Parent-Provider Relationships:

Are Parents and Providers of Young Children on the Same Page?

A dissertation submitted by

Melissa Lovitz

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Child Study and Human Development
Tufts University
May 2023

Committee Members:
Dr. Jayanthi Mistry (Chair)
Dr. Ellen Pinderhughes
Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development, Tufts University
Dr. Eric Dearing
Lynch School of Education and Human Development, Department of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology, Boston College
Dr. Lisa Knoche
College of Education and Human Sciences, Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this research should be addressed to Melissa Lovitz, Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development, 105 College Avenue, Tufts University, Medford, MA 02155. E-mail: Melissa.Lovitz@tufts.edu

Abstract

The relationships between parents and other care providers are critical, dynamic, and mutually influential for all the individuals and relationships involved in the system of care (Bornstein, 2015). The advantages of mutually influential relationships between parents and teachers are best demonstrated by the growing body of research that documents the benefits of strong, high-quality parent-provider relationships for programs, parents, children, and providers in early childhood contexts. The present study was designed using a multidimensional and multi-method approach to examine how parents of young children and their providers view their relationships and specifically if there are areas of congruence or divergence in terms of parents' and providers' perceptions of their relationship. Findings indicate that although there was convergence between parents and providers on what was important in the relationship, there were nuanced variations in specific aspects of the relationship; these differences reflected variations in parent-provider roles and early child care contexts. Implications for future research that underscore the importance of developing and validating measures that account for cultural and contextual factors to better understand parent-provider relationships in early childhood education are discussed.

Keywords: parent-provider relationship, Head Start, child care, role theory, mixed-methods, child development

Acknowledgements

When I was growing up, my mom would remind me of a story that Isidore Rabi, the American Jewish Nobel Laureate for Physics, used to tell when asked why he became a scientist. The story goes like this,

> *"My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: "Nu, did you learn anything today?" But not my mother. She always asked me a different question: "Izzy," she would say, "Did you ask a good question today?" That difference – asking good questions –- made me become a scientist."*

This comes as no surprise to my professors, but I have been focused on asking good questions for a long time. Now, I have the skills and tools to answer some of them!

There are many people who helped me develop into the scholar and teacher I am today. First, thank you to my entire committee for pushing me to think critically about the implications of my research, helping me solve data issues, and being willing to share your time and expertise to make my dissertation the best it could be. In one of the many emails I exchanged with my dissertation chair, Dr. Jayanthi Mistry, she wrote "I am committed to supporting you." I didn't know how much I needed to hear that when she said it. Thank you, Jayanthi; It has been an absolute pleasure working together. I also want to extend my sincere thanks to my advisors Dr. M. Ann Easterbrooks and Dr. Ellen Pinderhughes for their support over the past five years. Ellen, I especially want to thank you for your deep listening and care in conversations about my Ph.D. progress and my personal life. I would be remiss if I did not mention Dr. Theo Klimstra. Thank you, Theo, for your invaluable mentorship and for supporting my teaching endeavors. I am grateful for your guidance during the GIFT Fellowship and for all the ways you helped me during my search for full-time lecturer positions. Finally, I must mention Dr. Sara Johnson. Sara, you did not just teach me statistics; you modeled how I want to be in relationship with students and support their academic trajectories.

I am the first person in my family to pursue a Ph.D. Although at times I have felt misunderstood, I am deeply grateful to my family for their enduring support and confidence in me and my academic pursuits. I would not have been as successful on this journey without my parents' generosity with their time, resources, and belief in my ability to conquer whatever I set my mind to. Mom, thank you for always picking up the phone to hear about my day and for making the effort to understand my research interests and how I was spending my time as a Ph.D. student. Freyja and Fitz, you have brought me so much joy – especially when I was struggling with academics or needed a distraction. I am so glad you were my Ph.D./Pandemic Pets and could not ask for better roommates!

I want to extend my appreciation to my Dreamfar High School Marathon and Kavod communities and my friends. When I was feeling unsettled by my Ph.D. experience, you all grounded me and helped me remember who I was outside of my academics. Now, more than ever, I am grateful for these connections and relationships that have withstood the test of completing a Ph.D. and emerged stronger and more purposeful.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Sarah Lang for graciously sharing her data from the Cocaring Relationships Study and the folks at ICPSR for their assistance and guidance regarding the use of the FACES 2014 Family Engagement Plus Study data.

Table of Contents

Abstract ii

Acknowledgements iii

Table of Contents v

List of Tables ix

List of Figures ix

Parent-Provider Relationships: 1

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

  A Brief History of Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood 2

  Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood Education Contexts 5

  Introduction to the Present Study 8

    Overview of Methodology 8

  Author Positionality and Philosophic Assumptions 10

Chapter 2: Literature Review 12

  Why Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood? 12

    Benefits for Parents 12

    Benefits for Children 13

    Benefits for Providers 15

  Theoretical Perspectives on Parent-Provider Relationships and Applications for Early Childhood 15

    Systems Perspectives and Parent-Provider Relationships 15

    Role Theory and Parent-Provider Relationships 17

    Cultural Capital and Cultural Wealth 22

Conceptual Framework 26

  Defining Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood 27

  Parent-Provider Relationships are Not Static 27

  Factors Associated with the Parent-Provider Relationship in Early Childhood 27

  The Cocaring Relationship 33

  Summary of Conceptual Framework 35

Measuring and Comparing Perspectives of Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood 36

  Current Approaches and Challenges to Measuring Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood 36

  Comparing Parent and Teacher Perspectives of Parent-Provider Relationships 38

The Current Study 44

  Research Questions 46

  Hypotheses 46

Chapter 3: Method 50

Source #1: The Cocaring Relationships Study 50

  Participants 50

  Procedure 52

  Measures 53

    The Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire (CRQ) (Lang et al., 2017). 53

Source #2: Family Engagement Plus Study 54

Procedure 54

Participants 56

Measures 58

Analytic Approach 59

Research Question 1: How do parents and early childhood teachers/family services staff perceive their relationship with each other? 59

Research Question 2: Which items in each of the Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire dimensions and themes from the Head Start interviews are driving parent and family services staff perceptions of their relationship with each other? 63

Chapter 4: Results 66

Preliminary Analyses 66

Research Question 1 68

Levels of Agreement Between Parents and Teachers 68

Correlational Analyses 68

Paired Samples T-Test 70

Thematic/Taxonomic Analysis of Family Engagement Plus Interviews 71

Research Question 2 84

Model Fit 84

Comparison of Factor Loadings 85

Chapter 5: Discussion 89

Interpreting the Results 89

- Parent and Provider Roles in Context 92
  - Power Differentials as a Feature of Contexts 96
- Measurement in Context 99
  - Variations in Perceptions of Inclusion and Belonging 100
  - Lack of Differentiation by Role and Model Misfit 102
- Future Directions in Conceptualization and Measurement 105
- Limitations 108
  - Limitations Regarding Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire 108
  - Limitations Regarding the Family Engagement Plus Study 110
- Conclusion 111

References 113

Appendix A 141

Appendix B 142

List of Tables

Table 1 Demographic Information for Families 127
Table 2 Demographic Information for Teachers 128
Table 3 Cocaring Dimensions for Parents and Teachers 129
Table 4 CRQ Questions, Dimenison, and Standardized Factor Comparisons 130
Table 5 Categories for Level of Agreement Variable 134
Table 6 Levels of Agreement between Parents and Teachers on Cocaring Dimensions 135
Table 7 Bivariate Correlations for Cocaring Dimensions Between Parents and Teachers 136
Table 8 Paired Samples T-tests 137
Table 9 Model Fit Statistics Comparison 138
Table 10 CRQ Questions, Dimension, and Standardized Factor Comparisons by Cocaring Dimension 139

List of Figures

Figure 1 Summary of Data Sources 59
Figure 2 Example of Domain Analysis 63
Figure 3 Coding Taxonomy - Support Dimension (Information Sharing) 74
Figure 4 Coding Taxonomy - Support Dimension (Types of Communication) 75

Parent-Provider Relationships:
Are Parents and Teachers of Young Children on the Same Page?

Chapter 1: Introduction

In contemporary developmental science, human development is conceived of as a system of dynamic relations between individuals and their contexts (Lerner, 2018). Parenthood, for example, involves "mutually influential relations among characteristics of parents, characteristics of children, and the contextual characteristics" (Lerner, 2018, p. 288). Parents[1] and children develop in a system that is an integrated whole and composed of several interconnected, mutually influential relationships. This perspective is particularly useful to understand parents' relationships with other caregivers and service providers,[2] because in the United States, children of all ages receive care from adults outside of their family. More tangibly, in 2020, about 55% of children aged 3–5 years old were enrolled in formal schooling programs such as preschool and kindergarten. In prior years, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the values were higher. Further, households where all the primary caregivers were employed had higher preschool and kindergarten enrollment (National Center on Education Statistics, 2022). As a result of the amount of time and number of children who are enrolled in early childhood education programs, the connections between settings where children spend their time are important to understand.

Theoretically, at the intersection of these two important elements of a child's microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory – home and school – is the mesosystem. The mesosystem reinforces the importance of positive links between the environments in which children spend their time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). One critical, dynamic, and mutually influential aspect of a child's mesosystem is the parent-teacher relationship. Conceptualizing the parent-provider relationship this way denotes a shift from more fixed perspectives about parent and teacher roles in schools and reflects a shared sense of responsibility and collaboration by parents and teachers to support children's developmental and learning outcomes.

---

[1] The term "parent" is not limited to biological mothers and fathers. A parent can take on different forms, such as biological parents, stepparent, grandparent, foster parent, legal guardian, or a combination.

[2] The terms "provider," "caregiver," and "teacher" will be used interchangeably in this paper to refer to individuals in early education settings who care for and teach young children.

