

**A LOOK INTO THE FEELINGS AND PERCEPTIONS OF PARENT-TEACHER
CONFERENCES AND THE EFFECTIVENESS THEY HAVE**

by

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CERTIFICATION OF THESIS/PROJECT CAPSTONE WORK

We, the undersigned, certify that this project entitled HOW ARE TEACHERS IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY IMPLEMENTING THE ACCOMMODATION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY TO IMPACT THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES? by Karen Swank, Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science in Education, Curriculum and Instruction, is acceptable in form and content and demonstrates a satisfactory knowledge of the field covered by this project.



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ABSTRACT

Parent-teacher communication and relationships are an important component to student success. Parent-teacher conferences are a time for relationships to be built and to establish direct one-on-one communication. This study looks into teachers' and parents' feelings and perceptions of parent-teacher conferences in a rural school setting. The results show that there are similar feelings between both parties and suggests areas where improvements can be made. Future research could continue to examine the feelings and perceptions of parents and teachers in other areas, as well as examine the effects any improvements could have on parent-teacher conferences.

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A Look into the feelings and perceptions of parent-teacher conferences and the effectiveness they have

Introduction

The communication and community engagement utilized by teachers to actively involve parents and guardians in the educational process of their children is essential to the growth of the students (Ankrum, 2016). A parent teacher relationship can be an important component in motivating student achievement and can even make or break the student's relationships with teachers (Ankrum). According to Ankrum, "The partnership between parent and teacher should bridge the gap in the the child's education" (p. 167). The most common form of direct communication between parents and teachers in schools worldwide is the parent-teacher conference (Lemmer, 2012). According to a Parent and Family Involvement in Education (PFI) Survey, conducted by the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2012, 76% of students had parents who reported attending a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2015). However, knowing that parental involvement and communication is important and putting that knowledge into practice is often difficult for teachers (Jensen, 2011). Parent teacher conferences should be a time of honest two-way communication. Lemmer states that, "Parents and teachers need to share with, and learn from each other during regular, open, two-way communication in the interest of the child" and that "simply making parent-teacher conferences a regular feature in the school's annual program is no guarantee that these benefits will be realized (p. 83). He has found that ineffective communication can often be encountered during these meetings.

Unfortunately, parent communication, particularly face-to face contact, can bring on feelings of dread and anxiety, due to the fear of blame and criticism (Pillet-Shore, 2016). Additionally, first year teachers are often not equipped to deal with the challenges of parent-

teacher relationships and the challenges of working with families should be a part of teacher education (Mahmood, 2013). In this chapter, I will outline the problem related to parent teacher communication. In addition, I will outline the purpose and goals of my research project.

With the small number of times that parents and teachers actually meet face to face, it is essential that teachers initiate trusting relationships with the first contact (Bergeron & Deslandes, 2011). Communicating involves speakers and listeners and involves more than just words (Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, Hartman, & Kemp, 2010). It is not just the words that you say, it is also the gestures, movements, facial expressions, and body posture (Conderman et al.). According to Conderman et al. “Effective communicators also are aware of how they say their words and how the listener hears and understands those words” (p. 176). Parents expect a warm and personal welcome; they want to be greeted at the door to the classroom, be welcomed by the teacher (whether as a group or individually), and to have the teacher introduce herself, and even offer a handshake (Bergeron & Deslandes, 2011). Teachers also need to demonstrate that the child is the main focus of their practice and that they are passionate about their profession (Bergeron & Deslandes). The determining factor in initiating trust is the teacher’s attitude, not just informational content given during the meeting (Bergeron & Deslandes).

Teachers have often reported that they feel uneasy about parent teacher conferences, they feel ill-prepared for these meetings and that they can be unproductive when they don’t know how to react or communicate about sensitive issues (Conderman et al., 2010). Teachers usually steer the conversations and dominate the speech time, with parents often responding in short sentences (Markström, 2011). Often the socio-economic status of families can play a role in the ways that teachers communicate with parents too (Ankrum, 2016). Teachers need to make all types of families feel as if they are part of a team that is looked upon as an extension of the family, with

the best interest of the child in mind (Ankrum). Ankrum believes that, “Teachers should think of parents as thought-partners in providing rigorous, meaningful education with the teacher” (p.167). Parents often think of teachers as the experts and goal setters of these meetings (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2013). Parents can often feel as if they don’t make any contributions at these meetings, which can lead to declining parental attendance or lack of interest (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2013).

