FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS DURING COVID-19: EXPLORING HOW TEACHERS AND CAREGIVERS TALK ABOUT SUPPORTING KINDERGARTENERS' SCHOOLING

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this dissertation was to explore family-school partnerships of young children during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through qualitative methods, including interviews and case study, I sought to hear caregivers and teachers' stories of their experiences supporting children's schooling during this period of collective trauma. The data I generated provided insight into their experiences. The first study revealed the emotions and distances among teachers and caregivers and the complex nature of their relationships while partnering around children's schooling during the pandemic. In the second study, interview data and home-school communication revealed that school personnel and families privileged competing purposes of education that reinforced pre-pandemic norms, despite opportunities to reimagine schooling to be more inclusive and equitable. Finally, the third study highlighted participants' lived experiences with online schooling, revealing that the experience changed caregivers' positions and roles in relation to their children's schooling. The findings from each of these studies emphasizes the complexities of family-school partnerships in support of early childhood education. The lived experiences of participants revealed the emotion laden work they shared during the pandemic. The findings inform the field by sharing how school personnel need to examine their purpose and how they engage with families and children. Further, Covid-19 has opened the door to reimagining new ways to partner with families, specifically making the partnerships balanced and empowering caregivers to become agents of change in their children's schooling.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I entered my doctoral program wanting to focus on family literacy. I wanted to make literacy more accessible to all children, and as an early childhood teacher and parent of young children, I knew that family engagement was the key to addressing reading disparities among children. As I am finishing up my doctoral work, my focus continues to be on families and schools, yet my mindset and approach has vastly changed.

My Early Career

Upon graduation, I gained employment at a Visual and Performing Arts Magnet elementary school in the heart of Raleigh, North Carolina. Powell Elementary's context was vastly different from those in which I was a student as well as a student teacher in the mountains of NC. This was my first time in a building where there were more people of color in the school building than those who were White. For the first time, I had teacher colleagues of color as well. I taught almost a decade at Powell. During that time, I witnessed, firsthand, systemic issues of race and class, yet I was ignorant to the root causes of them. I continued to unknowingly perpetuate racism and classism by placing blame on families for children's academic issues. I remember pitying some of my children and saying (at times aloud), "Their parents don't read to them." Despite working with professionals of differing backgrounds, I was indoctrinated in beliefs that I was the expert and I knew what "these" families needed.

During my first several years of teaching, I worked towards obtaining a Master's degree in Reading Education. My graduate program did little to address social injustices within education. I took one elective course on social diversity over a five-week summer session that did little to compel me to interrogate issues of social inequalities. There were no classes offered

on families and communities, thus my knowledge of how to engage with families consisted of my prior knowledge (ignorance?) and experiences teaching.

Becoming a parent of two small children during this time informed my understanding of how important a caregiver-child relationship is to children's learning. I marinated my children in literature, reading daily even when they were in the womb. I recall reading to Griffin at two months old before his bedtime. He was crying because he wanted to eat, yet I was determined that I was going to get him on a schedule (obviously a first child) of "bath, feeding, books, and then bed." This worked, in time, and reading became our daily and nightly ritual. I regularly took my children to the library and checked out shopping bags full of books. This reinforced my ideas of how important the connection between caregivers and their children around reading and I wanted this connection for all children. This also reinforced the deficit mindset I maintained of families which I perceived as doing nothing to support their children's reading.

In 2011, I took on a new role at Brentwood Elementary, also in Raleigh, NC, which had a majority population (90%) of children who were apart of multilingual learners. Despite my minor in English as a Second Language, I felt quite underprepared to work with EL children. This school received two and a half million Race to the Top dollars to revamp the school. Brentwood had been a "failing" school and the previous principal was involved in a controversy of fraud. The district hired a completely new administration, who went on to mostly hire an all new staff of teachers. I was hired as the school wide intervention teacher and literacy coach. My role was to support all six of the school's intervention teachers as well as help inform the administration on assessments and data. Our school district mandated all children be universally screened three times a year and I was also charged with ensuring this happened. The "screening" turned into days and days of running records and took weeks at a time. From there, I was

instructed to develop data walls and data notebooks. Samantha, my instructional resource teacher colleague, and I constructed beautiful data walls based on every child's reading level. There was a public wall, which was supposed to be anonymous, as well as a private wall in the office that had children's names on each card. We were very proud of our work and I went on to develop a portfolio of it when pursuing jobs in the coming years. At the time, I was not aware of the harm this might have caused as well as how we used these data points to dehumanize children.

During this time, I also taught a developmental reading class at the local community college. There, I worked with students who had fallen through the cracks and needed to be able to read and comprehend basic level texts as a prerequisite for entry level English class. I worked with students straight out of high school as well as older students who were going to school to begin a second career. At this point in my career, I began to question how my students could have made it through high school without being able to read very well. I was struck by the fact that I was using the same strategies to work with adults that I used when working with third graders. We used four square vocabulary cards and acted out new words (they actually liked it). I modeled inferring the way I had in my elementary classroom. While I was beginning to question how collectively we, as teachers, could let this happen, I still remained ignorant to systemic issues of injustice in our schooling. I continued to ask why their parents had not stepped in and made sure they had learned what they needed to do.

When I moved to Iowa for family reasons, I got a similar job teaching a developmental reading course at Scott Community College. I had similar experiences there. After one year, I became a consultant at the Iowa Reading Research Center. I engaged in work with scholars, teachers, and families around the state. I oversaw the "Family Resources Project" in which I worked with a family engagement scholar, Dr. Joan Walker, from Pace University to develop a

tool for which to evaluate online literacy resources for children. I worked with her to train caregivers on how to evaluate online resources in order to develop a collection of tools the Center could share with families. Additionally, I wrote a regular blog in which I completed literacy activities with my children and shared with families. I really felt that the work I was doing was valuable and that I had good ideas to share with families. I continued to maintain the mindset that schools should operate unidirectionally and deliver the knowledge to the families. When I moved to Michigan I continued to work remotely for the Center. I continued working on social media and blogging to make literacy accessible to Iowa's families. The Center hired a new director who was immediately critical of the work I had been doing. At the time I was disappointed and felt misunderstood, but now I see that my blogging as a white, middle-class mom was likely not making literacy accessible to families from historically minoritized populations.

From all of my experiences working in education, inside and outside of classrooms, I knew I wanted to engage in research on the relationship between schools and families. I, then, applied and got accepted to the doctoral program at Michigan State. I entered graduate school with the same mindset that I was going to hone my knowledge to be able to "help" families learn how to work with their children. Through my studies, I worked with and learned from scholars in education that taught I had much to learn and unlearn. My mindset of working with families and children began to shift as I chose to center humanizing teaching and learning in my work. This shift did not happen overnight, but rather little by little. As I learned from my teacher, mentor, and friend, Dr. Fendler, bit by bit I began to change. In the next section, I will share moments, both small and large, in my graduate work that profoundly influenced the way I now want to center my work.

The Struggle is NOT Real

As a former data wall engineer, I was well versed in labeling children and determining who was green (proficient), yellow (below proficient), and red (alarmingly below proficient). I used these labels interchangeably with vocabulary like "high" and "low" when referring to groups of children. In my first semester of graduate school, I began to rethink how I talked about children. A conversation with my friend Kristen inspired me. I met Kristen, a fourth-year student when she became an unofficial mentor when she was assigned as an official mentor to my classmate. I latched onto her as she and I both commuted, had children, were "specializing in literacy" and she gave me good advice from the outset. One day we ran into one another in the hallway, just before my research methodologies course. I do not remember the exact context of our conversation, but somehow I referred to children as "struggling readers." Kristen vehemently said, "Oh, I do not use the term struggling when talking about children." I was dumbfounded as I had been brought up in teaching during the No Child Left Behind Era and being constantly scared of making Adequate Yearly Progress, where you did not want to have too many children who "struggled." I am not sure I heard anything else in that conversation as my wheels began spinning. I walked into class and sat with some peers who were likely less progressive as Kristen. I point blank asked them, "If you can't call a child a struggling reader, what would you call them?" They were just as puzzled as I was. Overtime, I began to see how my interpretation of what proficiency was likely held notions of racism and classism. I learned henceforth that calling a child a struggling reader places a label on that child that they might never shake. That children labeled as struggling or low are often children of color and/or economically disadvantaged. I began to see that my previous work creating data walls positioned children as

numbers, rather than humans. I began to interrogate other actions I might have taken to perpetuate these problematic practices.

Shadowing a graduate level math class with Dr. Amy Parks was another pivotal moment in my doctoral program and in my thinking as a teacher and researcher. It was in this class, alongside interns, that I learned about Carol Dweck's (2008) work on mindset work. Amy taught me about the power of our words and mindsets as teachers. Each class with Amy showed me how to center the children in mathematics work. Through high quality tasks, she demonstrated how to make difficult mathematics tasks accessible for all learners. Through shadowing her, I began to recall times as a classroom teacher where I only gave this kind of challenging work to children who I had considered to be "high" or "above proficient." Next, I recalled that most of my "high" children had been from white, middle class families. I learned from Amy how to approach my teaching with a strengths-based mindset. This helped me see that assessment should be more about what does the child know and where do we want them to go next, rather than what does the child not know.

All of these circulating thoughts and mindset shifts in my brain propelled me to begin thinking about reframing how I consider children and their families when I taught preservice and in-service teachers. I had been charged with teaching a literacy assessment course right from the beginning of my doctoral program. Within this course, I infused stories from being a former classroom teacher as well as a parent to young children. These experiences definitely informed my practice, but I recognize now that I frame my talk about this subject differently now than I did at that time. I recall sharing with my first students at MSU where I shared how lucky some children were to be marinated in literature, while some unfortunate children were not read to. Making these statements felt like stating facts, yet now I realize they were highly problematic

without considering how they were based on the hegemonic notions of academic literacy. I have reframed my thinking through my years of working with and learning from the mindful, critical scholars I have been fortunate to be surrounded by. Amy helped me see that one small shift in my vocabulary can help me position children as humans, rather than numbers on my (former) data walls. As early childhood teachers, she helped me see that if I charge myself with using the term children, rather than students, this one change can help inform my expectations of them as human beings. I began suggesting this shift for my own students. Additionally, I charged them with reframing their thinking and the way they talked about children's academics. I challenged them to use language that promoted the child's strengths and areas for improvement, rather than reinforcing language that labeled children as struggling. During my first couple of semesters teaching the assessment course, I had a lot of students use deficit-based language when referring to children. One instance in particular stands out. A student was writing about a kindergartner who she felt had excelled at most of the literacy assessments she had administered. At one point she said, "Child passed the print concepts assessment with flying colors, except she really struggled with quotation marks." This gave me the opportunity to have a discussion with my students about what it means to struggle versus everything else. We talked about the how the term struggle should really not be a go-to word we use as teachers as it truly does not reflect how children progress. Later, in math classes, we began as a class to reframe the word struggle into a positive light. VandeWalle encourages teachers to provide rich math activities for children in which they might experience a "productive struggle." We discussed that during this type of struggle is when children actually learn. These experiences translate into family-school partnerships because it directly relates with how teachers talk to caregivers about their children.

Using a strengths-based approach is now how I approach teaching preservice and in-service teachers how to work with children and families.

The Wall

There were many small moments in my first seminar course, TE 901, at MSU that informed new ways of thinking for me. My professor, Dr. Lynn Fendler (Lynn) taught me how teaching is a political act. She went a step further and said, "Walking down the street is a political act." This comment stunned me and I had to ask her to explain that further. It was about this time where I began to become aware of my White privilege and how that impacted all my years of teaching in ways I had not previously considered. I began to interrogate every belief and prejudice I had previously held. Not to mention that this semester, my first semester, was during the 2016 presidential election. I recall listening to my classmates of color describe being frightened, with tears in their eyes, when seeing a pickup truck with a trump sign pull up beside them at a stoplight. My colleagues feared for their lives, at times, when they encountered the kind of people I grew up seeing all the time in North Carolina.

During that time in our class, we learned about how education contributed to the marginalization of historically minoritized populations. As we unpacked all of the overwhelmingly distressing systemic injustices in our world we discussed how the "problem" was too big for us to try and solve. In one class as we were lamenting the mountainous struggles in our education system, Lynn stood in front of the room miming chiseling a rock wall. She said we can start breaking down the metaphorical wall--or problem--one chiseled rock at a time. I have considered this moment many times since that class. It has inspired me to see that every moment I have with my students can be moments that ignite some sort of change in the world. This encourages and excites me as I think about working with pre-service early childhood

teachers. I can see how by teaching my students to humanize teaching and learning and by approaching teaching with a strengths-based mindset that I am changing the world, one interaction at a time.

Growing as a Researcher

I learned about what kind of researcher I want to do by all four members of my dissertation committee. At the beginning of my program, I am not even sure if I understood what the words qualitative, quantitative, or methods even meant. At that time, I was on autopilot, in some ways, and planned to follow in the footsteps of a colleague. I recall being at Lynn's house for an end of semester gathering and telling her I was scared about taking statistics. She said, "This is your program, Tracy." I told her that I thought I needed the one from the Ed Psych program. She asked me, "What do you want to do with your degree Tracy?" We then discussed how I want to work as a qualitative researcher in which I observe and talk with others.

In addition to taking two of Amy's qualitative methods courses, she taught me how to ethically work with human participants. Prior to working with Amy, I had previously worked on an experimental study as a data collector. I was tasked with giving children short quizzes based on texts they read. I was urged that even if the children did not want to participate, I was to try my best to talk them into it. I learned from Amy that a participant has every right to stop volunteering their participation at any time and to allow them to have the agency to do so. It was then that I saw that I wanted to be supported by researchers who ethically considered humans first in their research.

Laura helped me as a novice researcher in many ways, but the most pivotal was in my first year at MSU. I met weekly with Laura as her co-instructor. We would have lunch and chat about having little boys about the same age. One day as the spring semester was ending, I asked

her if she would help me think about what I might do for a research proposal as a course assignment. I had felt that I knew nothing and had no prior knowledge to draw upon. In that conversation, Laura helped me see that I could not only research what I am interested in, but also that I had previously done a lot of work in the field of literacy research. I described my work on an apps project in Iowa and she, then, helped me think through turning that into a proposal. This conversation impacted my doctoral trajectory in several ways. For starters, I believe that Laura took that information and it helped her and Amy hire me to work as a research assistant on the Playtime Pads project. Secondly, I turned that initial proposal into my practicum project on literacy apps. And, finally, the Playtime Pads project led me to meet Shina, who I continue to work with to this day on family-school partnerships around media.

I have worked for Shina as a research assistant and we plan to continue our work with early childhood and families. I am very thankful for the opportunities Shina has continued to give me. There are many moments that helped me along the way towards completing this dissertation. One big one, for example, was providing me the chance to become a first author on a journal article. The small moments, however, are what have taught me so much along the way. Although Shina served as my boss, she always empowered me to take the lead in various ways. She also taught me that research and collaboration around research can be fun. One of my favorite days on campus was when we had color coded sticky notes and markers and completed qualitative data analysis in a conference room. We also learned about writing qualitative articles together, which I value tremendously. The opportunities Shina provided me helped reinforce my desire to work with children and families.

Developing My Craft

I look forward to the opportunity before me at Central Michigan University. I am grateful and honored to pay forward the support and gifts of knowledge my MSU committee members have bestowed upon me. As I open this new chapter, I want to continue collaborating with mindful, strong colleagues. I want to constantly center children in my work, therefore, families will be the focus of my research. I look forward to building connections with new colleagues and students and hopefully continuing to chisel away at the walls of injustice.

CHAPTER 2: Set Up to Fail: Teacher-Caregiver Relationships During Covid-19

Statement of Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic in the Spring of 2020 resulted in an abrupt switch to remote schooling in many communities. Teachers had to conform to new sets of rules and regulations in terms of instruction and had to depend on caregivers to follow through with instructional activities remotely. Schooling the next fall continued the shift from traditional classroom instruction to a variety of formats, including remote teaching, face-to-face teaching, or a hybrid model (Butcher, 2020). As the pandemic raged on, teachers and caregivers had to reimagine a "new normal" of supporting children's schooling (Lee et al., 2021; Santhanam, 2020). At-home schooling required teachers to collaborate with caregivers in unprecedented ways with no little to no additional training. Similarly, caregivers were expected to enact schooling practices at home with little to no training. Therefore, emotional distances between teachers and caregivers were likely impacted during this demanding period.

The pandemic created a school year filled with ups and downs and uncertainty both academically and emotionally. Not only were potential academic challenges and setbacks a concern to both teachers and caregivers, the emotional well-being of teachers, children, and families were tested in ways only seen during other periods of collective trauma (Crosby et al., 2020). Family-school relationships were at the forefront of children's schooling and were of utmost importance in supporting children's learning. During the emergency remote schooling period that occurred in spring 2020, teachers and families flew by the seat of their pants in an effort to survive, advance, and finish the school year (Butcher, 2020). Previously conceived notions of family-school partnerships required a shift as caregivers took on some teaching roles as a result of Covid-19. The lines between school and home blurred and at-home schooling

became a large part of children's lives for the unforeseeable future. Caregivers had to take over aspects of the teachers' roles, with classroom teachers facilitating how the schooling occurred at home. Recognizing caregivers as partners in their children's education, rather than an "influence separate from that of schools" became more important than ever (Raftery, Grolnick, & Flamm, 2012, p. 354). Due to the length of time children spent in new learning formats in their homes during Covid-19, it is important to explore family-school relationships during this period of trauma. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore how teachers and caregivers talked about caregiver-teacher relationships while navigating children's schooling during the pandemic.

Learning during the pandemic for many children, caregivers, and teachers meant learning in a period of trauma (Crosby et al., 2020). Trauma occurs when a situation is beyond a human's control and can cause feelings of helplessness or isolation (Crosby et al., 2020; Robinson, 2020). Typically, between half to two-thirds of children are impacted by trauma in some form during their school years (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014) and recently schools have begun to reimagine ways to support children through it (Phifer, & Hull, 2016). A trauma-informed approach involves teachers and schools being responsive to children in times of trauma, which may be periodic or ongoing (Crosby et al., 2020). Among the themes of the approach, some trauma-informed teaching strategies include building positive relationships and fostering trust among children and families. Covid-19 has presented an unprecedented period of widespread trauma for teachers, children, and families. Hence, it is important to consider how teachers and families engaged during this period of collective trauma.

Literature on Relationships Between Families and Schools

Traditionally, children's academic learning has been thought of as existing within the bricks and mortar of a school building, yet their homes and communities present other sites of

children's schooling (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Zeichner et al., 2016). For the purposes of this study, I distinguish between the words education and schooling, while recognizing they do overlap. The term *schooling*, for this study, refers to children's academic learning such as literacy, numeracy, humanities, and civics. Education is a broader term that encompasses lifelong learning beyond years of schooling. Due to the global pandemic, children experienced schooling outside of the confines of the school buildings.

Engaging families in children's academic learning is something schools have striven for in order to optimize support for children's schooling. Previous research has shown that caregivers (i.e. parents, guardians, etc.) who shared responsibility with schools and teachers have had a positive impact on their children's academic success (Epstein, 1987). Traditionally, sharing the responsibility involved levels of caregiver involvement that varied widely among schools and districts. For instance, Epstein's (2010) six typologies of caregiver involvement included parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating within the community. Epstein developed the typologies framework after decades of researching caregiver involvement in schools (Epstein, 1987; Epstein, 2010). Each of the typologies tended to privilege schools over caregivers as the authority on what was best for children.

Traditional forms of caregiver involvement include some components that are helpful for families and children, however, can be largely superficial in enactment and tend to be directed by schools and teachers. Further, they also tend to exclude caregivers' voices in decision making. Traditional parent involvement ideals, such as Epstein's typologies, are typically based on a teacher-dominated paradigm that does not foster balanced partnerships among caregivers and schools (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). While offering useful strategies such as reading to children and attending conferences, traditional parent involvement ignores potentially "rich

cultural habits of parents and families" (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006, p. 188). Scholars have argued a need for reimagining parent involvement across diverse contexts (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Zeichner et al., 2016). Their suggestions for rethinking parent involvement involved more inclusive approaches such as building on family and child strengths, validating all families in partnership, valuing a variety of contexts of involvement, and building trust (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006; Zeichner et al., 2016). The scholars' invitations to reimagine parent involvement cultivate more balanced teacher-family partnerships. For the purposes of this proposed study, I will use the term partnership when referring to how schools and caregivers work together to support children's at-home schooling.