A Brief History of Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood

The foundation of current approaches to the relationship between early childhood educators and parents can largely be attributed to the K–12 setting. Early in the 20th century, school PTA groups set the standard for how parents could be involved in their children's education. The idea that parents could be advocates for their children's education and the quality of the environments they were learning in originated from the examples of the PTA and similar organizations. Around the same time, nursery schools emerged with an explicit focus on parent education. Much of the focus through the 1960s was on disseminating child development knowledge and information about child rearing to parents. The first formal early intervention program for children with disabilities was founded in the beginning of the 1950s. The program marked the beginning of important developments to support for young children and their families (Powell & Diamond, 1995).

Around that same time, parent cooperative nursery schools were developed. These programs operated at neighborhood levels, and classrooms were jointly planned and staffed by parents and teachers. Parent cooperatives are a good example of the first time regular participation and responsibility for children’s education was shared by parents and teachers. The next milestone in the history of parent-provider relationships was the creation of Head Start in 1964. Head Start programs implement a two-generation approach aimed at supporting both children and their families. As part of that approach, Head Start required that parents participate in the program’s policy council. Parents were also encouraged to volunteer in the classroom and plan parent education meetings. However, the focus on parents in Head Start was mostly one of *involvement*, and their participation was “professionally controlled” rather than *partnerships*. This important distinction frames many of the most current conceptualizations of parent-provider relationships today (Powell & Diamond, 1995).

Parent-teacher *partnerships* were largely conceptualized in the mid-1970s. Early intervention programs, specifically, shifted to the concept of parent empowerment; they focused on family strengths and avoided looking for weaknesses. Later, in 1983, laws were passed with the purpose of creating “a family-centered system of services that recognizes individual needs, as well as the resources, of each child and family.” (Powell & Diamond, 1995, p. 86). A focus on family-centered practices prevailed through the late 1980s, and these practices were upheld by national organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Powell & Diamond, 1995).

During this time, research and theoretical analyses supported the importance of parent-provider relationships. Importantly in 1979, Bronfenbrenner proposed a theory of human development that emphasizes the interconnectedness of relationships and systems that support child and family functioning. Scholars built on their understanding of the ecological systems theory as it relates to parent-teacher relationships in several ways. For example, Joyce Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence was used to explain the shared responsibilities of home, school, and community for children's learning and development in elementary school contexts (Epstein, 2002). In addition, research quickly identified there is significant variation in parent-teacher relationships in early childhood and that the "idealized home-school partnership did not exist for large numbers of children" (Powell & Diamond, 1995, p. 88).

Since the mid-1990s, current attention to parent-teacher relationships has focused heavily on how programs can work with families and recognize the family contributions to children's development and learning. There has also been increased attention to fostering relationships between parents and teachers in culturally sensitive ways. Most recently, national training and technical assistance centers, such as the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (NCPFCE), have emphasized that family engagement is driven by relationships rather than transactions or prescribed roles (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services et al., 2018). Parents are considered to have important knowledge about their child's development that they can share with their child's teachers and vice versa. Echoing the importance of cultural sensitivity in these relationships, equity, inclusivity, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness were highly valued in the NCPFCE recommendations for family engagement (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services et al., 2018). Increased attention to the relational components of family engagement in early childhood education has largely focused on the outcomes associated with high ratings of parent-teacher relationships. Well-articulated understandings about the multiple dimensions and characteristics of the parent-provider relationship itself have not been as thoroughly documented. In addition, little is known about if parents and teachers view their relationship similarly and if the relationship features that are important to parents are shared with teachers.

Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood Education Contexts

Another important takeaway from the history of parent-provider relationships is that these relationships occur in many contexts (e.g., pediatrician's office, home visiting programs, child care settings), and each relationship is highly dependent on context. In the context of child care, the parent-provider relationship is often considered one of the elements that contributes to quality of care. Conversely, when the Abecedarian early child care intervention model, a nationally recognized model for high-quality child care, was used in a child care center located in an urban housing project, parents shared that they felt more connected with and trusting of the staff and aware of the child's development and their role in supporting their development (Koshyk et al., 2021). This is noteworthy because it demonstrates that parent-provider relationships are both a contributing factor in and a potential outcome of high-quality child care. Because quality of care has significant effects on children's development, understanding all the aspects of the settings within and across which children spend their time is critical (Swartz, 2009).

This study focuses on two specific contexts for early childhood development – center-based child care and Head Start. It also focuses on the two roles within each context that are most responsible for engaging with families. Child care centers are usually composed of many groups of children in classrooms with other similarly aged children. The classrooms are staffed by teachers who are typically overseen by a director. Licensed child care centers follow health and safety requirements and are often monitored to make sure they are following those requirements. Child care licensing requirements vary by state (*Child Care Options*, 2022). Family engagement is considered integral to quality child care, and there are several quality indicators that child care centers are evaluated on related to family engagement – communication, family needs and feedback, collaborative activities with families, and community resources and family support (*Family Engagement in QRIS*, 2022). The child care centers in this study were all accredited by The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC accreditation standards state that programs should promote positive relationships for all children and adults and maintain collaborative relationships with children's families that are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2022).

Head Start is a free, federally funded, and regulated program that serves low-income families who have children between three and five years old. In addition to educational activities, children receive basic medical and dental care services and healthy meals and snacks. Family engagement is embedded in Head Start programs through regular home visits, assistance with accessing other community services, and opportunities for parents to volunteer (*Child Care Options*, 2022). Furthermore, the importance of parent-provider relationships in Head Start has been reflected with greater and more specific guidance in the program performance standards, especially in the latest, 2018, revision of the standards (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services et al., 2018). In addition, Head Start and Early Head Start Centers receive training and technical assistance on parent, family, and community engagement via the NCPFCE (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services et al., 2018).

Studying parent-provider relationships in early childhood education is important because early childhood education settings are one of the settings in which children spend much of their time. Despite a growing focus and interest in studying family engagement in early childhood contexts, most of the literature about child care focuses on the association between children’s social and cognitive development and positive relationships between early childhood teachers and children (Swartz, 2009). However, research supports the claims that parent-provider relationships are important for young children’s development and experiences in child care and Head Start. Specifically, parent-provider relationships both directly and indirectly influence children’s academic and social outcomes; the most prominent example from the literature is the positive relationship between parent-provider relationships and children’s school readiness abilities (Mendez, 2010; Powell et al., 2010).

There is also empirical evidence that high-quality relationships between parents and providers are associated with positive outcomes for not only children but parents and providers too. High-quality parent-provider relationships are associated with parents’ self-efficacy, parenting beliefs, and ability to advocate for their child (Bornstein, 2015; Forry et al., 2012; Green et al., 2004; Kim & Sheridan, 2015; Marvin et al., 2019). For providers, effective parent-provider relationships are associated with a more positive sense of self efficacy and job satisfaction (Trivette et al., 2010). These benefits and their relevance for this study will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2: Literature Review. Although parent-provider relationships have many associated benefits, research examining the qualities and aspects of the parent-provider relationship, and specifically whether parents and providers agree about their perceptions of the relationship, is limited and will be the focus of this dissertation.

Introduction to the Present Study

The present study sought to contribute to the overall understanding about parent-provider relationships by examining how parents and providers view their relationships and specifically if there are areas of congruence or divergence in terms of parents' and providers' perceptions of their relationship. The specific research questions for the study were as follows:

1. How do parents and early childhood teachers/family services staff perceive their relationship with each other?
2. Which items in each of the Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire dimensions are driving parent and family services staff perceptions of their relationship with each other? Are these items the same or different for parents and teachers?

Overview of Methodology

To answer these research questions, data from two studies about parent-provider relationships in early childhood were used. The first study, the Cocaring Relationships Study, included data from parents and teachers in center-based child care. The original study documented the multidimensional nature of relationships between infant-toddler teachers and children's parents, particularly within a low-income setting, and investigated the implications of these relationships for parental involvement in their children's education and for young children's social-emotional adjustment (Lang, 2017). The participants included 90 parents and 40 teachers of 12 to 36-month-old children from 10 child care centers. Parents and teachers were asked to complete a set of questionnaires, including the Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire (CRQ). The cocaring construct focuses on how parents and teachers work together in their roles and is a specific way of conceptualizing parent-provider relationships that is borrowed from the literature on coparenting (Feinberg, 2003; Lang et al., 2017). The CRQ measures four dimensions of parent-provider relationships that are considered to be the central aspects of parent-provider relationships: support, endorsement, undermining, and agreement (Lang, 2017).

The second study, FACES 2014 Family Engagement Plus Study ("Plus Study") describes family engagement practices in Head Start from the perspectives of parents and Head Start staff and how parents and staff characterize their relationships with one another. This study was a cross-sectional, mixed-method addition to the FACES 2014 study. One of the primary research questions for this study was, "How do parents and staff characterize their relationships and interactions with one another?" (Aikens et al., 2017; Hurwitz et al., 2021). More information about both data sets will be discussed in Chapter 3: Method.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to examine these data sources. Descriptive and correlational analyses examined and compared parents' and providers' perceptions of their relationships with each other. Correlational analyses were used to assess the relationships between the two ratings (i.e., parents' and teachers') of the parent-provider relationship. Paired sample t-tests were conducted to examine the potential difference between teacher and parent ratings of the cocaring relationship dimensions. Because the factor structures for parent and teacher ratings of the subscales are not identical, using measurement invariance to evaluate group differences was not possible. Instead, more descriptive comparisons of the factor loadings were used to describe which constructs are driving parent and teacher perceptions of their relationship with each other. Finally, the "Plus Study" data was analyzed thematically to look for patterns within each group (i.e., parents and family services staff) and identify differences across each group. These methods are described in more detail in Chapter 3: Method.