As a second year teacher, in my first year of pre-kindergarten, I am interested in the experiences of other teachers and parents. In my experience, all teachers have their own way of conducting and communicating with parents. I feel that parent-teacher conferences can make both parents and teachers, especially new teachers, nervous since conferences can vary and neither party knows what to expect. I am also curious about the ways that both parents and teachers feel about the number of conferences that should be scheduled throughout the year. My district currently designates one week, in the fall, for conferences. Willens (2014) has found that, “And while there’s universal agreement that parent involvement is a good thing, these all-too-short meetings are often frustrating on both sides” (para 2). She continues to state that in New York City teachers and parents often find these meetings short and shallow and that schools in that area need to make these meetings richer and more productive.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of parents and teachers of parent-teacher conferences. To examine the experience of teachers I probed both veteran and newly hired teachers, in a rural community, through interviews and surveys in order to determine their comfort level, conference strategies, and any previous training. The perceptions of parents were examined through surveys. The data collected were used to gain an insight into the general

feelings of teachers and parents and whether there are any common occurrences in the practices of teachers and parents with positive experiences.

The research questions that drove this project thus were:

- How do most teachers feel about parent teacher conferences?
- How do most parents feel about parent teacher conferences?
- Are there any common occurrences for the participants that have positive feeling toward parent teacher conferences?

Communication and parent-teacher conferences can be a key factor in a student's success. Parents and teacher need to utilize open communication and work as a team focus on each child's future. In the next chapter, I will review the relevant research related to the problem that I have outlined above. The following studied examine the importance of parent-teacher conferences and good communication.

Literature Review

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of parents and teachers of parent-teacher conferences. In the previous chapter, I introduced the investigation of the perceptions of parents and teachers of parent-teacher conferences. For this study I examined the experiences of teachers and parents in a rural community, through interviews and surveys in order to determine their comfort level and feelings about parent-teacher conferences. This chapter is intended to review the literature on this topic and to see what kind of research has already been done.

Many researchers have investigated the ways that parent-teacher conferences should be conducted and the effects of parent-teacher communications. Santiago, Garbacz, Beattie, and Moore (2016) stated that, " ...research has begun to uncover how positive relationships between

parents and teachers may be associated with improved outcomes for students” (p. 1003). Their study also found that, “Higher levels of trust in teacher significantly predicted increased parent educational involvement” (p. 1013). Bilton, Jackson, and Hymer (2017) told us that, “...a number of researcher support mutually beneficial relationships between parents and teachers, in which both parties are equally responsible for ensuring that students learn effectively” (p. 233). Their research also found that “...when students are present, these events also provide opportunities for directly improving learning behavior” (p. 251). Lastly, Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, Hartman, and Kemp remarked that, “When communicating with family members, be honest and sincere, and indicate a willingness to collaborate and explore non-traditional communication methods, especially for families that have traditionally been involved in schools” (p. 178).

One article detailed its findings on common occurs and viewpoints of parent-teacher conferences. For this study Lemmer (2012) interviewed 17 teachers and 20 parents individually or by focus group, in natural settings, and asked to reflect on their experiences of the practice of parent-teacher conferences. All interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes and other relevant documents were gathered, along with extensive field notes during school visits. The results showed that these ritualised events were held with remarkable similarity in a wide variety of schools. These meetings were held at least annually, usually during the first term. Parents would first be addressed by the principal as a large group, parents then break away to be addressed by classroom groups to address curriculum, classroom and homework procedures. If time permitted, parents could stay to briefly discuss their children one-on-one with the teacher. Individualized parent-teacher conferences were then provided during the second term, and occasionally during the third term. These meetings were usually held without the student being present. During the interviews Lemmer found that time slots for individual conferences “...are very limited, ranging