Caregivers want to be included in their children's academic development, yet schools have not always made involvement accessible. Engaging in at-home academic activities is one way caregivers can be engaged with their child's schooling. Previous research indicates that various forms of caregiver involvement, such as exploring academic concepts at home or caregivers displaying interest in children's education, has positive impacts on children's academic engagement (Raftery, Grolnick & Flamm, 2012). At-home learning activities might be at the request of children's teachers or might be implemented by a caregiver's motivation to incorporate academics at home. These activities are centered around more traditional academic tasks which might include reading with children, playing academic games, having discussions, or ensuring children's homework is completed (Lewis, Kim, & Bey, 2011). Schools typically expect caregivers to be involved with children's at-home learning, but the scope of those activities are limited to what the school deems to be "academic" and tend to exclude potentially fruitful learning experiences that may occur in diverse households (Zeichner et al., 2016).

Power and inequities among families, schools, and communities serves as a larger issue surrounding children's schooling (). Previous research findings suggest inequities exist among class lines in terms of partnering around children's schooling (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012; Schecter & Impolito, 2008). Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) found that social class was indicative of ways in which caregivers partnered with schools. The researchers found that partnering with schools tended to involve behavioral approaches from caregivers, such as attending parent-teacher conferences or an open house event and were less likely to demonstrate cognitive or intellectual involvement, such as providing learning resources. Nevertheless, the researchers found that the behavioral components of involvement were notably important in supporting children's schooling. Remote learning during Covid-19 requires formal schooling opportunities at home, yet questions remain in terms of how power and inequities may be impacting children's at-home schooling.

Covid-19 has presented an unprecedented opportunity for schools to foster balanced partnerships that included reciprocal relationships between teachers and caregivers. Traditionally, schools provide little time for caregiver and teacher interactions. Most of the interactions were limited to brief teacher conferences or curriculum nights (Zeichner et al., 2016). With the global pandemic occurring and children schooling from home, the interactions among caregivers and teachers increased as well as their roles have shifted. While teachers have instructional tools and learning activity plans, much of the remote schooling is enacted or facilitated by caregivers, especially among elementary aged children. The heart of Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres highlights how caregivers and schools share caring for children. The home and school spheres that represent caring for the child tend to overlap more for younger school-aged children, thus schools and teachers can work together to support

children's schooling. This framework is promising in theory, yet in practice schools do not effectively partner with the diverse families that make up their school population (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Involvement paradigms need to account for culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse families and children. Traditional approaches can be reimagined to be more inclusive and validate all families ways of being. One shift from the traditional approach would be to ensure families are given shared responsibilities in decision making (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), truly living up to the term partners in their children's schooling. Shared responsibilities would shift more thinking, talking, choosing, and doing to caregivers than the previous unbalanced approach of caregiver-teacher relationship (Goodall, 2018). This shift would require schools to accept and appreciate that families have knowledge and skills to share. Covid-19 has employed a new level of sharing of responsibilities as caregivers and teachers attempt to find a way to maximize schooling during a less than optimal period of time. The relationship between caregivers and teachers, centered on children's schooling, matters more than ever.

Nurturing positive relationships between caregivers and teachers is beneficial for children's academic success (Bempechat & Shernoff, 2012). Caregiver outreach, or invitations to partner in their children's schooling, has proven motivating for caregivers to engage with schools (Lewis, Kim, & Bey, 2011). Caregiver outreach can take on a variety of formats among teachers and schools. Curry et al. (2016) described how effective school outreach focuses on building and sustaining relationships among the schools and caregivers. Moreover, school outreach that includes meeting the needs of caregivers leads to motivation for them to become more involved (Curry et al., 2016). Examples of these needs might include accommodating multilingual families' unique language needs or considering caregivers' various work schedules. Teachers

also can provide outreach to caregivers in various ways depending on various caregiver needs. For example, in their descriptive study, Lewis, Kim and Bey found that some ways teachers met caregivers' needs were by maintaining mutual respect and emphasizing caregivers' large roles in children's social and academic growth (2011).

Trust between caregivers and teachers is also a building block of a partnership towards supporting children's schooling (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Additionally, when educators view the students they work with as "children" they see more than simply students, rather they view the child as a whole and are likely to view caregivers as partners (Epstein, 2010). Adams and Christenson (2000) maintain that trust is "vital" in building and maintaining family school partnerships (p. 477). According to Adams and Christenson (2000), trust between caregivers and teachers involves both parties having confidence, or trust, that each is working towards a common goal, the goal in family-school partnerships is supporting children's academic success, and making decisions based on maintaining that relationship to meet the goal.

Collaboration is another important attribute of positive caregiver and teacher relationships in supporting children's schooling and tends to be excluded in traditional involvement programs (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Collaboration involves caregivers as decision makers and agents of change in schools (Barton et al., 2004). Zeichner and colleagues (2016) extend the meaning of collaboration to include the community. They argue the need for "teacher-family-community solidarity" to be schools' ultimate goals for partnering with families. They argue that teachers need to be trained on how to become acquainted with their schools' communities. Additionally, Vosler-Hunter's elements of collaboration among professionals and families of children with emotional disabilities also provides insight to fundamental qualities of positive collaboration among teachers and caregivers of all children (1987). These include

teachers and caregivers possessing mutual respect for each other's skills and knowledge, honest and clear communication, two-way sharing of information, mutually agreed-upon goals, and shared planning and decision making. The Covid-19 pandemic has heightened the need for collaboration among teachers and caregivers, including an increase of each of Vosler-Hunter's attributes. While these building blocks of collaboration among teachers and caregivers are ideal, one is left to wonder how they are being enacted during this period of remote schooling.

In addition to trust and collaboration, emotions are at the center of human interaction, thus being a large part of caregiver and teacher relationships (Lasky, 2000). Emotions are psychologically and biologically interconnected within relationships Additionally, notions of power and status are present among relationships centered around a common goal. In her work exploring the cultural and emotional politics of teacher-parent interactions, Lasky (2000) described emotions as being "inseparable" from caregiver and teacher interactions and are "interconnected with status and power" (p. 846). "Gains and losses" of power and status impact emotions centered around relationships.

As caregivers take on more of the teacher role for their children's schooling at home, the dynamics of caregiver-teacher relationships have likely changed, in turn, likely causing a plethora of emotional responses from both teachers and caregivers. Emotions are discursive practices and that power is an integral part of them (Zembylas, 2005). In an ethnographic study, Zembylas (2005) explores potential "emotional rules" that teachers have to adhere to. The teacher participant in this study initially felt that teachers' expressing emotions would be unprofessional, yet as the study progressed she acknowledged that thoughts cannot be separated from emotion, negating the idea of emotions being unprofessional (Zembylas, 2005). Given the circumstances of Covid-19 and the trauma that teachers, caregivers, and children are likely

experiencing due to a drastic change, questions remain about how their emotions are likely being impacted as well as how they are expressing them.

Emotions are interwoven in teachers' discursive practices, despite previously being considered disparate from the profession of teaching (Lasky, 2000). Historically, ideas of teacher professionalism involved teacher objectivity (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). Lasky's (2000) research explored how teacher-parent interactions resulted in teachers' varied emotions. She found that when caregivers appeared to agree with teachers and spoke in a respectful manner, teachers felt positive emotions. Additionally, teachers felt positive emotions when they were able to help caregivers "come around" to seeing their way of thinking (Lasky, 2000, p. 855). On the other hand, when teachers felt their authority undermined or that their professional judgement was in question by caregivers, they felt negative emotions such as anger and frustration (Lasky, 2000).

While the Covid-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented period of trauma in our lifetimes, it's longevity and impact on teaching and learning presented a lot of opportunities for inquiry. The previously nuanced relationships between caregivers and teachers were likely impacted as a result of shifts in learning. The changes in learning formats likely impacted how teachers and caregivers collaborated, therefore presented an opportunity to explore school-family partnerships. Previous scholarship centered on family-school partnerships, relationships, and emotions provides insight as to how to approach exploration of teachers' and caregivers' experiences during remote learning. The shift in roles among teachers and caregivers during periods of remote schooling have likely caused a range of emotions. Thus, this proposed study seeks to explore the following question:

How do teachers and caregivers talk about their relationships while supporting children's schooling experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Emotional Geographies

This study employed an emotional geographies theoretical framework to approach exploring how teachers and caregivers talk about supporting children's schooling experiences during a global pandemic with an overnight shift to remote instruction. This framework on the emotional geographies of teaching provided insight in thinking about how teachers' emotions have been impacted during Covid-19. As discussed in the previous section, both caregivers and teachers see their relationships with children and with each other through emotional lenses. Drawing on this framework centered those emotional responses in this study.

Hargreaves' (2001) work within an interview study highlights additional patterns among human interactions and how they impact emotional understanding of one another. Emotional geographies, according to Hargreaves, involves the concept of closeness and distance in human interaction and how that impacts our feelings and emotions. This work highlights a conceptual understanding of five emotional geographies among teachers and caregivers, including "sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political" (p. 1056). Using Hargreaves' work around emotional geographies provides a lens through which I can analyze teacher and caregiver interview data to explore the way they talk about their interactions around supporting children's schooling.

Teachers are tasked with supporting learners from families from a multitude of diverse backgrounds, which can often be complicated by *sociocultural* distance. This emotional geography, according to Hargreaves, can perpetuate teachers' perceptions of "strangeness" or "otherness" which can complicate interactions among teachers and caregivers as well as their

emotional understanding (p. 1065). For instance, teachers might judge caregivers who lie about their children's absences as the caregivers not really caring about their child's schooling, as teachers are often measuring caregiver involvement against white, middle class schooling values.

Moral distance refers to whether teachers and caregivers' purposes and goals align or do not align. For example, teachers in Hargreaves' study reported feeling positive emotions when getting validation from caregivers that they were happy with how their child was learning. On the other hand, teachers reported negative emotions, such as anger, when they felt their purpose or expertise were being challenged (2001). Hargreaves reports, however, that *moral* distance does not need to be a challenge, as humans can learn more from those who are morally distant from themselves.

Professional distance is a result among the dynamics of the "institutionalized office of teaching" (Hargreaves, 2001 p. 1068). In a profession dominated by females, the professional standards are often based on largely male populated professions such as the medical profession. These standards are often in tensions with the caring sort of nature required of human interactions among teachers, children, and families. Professional distance, according to Hargreaves, impacts teachers' emotions as well. Negative emotions result from caregiver criticism, while positive emotions resulted from positive feedback. Teachers described being torn between fostering relationships with caregivers and the more "clinical" type approaches of being classically "professional" by keeping their relationships distant (p. 1069).

Physical distance refers to the concreteness of teachers and caregivers meeting in person. These interactions within the elementary school are typically limited to conferences, parent nights, or open houses. Hargreaves (2001) shares that it is difficult to connect with another human when you rarely are around them, thus physical distance can impact caregiver and teacher

relationships. A question that remains is, how has physical distance potentially shifted as teachers are likely in contact with caregivers more frequently during remote learning?

Finally, Hargreaves describes how emotions are intertwined with humans' feelings of power and powerlessness. Hence, *political* distance is an emotional geography that plays a role in the nature of caregiver and teacher relationships. Traditionally, teachers are in a role of power, yet the emotional politics involved in the power and powerlessness feelings can cause fear, anxiety, or anger. Hargreaves suggests that if schools attempt to move caregivers' roles from the periphery to the core of teachers' work, the emotional labor teachers experience in this work may be mitigated as caregivers take on more of a partner role.

Methodology

By listening and privileging teachers' and caregivers' stories during this interpretative interview study, I learned more about how they supported children's learning during Covid-19. While this work is qualitative in nature and the findings are specific to the particular teachers and caregivers I interviewed, the participants' stories, developed assertions from the data, can speak to the larger body of literature on family-school partnerships by providing insight into theory as well as into how the context of the pandemic shaped home-school involvement in these cases. The assertions I developed through analysis exist in "past-tense," yet, point towards the assertions toward the "present, toward the contemporary issues" in school-family partnerships (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 123).

Critical Narrative Analysis

Critical narrative analysis (CNA) is an approach to analyzing stories and discourse. This analytic approach combines narrative analysis, exploring stories in which people make sense of their worlds with critical discourse analysis, which explores aspects of institutionalized power

through discourse (Souto-Manning, 2014). In a CNA methodology, micro-level narratives, human beings comprehend their worlds, are situated and how they are situated within larger macro-level institutional discourses (2014). In this study, caregivers and teachers telling stories about their personal experiences supporting children's schooling during Covid-19 would be micro-level, which are broadly situated within the larger institutional discourse of school-family partnerships. For this study, I used the words of teachers and caregivers. I did not make assumptions about their beliefs or experiences but focused on their words. Guiding my data generation and analysis within the concept of critical narrative analysis enabled me to learn how the teachers and caregivers' narratives were "constructed and situated in social and institutional realms" (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 163). I analyzed the narratives next to the backdrop of larger normalized, institutional teacher-dominated family-school relationships that likely impeded balanced partnerships among families and teachers. CNA as a methodology will helped me identify ways in which teachers might interrogate and disrupt the normalized institutional discourses and notions of family-school involvement, in hopes of reimagining more balanced family-school partnerships.

Context

Eastside Elementary School (EES) is a Title One pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school located in the midwestern United States. EES is situated within a rural community that is economically diverse, with approximately half of its children receiving reduced lunch. There is little in terms of racial diversity, with about ninety percent of the school population being White. Exploring caregiver-teacher relationships within the context of the EES community provided insight into how schools with large economically disadvantaged student populations promoted family-school partnerships during Covid-19. Historically, children from economically

disadvantaged school communities are underserved. Studying within the context of EES presents the opportunity to understand ways the school provided opportunities for caregivers and teachers to partner around supporting children's schooling. I interviewed each of the three kindergarten classroom teachers. Two of the teachers were assigned to classrooms that spent part of the year in a remote format and part in face-to-face instruction. They began their school year virtually, returned for face-to-face learning for about six weeks, and went remote for a period of two more months before finally returning face-to-face for the remainder of the school year. The third kindergarten teacher, typically an EES classroom teacher, had been assigned a virtual classroom for the entire year. I chose kindergarten because the shared responsibilities among teachers and caregivers are most overlapped (Epstein, 1987) among the early grades. Additionally, I recruited caregiver participants and the principal for interviews. The caregivers I interviewed were referred to me from each of the three teachers.

Participants

I interviewed each of the school's three kindergarten classroom teachers. Two of the teachers were assigned to classrooms that spent part of the year in a remote format and part in face-to-face instruction. They began their school year virtually, returned for face-to-face learning for about six weeks, and went remote for a period of two more months before finally returning face-to-face for the remainder of the school year. The third kindergarten teacher, typically an EES classroom teacher, had been assigned a virtual classroom for the entire year. I chose kindergarten because the shared responsibilities among teachers and caregivers are most overlapped (Epstein, 1987) among the early grades. Additionally, I recruited caregiver participants and the principal for interviews. The caregivers I interviewed were referred to me from each of the three teachers. While Eastside's families are economically diverse, the

caregivers interviewed in this study represented a range of middle class families. This might have been a result of middle class caregivers facing fewer life-altering consequences from the pandemic and had the bandwidth to participate. Also, while the pandemic caused collective trauma, none of the participants I interviewed revealed personal or familial loss during this time.

I incentivized participation among already overloaded teachers and caregivers. I offered each teacher participant and the principal a $50.00 Amazon gift card. Additionally, I gave each caregiver participant a $25.00 Amazon gift card. Incentivizing participation likely motivated potentially reluctant teachers and caregivers who may not have been willing to allocate any free time to activities outside of work. Given the heightened stress and uncertainty of supporting children's schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic, offering an incentive likely made participation more appealing.

Teachers. The three kindergarten teachers I interviewed were Mrs. Tulip, Ms. Daisy, and Mrs. Lilac. Mrs. Tulip and Ms. Daisy had taught at ESE for about twenty years. Mrs. Lilac started teaching at ESE in Fall of 2020, but had taught for about ten years in charter and Montessori schools in a more urban setting. Mrs. Tulip and Mrs. Lilac were both married White women with children of their own schooling at home. Ms. Daisy was a single White woman who was trying to gain custody of her two nephews during Covid-19.

Table 1. Teacher Participants.

Teacher Name	Family Make Up	Schooling Format
Daisy	• Single • In court process to gain custody of two nephews	Virtual Academy

Table 1. (cont'd)

Tulip	● Married ● Twin sixteen year olds	Face-to-face (when possible)
Lilac	● Married ● Two children (one kindergartner; one toddler)	Face-to-face (when possible)

Caregivers. I interviewed caregivers of children from each of Eastside's three kindergarten classrooms. Each of the participants were White and represented a diverse economic make up (See Table 2).

Table 2. Caregiver Participants

Participant Name	**Family Make Up**	**Child's Teacher**
Alexis	● Biological mother to two girls (aged 8 and 10) ● Foster mother to three biological brothers (aged 6, 5, and 2) ● In court process to gain custody of three boys) ● Stay at home mother ● Married	Daisy
Holly	● Mother to Ally and her sixteen year old brother ● Recently left corporate job to go back to school ● Married	Daisy
Jess	● Mother to three (second grade daughter, Hank in Kindergarten, and toddler) ● Stay at home mother ● Married	Lilac
Julie P	● Mother to one son ● Worked as a masseuse ● Married	Tulip

Table 2. (cont'd)

Kayla	● Mother to two boys (second grade and kindergarten) ● Worked as administrative assistant ● Married ● Husband worked as truck driver so he was gone for long periods of time	Tulip
Laura	● Mother to three boys (sixth grade, kindergarten, toddler) ● Worked as an occupational therapist ● Married	Tulip
Lindsay	● Mother to four children (step son who was twelve, kindergarten daughter, preschooler son, and toddler son)	Tulip

As the primary researcher, my positionality influenced the dynamics of the interviews and my data interpretation in various ways. All interview participants, both teachers and caregivers, were initially strangers to me, which would have shaped their participation. However, as a former elementary teacher and a mother with three children schooling at home, I believe I was able to connect with participants and make them feel more comfortable. I believe my warmth and relationship building skills allowed participants to feel comfortable and be open, in spite of the interviews being remote. Additionally, my experiences as a child in a working class family and a survivor of trauma helped me in navigating asking personal questions about challenges teachers and caregivers experienced during Covid-19. Even with the advantages I may have presented as the researcher, I remain cognizant that participants may not have revealed all of their personal experiences or insights. I cannot assume that they shared all of their experiences to the fullest extent.

Data Generation

Seeking to explore curricular and relational barriers among family-school relationships, I used a semi-structured interview protocol as my method of data generation. Each virtual interview lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour and was recorded via Zoom. I guided the interviews based on a series of questions, but was open to discussion provided by participants as well. Each interview was then audio and video recorded and then transcribed. Participants' information is confidential and pseudonyms are used in all written documentation.

Data Analysis

I began analyzing data using open coding, in which I looked across all transcriptions and looked for common themes. During coding I considered how each micro-level narrative was situated within a larger institutional discourse (Souto-Manning, 2014). Following that, I utilized a priori coding, which included a narrowed approach based on themes I determined in open coding as well as using the emotional geographies framework (Hargreaves, 2001).

Both open coding and a priori coding serve different purposes. Open coding allowed me to identify new themes. Initially, open coding served as a starting point for me to determine any "analytic leads" I explored (Saldana & Omasta, 2016, p. 115). I reviewed interview transcripts for ideas or themes related to my research question. Open coding allowed me to provide descriptive labels for discrete sections of interview transcripts in which I found patterns or themes that present in teachers' and caregivers' stories about supporting children's schooling during a global pandemic. From the descriptive labels I identified through open coding, I attempted to interpret themes of how teachers and caregivers talked about supporting children's schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Next, I used a priori coding as a next step of data analysis. For this I used the codes I established in open coding as well as themes presented from the emotional geographies theoretical framework. A priori coding allowed me to frame analysis within the sociocultural, moral, professional, physical and political geographies of human interactions. Identifying teachers' and caregivers' experiences based on the a priori codes allowed me to situate their micro-level narratives into a broader institutional context of family-school partnerships. A priori codes provided a theoretical lens through which to approach the interview data that has previously been associated in teacher-caregiver interactions. I then recorded these codes in NVivo Software, which is where I completed all analyses.

During each step of coding I created short analytic memos. I documented my steps of analysis, ideas that I considered, and any themes presented in the data. I identified big ideas and data from the corpus to support those big ideas. I wrote these memos in the qualitative software. Once I coded all data, I used the analytic memos to help me consider what the findings revealed. I used the memos to create an idea map in which I arranged and rearranged the ideas and themes from data analysis. After analysis, I developed assertions (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) for which to make an argument that is situated in the larger body of literature on family-school partnerships.

Findings

The shifts in schooling as a result of school shutdowns from Covid-19 changed many aspects of schooling. This study's findings suggest that Covid-19 required teachers and caregivers to reimagine school-family partnerships. Traditional norms flew by the wayside and caregivers engaged with their child's schooling like never before. In order to make this happen, the kindergarten teachers at Eastside Elementary nurtured partnerships with caregivers to help support children. Caregivers and teachers shared many experiences in which partnering with one

another felt challenging as well as other times that felt beneficial. Expectations that both teachers and caregivers would meet the standards of traditional schooling during the pandemic did not provide an opportunity for either group to feel accomplished. The tension between the reality these expectations and the reality of pandemic schooling led both groups to feel a variety of emotions throughout the school year.