Author Positionality and Philosophic Assumptions

Before I continue, it is important to assert my own positionality and any assumptions I bring to this research. This process is critical because without first examining my own positionality, I may risk promoting misinterpretations, misinformation, and misrepresentation of the individuals, dyads, and communities I am studying (Milner, 2007). To begin, I am a White, cisgender, queer woman who is Jewish and disabled. I do not have any children; although I have extensive research experience pertaining to parent-provider relationships, I cannot claim to fully understand parents' relational experiences in early childhood contexts. In addition to my background in research, my experience working in early childhood classrooms and as a nanny offers me some understanding about how providers foster relationships with parents. Furthermore, my parents were very involved in both my secular and religious education from early childhood through high school. My experience of having highly involved parents both motivates my research and has the potential to bias my perspective about how parents "should" be involved in their child's education. Similarly, it is important to note that much of what we consider to be "right" in terms of child rearing and child development imposes American White middle-class norms as rigid standards regardless of families' unique needs (Bernhard et al., 1998). Furthermore, what is meaningful for researchers often depends on their previous experiences; attaining "evidential truth" requires being mindful of potential filters or implicit biases and actively questioning what I believe to be true (Milner, 2007).

Understanding the multiple opportunities for bias, I will need to carefully consider if and how parents' socioeconomic status or race contribute to the ways that they are in relationship with their child's teacher. It can be easy to interpret variations in communication that stray from the “norm” or incongruencies between parents and teachers as indicators of poor parent-provider relationship quality. Knowing that this is a risk, I will pay specific attention to setting aside my own biases or expectations. One specific way I will do this is by heavily relying on direct quotes from the participants to understand parents’ and teachers’ reality and experiences of their relationships. I will also be deliberate in the assertion that “different…does not necessarily mean deficit or deficient” (Milner, 2007, p. 389). I will carefully attribute my discussion of the findings to the results with attention to not extrapolate meaning beyond the scope of the data, and wherever possible I will offer context for my interpretations of the results.

In this chapter, I provided information about the history and relevance of parent-provider relationships in the landscape of 21st century child development and briefly introduced the research questions and methodological approaches. In Chapter 2: Literature Review, I will review the theoretical and conceptual frameworks associated with parent-provider relationships. I will also review the existing research, which includes empirical evidence and various measurement tools used to measure the parent-provider relationship that were used to frame this research. In Chapter 3: Method, I will explain the methodological approach in detail. In Chapter 4: Results, I will articulate the results of both research questions and highlight the critical differences that will guide my conclusions. In Chapter 5: Discussion, I will present my conclusions from my study, the specific limitations I encountered in my work, and some suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To better understand how the present study contributes to the existing body of research on parent-provider relationships, I conducted a literature review. The overall purpose of the literature review was to first provide a rationale for why it is important to study parent-provider relationships in early childhood, then define the parent-provider relationship in early childhood, and finally discuss the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that were relevant to this study. To do this, I discuss information from my review of theoretical and empirical research on parent-provider relationships. Then, I review some of the limitations of the existing research and a rationale for my study. Finally, I offer an overview of the hypotheses for the research questions.

Why Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood?

The advantages of mutually influential relationships between parents and teachers are best demonstrated by the growing body of research, discussed below, that documents the benefits of strong, high-quality parent-provider relationships for programs, parents, children, and providers in early childhood contexts. Consequentially, studying parent-provider relationships is important because children spend much of their time in child care settings, and there is empirical evidence that the parent-provider relationship is beneficial for not only children but parents and providers too.

Benefits for Parents

Parenthood represents a formative life period; the parent-provider partnership may help parents better understand their own roles as agents in their child’s development, and help parents feel empowered, competent, and confident in their parenting skills, parenting beliefs, and ability to advocate for and engage with their child (Bornstein, 2015; Forry et al., 2012; Green et al., 2004; Kim & Sheridan, 2015; Marvin et al., 2019). Parental self-efficacy is the extent to which parents believe they have the ability to influence their children's development and the contexts in which that development takes place (Crnic & Ross, 2017). In research with Early Head Start populations, strengths-based relationships between parents and providers were positively associated with parents' self-efficacy (Green et al., 2004). Strong, supportive relationships between parents and providers may increase or reinforce a family's sense of emotional security and safety, which may help children and parents cope in difficult circumstances (Singer, 2007). Similarly, other research has found that when programs prioritize strong family-provider relationships and empower families, maternal depression can be reduced and parents' use of positive parenting practices can increase (Chazan-Cohen et al., 2007; Trivette et al., 2010). The preponderance of evidence about the importance of parenting support reinforces the need to examine how supportive relationships between parents and providers are conceptualized and enacted.

Benefits for Children

The relationship between parents and providers may directly or indirectly influence the relationship each one has with the child and the child's academic and social outcomes (Murphey, 1992; Powell et al., 2010). An example of a direct association between parent-provider relationships and child outcomes is children's school readiness; high-quality parent-provider relationships are associated with several school-readiness skills, such as early reading skills, more positive behavior, and higher social skills (Forry et al., 2012; Mendez, 2010; Powell et al., 2010).

An example of an indirect association is parenting beliefs and practices. Parents' knowledge and beliefs about parenting may develop from strong parent-provider relationships (Lang et al., 2020). In addition, supportive networks and relationships are important for helping parents manage parenting stress and have more positive attitudes about parenting (Daniels & Moos, 1988). In one study, parenting beliefs (i.e., attitudes toward child rearing) as measured by the parental modernity scale were related to children's social and academic outcomes (Schaefer, 1987). High-quality family-provider partnerships are also associated with positive parenting practices, such as the quality of parent-child relationships (Forry et al., 2012; Lang et al., 2020). Not only are parenting practices strengthened by the parent-provider relationship, but parents' relationships with teachers and, in particular, family services staff also support families in meeting their other basic needs and accessing critical resources, such as nutrition support.

Another example of an indirect association is that teacher-reported attitudes about families were predictive of fewer behavioral problems and higher academic outcomes. In contrast, family involvement was associated with higher behavior problems (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2003). Finally, the importance of family involvement at home, as opposed to school-based or home-school conferencing, was the "strongest predictor of child outcomes" (Fantuzzo et al., 2004, p. 467); the importance of family involvement both within and outside of school has implications for children's academic and social development. In the upcoming sections, I will discuss the research connecting family involvement and child outcomes in-depth and offer a critique about how this approach is insufficient for understanding the parent-provider relationship itself.

Benefits for Providers

Indicators of provider outcomes from effective family-provider relationships are documented in a meta-analysis that comprised providers' self-report and observational data (Trivette et al., 2010). Those outcomes include: a positive sense of self-efficacy and professionalism, job satisfaction, and more positive attitudes toward the families with whom they work (Trivette et al., 2010). These outcomes demonstrate the bidirectionality and reciprocity in parent-provider relationships. The abundance of positive relations between the parent-provider relationship and outcomes for parents, children, and teachers makes this topic interesting and relevant to both policy makers and researchers. However, assessing the various qualities and aspects of the parent-provider relationship is less straightforward and is the focus of this dissertation.

Theoretical Perspectives on Parent-Provider Relationships and Applications for Early Childhood

This study employed several theoretical perspectives to understand parent-provider relationships in early childhood. The first two theories were based on systems perspectives – Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and family systems theory. The third perspective that framed this research was role theory. In addition, I used cultural capital and cultural wealth theories. Taken together, these theories provide the basis for the bidirectional, comprehensive, and more equitable conceptualization of parent-provider relationships and guide this study.

Systems Perspectives and Parent-Provider Relationships

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is the predominant theory used to provide a rationale for and explain parent-provider relationships. Bronfenbrenner's early conceptualizations of ecological systems theory promoted the study of an individual’s development in its ecological context. More specifically, development is characterized by the processes of reciprocal interactions between an individual and their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). The microsystem refers to the activities and interactions in a child’s immediate environment. Home and school are two settings that are in the microsystem. Beyond the microsystem, the mesosystem reinforces the importance of positive links between the environments in which children spend their time (i.e., between two or more microsystems) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). One critical, dynamic, and mutually influential aspect of a child’s mesosystem is the parent-provider relationship. One aspect of the parent-provider relationship that aligns with ecological systems theory is parent-teacher communication. Ongoing, bidirectional communication between parent and providers has been linked to better child outcomes and is essential for building trust between parents and providers and for enhancing the parent-provider relationship (Owen et al., 2000; Perlman & Fletcher, 2012; Reedy & McGrath, 2010).

Family systems theory provides a conceptualization of families as a whole and argues that an individual cannot be understood without considering the complexity of relationships between all family members and people close to the family (Minuchin, 1985). From this perspective, family patterns and dynamics need to be explored and respected to better understand individual and system needs and factors that may be acting as barriers and/or assets for individual coping and functioning (Wasik & Bryant, 2001). In terms of this research, the family is considered a system of connected relationships wherein each individual influences and is influenced by other family members (Schneirla, 1957). Family systems operate by rules, routines, and traditions, often unspoken but powerful. Providers who take the time to understand families and their operating functions can work more respectfully and effectively with families (Wasik & Bryant, 2001).

Another relevant application of family systems theory that will be discussed later is coparenting or cocaring relationships. Coparenting considers “how parents or key adult family members work together in their caregiving roles” (Lang et al., 2020, p. 625). In coparenting relationships, individuals may have different social roles, levels of responsibility, and knowledge of the child. The qualities of coparenting extend well to parent-provider relationships wherein both teachers and parents hold different roles, levels of responsibilities, and knowledge of the child, but they are both invested in and regularly caring for the child. Parents and teachers bring both shared responsibility and different experiences to working with the child (Lang et al., 2017, 2020).

Role Theory and Parent-Provider Relationships

Some research on parent-provider relationships relies on role theory and the specific roles providers have in families’ lives. Conversely, for parents, role theory contributes to parents’ role construction or parents’ ideas about their role in their children’s lives (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1997). Parents’ views of their role in their children’s development are important predictors of how they engage with their children (Kim & Sheridan, 2015). Role theory suggests that roles are “socially constructed sets of expectations held by groups for the behavior of individual members…[and] are also sets of behaviors characteristic of specific kinds of group members” (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1997, p. 3). Regarding parenting, parents’ roles are negotiated and constructed by an interactive process in which parents behave in ways congruent with the expectations and obligations of their role in a specific context, and parents modify their behavior based on their perceptions of how others respond to them or their own expectations for themselves in their role (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1997). It is important to note that these roles are socially, historically, and culturally defined (Lerner, 2018). The contribution of context on parents' understanding of their roles further reinforces the dynamic process by which parents learn about and enact their roles (Lerner, 2018).