from 5 minutes to 15 minutes, and conferences often exceed the time allowed, creating long queues of impatient parents” (p. 90). One mother’s response during the interview was “It is a pain because...there is always a crowd of people and they run over time and you end up waiting and it gets late” (p. 90). Teachers described sitting around a table or desk with parents, however observations made showed parents sitting uncomfortably in child-sized chairs while teachers sat in their own chairs. Lemmer also found that most parents find that conferences are dominated by teacher talk, and some feel that are not many teachers that listen to parents. However, “Contrary to parental experiences as shared in the interviews, teachers felt that parents were given adequate opportunity to give inputs at conferences” (p. 93). Many of the teachers in this study described parent-teacher conferences as being stressful, tiring, and time-consuming. Additionally, “None of the teacher participants had ever received any training in communicating with parents, preservice or inservice” (p. 93). Lemmer’s findings show that there can be a disconnect between parents and teachers during parent teacher conferences with both parties possibly feeling uncomfortable. With the importance of a child’s success and the parent teacher relationship steps need to be taken to ensure a better experience for all.

Lemmer’s study (2012) found that the child solemnly attended conferences. However, Bilton, Jackson, and Hymers’ (2017) results showed that, “...when the student was present, parents and teachers frequently joined forces during meetings, working together to seek to modify the child’s study habits or conduct” (p. 231). The student being present often lead to mutually desirable educational goals being set in place, regardless of age, gender, or social background of the parent involved. An early childhood study by Cheatham and Ostrosky (2013) found that cultural differences and misunderstanding may affect child goals setting and that, “...teachers may not have had appropriate professional development to accommodate for

linguistic differences” (p. 184). The researchers also found that, “teachers largely exercised control of conference talk at the expense of parental participation in goal setting” (p. 184).

Technology is such a large piece of everyone’s daily lives. Nitza and Roman (2017) examined whether parent-teacher meetings are still relevant and if they should be changed due to our technological era. They found: “Where encounters between parents and teachers, and communication between school systems and school figures one took place face-to-face, today technology-based communication is gradually occupying a major role, one that does not require physical presence” (p. 155). Parent-teacher communication can be made more accessible through video conferencing, telephone conferencing, online correspondence, and e-mail. Technology can make communication between parents and teachers more convenient for both parties. Although this study finds that further research needs to be made in the area of changing the structure of parent-teacher conferences due to changes in technology, Nitza & Roman found that, “It is evident from the responses that the great majority of respondents see room for change, i.e., the current structure of the teacher-parent meeting is not optimal” (2017, p. 160). Some responses to the questionnaire for this study include more individual meetings throughout the year and more time devoted to each parent (Nitza & Roman, 2017, p. 160).

In conclusion, the literature suggests that communication and trust is an integral piece in parent-teacher relationships and conferences and can significantly impact a child’s success. However, it was found that parent-teacher conferences can be a stressful time for both parents and teachers due to unknown factors and time constraints. Additionally, having students present at their own conferences can also lead to greater participation in decision making. Due to the use of technology today, it can also be argued that technology play a large role in our daily communication and that the traditional face-to-face meeting for conferences might be outdated.

Despite this scholarship, there is not a lot of research at this time that specifically focuses on the perceptions of parents and teachers of parent-teacher conference.

The purpose of this study was to examine the feelings and perceptions of teachers and parents in rural Western New York. This study allowed the feelings and perceptions of parents and teachers to be compared and contrasted to determine any overlying themes. The primary research questions that drove this investigation were:

1. Is there a common occurrence among parents and teachers that have positive parent-teacher conferences?
2. Are there common occurrences in the practices of teachers and parents with positive experiences?

The next chapter will describe how the study was conducted, the participants, setting, and a description of the data collection and analysis procedures.

Method

Introduction

A parent-teacher relationship can be an important component in motivating student achievement and can even make or break the student's relationships with teachers (Ankrum, 2016). The most common form of direct communication between parents and teachers in schools worldwide is the parent-teacher conference (Lemmer, 2012). Lemmer stated that, "Teachers are seldom trained to interact with parents, and both parents and teachers often find such encounters stressful and ineffective" (p. 83). Unfortunately, parent communication, particularly face-to face contact, can bring on feelings of dread and anxiety, due to the fear of blame and criticism (Pillet-Shore, 2016). My study investigated the perceptions of parents and teachers and parent-teacher conferences. I explored the comfort level and the perceptions of both teachers and parents

regarding the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences. Through this investigation I hope to be able to give voice to the general feelings of teachers and parents and whether there are any common occurrences in the practices of teachers and parents with positive experiences.