Physical Distance

The shifts in learning formats created physical barriers between teachers and families that maintained a physical distance they had previously not encountered. In an effort to situate their experiences during Covid-19, I also inquired about their previous experiences with school-family partnerships. Data analysis revealed that the physical distance teachers and caregivers experienced challenged the teachers and some caregivers, however, some caregivers surprisingly felt more connected during that time period. Despite the varied experiences interview data revealed, a uniting factor among participants' stories was that their feelings about them were relative to their previous experiences with family-school relationships. In the teacher interviews, all three described how before Covid-19 they had had "open-door" policies and welcomed in caregiver volunteers. Much of the involvement the teachers described centered around preparing materials for instruction. Ms. Tulip described having a rotating schedule where she had one caregiver per day work in the classroom, assisting with preparing materials or helping with students. She lamented that she missed that assistance tremendously. Some of the caregivers I interviewed had also discussed previously working in their child's classroom. When they depicted their involvement in classrooms, the caregivers who volunteered talked mostly about attending holiday parties and making popcorn on Fridays for the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) and less about assisting the teacher for instructional reasons. Julie said, "I was able to

assist in the PTO and do popcorn Fridays (before Covid). I was in the school helping when I could and with what I could. I was in the classroom with Mrs. Tulip as a parent volunteer." Regardless of how they supported teachers and the school, the findings suggest that prior to the pandemic, Eastside welcomed in school volunteers for various reasons.

Among the many disappointments about the schooling changes due to Covid-19, some of the caregivers, who had previously spent time volunteering at Eastside, were also disappointed in not being able to do more to be present at Eastside as they previously had. Jess, Hank's mom, for example, described how she was able to build relationships with staff around the school when she visited the school. Jen's older daughter was in second grade so Jess described interacting with her daughter's teacher on days she came to the school. She felt she missed out on those interactions because she was unable to do that for Hank's kindergarten year. Alexis, Jaden's mom, was also disappointed she could not volunteer in his classroom the way she had previously for his older brother. Her experience, however, gave her a unique perspective on how valuable volunteering in classrooms can be. She recalled, "So before the pandemic I had children in school, and I knew how the school worked. You know I volunteered at holiday parties. I saw how it was going. And I also had a pretty good grasp of how much was being covered in a day or, you know, how much would be sent home for kindergarten for homework, things like that. And so, I felt like, um, you know when virtual came on, it was almost like an opportunity for them to super load our days and schedule out way more than would be accomplished in a traditional classroom." Her previous experience volunteering at Eastside contextualized her new experiences with remote schooling and led her to see that Jaden was assigned a lot more work than traditional classroom learning.

Caregivers who normally were unable to volunteer in the school actually saw some positives from Covid-19. Some of the caregivers I interviewed worked full time jobs and were previously unable to be present in the classrooms. The changes during Covid-19, however, allowed them the window of opportunity to see inside the classrooms that they previously were unable to have. One mother I interviewed worked full time as a recruiter at a community college and was typically unable to visit the school during her workday. Lisa described one positive about remote schooling was that she learned more about what type of learner Brooklyn, her kindergarten daughter, was. Lisa said, "I think it gave me a different vision of where she was and learning, and some of her strengths and weaknesses that may be. I thought she was. So, I think that was good as far as me being able to identify those things to be able to support her...I didn't realize that she was so insecure in her work." Kayla, a mom who worked full time as an administrative assistant, appreciated seeing her child in remote learning, as she previously had been unable to attend during the school day as well. When talking about her son Jack, she said, "I think the most positive thing was I could actually see him doing the school work and see him like see him engaged in this classroom because obviously I would normally not see that if they were in class. So seeing him answer questions, raising his hand, and do that sort of stuff, just gave me a sense of like proud and just pure joy that I could see that." For these two mothers, remote learning during Covid-19 allowed them to gain more insight into their children's schooling experience which they found to be a positive outcome.

Professional Distance

Data analysis revealed that the professional distance among teachers and caregivers came into play through home-school communication. Remote schooling during Covid-19 required a shift in home-school communication for Eastside teachers and families. Mrs. Rhoads, the school

principal, said she had to beef up her communication for families. She said, "(I had to) make sure that I had great communication for parents and teachers, because that face to face communication was gone." Alexis, Jaden's mom, recalled the styles of communication shifting due to Covid. She found that the communication became reciprocal rather than merely receptive. She said, "When I think of parent communication pre-Covid was a little bit more one way. And it seems like (it) depends on the teacher, but this two-way...It seems like there's more parent input." Ms. Daisy, Jaden's teacher, validated Alexis's perspective by describing how she needed caregiver input during Covid. Ms. Daisy said,

> I would say pre-Covid I was in the classroom and kind of parents were at home and at work, right, mostly at work. Sure. So my communication with them would have been more what's happening in the classroom, like a general, you know, any events that are coming up and always encouraged to attend. Families are welcome. Right. So I think my lines of communication have really opened up to more working together (during remote schooling), because we kind of need each other.

Ms. Daisy sent daily and weekly check in forms to caregivers so she could know how the children and families were getting along. Feeling the need to draw from the caring nature of the teaching profession, she felt she needed this information so she could better support the children. She described just how important caregiver input was when she said, "We've had a lot of communication back and forth. I told them this is not going to work unless we're talking back and forth. We have to dance here. Or else, we're not going to know. Right? First time it's ever been done."

Ms. Tulip noticed that she needed to emphasize to caregivers that it was important to have two-way communication. She described how at the beginning she perceived caregivers being reluctant to reach out, which could have been a result from prior professional distance that caregivers might have felt the need to maintain. Ms. Tulip said, " It was just that open communication and I wanted to make sure the parents didn't feel scared to call me. Like I think, first they were hesitant to call me like 'Oh she's at home' and it's like 'This is my job.'" Laura. remarked that Ms. Tulip had been very receptive to her caregiver input. When she felt her son Gabe needed more of a challenge, as he entered kindergarten knowing all his letter names and sounds, Ms. Tulip responded to her request with providing Gabe with sight word lists. She found Ms. Tulip's response and attention to her request to be a style of communication she appreciated.

Professional distance was also highlighted at times when the teachers felt they needed to teach the caregivers. The teachers felt a new sense of duty to impart knowledge on caregivers. Due to remote schooling, the teachers felt compelled to teach the caregivers how to support their children. Ms. Tulip said, "I knew the kindergarteners couldn't do it on their own, so I had to teach the parents. Because if I wouldn't have taught the parents, I don't think half my class would have been on the computer. Even though the district gave step by step directions, they weren't enough for the parents. Like the district did an overview. These parents needed more. And so I just took that on personally and said, 'If I'm going to teach, this is what I have to do." I asked her to describe how that felt having to rely on caregivers for her teaching and she said, "I hated it and it wasn't their fault. It's what happened. I did not enjoy having to rely on parents. I actually feel bad for the parents. Like I know this isn't what they want either."

Many of the caregivers I interviewed agreed that there was more home-school communication during Covid-19 schooling than prior to Covid, however there was one mother

who felt there was little communication. When I asked her to describe home-school communication during remote schooling, Kayla said, “Oh gosh, honestly, I feel like I've gotten zero communication. I know that's gonna sound really bad. Miss Tulip sends out...like an email every week so I guess I can't say that I'm getting no communication.” Then, in the next breath, she shared that in the beginning of the pandemic and the following school year she received a deluge of emails. So many, in fact, that she “could barely keep up.” Then, once the school year had settled in, Kayla shared that Mrs. Tulip corresponded in a “normal” pattern of sending a weekly newsletter email with information about curricular activities, such as the letters her class was learning for a particular week. These findings suggest that a flurry of communication at one time might overwhelm caregivers and that weekly information might be easier for them to digest.

Teacher accessibility was something that the caregivers found very helpful. Based on caregiver interviews, all three kindergarten teachers were receptive and responsive to email communication. Alexis described reaching out to Jaden’s teacher for troubleshooting some learning modules and that Ms. Daisy would respond quickly and helpfully. Alexis said, “I felt like she was very reachable by email. There were times when I would email her at the end of my day and she would still respond even in the evening. There was no expectation for that but she did.” Similarly, Kayla shared that anytime she reached out to Jack’s teacher, Mrs. Tulip, or her second grader’s teacher, she received timely replies. Collectively, the caregivers I interviewed shared that they seemed satisfied with teachers’ accessibility for communicating.

Moral Distance

Data analysis revealed that moral distance impacted teachers and caregivers relationships during Covid-19. The participants’ shared instances of benefits and challenges to their relationships based on either shared or disconnected purposes. Due to the increase in interactions

around supporting kindergartners, there were natural shifts in their relationships. Laura, Brooklyn's mom, felt that her relationship with Mrs. Tulip was closer than she thought she would be with a teacher. She said she "Can't say enough about (Mrs. Tulip) and her communication." Laura described her understanding of how Mrs. Tulip must have been challenged by working with so many different home life situations. This empathy, Laura shared, increased her appreciation for how hard the teachers worked during Covid.

Mrs. Tulip also felt closer to caregivers than in traditional schooling. She said, "I actually think my relationship with them is actually better." She shared how she thought that caregivers gained appreciation for the role of teachers due to remote schooling. She described remote learning as being an eye opener for caregivers. Additionally, the teachers felt that because of their new role as their child's learning coach at home, caregivers were more apt to share their appreciation with teachers. The kindergarten teachers shared they received more positive support and feedback from caregivers than before Covid-19. Mrs. Lilac, for example, said, "I think (the) most positive experiences I've had is with the amount of parent support I feel like I've gotten." She went on to describe how she might make an error in assignments or communication, but the caregivers had been very understanding. Mrs. Lilac, too, felt that caregivers were able to gain newfound appreciation for teachers. She described,

> I'll make a mistake and I forgot to send one copy and they're all 'Oh no. You've done this. We appreciate everything you've done. And then when we we're doing the face-to-face I was really happy to hear when parents were (like) 'We're so glad we're back face-to-face. I'm so glad my kid is with you.' So I think just hearing. Now that a lot of parents have seen what it's like to be a teacher, because they've had to be a teacher for their kid, I think, at least the group of parents that

I've had, have been really supportive with that and realize how much we really do for their kids.

The nature of caregiver support in Mrs. Lilac's class changed and also helped her feel more supported than in previous years. Ms. Lilac described that her students' caregivers missed the classroom connection and were eager to provide moral support. She commented that before Covid-19 caregivers would have wanted to send in treats for a holiday party, but during remote learning that support shifted into asking her how they might provide help. She described caregivers during Covid-19 as, "This year it's more of what can I do to support you." Mrs. Lilac only had positive remarks when discussing her caregiver support during Covid-19. She felt supported and had yet to hear "negative feedback" from families.

Caregiver-teacher relationships were also challenged during Covid-19, due to a conflicting sense of purpose among stakeholders. An example of this was when Ms. Daisy shared how she had a teaching partner that had some mental health issues and had to reduce her workload. Because of that Ms. Daisy had to step up and take some responsibility for additional students. With her increased class roster, she inherited a mother who had regularly challenged the previous teacher. She described a situation where the mother was disgruntled and contacted her about a positivity project video her co-teacher had created. The mother was upset because the co-teacher's own child, a toddler, was seen in the background of a video she had sent to the class. Ms. Daisy felt like the liaison between the co-teacher and this mother. Empathizing with her co-teacher, Ms. Daisy tried to rationalize the video mistake as being that the co-teacher's husband worked twelve hour days, she had two toddlers at home and was teaching as well. In another situation, the same mother expressed her chagrin at Ms. Daisy for mistakenly not blind copying her students' caregivers on a class email. She recalled that it had been an honest

mistake, but the caregiver was very upset. Ms. Daisy was dismayed by the mother's reactions, but tried to imagine that the mother, too, was likely stressed out and was taking it out on the teachers. Trying to empathize with the mother helped her not take the situation too personally.

Teachers in this study had to place trust in caregivers in ways they had not before Covid-19, due to schooling expectations, such as testing. As all of the kindergartners attended school remotely for at least part of the school year, their caregivers had to take up some of the teachers' previous responsibilities. Teachers had to trust that the caregivers to complete tasks as they would, such as assessing kindergartners. One example was when the district required all children to take their standardized tests, the caregivers were tasked with helping administer the assessment. Due to the standardization, testing procedures did not permit any support for children on answers to test questions. The teachers said that they had to trust that the caregivers would follow the rules they had given them. Teachers in the study expected caregivers to act like educators and maintain the same norms for assessments typically used in traditional schooling. Mrs. Lilac said, "I had to trust that parents were not clicking something for the kids. I had to trust that they're not reading something for the kids. They're not correcting the wrong answer." Mrs. Lilac, however, shared that the testing did not work out as she had planned. She went on to say, "And I already know that it's not the case for some of them because some of them scored very high. A lot higher than you would expect." Mrs. Lilac also empathized with the caregivers she suspected had offered too much assistance. As a mother of a kindergartner herself, she said it took all her self-control to watch her child answer questions incorrectly on his own standardized tests. She said she empathisized with the caregivers and did not seem to be disgruntled about the caregivers' actions. Ms. Daisy experienced similar experiences. She even had witnessed a caregiver teaching her daughter multiplication during the test. She stepped in and asked the

mother to refrain from teaching during the test. The mother questioned this, but Ms. Daisy explained that the purpose of the test is to see exactly what the children can do in a particular moment and that after the test would be an appropriate time to teach the child multiplication. Both teachers said they would not put a lot of faith into their testing data when the caregivers administered because of these experiences. It would be good here to have a quote from a caregiver about how they saw these testing experiences.

The broader context of enforcing standards and accountability during a global pandemic required caregivers to perform clinical testing procedures and teachers to rely on caregivers to do so. These experiences were directly antithetical in nature to the home environment.

Trust was something the caregivers had to place in the teachers as well. Holly, Ally's mom, had to use her trust for Ms. Daisy to help her support her daughter. She used her trust in Ms. Daisy to help guide her in supporting Ally's schooling. She said, "You can just tell that she's passionate about what she does. And that she's doing the best that she can. And that she really does care. You can see you're putting in the effort. I don't know that I would be doing it as well as her." Even though she had been irritated, her faith and trust in Ms. Daisy helped her to remain engaged in her support for Ally's schooling. She shared how she thought Ms. Daisy had settled into virtual teaching after a few months and mentioned that she had improved with her system and procedures. Holly also described her irritation at times, especially at the beginning of the school year, with the layout and all of the assignments and the confusing nature of submitting them. She spent a lot of time sharing how she was dismayed at how she perceived the learning platform to not be well organized.

Teachers and caregivers' purposes were also put into opposition at times when caregivers challenged the teachers' procedures or instruction. On one hand, some of the caregivers shared

their concerns that the schooling did not address their child's social needs. They believed that the schooling should have included more social experiences. Holly, for example, shared that she felt that the academic tasks would have gone better for each child if they could have been done together. She described her daughter, Ally's, resistance in completing tasks, such as cutting out letters. She said that she would have appreciated the opportunity for children to be able to work on their individual tasks together. She mentioned that had Ally been able to work with other children, even on a screen, she would have been more inclined to complete her tasks. Another example of opposition was when a grandmother caregiver questioned Mrs. Tulip about her writing instruction. Mrs. Tulip shared how she teaches her kindergarten children to use invented spelling, in which they write phonetically the sounds they hear. She indicated this is helpful in teaching children to draw connections between reading and writing. The grandmother caregiver was dismayed to see that Mrs. Tulip accepted, if not encouraged, the child to "misspell words." She said the grandmother "Flat out emailed me and was like, 'Why do you spell the way you spell?'" She explained her reasoning with the grandmother, but left their conversation unsure if the caregiver truly understood. This led her to mistrust how the children were going to progress with their reading and writing once they returned face-to-face. She was worried that caregivers might unintentionally disrupt the way she believed children should learn to write. Ms. Daisy, too, had been questioned about her math teaching, but she said she had to believe that the caregivers "meant well."

Sociocultural Distance

Another challenge Mrs. Tulip experienced was how the remote platform left her assuming some caregivers were disengaged. When some children did not appear in virtual classrooms, with no notice from caregivers, she inferred that the caregivers did not care. She

made this inference with no insight as to potential technology failures or family issues. An example of this "othering" was revealed when she said,

> When a parent emails me and says, 'Someone's not going to be on today because we have a doctor's appointment or we're not going to be on this afternoon because we have an appointment.' 'Okay, thank you for letting me know.' Sure, but when a parent never tells me why they're not on. 'Yeah, you start to be like, why aren't you on?' I want to be sympathetic, but I also want to be like, 'I get this isn't ideal, but this is your child's education. How can you deem this not important?'

Sociocultural distance came into play when families struggled to complete the tasks their children were assigned. Some caregivers described not wanting to disappoint the classroom teachers. They were concerned that if their children failed to complete assignments they would be judged, even when they felt the tasks were meaningless. Jackie, for example, was a stay at home mom in an affluent family who struggled through supporting her son, Hank's, learning. Jackie described how it took everything in her to have Hank complete his academic assignments. She said she did not see him getting anything out of the tasks he was assigned, yet she slogged through completing them with him. Jackie shared

> He did not pay attention. He didn't want to look at the screen. He didn't know what to write. They were writing sentences. He doesn't even know his words. I mean, and so I had to sit there and say to write the, you know. I would show him (the word to write). Then the teachers on a different word and then he's sitting there like, 'Mom. Mom. Mom, I have to go to. I'm hungry.' Like I just, I mean the stress and anxiety that I would see. I'm like 'You're not effing doing gym later. Like you're not.

Although Jackie struggled to help Hank, she continued to feel like she had to ensure he complete the academic assignments, as that was what expected of her family. Eliminating specials classes was one way that Jackie felt she could help Hank cope. She did not feel it was an option to eliminate any assignments given from Hank's regular classroom teacher. Jackie was given no leeway in the academic decision making for Hank.

Sociocultural distance also was revealed when teachers shared their judgments of families who were not adhering the school's expectations. Mrs. Tulip, for example, described one family that particularly "got under her skin." The daughter in that family attended the live sessions sporadically and the teacher recalled receiving many excuses as to why. She said, "I have a family. I know that they have a lot of children...I want to give them the benefit of the doubt, but they wouldn't maybe attend one zoom meeting a week. They never turned in work. I guess I feel bad for the little girl because I feel like she has so much potential, but her parents aren't getting her to the zoom meetings." Mrs. Tulip would then follow district protocol for marking the child absent. The office and Mrs. Tulip, then, would connect with the family to inquire about the child's "truancy." The district's attendance policy based on children's virtual attendance might not have been feasible for this family, due to connectivity issues or other social and health issues many Americans were facing during the pandemic. Rather than expressing the need to inquire about the family or child's needs, the school stepped in in a punitive way by enforcing "attendance." This, in turn, inflamed the child's caregivers. Mrs. Tulip recalled, "When I started to email it (got) kind of more aggressive kind of emails. Like she started to get kind of snippy. She got snippy with the office staff. So I just backed off and said, "I need to let this one go. I can't do anything more to help this child." Once the school resumed in face-to-face format, Mrs. Tulip felt she could better support the child. She said, "So she came back to the

classroom. Which is wonderful because now I can give her what she needs. I just feel like she wasn't getting what she needed because they weren't logging her on." Mrs. Tulip's experiences with the caregivers left her feeling she could only work with the child while she was in school, due her perceived lack of connection with the family. The school's attendance expectations did little to provide teachers with leeway into contextualizing individual issues and problem solving from there.

Alternatively, at other times, participants shared experiences with giving or receiving empathy and grace. Each of the three teachers talked about how they felt they needed to be as understanding as possible towards caregivers, even when it was challenging to do so, because of the traumatic period of Covid-19. Each of the teachers described how they understood how stressful the time period must have been for caregivers. Mrs. Tulip said:

> I think they were just overwhelmed. I mean if you (thought) about it, they shifted their thinking from they're working at home and they're supposed to be helping their child learn too. And I think they, the parents, became overwhelmed. And I tried to really think about each family and some families just had a little bit more support at home. So I tried to make sure that I was hitting all of my different socio-economic and parents that could and couldn't and didn't have the materials and find different ways to help them.

Ms. Daisy also talked about imagining how much stress caregivers must have experienced. She said she supported caregivers by inviting them to one-on-one zoom meetings in which she could be a person whom they could "vent to or cry on my shoulder or talk to." Ms. Daisy's mission was to "be a force for families" and she would reach out if she ever sensed a caregiver was in

distress. She said, “I just poured it on them. Every single email. Like ‘You are amazing. I know these times are difficult and tough. We are going to get through this.’”