Early Childhood Provider Roles in Context. Understanding the roles of child care teachers and family services staff in their respective contexts is critical to this study. Most importantly, both child care teachers and family service staff (FSS) roles include being the primary people assigned to work with families in child care and Head Start programs (Trull, 2015). However, the pre-service and in-service training for these two roles may be different. This is important because it has implications for how providers partner with families. For example, if teachers have multiple responsibilities in a classroom, including working with families, they may have less time available to build meaningful parent-provider relationships. In addition, if teachers are expected to partner with families but have limited professional development or formal education to meet those expectations, their knowledge of how to build relationships with families and the importance of family engagement may be limited. Conversely, if a staff member's main responsibility is working with families and they have the corresponding pre-service and in-service professional development, their capacity and availability to partner with parents may be higher than teachers who are managing multiple responsibilities in addition to family engagement. This important distinction is not only recognizable in professional practice, but in the ways family engagement is embedded in program standards for both NAEYC accredited early learning programs and Head Start programs. I will return to comment on the variation in role expectations and education in the Discussion as it undoubtedly will impact how I interpret and understand parents' and providers' perceptions of their relationships.

As previously mentioned, all the child care centers in this study were accredited by The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria include some specific guidance on staff competencies and preparation. Generally, a NAEYC-accredited program must "employ and support a teaching staff with the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and support families' diverse needs and interests" (McDonald, 2009, p. 8). More specifically, between 2006 and 2020, a requirement was phased in that all teachers must to have a minimum of an associate degree or equivalent and at least 75% of teachers were required to have a minimum of a bachelor's degree or equivalent in early childhood education, child development, or a related field. In addition, teachers' training should encompass not only child development and learning for young children but also family and community relationships. Knowing about, supporting, and collaborating with families is incorporated in staff orientation and ongoing staff development and expectations for child care professionals in NAEYC-accredited centers. This is an expectation of all program staff – there is not a separate role or designation for staff responsible for working with families (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2014). The NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items from 2019 specify the educational requirements for teaching staff in accredited centers and prioritize professionalization of the early childhood education field (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2019). It is unclear if the teachers in the Cocaring Relationships Study were required to uphold these education requirements at the time of the study, 2013, or whether they received extensive professional development related to supporting families. However, 65% of the teachers in the study have at least an associate degree and almost half of the teachers have other early childhood credentials, such as a Child Development Associate Credential (7.5%) or PreK–Grade 3 teacher licensure (12.5%).

Head Start FSS are characterized as staff that provide "in-home and other services including assessment, development of service plans, family advocacy and coordination of service delivery" (Head Start Act Section 648A(c), 2007, in Trull, 2015, p. 94). The requirements for FSS education and experience vary by program. In 1999, the Head Start Performance Standards (HSPS) vaguely suggested that "family and community partnership services must be supported by staff or consultants with training and experience in fields(s) related to social, human, or family services" (HSPS, 1999, p. 27, in Trull, 2015, p. 25). The Head Start family services staff in this study were interviewed in 2015 and had varying levels of education. It is not clear if FSS at the time of this study had substantial family support training, but compared to child care teachers, supporting families is the central aspect of their role, rather than one responsibility out of many.

Notably, as of 2016, the Head Start staff qualifications and competency requirements have changed. Family services staff who work directly with families and were hired after November 7, 2016, are minimally required to have a credential or certification in social work, human services, counseling, or a related field within 18 months of being hired. In addition, professional development for FSS should focus on ensuring "staff have the skills to support and engage families in the family partnership process” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Although these requirements are not applicable to this study’s sample, it is important to acknowledge the changing landscape and professionalization of the early childhood workforce and the role of policy in enacting these changes. It is specifically important to recognize Head Start’s commitment to not only children but their whole family in these updated qualification requirements.

Outside of credentialing and higher education qualifications, there is extensive variation regarding the roles that providers play in the lives of families with whom they work (Riley et al., 2008). The variation in the ways in which parents and providers interact can be encouraging and create opportunities to engage in ways that feel comfortable and appropriate. However, it is also possible this variation can contribute to role confusion and relationship strain (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; McGrath, 2007; Riley et al., 2008; Sharpe, 1991). Identifying discrepancies in parent and teacher perceptions in their roles has been discussed in the literature since as early as 1977 when Sara Lawrence Lightfoot wrote about the tensions and conflict present in elementary school parent-teacher relationships. She remarked that, “though the roles differ, parents and teachers continue to share many of the same responsibilities for the socialization of children” (p. 397). She described territorial issues among parents and teachers that led to confusion and animosity and the potential harms of further discontinuity between home and school (Lightfoot, 1977).

Many years later, when referencing early childhood, McGrath (2007) characterized parents and teachers as “ambivalent partners.” Echoing previous research, the parent-teacher dynamic is typically structured as parents in the role of learners and teachers in the position of authority (McGrath, 2007). Riley and colleagues (2008) add to the conversation about parent and teacher roles and suggest that a lack of clarity about this shared responsibility and anxiety for both parents and providers about collaborating to care for the child can lead to confusion and disillusionment (i.e., the role of the provider is not clearly defined and sometimes the expectations between parents and providers are incongruent). In another study about parent-provider relationships in home visiting programs, when participants were asked about the role their home visitor plays in their lives, they mentioned friend, teacher, parent figure, social worker, and nurse (Riley et al., 2008). However, if parents and providers have a strong relationship, some of these challenges may be positively resolved by improving communication and lessening tension between parents and providers, thereby reinforcing the value of strong partnerships in children's learning and care (Julius, 2017). Furthermore, the parent-provider relationship is likely to influence other interactions and outcomes for parents, teachers, and children as each are developing in multiple contexts that may be influencing each other (Downer & Myers, 2009).

Cultural Capital and Cultural Wealth

Thus far, the theoretical frameworks I have introduced are focused on how parent-provider relationships operate in context and the specific roles parents and providers negotiate within the relationship. Another critical aspect that frames this work is cultural capital and cultural wealth. Cultural capital "emphasizes micro-interactional processes whereby individuals' strategic use of knowledge, skills, and competences comes into contact with institutionalized standards of evaluation" (Lareau & Calarco, 2012, p. 62). Similarly, knowledge of middle-class families is considered valuable in hierarchical contexts, such as schools. Differential knowledge is, therefore, related to social inequality. This is not only the case for parents from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Cultural capital is also applicable to race relations. Yosso (2005) suggests that cultural wealth is critically important for rebuking deficit perspectives about minority students and families. Specifically, deficit thinking assumes that families enter educational settings without the normative cultural knowledge and skills. This perspective perpetuates and replicates educational inequalities because cultural knowledge of schooling from a dominant perspective and conformity is often the aim of educational institutions. Importantly, marginalized groups have cultural capital that is often not valued by the dominant group. Yosso (2005) criticizes traditional cultural capital theory for its limited view of what knowledge, skills, and abilities are valued. Both cultural capital and cultural wealth are related to understanding parent-provider relationships.

In school settings, the notion of institutionally situated cultural dominance shows up in the expectations for parents' involvement both in school and at home. In a way, schools automatically view middle-class parents as better because middle-class families are better able to and more often comply with the school standards regarding parental involvement (Lareau & Calarco, 2012). Lareau and Calarco (2021) connect these concepts by suggesting that middle-class parents are able use their cultural knowledge to meet the school's expectations of the ideal parent. If teachers approve of the way parents are engaging in their children's education, this may be the basis for developing a strong relationship with families. In this way, middle-class parents are often considered well-equipped with their own knowledge, so they are comfortable intervening and asserting their preferences for their child and gain access to certain advantages from interacting with their child's teacher (e.g., respect when they intervene on behalf of their child). Sometimes it is also the case that middle-class parents personally know people who are teachers and can use their own social networks to help prepare for conversations with their child's teacher (Lareau & Calarco, 2012). These advantages are related to parents' social mobility within school settings. Parents who progress up the social ladder through the traditional hierarchies of educational contexts can gain access to teachers in ways that are deemed valuable. This access and valued interaction may serve as the basis for quality parent-teacher relationships.

Conversely, working-class families may not have the capacity to intervene or regularly interact with their child's teacher in the ways that schools prefer. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that working-class parents may not have the same knowledge about their children's schooling. More specifically, "because schools are predominantly middle-class institutions, working-class parents' resources were often incompatible with those expected by the school…schools tended to dismiss working-class and poor parents" (Lareau & Calarco, 2012, p. 70). In response to this dismissal and lack of knowledge, working-class parents may choose to defer to the school and teacher expertise rather than intervene and share their preferences about their children's learning and development.

Whereas Lareau and Calarco (2012) considered differences in cultural capital based on socioeconomic status, Yosso (2005) suggests six forms of capital that are specifically "possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro- and micro-forms of oppression" – aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (p.77). Many of these forms of capital are related to parent-provider relationships. Aspirational capital is concerned with "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). If parents' and teachers' aspirations and goals for a child are aligned, there may be less strain on the relationship. It is sometimes the case that parents have goals for their children that are not able to be met with the resources they have available. Strong parent-teacher relationships may help families gain access to necessary resources for children to meet academic and developmental goals. Social capital is also related to parent-provider relationships. Social capital is understood as the networks of people and resources to which people have access (Yosso, 2005). Sheldon (2002) found that in elementary school contexts, parents gain resources through their relationships with other parents and adults at their child's school; these networks contribute to their involvement in their child's education. In terms of the parent-provider relationship, when parents hear about the resources and support another parent received from their child's teacher as a result of their relationship, they may be more likely to also want to develop a relationship with their child's teacher. Navigational capital is also related to parent-provider relationships. If parents can navigate the social institution of schooling, they may be better able to access their child's teacher in meaningful ways and build a relationship with them. In a way, this is also related to social networks. Social networks help facilitate some of the navigational challenges, especially in institutions not created with marginalized families in mind (Yosso, 2005). Rather than simply considering what working-class or Communities of Color lack, Yosso (2005) focuses on multiple strengths and expands the conceptualization of cultural capital in ways that focus on assets rather than deficits.