Research Frameworks

This study used qualitative methods, primarily in the form of interviews and surveys. According to Johnson and Christensen (2016), “Qualitative research uses a wide- and deep-angle lens, examining human choice and behavior as it occurs naturally in all of its detail” (p. 35). The study consisted of 8-minute face-to-face interviews with a veteran and a newly hired teacher, in a rural community of Western New York State. The parents of school age children, in a rural community, were given surveys as well. A qualitative approach allowed for open-ended questions to be used in order to determine the feelings, expectations, and outcomes of parent-teacher conferences. The information obtained was analyzed in order to explore any common occurrences that has the potential to lead to positive parent-teacher experiences.

Research Setting and Participants

The interviews took place at Vineyard Central School, in May of 2018 at 3:30 p.m., in the classroom of the teacher being interviewed. The study involved interviewing 2 teachers, 1 veteran practitioner and 1 newly hired. A veteran and newly hired teacher were purposefully selected to investigate if there is a difference in their insight and feelings. According to Johnson and Christensen (2016), “In short purposive sampling, is a nonrandom sampling technique in which the researcher solicits persons with specific characteristics to participate in a research study” (p. 268). The following were criteria used for selecting teachers to be interviewed:

- The participant must teach within the Vineyard School District

- The participant must have performed parent-teacher conferences at Vineyard School District
- One participant must have taught full-time, in their own classroom, for less than 4 years
- One participant must have taught full-time, in their own classroom, for more than 10 years

Both teachers selected for the interviews were female and teach kindergarten and second grade. Parents were purposefully selected from a list of parents that attended annual parent teacher conferences within the Vineyard School District. Parent surveys were distributed through the mail. The following were criteria used for selecting parents to be surveyed:

- The participants must have a child that attends school within the Vineyard School District
- The participant must have attended 1 or more parent-teacher conferences

Data Collection

The data collection for this study was in the form of surveys and interviews with parents that participate in parent-teacher conferences, as well as a veteran and a newly hired teacher. Purposive sampling allows for only data from participants with specific interests and characteristics to be collected (Johnson & Christensen, 2016). The kindergarten teacher interviewed has been teaching full time for 3 years, and has not taught any other grade. On average she has 16 students in her class each year. This year she has 7 boys and 7 girls. Even though there are some hesitations, all of her students are going on to first grade. She stated that her class the year is very active and likes to be in control of things, which can lead to difficulties at times. The second grade teacher interviewed has taught for 19 years; 5 in first grade, 10 in fourth grade, and 4 years in second grade. On average she has 15 students a year in her class. This year she has 17 students, 10 boys and 7 girls, 1 student has a one-on-one aide, 3 students

have an IEP, and one student has a 504 plan. Interviews and surveys are often used in qualitative research to gather information with the goal of better understanding the characteristics of a particular population (Johnson & Christensen, 2016). According to Johnson & Christensen, “Qualitative interviews are also called depth interviews because they can be used to obtain in-depth information about a participant’s thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivation, and feelings about a topic” (p. 235). After confirmation of permission from the school’s administration to conduct research, a letter was given to teachers to be sent home to parents with a website link where the survey could be completed, See Appendix A. A letter was included with the survey explaining the intent of the study and the importance of completion of the survey. Parents were asked to complete the survey within one week of this communication.

The teachers were interviewed and the interviews were audio recorded and took place in their own classrooms, after students left for the day, see Appendix B. For both interviews we sat across from each other at a table in the back of the room with the recorder between us. Questions were asked from the interview protocol and the interviewee responded. The interviewee was reminded at the beginning of the interview that all names would be kept confidential and that there were no right or wrong answers.

Data Analysis

The information obtained from the interviews was transcribed through Scribie.com. The interviews were then open coded in order to examine any common practices in feelings about parent-teacher conferences or any common practices in positive experiences. Open coding is a way of examining data and usually involves reading transcripts line by line to be able to name and categorize discrete elements ((Johnson & Christensen, 2016). The surveys were examined to further explore parental feelings and perceptions of parent-teacher conferences. The data from

the teachers and parents was compared in order to give light to common feelings and perceptions between both groups.

Alternative Approaches

An alternative approach to this study could have been through observations or a quantitative approach through strictly closed-ended surveys of both groups. However, I rejected these approaches as I am interested in discovering the feelings, perceptions, and behaviors surrounding parent-teacher conferences; therefore, a qualitative approach using interviews was in my estimation best suited for this study.

