baum & Swick, 2008). Preservice teachers may be naïve about the complexities around involving families in their children's education and lack dispositions affirming the value of family involvement. For example, in a survey study of preservice teachers' perceptions about parental involvement, Ferrara (2009a) found that 85% of sophomore preservice teachers preferred to prepare a memo or make a phone call when interacting with parents rather than face-to-face conferences. Moreover, Ferrara also found that preservice teachers believed that parent involvement is not the solution to children's problems at school, and that parents do not have the appropriate education or training to participate in school governance. Based on the results of this study, Ferrara concluded it to be vital that pre-service and collaborating teachers have the foresight in understanding and interacting with parents within the education school system.

In another study Ferrara (2009b) used various strategies for implementing parent involvement within a curriculum designed for a teacher preparation program. She aimed to increase preservice teacher knowledge, and raise awareness among course instructors about the importance of parent involvement in student learning. In this study, data related to the pre-service teachers' perceptions on their quality of understanding of parent involvement were collected through open-ended questions. Additional data were collected after completing the course on parent involvement strategies and just before starting internship. Results of a survey taken prior to the course showed that 40% of pre-service teachers showed that they have a fair to

poor knowledge about parental involvement and effective parent involvement strategies. At the end of the semester and internship, 80% of pre-service teachers rated their knowledge as good to excellent.

Hedges & Gibbs (2005) examined the field experience of two pre-service teachers in family homes. Those two pre-service teachers found an opportunity to observe their students in their homes and to interact with their students' families. Hedges & Gibbs stated "… [Pre-service teachers] saw a clear distinction between the role of a nanny and that of a student teacher was useful for their clarification of professional roles and responsibilities on the placement" (2005, p. 122).

In the study of Katz & Bauch (1999) a parent involvement training program that is used for pre-service teacher education was examined. They wanted to understand how pre-service teachers felt about family involvement after taking this program. Sixty-seven undergraduate students participated the survey and 94% of pre-service teachers thought parental involvement activities were important. The data in this study cast doubt on the result of the study by Ferrara (2009) mentioned earlier. According to the findings of Katz & Bauch (1999), 84% of pre-service teachers think that unscheduled parent teacher conferences are more comfortable for them.

In a qualitative study, Flanigan (2007) investigated how teacher education programs prepare preservice teachers for partnerships with parents. Focus group method was used in this study, and Flanigan (2007) sought to understand participants' attitudes related to preparing pre-service teachers for partnerships with parents, exchanging ideas about field experience and classroom activities, and how teacher preparation can be improved. Five key themes emerged: (a) providing examples of parental partnerships within the field experience, (b) understanding the socio-economic background of the community, school, and therefore parents, (c) warning pre-

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service teacher to be aware of possible adverse perceptions about parents, (d) pre-service teacher comprehension of how parents are involved as the students progresses throughout kindergarten through eighth grade, and lastly (e) promoting ways that preservice teacher, collaborating teachers, and parents can effectively communicate about student education. One conclusion reached by Flanigan based on these results was that teacher preparation programs that the author reviewed often do not effectively prepare pre-service teachers for parent involvement experiences, nor do they prepare students for the impact of experienced teachers who have negative attitudes about parent involvement, especially when pre-service teachers experience student teaching.

Mulholland and Blecker (2008) explored pre-service teachers' interviews with a parent of a special needs child and a special education teacher as a part of a course assignment. The purpose in this study was to increase the opportunities for interaction with families and special education teachers. The reflections of 90 undergraduate students over a 3-year period of time is examined (Mulholland & Blecker, 2008). In these interviews, pre-service teachers found out that most of the teachers only communicate with parents when there is a problem. Furthermore, they found out that most special education teachers want general education teachers to receive minimal training from special educators since there is more inclusion. On the other hand, interviews with parents also brought up some interesting concepts, such as family-school partnerships, family-teacher partnership, and special education –general education partnership. Most parents complained that general education teachers do not understand their children's disability, so they cannot be very helpful to them.

Another study similar to Mulholland's (2008) was Murray, Curran & Zellers (2008) which also took place in a university setting with special education undergraduate students.

Murray et al. (2008) modified a course related to increasing the interaction with parents of students with special needs. The course instructor brought in six parents of children with disabilities to the course and one of the parents was the co-instructor of the course. Nine pre-service teachers volunteered for a focus group in the first and last week of the course. In the pre-intervention focus group, general themes were raised, including the fact that pre-service teachers were unprepared and inexperienced with families. They generally think that parents do not care about their children's education. They thought that parents have lack of knowledge about special education, and that parents care that their kids do what teachers told them to do. Unlike the pre-intervention responses, post-intervention focus group themes were very different. We can see that the course really helped them to change their ideas relating to parent involvement, and this time, they were more prepared and experienced when it came to collaboration with parents. They also realized that parents have barriers to participation; it is not that they do not care about their children's education.

Murray, Handyside, Straka, & Arton-Titus (2013) broadened the study of Murray et al. (2008), and this time, they looked at the perspectives of the parents. In this phenomenological study they examined the experiences of 71 parents of children with disabilities who participated the special education pre-service teacher education course. This time, pre-course and post-course focus groups were conducted with parents instead of pre-service teachers. Before the course, parents were thinking that teachers were seeing their children as tasks rather than as people. Post-course parents realized that teachers are only humans and that they as parents expect a lot from them. Also, pre-course parents were thinking that the reason for lack of partnership was teachers' inability to collaborate. Post-course parents have more confidence in collaboration and decision making in their children's education. Furthermore, in the pre-course focus group, participants

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thought that they should be more proactive in advocating for their children. However, post-course, they had more trust in teachers. Finally, parents had felt hopeless and were not seeing a bright future for collaboration with teachers, and after the course they had more hope.

Uludag (2008) also conducted a study related to the opinions of elementary education pre-service teachers on collaboration with families. Uludag (2008) had 223 pre-service teachers for the quantitative part of the study and twelve pre-service teachers for the qualitative part as participants. Uludag (2008) found out that in general pre-service teachers have positive opinions about parental involvement. She also found that pre-service teachers who were in their last semester were more prepared to implement parental involvement strategies than the other groups (Uludag, 2008). Furthermore, courses about parental involvement were found to be very beneficial for pre-service teachers.

Factors That Effect Family-School Collaboration

Collaboration Between General Education and Special Education. General education teachers are often not prepared to teach students with disabilities, as they often have not had the appropriate coursework, and field experiences necessary to possess the knowledge and skills they need to be effective teachers for students with disabilities (Rosenzweig, 2009; Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover 2006). Therefore, they rely on other special education teachers and other experts for information and guidance (Florian, 2014). For inclusion in a general education classroom, the abilities of general education teachers to collaborate with special education teachers is key to making successful for students with disabilities (Friend & Cook, 2007). Successful collaboration requires shared responsibility amongst all involved parties. Teachers and pre-service teachers can learn things from each other, such as individual experiences, teaching techniques, and strategies via collaboration. Also, both teachers must

develop methods and strategies to deal with all students in order to increase the quality of education. Collaborative teacher education programs can be extremely helpful for both special education preservice teachers and general education preservice teachers. The goals of collaborative teacher education programs are to progress the development and understanding of general education teachers and how they service correctly the needs of special education students within the traditional classroom. Also, general educational training should further prepare general preservice teachers on how to work collaboratively with special education teachers, and how to appropriately utilize the professional expertise for servicing students with disabilities. (Pugach, Blanton & Boveda, 2014).

Some of the tools for servicing special needs students that teachers may share are very helpful. One of these most important instructional practices for special education teachers is providing small-group instruction to students who are struggling to learn academic content. In general education, small group instruction is heterogonous and focuses more on collaborative work. On the other hand, special education teachers often provide focused, intensive instruction for homogeneous groups of students who have similar instructional needs. The skills to provide intensive instruction to small groups that are typically not included in general education teacher preparation, but are often part of the specialized knowledge and skills included in special education teacher preparation programs (Brownell et al., 2005). This skill, as well as many others, would benefit the general education teacher who is collaborating with a special education teacher to make inclusion a success.

Separating general and special education teacher preparation programs, and services cause to the barriers experienced with inclusion (Winn & Blanton, 2005). A few general and special education teacher preparation programs are unifying the training of general and special

educators through overlapping courses and field experiences (Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005).

Lack of Family Involvement Related to Decisions About Special Education Services. Given the importance of family involvement in the special education process, and federal legislation that increasingly mandated and supported such involvement over time. Also, considerable research has focused on the multiple ways that relationships between schools and families in the special education decision making process have played out. In general, while some research has provided examples of what truly collaborative relationships look like (see for example, Angell, Stoner, & Shelden, 2009), much of the literature points to significant problems with these relationships and their outcomes in the forms of parents obtaining insufficient or inaccurate information about special education services (Nespor & Hicks, 2010, Duquette, Fullarton, Orders, & Robertson-Grewal, 2011).

Furthermore, some studies have demonstrated that certain school professionals have more power in making special educational decisions as compared to other school professionals and families (Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997; Klingner & Harry, 2006). For example, Rogers (2002) studied the discourse used by school professionals and the parent of one student with a disability across two IEP meetings and found that school professionals all but forced the parent and child to make a decision that the school professionals believed to be best, rather than providing information for the parent and child to formulate their own conclusion. Similarly, Harry Allen, and McLaughlin (1995) stated that unexplained jargon like classification notes and presenting of test results are generally misunderstood by parents, which creates a scenario in which parents must rely on the decisions of the school professionals without understanding what those decisions entail.

Merely including parents in IEP meetings is not enough; parent and student knowledge and input must be central to special education decision making, and the rights guaranteed to parents under IDEA must be fully carried out. Yet this is all too often not the case. For example, research has demonstrated instances in which it is not typical practice for school personnel to invite parents to discuss issues related to IEP development (Duquette, Fullarton, Orders, Robertson-Grewal, 2011). Relatedly, special education teachers prepare IEPs in isolation and prior to IEP meetings according to the required information for each section as set by the state procedures for doing so (Hess et al., 2006). Therefore, once the IEP meeting occurs, there is very little opportunity for generation of new ideas on the basis of parental input. This may be thought by some schools to be efficient IEP development, but if parents are not involved in every decision in the IEP process, major or minor, there is potential to neglect or insufficiently address sections that may be of great importance to the parents. When parents are not provided opportunities to make decisions about the level of support provided by the IEP, students may not get adequate accommodations or modifications of the general education curriculum (Nespor & Hicks, 2010).

Despite the importance of family involvement guaranteed by IDEA, these issues with the quality and outcomes of school-family relationships within the special education decision making process and throughout the educational trajectory of students with disabilities are exacerbated for families from groups traditionally marginalized in U.S. public schools: namely, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families.

Issues for CLD Families. Numerous structural barriers limit authentic and collaborative relationships between schools and CLD families, particularly in regard to special education. According to Kalyanpur, Harry, and Skrtic (2000) these barriers include families' economic

circumstances such as lack of transportation or child care, and language differences as compared to school professionals.

There are some differences in cultural norms between CLD families and school professionals. One of the most marked ways in which difference in cultural beliefs impacts school-family collaboration is related to varying beliefs about disability held by CLD groups. For example, parents may interpret that having a child with disabilities is a punishment for past wrongs and accordingly do not seek help from professionals because of social stigma (Lo, 2010; Klein, 2009). In many Asian cultures, it is not appropriate for parents of children with disabilities to discuss their child's problems with people outside of family because they think it may damage the pride of family (Lo, 2010). However, in Latino families, including extended family members in special education processes for their support and opinions is very common (Klein, 2009). In addition, unlike Asian families, Latino families may be more willing to talk more about their children's problems with other people outside the family (Salas, 2004).

Accordingly, school professionals of dominant cultural backgrounds who view disability as a biological condition which should be openly addressed in schools through special education, may interpret lack of parent participation in special education as disinterest or apathy, when instead, it is what is appropriate, given the cultural norms of the family.

Munn-Joseph and Gavin-Evans (2008) assert that there are conflicting issues that prevent meaningful collaboration between teachers and parents within urban schools that have a large low socio-economic status or racial minority student populations. This incongruence is mainly based on faulty perceptions of CLD families by school professionals; the U.S. education system is built upon the norms and values of the majority white, middle class U.S. culture (Hess, Molina, Kozleski, 2006).