In a later section, I will talk about current approaches and challenges to measuring parent-provider relationships in early childhood. Importantly, some of the most widely used measures of parent-provider relationships were developed and validated on White, middle-class families (e.g., Parent Caregiver Relationship Scale and Caregiver-parent partnership scale)

(Elicker et al., 1997; Owen et al., 2000). Without considering cultural capital and cultural wealth, there is a danger that marginalized families and low-income families may be too harshly critiqued for what they do not bring to their relationships with teachers rather than what they do bring. In addition, considering the relationship between parents and providers as a cultural asset, especially for families who are expected to navigate institutions not designed with them in mind, may explain parents' motivation to form a relationship with their young children's teachers.

In this study, the average income for parents and teachers in the two samples are vastly different. In the child care context, parents tend to make more money than teachers. However, in the Head Start sample, that dynamic is the opposite. Therefore, it is important to consider the implications of cultural capital as it relates to parent-provider relationships. Some families may not be involved in the way schools want them to be or the way that measurement tools capture. That may be frustrating for teachers and parents. The frustration might cause ruptures in the relationship or make relationship building difficult, especially for working-class families (Lareau & Calarco, 2012). Considering cultural capital and rejecting a deficit-based perspective contributes to a more equitable understanding of the parent-provider relationship.

Conceptual Framework

Parent-provider relationships have notable benefits for parents, children, and providers and are theoretically supported. Next, I offer a conceptual framework that begins with a definition of parent-provider relationships and continues with a discussion of some of the features and factors the impact the parent-provider relationship. Finally, I introduce and discuss the cocaring relationship conceptualization of parent-provider relationships – the guiding conceptualization for the current study (Lang, 2017).

Defining Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood

The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework defines the relationships between families and providers as collaborative, positive, and goal-oriented relationships that require mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services et al., 2018). Furthermore, parent-provider relationships are characterized as reciprocal, positive, ongoing, and goal-oriented relationships that develop over time and are related to parents' self-efficacy beliefs (Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). The parent-provider relationship is often described as one that involves trust, collaboration, and active participation by parents and providers (McGrath, 2007; Powell et al., 2010; Rosenblatt & Peled, 2002; Saïas et al., 2016).

Parent-Provider Relationships are Not Static

Quality parent-provider relationships develop over time. For example, the length of time that parents and providers spend together may impact the strength of their relationships (Lang et al., 2017). Much like therapeutic relationships, parent-provider relationships may develop due to the length of time that parents and providers spend together (Lang et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2006). It may also be the case that as time goes on, parents and teachers rebalance their relationships such that over time power and knowledge moves from being separately held to jointly held; ideally in quality parent-provider relationships, the discrepancies diminish or are successfully navigated to create more closeness and partnership (Watson et al., 2006).

Factors Associated with the Parent-Provider Relationship in Early Childhood

There are several factors that are associated with parent-provider relationships and are considered widely applicable across several types of parent-provider interactions. Many of these factors are associated with how the relationship functions – among whom and within which contexts (Lerner, 2018; Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). The context of the parent-provider relationship also offers the possibility for variation in the relationship characteristics.

Broadly, the foundation of the parent-provider relationship includes some level of mutual “sizing up” of the other. In this way, both parent and teacher perceptions and qualifications contribute to the development of parent-provider relationships. Some of the factors that contribute to parent-provider relationships include the attributes of the parents, such as their level of income, education, or overall involvement (Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). Providers’ attitudes toward parents are another set of factors that influence the parent-provider relationship (Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). Incongruencies between parents and teachers also contribute to the quality of the parent-provider relationship (Lasky, 2000). Other factors such as mutual trust and communication between parents and providers are important too (Elicker et al., 1997). These factors will be discussed further in the following paragraphs.

Parental Factors. Parent characteristics such as their level of education, marital status, race, and income are associated with providers’ more frequent interactions with parents and providers’ positive perceptions of parents (Swartz, 2009). Parents’ satisfaction with child care, the amount of time the child spends in child care, parents’ past interactions with the provider, and the amount of communication with providers may also contribute to the parent-provider relationship (Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). In a study of child care providers and parents, Swartz and Easterbrooks (2014) identified that providers interact more frequently with, and have more positive views of, more highly educated parents, married parents, and parents with higher incomes. It is possible that these qualities are related to providers’ perceptions of parental competence or child rearing capabilities (Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). Likewise, parents' perceptions of their child's teacher may contribute to the development of the parent-provider relationship.

Parents' perceptions about the provider's competence in taking care of their child may also contribute to parents' opinions or openness to collaborate with their child's teacher (Elicker et al., 1997). In one example, parents felt more secure and trusting of teachers as they gained more years of experience and more confidence (Swartz, 2009). The significance of trust in parent-provider relationships will be discussed in a later section. Interestingly, despite parents' perceptions of teachers, they generally report high levels of satisfaction about their relationship with their child's teacher (Zellman & Perlman, 2006).

Staff Factors. Characteristics such as the provider's experience in the field, educational background, race, parental status, and classroom management may be associated with providers' relationships with parents (Swartz, 2009). As previously indicated, providers' attitudes toward parents may be an important determining factor in the quality of parent-provider relationships because parents' perceptions of providers' attitudes are associated with how supported parents feel by their child's teacher (Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). Providers' attitudes toward parents may also be indicative of whether and how much they like the parent or vice versa. The degree of affiliation or liking also contributes to the quality of the parent-provider relationship (Elicker et al., 1997). Parent-provider relationships are often contingent on providers' attitudes about and toward parents; these potential biases can favor families who experience fewer risk factors or higher socioeconomic status. In addition, teachers' job satisfaction is associated with teachers' views of their relationships with parents (Elicker et al., 1997).

Program Factors. Program characteristics may also influence the parent-provider relationship. For example, the program setting (e.g., center-based child care vs. Head Start) may be related to the opportunities for and the nature of communication between parents and providers (Swartz, 2009). In addition, staff-child ratios, the number of children in the classroom, and teacher turnover may contribute to parent-provider relationships. Because parent-provider relationships develop over time, teacher turnover disrupts ongoing relationships and may make it difficult for parents to feel invested in forming new relationships. High turnover may also diminish parents' trust in the center (McGrath, 2007; Swartz, 2009). Furthermore, compared to other programs, in programs that are both relationship-focused and practice continuity of care, parents reported closer relationships with their child's teacher (Owen et al., 2008).

As previously discussed, program policies, accreditation requirements, and both formal and informal expectations regarding collaboration and communication with parents may also influence the ways parents and providers interact. Likewise, program philosophies about parents' roles in their child's education and development may impact the parent-provider relationship. For example, if programs assign teachers to positions of authority and consider them as child development experts, parents may be considered as lesser or ascribed a role as a learner or consumer of information rather than a contributor (McGrath, 2007). Hierarchies are unhelpful foundations on which to build partnerships.

Collaborative Factors. Incongruencies between family and provider, as well as in cultural values, may influence providers' viewpoints about parents and therefore how they are in relationship with each other (Lasky, 2000). For example, if the providers, representing the dominant group, dictate the norms and values, they have the potential to undermine parents' own approaches to parenting, which may be based in family history or culture (Jordan, 2017; McGrath, 2007). One way these incongruencies play out is in terms of how much respect is offered and received by both parents and providers. If either or both people are not treated with respect, a sense of devaluation or undermining may occur (Elicker et al., 1997; Jordan, 2017; Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). The misalignment of cultural values may also refer to parents' and providers' ideas about child development and child rearing; this is especially true if the providers' approaches threaten parents' deeply held beliefs or values about parenting and caregiving. Put another way, shared values about child development can positively contribute to the development of parent-provider relationships in early childhood (Swartz, 2009). Earlier research also identified discrepancies in parents' preferences for children's self-direction versus conformity based on the caregivers' race and socioeconomic status (Shpancer, 1998). Furthermore, language differences between parents and providers may inhibit the frequency, content, and quality of communication. These limitations may make it difficult for parents and providers to develop a close relationship. Cultural values and beliefs about child rearing may be associated with how often and what topics parents and teachers discuss as well as parent and teacher perceptions of each other.

Maintaining trust in parent-provider relationships is an important shared responsibility that is also related to the power dynamics between parents and providers (McGrath, 2007). One example of how providers help maintain parents' trust is by regularly and openly communicating with parents; keeping parents informed helps parents affirm their child's wellbeing (McGrath, 2007; Perlman & Fletcher, 2012; Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). The role of consistent, two-way communication cannot be understated in developing quality parent-provider relationships

(Blitch, 2017; Perlman & Fletcher, 2012; Reedy & McGrath, 2010). The importance of trust and trust building is so central to the parent-provider relationship that it is emphasized in measurement tools used to evaluate the parent-provider relationship (e.g., The Parent-Caregiver Relationship Scale (Elicker et al., 1997)). In the first studies that tested and validated this measure, trust and respect were two salient features that contributed to the parents' and teachers' confidence and collaboration dimension ratings (Elicker et al., 1997). Behaviors or interactions that threaten providers' trust in parents or vice versa increase divides and can lead to feelings of disconnection rather than partnership among parents and providers.

Summary of Factors Associated with Parent-Provider Relationships. The demographic and background characteristics of both the teacher and parent are related to parents' and providers' views of each other. However, there is more variation and nuance when looking at the specific characteristics that impact both parents' and teachers' perceptions of each other. Parents seem to be most concerned with provider and program characteristics that are associated with their level of trust and confidence in the program or provider. Teachers' perceptions seem to be based more on their affiliation, liking, or how positive their views are about the parent. In addition, the amount of time a child has been in a classroom and the number of opportunities for parent-teacher communication seems to be related to how the parent-teacher relationship develops for both parties. Notably, barriers that limit the already brief communication between parents and teachers and the substance and frequency communication make it more difficult for parents and teachers to build quality relationships. Similarly, congruence, or lack thereof, of cultural values and beliefs about child rearing may be associated with the quality of the relationship between parents and providers. Understanding that many factors contribute to the parent-provider relationship, this study focused on gaining an understanding about parents' and providers' perceptions of their relationship and the possible reasons for convergence or divergence of their perspectives.