Conclusion

Through the use of surveys and interviews, I hope to be able to study the general feelings of teachers and parents and whether there are any common occurrences in the practices of teachers and parents with positive experiences. The goal of this study was to add to the knowledge of practices that have the potential to help ensure that parent-teacher conferences are a positive and beneficial experience for both teachers and parents.

In the next chapter I will discuss the result of this research study. My interviews will show the feelings and perceptions of parent-teacher conferences of a newly hired and a veteran teacher. The surveys allow for insight into parents' feelings and perceptions of parent-teacher conferences. Using the results from both, I will examine to see whether there are any common occurrences in the practices of teachers and parents with positive experiences.

Results

The previous chapter discussed the methods taken to obtain results for my study of the perceptions of parents and teachers regarding the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences. I interviewed two teachers and surveyed ten parents in order to gain insights on the general

feelings of teachers and parents and whether there are any common occurrences in the practices of teachers and parents with positive experiences. This chapter will discuss the results that emerged from the interviews and surveys.

Interviews

I conducted separate interviews with a kindergarten and second grade teacher. The interviews consisted of questions that asked about their teaching experience, classroom demographics, parent-teachers conference experiences, their feelings about conferences, and whether there is anything they feel should be changed (see interview protocol in Appendix B.)

The kindergarten teacher, Kathy, conducts 20-minute parent-teacher conferences once a year, in October as per the district policy, but feels that another conference in January or February would be beneficial. Occasionally conferences run a bit longer, depending on the child and how much a parent wants to talk. This year Kathy had 100% attendance for her parent-teacher conferences. In prior years' attendances have been similar, with possibly one parent not showing up or rescheduling. It can take a week or two to prepare her room for conferences, as she likes to display the students' work for parents to see. It takes her about an hour to prepare for the actual conferences, though. Kathy has a binder that she has used in previous years that just needs updating. The binder helps her to give talking points and keeps the conference going in the right direction. Kathy said that she like the binder because "It gives you really good guidance where to start, and then you can kind of relax and go from there". After going through the information in the binder, she opens up the discussion for questions and talking about the child individually. While discussing each child, she will show the parents how their student is progressing with letters, sounds and sight words, and then discuss anything they can work on at home with their child. Her conferences don't usually change much; however, the discussion

length at the end might vary based on the child's needs or issues. In regard to her experiences so far, she stated that she likes the idea of parent-teacher conferences, but she doesn't love them. They can make her nervous. Even as a parent of a small child, she didn't love parent-teacher conferences. She went on to say that, "Just any time you're talking with parents you gotta be careful about what you say and how you say it." The first year, she especially didn't like parent-teacher conferences, but every year since then they have gotten easier. However, she feels that conferences are effective and that it is good to have open communication, meet parents, and talk to them one-on-one. There isn't anything about conferences she would change other than kids occasionally attending with their parents. When they do she usually has them play while she talks to the parent(s). When asked if there is anything else she would like to add about parent-teacher conferences, she stated again that she believes another conference later in the year could be beneficial, especially since some students start to fall behind after the beginning of the year. Kathy also added "Also with a conference later in the year you'd be more apt to talk to parents, whereas there's times when I should talk to certain parents and I haven't called them".

The second grade teacher, Jane, conducts one conference in October, along with the rest of the school district, with 90 to 100% parent attendance, and then she will invite parents in to meet throughout the year as needed. Jane added: "I've been at two school districts and it's always been the same. They've always been in October". Her parent-teacher conferences usually last 20 to 30 minutes, if there are any issues to discuss during the conference or if a student has an IEP it might end up being longer. Jane says "...if a student is doing well you can be in and out in 15 minutes. But I've had them go about 40 minutes, 45 minutes would probably be my longest one, and I've had to cut them short and schedule for another time too". When asked if she felt the number of conferences held was good she responded that it would be nice to have another