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Furthermore, most U.S. teachers are of European American descent and have a middle-class background, which contributes to barriers between teachers and a lack of understanding of the culture of parents from different backgrounds, which has significant implications for how school professionals explain the academic performance of CLD students (Hess, Molina, & Kozleski, 2006; Trainor, 2010). Research has demonstrated that teachers have attributed academic struggles of ELLs to disability, rather than typical performance in light of the students English language acquisition (Klinger & Harry, 2006). Relatedly, ELLs are disproportionately referred to and found eligible for special education in some districts and states (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005). Other studies have found the overrepresentation of African American students as Emotionally Disturbed, and in segregated (i.e., separate) special educational placements as compared to their White counterparts with the same disability diagnosis as related to teachers' bias in interpreting the behaviors of African American students as problematic, and more specifically, threatening (Hosp & Hosp, 2002).

Practices That Will Improve Family Schools Collaboration

Culturally Relevant Practices. An important element of family is culture. We can help to counter the cultural bias in PK12 schools by preparing teachers to engage in culturally responsive teaching. When teacher candidates receive culturally relevant teacher preparation, they can better understand the traditions of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Teacher preparation curricula should incorporate multicultural issues and culturally relevant education. All students, including students with disabilities, will benefit from teachers who have knowledge of culturally relevant education.

Generally pre-service teachers bring their own understanding from their own cultural experiences about collaboration with families when they start teaching (Ferrara, 2009). One of

the findings of Flanigan (2007), was that most of pre-service teachers live in suburban areas and have not been extensively exposed to other diverse cultures. Relatedly, Doucet (2008) conducted a study about how African American parents understand their roles, as well as teachers' roles, in their children's education. When pre-service teachers come from different backgrounds compared to the students they teach, they can misinterpret families' involvement in schooling since involvement patterns might be different than theirs (Doucet, 2008). Doucet (2008) interviewed twenty-five African American parents and caregivers. Based on the results of the study, Daucet concluded that pre-service teachers should be taught to become more cognizant of parental involvement, and to include them by actively collaborating with them in educational decision matters based on their student's holistic needs.

Relatedly, Siwatu (2011) found out pre-service teachers are more confident and prepared to teach in a suburban school rather than an urban school. These studies in general, suggest that preservice teachers are not being prepared for every educational setting and could potentially be more acquiescent to teaching in a larger variety of settings should teacher preparation programs improve to include in culturally diverse communities. Moreover, some researchers state that teacher preparation programs have not done an adequate job preparing prospective teachers to teach in urban schools (Chizhik, 2003).

Teacher education programs in universities are not preparing their future teachers well enough for culturally responding education in urban schools. For example, Merryfield (2000) suggests that little research has been done to show how teacher preparation programs effectively trained pre-service teachers to work within culturally diverse environments. Merryfield (2000) also questioned whether experienced teaching professionals are adequately prepared to meet the needs of students from various multicultural backgrounds.

A few researchers have begun studying programs that attempt to enhance, Bales & Saffold (2011) examined a field based pedagogy lab in an urban focused collaborative teacher education program. This lab gives opportunities to teacher candidates to inquire about their own ethnicity, gender and social class and implement that information to enhance disciplinary based instructional activities for PK-12 students. Bales & Saffold conclude that "by bringing together multiculturalism, disciplinary-based content, and pedagogy in the pedagogy lab, we advance possibilities on how to prepare culturally responsive teachers" (2011, p. 970).

Bergeron (2008) published a study about how novice teachers' cultural responsiveness increased when they received support like appropriate mentoring and language support from administrators and if they were given the opportunity for professional development. Novice special education teachers face several challenges when it comes to entering the teaching profession. For example, special education teachers must learn how to multitask meeting the needs of their students by working and collaborating with the general education teachers, managing multi-subjects and pedagogy, and overseeing a range of responsibilities (Sindelar, Brownell, & Billingsley, 2010). Additional research and approaches need to be further addressed when it comes to deal with these kinds of challenges and in order to help educating students in terms of the expectations of families, local labors, agencies and states. Bergeron (2008) drew attention to the idea that novice teachers' experiences are very different from their students in urban schools. In addition to that, Bergeron (2008) suggested that pre-service instructors should provide continuous support and modeling on how to implement educational guidelines and strategies that promote pre-service teachers who are consciously aware and active of cultural responsivity.

Clinically rich experiences. Brownell et al. (2005) suggest seven common features of effective teaching are: a coherent program vision, disciplinary knowledge, subject-specific pedagogical knowledge and practice, carefully crafted field experiences, establishing standards for quality teaching, active pedagogy, a focus on meeting the needs of a diverse student population, and collaboration as a vehicle for building a professional community (Brownell et al., 2005). An example of one of these features of effective teaching is to plan applicable clinical experiences in collaboration with school partners that include comprehensible and educational content coursework. Therefore, rich clinical experiences are an essential component of effective teacher preparation. Hence it is essential for there to be well-supervised clinical practices for the transformation of teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Darling-Hammond calls for a model of pre-service teacher education that places clinical practice at the center of teacher preparation.

An example of a model that supports clinically centered teacher preparation is the triad model. The triad consists of pre-service teachers, collaborating teachers and partnership resource teachers or University Supervisors. The triad model offers greater support and constructive feedback to the preservice teachers from the collaborating teacher and the university supervisor (Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman & Stevens, 2009). Valencia et al (2009) found that the triad model for pre-service training was an important characteristics of high quality internship experiences. In the triad model cooperative teachers provide pre-service teachers opportunities, but they do not provide productive feedbacks (Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman, 2009). The structures that have an impact on preservice teachers' learning include: course content within the triad model and conflicting objectives in the preservice field experience. Frequently, there are also contradictory and unclear roles of responsibility between those in the triad composed of the

university supervisor, the collaborating teacher, and the preservice teacher. (Valencia et al., 2009).

Wraparound Services. Wraparound programs were established for the lack of individualized services for children with special needs, and the following programs are critical for providing support for special education students: child welfare, mental health, special education, juvenile justice, and other service delivery agencies (Epstein, Nordness, Kutash, Duchnowski, Schrepf, Benner, & Nelson, 2003). In the wraparound services, all stakeholders of students, including educational professionals and all family members, to come together collaboratively to create an action plan to support the student's particular needs in and out of the school environment (Epstein et al., 2003).

Wraparound services are student and family supports integrated with and often delivered directly within schools (Eber, 2005). Wraparound services help schools address social and non-academic barriers to student learning. The wraparound process is beginning to be used in schools for those few students (1% to 2%) who have the highest level of emotional or behavioral needs (Eber, Breen, Rose, Unizycki, & London, 2008). School personnel who provide the wraparound support do so in collaboration with community teams, families, and agencies, for a comprehensive support service (Fries, Carney, Blackman-Urteaga, & Savas, 2012). According to Eber, Sugai, Smith, & Scott (2002) the concept of the wraparound process is used to promote collaborative and meaningful relationships between families and educator to support students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD).

According to Duckworth et al. (2001), for preparing preservice teachers to implement wraparound services, teacher education programs must include: (a) access to data-collection opportunities, (b) preferred practices that are research based, (c) instruction in trust-building

skills, (d) a long-term commitment to intervention programs. Furthermore, Mihalas et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of family-school partnership and wraparound services for a better teacher student relationship. The first step of implementing family-school partnership and wraparound services, starts from teacher preparation programs that include field experiences with course work that incorporates collaboration between teachers, parents, and pre-service teachers when caring for students who EBD (Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & McHatton, 2008). Similarly, Ludlow (1998) also suggested that since wrap-around services will be more popular in the future, "cross-disciplinary preparation programs will be needed to insure effective collaboration in special education and early intervention" (p. 62).

      Communication for effective family-school partnerships. Another important aspect of effective school family partnerships is communication (Christenson, 2004; Epstein, 1995). Communication is an important element for a better family-school partnership because when school professionals over-rely on jargon (i.e., professional language) or acronyms in special education meetings, resulting in parents not having access to enough or accurate information upon which to contribute to or raise questions about special education decisions. To illustrate, Harry et al. (1995) stated that unexplained jargon like classification notes and presenting of test results are generally misunderstood by parents, which creates a scenario in which parents must rely on the decisions of the school professionals without understanding what those decisions entail.

      Epstein (1995) pinpoints the importance of creating integrated social skills into the curriculum for children's development. According to Epstein (1995) there are six types of involvement; parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Communicating refers to establishing regular, two-way

avenues of dialogue with teachers and other relevant school staff (Epstein, 1995). According to Epstein (2010) low socio-economic schools require frequent communication with students' families to address particular student needs or challenges. A balanced collaboration and communication is critical between families and schools to create a positive partnership for the student's well-being. Schools with higher percentages of students on free and reduced-price lunches face more challenges to building positive partnerships and have more problems in communication. Furthermore, when the school does not actively seek the attendance of single parents, fathers, working couples, and families whose first language is not English, they are unlikely to participate in events and volunteer activities (Epstein, 2010). Communication is an element both parents and schools want. Because "just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed, and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities so as to remain good partners in their children's education" (Epstein, 2010, p. 84). Parents and families care about their children. They just vary in their current capacity to be strong partners with schools based on effective communication. Relatedly, teachers and administrators want to improve the outcomes for students, though they vary in their current capacity to reach out to families and the community. According to Epstein (2010) "just about all students at all levels—elementary, middle, and high school—want their families to be more knowledgeable partners about schooling and are willing to take active roles in assisting communications between home and school. However, students need much better information and guidance than most now receive about how their schools view partnerships and about how they can conduct important exchanges with their families about school activities, homework, and school decisions" (p. 84).

Parental involvement is a blind spot for pre-service teachers, one key reason being that communication with parents is a new experience for the pre-service teacher.

Mulholland (2008) explored preservice teachers' interviews with a parent of a special needs child and a special education teacher as a part of a course assignment. In this study, Mulholland's purpose was to increase the opportunities for interaction with families and special education teachers (2008). The reflections of 90 undergraduate students over a 3-year period of time is examined (Mulholland, 2008). In these interviews, preservice teachers found out that most of the teachers only communicate with parents when there is a problem. Furthermore, they found out that most special education teachers want general education teachers to receive minimal training from special educators since there is more inclusion. On the other hand, interviews with parents also brought up some interesting concepts, such as family-school partnerships, family-teacher partnership, and special education–general education partnership. Most parents complained that general education teachers do not understand their children's disability, so they cannot be very helpful to them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a review of literature about family-school collaboration including preservice teacher perceptions, factors that affect family-school collaboration, and some practices to improve. Even though the current literature talks about how to prepare preservice teachers for a better family-school collaboration, there is not enough information about preservice teachers' past experiences and interactions of their families' when they were at K-12. Moreover, there are not any studies related to comparing program objectives with preservice teachers' perceptions about what they learned. On the other hand, I found four practices that will improve family-school collaboration such as culturally relevant practices, clinically rich experiences, wraparound services and communication. Teachers should fully collaborate with families. In preparing teachers for collaboration, teacher preparation programs

play a crucial role. Pre-service teachers should feel ready to collaborate when they have their own classrooms and they should avoid struggling with problems related to lack of collaboration with families. Therefore, examining a program structure of a teacher preparation program will give the field a contribution. More specifically, the following research questions guide my inquiry:

1. How do pre-service teachers perceive the family/guardian's role in collaboration?

2. In what ways do pre-service teachers describe how their family/school experiences as a K-12 student affect their future collaborating skills with families?

3. What is the nature of learning experiences that preservice teachers had regarding family involvement within the coursework and field experiences in special education program?

4. How do pre-service teachers describe experiences within their teacher education program they have had that prepare them for collaboration with families?

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the integration of family involvement in the courses and field experiences in an undergraduate special education program. This study also explored preservice teachers' perceptions about what they learned in their program. To this end, this study investigated the perceptions and understandings of pre-service teachers regarding collaboration with families based on their past experiences with their own families. In this study I am investigating the core program within the larger coursework of the special education preservice undergraduate program. In this chapter, I will address (1) research questions, (2) pilot study, (3) research design, (4) participants, (5) data collection, (6) data analysis, (7) trustworthiness, credibility, & transferability, (8) researcher's role, and (9) ethical considerations.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do pre-service teachers perceive the family/guardian's role in collaboration?