The teachers’ empathy extended into them sharing grace and understanding when caregivers needed it as well as was reciprocated by caregivers. Several caregivers described instances in which they were unable to help their children complete their weekly tasks and felt guilty when they emailed the teacher to explain their delay. Each time an instance like this came up, each participant described how the teacher’s response exuded understanding. For example, when talking about Ms. Daisy’s level of understanding and grace, Alexis said, “She accepts whatever our best is...and that's much needed during this time of survival.” Holly also described how Ms. Daisy never once made her feel ashamed when she missed a zoom meeting or an activity. She shared how this helped her feel like she could, indeed, continue supporting her daughter, Abigail, in her remote learning. This understanding and grace is in direct contrast to the other times when the teachers were less tolerant, if not downright judgmental of the caregivers’ perceived lack of effort. Additionally, when Holly mentioned her irritation with Ms. Daisy’s procedures and the amount of assignments, she followed up with sharing her understanding of how she knew Ms. Daisy was not trained to be a remote teacher and that she understood she was doing her best. The nuanced experiences and responses speaks to the complex time period and unrealistic schooling expectations of Covid-19 that elicited a multitude of reactions and emotional responses by all.

Discussion

The findings from this study illustrate ways in which caregiver-teacher relationships were impacted by Covid-19 schooling shifts. The emotional geographies distances that previously existed (Hargreaves, 2001) within caregiver and teacher interactions were also depicted among

participants' storied accounts of schooling during the pandemic. Caregivers and teachers shared both benefits and challenges from their experiences with working together to support kindergartners. The data suggests that participants viewed scenarios in varied ways. While at times their stories of closeness and distances converged, there were other times when they shared vastly different feelings about a specific scenario. Undoubtedly, this was a result of the heightened emotions and uncertainty of the pandemic. Participants' narrative accounts also revealed the broader implication that neither group of participants was set up to succeed at schooling during the pandemic. The school's attempts to replicate traditional schooling resulted in teachers and caregivers experiencing a range of emotional distances that might have prevented collaborative involvement. At times caregivers felt the demands of their children's assignments were burdensome, yet felt they had no input into what types of assignments their children should be doing. Rather, they plugged along, at times in survival mode.

The variety of emotional responses participants experienced highlighted the various emotional geographies distances that existed among partnerships at times. The natural physical distance that was created by school shutdowns and social distancing shaped how caregivers and teachers worked together. At times participants found interactions beneficial and validating, while others they were discouraged, felt guilty, or were anxious. The lack of proximity from the inevitable physical distance (Hargreaves, 2001) teachers and caregivers experienced had varied emotional impacts on participants. The ways in which teachers and caregivers talked about the adjustments highlighted both opportunities and challenges that resulted. Caregivers who previously had been privileged to volunteer in classrooms and be present around the school found their involvement had been drastically reduced. They missed the connections they were able to make with school staff when present at school. Those mothers described how being in the

school helped them feel in touch and aware of their children's academic lives. This type of traditional involvement reflects traditional notions of caregiver involvement (Epstein, 1987), which some educational and family scholars criticize as not being inclusive of diverse families (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). While the traditional tropes of caregiver involvement benefited *some*, the changes during Covid-19 suggest new ways to include *more* caregivers. The caregivers who worked full time and carried more responsibilities outside their homes ended up feeling more informed and connected during Covid-19. They described appreciating how they were able to gain insight into their children's progress and learning styles. They got to see how the teacher delivered instruction and what was expected. These differences in the ways caregivers experienced family-school partnerships suggest that schools might try to partner with caregivers in new ways that would help them know more about how their children operate within classroom walls. The findings in this study suggest that caregiver involvement does not have to be strictly within the building and also caregivers are eager to support their children.

In addition to the naturally occurring physical distance, data analysis revealed teachers and caregivers talked about moral and sociocultural distances (Hargreaves, 2001) most commonly. First, the moral distance between caregivers and teachers was addressed at times when the teachers felt supported or challenged. The teachers commented on how they felt mostly supported by caregivers, but there were instances when caregivers questioned a teacher's instructional methods. As Hargreaves (2001) suggests, moral distance between caregivers and teachers can cause feelings of anger and frustration. While two of the teachers admitted those feelings, one chose to empathize with the caregiver and figured she must be very stressed out. The other teacher felt resigned and admitted she just "let it go." These findings reveal that the natural human emotions these teachers felt led them to respond in different ways and at different

times. While unclear, this might be a form of responding to the collective trauma of Covid-19 (Crosby et al., 2020) and teachers giving families more grace.

The other most common distance that teachers and caregivers talked about was sociocultural distance (Hargreaves, 2001). This occurred at times when there was a level of judgment from the teachers. For example, when the teachers assumed caregivers were disengaged or did not care is a form of sociocultural distance. The time when Mrs. Tulip assumed caregivers deemed education as unimportant when their child regularly missed zooms highlights the way that when teachers feel families do not ascribe to their perceived norms of involvement, they resort to "othering" or stereotyping (Hargreaves, 2001). Rather than attempting to inquire as to the reasons behind the absences, Mrs. Tulip appeared to have written the family off. This, Hargreaves (2001) suggests, is when teachers actually see "obstacles" rather than "opportunities" (p. 1066). Mrs. Tulip was, therefore, reifying the problematic notions of traditional caregiver involvement, rather than considering the needs of diverse families (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). On the other hand, Ms. Daisy chose to take those opportunities as times to increase contact with families. Her "need" to get information from families in order to better support them reveals the empathy she put forward rather than feeling unable to help as other teachers might have.

The findings also suggest that changes made to home-school communication during Covid-19 exemplified professional distance between teachers and caregivers (Hargreaves, 2001). The teachers described varied experiences with communicating with families. Ms. Daisy, for example, described needing input from caregivers in order to effectively work with the children. Thus, her home-school communication shifted from a one-way form to two-way communication in which the caregivers were invited to provide input. This shift likely created more balanced

partnerships (Goodall, 2018) between caregivers and teachers, further reimaging another form of caregiver involvement. The shift also highlighted how Ms. Daisy chose to navigate the challenges teachers faced between working within a "caring" profession to the patriarchal standards of "professionalism" (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 1057). Mrs. Tulip, on the other hand, positioned herself as the teacher and the caregivers as the learners. She expressed the need to teach the caregivers how to support the children but did not mention wanting any input from caregivers. She positioned herself as the authority (Goodall, 2018), rather than providing opportunities for caregivers to become "agents of change" (Barton et al., 2004). These findings suggest that teachers' methods of communication varied and that despite more interaction they reinforced their conventional practices. The data highlighting Ms. Daisy's efforts to glean information from families suggests that by opening up communication and inviting caregiver input, schools might honor and privilege previously excluded and marginalized groups (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006) by welcoming caregivers to share their diverse and unique cultural experiences.

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CHAPTER 3: Purpose(s) of Kindergarten During Covid-19

Schooling is perhaps one of the most contentious and widely debated topics of public discourse. Practically every United States citizen, no matter their occupation, political leanings, or background, has beliefs about how schools should operate (Kliebard, 2004; Labaree, 1997; Lortie, 1975). One can conduct a simple search on Twitter or Facebook to determine how peers in their community feel about how schools should be run. People's prior experience participating in education, mostly as students, helps inform their beliefs about schooling. Oftentimes their beliefs are based on what they assume to be the goals or purposes of schooling. The public debate, over what is best for children and how schools should operate, was amplified as public outrage intensified due to disruptions to traditional schooling caused by Covid-19. Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, schools had to decide what their primary purposes were and how to best pursue them, all within the spotlight of the public eye. Overnight debate over the purposes of education became the hottest topic on every block.

The Covid-19 pandemic generated global chaos in every aspect of humans' lives, including schooling. The shifts in schooling formats and uncertainty presented school districts with a myriad of challenges, including children's social, emotional, and academic needs. Schools had the opportunity to potentially reimagine their purpose and adjust plans accordingly. Health and safety were of utmost importance, therefore mitigation of infection became a top priority for schools, but, beyond that, what was their next goal?

Schooling during Covid-19 exposed the vast social inequalities in the United States (Nanda, 2020). Guhin (2020) argues that society historically has viewed schools and education as a way to eradicate social inequalities, but their competing priorities worked against one another. Guhin suggests, however, that Covid-19 was an opportunity to reimagine schooling and

its purpose. Covid-19 could have been a time period for schools to work to create solidarity and foster community, rather than pit individuals against one another in academic competition (Guhin, 2020). Schools across the United States, however, were still held to teaching the standard curriculum as normal, while Covid-19 ravaged the world, especially poor and minoritized populations. It became evident that families in economically disadvantaged areas were hit harder by the pandemic (Kashen, 2021). A growing public consensus, however, expected children to be back in school during the pandemic. While life as every human knew it drastically changed overnight and infection rates were at sky high levels, public discourse substantially increased around reopening schools (Koski, 2021). communities were divided over how schooling should proceed. Concerns over "learning loss" (Koski, 2021) inspired calls to reopen schools were juxtaposed by those more concerned with the health and safety risks of spreading infections. Covid-19 highlighted the priorities and motivations around schooling.

An added layer to the debate was the purpose of early childhood education during this time. With disregard for widespread developmentally appropriate practices for early childhood, public policy has increased the standards and accountability in early classrooms in recent years. As kindergarten has become the "new first grade," questions remain as to how, if at all, Covid-19 might have impacted what schooling expectations for kindergarteners were during the pandemic.

Conceptions of Early Childhood Education

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has emphasized developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) (Bredekamp, 1987) as being the gold standard for early childhood education. The DAP includes nine guiding principles that "foster young children's joyful learning and maximize the opportunities for each and every child to achieve their full potential" (NAEYC, 2020, p. 1). NAEYC's most recent position statement

(2020) on DAP, likely in an attempt to address critiques of previous editions (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018), provided three updated core considerations to inform schools' decision making for early childhood programs. These included commonality, individuality, and context. Commonality, the first consideration, provided a lens for which to think about when reviewing and enacting the nine guiding principles. The statement reported that while the guiding principles are based on a broad, well-established research base, educators must consider the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which learning occurs. They reported that the nine guiding principles are helpful in most instances, yet do not occur in a vacuum. They also recognized that the research field has primarily measured education against Western norms, "typically White, middle-class, monolingual English-speaking" and that variations from this are often viewed as deficits within the field (NAEYC, 2020, p. 6. Secondly, the position statement stated that children's individuality should be kept in mind when incorporating the nine guiding DAP principles. They posited that in order to provide education for all children, educators must consider children's diverse assets and strengths they bring to the classroom. Finally, the third consideration, context, referred to children's and teachers' diverse social and cultural contexts they bring to classroom learning. The statement said, "By recognizing that children's experiences may vary by their social identities...with different and intersecting impacts on their development and learning, educators can make adaptations to affirm and support positive development of each child's multiple social identities," (NAEYC 2020, p. 7). When considering the purposes of kindergarten during Covid-19, these three considerations provide an understanding of how the experts view decision making in early childhood education.

Although widely accepted as best practice, scholars have criticized DAP as adhering to socially unjust and dominant norms (Souto-Manning & Rabadi-Raol, 2018). Further, the scholars

use critical race theory, translanguaging, and culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogies as counter stories to the "Eurocentric norms" (p. 206). After intersecting injustices and recentering "quality" into early childhood education, Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol (2018) propose four "design principles" for which to ensure just education for all children (p. 217). The first design principle regards children's development as being social, cultural, and historical. They posit that children's learning does not happen on a prescribed timeline and the authors suggest that teachers should approach their work with children by considering themselves learners about children. The second design principle takes a firm stance that all children bring to classrooms rich, cultural backgrounds that should be honored as strengths. The third design principle states that early childhood educators must engage with children's intersectional identities and speak back to the "hegemonic paradigm" of only one way of viewing the world. Finally, the fourth design principle states that curriculum be redesigned to center the voices of "the global majority" (p. 218). This principle suggests that early childhood educators disrupt racism and socially accepted privileges that have only been historically "afforded to Whiteness" (p. 218).

The DAP (Bredekamp, 1987) and Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol's design principles focused on a reconceptualized version of the "whole child" (Noddings, 2005). The NAEYC position statement (2020) described honoring the traditional "whole child" approach by meeting children's social, emotional, physical, as well as their cognitive needs. Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol disrupted how historically DAP have been measured against a hegemonic paradigm and center social justice in early childhood education. I argue that both of these approaches, in their own ways, honor the "whole child," (Moyer, 2001; Noddings, 2005) by honoring children as individuals that enter classrooms with unique, individual backgrounds that serve as assets to learning. Because each child is uniquely individual, as the NAEYC position statement suggests,

schools must consider each child's individual needs and characteristics. Further, Souto-Manning and Rabadi-Raol posited early childhood programs must counter social inequities. Considering the "whole child" when implementing early childhood education, Moyer (2001) suggests that educators "recognize and accept individual differences," such as unique growth rates and developmental patterns (p. 162). Additional recommendations include play as fundamental, children having active voices in their learning, as well as focusing on the process of learning, rather than discrete skills or content objectives (Moyer, 2001).

A Changed Kindergarten

Early childhood education spans the years of birth through age eight. Kindergarten falls within the realm of early childhood and has historically served as a bridge to formal schooling (Muelle, 2005). Since about the turn of the century, kindergarten has increased tremendously in academic rigor. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation as well as increased public support for both public and private early childhood programs has heightened the fact that academics have taken center stage in kindergarten (Bassok et al., 2016). Accountability and standards-based curriculum have left teachers with no choice but to change some of their instructional approaches. Kindergarten teachers spend more time assessing and teaching curricular standards. Research suggests that teachers report that these adjustments contradict what the field knows about what is best for child development practices (Brown & Barry, 2020). For example, early childhood teachers have reported that their teaching has changed as a result of increased accountability measures (Parks & Bridges-Rhoads, 2012; Brown & Barry, 2020). Some have even suggested that kindergarten is "not fun anymore" (Brown & Barry, 2020, p. 1), which directly contradicts the NAEYC's position on joyful learning and teaching the whole child.

Schooling for kindergarteners during a global pandemic almost seemed like an oxymoron. Questions remain about how Covid-19 impacted the tension between providing education that is developmentally and socially just while also adhering to accountability measures and curriculum standards. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to answer the following research question:

Which purposes of education were enacted by schools and families within kindergarten classrooms during Covid-19?

Defining Purposes of Education

In order to frame analysis of this study, I drew on several different competing purposes of education. The purposes of education have been studied and theorized for centuries. Labaree (1997) argues that schooling issues arise from competing *political* goals of education, rather than solely pedagogical, social, organizational, or cultural issues as other scholars contend. He suggests there are three overarching political goals driving decision making and reforms in education: democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. Labaree claims that these three political goals have historically worked to reinforce and "undermine" one another at times (1997, p. 41). Labaree argues that before we can focus scientifically on what works (or does not) in schools, the focus should be on the existing goals of education that have conflicting undergirding values. The first political goal, democratic equality, is based on the value that schools should provide equal educational opportunity for citizens. Democratic equality posits that all children should be prepared as citizens of society and that schools should provide "effective citizenship and relative equality" (Labaree, p. 42). The values behind social efficiency, Labaree's second political goal, emphasize how education contributes to the larger economy. It posits that society works best when each citizen is trained and conditioned for specific roles as

workers. Education thereby serves as a pathway to train citizens for their future roles. Social mobility, the third political goal, underscores an individual component of education. It posits that education is a commodity and situates citizens in competition with one another. This goal, often referred to as the "American Dream," is based on the beliefs that citizens' success is a direct result of their individual merit and suggests that schools promote mobility by providing "credentials" (p. 50).

Labaree's three educational purposes have co-existed and competed throughout the existence of the American education system, which is evidenced through history of school reform. Each goal has values that contradict elements of each of the other political goals, thereby positioning children in different ways. In addition to Labaree's (1997) goals, there are a multitude of others. As this study explored kindergarten classrooms, I also used child-centered learning (Kliebard, 2004) educational goal in framing the data analysis. A child-centered approach posits that learning is directed by the child (Moyer, 2001). A teacher must be able to position themselves as learners, in which they listen and learn from the children in their classrooms. In this approach, children have voices and are able to make decisions with regards to their learning (Moyer, 2001). It lives up to its name by centering the child.

While different education purposes point towards an end in mind, the means in which those goals are achieved, or the curriculum, is a whole added complexity in the American education system. Elements of democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility drive curriculum design and planning. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is one example that contains elements of each of the three educational purposes and how they contradict one another, either in enactment or rhetoric. Democratic equality suggests that all children be provided with equal access to the same educational opportunities, therefore standardizing curriculum is an

example of the influence of democratic equality. The CCSS were advertised as a way to level the playing field by standardizing curriculum for all children across the United States. Each grade level was assigned a set of benchmark standards that students were expected to meet in order to advance each year. While the CCSS purports to provide equal access for all children and to narrow existing "gaps," some argue that the CCSS perpetuates social stratification by design. In name alone, the label of college and career readiness suggests a need to prepare students for future working roles in society, thereby preserving social efficiency. In a similar vein, social mobility is present by the very nature of how the standards came to fruition as well as how they are assessed. In a very top-down approach, the CCSS were designed by top business leaders, politicians, and academics, rather than by workers (teachers) with boots on the ground. The fact that the common core standards had to be campaigned and incentivized by Race to the Top Funding suggests themes of elements of societal hierarchy. Additionally, the standards provide access to learning, but do not address historic, cultural disparities in access prior to formal schooling.

The content explicitly stated within curriculum standards is important, but the implicit, or hidden, curriculum (Giroux & Penna, 1979) is equally if not more noteworthy in a child's education. The hidden curriculum is how children learn to function and thrive (or not) at school. It also includes how they experience, or how to do, school. As human beings, we learn by doing. The content of a hidden curriculum consists of behaviors, values, and norms that are adopted, as well as expected, within classrooms and school buildings. Children learn the ways of schooling of this hidden curriculum by experiencing school. They learn how to function at school through observing and interacting with their teachers and classmates (Wren, 1993). They might learn through positive or negative reinforcement of consequences of their actions. For example, a

kindergartner might enter school not understanding the preferred way to walk in a classroom line. They might learn how to walk quietly in a single file after observing other classroom lines or having their teacher ask the class to walk silently and in single file. After seeing a teacher put their finger to their lips and say "Shh" might help a child infer they are supposed to walk quietly. All of this is done without one utterance. Similarly, a teacher's frown could be a nonverbal cue that could lead a child to stop talking or acting in a particular way. Children learn the rules of how to be in school by observing those around them. Making inferences or observing behaviors is a large part of how children learn to navigate the hidden curriculum of schools.

A school's hidden curriculum can also be interpreted beyond the bricks and mortar of the school building. While a school may explicitly state their agenda through carefully crafted mission and vision statements, their communication can also send messages that reveal more implicit, or hidden, meanings, thus highlighting their implicit purposes of education. The hidden curriculum of schooling also reveals underlying motivations and intentions of the dominant society (Anyon, 1981). In the U.S., this takes shape within school reforms that might advertise to target all children's needs, yet largely foster capitalistic, neoliberal ideas (Garcia & De Lissovoy, 2013). At times, schools have been burdened by reforms in hopes to repair social inequalities. Schools may overtly advertise community and equality as their first priorities, yet implement other measures that imply more individualistic reforms such as high-stakes testing. The "achievement ideology" that has pervaded schooling in recent decades perpetuates the false notion that individual merit and success is solely based on individuals' hard work and motivation (Booher-Jessings, 2008). Rather than meeting the needs of all children and providing equity to those who have been historically marginalized, the measures within the "achievement ideology" end up maintaining the status quo.

Methodology

This qualitative study used a case study design (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) to explore how schools and families enacted purposes of education during Covid-19. A case study methodology allowed me to explore the phenomenon of early childhood schooling during a global pandemic. By exploring textual artifacts as well as the ways teachers and caregivers' share their lived experiences, I will gain a glimmer of insight into kindergartener's worlds during the pandemic. This study builds on the extant literature outlined above as well as draws on Labaree's purposes of schooling as a frame through which to explore how schools and families enacted and interpreted implicit purposes of education. Data generated from caregiver and teacher interviews as well as home-school communication artifacts provides insight into a school's purposes of education by exploring potential hidden curriculum and experiences.