mandatory designated conference time, scheduled through the school, later in the year. On average it takes her about a half an hour per student to prepare a folder with information on academics, behavioral, positive and negative concerns, and work samples. When parents come in to meet, she generally sits down with them and goes over the information she has collected in their child's folder. Jane says "I allow parents to ask questions in between, and then I'll ask if they have any concerns to discuss". She said that conference can be a little fearful at times due to uncertainty of what to expect from parents, but they usually turn out well. As a first year teacher she was nervous about meeting parents, but then it became easier for her as the years went on. She believes that conferences are a good way to get parents to become involved and active in their children's educations. Jane believes that parent-teacher conferences are effective and went on to add "Because oftentimes, if there's an issue and the parents are brought in to have a conversation with me, the behavior changes if it's something they're not aware of, and I get the opportunity to speak with them one-on-one about it". When asked if there is anything she would change about parent-teacher conferences she responded again that she would like to meet again with parents later in the year because, sometimes early on in the year, a teacher can get a false sense of a student and issues might not arise until after the first conference. She believes that January would be a good time to formally meet again for parent-teacher conferences.

Parent Surveys

Parent surveys were distributed to parents of students in a kindergarten, a first grade, a second grade and a fourth grade classroom through the students' daily take home folders. Parents were asked to sign and return an informed consent form and to complete an online survey through a given website link. 10 parents completed the online survey; one parent from the kindergarten class, two parents from the first grade class, three from the second grade class, one

from the third grade class, two from the fourth grade class, and one from the fifth grade class. Five of the respondents reported that they had a female child and 5 reported having a male child. Five of the parents surveyed reported having attended one or two parent-teacher conference in the past, three parents responded that they've attended four to 6 parent-teacher conferences, and two parents responded that they've attended 7 or more parent-teacher conferences.

All participants responded that they enjoy attending parent-teacher conferences. When asked whether they feel if parent-teacher conferences are effective all parents except for one responded "yes," with the one parent responding "sometimes." Eight parents gave a response to why or why not do you think the parent-teacher conferences that you have attended are effective. Parents responded that they liked being able to experience the personality of the teacher and to see their children's classrooms and what they are working on, other than just homework. One parent's response was that, "I don't feel like there is much adult interaction between schools and parents as there was in past. I suppose 'No news is good news,' but it was nice to be updated on her progress." The parent that said that they feel that parent-teacher conferences are sometimes effective added that he? she? want to talk more specifically about his? her? child and spend less time on the classroom procedures and schedules. When asked if there is anything that would make their parent-teacher conferences a better experience, four parents responded that they would like to see have another conference scheduled later in the year. One parent reported that they would like more comfortable chairs, another added that they'd like to see more child samples, and one parent suggested that reducing the unknown and having a more uniform way for all teachers to conduct conferences could make parents less nervous.

Conclusions

This chapter shows the results given from my interviews and surveys during the course of my investigation of the feelings and perceptions of teachers and parents and parent-teacher conferences. The interviews gave me insights into the ways that teachers conduct and feel about parent-teacher conferences in a kindergarten and a second grade classroom. It also presented me with insights on the degree to which they are effective they feel these conferences are and the ways in which they can be improved. The parent survey gave me insight into parents' feelings about parent-teacher conferences, their effectiveness, and the ways that they can be improved. The data shows that parent-teacher conference can be a time of unknown and uneasiness. Both teachers and parents also feel that parent-teacher conferences later in the year could be beneficial as well.

In the final chapter, I will analyze and discuss the significance of the results of the interviews and surveys. I will also discuss any limitations of my study and the factors that could have altered my methods.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of parents and teachers of parent-teacher conferences. In the previous chapter, I presented the results from the interviews and surveys. This chapter is intended to discuss and make conclusions based on the findings from the interviews and survey. This chapter will also include a discussion about any possible limitations that may have altered the findings.

The findings of this study show that both parents and teachers share many of the same feelings about parent-teacher conferences. The data shows areas where improvements can be made to ensure that parent-teacher conferences are a positive experience, where parents and

teachers create relationships while working together for the benefit of the child. These findings correspond with earlier findings from Bergeron and Deslandes (2011), who found that, “Collaboration between the school and the parents is important for maximizing a student’s chances of success. Collaboration among the various partners, for its part, is based on the relationship of trust that characterizes positive relations.” (p. 43). By creating a more positive environment more authentic relationships can be established.