2. In what ways do pre-service teachers describe how their family/school experiences as a K-12 student affect their future collaborating skills with families?

3. What is the nature of learning experiences that preservice teachers had regarding family involvement within the coursework and field experiences in special education program?

4. How do pre-service teachers describe experiences within their teacher education program they have had that prepare them for collaboration with families?

Pilot Study

   I conducted a pilot study to inform the design of my dissertation study. The purpose of the pilot study was to evaluate the interview process and the quality of the data obtained. In the pilot study, I explored the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding collaboration with families based on their past experiences with their own families. I tried to find out how pre-service teachers' families/parental interactions affected their perceptions of collaboration. In the pilot study, I had two participants who were special education undergraduate students a female student from level 2 (second semester in the program) and a male from level 5 (fifth semester in the program).

   The pilot study explored the following research questions:

1. How do pre-service teachers perceive the parental role in collaboration?

2. What are the perspectives of pre-service teachers regarding how their past experiences of a pre-service teacher affect their future collaborating skills with families?

3. How do pre-service teachers describe experiences they have had that prepare them for collaboration with families?

   There were three major findings of the study. First, several themes emerged related how participants described collaboration with families, including differences of age and grade levels in collaboration, effective ways to collaborate, barriers and facilitators in collaboration, the importance of collaboration, plans for collaboration, important areas in collaboration, the involvement of parents in the IEP process, plans for communicating with families, how students can benefit with collaboration, the involvement of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families, and differences in involvement of children with or without disabilities. Second, several themes emerged around their past personal experiences and how these experiences affected their

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perceptions in terms of collaborating with families, including their families' collaboration experiences, their teachers' collaboration experiences, their favorite teacher and communication experiences. Third, several themes emerged about the effectiveness of their teacher preparation program regarding family collaboration. including impact of coursework, and examples of collaboration.

In the pilot study, I used phenomenological lens as a researcher to explore the past experiences of the pre-service teachers. Because, I am seeking to explore for deeply understanding a particular group of people (preservice teachers) in this dissertation study in a real-life context, I will utilize a case study approach.

Research Design

This study used qualitative research methods to answer questions about perceptions of pre-service teachers' perceptions of collaborating with families and the extent to which their perceptions are influenced by their own family backgrounds as well as their perceptions about what they learned in their program. In order to address the goals and related research questions of this study, the research design will be a descriptive case study. According to Simons (2009) a case study is based on a variety of multifaceted and various perceptions of those who are being observed in a precise environment at a particular moment in time. Similarly, Yin (2009) describes a case study as an analysis of a currently reality happening within the contemporary environment being studied. Moreover, Baxter and Jack (2008) define case study as "… an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources" (p. 544).

The intention of using a descriptive case study is to understand the perceptions of pre-service teachers, and based on these understandings, suggest ways teacher education programs

can effectively prepare pre-service teachers better, for collaborate with families. In this study, the case will be the perceptions of preservice teachers regarding collaborating with families. Additionally, preservice teachers should be advised to recognize their own biases towards their future family-teacher relationships with their own experiences. Thus, this is another reason for selecting descriptive case study. According to Stake (1981), a case study has an epistemological similarity to a reader's experience. A case study also seeks to explore the multiple realities of those studied and present them using thick description to create a vicarious experience for the reader (Thomas & Myers, 2015). Furthermore, case studies provide multiple lenses from which to view data, which can provide a more in-depth explanation of the findings (Stake, 1995). Relatedly, according to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. In my research, I will investigate the "why" and the "how" behind what I want to study and I want to cover contextual conditions relevant to the phenomenon under study.

Participants

I used a variety of purposive sampling strategies to select participants in this study. Purposive sampling strategy is common in qualitative research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013; Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003) where reserachers use their prior knowledge about the people who are representative of the population of interest (Berg, Lune & Lune, 2004). Among purposive sampling strategies, I will use typical case sampling (Patton, 2002). In typical case sampling "cases which characterize positions that are 'normal' or 'average' are selected to provide

detailed profiling" (Rithchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 79). I used this strategy because I have prior knowledge about my participants by observing a few classes they are having prior to sampling.

There is a total of eight participants in my study. Six of them are undergraduate students from a Research-I university the southeastern region of the United States. They are enrolled in a special education program - four students from level 2 (second semester in the program) and two students from level 5 (fifth semester in the program). Part of the reason for which I did interviews at these two different levels is for the purpose of getting various opinions from undergraduate students, those near the beginning of the program and those about to finish the program. The other two participants are professors and coordinators of the special education teacher education program. Interviewing the professors who are teaching pre-service teachers helped me to get a better understanding of how the special education teacher education program attempts to prepare their students to work with families.

Data Collection

Figure 3.1. Data Collection Timeline

Interviews are dominant research tools in a qualitative case study (Gleshne & Peshkin, 1992; Stake, 1995). Therefore, I did interviews with two professors who are in charge of the undergraduate special education program and six preservice teachers in the undergraduate special education program. By interviewing the professors, I had more knowledge about the objectives of the special education teacher preparation program and their perspectives on how

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family collaboration is integrated. There were one on one semi-structured interviews with each participant and the interviews took approximately one hour.

Furthermore, there was document analysis of the special education program for a better understanding of the preparation of the pre-service teachers. In this document analysis, I examined the course modules related to families, power points, and in class and take-home assignments. First, I interviewed with the professors and get the information about what their objectives are, what they do, how they teach and how they prepare students for a better family school collaboration. After that, I did document analysis so I had a better understanding of what the professors said in their interviews. Because in the course module, I saw the professor's PowerPoint presentations, their assigned readings, and their assignments for the preservice teachers. Finally, I started interviewing with the special education undergraduate preservice teachers within a two weeks' time frame after getting the IRB approval. I first interviewed the level 2 students and then I interviewed level 5 students. The interviews occurred in the last two or three weeks of the spring 2017 semester.

For analyzing the interview data, I recorded the interviews through an audio recording feature on a cell phone and as soon as possible will transcribe the interviews. For participants to be comfortable during the interview process, they were informed before the interview starts that they could decide to stop the interview whenever they want.

The first part of the semi-structured interview was related to pre-service teachers' past experiences and pre-service teacher preparation for collaboration. The second part of the interview was related to their perceptions about collaboration with families. There were nineteen main interview questions. Besides those questions, I asked some additional follow up questions based on the flow of conversation. Instead of asking direct questions about participants'

experiences, I let the participants talk about their own experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). While the interview questions are based on the research questions, there are also some questions designed specifically to establish rapport with the participant.

Table 3.1. The relationship between research questions and interview questions

Research Question	Interview questions
1. **How do special education preservice teachers describe teacher-family/parent collaboration related to the education of their students/children?**	12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
2. **In what ways do special education preservice teachers describe their family/school experiences as a K-12 student and how they have affected their thinking about and knowledge/skills related to collaborating skills with families?**	3, 4, 5, 6, 7
3. **What is the nature of the learning experiences that special education preservice teachers received with respect to family involvement within the coursework and field experiences in special education program?**	8, 10
4.**How do special education pre-service teachers describe their experiences within their teacher education program that are preparing/prepared them for collaboration with families?**	8, 9, 10, 11

In qualitative research using more than one method is a significant research tool for collecting data (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). According to Bowen (2009), "document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer—based and Internet-transmitted) material" (p. 27). I will analyze the necessary documents such as course modules related to family-school collaboration, course assignments and course documents of the instructors of special education undergraduate courses. In this analyzing process, I tried to get a sense of how coursework in a special education teacher

preparation program addresses family collaboration. Before I start analyzing the documents, I interviewed the special education undergraduate program coordinators and I asked them how and when they teach topics about family school collaboration as a part of study. When I get a better sense, I decided what documents I will analyze. When I analyze, I paid attention to two main elements. How the instructor explains the related topic about families based on their lesson plans and materials, and how the special education program is designed for teaching preservice teachers about collaboration with families.

Data Analysis

Table 3.2. Table of research questions and data analysis methods

Research Questions	Data Collection Methods	Analysis	What I expect to learn
1. **How do special education preservice teachers describe teacher-family/parent collaboration related to the education of their students/children?**	Individual Interview with preservice teachers	Finding common themes	To get a better understanding of what pre-service teachers think about collaborations with families
2. **In what ways do special education preservice teachers describe their family/school experiences as a K-12 student and how they have affected their thinking about and knowledge/skills related to collaborating skills with families?**	Individual Interview with preservice teachers	Finding common themes	To get a better understanding of how personal experiences of pre-service teachers affect their perceptions in terms of collaborating with families.
3. **What is the nature of the learning experiences that special**	Individual Interview with preservice teachers	Finding common themes	To get a better understanding of the effectiveness of teacher preparation

education preservice teachers received with respect to family involvement within the coursework and field experiences in special education program?			programs regarding family collaboration
4. How do special education pre-service teachers describe their experiences within their teacher education program that are preparing/prepared them for collaboration with families?	Document analysis	Finding common themes	To get a better understanding of the integration of family school collaboration in the curriculum of teacher preparation program

According to Stake (1995) the definition of data analysis in a case study is constructing meaning of beginning and final reactions to the data. Relatedly, Merriam (1998) defines data analysis as the procedure of making sense of the data by consolidating, condensing, or constructing the results based on the interviews conducted.

The main data sources included open ended, semi-structured interview transcripts of students and professors and document analysis notes. It is suggested by other researchers that data collection and data analysis should be done at the same time (Stake, 1995, Merriam, 1998). Therefore, I started analyzing the data while it is being collected. Next, the coding of the research will be organized to include common trends found between the participants' interviews, field notes from observations and document analysis notes based on the research questions. In this process, I used qualitative analysis software called ATLAS.ti.6.2. This software helped me to sort and analyze complex unstructured data.

I listened to the interviews multiple times to ensure that transcription is accurate. I decided on common themes based on the codes I found after deeply examining the interview transcripts, document analyzation notes, and observation field notes. After finishing transcription and analyzing documents, I started analyzing the data by coding. According to Durkin (1997), coding is the translation of question responses and respondent information to specific categories for the purpose of analysis. At first, I determined the initial codes in interviews and observation notes. I did inductive coding because I did not have any codes in my mind before staring the process. I used the open coding process and I coded each interview and the observation notes by using a line-by-line coding approach. Cohen, Manion and Morrison state that "open coding involves exploring the data and identifying units of analysis to code for meanings, feelings, actions, events and so on" (p. 600). I generated sub-codes and integrated these sub-codes with each other. Sub-codes combined and created codes, and combinations of codes will generate themes (figure 3.2).

In the coding process, when I created themes, I tried to find themes based on my theoretical framework. In the theoretical framework, I have two theories (Ecological Theory and Family Systems Theory) and these two theories have potential for understanding pre-service teachers' experiential learning as well as the existing knowledge and established ideas they arrive to their programs with, including ideas about families, the teaching profession, and special education.

| Subcodes | Codes | Themes |
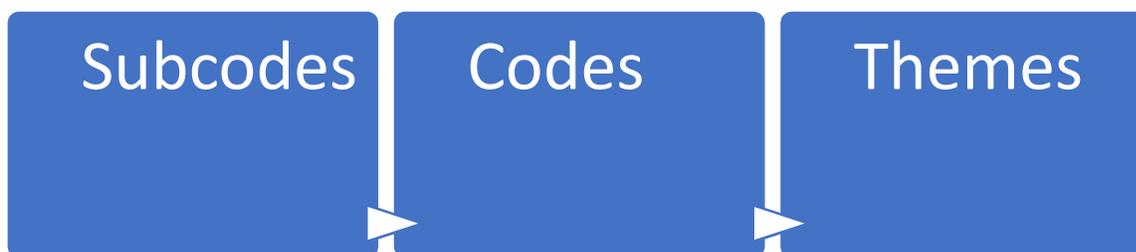
Figure 3.2. Coding Process

Trustworthiness, Credibility, & Transferability

According to Merriam (1998), one of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research. The terms *trustworthiness*, *credibility, and transferability* are more consistent with this perspective.