The Cocaring Relationship

Lang et al. (2017) present a conceptual framework for "making sense of the parent-teacher relationships and the multiple interactions that parents and families have each day within child care centers" (p. 98) via The Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire (CRQ). The CRQ measures the overlapping dimensions of parent-provider relationships to define the central aspects of parent-provider relationships. The cocaring construct focuses on how parents and teachers work together in their roles and is a specific way of conceptualizing parent-provider relationships that is borrowed from the literature on coparenting (Feinberg, 2003; Lang et al., 2017). This perspective aligns well with Bronfenbrenner's perspective (2002) about a network of relations; Bronfenbrenner (2002) notes that primary caregivers should have at least one other caregiver adult who "encourages and expresses admiration and affection for the person caring for and engaging in joint activity with the child" (p. 45). This other person may be considered either a coparent or, possibly, a child's teacher.

Relating the parent-teacher relationship to coparenting is not an entirely new phenomenon. McWilliam and colleagues (1997) presented four types of family philosophies in early care and education programs. The fourth philosophy, "families as partners," is based on the idea that teachers and parents equally contribute to decision making about the child and function as coparents. Some other research explicitly refers to the "co-caring communication" within parent-provider relationship. Perlman and Fletcher (2012) use the term "co-caring communication to refer to information exchanges between child care staff and parents regarding an individual child's experiences, development, and needs" (p. 541). As previously discussed, two-way communication is a particularly important factor associated with parent-provider relationships.

The four dimensions of the CRQ are endorsement, support, undermining, and agreement. These dimensions were derived from exploratory factor analysis that assessed whether the core dimensions found in both research on coparenting and the qualitative research conducted on cocaring were similar in the context of parent-provider relationships (Lang et al., 2017). The support dimension focuses on parents' and teachers' perceptions of support each other. This dimension emphasizes supportive messages about one's role, validation, encouragement, collaboration, and open communication. The endorsement dimension represents parents' and teachers' confidence in each other as a strong caregiver. The undermining dimension reflects parents' and teachers' feelings of being invalidated in their role. Features of the undermining dimension include distrust, subversion, discomfort, contradiction, and criticism. Lastly, the agreement dimension measures parental and teacher perceptions of agreement with each other. The agreement dimension is most specifically related to ideas about child rearing practices and shared goals for the child's development (Lang et al., 2017, 2020). Importantly, there is no overall score of parent-provider relationships that can be derived from the CRQ. Instead, four separate dimensions are considered. The use of a multidimensional measure rather than a composite score addresses the missing nuance for which other measures are critiqued. Additional critiques of measures of the parent-provider relationship will be discussed in the section titled "Measuring and Comparing Perspectives of Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood."

Lang’s (2017) original study using this measure of parent-provider relationships documented the multidimensional nature of relationships between infant-toddler teachers and children’s parents and investigated the implications of these relationships for parental involvement in their children’s education and for young children’s social-emotional adjustment (Lang et al., 2017). Lang et al. (2017) found that higher levels of support were associated with higher levels of parents’ involvement at home and school. In addition, higher levels of undermining were related to parents’ higher involvement at school. The cocaring conceptualization of parent-provider relationships will be quantitatively and qualitatively evaluated to answer this study’s research questions.

Summary of Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework emphasizes the multiple factors associated with parent-provider relationships in early childhood education. There has been a significant amount of empirical research on both factors associated with and the outcomes of parent-provider relationships. There is limited empirical evidence that examines the extent to which parents and providers agree on their perceptions of their relationship, and there is a lack of understanding about what both parents and providers value in the relationship (McGrath, 2007). Building on the contributions of Lang and colleagues (2017), the purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the multiple dimensions of parent-provider relationships, learn about how parents and early childhood teachers/family services staff perceive their relationship with each other, and investigate whether there are clear areas of convergence or divergence in their perspectives.

Measuring and Comparing Perspectives of Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood

Before I describe some of the research studies about parent-provider relationships, I will review the common measurement tools used to operationalize the parent-provider relationship. Then, I will address some of the limitations of these measurement approaches and how I think the two proposed data sources for this study can address some of the limitations. In the next section, I will specifically discuss comparison studies about parent-provider relationships. In doing so, I will strengthen the rationale that similar comparison studies with the proposed data sources are warranted.

Current Approaches and Challenges to Measuring Parent-Provider Relationships in Early Childhood

Researchers studying parent-provider relationships have focused on assessing parent involvement, examining participant satisfaction with various aspects of the program services, and mutual attachment of providers and families. These methods may also impose bias, either by judging the relationship based on only the provider notes or using specific scales which prime the evaluator to only consider those specified behaviors when evaluating the relationship. In addition, there are challenges related to observational assessments, especially when interpreting dynamic relationships across cultural groups. However, observational methods do have some promise; observational techniques when triangulated with other data sources may strengthen researchers' understanding of the parent-provider relationship (Riley et al., 2008).

Questionnaire and satisfaction scales used to understand the parent-provider relationship tend to be one-sided and highly subjective. There is a strong positivity preference in many perspectives of parent-provider relationships. By this I mean, parent assessment of services and service providers tend to be high with little variability (Zellman & Perlman, 2006). This measurement trend does not reflect the heterogeneity within parent-provider relationships. This is especially true if questions about the family's culture as it relates to parent-provider relationships are vague. Failure to appreciate and investigate the heterogeneity within ethnic groups and/or parent-provider relationships may contribute to insensitive and ineffective interventions.

As with observation studies, satisfaction scales are not looking at the relationship from multiple perspectives (Bernhard et al., 1998; Zellman & Perlman, 2006), Furthermore, using questionnaire methodologies may again provide a narrow view of parent-provider relationships. If there are individual or cultural differences that impact the relationship, those are typically not captured in these measures. Several measurement tools I reviewed are lacking culturally specific questions or any questions about how culture is associated with relationships (e.g., Elicker et al., 1997; Green et al., 2004). In one example, the Measure of Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality, the parent form has two items related to culture. One of these items is phrased negatively, "my child care provider or teacher judges my family because of our culture and values" (*Development of a Measure of Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FTPRQ)*, 2015). When the family or child's cultural values and practices are assessed, the items in the measure are typically vague and are not related to parent-provider relationships, but to measures of parenting competency and program engagement (Green et al., 2004). As such, cultural bias in a measure occurs when there is unintended systematic variance produced by factors linked to and varying across cultures or subcultures (e.g., assuming one universal pattern)

(Knight & Hill, 1998). It is important, however, to avoid standardization fallacy; instead of automatically assuming that the test is biased, researchers should investigate the reliability and validity of the test in the minority group before deciding if it is biased (Knight & Hill, 1998). Several of the prominent measures of parent-provider relationships have not been validated on specific cultural groups, and results from prominent studies using these measures are not representative of diverse populations in U.S. (e.g., Parent-Caregiver Relationship Scale and Caregiver-Parent Partnership Scale were developed and validated on mostly White middle-class families) (Elicker et al., 1997; Owen et al., 2000).

Measures such as the Parent-Caregiver Relationship Scale (Elicker et al., 1997) or the Caregiver-Parent Partnership Scale (Ware et al., 1995) include several of the characteristics of relationships between parents and early childhood educators, such as trust, collaboration, and communication. When assessing the validity of these measures of parent-provider relationships, it is also important to consider whether the underlying construct being addressed by a measure differs across specific groups. This specific validity issue is not explicitly discussed in the literature, but if parents and providers differentially understand constructs in a measure of parent-provider relationships, this is a worthy concern for current measurement tools. More research about the congruence of parent and teacher perceptions of their relationship is necessary to understand parents' and teachers' different responses.

Comparing Parent and Teacher Perspectives of Parent-Provider Relationships

Research suggests there is difficulty assessing the complexity in and qualities of the parent-provider relationship. Accordingly, few researchers have attempted to conduct analyses on substantial subsamples, coordinate data from several resources to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship (e.g., included both quantitative and qualitative data), or examine both the teacher and parent perspectives of the parent-provider relationship. There are a limited number of studies that have focused on comparing parents' and teachers' perceptions of their relationships. The existing studies identified differences between parents' and providers' ratings and views of the relationship. These differences range from varied perspectives on the type and importance of communication (McGrath, 2007; Perlman & Fletcher, 2012; Powell, 1978; Reedy & McGrath, 2010) to differences about which aspects of the relationship are most important (e.g., Elicker et al., 1997).

In early childhood settings, there are, specifically, a few studies that have examined the level of agreement between parents' and teachers' perceptions of their relationship. The studies that have examined this association have limitations and conclusions that indicate more research on this topic is an important contribution to the field. In one study, Elicker et al. (1997) presented an analysis of congruence of infant and toddler parent and caregiver responses to the Parent-Caregiver Relationship Scale (PCRS) and found that the responses were not significantly correlated ($r = .14$). Whereas parents and providers agreed on the qualities necessary for high-quality relationships, their operational definitions varied. This signaled a potential lack of congruence between how parents and providers view the relationship or a flaw in the measurement (Elicker et al., 1997). Another study of Head Start children evaluated the relationships between parents and teachers and its association with parent and teacher ratings of children's self-regulation (Zulauf-McCurdy & Loomis, 2022). They found that there were low and not statistically significant levels of congruence between parents and teacher reports using the Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale ($r = .07$). Their findings suggest that there may be “substantial differences between how parents perceive their relationships with teachers compared to how teachers perceive their relationships from parents” (Zulauf-McCurdy & Loomis, 2022, p. 10). The findings from these two studies in early childhood settings suggest that more exploration into the factors that contribute to differential perceptions of relationships between parents and teachers is necessary and that it is imperative to empirically capture both sides of the parent-teacher relationship in future research.