Context

This is a case study about how the district, school, and caregivers privileged the purposes of schooling in three kindergarten classes in a rural, midwestern K-5 elementary school during the Covid-19 pandemic. Eastside Elementary School's population consisted of a majority of White students and families and has a great deal of socio-economic diversity. The families included in this study represented a range of middle-class backgrounds. The middle class families ranged in terms of affluence. While some families had stay at home moms and fathers who earned enough for the family, there were other families that consisted of two caregivers who worked blue collar jobs. For example, one family had a father who worked in operations management while the mother was a full time graduate student. Another family had a mother who worked as a receptionist and the father was a truck driver. The caregiver participants were

referred by the kindergarten teachers, therefore were not completely representative of Eastside's population. Like many schools around the world, Eastside adjusted schooling as the pandemic ebbed and flowed. The school district offered a year-long virtual academy as well as the option for in-person instruction. Their school year, like most, was disrupted based on infection rates. Eastside began the 2020-2021 school year virtually for all children for one month. They, then, engaged in a five day per week in-person learning format, complete face masks and social distancing. Due to an increased infection rate, they were required by the district to roll back to virtual schooling for all children for two months and then resumed in-person learning mid-January. They remained at an in-person learning format, although had to navigate through many classroom wide and grade level quarantines from time to time. Some families chose to remain in the virtual academy all year, while others transitioned from one format to another based on their children's or families' needs.

Participants in Context

The participants in this study included teachers and caregivers of children from Eastside's three kindergarten classrooms. Two of the kindergarten teachers, Mrs. Tulip and Mrs. Lilac, taught in-person format classes, while Ms. Daisy was assigned to the district's virtual academy. Ms. Daisy's class roster included children from each of the school's three elementary kindergarten classes. I chose to focus solely on kindergarten due to the unique nature of their entry into formal schooling. All kindergarten children entering school in the Fall of 2020 had an unprecedented transition into formal schooling, no matter which format their classrooms were appointed. Their experience was unlike any traditional experience and therefore their caregivers likely had very different experiences than they had expected. Exploring communication among

families and the school would provide insight as to how the purposes of education were enacted within the school.

Data Generation

This study included a variety of sources. These included textual artifacts as well as interviews. First, interview data provided me firsthand accounts from caregivers and teachers about their experiences supporting children's learning during Covid-19. This, in turn, allowed me to generate data to explore how various purposes of education the school enacted duringCovid-19. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the building principal, each of the school's three kindergarten teachers, and seven caregivers who had children in each of the three classrooms (Table 3). Each interview, due to Covid-19 restrictions, was completed via Zoom and lasted approximately an hour. After each interview, I drafted a brief memo of my questions and thoughts about the interview. Then, I transcribed each interview and uploaded each transcription into a qualitative data software program.

Table 3. Interview Participants

Interview Participant	Role	Details
Mrs. Rhoads	Principal	White, married, mom of 3
Mrs. Lilac	K teacher	White, married, mom of 2
Mrs. Tulip	K teacher	White, married, mom of 2
Ms. Daisy	PreK-K combination teacher	White, single

Table 3. (cont'd)

Kayla	Jack's mom	White, mom of 2, married, administrative assistant
Alexis	Jamal and Jaden's foster mom	White, mom of 2 biological children and 3 foster sons (biological brothers), stay at home mom
Holly	Ally's mom	White, married, mom of 2, graduate student
Jess	Hank's mom	White, married, mom of 3, stay at home mom
Julie	Ian's mom	White, married, mom of 1, massage therapist
Laura	Alex's mom	White, mom of 3, occupational therapist
Lindsay	Brooklyn's mom	White, married, mom of 4, community college recruiter

Additionally, I examined many artifacts and resources that were either publicly available or provided to me by Ms. Tulip, Ms. Daisy, and Mrs. Rhoads, the school principal. Public resources included Eastside's school website and Facebook page as well as Riverside school district website documents. Ms. Tulip and Ms. Daisy provided me with files of electronic documents that included instructional slideshows, newsletters, and parent-teacher

communication. These electronic artifacts generated additional data for me to explore which purposes for education were enacted during the pandemic. I copied and pasted the text from each artifact into the qualitative data software program in which I uploaded interview transcriptions.

As the fall of 2020 approached, districts were faced with a long road of uncertainty as forecasts of infection rates and shutdowns varied widely. In response to a statewide mandate about providing intentional planning for the unprecedented school year, Riverside drafted a thirty page "Return to Learn" plan. This plan offered explicitly stated goals, or purposes, for the school year and detailed the district's preparations for schooling during a pandemic. The "Return to Learn" plan provided four guiding principles that matched those on the state's "Return to School Roadmap." The guiding principles explicitly stated the district's purposes of education during the pandemic. The plan also provided insight into potentially implicit purposes of education that the district planned to enact.

Data Analysis

I conducted several rounds of data analysis of both the interview data and the textual artifacts. First, I used an open coding approach in which I coded for ideas and general themes in the data. In this round of data analysis, I coded for instances of participants' response frequency, intensity, as well as their emphasis of importance (Krueger, 2014). Next, I drafted a brief analytic memo of additional questions I had developed and broad themes I identified. Next, I added those initial codes to the qualitative software program I used. Next, I conducted a round of a priori coding using the initial codes as well as codes based on Labaree's (1997) three competing purposes of education. Throughout each round of coding, I reviewed data for collectiveness as well as emphasis of responses.

Findings

Interview data and textual artifacts demonstrated that the school district facilitated schooling, whether remote or in-person, similar to that of traditional classroom instruction. Classroom schedules resembled traditional classroom routines and accountability measures, such as testing, continued to be implemented. The school day schedules accounted for live virtual class meetings for each academic area. Despite being in a global pandemic, classroom schedules were dictated by the district, in a way to account for all children being instructed similarly. Teachers, vastly underprepared to teach young children in virtual or socially distanced formats, were expected to deliver instruction in familiar and traditional ways. My findings suggest that the school district, school staff, and caregivers privileged varied purposes of education at varied times. The district and school, at times, planned for democratic equality and child-centered learning, but continued to push social mobility. Likewise, caregivers privileged social mobility.

Through analysis of textual and interview data, I found instances of competing purposes of education enacted by Eastside Elementary school and families throughout the pandemic. Findings suggest that the district and school expressed intentions to promote democratic equality through both home-school communication and interviews with the school principal. There were very few instances of both social efficiency and child-centered purposes, by the school and district, in both textual artifacts and interview data. Overwhelmingly, based on participants' lived experiences, it was evident that teachers and caregivers privileged social mobility as the purpose for schooling. In this section, I present how the varied purposes of education were enacted as evidenced through data analyses.

At the onset of Covid-19, Riverside School District, like districts across the country, switched to remote learning overnight. School districts had no forewarning as to how to make

this transition and as one teacher described, the spring of 2020 was sort of a "triage" period. Riverside set out to ensure children and families were healthy and that they remained connected to the school community. Riverside had an abundance of responsibilities to consider when drafting their "Return to Learn" plan for the following school year, while the world remained in the throes of the pandemic. In addition to the traditional preparation required to start a school year, they had the added challenges of including learning format options, health screenings and protocols, academic endeavors, health and safety measures, as well as social-emotional well-being goals. Each detail in the plan was intended to pursue one of the following four guiding principles of the plan:

1. Equitable access to learning is a right for each child.
2. In collaboration with parents, students, and teachers, schools will use data and evidence to prioritize resources for each child.
3. Teachers and staff will prioritize meaningful relationships to create safe learning environments for each child.
4. Teachers and staff will empower the value, cultivation of relationships, and belonging to students and parent voices in all aspects of learning and emotional support for families.

The "Return to Learn" plan explicitly stated the school district's purpose for the school year during a pandemic. The above mentioned four guiding principles provide insight into the district's purposes of education which are evidenced by additional data I generated, including interview data and additional artifacts. The plan also helps provide a contextual background for exploring potential implicit purposes enacted.

Intentions of Democratic Equality

Tenets of democratic equality (Labaree, 1997), such as equal access and citizenship training, were overtly stated throughout Riverside's "Return to Learn" plan, yet data analysis revealed very little evidence of enactment. Each of the plan's four guiding principles advertise the district's mission to provide equal opportunity for all children, thereby serving the community at large. Democratic equality is evidenced in each principle by the plan's use of planning to incorporate citizenship, equal access, and equal treatment. The principles describe involving the community stakeholders, such as families and teachers, to build relationships in support of children. Additionally, they describe their motivation being that each child has the right to learn. The plan goes on to explicitly outline how they will fulfill each of the guiding principles, thereby reinforcing their goal of working towards democratic equality as a purpose of education.

According to the plan, based on assessment data, the district planned to assess children to understand how they were progressing and to meet children's needs. Riverside poised itself to ensure each child was "offered scaffolds and supports to meet their diverse, academic and social-emotional needs." Of particular interest was how Riverside's plan discussed accommodating and differentiating based on children's diverse needs but did not make any adjustments to curricular requirements. In a time of trauma during a global pandemic, the district continued to require that children be held accountable for the regular standards. This data highlights the district's intentions to promote democratic equality.

Interview data reveal participants' lived experiences that despite intentions, little enactment of the democratic equality purpose occurred during the pandemic. The principal and teachers confirmed that the district did indeed provide digital tools, online resources, and access

to learning for all, yet that was the extent. There was no evidence to support that children's voices and caregivers' voices or suggestions were sought or included. The learning appeared to be dictated by prescribed programs and scheduling and families had no say in planning. There was also no evidence of collaboration with families and children, aside from wanting to build relationships, which was not evidenced by all interview data.

Traces of Social Efficiency

Social efficiency appeared in instances where the district's and school's home-school communication discussed serving all children or the community as a whole. Focusing on serving all children, the district placed "equitable access to learning" in the forefront of devising plans focused on how students would participate in schooling during COVID-19. The district provided two viable learning format options for families to choose from in order to serve the needs of those who were medically vulnerable in addition to families that were uncomfortable with sending their children to in-person learning amidst the virus. Recognizing that both options were necessary despite not being ideal, the district set to work to ensure all children had access to teachers and technology. This is evidenced by the district's efforts to provide devices and to establish internet connectivity for families in need. The district committed to ensuring that all students and families have adequate connectivity and the devices necessary to successfully engage in and complete schoolwork. Home-school communication on the district's Facebook page stated that all families were to be given the option to request Chromebooks. Additionally, in partnership with T-Mobile, according to the district's website, they were able to provide mobile hotspots for families who qualified for free lunch. Families that qualified under the reduced lunch program were offered a discounted price for a year-long hotspot and families that did not qualify could rent one for approximately two hundred dollars.

Social efficiency was also evidenced in teachers' remote learning textual artifacts. Based on the concept of developing children's roles for a thriving future economy, social efficiency reifies notions of sorting individuals into different hierarchical social levels. In traditional schooling, this goal appears in instances of ability grouping or tracking children. Despite planning for a non-traditional year, these elements were similar to those within traditional schooling. Despite notions of community and "#WeareRiverside, upon enactment the school implemented sorting of children in ways that stratified classroom communities. For example, Ms. Daisy's weekly "small groups" schedule included time for small group reading instruction, based on children's reading proficiency. Ms. Daisy had her class split into "teams," numbered one through seven. Most of the teams met with her twice weekly, but team seven met with her four days each week. In looking at the weekly goals for each team, it appears that team seven would be considered to be less proficient in reading. Specifically, team seven's focus in November, 2020 was on the individual simple high-frequency words "is" and "the." In the same month, team five's learning outcomes were focused on more sophisticated skills such as visualizing and forming opinions. The stark differences in literacy skills addressed across teams highlighted different learning outcomes for each group. Looking across teams, these findings suggest that children were grouped according to ability, thus perpetuating notions of social efficiency.

Interview data analysis also suggested that school staff and families also implicitly privileged social efficiency as a purpose of education. Their lived experiences highlighted instances of social efficiency that were less overt than other competing purposes. These appeared in areas where children were sorted based on their academic abilities. One example of this was when Ms. Tulip talked about her kids and referred to them in terms of groups. She mentioned

that historically in kindergarten she has children that are “high” and children that are “low” in terms of academic levels, but that she was concerned that Covid-19 would widen that gap. She said, “I think what's going to happen is we're going to see that start to even become more of a gap. And, how are we, as teachers, going to figure out how to shrink that gap? Again, that's already big as it is.”

Minimal Instances of Centering Children

There were a few instances that highlighted the school’s and district’s purpose of child centered education. These were revealed through home-school communication, the “Return to Learn” plan, and interview data of participants’ lived experiences. They mostly occurred at times when addressing the mental and emotional well-being of children and their families. With regard to offering learning opportunities and resources for *all* children, Riverside’s “Return to Learn” plan included addressing children’s “mental and social emotional health.” In order to ensure that children had access to learning, the district’s plan acknowledged the need to potentially address their emotional needs as well. The plan emphasized trauma and crisis as descriptions of what children were experiencing. In addition to implementing existing “crisis management plans,” the district committed to providing resources for families, which is evidenced on their website. Their site includes links to outside resources that address challenges families might have faced when doing remote schooling. An example includes an article from a non-profit endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics that focuses on how caregivers can remain calm while supporting their children’s schooling at home. Recognizing that families would need socio-emotional support during a time of uncertainty and fear appeared to be a focus of some of Riverside’s resources, such as links included on the school district’s website that included

parenting and mindfulness tips. All of these efforts overtly reinforce Riverside's priority to fostering a community of learning by serving the needs of each child.

Similarly, home-school communication, such as newsletters and social media posts, including the hashtag #WeareRiverside, stressed notions of addressing children and families' mental and emotional well-being. One example of this support was evidenced in a September, 2020 principal newsletter. As the school prepared to return to face-to-face learning after beginning virtually, Mrs. Rhoads wrote, "It is our intent to continue doing what we have always done at Eastside--put students first to ensure that they are safe and feel valued." Enacting this, Mrs. Rhoads offered a chance for incoming kindergarten children to tour the school and classroom prior to attending their first in-person school day. She addressed that the visits might help alleviate anxiety that caregivers and children might have been feeling at the time, having not previously attended Eastside. Other instances were also present in Eastside's Facebook posts. One post, for example, requested support for a child whose parent had recently been diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. Additionally, their Facebook page asked children to send photos of themselves reading with their favorite stuffed animal, to encourage enjoyment of reading. Analysis of both Riverside's and Eastside's home-school communication and social media posts present messages of community and support for all children, families, and staff.

Taking a child-centered purpose as their approach was also present when Eastside's school staff and surrounding community collaborated to support families in order to help each child within the school community. While collaboration was nothing new to Eastside, the needs of families and the ways they delivered support changed due to Covid-19. The "#WeareRiverside" mantra was reinforced and elevated by Eastside's staff by providing food and other forms of support for families. Interview data revealed occasions when the principal and

teachers went the extra mile to ensure families were cared for. While the district had implemented measures to support families, Mrs. Rhoads and her teaching staff encountered situations in which families needed additional support. One example was when a family needed help getting food delivered. While the district set up meal distribution twice weekly, Mrs. Rhoads knew the family did not have transportation to retrieve the meals so she took it upon herself to deliver food regularly to them twice weekly. They lived out of the town limits and she navigated the yard, which housed eight to ten hens and a rooster, to deliver food to their doorstep. At times she felt torn between her own family and those at her school. Mrs. Rhoads found herself questioning what she was doing when her own three children were in virtual school limbo at home. She always came back to, however, the idea that the need for some of her school families was overwhelming. Mrs. Daisy, too, drove to a family's home to provide additional support. At the district level and the school level, families had been provided technology, internet access, as well as tutorials on how to log children into virtual schooling. While instructions were easy for some families, others found them to be quite challenging. Ms. Daisy recalled a time when a child's grandfather became overwhelmed by all of the technology. She recalled saying to him, "Listen, I will come to your house. We'll walk through how this needs to...be done. How you need to turn it in based on what you're telling me...There's so many different ways to access things." These two scenarios reflect Eastside's initiative to lend support so that each child's needs were met.

Prevailing Occurrences of Social Mobility

Social mobility, an educational purpose that positions children and families as consumers and focuses on individual merit, was a common theme found within the Return to Learn plan, textual documents, and participants' lived experiences. Data analysis revealed that themes of

social mobility were also displayed in Riverside's "Return to Learn" plan. One attribute of social mobility implied in Riverside's "Return to Learn" plan was its attention to grade level proficiencies and testing accountability. The plan stipulated instructional plans and resources centered around providing instruction for grade level standards as well as assessing children for "readiness" of those standards. The plan specified that the district would consult the state department of education for "best practices" for blended and remote learning. Additionally, assessment and the resulting differentiation based on "student needs" was a large part of the academics section in the district's plan. The plan, however, did not address any changes to the grade level standards, which suggests the grade level proficiencies would be based on prior years' curricular standards. Despite children living through trauma, school districts across the state were required to push forward and mandate that children, even as young as kindergarten, complete standardized testing, due to legislative mandates. Additionally, Riverside's plan specified they would implement assessments in multiple formats, including assessments, screeners, and/or diagnostics, to identify children's diverse areas of need. The academics section of the plan was riddled with terminology that suggests a social mobility purpose.

Another area of social mobility was how Riverside and Eastside Elementary included added accountability measures in the Fall, 2020. Another accountability measure was enforcing attendance to virtual sessions. While spring of 2020 was a triage period and the state mandated that schools were not allowed to enforce attendance and work requirements for children, the district's "Return to Learn" plan stated that the following school year would be quite different. Teachers' beginning of the year slideshows described having attendance requirements in which children must be present, even in virtual classrooms. For kindergarten children, the district created a schedule in which on Monday through Friday a child would attend live (virtual)

instruction for academic subjects for one and a half hour chunks throughout the school day. Additionally, on Tuesdays through Thursdays, children were required to attend virtual "specials" classes, which included art, physical education, and music classes. Children were held accountable for attending specials classes by having to complete corresponding assignments. Efforts to mandate children's attendance suggest the district was motivated to say they had indeed provided curriculum for every child and it was families' responsibilities to ensure children attended.

Interview data revealed that the school also privileged social mobility, despite intentions of democratic equality. Social mobility, according to participants' lived experiences, was also implicitly enacted. School principals had to enforce the accountability measures, such as attendance requirements, but were offered resources for assistance. Ms. Rhoads, Eastside's principal, describes how she navigated the challenges of ensuring her students attended virtual classes and also empathizing with families. Ms. Rhoads said:

> So there has been a lot of time figuring out how to navigate the best way, because I understand the stress and the pressure on parents. But we've been in this for almost a year. So, not to be judgmental, but if you haven't found a way to overcome your own limitations to do what's best for your child. At some point, that just has to be where the rubber hits the road.

Mrs. Rhoads described difficulties with wrestling with the notions of trying to empathize with caregivers and their challenges through the pandemic while also carrying out academic accountability. Mrs. Rhoads's experiences with this tension demonstrates how purposes of education occur in tandem and in competition with one another. This reinforced how the goals worked against one another.

Another instance of social mobility being reinforced by the school is that the testing was summative, rather than formative. The teachers remarked that there was little to no formative assessment during the school year. The district's "Return to Learn" plan stipulated that children would "be assessed on their understanding of prerequisite skills and grade-level proficiencies using formative assessments, screeners, or diagnostics," however, upon enactment the testing ended up being more summative. The test they implemented was a state-mandated test that they administered three times in the school year. Additionally, Mrs. Lilac described how getting "no direct feedback" from children concerned her. She said she felt as if she was assigning work and that even though it was submitted by children she was unable to get a grasp of how the child was progressing academically. She said in in-person learning she is able to get in the moment feedback from children to gauge their levels of understanding, but that she felt she was getting no information on how her children were doing.

Social mobility appeared to have been privileged by caregivers more than school staff. Collectively, the caregivers shared that all of the remote learning provided them the chance to gain insight into their children's learning. They were able to observe other children and it helped them think about their own children's progress. A few caregivers I interviewed expressed concern over their child potentially being "behind." Following up to one mother, I asked her how she came to that conclusion and Kayla said, "Well, I knew what other kids could do so like I knew that other kids could recognize all the letters and Jack could only recognize like x." She also said that her child attended intervention classes, due to being "behind."[LF4] Her concerns about the schooling disruptions from the pandemic had likely made him fall farther behind. Kayla even went on to say she hoped the school did not retain him in Kindergarten. I asked her if the school or teacher had communicated that as a possibility. She said they had not, yet she was

still very concerned about her son. While several caregivers shared concerns about their children being "behind," one mother worked hard to help her daughter advance. Holly hired a tutoring company for her daughter, a student in Ms. Daisy's class, to get ahead. Despite Ally, her daughter, having no academic concerns, Holly wanted Ally to work with a tutor, because she said, "Education is so important." Also, having watched Ally work at home and seeing her struggle to stay focused on her work all day, she thought her kindergarten daughter might have a "touch" of Attention Deficit Disorder. Holly felt the tutoring company would help with that as well. She was motivated to help her daughter advance, which is an example of the "individual status attainment" of social mobility (Labaree, 1997, p. 51). Holly even mentioned that she wanted to make sure her daughter graduated high school one day, thereby reinforcing the credentialism aspect of social mobility.