In qualitative research, triangulation is a strategy for increasing trustworthiness and credibility. According to Mathison (1988), "Triangulation has risen an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation [in order to] control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology" (p. 13). There are four types of triangulation methods in qualitative studies; (1) multiple methods, (2) multiple sources of data, (3) multiple investigators, (4) multiple theories (Merriam, 2009). Hence, I used triangulation in this study to increase the trustworthiness, credibility and transferability of the data findings. I used multiple sources of data such as interviews and document analysis.

Moreover, I did member checking with the people I interviewed to get their insight and opinions. Member checking increases the trustworthiness of a research study (Mcmillan & Schmacher, 2014). I reconnected with the professors and preservice teachers who I interviewed and send them the process I am at with my research over the length of the study. I sent them my transcripts of the interviews and I asked for their feedback and interpretation about what I wrote. However, only one of the participants responded my email.

Additionally, for the peer reviewing process, I asked a fellow doctoral student and a recent graduate who has a PhD in special education whose familiar with my research to serve as

a peer reviewer. I showed them the codes and explained the meaning of the codes with some quotes. Subsequently, the peers, checked the relationships between the codes and themes, and gave me feedback about the code-theme relationships. In some instances, the peer reviewer asked why I might have collapsed the particular set of codes together. Based on my rationale my peer reviewers either agreed with my thinking or suggested an alternative. Other times the peer reviewer needed further explanation on why I might have coded a statement in a particular way. If my explanation did not make sense to the peer reviewer, then we discussed al alternative code. In these ways I used the peer reviewers input to improve my coding process. Finally, I used a thick and a rich description to increase the transferability.

Researcher's Role

Since the researcher is an instrument of data collection, the data in qualitative research is a human instrument instead of inventories, surveys or questionnaires (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Since it is a human instrument, researchers sometimes may have involved their biases, assumptions, expectations, and experiences to the research (Greenbank, 2003). According to Anderson (2010), "research quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies" (p. 2). Personally, I began this research by admitting I assume that colleges of education do not adequately prepare preservice teachers to effectively foster positive family-school collaboration and I was open to thinking differently. At the end of my study I found out that the college I examined actually prepared preservice teachers better than I thought for family-school collaboration. To address my bias in potential impact on my interpretation of results I employed triangulation of the data, member checking, and peer review.

Ethical Considerations

Since human beings are included in my research, ethical concerns should be addressed (Wellington, 2015). For protecting the privacy of the participants in this study, all the information will be kept confidential. Informed consent will be obtained both in writing and verbally per requirements of the Institutional Review Board to ensure that participants are fully aware of the study's scope and their involvement as participants. All participants participated in this study voluntarily. Participants also informed before the interview starts they can decide to stop the interview whenever they want. Since, it can be possible that the participants may feel uncomfortable during the interview, I avoid asking them sensitive and offensive questions. I used pseudonyms instead of the real names in all transcripts and other written documents including the dissertation document. Other identifying information like the specific location of the teacher preparation program is be included. Furthermore, I obtained a permit from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the university where the study conducted to ensure that the study adheres to the guidelines stipulated for Human Subjects Protection in research and inquiry.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the integration of family involvement in the courses and field experiences in an undergraduate special education program. This study also explored preservice teachers' perceptions about what they learned in their program and the perceptions and understandings of pre-service teachers regarding collaboration with families based on their past experiences with their families. This study investigated the core program within the larger coursework of the special education preservice undergraduate program. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. How do pre-service teachers perceive the family/guardian's role in collaboration?

2. In what ways do pre-service teachers describe how their family/school experiences as a K-12 student affect their future collaborating skills with families?

3. What is the nature of learning experiences that preservice teachers describe regarding family involvement within the coursework and field experiences in special education program?

4. How do pre-service teachers describe experiences within their teacher education program they have had that prepare them for collaboration with families?

Description of the Teacher Preparation Program

Before starting to discuss about findings, I think it is important to know about the special education teacher preparation program. After analyzing the documents which is related to the content about family school collaboration in the courses, I found that while content on working

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with families was introduced in the very first semester, the topic is revisited multiple

times throughout the program. The undergraduate program I examined has adopted a Spiraling

Curriculum, in which the content is re-introduced, at a more in-depth level, each semester. For

example, Figure 4.1 shows an excerpt from the first semester syllabus that identifies content and

assignments related to the family-school relationships. Furthermore, highlighted courses in

Figure 4.2 shows the courses they talk about family-school collaboration.

| 10-19

Wednesday | Working with Families

• Self-reflection
• Case Study | The role of special education

teachers in fostering family-

school relationships (6.1)

The roles of special educators

for facilitating inclusive practices

(6.2)

Impact of special education on

the lives of students with

disabilities and their families

(5.4)

Ethical issues in special

education (5.6) | **Turnbull & Turnbull**

Chapters- on Canvas |

Figure 4.1: EEX 4202-003 Context and Foundations (the week the program first discusses about

family-school collaboration)

I also interviewed the two program coordinators who also taught in the program to better

understand the nature of the program and how it addresses family-school collaboration. For

example, Dr. Taylor described the special education undergraduate program as:

> "Unlike many undergraduate programs, our student experience what we define as a
> spiraling curriculum, where we have a series of four block courses and a group of
> practices and a group of conceptual questions that we want our students to be able to

answer. We introduce the concept the first semester that they're in, that's in our class, it's called Creating Positive Learning Environments and which is also linked to a practicum where they have the opportunity to see and interact with various models of special education services. So that whole concept of, that spiraling concept begins with that first course where in your case in terms of your work, we introduced a notion of families and school partnerships. But it doesn't stop there. It's then repeated over a three additional course series and where each semester, the student grows in their theoretical, conceptual and their practical understandings of the concept, culminating with the final internship where they actually engage with parents. So, it's a four-course series that addresses concepts but at multiple levels, spiraling to a higher level each semester"

Dr. Davis added:

"At each semester in addition to the spiraling curriculum, the curriculum is like you go into a classroom, "Wait, I need to know behavior management. I need to know how to teach lesson planning... But I can't teach a lesson plan until I know how to assess a student. So there's many things I need to know, but we can't teach you everything you need to know. So, we start with the surface level. This is the basics what you need to know to create that positive learning environment and each semester then we go back. Okay. Let's backtrack. This is what you need for a learning environment, but now you have to manage behavior. So, we get that in line and then we build on behavior with assessment"

Fall (Semester I)		Credit hours
EEX 4202	Context and Foundations*	6
FLE 4317	ESOL: Teaching LEP K-12	3
RED 4312	Emergent Literacy	3
EDP 3271	Child Dev. w/in School Context	1
EEX 4942	Practicum in ESE	1
	* Linked to Practicum	
Total / SEM I	**14**	
Spring (Semester II)		
EEX 4240	Beginning to Teach*	6
RED 4724	Literacy for Intermediate Grades	3
MAE 4310	Teaching Math	3
EDF 4430	Measurement for Teachers	3
EDP 3272	Learning Within School Context	1
EEX 4942	Practicum in ESE	1
	* Linked to Practicum	
Total / SEM II	**17**	
Summer (Semester III)		
EEX 4241	Creating Effect Learn Environment	3
EDP 4275	Enhancing Children's Learning & Development all within A School Context	1
LAE 4311	Teaching Writing	3
EEX 4942	Practicum in ESE	3

Total / SEM III	**10**	
Fall (Semester IV)		
EEX4242	Enhancing expertise in Teaching and Instructional Decision- Making*	6
FLE4316	Language Principles & Acquisition	3
EEX4742	Historical /Narratives Perspectives	3
EDF3604	Schools & Society	3
EEX4942	Practicum in ESE	1
	*Linked to Practicum	
Total / SEM IV	**16**	
Spring (Semester V)		
EEX4244	Becoming a Special Education Teacher (Writing Intensive and Gordon Rule Comm)	3
EEX4944	Final Internship	6
Total / SEM V	**9**	
TOTAL PROGRAM HOURS	**66**	

Figure 4.2: Special Education Undergraduate Program Sequence

Dr. Taylor talked about whey taught related to family school collaboration by saying that:

"in terms of the subject that you're researching, families, the concept is introduced the first semester so they get the theoretical pieces. They get a broad understanding of what's in the professional literature and they get some specific strategies that evidence based practices that have been effective in working with families. But the next semester, they actually, take what they've learned that first semester and they implement that through another area working with parents"

And Dr. Davis added that:

"So, in this semester, they did some case studies. They did some modules on it, but yeah, they really learned the importance of why we need family partnerships that first semester. And as Dr. Taylor said, not only that, but they learn what families look like. If I'm a white middle-class female, this is my conceptual framework of family. If I say, "Send this home to your family and have somebody in your family sign it", if it comes back signed by a grandmother or a cousin, they might be confused. So, they learn that families are made up of so many different structures and that's a really important concept for if we have white middle class teachers that don't understand our cultural definitions of family. So, they do a lot of investigating of their own biases about what is a family. And then that next semester, they really take that and think about, okay, so let's look at some scenarios when we would involve families and how you do it and what looks like to me as resistive families or parents that don't care, how do I take that?

Three themes emerged from the data that inform the study's questions. Table 4.1 shows

these three themes and related codes. The first theme, *perceptions of preservice teachers about*

family-school collaboration, relates to what participants described about collaboration with families. Coded statements included within this theme address a variety of perceptions about family-school collaboration on the part of the preservice teachers in this study including *differences based on age and grade levels, effective collaboration practices, the importance of family-school collaboration, barriers, future plans as teachers, important areas for collaboration, the need to involve parents in the IEP process, communication about student progress, and involving culturally and linguistically diverse families*.

The second theme of the study is *preservice teachers' past experiences when they were at K-12 in terms of family involvement* relates to what participants described with respect to their personal experiences and how these experiences affected their perceptions in terms of collaborating with families. Coded statements included within this theme are: *how preservice teachers' family were involved with their education, how preservice teachers' teachers communicate with their parents, barriers that preservice teachers' families experienced for collaboration, how preservice teachers' K-12 education prepared them to be a teacher, and how preservice teachers' K-12 experiences informed them about collaborating with families*.

The third theme is *teacher education program experiences of preservice teachers*. This theme explained participants' perspectives about the effectiveness of their teacher preparation program regarding family collaboration. Coded statements included within this theme are as follows: *how preservice teachers' teacher education program addressed family-school collaboration, facilitators and barriers to developing knowledge and skills related to family-school collaboration, and preservice teachers' experiences as teacher candidates in K-12 schools*.

Table 4.1 Relationships between Themes and codes

Themes	Codes
Perceptions of preservice teachers about family-school collaboration	differences of collaboration based on age and grade levels effective ways of family-school collaboration importance of family-school collaboration barriers of family-school collaboration future plans for effective family involvement important areas for family-school collaboration involving parents in the IEP process communicating with parents about student progress involving culturally and linguistically diverse families
Preservice teachers' past experiences when they were at K-12 in terms of family involvement	how preservice teachers' family were involved with their education how preservice teachers' teachers communicate with their parents barriers that preservice teachers' families experienced for collaboration how preservice teachers' K-12 education prepared them to be a teacher how preservice teachers' K-12 experiences informed them about collaborating with families
Teacher education program experiences of preservice teachers	how preservice teachers' teacher education program addressed family-school collaboration facilitators and barriers to developing knowledge and skills related to family-school collaboration preservice teachers' experiences as teacher candidates in K-12 schools

Theme One: Perceptions of Preservice Teachers About Family-School Collaboration

perceptions about different age and grade levels in terms of involvement	positives and negatives in the family-school collaboration	communication and family involvement
• differences of collaboration based on age and grade levels	• effective ways of family-school collaboration • importance of family-school collaboration • barriers of family-school collaboration • important areas for family-school collaboration	• future plans for effective family involvement • involving parents in the IEP process • communicating with parents about student progress • involving culturally and linguistically diverse families

Figure 4.3 Subthemes and codes in Theme One

This theme consists of three subthemes such as *perceptions about different age and grade levels in terms of involvement, positives and negatives in the family-school collaboration, communication and family involvement.*

Perceptions about different age and grade levels in terms of involvement. When it comes to participants' perceptions about how collaboration varies through different grade levels, they all agree that collaborating with families is different at different age and grade levels. For example, Lauren from Level 5 said that:

> "Of course. Younger kids the parents are more involved because they're still younger than they need that guidance as opposed to our students who are being transitioned to adulthood or on their own. So, they need to learn to self-advocate and self-monitor and stuff like that so parents are slowly backing away from that unless there's obviously a behavior problem"

Similarly, Alex from Level 5 mentioned:

> "Yes, I think it's different with age groups and grade levels because the responsibilities of students will change umm like being in elementary school you'll probably have the parents who are a little more on the student and being able to like say you can send the take-home folder and it stays in her book bag and a parent picks them up so they know to go in their book bag and take out their folder versus in High School parents aren't going to necessarily go in their child's book bag because the child may like feel like their parent is being you know disrespectful or something"

Adrian from level 2 has a similar perspective:

> Yeah, I think it's definitely different at different ages, and I think it depends on the student need as well. I guess it's all subjective to the parent because I've seen parents, "Yes, he's doing great here every day," and understand you're here to help their kid. But I've also seen parents who come in and think that because you're a teacher, you're at their will, which I guess kind of makes sense 'cause, okay, you're dealing with their kid, it's not your kid. And you obviously have your student's best interest but I've seen parents who are completely unsympathetic to the teachers and just, "Okay, my kid needs this. Why aren't you getting them this?"