In elementary school settings, there are a few examples of comparing parent and teacher responses that I will introduce specifically to strengthen the rationale for the proposed study and highlight gaps in the literature that extend beyond the early childhood context. First, Iruka and colleagues (2011) studied whether the concordance between parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of their relationships was associated with children’s social skills. The parent-teacher relationship rating was based on three items about trust, communication, and the degree of agreement. These three items were collected as part of the National Center for Early Development and Learning’s (NCEDL) Multi-State Study of Pre-Kindergarten (Iruka et al., 2011). The researchers used correlations and the creation of two-way interaction terms between parents' ratings of their relationships with teachers and teachers' ratings of their relationships with parents to assess concordance of views. They found that parent and teacher ratings of their relationship were significantly correlated ($r = .23$). In this study, parental income was positively associated with teacher’s report of stronger agreement, communication, and trust. The authors did not state if parents of higher incomes also rated their relationship more positively (Iruka et al., 2011). The use of interaction terms suggests that the researchers acknowledged the dynamic quality of the parent-teacher relationship. However, by using only three survey items and primarily focusing on child outcomes, this study only scratched the surface in terms of understanding the essence of parent-provider relationships.

In another study of congruence, the Parent-Teacher Relationship Scale (PTRS) was used to assess kindergarten parents’ and teachers’ reports of relationship quality. In this study, three categories of parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of the relationship quality were created based on the categorization of parents’ and teachers’ mean item scores: positive congruence, incongruence, and nonpositive congruence. Over 60% of the parent-teacher dyads were categorized as positively congruent (i.e., mean item score of ≥4.00 on the 5-point Likert scale from both participants) (Minke et al., 2014). The negatively skewed data (i.e., largely positive responses) aligns with previous research on parent and teacher satisfaction and relationship ratings (Zellman & Perlman, 2006). Following the trend of connecting parent engagement in school to child outcomes, researchers used these parent-teacher relationship congruence groups to predict children’s social and behavioral functioning and academic performance (Minke et al., 2014). Of note, this study found that parents’ reports of more home-school conferencing and parental self-efficacy were associated with congruent ratings of the parent-teacher relationship. None of the teacher variables in the study predicted congruence within the parent-teacher relationship (Minke et al., 2014). An important, and reoccurring, criticism of the research is that in this study, the parent-teacher relationship was primarily evaluated for its association with the child’s development rather than for the purpose of understanding the parent-teacher relationship.

Similarly, a study in Norway focused on one specific quality of the parent-teacher relationship – cooperation – and assessed how agreement and disagreement about relationship quality was related to children’s academic and social outcomes in their first year of school (Cook et al., 2018). The researchers used both parents' and teachers' responses to a single question about their rating of cooperation with the other to, like Minke and colleagues (2014), create a categorical variable that represented their shared or different perspectives about their joint level of communication (i.e., a proxy for relationship quality). From the overall sample, 38% of children's parents and teachers agreed that they had a very good cooperative relationship (Cook et al., 2018). This is about half as many parent-teacher dyads than Minke and colleagues (2014) found in their categorizations. The combined level of cooperation from parents and teachers was used to predict first graders' academic and social outcomes. For children whose teachers and parents reported very good cooperation, their academic outcomes were slightly better when compared to their peers. A similar pattern was observed for children's social skills (Cook et al., 2018). This study is important because it measures the parent-provider relationship in terms of perceived cooperation (i.e., something that is fundamentally conceptualized as bidirectional), but it uses a single item to measure their perceptions of cooperation and focuses on how that perceived cooperation impacts child outcomes. The ways in which parents and teachers collaborate and view their relationship are more dynamic than a single item can represent. This study contributed to the vast literature that demonstrates the importance of the parent-teacher relationship and, specifically, the importance of considering both parents' and teachers' views. It did not, however, provide an analysis of the relationship itself or consider the multiple dimensions of parent-provider cooperation.

In summary, the focus of these three studies in elementary grades was not on the parent-teacher relationship itself. Understanding how the parent-teacher relationship is conceptualized is often glossed over in favor of assessing its associations with various outcomes. Furthermore, a critique of most measures of the parent-provider relationship, including the ones discussed above, is that they characterize the parent-provider relationship holistically (i.e., as one variable rather than via the subscales/dimensions) which limits the important nuance and complexity of understanding the parent-provider relationship (e.g., Minke et al., 2014; Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009; Owen et al., 2000; Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). As our understanding of the parent-provider relationship has evolved, newer measures have been created that address many of the critiques discussed above.

One measure, the Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire (CRQ), aligns with the evolving conceptualizations of the parent-provider relationship (Lang et al., 2017). First, the CRQ is not used to find a composite score for the parent-teacher relationship. Instead, it is used to assess specific dimensions of the relationship – support, endorsement, agreement, and undermining (Lang et al., 2017, 2020). In addition, the inclusion of the undermining dimension in the CRQ – a negative relationship attribute – allows for a more expansive understanding of the parent-provider relationship and addresses some of the concerns that the ratings of parent-provider relationships are largely positive (Zellman & Perlman, 2006). The CRQ addresses another critique that many of the measures of parent-provider relationships were validated on mostly middle-class families. The CRQ was validated on a sample that included low-income families; 24.5% of the original sample received subsidized child care. The cocaring framework and associated measure (CRQ) appear to address many of the critiques discussed above, and, therefore, both were selected for this dissertation. Furthermore, it is possible that studies using qualitative data will be well suited for addressing the lack of multidimensionality described above. The choice to use both quantitative and qualitative data in this study is particularly useful to add texture and dimension to an often-flattened phenomenon – the parent-provider relationship.

The Current Study

An evaluation of the congruence of perspectives, like the one conducted using the PRCS or PTRS, has not been conducted using either the CRQ, which assesses four dimensions of parent-teacher relationships within child care centers, or the FACES 2014 Family Engagement Plus Study ("Plus Study"), which describes family engagement practices in Head Start. The data collected for the Cocaring Relationships Study is particularly advantageous because participants who completed the CRQ, teachers and parents, are matched and are, thus, reflecting on a single dyadic relationship, rather than more general relationships. Despite the availability of the data, many researchers have not investigated these paired responses to gain a better understanding of the parent-provider relationship in early childhood settings.

Likewise, a large-scale evaluation of the "Plus Study" (2017) reported frequencies, topics of communication, and collaborative efforts for supporting children's development from parent, FSS, and teacher perspectives; although for the most part, parents and teachers perspectives' were not directly compared in a thematic or taxonomic analysis to examine extent of convergence. However, one notable contrasting opinion was observed between parents and family services staff. Parents and family services staff (FSS) disagreed about how often FSS listened to parents ideas about ways to improve and offered activities, materials, or suggestions about parenting; FSS reported doing these things more often than parents reported experiencing them (Aikens et al., 2017). The report included some other comparison charts showing the difference in the number of times certain types of communication, for example, were mentioned by parents and FSS (e.g., Aikens et al., 2017, p.40). The study aims were also different than my current study, the researchers used open and closed-ended questions to answer four specific research questions:

1. How do families and staff view and interact with each other?
2. How often do families and staff communicate with each other? What topics do they discuss?
3. How do families and staff work together to support the child's learning and development?
4. What goals do families have for themselves and their children? How do staff work with families to help them meet these goals?

Finally, this study did not highlight or focus on the differences between teachers and FSS roles when collaborating with parents. All the participants in the "Plus Study" are associated with Head Start. With the FSS role, the division of responsibility between FSS and teachers as it relates to family engagement may be different. Still, the researchers often presented the "staff perspective" grouping FSS and teacher responses together.

The current study aims to further contribute to the overall understanding about parent-provider relationships by examining how parents and providers view their relationships and specifically if there are areas of congruence or divergence in terms of parents' and providers' perceptions of their relationship. The fist evaluation of the "Plus Study" data by Aikens et al. (2017) provided a strong foundation for understanding parent-provider relationships. Different research questions and analytic approaches may be useful to understand the parent-provider relationship more deeply.

Research Questions

The research questions (RQ) of the present study are as follows:

1. How do parents and early childhood teachers/family services staff perceive their relationship with each other?
    a. Using the Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire, what are the correlations between teachers' and parents' perceptions of their relationship? Are there statistically different perceptions of parents' and teachers' perceptions of their relationship?
    b. Using the "Plus Study," what are the similarities and differences in how parents and family services staff perceive (or describe) core dimensions of the cocaring relationship?
2. Which items in each of the Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire dimensions are driving parent and teacher perceptions of their relationship with each other? Are these items the same or different for parents and teachers?

Hypotheses

The data sets for this study examine the relationship with parents and teachers (i.e., Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire) and parents and family services staff (FSS) (i.e., "Plus Study"). I consider teachers and FSS similarly when reflecting on their relationships with parents. This is because in their respective contexts (child care and Head Start) they are the ones most directly responsible for engaging with parents. For a more thorough discussion of the similarities and differences between the roles, please see the section titled: Role Theory and Parent-Provider Relationships.

Using the CRQ, I hypothesize that overall, both parents' and teachers' ratings of their relationship will be largely positive across all dimensions (i.e., greater child-rearing agreement, greater levels of endorsement, greater levels of support and lower levels of undermining). However, there may be some differences in the ways parents and teachers characterize and perceive their relationship that appear when looking more closely at the item-level responses and factor loadings. I predict that the ratings on the support dimension will be higher for parents than for teachers. These differences may appear in the support dimension of the CRQ because that dimension includes items that assess communication. As previously noted, communication is an important element of parent-provider relationships and there is ample research suggesting that communication preferences and perceptions vary among parents and teachers in early childhood contexts. This may also be attributed to how parents and teachers understand and enact the roles they hold in early childhood settings. If teachers perceive their role as one of validating, encouraging, and providing caregiving help to parents, and act accordingly, parents may feel more supported than teachers. Conversely, if teachers perceive their communication with parents to be one-sided or unequal (i.e., they are often initiating communication or providing support) they may not rate their perception of support as highly. This may indicate a gap in reciprocity in the parent-teacher relationship.