Another example of caregivers implicitly perpetuating their children's social mobility included their actions surrounding standardized testing. Due to varied schooling formats, at times, testing had to be completed at home. The classroom teachers held virtual sessions in which the children would complete an electronic test on the computer while also on camera. Caregivers were given instructions for how to administer the test and the teachers had them work on camera to monitor for test security. The kindergarten teachers described concerns over the accuracy of testing results, as they had seen caregivers giving their children too much support. Ms. Daisy and Ms. Tulip each described how their test score data was significantly higher than previous years. This, they suspected, was due to the children getting help with test questions. At one point Ms. Daisy described having to interrupt a child testing because the caregiver was prompting the child by holding up fingers for the numeric answers. When the mother described that she wanted to help her child learn how to solve the problems, Ms. Daisy replied that *after*

the test would be a good opportunity to teach the child. Ms. Daisy reiterated to the caregiver that the testing was so teachers could get an accurate picture of which skills the kindergarteners had mastered and which they needed assistance with developing. All three teachers mentioned that the testing data was likely not a reliable reflection of children's progress due to caregivers' interference.

Caregivers also described having difficulty suppressing the urge to assist their children during testing times. They found it difficult to withhold support during testing as they had previously spent so much time supporting and coaching their children's learning. Alexis, Jaden's caregiver, described, "That was very challenging, because it is really hard to sit there and test. Because I spend all the rest of my days explaining concepts right and teaching and correcting and things. And so you have to sit there and be like, 'Buddy, I can't help you.'" While the caregivers did describe the tension they experienced between supporting and adhering to testing rules, none of the participants shared that they had provided their children with answers. That observation came from the teachers I interviewed. These experiences are noteworthy in that they either speak to the desire of caregivers wanting to help their children climb the ladder of success or the caregivers wanted to alleviate the emotional stress the kindergartners felt in the moment of testing. Regardless, schools setting expectations for caregivers to provide clinical procedures, such as administering standardized tests, was inappropriate to say the least.

Discussion

Covid-19 presented an opportunity for schools and families to refocus young children's schooling based on reimagined purposes of education (Ashoka, 2020; Guhin, 2020), yet that did not happen. News outlets and school districts presented coverage that seemed like a post-Covid era could have been like making lemonade out of the lemons that were the disruptions of

schooling due to Covid (Ashoka, 2020; Guhin, 2020; *Reopening and Reinventing Schools in the Time of COVID-19, 2020).* The systemic inequities in our schools that Covid-19 highlighted could have been considered if schools had reframed their purposes to be more inclusive and foster equitable access for all children. The historically competing purposes of education could have been swept aside, but with shutdowns and scrambles to figure out schooling during a pandemic it appears that did not happen. Despite stated intentions to make schooling more democratic and child-centered, Riverside school district staff and families reified and amplified social mobility as their purpose. The schooling purposes enacted were standards and academic focused, with little attention to children and families' needs.

Textual artifacts from the school and district, such as home-school communication and the "Return to Learn" plan, revealed intentions for work towards democratic equality as well as child-centered learning, yet while implicitly pushed for social mobility. Their plans and communication were laden with discourse about involving families and children's voices and creating access for all children. In enactment, however, they perpetuated notions of social mobility by requiring standardized testing accountability and grade proficiency requirements for kindergarten children. Interview data revealed that the school staff and caregivers enacted competing purposes of education in varied ways. The principal and teachers shared their desire to incorporate democratic equality, yet adhered to norms of accountability and standardization. Therefore, pushing the social mobility goal. State and local accountability measures left school staff little choice otherwise.

Based on this study's findings, in the early childhood sense, kindergarten at Eastside Elementary was not based on democratic equality, nor did it have a child-centered focus. Democratic equality appeared only as intentions of actions, but based on participants' lived

experiences, children simply had to attend virtual classes and complete assignments to be considered proficient. Additionally, due to the focus on accountability through state mandated testing, the school reinforced social mobility by privileging sorting children based on proficiencies. There were few instances where child-centered schooling was revealed. These came mostly in the form of addressing children's and families' emotional well-being. Child-centered instruction, which focuses on the child's voice and choice, play or joyful learning, was not present in any textual artifacts nor lived experiences. In fact, it appeared to be more rote and quite the opposite. More research is needed to determine if the lack of child-centered focus was due to the teachers being incredibly overwhelmed or if it was intentionally planned.

Not only did schooling in this district during Covid reinforce more of the same competing purposes, it also amplified social mobility. Based on caregivers' lived experiences of seeing their children succeed or "fall behind" and gaining a window into classrooms heightened their awareness of what it would take to help their children succeed or not. With this new knowledge and insight, this could likely impact schooling even when it returns to "normal." Amplifying social mobility could reinforce social inequities that have long existed in our schooling, rather than reframing schooling purposes to be more democratic or child-centered.

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CHAPTER 4: From Bad Guy to Cheerleader: Caregiver-Child Relationships through Schooling in the time of Covid

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted schooling globally. Overnight, schools and caregivers adapted to new forms of schooling for their children. All aspects of schooling were impacted, including caregiver involvement in children's schooling. During Covid-19, schools and teachers provided direction and instruction for learning, but many caregivers had to carry much of the burden of at-home learning. For many, involvement in children's schooling shifted from being supplementary to ensuring children completed school assignments, attended virtual classes, and even completed tests (Lee et al., 2021; Santhanam, 2020). Many caregivers were unprepared to take on the roles and responsibilities in their children's schooling at home. Because schooling during the pandemic was facilitated in such an anomalous context, many questions remain about families' experiences with schooling at home.

Prior to Covid-19, decades of research and legislation have emphasized the importance of caregiver involvement in children's schooling. Research has consistently shown positive correlations between caregiver involvement and children's academic development (El Nokali et al., 2010; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Children's motivation and engagement is one way that caregiver involvement can impact children's academics. In a systematic review of literature, Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005) reported that caregiver involvement can impact a number of "motivational constructs" such as children's engagement and learning motivation, which in turn can improve children's academic achievement (p. 100).

The term caregiver involvement can be interpreted in different ways, yet the role of the caregiver remains at the forefront. A meta-analysis conducted by Henderson and Berla found that children benefited when caregivers provided a home environment that encouraged learning and

emphasized the importance of academic achievement and involvement in the schools. Similarly, in another more recent meta-analysis of early childhood and elementary aged children, Ma et al. (2016) found that the role of caregivers, including "behavioral involvement, home supervision, and home-school connection" had a correlation to children's learning outcomes (p. 771). When it comes to family-school partnerships, the role of caregivers has been shown to be more pertinent to children's learning outcomes than those of the school and communities (Ma et al., 2016). Ma et al. argued that caregivers' role are more pertinent to children's learning outcomes than the roles of the schools and communities in family involvement. Their findings suggest that when schools implement family involvement frameworks, they should prioritize the caregiver's role at the forefront of planning. Because of the vital role caregiver's play in children's learning, this study explored how caregivers talk about supporting their children's schooling at home during the pandemic.

Literature Review

Caregiver involvement in children's schooling has been studied extensively. The extant literature in educational research highlights positive outcomes for children when caregivers are engaged in their children's schooling. Research findings suggest that caregiver involvement increases children's engagement in schooling and promotes their academic success (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ma et al., 2016). Epstein (1987) describes caregiver involvement as sharing responsibility for children, especially in the early education years. Her research findings suggest that young children succeed when caregivers and schools share responsibilities for children's schooling. How those responsibilities are shared among stakeholders, however, varies greatly. The term *involvement* paints a broad brushed picture of a variety of approaches in which caregivers participate in their children's schooling, which oftentimes consists of performative

actions directed by schools. For example, Epstein's typologies of involvement have served as a framework for many caregiver involvement programs. The typologies include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating within the community (Epstein, 2010). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic one part of involvement, at-home involvement, or learning at home, moved to the forefront of caregiver involvement in children's schooling.

Research suggests that caregiver at-home involvement in schooling enhances both children's learning motivation and their academic skills (Pomerantz et al., 2007; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005). In a review of literature centered on caregiver involvement at home, Pomerantz et al. (2007) categorized the influence on children of caregiver involvement into two models: *skill development* and *motivational development*. A *skill development* model includes caregivers fostering children's cognitive skill development like reinforcing phonics concepts or number sense concepts. Skill development can also develop children's metacognitive skills such as critical thinking and revising. Caregivers might develop children's cognitive and metacognitive skills through review, homework practice, and drills. *Motivational development* is a model of involvement where caregivers develop children's motivation for schooling in intrinsic ways. Pomerantz and colleagues (2017) posit that when caregivers are involved, children learn the value of school. Additionally, through this involvement, children learn how to navigate the systems of school intrinsically, which, in turn, appears extrinsically in their academic achievement.

While many educational scholars would argue that caregiver involvement is important, findings have begun to problematize traditional notions of involvement, such as Epstein's typologies (2010), because they perpetuate hegemonic ideologies within education (Fennimore,

2017). Traditional ideals of caregiver involvement are based on teacher-dominated paradigms and do not foster balanced partnerships among caregivers and teachers (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Furthermore, scholars argue that traditional involvement approaches are founded on the ideals of White, middle-class populations and ignore potential strengths of non-dominant groups (Fennimore, 2017; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). These seemingly noncontroversial approaches, such as a "Family Science Night" or a school reading program, assume that all families are positioned on equal footing, yet this is not the case in reality. Children from non-dominant groups, such as those that are economically disadvantaged or from racially minoritized populations, enter schools that systemically perpetuate inequalities. Fennimore declares that the way schools and researchers position children from non-dominant groups as being "behind" privileged peers through a deficit lens is in direct contrast with suggesting that all families have equal access to home-school involvement. Therefore, Fennimore (2017) argues that traditional caregiver involvement frameworks further marginalize non-dominant families by silencing race and poverty (Fennimore, 2017).

Traditional caregiver involvement paradigms also posit that caregivers and schools each have their own roles to play in the process. Common notions of caregiver involvement involve the actions caregivers take up, typically dictated by the schools. Barton and colleagues suggest that this focus on "what" caregivers do should shift to thinking about "how" and "why" caregivers are involved (2004). They suggest that traditional involvement programs ignore caregivers' ideas and suggestions. Because of existing hypocrisies in caregiver involvement frameworks, scholars argue the need for reimagining parent involvement across diverse contexts (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019; Fennimore, 2017; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Rethinking caregiver involvement involves more inclusive approaches such as building on family and child

strengths, validating all families in partnership, valuing a variety of contexts of involvement, and building trust (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019; Fennimore, 2017; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Reimagining caregiver involvement would cultivate more balanced teacher-family partnerships and also provide opportunities for caregivers to become "authors and agents in schools" (Barton et al., 2004, p. 3). Due to the drastic changes in schooling in 2020 and 2021, Covid-19 presented schools an opportunity to reimagine ideals of caregiver involvement and include caregivers in new ways. Caregivers were placed in almost impossible situations to take on the role of their children's teachers.

Learning at Home: Before and During Covid

Enacting at-home caregiver involvement has shifted over the past year and a half due to Covid-19. Traditionally, caregiver involvement at home involved caregivers extending classroom learning such as through supporting children's homework, preparing them for a test, or reading with them (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Public discourse has centered on the importance of family-school partnerships in children's success, yet schools often struggled with how to enact partnering and do so in equitable ways. Common tropes among educational scholars included the sentiment "caregivers are children's first teachers," yet views on what lessons they learn and how they are taught within homes have been narrow (Fennimore, 2017). Caregivers are revered as children's teachers, yet are limited in their autonomy through narrow ways they "should" work with their children. These oughts and shoulds highlight the unidirectionality schools emphasize through their caregiver involvement (Freeman, 2010) Caregivers are expected to ensure children complete the school's specific assignments and meet their specific benchmarks. Covid-19 changed everything. As schools shut down overnight in the spring of 2020 and continued into the next school year to include a large amount of virtual learning due to surges in

infection rates, caregivers had to shoulder much of the responsibility for children's schooling. Caregivers who never dreamt of being teachers had to transform into pseudo homeschool teachers, ensuring their children attended live virtual sessions as well as completed remote assignments (Lee et al., 2021; Santhanam, 2020). While the amount of at-home involvement drastically increased for caregivers, questions remain as to how the schools' expectations of children impacted the ways in which caregivers supported children's schooling in the home.

Previous research highlights that the ways in which caregivers enact involvement with their children contribute to their success or lack thereof. Pomerantz et al. (2007) posit four qualities of how caregivers support children's learning in the home: "autonomy support vs. control, process vs. person focus, positive vs. negative affect, and positive vs. negative beliefs about children's potential" (p. 381). Below I briefly describe each quality and how it relates to caregiver involvement.

When caregivers provide *autonomy support* when involved with their children's schooling, they serve as guides and resource providers, yet let the child lead the way through problem solving. An example might be providing children a task to solve but allowing them to choose how to solve it. Enacting autonomy support provides children the opportunity to flex their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, thus developing both their skills and motivation. In contrast, enacting *control* is exemplified when caregivers push children towards a specified outcome. For example, a caregiver might provide a child a math problem and then dictate a particular strategy or algorithm, without giving any leniency on the child's choice of strategy. Research findings have shown that children have more positive perceptions of their academic progress when they are part of an autonomy supportive climate of caregiver involvement at home (Pomerantz, 2007). While it appears that autonomy support is preferable to

control, questions remain as to if, at all, caregivers were afforded the opportunity to provide autonomy support.

Research suggests that when caregivers focus on the *process* of learning over the child's *personal* attributes, children trend towards mastery learning and are more inclined to tackle challenging tasks (Pomerantz, 2007). Focusing on the process involves caregivers praising the process of learning and the effort a child might have put forth. In contrast, a person focused example would be when a caregiver praises the achievement or performance by a child.

Caregiver involvement in schooling is part of parenting, which previous research has stressed is "an inherently affective endeavor" (Pomerantz et al., 2007). *Positive affect* in caregiver involvement might include warm, empathetic exchanges between the caregiver and child, while a caregiver's *negative affect* might come across as hostile or irritated. Pomerantz et al. (2007) suggest that a positive affect might positively impact their motivation for learning, while a caregiver's negative affect might inhibit a child's desire to engage in learning or school activities. Similarly, a caregiver's *positive* or *negative beliefs* about their child's academic potential have the potential to impact caregiver involvement. Loughlin-Presnal and Bierman's (2017) study found that caregivers' academic expectations can shape learning behaviors of early childhood aged children. Caregiver beliefs also translate into how they perceive their children's abilities to progress academically. Fixed minded caregivers view intelligence as a construct that is static and unmovable, while growth minded caregivers perceive their children's intelligence as having the potential to grow and change (Dweck, 1999). Muenks and colleagues found that caregivers that have growth mindedness, rather than fixed mindedness, regarding their children's academic potential are more likely to engage in at-home learning centered on process-oriented work.

Conceptual Understanding

The purpose of this study was to dig deeper into caregivers' at-home involvement within the context of schooling format shifts as a result of the pandemic. In order to explore the ways in which caregivers talk about their experiences supporting their children's schooling during Covid-19, this study employs a discursive positioning theoretical framework. Positioning theory (Frigerio et al., 2013; Langenhove, L. V., & Harré, 1994) posits that individuals conceptualize their identities in socially constructed ways. Their positions, or identities, are relational to the varied contexts conducted through discursive practices. Humans possess innumerable forms of identities and this theory suggests that the position in which an individual places oneself is changeable. Thus, in one instance an individual may position themselves highlighting one of their identities in a particular instance, yet when might reveal a separate identity in a differing context. An example including caregivers might be how a caregiver's position adjusts based on the context. If they speak to a peer, such as another caregiver, they might take up the position of the authority of their own child. In contrast, the same caregiver might feel insubordinate or inferior at a parent-teacher conference where they may perceive the teacher as the authority of academic knowledge. Langenhove and Harre (1994) state that each position that is taken up has reciprocity to another position based on an individual's role in a particular context. They argue that through discourse individuals both position themselves and others as well as "present versions of the material and social world by means of rhetorical reconstructions" (1994, p. 362-363). Research findings suggest that the intersectionality of schools and home provide a context in which caregivers from different social contexts conceptualize varied positions within themselves (Freeman, 2010). Through discourse, caregivers and teachers together socially construct a storyline of experiences which delineates their own positions and those of each other.

Freeman found that working class mothers' intentional positioning, in which they "refused to allow themselves to be viewed as lower class" by school personnel, drove opportunities to generate a new understanding of their involvement within schools (2010, p. 181). We can learn by exploring how caregivers asserted themselves into specific positions and also had positions thrust upon them during this period of remote learning. Thus, this study sought to explore the following research question*:* How have caregivers' relationships with their young children been impacted by the experience of at-home learning?

Methodology

I used narrative inquiry to frame this study because I wanted to explore how caregivers describe their experiences with supporting their children's at-home schooling. I was most interested in participants' understandings of their own experiences of their relationships with their children. According to Huber and colleagues (2013), humans learn and understand one another through shared stories. According to Kim (2016), using a narrative inquiry approach allows researchers to use "stories to understand the meaning of human actions and experiences, the changes and challenges of life events, and the differences and complexity of people's actions (Kim, 2016, p. 11). Narrative inquiry is a long-established methodology in educational research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Huber et al., 2013) and has been particularly useful in uncovering participants' affective experiences, such as preservice teachers in rural schools (Hudson & Hudson, 2008), beginning teachers who leave the profession (Harfitt, 2015) and young children and their families' engagement with music (Barrett, 2009). Narrative inquiry framed this study well by privileging caregivers' storied accounts of at-home schooling during the pandemic.

During data generation, as I witnessed caregivers' stories, I began to contemplate how their narratives might be situated in the larger, very public, discourse centered on schools and

families. This led me to dig deeper into research methodologies around storied accounts. I discovered critical narrative analysis (CNA), which is an approach for analyzing stories and discourses, and I thought it would address my desire to situate caregivers' stories into the larger discourse that exists. CNA is an analytic approach that blends narrative analysis, which looks at people making sense of their worlds through stories with critical discourse analysis, which explores notions of institutional power through discourse (Souto-Manning, 2014). CNA posits that via micro-level narratives, human beings comprehend their worlds and how they are situated within larger macro-level institutional discourses (2014). Epistemologically, my work was grounded in the belief that the participants' own words and stories were foremost in understanding supporting children's at-home schooling. I did not make assumptions about their beliefs or experiences but focused on their words. With this commitment, I explored how teachers and caregivers' words helped them make sense of their worlds within larger institutional discourse of family-school relationships. I guided my data generation and analysis within the concept of CNA, which allowed me to learn how the teachers and caregivers' narratives have been "constructed and situated in social and institutional realms" (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 163). I analyzed the narratives next to the backdrop of larger normalized, institutional school-dominated parent involvement paradigms that likely contribute to continued inequities among families and children. Using CNA as a methodological lens helped me gain an understanding of how caregivers describe supporting their children's at-home schooling.

Context

The data presented within this report is from a qualitative interview study conducted in a rural kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school situated in a small town in the Midwestern USA. The student population was predominantly (84%) White and all of the

kindergarten teachers were White. The poverty rate of the surrounding community exceeds that of the national average in rural areas. Eastside Elementary School is a Title-One school, located in a small, economically diverse area. The elementary school documented approximately half of the children as eligible for free or reduced lunch. Thus, exploring caregivers' experiences with schooling within the Eastside community provided insight into how schools with large economically disadvantaged student populations supported children's at-home schooling during the pandemic. Historically, children from economically disadvantaged school communities are underserved. The families represented in this study, however, were from middle class backgrounds. They were referred by the classroom teachers. It is possible that caregivers from more needy families were unable to participate due to being overwhelmed. Studying within the Eastside context presented the opportunity to understand ways in which caregivers support children's at-home schooling.

At the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, Eastside closed its doors and transitioned to remote learning for the remainder of the academic year. During the summer, families were given an option to choose between a face-to-face option or a virtual academy. The face-to-face option had the academic year begin virtually for a month and then children transitioned in October, 2020. Due to a surge in infections, Eastside's district transitioned back to virtual learning for everyone in November, 2020 until mid-January, 2021. The remainder of the school year for Eastside children was in a face-to-face format. Children who enrolled in the district's virtual academy spent the entire year with remote learning, which included a mixture of live teaching sessions and asynchronous activities. Teachers assigned to the virtual academy had previously worked in one of the district's three elementary schools.

Participants in Context

This study is part of a larger research project that examined school and family partnerships in which I interviewed the building principal, all of the kindergarten teachers and several caregivers from each classroom and collected textual samples of home-school communications. For the current study, I purposefully selected caregivers from three kindergarten teachers' classrooms because of how they consistently referred to their relationship with their children throughout our interviews. This is a small sample of families that experienced widespread trauma and at-home schooling as a result of Covid-19. The stories from the included participants are not generalizable nor representative of all families, even of those at Eastside Elementary. Below I provide a brief introduction of each caregiver and their children:

Alexis, Jamal and Jaden

Alexis was a White married stay at home mother of five children. She had two biological daughters, aged eight and ten, and three Black foster sons, each biological brothers, that had impending adoptions, ages 7, 6, and 3. Alexis's husband worked outside the home full time and she carried the weight of the at-home learning and children's responsibilities. Alexis and her husband had had the three boys in their home, as foster children, for three years, and were in the midst of the adoption process. The boys' biological mother came by weekly for supervised visitations, and was supportive of the adoption.