Mandy (Level 2) thinks that there should be more family-school collaboration when they were younger:

"Yes, in elementary school, I think it should be very on top. You should definitely have that line of communication very strictly because that's when they really need that instruction. That's when they really need that support from both ends, parents and from school. So, when that line of communication is open, you all are on the same page, teachers and families. And you'll be able to help the student more. As they get older, this is my opinion, I feel like, like I said before, it should be... Kinda the barrier should be built a little more, so the students can gain that motivation because what happens when they move out? They won't have that self-motivation if it's always, "Okay, are you doing this? Are you doing that?" You can still watch, but just kinda see... 'Cause in high school, they don't baby their students. It's like, "Okay, so here's the material. I've taught you the material. Alright, now let's kind of work together." But it's not as strenuous as elementary. So, I think that barrier should be built a little bit as they get older"

Positives and negatives in the family-school collaboration. Participants had a variety of ideas about effective ways for collaborating with families such as phone calls, texting, notes, face-to-face communication, and parent letters. Mandy (level 2) emphasized the importance of face-to-face meetings. She commented that teachers should make every effort to meet with families especially if it is a student with special needs. She said:

"I think the teacher should make every effort to meet with them in person, even if it's like a weekend for an hour or something. Especially if it's like a student with special needs, and their needs need to be discussed with the parent. And so, the teacher should make every effort to meet with the parents"

With respect to what things to participants believed might make collaboration more likely to occur, their comments spoke to the importance of mutual understanding, getting to know the parents, being accessible and communicative, positivity, and active parent involvement. Mandy (level 2) and Courtney (level 2) both stressed the importance of positive communication. Mandy said:

"Positivity. Send more positive things home. Make more phone calls home that are positive. Don't make it always negative 'cause parents will ignore you. They don't care about negativity"

Courtney responded:

"If they're really struggling you can reach out I mean anything you don't even it doesn't have to be a thing you can say make your kids doing great today and give him a phone

call give him a letter home and just say they were they were fantastic or he/she needs help"

With respect to the barriers participants see in family-school collaboration, participants included a variety of comments like time, lack of transportation, lack of technology, language barriers, negativity, and lack of interest from parents. Becky (level 2) and Courtney (level 2) shared stories about lack of interest from parents. They both experienced these events when they were having their practicum at schools. Becky said:

> "Sometimes, there are parents that aren't really interested. We had this one parent, we had this girl very, very low functioning high school, she would drop any time. You would tell her to do an activity, and it would take like four people and super coddling to get her do stuff. But then, one day we went to the parent and we were just like, "This girl, you need to work on this stuff at home," and then he said, "When she acts out at school she doesn't act out at home." And then, just left the conversation"

Courtney also shared a similar story:

> "Last semester there was a little boy who is like 10 grade levels behind reading and he's only in third grade or like dra levels whatever was and he missed 57 days of school and when he showed up like his teeth had rotted out and he's spat them out on his desk one day like his back molars rotted out and they were on his desk and he was the skinniest kid I've ever seen. He wasn't eating and the mom had never responded to this teacher. Phone call she called the principal called the AP called every number in his given address and sent letters home the principal sent letters home they sent emails that I mean tried Skyping so there was no communication and that's a barrier. I see you because that point it would ring and ring a ring and she leave voicemail after voice mail and not just a parent ignoring the reach out because it's some point you can only do so much"

With respect to what extent family teacher collaboration is important, and participants gave me a number from 1 to 10. All of them said 10 except Adrian (level 2) said 6. When I asked him why not 10, but rather, 6, Adrian gave himself as an example and said some students can still be successful without collaboration. He said:

> "Because, again, looking back at my thing, I think I turned out pretty okay, which is really self-serving and kind of bad to say. I think I turned out pretty okay, again, because of me, my parents weren't super involved but I do think it is your job as a parent to say whether it's... We want you to get a trade, or we want you to go to college. And, obviously, don't force your kids into anything, don't live vicariously through your

children because that's harmful and toxic. But, yeah I think parent involvement does have some importance because you're the ones who are getting the kid to school, whether it's getting them on that bus or dropping them off, walking them there, whatever it is, and showing them that, "Hey, for this," let's say it's 13 years of your life, "this isn't in vain, you're not wasting your time."

Regarding important areas for family-school collaboration, I got various comments. Lauren (level 5) said trust, being comfortable, consistency, variety and communication. Alex (level 5) thinks that classroom culture, student motivation, academic success, and shared responsibility are the important areas for a better family-school collaboration. Adrian (level 2) mentioned about consistency, communication, behaviors and academics. Mandy (level 2) talked about trust, respect, positivity, and shared responsibility. Becky (level 2) said communication and respect. Finally, Courtney (level 2) shared behavior, grades, assignments, and updates as her thoughts on important areas for family-school collaboration.

Communication and family involvement. All preservice teachers I interviewed have great and interesting plans for developing effective family involvement when they have their own classroom. The responses were such as open house, notes home, phone calls, communication right from the beginning, and creating a web page. Three of the participants would like to send written materials to home for developing effective family involvement. Mandy said:

> "I definitely wanna continue sending the folders home, but depending on grade level, I switch it up a little bit. I would also make sure that in the grade book, instead of just putting grades, I want to put explanations, because that was my biggest pet peeve. When I was growing up, teachers would put grades in, or they would give you a certain grade when you didn't really deserve it, but they were waiting to get the work or something like that, but there was no explanation so parents are on you at home.

Becky Mentioned:

> "notes home, I really like. At least for the first day, I'll have that. I'd like to send notes home"

Also Courtney emphasized the importance of sending more written materials:

> "I really like to take a book from the a page from my intern teacher's book last semester where she just sent out a Weekly Newsletter she printed it out before there was three kids without internet or email access so she would print it out and put it in their folders and parents add up to sign in and knowledge that they got it whether or not they read it as their own problem and they signed every week at the end of the homework week they would sign it and I should grade the homework so they could see. All right when my kid really didn't do homework on Wednesday she got to 0 or all right while you're doing excellent you're doing all your homework your grades are reflecting that I mean just keeping in contact and little ways like that just so that when the time comes not only are you record-keeping saying well she's not showing progress but she's also not doing her work. The parents acknowledging oh my gosh my kid is doing great or oh my gosh my kid is not doing so great why can't how can we come together and fix that and the collaboration is key to a smooth classroom because you're play mom to like 12 kids 12 right here so it's like it's a lot of work for just one person to do. So that helps bridge the gap from class to home"

All participants strongly agreed about involvement of parents through the IEP process.

Also all of them observed an IEP meeting. Some of the preservice teachers like Courtney had

bad experiences in the IEP meeting she observed.

> "It was horrible. The woman running it had no idea what she was doing. She didn't even make the IEP. It was for a young boy who has deafness. I don't know if she was a full teacher at that school but I know that she worked with him very closely but she made the presentation like 7 minutes before we all walked in. I walked in she was still trying to type up his IEP which was horrible and poor planning and she didn't even facilitate the meeting because she didn't even know what the kid needed or what his goals were and so she left it blank so they could fill it out together quote on quote. But really, she just said makes me feel like she really didn't care enough or work like super-duper closely with him because she couldn't even felt his IEP or didn't care enough to until the day of"

Mandy also concerns about the involvement of families at the IEP meeting she attended. She

thinks that family of the student with disabilities did not have enough voice or they did not use it

as much as they should.

> "They (teachers) wanted that feedback, "Okay, so how do you feel about this? How do you feel about that?" And it was just more like, "Oh that's fine. That's good. Okay, sounds good." "You know the best." So I feel like more pressing questions, not pressing questions, but instead of saying, "Okay, so how do you feel about this?" Ask them more like, "Okay, so what can we do to benefit this?" And then that will stimulate that conversation or stimulate ideas that can be added to the IEP"

Another important part of family involvement is culturally and linguistically diverse family involvement. Most participants said that they would rely on technology like google translate however Lauren, Alex, Becky and Courtney do not really have a plan. Only Adrian and Mandy have a plan and here is what Adrian said:

"I took five or six years of Spanish. I would love to become fluent in it. Although that critical period may have passed for me because I stopped taking it when I was 16. But, for that, I would definitely see if anyone who is ESL certified, we're gonna be ESL certified, assuming everything goes to plan when we graduate. But if there's a teacher who speaks Spanish, if it wouldn't be too much work for them, ask like, "Hey can you communicate this with my family?" Or Google Translate is something I've seen work really well. Last semester, I worked with students who were refugees from Syria. Their father only spoke Arabic and they used to tell us all the time, "You can call our parents, but they don't speak English." We found out that their dad had Google Translate on his phone. We would send home notes then, and he would type it into Google Translate. And while there's idiomatic expressions and stuff that get lost in the shuffle there, Google Translate's something really good, so I'll make use of that. But do it in a judicious way where I'm not just typing in stuff and assuming that it's gonna translate perfect"

And similarly, Mandy thinks:

"Basically, it depends on the culture, but I'm very open to different cultures. I don't think a lot of teachers are 'cause I know when I was growing up, I felt kinda left out in a lot of my classrooms, being of African-American descent. But yeah, I'm definitely open to whatever it is because again, that's building that trust, that's building that rapport with those parents. And without it, it's... And some parents, they might speak a different language, different things like that. So those are all the things that you have to think about. And there's tools out there. Google Translate, different things, so there's no excuse. If you wanna do it, it can be done."

Finally, participants commented on the difference in families of children with disabilities and families of children without disabilities in terms of involvement. Becky, Adrian and Mandy said definitely families whose children have disabilities are more involved. For example, Becky stated "parents of kids with special needs are usually a lot more open to talking to you and being... 'Cause they have to be the voice for their child". Courtney and Alex think there is no difference. In addition, Lauren said it depends:

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"I would say it depends on the area because I see kids who have disabilities that parents are involved and then other kids with disabilities and parents aren't involved. And then the same thing with the general ed students. It's just it depends on what their culture is what they believe school is to their children. So, I don't think it matters if their child has a disability or not cuz I think it just depends on the area and then the parents themselves"

Theme Two: Preservice teachers' Past Experiences When They Were at K-12 in Terms of Family Involvement

According to the participants, all their families, except for Alex (level 5), were very involved with their education when they were a K-12 student. Alex commented that her parents not as involved because she was a good student and she was academically successful. Alex said that:

"Umm, well, my, I don't know, my mom always, like, everyone asked her the same thing and they asked me the same thing to this day, but she said that for some reason I was just always a student who kind of, when I went home, I enjoyed doing my homework, probably it was because I wanted to be a teacher also but like I would go home and I wanted to do my homework and I wanted to read and I was always reading and like I was always doing math and, like, that was just me. I was definitely different from my brother who, she obviously had to make sure he was doing his homework every day and she was definitely more on top of him when it comes to that but I know, I also know that my mom and my dad always expressed the importance of school, just making sure that I was, you know, performing well and they would always communicate with my teachers, come out. My school, uhh, elementary school did, umm, a thing where your parents had to commit, umm, a certain number of community hours so my mom or my dad would always come out and volunteer because it was required so I think that was definitely something that I anticipated knowing, like, oh my mom would come, let me make sure I am doing good so when she comes she can see my good work on the wall and then we got, like, you know, just getting the awards when you graduate from the different grades so, umm, yeah they definitely were good on that and also just kind of, umm, encouraging me when I didn't do well because I was in, always on the principal honor rolls so those couple of times I got a B and I was just crying hysterically. I'm like, "I got a B, uhhhh, what am I going to do?" She was also there to like let me know that it's okay you know you can make it up. So, I think just being there for the good and the bad, umm, they definitely were, well, it's really my mom, really, she was definitely someone who was just always there encouraging me, so, she definitely was in my plans.