During this study both parents and teachers reported having feelings of nervousness and stress at times, due to parent-teacher conferences. These feelings stem from the unpredictability and nonuniformity that conferences can have. These findings are consistent with the literature discussed previously (Pillet-Shore, 2012). Pillet-Shore summed up those understandings as, “In short, parents and teachers approach conferences apprehensive about being criticized” (p. 2). Both parents and teachers can feel as if they are being criticized by the other and they can be unsure of how the other party will reciprocate in the discussion. All the while the nonuniformity of conferences among teachers increases the amount of unknown territory for parents. In addition to the feelings of nervousness and stress, parents also reported the possibility of feeling uncomfortable at conferences due to the tables and chairs provided for them at conferences. This issue was also uncovered in Lemmer’s 2012 study. Lemmer found that parents felt uncomfortable sitting in child-size chairs and at child-size tables, while teachers often sat in their own adult-size chairs. This arrangement can escalate the feeling of criticism and dominance toward parents that teachers must avoid.

The most prominent finding from this study is that both parents and teachers feel that an additional school-wide conference time, later in the year, would be beneficial. As stated by both of the teachers interviewed for this study, a conference later in the year would require all

teachers to meet with parents one-on-one and would allow for discussions on any changes in student performance. As stated in a parent survey, the theory of “No news is good news” is often practiced by teachers of well performing and behaving students. Scheduling schoolwide conferences in the fall would assist in alleviating some this habit. While teachers are quick to contact parents to discuss academic and behavioral concerns, there can be a lack of communication for praise. A second parent-teacher conference would allow for teachers to better acknowledge students’ successes while giving opportunity to discuss any concerns as well.

Since parent-teacher conferences are an indispensable tool for building school and home relationships and this meeting can be a time to initiate the relationship of trust (Bergeron & Deslandes, 2011; Lemmer, 2012) some changes could be made to improve conferences. Based on the above findings, schools should provide teachers with guidelines in order to enhance conferences and increase uniformity among teachers and classrooms. Schools should provide professional development focused on communicating with parents and home-school relationships. A study by Walker and Dotger (2012) found that few teacher education institutions develop teacher candidates’ knowledge and skills for family-school partnerships. This is alarming considering the impact that a positive family-school partnership can have. Additionally, teachers should provide comfortable seating for parents to encourage a feeling of equality and valued contribution.

Although this study found areas of commonality between parents and teachers and allowed for findings to be made, there are some study limitations that should be considered. First, the study was conducted with only the participation of 2 teacher interviews and 10 parent surveys in 1 geographic location, and within 1 school district. Future research should include more interviews and surveys from teacher and parents in more than one school district.

Contrary to the literature that students attending parent-teacher conferences can allow for collaboration in goal setting, student attendance was a complaint reported during a teacher interview. Further investigation should be made into this claim to examine if grade level has a determination in the effectiveness of collaboration.

In summary, this study examined the perceptions of parents and teachers of parent-teacher conferences in a rural elementary school district. Current findings indicate that both parents and teachers can have feelings of stress and nervousness while attending parent-teacher conferences and improvements can be made to decrease these feelings. Future research to explore could be:

- Does providing a comfortable environment for parents decrease stressful feelings?
- Does teacher professional development on family-school relationships increase the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences?
- Is having more than 1 parent-teacher conference a school year beneficial?

Parents will always be the most important influence in a child's life. This means a teacher's role goes well beyond the classroom and they are able to set the tone and lay the foundation for this "university". The parent-teacher relationship should never be taken lightly, and the time and effort it takes to create these relationships is justifiable with its return on the influence it has on students' success. Every teachers needs to ask themselves a question – are they putting in the effort it takes to truly make an impact on their students' lives inside and outside the classroom?

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Appendices

Appendix A: Parent Participation Letter

May 4th, 2018

Dear Participant,

I am writing to you to request your participation in a brief 5-minute survey. As a graduate student at SUNY Fredonia I am conducting research on parent-teacher conferences. The purpose of the study is to gain insight on parent and teacher feelings and perceptions of parent-teacher conferences and the effect they can have.

Your participation in the survey is completely voluntary and all of your responses will be anonymous and kept confidential. Enclosed is an informed consent form, that must be signed returned to school upon your completion of the survey.

The survey can be completed online at: <https://goo.gl/forms/gy9ysHC6rIP1PVZJ2>
A printed copy of the survey can be provided if requested.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Karen Swank

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for Teachers

Thank you for agreeing to talk with me. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask because every teacher is different. I am just trying to get a picture of your parent-teacher conference experiences. To facilitate note taking, I would like to record our conversation today.