For data generation, I focused on Jamal and Jaden as they were both in kindergarten during the pandemic. Alexis's two daughters and preschool aged foster son are not included in this data collection, except on the periphery as they were not enrolled in Eastside Elementary, which was the context of the study. Alexis had always homeschooled her daughters, but the school-aged foster brothers were enrolled in public school. The family had chosen public school

for Jamal and Jaden as part of legal foster requirements. Additionally, public schools offered both boys mental and emotional therapies. Jamal was a kindergartener in Ms. Daisy's class during the spring of 2020 when the pandemic began. At the initial school shut down due to Covid-19, Jamal had been in Ms. Daisy's kindergarten class. Alexis said that Jamal transitioned easily to remote learning, due mostly to Ms. Daisy's support. Because of their experience, Alexis decided to enroll Jamal and Jaden in the virtual academy for the following school year. Much to Alexis's delight, Jaden was placed in Ms. Daisy's split young 5/kindergarten class. Jamal was placed in a first grade class taught by a teacher that was from a different school than their home school. Data findings describe Alexis' experiences in working with Jamal's first grade teacher, Ms. Rose, who was not a participant in this study. The storied accounts I gathered from Alexis' interview data are her lived experience and had I interviewed Ms. Rose I may have gathered a different story.

Holly and Abigail

Holly was a White married mother of a kindergarten daughter named Abigail and a high school aged son. Holly's husband worked full time, but due to a more flexible schedule took over much of Abigail's schooling responsibilities. After a few weeks, much to Holly's dismay, she discovered that her husband had failed to have Abigail complete and submit assignments consistently. Holly was mortified by this and declared to her husband she would be "in charge" from then on. Holly had recently stopped working as a corporate operations manager and entered a graduate business degree program. Abigail was a student in Ms. Daisy's virtual academy class. Holly enrolled Abigail in virtual academy to minimize exposure since they interacted with Ally's grandparents frequently. Once Holly took over Abigail's schooling, Abigail was caught up on assignments.

Kayla and Jack

Kayla was a white married mother of two brothers, aged five and eight. Jack, her five year old, was in Ms. Tulip's virtual class. Kayla worked as an administrative assistant in a medical imaging office and her husband was a truck driver. His job required a lot of travel, so Kayla, at times, had to rely on her retired parents to help with her children's remote learning. She had some flexibility in her work schedule, so she stayed at home one to two days a week to help the children with school.

Data Generation

Due to Covid-19 health restrictions, all of my data was generated electronically or virtually. After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and gaining permission from school district administrators, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the caregivers highlighted in this report through Zoom.

An interview method enabled me to explore caregivers' experiences of supporting their children's schooling among all the transitions to and from remote schooling. I used a semi-structured interview protocol for the first round of interviews with Ms. Daisy and the caregivers. I facilitated each interview using a protocol with open-ended questions designed to answer the research questions. After obtaining participants' informed consent, I video recorded their interviews.. After each interview, I wrote an analytic memo where I documented observations I had made during our interviews (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Glesne, 2006). Additionally, I transcribed each interview recording and uploaded all data, including textual samples, into a qualitative data analysis program. I decided to reinterview the participants featured in this article after I initially coded data to ask follow-up questions. I describe the need for conducting additional interviews in the data analysis section.

Data Analysis

First, I open coded each interview identifying themes in each participant's responses. Open coding presented me the opportunity to determine any "analytic leads" within the transcriptions and texts (Saldana, 2016, p. 115). For example, I noted when one of the participants remarked that she became the "bad guy" and another said she became an "enforcer." Looking across these role shifts made me begin coding for instances when the data presented changes in the caregiver-child interactions. Next, I reviewed each participant's story and open codes and attempted to situate their micro level narratives within larger, broad institutional discourse. Both participants frequently discussed family dynamics and relationships with their kindergartners., After open coding, I used the at-home caregiver involvement types drawn from Pomerantz and colleagues (2007) as priori codes to code how the caregivers and Ms. Daisy talked about interacting with the children to support their at-home schooling. I reviewed each open code referring to family dynamics or parent-child relationship and coded them based on parent involvement types. Organizing the parent-child relationship codes among this framework allowed me to identify patterns within participants' stories about supporting their child's schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, in taking a critical stance on systemic injustices riddled throughout research on caregiver involvement in schools, I attempted to keep in mind instances of racial or economic inequities among families and schools.

After completing open coding and a priori coding on the interview transcriptions and textual samples, I was left wanting more details. I sought a second round of interviews from participants and incentivized their additional participation with electronic gift cards. I drafted an interview protocol for each interview based on our previous discussion. For example, in Alexis's first interview she had shared that they made the difficult decision to transition the boys back to

face-to-face learning and that they were working towards adopting the foster brothers this summer. From our previous conversation, I was able to tailor my interview questions towards Alexis's family specifically and ask questions such as, "How have the boys adjusted to transitioning to face to face?" and "How has the transitions impacted your family dynamics?" The second round of interviews proved to be even more fruitful and I felt able to understand the caregivers' experiences more clearly. Additionally, due to our previously established rapport, it was easier to dig deeper in a second interview session.

Findings

The findings from this study highlight the complex nature of at-home parent involvement, specifically between caregivers and their children. The mothers in this study bravely shared the deeply personal experiences of supporting their children's schooling at home and how that impacted their relationship with their young children. Their accounts of supporting their children's schooling revealed how conceptions of their roles and their affect varied regularly. Their fluctuating roles and the complex range of emotions the mothers experienced prompted them to cope by making decisions and prioritizations they had not previously considered.

The caregivers' ideas of providing at-home schooling support for their young children differed upon enactment of that support. Alexis, Kayla, and Holly each described how their previously conceived notions of supporting their children were different from what they had envisioned at-home learning could be like before the pandemic. Each mother's stories were unique yet each mother shared stories featuring how their shifting roles developed and how their acceptance or coming to terms with the changes occurred. In the section below, I relay how the

mothers talked about their shifting roles and affect while supporting their children's schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Alexis, Jamal, and Jaden

Alexis enrolled Jamal and Jaden, her foster sons, in the district's virtual academy due to the positive experiences Jamal had been in Ms. Daisy's class when Eastside shut down at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ms. Daisy had approached those three months at the close of the school year as a sort of "triage" time period and had been very flexible and supportive of families. Alexis reported that the flexibility and lack of structure virtual schooling offered worked well for her family. So, with those experiences in mind, Alexis felt that the virtual academy would work nicely for Jamal and Jaden for the next school year. Alexis shared that she approached the school year thinking, "Originally, I believed that virtual school was going to be great because it was going to be something where I could individualize it and it would offer the boys, much more of the autonomy." She shared how she initially believed she would have been able to create fun learning experiences and felt ready to do so, considering her background as a homeschool teacher for her biological children.

With more time for Eastside teachers to prepare for remote learning, the new school year brought a lot more perceived rigor and structure than the previous year, which did not work as smoothly for Jamal and Jaden. Alexis said the intricacies of having to teach the brothers how to handle a laptop and log into various programs and meetings were challenging, and those new skills had to be developed *before* the boys could even begin the work. Alexis described having to provide a lot of hands-on support for both boys. She said, "They could navigate within a web page, but they definitely could not click and open a new tab, and, you know, um, you know, neither one of them were proficient readers." In addition, each brother was required to attend

synchronous meetings with their class each day as well as complete assigned worksheets the caregivers had to submit.

Jaden was assigned to Ms. Daisy's kindergarten class. With his older brother, Jamal, having been in her class and having the familiarity of the teacher, the transition was smooth for Jaden. Although Alexis described the increased rigor of virtual school in the fall, 2020, she reported that Ms. Daisy was very supportive and accommodating to any particular needs of Jaden or their family. She said, "She (Ms. Daisy) went above and beyond to make sure everybody understood how things were going to work." Alexis described herself as Jaden's "learning coach" and that Ms. Daisy was very hands-on in supporting Alexis in supporting Jaden's at-home schooling. She reported that Ms. Daisy empowered caregivers to take charge and make decisions for each individual child. Alexis said, "She gave us the power to be in charge of that you know if we felt something was inappropriate we didn't have to do it if it was too much." An example of Ms. Daisy's support came to fruition when Jaden became overwhelmed from his workload. Alexis described how the district required special class assignments, for classes such as P.E. and art, but adding those to the academic work was too much for Jaden. She said that Ms. Daisy took time out of her busy schedule to add in special class times that would allow the children to complete the assignments. Alexis said, "She actually offered to do additional zoom three times a week to get the specials and in with our kids." Alexis appreciated how Ms. Daisy helped shoulder some of that responsibility. Ms. Daisy's actions affirmed her supportive nature to both the children and families in her virtual classroom.

Jamal, much to Alexis's disappointment, had a very different experience entering virtual school in fall 2020. He entered the school year as a student in Ms. Rose's class. Ms. Rose had been assigned to teach first grade in the district's virtual academy. Jamal's teacher was not

staffed at Eastside Elementary, but from a neighboring school in the district and was not a participant in this study. Alexis described Jamal as having a drastically different experience than the previous one with Ms. Daisy. She said, "I feel like my first grader had nothing like that (Jaden's experience with Ms. Daisy). Much less interaction. Much less personalization." While Ms. Daisy made a point to build relationships with each child and their families, Ms. Rose did not. Alexis was disturbed by Ms. Rose's "curt" demeanor, as it was unlike any teachers she had previously worked with. She said, "That's just not my experience with teachers. Usually teachers want to be more involved."

As Jamal's caregiver, Alexis felt defeated and dejected as a result of her interactions with Ms. Rose. As Jamal's caregiver, she found Ms. Rose's style to be unsupportive and demoralizing. An example of her lack of support unfolded when Jamal missed a live zoom session. As part of the virtual academy, the school district required children to attend live virtual sessions. On some days, Jamal was required to attend up to five live teaching sessions via Zoom. Trying to ensure Jamal attended each session was difficult at times, despite Alexis's meticulous organization. Alexis created color coded spreadsheets of schedules in order to ensure her four school aged children met all of their academic goals, including school and therapies. On occasion, however, Jamal missed a live session. When a child missed a zoom session, the district required the teacher to follow up with the caregiver. Alexis recalled a time when Ms. Rose emailed a condescending follow up email. Alexis said, "I received one email that wanted to remind me of the importance of education. And. Okay. Um, and this is first grade and I value that and I do, but we missed one zoom out of that day. I do value education, it was, it was a mistake. We all make them, you know, and so it was just like, and then her follow up email...it was just a bit insulting." This example was in stark contrast to how Ms. Daisy followed up when

a mistake occurred. In those instances, Alexis reported that Ms. Daisy emailed to check in and see how Jaden was doing. The two drastically different types of support and connections with the two teachers amplified the pressure and stress Alexis felt as her boys' learning coach.

Alexis felt tremendous pressure, due in part to Ms. Rose's lack of support, to ensure Jamal attended every virtual session and completed every assignment. In addition, despite Ms. Daisy's caring nature, Alexis felt similar pressure and burden when also supporting Jaden. She reported that working as the boys' learning coach was overwhelming and at times the assigned tasks were more than the family could handle. Whereas before Covid-19, she felt only accountable to herself as her children's caregiver and learning coach, Alexis felt added accountability to the teachers. Alexis described reteaching or reviewing concepts that the live teaching sessions had covered in each boy's class to ensure they had learned what they were supposed to. She said, after that, the boys would have worksheets or other assignments to complete for submission. Alexis recalled a time when Jaden, already exhausted from being in front of a screen all morning, had to complete forty math equations. Alexis said, "The amount of time spent on the computer before we ever even get to paper and pencil worksheets is just a lot some days." She described the challenges involved with motivating the boys to complete those assignments and how sometimes they had to stop work for the day and then complete the assignments in the evenings or weekends. There were times when Alexis felt troubled by the boys' heavy workloads, yet felt she had to push them to complete tasks, even though she did not always see value in the work.

To a certain extent, Alexis felt that her role in the caregiver-child relationship had shifted from being a mom to that of an enforcer, or "bad guy." Prior to the pandemic, Alexis's role had consisted of supplementing her foster children's learning by reading books to them and playing

learning games. Once the pressure of workload set in, Alexis believed her boys began to perceive her as the “bad guy” in the home because she ensured the boys completed all assignments. This devastated her. Alexis had to facilitate Jaden taking an online standardized test. She described the extreme difficulty in transferring from a support role to having Jaden complete the test with no help. She said, “And so we take that and then all of a sudden I'm practicing this test, and I can't help. And it's almost like I worked so hard to have this trust and then I'm just gonna leave him there to die. You know, and I think part of that is because he has some dysregulation issues. And so then he gets very upset and becomes my fault.” Alexis found it very difficult to navigate the role of test administrator and switch off her role of learning coach. Another example of being an enforcer was when she had to push the boys to sit in front of the screen, even when she felt they had enough. Alexis said, “It is hard to sit there and see that your child is desperately struggling, and he is on his fourth zoom. And he is burned out. And you're like he's not getting anything from it anyway. But we have to take attendance.”

Alexis’s conception of her previous role as caregiver was also challenged by remote learning. Alexis described how the lines between home and school and those between her shifting roles were blurred. All of this played out right on her kitchen table. One day, Alexis tried to distinguish between home and school activities by setting up a family lunch period. She said, “I said okay we're going to stop and we're going to take a lunch from, you know, 12 to 1230 and we're going to clear the table. And, try and separate school from, like, the meal. And it doesn't work well when you do school from your table. All of a sudden, I ended up with a 12:20 zoom chat and there goes lunch. Yeah, so it's kind of like, I think my kids have seen it as mom's wishy-washy on things. You know, because I'll have this idea (to balance home and school) and then I will have to bend, but it's hard for your kids to see you like a double standard.” Alexis admitted it

would have been nice to have some sort of "parent veto power," yet she felt pressure to accomplish all assigned tasks, thus she felt she did not feel as if she was on solid ground in terms of her role in supporting Jamal and Jaden in their at-home schooling.

Alexis sought guidance from Ms. Daisy and Ms. Rose several times throughout the school year in hopes to alleviate some of the pressure she and the boys felt. Each boy had moments throughout the year where they resisted participation or struggled to make it through the assignments. While Alexis tried to help them persevere through many occasions, there were times where she reached her limit and sought help from the teachers. The responses she received from each teacher were drastically different. Alexis felt comfortable reaching out to Ms. Daisy when Jaden experienced difficulties or the workload was too much. Ms. Daisy listened to Alexis's concerns and responded with a lot of grace. Alexis recalled a time when Jaden refused to participate in live sessions. He would neither respond nor interact with the class or teacher. When Alexis reached out to Ms. Daisy, she gave Jaden the option just to listen and only participate when he wanted to. She let Alexis know that only observing was ok for him to do, thus alleviating some of the pressure Alexis felt as a mother and his learning coach. Alexis said, "That is very helpful, because you know obviously when we're on a live zoom with all these other kids I don't want to be sitting there like coaxing my child along." Jamal experienced similar issues, in terms of resistance and refusals. Ms. Rose's responses troubled Alexis when she reached out for support. Alexis recalled one experience as:

> I had said (in email), 'Look, we are struggling. How can I modify this so that we're still meeting the requirements? We can't get enough done today.' I did virtual school seven days a week for several months before I finally asked her

how, you know, like how do I make this stuff right. And her response was not helpful. She basically said you know that she would have gotten it all done.

Alexis then commented that the email made her feel like she did not value education for her children. The email lacked the empathy and compassion that Alexis needed. Alexis added:

> It's like okay well if he was in your (Ms. Rose) classroom and he was not getting it done, what would you do? You know, there are different things. I mean it could be as simple as saying okay we're going to do half of each worksheet, you know. And again, it's like it's first grade. Why are we going to push so hard? And I do value education. I read the email. I value it. Um, but I also feel you can't push kids that hard.

After a tremendous amount of reflection and soul searching, Alexis and her husband decided to transition Jamal and Jaden back to Eastside Elementary for face-to-face instruction for the remainder of the school year. The boys and Alexis were both struggling with virtual schooling and the lack of support from Jamal's teacher was the family's last straw. Alexis felt despondent and like her relationship with Jamal was diminishing. This was especially disconcerting, as the family had plans to proceed with adopting Jamal, Jaden, and their toddler brother James the following summer. Alexis worried that the pressure she felt as a caregiver and Jamal's learning coach was interfering with her relationship with him. When reflecting on the decision to transition Jamal to in person schooling, Alexis said:

> And so, and I know that he's going to have a good year. But it's hard to admit like, 'buddy I can't.' I don't want to say I can't handle your teacher anymore. But it's almost like I can't let her ruin our family. I know that that's not her intention at all, but she has never met him. He has never met her. She has no idea about

> him and I feel like if she knew him in person things would be different, because she would recognize that he really is genuinely struggling a lot. We are all going to have those days, but I gave her substantial information, and she basically told me, 'Tough.'

Alexis felt that staying virtual would continue to damage Jamal's spirit and that their relationship would be forever changed. She said she felt that it sounded ridiculous, but that by making the change she thought they could "salvage" Jamal's school year and repair their family dynamic.

Almost two months later, I checked in with Alexis to see how the transition went for her family. She expressed that overall, she felt great about the decision and that both brothers were thriving. Alexis said the communication between herself and the new teacher was great. She described some initial challenges for the boys in their transition, such as wearing a mask all the time, but Alexis said she thought those were to be expected. When talking about the move to in person learning, Alexis said, "You know now everything is not my fault." She felt that the move improved her relationship with Jamal in some surprising ways. Alexis reflected:

> There's just been a lot of little things that have been reinforced. You know, what we do at home has been reinforced by what's expected at school. And, so, I think Jamal especially is realizing that not everything is ridiculous at home. You know, that it's okay that I have these rules, because other people have them. And, you know, he's made comments that other people's moms make them wear pants, and not shorts in the winter. I don't know. It's been different because it's not what I expected. You know, for him to pick up on. Yeah, it's definitely helped our relationship in the fact that I'm not enemy number one, all the time.

Alexis attributed some of their previous relationship issues to him not having a rapport with Ms. Rose. She said that because Ms. Rose did nothing to connect to Jamal on a personal level, he connected his struggles with his mom. Therefore, Jamal's move to in person learning helped him establish a positive relationship with his new teacher and also reinforced his expectations of schooling. Jamal even commented to Alexis, "Mom, did you know we're not allowed to lie at school either?" She felt that building relationships in school strengthened her relationship with Jamal at home.

Holly and Abigail

In the fall of 2020, Holly enrolled Abigail, a kindergarten girl, into the district's virtual academy. Holly felt that keeping Abigail at home for school would allow their family to safely see Ally's grandparents by minimizing Abigail's exposure to the virus. Additionally, Holly mentioned that the flexibility virtual schooling offered enticed her. She made a couple of long trips with Abigail and considered how nice it was that Abigail could "do school" from Florida and northern Michigan.

When we began our interview, Holly talked frequently about Abigail's opportunities to socialize, or lack thereof. At first, I asked Holly to describe herself and Abigail, and to share something that made her smile. She dove right into describing Abigail as a very social child and said being in virtual school had been extremely challenging for her. She described Abigail as having difficulty adhering to traditional social boundaries that children typically learn in a typical, in-person school setting. Abigail had a brother, but he was much older so often it felt like Abigail was an only child and grandchild. Holly had been hoping that once Abigail got to kindergarten, she would learn how to operate socially among her peers. She mentioned that Abigail had difficulty taking turns and did not understand the concept of filtering her language.

For example, Holly was mortified when she observed Abigail tell another child they did not know how to sing well. She said, “And she didn't (sing well), but she (Abigail) wasn't saying it to be mean. She just said it like that doesn't sound good. And, you have to like ‘that's not nice. How would that make you feel?’ Those experiences, teach you, you know like, don't do that again.” Holly felt burdened by the idea of taking on the challenges of helping Abigail socially. She felt that virtual schooling did not provide Abigail opportunities to develop those social skills, thus she had to continually address them at home.

Like Jamal and Jaden, Abigail was resistant to completing assignments or attending virtual sessions at times. There were times when Abigail wanted to play or go outside, rather than do her assignments, typical of many children at that age. Holly recalled saying at times, “No, you can't play with your dolls and your toys. You can't go outside. You have to like cut these little letters out and paste them.” Holly described her reactions to Abigail’s refusals as varied. Sometimes she was calm and would try to reason with Abigail. For example, Holly recalled, “I think she gets frustrated and chooses to cry a lot. (She would say) ‘Mom, I hate school! Like, I don't want to do it. I hate these zooms! (They) are boring!’ I'm like, ‘Abigail, listen. You should be blessed and highly favored that your life is so fun that this is boring, but I can make your life boring so this is fun like we can do that.” At other times, Holly became frustrated at Abigail’s resistance to complete her schoolwork. Holly described a specific instance where Abigail was supposed to be working one on one with Ms. Daisy, but was refusing to participate. Holly said, “She (Abigail) was tired. She was not having it. Wouldn't even pay attention. Wouldn’t even sit up. It was horrible. I was so embarrassed. And this is Bonkers!” Holly’s approach to supporting Abigail’s schooling vacillated from being Abigail’s cheerleader to becoming the enforcer. While Holly and Abigail experienced a lot of frustration at times,

Holly described Ms. Daisy as having the "patience of a god." Holly shared that over time she learned to give Abigail breaks and that helped lower the frustration.