Becky's grandparents were very involved and they always had her tutors. Courtney, Mandy and Adrian's parents were involved in more academic ways. Lauren's parents were fully involved in every available way either social or academical.

When participants were K-12 students, their teachers used emails, notes, phone calls, report cards, and face to face. Adrian shared his personal story about teachers communicating with his parents. He mentioned:

> "I think, second or first grade where I had a concussion on the playground, and this was one of the worst miscommunications I've seen, whether in my own life or as a teacher, but I had a concussion and I was unconscious. Both of my parents are intensive care nurses, so instead of calling an ambulance to pick me up, they called my dad who was at work at the hospital and said, "Can you come pick up your son?" So, there's, I think it was like a 20-minute period where I was unresponsive, and instead of getting... So, I think that, and naturally, if something like that happens to your child, you're concerned, so I think that severed some ties with parent-teacher communication where they were, "We are not gonna talk to these people unless they explicitly talk to us."

Some participants commented about some barriers between their family and teachers with respect to communication, including such things as limited time, grade level of students, and work schedules. Courtney said there were no communication barriers between her teachers and her family and Adrian said the barrier was himself. He stated:

> "A huge barrier was like me, being stubborn, and just, "I don't want my parents seeing this stuff." And it wasn't so much, as like, "Oh, I got a bad note home. I can't show this to my parents because I'm avoiding punishment." It was more of, "I don't want my friends to see my parents." And looking back, I guess it's typical of children, or some children"

I asked participants about their favorite teacher when they were a student to see if their favorite teacher was good at collaborating with their families. Furthermore, I wanted to understand if collaboration of the favorite teacher with families was one of the reasons affect participants' perceptions. Becky's favorite teacher was her theatre teacher in high school and the reason she liked her because the teacher was really involved with her. However, she does not remember her favorite teacher having any conversations with her family. Adrian's favorite

teacher was his history teacher in 10th grade. He liked this teacher because the teacher was so

friendly and made the class enjoyable. Yet, there was no collaboration with his family. He said

"He never contacted my parents at all. Yeah, so there's no collaboration there". Mandy's favorite

teacher was her pre-school teacher. She said:

> "When I was a little girl, I wasn't even in school yet. I was actually preschool, but she
> was always just so full of life and energetic, and I think that's what's translated, and
> through myself. Even in this classroom, I can think back I'm like, "Wow! I really feel like
> I'm her." When I'm in the classroom, I'm very enthusiastic and it translates to my students
> and she was definitely the same way. I was always excited to go to her classroom, and we
> always did projects and activities. It was never just book work and I also do the same
> thing here. We're always up and moving around, and it's almost like sensory learning, so
> definitely she was my favorite teacher and it's definitely translating for me now"

Mandy remembers that her favorite teacher was collaborating with her family all the time:

> So, every day when I got picked up, they would just have full conversation, so I think
> that's awesome because you keep that communication line open and it's not just a note.
> It's better to come actually physically and actually speak person- to-person, so that was
> the communication line with both parents.

Courtney's favorite teacher was her 5th grade teacher who has a great personality and kindness.

Also, she was constantly communicating and collaborating with her family. She said:

> "She was just so warm; her classroom was so welcoming and she and my mom I mean
> really developed a friendship because actually I have 3 Sisters and all 4 of my sisters and
> I had this one teacher over the course of our elementary school up to 5th grade. She
> moved up with us and she was just fantastic sure so kind she sent home parent letters
> rather than just email. So, there was constant communication and no student was a failure
> in her class you just weren't there yet you're going to you were going to get there but
> you're just weren't there yet"

Alex's favorite teacher was her kindergarten and 1st grade teacher:

> "Umm, I honestly cannot tell you why this lady is my favorite teacher to this day like she
> just really, she was just, I don't know, I was too young to give you specifics as I would
> now but for some reason she just always stuck with me and I just always imagined her
> pinching my cheeks and telling me "you can do it, don't ever let anyone tell you 'you
> can't'" and then she just always had a smile on her face and like, I was the kid that like
> would cry if I mess up because I want to be perfect and she's the one that like "you're not
> always gonna do everything perfect, it's ok, you know" so I don't know, if it was just her
> nurturing kind feel, I don't know if it was because I was so young and then at the same

time, she didn't play games with us, so she made sure we were on top of our stuff, umm, so it was a good balance and then I actually went to school with her son in high school so I was able to see her then like I would run into her all the time and she was the same way so umm, I can't tell you I probably would be able to give you know more details and in regard to instruction and stuff but I was so young so I don't remember but she was amazing"

Alex's favorite teacher collaborated with her family well:

"She definitely, umm, collaborated with, especially like, yeah, definitely collaborated a lot, umm, especially since they did the volunteer hours, umm, she was good with like the journals we sent home every day. She was religious, like, she had a time, 1pm every day we all line up, we give her our planners and then she signs them and she would write any notes for our parents and she checks our parent's signatures from the day before and then umm, so that was something that was done on the day to day basis. She always called, every week she sent home a guide with us to see if our parents wanted to volunteer for something that was coming up whether it was like dropping off like tissues or snacks for the week or anything and then umm, every day I remember her, she would walk you to, rather, like I started catching the bus home, she would walk us to our bus every day, she would walk each parent, to their parent to the cars, she would make sure she would speak with your parent so if your parent was dropping you off in the morning, she was there bright and early you know just to say "hey, she's doing fine" or "we're working on this" so umm she kind of went out of her way to make sure that the parents were aware of what was going on and then she also umm was really good with just incorporating things for parents to like do for us throughout the year so she was really good with umm just establishing that communication and like parents were comfortable, you know? Like, we would always have a parent in our classroom always"

Finally, Lauren's favorite teacher was her 8th grade social studies teacher. Lauren like this teacher because his classroom environment is so inviting and she felt so comfortable. She does not remember about this teacher doing anything with families.

All participants except Adrian think that their experiences in K-12 also prepared them to be a teacher. Alex described both positive and negative examples of teachers se experienced as a student. Also, Lauren's experiences helped her with networking skills. Becky was in Best Buddies program and she really liked other students and she liked teaching those students. Best Buddies is a non-profit organization partners people with intellectual and developmental disabilities with opportunities for new friendships, employment, and leadership development.

With Becky's description best buddies program is "Best Buddies is this program. I don't know if it's just Florida or a national thing, but it's run by special education teachers. And I think they have it nationally or outside of schools, but they will pair a developmentally delayed, usually autism, down syndrome student with a student who does not have special needs with a regular ed student". K-12 experiences taught Mandy what to do when she has her own classroom. She said:

> I know that this, just this outlook, this perspective of the classroom, having these visuals around the classroom definitely helped me. It also taught me to not do one type of learning because students learn differently. I had a lot of teachers that just did the writing on the board and expect you to just pick up on it, and I was never that type of learner. I was always hands-on, kinesthetic. So, I always try to implement every aspect. It's not really that difficult. You can have a hands-on activity and still have that aspect on the board, while you're still lecturing and telling them what they're supposed to be doing. So, I think focusing on those different aspects of learning, especially in special education, because these students have so many different needs and in order to meet them, you have to make sure that you're open and you're willing to go the extra mile to make their needs met, to meet their needs.

Courtney had a teacher who was a negative example:

> "I had one teacher he was not 100% there in the head in all honesty he was an alcoholic But a high functioning alcoholic but he would he was I mean verbally abusive he was rude to the faculty and administration and he was like s*** heads to us and we were like 11th grade so we're loving it we're like you're the best you get it but now looking back I'm like that's horrible and that's not he's that he wasn't supposed to be a friend. He was supposed to be an advocate he was supposed to be a teacher and a partner rather than somebody who sitting there trying to be your buddy and saying all the principle sucks"

A limited number of participants commented that their K-12 educational experiences informed them about collaborating with parents/families as a preservice teacher too. For example, Becky said:

> "It helps me see that different families process things differently. There are different relationships. Some parents, I would have friends with different family, different income who didn't have the money, my grandparents did or had more money than my grandparents did or have one parent or two parents or divorced and just sees how different families communicated with different teachers"

And relatedly Mandy said:

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"I know that's it's very important because parents need to be on the same page, because if you're teaching one thing in class, or you expect this in class and then they go home, and it's not the same, if you're collaborating with those parents, we're on the same page. And that takes things a lot further because learning comes in and out of the classroom. So, there has to be that conjunction in order for the students to actually grasp the material and grasp the learning environment that you have set for them. So that communication and that open line is very important. Getting parents to communicate can be difficult, but there's strategies to do so. So, I think that's very important"

Theme Three: Teacher Education Program Experiences of Preservice Teachers

Participants perspectives about the extent to which their teacher education program addressed family school collaboration were mixed. Becky, Adrian, Mandy and Courtney had only completed their second semester so their perceptions were that they had not learned as much as they needed to learn about family-school collaboration. However, most of these students indicated that they anticipated that when engage in their year-long final internship, they will have a better understanding about how teachers and families collaborate. According to Becky:

"We haven't really been assigned to work with parents much. The only time I really interacted with parents was last semester, was we wrote a behavior intervention plan. And I was gonna observe it, but it with the parents of the students I did my behavior intervention plan was. So, at one point, the social worker was just like, "Oh well, (Becky) has this." So, I had to present it to the parents which was really, it was really interesting. It was the first time I've really had to interact with parents"

Adrian stated:

"I wanna say, in context and foundations, there was more discussion of it. But that was in the fall. And at this point, a lot it's hazy. I can remember we had a discussion, because it was like, about communication in general. How do you communicate messages? We were talking about how, I think it depends on the severity of the message. If it's your kid doing a great job today at school, obviously, that's okay to communicate in a note"

Mandy said:

"I'm trying to think... I don't really think there's a particular experience as far as communicating with families. But, I guess I could say, you could see the positivity that comes back, the response. Parents are grateful that, like I said, they have someone that cares about their students, I mean, their children. So, that positivity that comes back, it definitely enlightens us. It makes us feel good. It makes the students feel good 'cause I'm

sure they're getting that positive feedback at home. And it makes the parents feel good as well, so..."

And finally, Courtney said:

"The only time we learned about families was last semester. We took a course called measurements and that we wrote letters like faux letters to parents like fake big letters for grade. And that was wonderful because it was like you know you had students who they stop test scores and you to tell the parents well I'll pay your child is going way low but you had to put it in a nice way an educational way and explain all this break down all these test scores and data and put it in a parent letter which was probably the most beneficial I've ever and first remember see but this semester is the first Hands-On like send home to a parent letter we've done and you know it was weird cuz you was like right a little bit about yourself and what you want to do and this is like I guess"

Alex and Lauren are in their last semester and they are done with their coursework. By

the time I was interviewing, they were pursuing their practicum full time. They believe that their

undergraduate program emphasizes parent communication a lot. They also mentioned they had

several projects which was related to parent communication. Alex mentioned:

"They definitely imbedded a lot of parent communication within their curriculum for us. Umm, I can't remember one particular, well, two projects we did a family communication project. We had two of them so it was definitely something that was worth a lot of points so you know in college if it's worth a lot of points, you're going to do it"

Additionally, she described the assignment as:

"so the assignment was broken down I think into four or five different parts. It started off with us kind of creating our own web page or newsletter or anything we decide on that is creative and kind of invites umm parents to contact us umm electronically and then we also did umm welcome letters so that we sent home with our actual students so we actually gave those to our students umm at, for both, so it was two different umm, we did it at level 3 and at level 5, umm, well level 4 or 5. We were at the same school for levels 4 and 5 so level 3 and level 4 but we sent home the letter we did the online newsletter we had to keep our webpage updated then we also had to keep record of any communication that was done with parents and a form of communications and then we also had to come up with our own layout or sheet on documenting it so that was cool also because we got to see different examples of how parents keep up with what was communicated with the student and teacher and then it also made sure we were able to list things that weren't only bad but also good communication and in the midst of doing those projects we were exposed to just different tools we can use in the classroom and then we also read this book that had different scenarios of just that one particular teacher and her experience over the time and the book kind of outlined the book basically outlined her different

experience with communicating with parents and that was a good exposure for us because not everything she did was something we may have agreed on but we were just able to kind of see both sides so it will have a lot of discussions"

Lauren also talked about the teacher preparation program emphasized the family content throughout the coursework.