1. What grade do you teach?

Probe: Tell me about the students in your class.

Probe: How many students do you usually have each year?

2. How many years have you been teaching?

Probe: Have you taught any other grade level?

3. How often do you conduct parent-teacher conferences?

Probe: Do you feel that this is a good amount? If not, how often do you think parent-teacher conferences should be held?

Probe: Has this amount ever changed over the years?

4. Can you estimate what percentage of your students' parents attend their child's conference?

Probe: Has this percentage ever changed over your years of teaching?

5. How do you prepare for parent-teacher conferences?

Probe: How long does it take you to prepare for conference?

6. Can you describe a typical parent-teacher conference for me?

Probe: Do your conferences change depending upon the type of student?

7. How do feel about parent teacher conferences?

Probe: Have your feelings changed at all over the years? If so, how and why?

8. How long do your parent-teacher conferences last?

Probe: Does this ever vary?

9. Do you feel that your parent-teacher conferences are effective?

Probe: Why or why not?

Probe: Would you change anything about parent-teacher conferences?

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about parent-teacher conferences?

Appendix B: Consent Form

Informed Consent

Protocol Title: A Look Into the Feelings and Perceptions of Parent-Teacher Conferences and the Effectiveness they Have

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

The investigator in this study proposes to research teacher and parents' feelings and perceptions of parent-teacher conferences. The investigator of this study plans to interview elementary and middle school teachers at Westfield Academy and Central School (WACS) to gain insight on teacher feelings and perceptions of parent-teacher conferences. The investigator of this study also plans to survey parents of children at WACS to gain insight on parental feelings and perceptions of parent-teacher conferences.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

Teachers will be asked to respond to an interview that includes open ended questions. Parents will be asked to respond to a survey that includes multiple choice and short response questions.

Time Required:

The time required for teachers to complete the survey is approximately 45 minutes.

The time required for parents to complete the survey is approximately 5 minutes.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in the study.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by the law. All data will be kept secure on a thumb drive and any paper forms will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Potential Benefits and Risks:

It is possible that participants speak candidly during their interviews about complex relationships involving students. All information is kept confidential and only information that pertains to the study will be used in the final research paper. Following this investigation, participants will be allowed to read the research and discover how other responded to questions about their parent-teacher conference experiences. Only questionnaire responses relevant to the research question will be used in the final research paper. Comments made about other teachers or specific students will not be a part of the final paper.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Karen Swank

Email: kswank@fredonia.edu

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

Dr. Judith Horowitz

Associate Provost for Graduate Studies, Sponsored Research and Faculty Development

Maytum Hall 805

Judith.horowitz@fredonia.edu

(716) 673-4708

**I have read the procedure outlined above. I voluntarily agree to participate
in this study and have received a copy of this description.**

Participant's signature

Date

Principal investigator's signatures

Date

Appendix C: IRB Human Subjects Approval



14 February 2018

Karen Swank
c/o Robert Dahlgren, Ph.D.
Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education
Thompson Hall
The State University of New York at Fredonia

Re: Karen Swank—A Look into the Feelings and Perceptions of Parent-Teacher Conferences and the Effectiveness They Have

Your research project using human subjects has been determined Category 1, Exempt, under the United States Department of Health and Human Services Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Public Welfare, Part 46 Protection of Human Subjects, 46.101, Subpart A (b) (1) and/or (2). This document is your approval and your study titled “A Look into the Feelings and Perceptions of Parent-Teacher Conferences and the Effectiveness They Have” may proceed as described, beginning on **February 14, 2018 and ending on May 30, 2018**.

Thank you for keeping the high standards relating to research and the protection of human subjects under the auspices of the State University of New York at Fredonia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Judith M. Horowitz".

Judith M. Horowitz, Ph.D.
Associate Provost, Graduate Studies, Sponsored Programs
and Faculty Development
Human Subjects Administrator

Appendix D: Citi Human Subjects Training



Completion Date 23-Sep-2017
Expiration Date 23-Sep-2019
Record ID 24726009

This is to certify that:

Karen SWank

Has completed the following Citi Program course:

Human Research (Curriculum Group)
Group 1. (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

SUNY - College at Fredonia



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w48320f38-dc31-4bf6-9980-f1756230d900-24726009