When I asked her about how at-home schooling has impacted her relationship with Abigail, Holly shared that she turned to a tutoring company to alleviate some of the pressure she was feeling that was bleeding over into being frustrated with Abigail. Holly described a moment where she became very frustrated and felt she needed added support. She said:

> I was just like, you know, I'm not going to stress out about it because I was getting mad. (When helping Abigail) I'm like just write the word. Just put your pencil on paper. And she's gonna go ahead and roll around. Like, oh my god. This is like taking five years. But I didn't want to make education not fun, because it's so important. They (the tutoring company) are well trained to be more interactive and more one on one.

Holly shared that the tutoring company helped ensure Abigail completed her assignments and was progressing academically. She said, "I'm not a kindergarten teacher." Holly was grateful to have the financial means to hire the for-profit tutoring company. This alleviated some of the pressure she was feeling and she claimed it helped improve her relationship with Abigail. Additionally, she said she learned to implement break times and to walk away when she got very frustrated. She said she had difficulty empathizing with Abigail when she refused to do work, because as a child herself, Holly had been very compliant. Holly, even at one point, began to wonder if Abigail had "a touch of attention deficit" because she had difficulty sitting still. Despite Abigail being "way ahead of where she needs to be," Holly enrolled Abigail in the tutoring company as a way to ensure Abigail completed assignments as well as to mitigate turbulence in their relationship.

Kayla and Jack

Kayla's two sons, Jack and his second grade brother, enrolled in Eastside Elementary's face-to-face program in fall, 2020. There were two time periods during the school year in which all face-to-face students had to roll back to virtual learning. When describing those time periods, Kayla said, "It was the most stressful time I think I've ever been through." Her employer allowed her to work remotely on Wednesdays, but the other four weekdays she had to rely on her aging parents for the boys' remote schooling. She described, "I wake them up super early like six in the morning, get them ready pretty much as fast as possible. Go to my parents' house. Drop them off there...Then I leave work, go pick them up, bring them home, typical day it's actually kind of like a lot." She shared that her father, Jack's grandfather, became very frustrated with the online learning, so he was only able to manage getting the boys logged into their zoom meetings. Her mother helped as well, but the bulk of the asynchronous assignments were Kayla's responsibility to complete outside of the boys' school days. She used Wednesdays and the weekends to play catch up, which is when she would submit work that the boys were not able to complete at their grandparents' home. Kayla described how Ms. Tulip was very flexible and understanding of the family's schedule.

Kayla shared both ups and downs she experienced supporting Jack's learning, but overall our conversations centered on the challenges within their family. Kayla reported that working to support Jack's learning was very frustrating at times, for both Kayla and Jack. One source of her frustration was that Jack would resist completing assignments and staying engaged in virtual classes. Kayla shared, "He would get up and go to the bathroom whenever he wanted. He would get up and go get snacks, all the time when it was not break time. It was a fight. So it was a fight to keep him in the seat on the computer, you know, paying attention." She felt like she spent

much of her time enforcing the rules and schoolwork. She attributed some of Jack's resistance to kids' propensity to not listen at home as well as they do at school. She said, "I feel like everybody knows that kids, they know they can get away with not listening, they know they can get away with things. And it's a comfort zone." Kayla felt that schooling at home led Jack to be less motivated to listen and cooperate.

Kayla's frustration could have been due in part because she was troubled that she thought he was "behind" academically. Throughout our interview, she shared concerns for Jack and how he was not "where he needed to be" for school. She mentioned how his year of preschool had been interrupted due to Covid. Additionally, she described Jack as a child who did not want to sit and learn, thus impeding his learning for his kindergarten school year. She said, "He's a kid. Oh yeah, he just didn't care. Yeah, you know, he just, it just wasn't him. So, I knew going into kindergarten that he was already behind and virtual made it worse." Kayla developed the notion that Jack entered school behind and that he was not able to catch up. When I asked her if the school had expressed concerns over Jack's academic progress, she said she had come to the understanding herself. Kayla said, "That was more of my feeling just in talking with other moms. I knew what their kids could do, so like I knew their kids could recognize all the letters and Jack could only recognize like x. So, I just knew that he was, unfortunately, one of those kids in preschool that didn't care to learn. Didn't want to learn." While at times during our interview Kayla discussed pushing Jack, when talking about academic progress she almost seem to resign to him being "behind" academically. She described herself as "a pushover" and oftentimes would let Jack slide as she was the only caregiver in the home because her husband's job as a truck driver kept him away most of the time. At times, dropping some of Jack's tasks alleviated some

pressure Kayla felt. She added, “I would assume a lot of parents are probably having the same frustrations. Yeah, just, you know, I feel like it's almost like a survive and advance every day.”

Kayla’s concern about Jack’s academic progress prompted her to prioritize tasks and even which of her children she worked with in the home. She stopped having Jack log into specials classes, such as art and gym, because they were not his core academic subjects. Kayla recalled, “I had a hard enough time getting the regular school worked on, like, let alone logging into art. I just couldn't do it.” She prioritized Jack’s tasks in this way due to him being behind academically. Kayla said, “I have so much mom guilt because I knew how far behind he was.” Having to make decisions and prioritize also impacted which of her sons she felt needed support. She said that Jack needed so much of her attention and support that she barely grasped how her second grade son was developing with school. When talking about her second grader, she said, “I had to let him just figure it out.” Feeling as if she was ignoring her older son, Kayla also said she took on more mom guilt.

Looking Across Cases

Interview data revealed similarities and differences among the mothers’ lived experiences of supporting their kindergartner’s at-home learning during the pandemic. Each mother felt a range of emotions during this period and described how at times it was extremely frustrating. They each felt pressure to complete assignments and became frustrated when their children were resistant to getting the work completed. Schooling during the pandemic did not set them up for success. Each mother described how their role shifted and their relationship with their child was impacted. They described having to enforce that the work be completed, whereas they discussed becoming an “enforcer” of the schoolwork. They each made choices in response to the frustrations but differed in how they responded. Alexis chose to change schooling formats due to

disappointing experiences with Ms. Rose. Holly hired a tutor in an attempt to alleviate some of the turmoil between her and Abigail. Finally, Kayla simply had to make the decision to let some things go. She decided to prioritize the academic sessions and skip the specials classes. An additional difference among the mothers is how they felt about the decisions and prioritizing. Holly felt content in her decision to hire a tutor, while Kayla and Alexis shared feelings of having guilt that they were unable to meet all requirements of virtual schooling.

Discussion

Looking across all three mothers' very different accounts of supporting their children's at-home schooling provides insight into how these caregivers conceptualized their positions (Freeman, 2010; Frigerio et al., 2013) and how they made decisions to cope with their situations. All three mothers described their varied positions they took up in different situations. They each ranged from being their child's cheerleader to becoming the schooling enforcer. Further, each mother described how the qualities through which they enacted support varied and changed regularly. Additionally, all three mothers described decisions they made in order to cope with the pressure and burdens they felt as their children's at-home teachers. Their individual stories also speak broadly to the no-win situation caregivers were placed under. They were set up to enact clinical practices that were antithetical to the home environment. They felt they had no choice but to jump through schooling hoops and check off the proverbial boxes to make sure their children completed the tasks, despite the caregivers not believing there to be much purpose to the tasks.

Each mother described ways in which conceptions of their positions (Freeman, 2010; Frigerio et al., 2013) in supporting their children changed regularly as they navigated at-home schooling. The at-home involvement activities they described were prescribed by the school and

left little leeway to modify. The children's assignments were focused on skill development, which each mother said they value, but were naturally frustrated there was little room to individualize for their individual children when needed. They were not able to provide the autonomy supportive environment, which likely led them to be in more of a controlling role (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Each child had specific times they had to attend live sessions as well as complete additional assignments to submit for credit. Each mother described moments of struggle or putting up a fight to ensure their children completed the teachers' assignments or attended live class sessions. Each mother described regular occurrences of their children resisting and refusing to complete specific tasks, which, in turn, frustrated them. When Holly described that Abigail was rolling around on the floor rather than completing a worksheet, she was furious and exasperated. At times like these, the mothers took on the role of an "enforcer" or as Alexis described, "the bad guy." On the other hand, at other times during their interviews, each mother also shared moments of encouragement for their children and took on the role of their child's "cheerleader." Alexis described seeking help from the teacher(s) when the boys were overwhelmed. Additionally, Holly tried to motivate Abigail by describing how blessed she was or instead of struggling with her over assignments she learned to give Abigail breaks. Although the caregivers' positions shifted at times, they were troubled by guilt and shame of not being able to get everything done. They became overwhelmed and frustrated at the narrow options for their children's virtual assignments and tasks. This likely contributed to some of their positioning as enforcers at times, as they felt they simply needed to jump through the metaphorical hoop. Other times, when their role shifted to more of a motivator or presenting a calm front, they seemed to describe that they accepted not being able to complete everything. What was common among all three mothers is that they always felt behind and that they rarely felt they were able to stay on

top of things. The pressure, burden, and guilt resulted from the school academic requirements imposed by the district. The district, and in turn the school, did little to offer families permission to adjust according to the emotional and mental state of their families. This unidirectional involvement imposed by the school district highlights the performative, hegemonic, teacher-dominated traditional caregiver involvement paradigms that persists (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Covid-19 likely could have been a time to reimagine at-home involvement and include caregiver and children's voices and ideas, yet the schools largely ignored families as partners (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019; Fennimore, 2017; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). They positioned caregivers as the facilitators but maintained their status as the authority.

The findings from this study suggest that the caregivers' affect varied and was inherently related to the role of supporting their children's schooling at home. This supports previous research which highlights how affect is relative to parenting (Pomerantz et al., 2007). The mothers described ways in which their affect shifted moment to moment or day to day. These shifts were not how the caregivers had set out to support their children. Alexis described how she had imagined making at home learning fun by playing games and doing experiments, but the nature of the school requirements changed that. The mothers were not able to enact autonomy supportive qualities (Pomerantz et al., 2007), as the school activities were prescriptive. They ended up having to enact more of a controlling quality as they felt they had to adhere to school requirements. This became difficult due to the children's resistance at times. They described having to adjust their affect in order to coax their children to complete their tasks. At times it sounded like they threw every affect at the proverbial wall to see which would stick, or ensure their children completed tasks. The lack of freedom and agency schools provided families during Covid-19 caused struggles in the relationships between caregivers and their kindergarteners.

The caregivers' descriptions of their changing positions and the struggles they had with their children led them to make decisions and prioritize things in ways they had not imagined. All three mothers described dropping some tasks, such as specials class assignments, in order to manage their children's workloads. Additionally, each mother described having to make a choice in order to "survive" supporting their children's learning at home. For example, after seeking support from Ms. Rose and getting none, Alexis felt her choice lay between Ms. Rose or her family. She ultimately chose to send both Jamal and Jaden back to face-to-face learning to rescue Jamal from a troubling situation with his virtual teacher. In a similar vein, Holly enrolled Abigail in a tutoring program to ensure Abigail completed assignments. Although Abigail was progressing well academically, Holly claimed that the tutoring company helped mitigate some of the struggle she experienced with Abigail. Finally, Kayla felt she had to prioritize between her two young sons. She described needing to spend so much time with Jack in supporting him that she had to just let go of any control over what her second grade son was doing. She said she really had no idea how he was doing, but that she had not heard anything from his teacher. She had to operate on the assumption that he was progressing well. Neither Alexis nor Kayla felt good about the choices they made, but both shared sentiments that decisions they made were based on surviving and also maintaining some peace among their relationships with their children. Holly, on the other hand, seemed pleased with her decision as it had minimized the stress between her and Abigail.

The findings from this study reinforce the need for schools to reimagine partnerships (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006) with families and the expectations they hold for children's learning. Covid-19 could have been an opportunity for caregivers to have balanced partnership roles with the school, yet this did not occur at Eastside Elementary. While caregivers did have

input in some ways, they were merely expected to enact traditional classroom practices at the direction of the teachers, rather than having a say as to how and what the kindergartners should be learning. Relationships between caregivers and their children were harmed as a result of the unrealistic expectations schools set on families. Rather than having space to draw upon their children and families' strengths and areas of need, the system of schooling during Covid-19 pitted caregiver-child relationships against schooling. It also left the caregivers feeling as if they had to choose between their relationships with their children and the school. During this period of widespread trauma, families social and emotional needs should have been at the forefront of schooling, yet academic standards and expectations left the caregivers feeling dejected and demoralized.

Implications

This study's findings highlight the complex nature of caregiver involvement in supporting young children's schooling. While the context of at-home schooling during Covid-19 will hopefully live in the past, the experiences of caregivers can likely inform schools' future caregiver involvement practices. Each of the mothers adhered to the schools' expectations, despite being troubled by them at times. These findings reinforce previous research findings that traditionally school's enact one-way caregiver involvement practices (Compton-Lilly et al., 2019; Fennimore, 2017; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Had the schools fostered a more balanced partnership, reciprocal in nature of content, with caregivers, there possibly could have been ways the mothers might better mitigate the struggles they experienced.

This study also provides a methodological implication for future educational research related to caregiver involvement. The nature of the caregivers' descriptions of their changing positions and affects instantiates the necessity to offer them the chance to tell their stories.

While survey research is merited, when exploring how caregivers experience working with their children an interview or focus group method would provide caregivers a platform to situate their experiences. Additionally, the positions the caregivers took up in response to the rigid school requirements, such as those of the enforcer or cheerleader, were imposed by the school. Had the school been receptive to caregivers, children's, and their families' needs and adjusted and tiered instruction towards that, the caregivers might have felt more successful and confident in supporting their children.

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CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

The findings presented in this dissertation highlight the complexities of family-school partnerships. Covid-19 presented a period of collective trauma (Crosby et al., 2020) that resulted in school shutdowns and shifts in learning formats (Lee et al., 2021; Santhanam, 2020). For many families, caregivers were thrust into the role of facilitating their children's schooling as virtual learning persisted. This new phenomenon required schools and families to partner in unprecedented ways. The purpose of the three studies included in this dissertation was to explore family-school partnerships and identify ways the experiences might inform the field as to how to reimagine family-school partnerships.

The willingness of the staff and families at Eastside Elementary provided a research context for which to generate quite a bit of data during a particularly difficult time to meet with participants. Due to social distancing guidelines and simply the emotional toll taking place in our world, I was pleasantly surprised and grateful to those who were willing to participate. Additionally, due to the importance of school-family partnerships in early childhood years, I chose to connect with kindergarten teachers and caregivers of young children.

Before discussing the ways in which the three studies reported here converged, I want to acknowledge some limitations of the project. First, all data generation had to be conducted remotely over Zoom in order to adhere with social distancing guidelines. This might have limited the connection and communication between myself and the participants. They may not have felt the warmth and openness that can be present when meeting in person. Alternatively, remote meetings might embolden some participants to be more open as they were meeting from their home environments where they might have felt more comfortable.

Next, although I did conduct second interviews, it would have been helpful to spend additional sessions with each participant. Due to time constraints and hectic schedules, this was not possible.

While the research in each study was conducted at an economically diverse school, more research is needed to explore experiences of populations that are racially diverse in order to gain insight into experiences of the global majority (Souto-Manning & Rabaldi-Raol, 2018).

Convergence Among Studies

Throughout data generation, data analysis, and writing the articles, I considered ways in which these three studies compared with one another. First, each of the studies highlighted the tremendous complexities surrounding school-family partnerships. Next, each study revealed, sometimes implicitly, ways that schools might empower caregivers to engage with children's learning. Additionally, each study revealed a need for centering the child in early childhood education. Finally, the three studies affirm the necessity for humanizing teaching and learning. In the following section, I describe how each of the three studies revealed the ideas I presented above. For the purpose of reading this, I will refer to each study as follows:

Table 4. Articles

Article Nickname	Article Title
1st Article	"Set Up to Fail: Teacher-Caregiver Relationships During Covid-19"
2nd Article	"Purpose(s) of Kindergarten during Covid-19"
3rd Article	"From Bad Guy to Cheerleader: Caregiver-Child Relationships through Schooling in the time of Covid"

It's Complicated

Looking across each of the three studies it is evident that family-school partnerships continue to be riddled with complexities. Human beings are complex creatures and coupled with trying to work together in support of their nearest and dearest makes the situation incredibly complicated. Building off previous research on teacher-caregiver relationships (Hargreaves, 2001), each study presented relational situations that were ripe with emotion. Each participant in Article 3 described feeling a range of emotions that varied constantly. Oftentimes, it appeared that participants had to wrestle with the emotions they felt and also comply with the expectations of them. At times, some caregivers said they had to become stern or strict with their children when they resisted completing the work. One mom described becoming the "enforcer" and another called herself the "bad guy." Holly described getting upset and having to walk away when her daughter refused to complete her work. At other times the caregivers shared they felt guilty when they chose to put the work aside. They felt they had not done their job as their child's "learning coach." Emotions in Article 1, among teachers and caregivers, were also present in the ways the participants discussed their interactions. At times they felt supported by one another, and other times they felt defeated. Article 2 focused on the enacted purposes of kindergarten, but emotions were also present as part of the findings. An example of this was when Mrs. Rhoads, the principal, discussed her desire to empathize with caregivers but also had to enforce student accountability. She expressed a form of sociocultural distance (Hargreaves, 2001) when she said (with the disclaimer that she was not being judgmental) at this point in the year caregivers need to be able to overcome their own limitations.

It is not surprising that a commonality among each study concerning family-school partnerships was the presence of strong emotion. Emotions are at the heart of human interaction

(Lasky, 2000), therefore exploring family school partnerships will reveal those emotional connections. Further, this study took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, which was a period of global trauma during which all humans faced uncertain and stressful times. Building and nurturing positive relationships with families is a challenging task but doing so will best support children.

The findings from each of these three studies with regard to emotions can inform the field by centering family-school relationships as trauma informed care (Crosby et al., 2020; Robinson, 2020). As many children entering school have experienced a life trauma, understanding the emotions surrounding family-school relationships can help schools understand the rooted emotions that exist in interaction.

Listen and Learn

The findings from these three studies inform practices in school-family partnerships. Previous frameworks of caregiver involvement (Epstein, 1987) have perpetuated social inequities and have ignored the rich, cultural strengths that children from historically minoritized populations bring into classrooms (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Additionally, caregivers' voices should be privileged when making decisions about children's learning, ensuring more balanced partnerships. There were many examples throughout each study of unbalanced partnerships. In each of the studies, the caregivers followed through, at times, with the work, despite their inclinations that their child was getting nothing from the experience. They were troubled by the amount of work and the lack of freedom they had to be creative. They felt guilty when they could not get everything accomplished. Had the caregivers been empowered to present ideas or suggestions for making adjustments, these experiences might have lessened. These findings suggest that schools adopt a "listen and learn" stance. Families bring a lot of

strengths that can be harnessed, and teachers can gain insight about children by simply listening to their caregivers.

The findings from the three studies showed that the traditional paradigm of involvement persisted in most instances, where the school was the authority and taught the caregivers how to work with their children. This unidirectional model of communication and involvement was evident in all three studies. There were instances, however, when one of the teachers provided space for caregivers' voices. In Article 1, Ms. Daisy described how she needed the caregivers' input in order to do her own job. She shared how the experiences of teaching remotely resulted in a big increase in her communication with caregivers. Additionally, in Article 3 Alexis described how Ms. Daisy had given her understanding and grace when she reached out to say that her child was overwhelmed. Ms. Daisy worked with Alexis to meet her son's needs in ways it was not clear the other teachers did.

Centering the Child

The findings from each study highlight that there were little to no instances of child-centered instruction (Kliebard, 2004; Moyer, 2001). First, in Article 1, this is evidenced when Ms. Tulip framed her work on teaching the caregivers, but not seeking any input from families. This suggests she was focused on the act of teaching rather than the recipient of the learning. In Article 2, the purposes of education enacted by the school and privileged by the families were more about academics and social mobility than meeting the needs of the individual child. Interview data revealed the children had little to no voice in terms of what they learned and how they learned it. Finally, Article 3 discusses the children and their resistance to online schoolwork, yet rather than modifying assignments or making adjustments they appeared to plow through.

This suggests that had the children had their druthers, they would have chosen different activities.

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