"It is brought up in a lot of lessons that we learned throughout our program because that's you learn that that's like the base it says the key in the classroom is to communicate with your parents because parent involvement is it's like a top priority. If you don't have parent involvement you're not going to have a student involvement because once the parents involved the students are gonna be like all right I got to do this. But I mean if the parent needs to feel comfortable talking to you about their child like you're watching their child all day so we have definitely learned it throughout the whole program basically every class no matter it was our math class our assessment class is everything"

Furthermore, I asked the participants about what have been facilitators and barriers to developing their knowledge and skills related to family-school collaboration. Level 2 students (Becky, Mandy, Courtney and Adrian) mostly mentioned that they did not learn a lot from their teacher education program about family-school collaboration. For example, Becky said:

"Just the main thing is, we haven't really, I'd say, gone over that. Right now, we're just focusing on the students. I feel like they're doing a 'throw us to the dogs' approach when it comes to talking to parents, where we just have to figure it out ourselves 'cause I don't really... You can teach it, but it comes with some personal tact to be able to talk to parents and you just start and either ease back or go forward"

Courtney commented:

"I'd say barrier is that it's not addressed as much as it could be or other people tell you different. I just feel like it's not something as addresses much as the children themselves. I mean mostly what we're learning about how to be in here and meet the kids needs which is what is being reinforced how to meet every student's' individual needs. Not so much how to speak with the parents."

On the other hand, Adrian said there were no barriers and there is a facilitator which is watching his mentor teacher during his field experience in schools as a teacher candidate. He added:

Facilitators, watching... Watching that, I try to take from them, Mr. …. I'll see him some mornings, and it's funny, 'cause he has a bit of a reputation as like, being, kind of difficult or stuff. But he's amazing with both the kids and the parents. I try to model what he does.

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Watching how he communicates with parents, and do so in a professional manner. It's definitely something I'm trying to embody myself as I get more exposure to parents.

Barriers for Level 5 students (Alex and Lauren) was not about what they learned from their teacher education program, instead they thought barriers related to other factors. Alex thinks that being an intern instead of the actual instructor was a barrier for her. She said

"some barriers for me was definitely not being an actual instructor. Because at the end of the day, we were still interns so just not being the one that can't necessarily take on our responsibilities. So, like yeah we are working with these students every day or doing this and that but I mean we're trying to establish that trust"

Lauren said that teachers' beliefs about collaboration can be a barrier. She said, "I guess a barrier would be if you don't agree with collaborating with the family or parents if you if you believe that they don't play a big part I guess that can be a barrier in your knowledge".

Summary of the Findings

Three themes emerged from the data analysis. The first theme related to the overall perceptions of preservice teachers about family-school collaboration. Participants' comments coded to this theme revolved several areas including differences of family collaboration based on age and grade level, effective ways for creating collaboration between teachers and families such as phone calls, texting, notes, face-to-face communication and parent letters, and the importance of mutual understanding between educators and families, teachers who get to know the parents, teachers being accessible and actively communicating with families, positivity, and active parent involvement. Additionally, participants indicated that trust, being comfortable, consistency, variety, communication, classroom culture, student motivation, academic success, shared responsibility, behaviors, academics, respect, and positivity were all important factors for effective family collaboration. Participants also identified barriers that thought hindered family-

school collaboration. These barriers include time, lack of transportation, lack of technology, language barriers, negativity, and lack of interest from parents.

The second theme, *preservice teachers' past experiences when they were at K-12 in terms of family involvement* relates to what participants described with respect to their personal experiences and how these experiences affected their perceptions in terms of collaborating with families, I found out almost all the participants' families were very involved when they were K-12 student. Some of the responses about barriers between their family and teachers in terms of communicating were time, their grade level, and work schedules of their parents. Moreover, most of the participants'' favorite teachers were collaborating well with their families. In addition, almost all the participants think that their K-12 experiences also prepared them to be a teacher.

Finally, the third theme was about teacher education program experiences of preservice teachers. In this theme, I got different opinions from different level groups of participants. It is only second semester of Becky, Adrian, Mandy and Courtney so they did not learn about family teacher collaboration as much as level 5 students. However, most of level 2 preservice teachers think that when they start their practicum in their last semester, they will have a better understanding about how teachers and families collaborate.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, I discuss the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the study's research questions. Additionally, I discuss the study's limitations as well as the implications of the study for research and practice.

This study was guided by Ecological Theory and Family Systems Theory as a conceptual framework that acknowledges there are multiple layers that impact what a person thinks. These theories address the multi-layered nature of experiences and understandings about the roles of preservice teachers and how they relate to understanding working with families. As I discuss findings relative to each of research questions, I will address how they do or do not associate with Ecological Theory and Family Systems Theory. The purpose of this study was to explore the integration of family involvement in the courses and field experiences in an undergraduate special education program. This study also explored preservice teachers' perceptions about what they learned in their program and the perceptions, and understandings of pre-service teachers regarding collaboration with families based on their past experiences with their families. This study investigated the core program within the larger coursework of the special education preservice undergraduate program.

As discussed in chapter 4, three themes emerged from the data. The themes are as follows: *perceptions of preservice teachers about family-school collaboration, preservice teachers' past experiences when they were at K-12 in terms of family involvement* and *teacher*

education program experiences of preservice teachers. These themes provide a frame for addressing the research questions.

Discussion Related to Research Questions

How do pre-service teachers perceive the family/guardian's role in collaboration?

Participant responses related to *Theme One: Perceptions of Preservice Teachers About Family-School Collaboration* are pertinent to answering this research question. All participants agreed that family-school collaboration should be based on age and developmental level of the child (interestingly, this is something that is not mentioned in the literature). This is related to Family Systems theory because family experiences in a child's development shape individuals' expectations and predictions. For instance, the level 5 preservice teachers expressed a direct need for the family members and teachers to be in continuous contact. Participants also expressed a need for more specialized communication between the school and the family at the elementary level. A firsthand account of Adrian (level 2) expressed how the attitude of parental involvement could directly positively or negatively affect the needs of the student if collaboration between school and family. Additionally, all preservice teachers agreed as the child progresses through the grade levels he or she should become less supported by the teacher and family members as they cultivate the skills of self-advocacy and self-responsibility on their own.

Communication with families is an important aspect for preservice teachers (Christenson, 2004; Epstein, 1995). However, it is intimidating for preservice teachers because it is usually a new experience for them (Bartels & Eskow, 2010). When it comes to ways to communicate with families, Ferrara (2009a) found that 85% of sophomore preservice teachers preferred to prepare a memo or make a phone call when interacting with parents rather than engaging in face-to-face conferences. The preservice teachers I interviewed expressed a number of important ways to

effectively communicate with families. These suggestions varied from face-to-face meetings, phone calls, notes, and even texting. The level two intern Mandy was adamant about the significance of collaboration through having teacher and family meetings. She stated that teachers should be accountable to make an appointment by any means possible with the family member of a student with special needs. Also, several interns mutually agreed that positive collaboration was essential in developing positive family-school communication and relationships. For example Mandy suggested that sending home positive notes home and making phone calls to convey positive messages to family members about students is important. She also said that just making negative phones calls home might just be ignored by the parents of the special needs child.

Furthermore, the preservice teachers conveyed their own examples of communication difficulties when it came to school-family collaboration. Similar to what I found in the literature, participants included a variety of comments like time, lack of transportation, lack of technology, language barriers, negativity, and lack of interest from parents. One eye-opening experience was told by a level two intern (Courtney). She shared a story of a tenth-grade boy whose parent never responded to teacher phone calls about addressing varying serious concerns about the boy's overall well-being. She reported that the Assistant Principal ended up stepping in to communicate with the parent. The Assistant Principle called every available number, sent letters home, and even tried Skyping. Unfortunately, all forms of communication were left unanswered.

Future plans on communicating with parents were very evident in the minds of the preservice teachers. Many mentioned having open house presentations, sending notes home, making frequent phone calls, and creating a web page. For example, preservice teacher Becky exclaimed that sending notes home, even on the first day, would be very important to her in her

future classroom as a way to communicate home. Another instance included Courtney's experience of one teacher who communicated with a Weekly Newsletter that went home in a communication folder. Also, she mentioned that certain work or notes had to be signed by the parent in acknowledging the students' growth and progress within the classroom.

All participants have varying ideas when it came to significant areas for family-school collaboration. Most preservice teachers included communication, academics, respect and positivity. For example, Adrian (level 2) included classroom culture, student motivation, academic success, and shared responsibility for a positive family-school collaboration format. Courtney (level 2) thought that sharing a student's behaviour, grades, assignments, and overall updates created the ideal communication between school and home.

When it comes to IEP parental participation, all interns expressed the importance of school-family collaboration. Mandy expressed concerns about her experience at the IEP meeting she attended. She thinks that the family did not have enough voice or they did not use it as much as they should. She felt that the teachers did not give the parents of the student enough time to communicate any real concerns. In the meeting she said that the teachers just asked basic questions like, "How do you feel about that? Or how do you feel about this?" She thought the IEP meeting would have been more productive if the question were more probing and allowed the school-family collaboration to be more thought-provoking and meeting the holistic needs of the child.

Involving families who are culturally and linguistically diverse is another important aspect of family-school collaboration for participants. Despite the importance of family involvement guaranteed by IDEA, issues with the quality and outcomes of school-family relationships within the special education decision making process and throughout the

educational trajectory of students with disabilities are exacerbated for families from groups traditionally marginalized in U.S. public schools: namely, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000). As part of their course assignment, the preservice teachers were asked to address the parent communication involving the CLD families and how to address potential language and cultural barriers. I found out that the participants were very informed and respectful about this aspect of family-school collaboration. Some of the interns said that they would rely on technology like Google Translate for communication purposes with CLD families. Adrian (Level 2) mentioned that one time he had a parent from Syria who only spoke Arabic. Hence, Adrian decided to use Google Translate in the conference with the parent. He stated that the technology was helpful, but some of "the idiomatic expressions" got lost in translation. Adrian later reflected that Google Translate was useful, but should not be used as a sole use of communication with a non-English speaking parent.
In contrast to Adrian and others who had specific ways to address language barriers in order to communicate with CLD parents, several other participants did not have a direct plan on how to address this potential communication barrier with CLD families.

In what ways do pre-service teachers describe how their family/school experiences as a K-12 student affect their future collaborating skills with families?

Participant responses related to *Theme Two: Preservice teachers' Past Experiences When They Were at K-12 in Terms of Family Involvement* answered this research question which pertains to the perspectives of pre-service teachers regarding how their past experiences of a preservice teacher affect their future collaborating skills with families.

In the Ecological Theory, a child's environment and family life play an important role in child's growth and development. Therefore, schools should encourage child's relationship and

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they should make a setting that welcomes families. According to Epstein (1995), "If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development" (p. 7). Lo (2010) adds that, "Parents have a unique understanding of their child's needs, they are often considered to be the best advocates to assert their child's interests and make decisions regarding what is appropriate for him/her" (p. 405). Therefore, involvement of the family is very important and both teachers and families need to recognize this importance.

Overall, nearly all participants indicated that their families were involved in their education as K-12 students. Alex (level 5) was the only participant who indicated otherwise. Alex thought that his family was not involved as much because she was a good student and she was academically successful. However, her family was very supportive and involved with school activities time to time. Other than Alex, participants said that their families were involved academically. One participant, Lauren (level 5), commented that her family was involved socially such as joining all the events school was organizing as well.

Communication is a critical aspect of effective family-school collaboration (Christenson, 2004; Epstein, 1995). Myriad structural barriers limit authentic and collaborative relationships between schools and families with respect to communication. Three barriers that participants commented on that they believed affected communication between their teachers and their families were limited time, their grade level at any particular point in time, and work schedules. Most of the participants thought that work schedules of their families and available times for their teachers do not match. Also, most participants mentioned that when the grade level changed

from elementary to high school, this change affected school-family communication negatively. Common ways that participants said their teachers communicated with their families included emails, notes, phone calls, report cards, and face-to-face meetings.

Interestingly, I found out that three out of the six participants (Mandy-level 2, Courtney-level 2, Alex-level 5) commented that they had a favorite teacher and that this teacher collaborated with their families regularly. For these three participants, the common mode of communication between their favorite teacher and their family was face-to-face communication.

All of the participants except Adrian (level 2) thinks that, their experiences in K-12 prepared them to be a teacher. Their K-12 experiences prepared them via positive and negative experiences, networking skills, and Best Buddies program. Generally, participants thought their K-12 school experiences helped them better understand what to do when they have their own classrooms.

Despite this perspective, only two out of six participants said their K-12 educational experiences informed them about collaborating with families.

What is the nature of learning experiences that preservice teachers describe regarding family involvement within the coursework and field experiences in special education program? How do pre-service teachers describe experiences within their teacher education program they have had that prepare them for collaboration with families?

Participant responses related to *Theme Three: Teacher Education Program Experiences of Pre-Service Teachers* are pertinent to answering these two research questions. These themes are about preservice teachers' experiences in their teacher preparation program and what they learned in coursework and field experiences they have had that prepare them for collaboration with families.

To obtain a greater understanding of the context regarding this special education teacher preparation program I informally interviewed two professors who taught in the undergraduate program and who served as co-coordinators of the program. Moreover, I did two informal observations for Level 2 and one observation for Level 5 student groups gave me an idea about how the instructor explained the related topic about families and how preservice teachers perceive this instruction. I also analyzed pertinent documents related to the program (e.g., syllabi). This program uses a type of spiraling curriculum. According to Harden & Stamper (1999),

> "a spiral curriculum is one in which there is an iterative revisiting of topics, subjects or themes throughout the course. A spiral curriculum is not simply the repetition of a topic taught. It requires also the deepening of it, with each successive encounter building on the previous one" (p. 141).

Hence, in this particular special education teacher preparation program, particular themes run across the entire 5-semester program of study. Additionally, similar topics are taught by revisiting the topics, increasing the level of difficulty and relating new topics with the previous topics including family involvement. The literature supports the importance of embedding family involvement within the curriculum across the entire teacher education program. According to Baum and McMurray-Schwarz (2004) "in addition to offering a course specifically devoted to the topic of family involvement, it would most beneficial for information regarding parent involvement to permeate the entire preservice teacher preparation program" (p. 60). This special education teacher preparation program includes mentor teachers who serve as cooperating teachers during both practicum and final internship. The work in conjunction with university supervisors to provide support, coaching, and feedback in ways that are meant to help students connect coursework to practice. Cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and faculty meet several times each semester to debrief, share student progress, discuss issues, and plan.

There are some differences based on what level 2 and level 5 preservice teachers think. One main reason for level 2 and level 5 preservice teachers have different opinions is level 2 ones are young. It is only their second semester and they are trying to make sense of the topics they learn. On the other hand, level 5 preservice teachers they are at the end. They can make sense of what they have done and how they everything scaffolded and emphasized. The other reason is Level 5 preservice teachers supervised by different group of instructors and professors then level 2 preservice teachers. Hence, they were in the same program but they had different experiences.

According to literature, preservice teachers sometimes lack understanding about how to both improve relationships with families and how to collaborate with them in their child's education. Some researchers suggest that this is because some teacher education programs are generally theoretical in nature and lack real life application when it comes to family interactions (Baum & Swick, 2008; Epstein, 2011). Moreover, Flanigan (2007) mentioned that traditional teacher preparation programs do not effectively prepare preservice teachers for parent involvement experiences. Baum (2000) found that preservice teachers suggested that they did not have much experiences with family collaboration in their teacher preparing programs. However, this is not the case for the Special Education program I studied. In the teacher preparation program I examined, participants have mixed perspectives about the extent to which their teacher education program addressed family school collaboration. Level 2 students thought that they did not do too much related to family-school collaboration. However, their professors did not have the same idea. According to the professors the preservice teachers included numerous assignments such as writing a letter home, family communication project, family newsletter and

case studies. On the other hand, level 5 participants stated that they learned a lot about family-school collaboration in their program.

When participants described the facilitators and barriers to developing their knowledge and skills related to family-school collaboration, some of level 2 preservice teachers mentioned not learning enough from their teacher education program as a barrier. Level 5 participants mentioned that their role as a final intern was a barrier because it is limited what would be able to do if they were the teacher of record. Furthermore, they thought that another barrier was of experienced teachers who have negative attitudes about parent involvement.

Implications

Preparing preservice teachers to be skilled in effective family-school collaboration is necessary for helping children obtain a better and quality education. The results of this study suggest that preservice teachers in this particular special education preservice program are aware of the importance of collaborating with families. In preparing teachers for collaboration, teacher preparation programs are very crucial. In this study, I found that the level 2 (second-semester in a five-semester program) preservice teachers were not fully prepared for family collaboration. However, level 5 (fifth semester of a five-semester program) preservice teachers should feel ready to collaborate when they have their own classrooms and beginning teachers should be prepared to address common issues related to effective family collaboration. Based on my analysis, participants who were near the end of their program believed that they were prepared to communicate with and collaborate with families even though they do not have their own classrooms. Participants who were nearer the beginning of their program felt less prepared.

Implications for teacher education programs. Teacher preparation programs should focus on teaching more about families to the preservice teachers so that they feel more

comfortable and therefore are able to collaborate more authentically and meaningfully when preservice teachers start teaching. Especially preservice teachers in their beginning years of their program should be more actively involved with families rather than just learning about it theoretically. Furthermore, teacher preparation programs should provide opportunities for open communication between preservice teachers and the families. Teacher education programs also need to help preservice teachers to find a way for a better communication with families whose primary language is not English and/or have limited English proficiency. Finally, teacher education programs should help preservice teachers how to overcome the barriers that are mentioned by the participants in the study.

Implications for researchers. Although, this study suggests the special education teacher preparation program that was the focus and did emphasize family collaboration across the program, future research should focus on what teacher education programs can do to increase face-to-face interaction of preservice teachers with families and why teacher education programs do not already do this. While it is important to identify the barriers to family-school collaboration, research that attended to promising practices in building positive family-school relationships within the teacher education process would provide a model for practice. Future research should focus on the various aspects of cultural differences and professional assumptions about families that are cause for conflict between school professionals and families. Also, researchers should include in their analysis explicit attention to the ways in which families' experiences are inextricable from oppressions related to their race, ethnicity, national origin, language, and in some cases, income.

Limitations

There are three main limitations in this study. Firstly, observations were not used as a data collection method because the topics related to families did not be specifically taught in the Spring 2017 semester. The main content on *working with families* was introduced in the Fall 2016 semester, the topic is revisited multiple times throughout the program minimally. Therefore, I was not able to observe the Fall 2016 course. Additionally, with interviewing the professors and preservice teachers as well as analyzing the course modules I was able to get a sense of how the class is taught. Secondly, another limitation is that this study included six out of the 41 preservice teachers in the level 2 and level 5 cohorts, therefore the results of this study are not generalizable to the all preservice teachers in these two cohorts. Finally, this study is a one snapshot in time of preservice teachers' experiences in one program, that may or may not be totally representative of totality of preservice teachers' experiences.

Conclusion

When it comes to the perceptions of the preservice teachers in this study related to family collaboration, there are varying degrees of thought from these preservice teachers. On one hand, all the preservice teachers agree that the level of involvement of collaboration between school and home should fluctuate based on the students' age and needs. However, some of the preservice teachers found that the most effective way to engage in communication with family members was to communicate face-to-face, while some thought notes home were effective and more feasible because of possible time and transportation difficulties. Perhaps most importantly, the majority of the preservice teachers in this study sought out to express the significance of positivity between family-school collaboration. The stronger the optimistic bond between the family and school, the greater the educational benefit for the student. Based on the preservice teachers' perspectives, the bonds between the family and school collaboration should be

strengthened by classroom culture, shared information on student progress and behavior, respect for diversity in cultures, and most of all a positive responsibility between both parties. Furthermore, these preservice teachers agreed that experiences around students' IEPs prompted strong ideas about family-school collaboration.

Participants came up with different ways to communicate like emails, notes, phone calls, report cards, and face-to-face. However, there are some barriers that they believe limit communication. These barriers are limited time, grade level of students, and work schedules. Furthermore, some of the participants thought that their favorite teachers as K-12 students were also a great collaborator with their families. Although most of the participants stated their K-12 experiences prepared them to be a teacher, only a limited number of them said their K-12 educational experiences informed them about collaborating with families.

Finally, the undergraduate special education teacher education program is using a spiral approach for teaching contents. Despite the fact that the professors in this teacher education program said that they teach enough about family-school collaboration, the results of this study suggest that there were differences in perspectives among level 2 and level 5 preservice teacher participants about their current preparation around family collaboration. It is my hope that researching the perceptions of preservice teachers about collaboration with families, will contribute to the special education teacher education programs be more focused around family-school collaboration.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Interview Questions for preservice teachers

1. What is your program and major? What year are you in your program?

2. Why did you decide to be a teacher? Why did you choose special ed.?

3. How was your family involved with your education (communicating with teachers) when you were a student? Elementary, middle, and high school. What extent your family involved?

4. How did your teacher communicate with your parents? What do you think facilitators and barriers for communication?

5. Tell me a story about your favorite teacher when you were a student. Why is that teacher stand up in your mind? Do you remember anything this teacher collaborate with your parents?

6. Explain to me how your K-12 education prepared you to be a teacher? Were there times when an experience made you want to become a teacher? If so can you describe?

7. To what extent-your teacher education program addressed family school collaboration? What particular experiences stand out for you to shape your thoughts about communicating families?

8. Thinking about your experiences so far, what are facilitators and barriers to developing knowledge and skills related to family collaboration?

9. What are your experiences in schools as teacher candidates? What do you learn from your cohort peers?

10. What grade level would you like to teach when you start teaching?

11. Do you think collaborating with families is different at different age and grade levels of students?

12. Given the grade level you specified, what are effective ways teacher and families can collaborate? What things might make collaboration more likely to occur? What barriers do you see?

13. To what extent do you think that family-teacher collaboration is important? Scale 1 to 10. Why is this true for you?

14. What are your plans for developing effective family involvement when you have your own classroom?

15. What are the top 5 areas that you think are important for teacher family collaboration?

16. What do you think about involving parents to IEP process?

17. How do you expect to communicate with parents about student progress?

18. What does that mean to you? How would you involve culturally and linguistically diverse families?

19. Parents with disabilities and compared to non-disabilities involving the families?

Interview Questions for professors

1. What's your position and how is that related to preservice teacher preparation?

2. How long have you been preparing preservice teachers?

3. Why did you want to become a teacher educator?

4. What are some details about your teacher preparation program in your university?

5. How do you teach the topic about collaboration with families to preservice teachers?

6. What kind of activities and assignments do you give to preservice teachers about family/school collaboration?

APPENDIX B

USF

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA

May 23, 2017

Mehmet Ozturk
Teaching and Learning
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**

IRB#: Pro00029668

Title: Collaboration with Families: Perceptions of Special Education Preservice Teachers and
Teacher Preparation

Study Approval Period: 5/23/2017 to 5/23/2018

Dear Mr. Ozturk:

On 5/23/2017, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above
application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):

Protocol Document(s):

protocol.docx

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:

Consent form preservice.docx.pdf
consent form professors.docx.pdf

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the
"Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent
document is amended and approved.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which
includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve
only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review
research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research

proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board