Due to the potential for power imbalance in parent-teacher relationships, parents' and teachers' perceptions of undermining and endorsement may be different. My review of the literature and conceptual frameworks suggest that if parents and teachers have similar perceptions about how well their beliefs about child rearing and caregiving are aligned (i.e., no statistically different perceptions on the agreement dimension), then they may not have differences in their perceptions of undermining or endorsement. Parents want to have their views heard and they want to be collaborators in their child's observations (McGrath, 2007; Sharpe, 1991). Both parents and teachers are interested in working together to understand their needs and aspirations (Sharpe, 1991). One important way this can be accomplished is by sharing experiences and observations – i.e., having a strong level of agreement and communication. Conversely, if they have different ratings of agreement, the other dimension ratings may, also, be different. It will be interesting to see if there are any patterns among parent-teacher dyads. For example, if parents and teachers both rate the support dimension positively, do they rate the other dimensions positively too? Conversely, if there is a high rating of the undermining dimension for both parents and teachers, are the other dimensions potentially impacted?

Using the "Plus Study," I predict that both parents and FSS will agree that a quality education and a safe, nurturing environment for children is important. A shared focus on the child's well-being and school readiness may be an indicator of a positive relationship between parents and FSS. This shared focus may reveal levels of agreement among parents and teachers. However, there may also be some level of disagreement about how to support children's growth and development; differences about parenting practice and beliefs between parents and FSS may come out in practice. Despite sharing similar overall goals, the ways that parents and FSS talk about their relationship with each other may be less positive or aligned with each other if the ways that parents and FSS work toward those child-related goals are not aligned.

As previously mentioned, parents and FSS disagreed about how often FSS listened to parents' ideas about ways to improve and offered activities, materials, or suggestions about parenting; FSS reported doing these things more often than parents reported experiencing them

(Aikens et al., 2017). As with the previous hypotheses, I predict that communication patterns, including the topics of conversation and the reported frequency of communication, may differ between parents and FSS. A more detailed look into the frequency and topics of conversations between parents and FSS may reveal distinct goals or objectives for parents and FSS.

Chapter 3: Method

In this chapter, I will discuss the data sources for this study and the analytical approaches that I will use to answer each of the research questions. I will first present information about each of the data courses, individually, and then I will discuss the analytical approach for each research question using both data sources and a variety of methodological approaches. When appropriate, I refer to preliminary analyses that informed my research choices. These analyses include demographic information, information about the distributions of the variables, and some information from early analyses of congruence between parent-provider perspectives of their relationship.

Source #1: The Cocaring Relationships Study

Participants

The Cocaring Relationships Study included 90 parents and 40 teachers of 12 to 36-month-old children (i.e., one to three years old) from 10 child care centers. Within each child care center, one to 18 infant and/or toddler classrooms participated in the study (Lang et al., 2017). Parents and teachers completed a set of questionnaires that included demographic questions, the Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire (CRQ), and questions about family involvement. This study uses data from parent and teacher responses on the CRQ.

The total number of parents in the current study is 88.[3] Based on self-reported racial/ethnic information collected via the initial parent survey, 68% of the participants identified as White, 23% identified as Black or African American, and 14% identified as another race.[4] In addition, 5% identified as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. The average age of children was 2.07 years (*SD* = 0.60). The average age of the parents was 33.88 years (*SD* = 5.54). In addition, 88% of the parents self-identified as female. Parents' median income was $75,500, and 76% of parents reported having a bachelor's degree or higher. Ninety percent of parents reported that they were currently employed and working at the time of the study. Most of the children were enrolled in their current classroom within their child care center for an average of 11.48 months (*SD* = 6.38). Additional demographic information for families can be found in Table 1.

---

[3] One participant was removed during pre-analysis screening because they were identified as an influential case. An additional participant was removed before beginning analyses based on study notes from the team that originally collected these data (S. Lang, personal communication, August 2021).

The total number of teachers in the current study was 40. Most of the teachers identified as White (73%), 25% identified as Black or African American, and 5% identified as another race.[5] Three percent of teachers identified as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Most of the teachers self-identified as female (93%). The teachers' median income was $29,000. Sixty-five percent of teachers reported having an associate degree or higher. Additional demographic information for teachers can be found in Table 2.

As previously mentioned, this data set includes pairs of parents and teachers. The matched data set is composed of parent-teacher pairs with complete responses to the CRQ. This data set includes 38 teachers and 85 parents. As teachers were not answering collectively about all the families in their classroom but responding about a particular relationship with a specific family, each teacher response for each family is considered a different observation.

---

[4] Participants could select more than one race/ethnicity category; the percentages may add up to more than 100%.

[5] As with parents, teachers could select more than one race/ethnicity category.

Procedure

Eighteen child care centers from within a large midwestern metropolitan area that were registered with the state's Department of Job and Family Services were selected for the study. Eligible centers had at least two infant and/or toddler classrooms. Using information from statewide and national accreditation ratings, centers were selected to represent varying levels of overall quality. In some cases, "snowball sampling" was used to identify additional contacts in the area that met the study criteria. After initial outreach, 10 centers agreed to participate in the Cocaring Relationships Study. Nine of the 10 centers provided subsidized child care to eligible families (Lang et al., 2017). Center directors helped identify one lead or co-teacher from each classroom within the center to participate in the study. To be eligible for the study, the teacher had to have been teaching in their classroom for at least three months. In most cases, only one teacher met the qualifications for the study, but when two teachers in a classroom were eligible, teachers were randomly selected (Lang et al., 2017).

Families were recruited via flyers in their mailboxes and word of mouth from research staff who spoke to parents in-person at the child care center. Up to three parents who met the eligibility criteria were selected from each classroom. The criteria for participation were as follows: (a) The child had to attend child care for an average of at least 25 hours per week, (b) the parent had to be able to read and write in English, (c) the child had to have been in their current classroom for at least three months, and (d) the child must have maintained a consistent residence for the past 6 months. Parents were asked to complete a packet of questionnaires that took approximately two hours. For their time, they were compensated $30 in gift cards (Lang et al., 2017).

Measures

The Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire (CRQ) (Lang et al., 2017).

Parents’ and teachers’ perspectives on their relationship with each other were measured using the CRQ – a 30-item measure that assesses four dimensions of parent-teacher relationships within child care centers. The CRQ items were rated on a Likert-type scale from 0–6 with 0 indicating *not at all true* and 6 indicating *very true*. The questionnaire was analyzed as four subscales or dimensions – support, endorsement, undermining, and agreement – which were presented as summed values from the items associated with each dimension. A higher score on any dimension represented a higher rate of parents’ or teachers’ perception of that dimension of the cocaring relationship. Summed scores are problematic with missing data. However, an analysis of missingness indicated that only one response was missing from each of the items that comprise the four CRQ dimensions. The amount of missingness was assessed and was not overly concerning; sum scores were calculated to stay close to the fidelity of the original scales’ measurement and reporting. The sum scores for each of the cocaring dimensions for parents and teachers can be found in Table 3.

Each of the cocaring dimensions captures a specific aspect of the cocaring relationship between parent and providers. The support dimension focuses on ways in which parents and teachers feel supported by their each other. Two examples of parent questions about support are “My child’s teacher asks my opinion on issues related to caring for my child,” and “We often discuss the best way to meet my child’s needs.” Examples of teacher questions about support are, “This parent asks for my opinion on issues related to caring for his/her child,” and “We often discuss the best way to meet his/her child’s needs.” The endorsement dimension represents parents’ and teachers’ confidence in each other as a strong caregiver. One example of an item from the endorsement dimension for parents is, “My child’s teacher pays a great deal of attention to my child.” An example of a question for teachers is, “I believe this child’s parent is a good parent.” The undermining dimension reflects parents’ and teachers’ feelings of being invalidated in their role. Some parent items in this dimension include, “My child’s teacher tries to show that she or he is better than me at caring for my child,” and “My child’s teacher does not trust my abilities as a parent.” Some teacher items include, “It is easier and more fun to be with this parent’s child alone than it is when the parent is present,” and “This parent does not trust my abilities as a teacher.” Lastly, the agreement dimension measures parental and teacher perceptions of agreement with each other. This dimension comprised items, such as, “My child’s teacher and I have different ideas about how to raise my child.” For teachers, an example is, “This parent and I have the same goals for his/her child.”

One important note is that although the questions for parents and teachers were similar, the factor structures were slightly different for the dimensions between parents and teachers. The full list of questions and dimensions can be found in Table 4. In the current study, the coefficient alpha for each of the four dimensions of the cocaring relationship indicated high levels of internal consistency (coefficient alpha = 0.82–0.90 and 0.75–0.90 for parents and teachers respectively).

Source #2: Family Engagement Plus Study

Procedure

The Family Engagement Plus Study (“Plus Study”) includes semi-structured family engagement interviews with both Head Start parents and family services staff (FSS) that were conducted between April and July 2015. The interviews included both open-ended qualitative items and closed-ended survey items. To ensure consistency, the interviewers strictly followed the interview protocol (i.e., no rephrasing, adding probes, or asking items out of order). The semi-structured interviews were completed in either English or Spanish by a team of trained telephone interviewers. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by an external vendor. Interviews conducted in Spanish were translated to English (Aikens et al., 2017; Hurwitz et al., 2021).

To attain the final sample, which includes 449 participants: 305 parents and 144 FSS, sampling groups were sorted using a technique called implicit stratification. Implicit stratification helped ensure that the result sample more closely represents the entire sample (Aikens et al., 2017; Hurwitz et al., 2021). Similar implicit stratification approaches will be used to select a sample for this study.

Parents were asked to participate in a one-hour, semi-structured interview via invitation after they completed a survey about their family engagement experience in Head Start. Specifically, a subset of 12 parents were selected from each program (*n* = 720) and 650 parents were eligible for FACES 2014 data collection. From the eligible sample, 315 parents completed a semi-structured parent interview. Parents who completed the interviews received $25. Ten parent interviews were not included in the final sample (Aikens et al., 2017; Hurwitz et al., 2021).

One hundred and forty-five FSS interviews were completed. Importantly, because of the length of the FSS interview, about half of the FSS sample was assigned to complete one set of open-ended items (*n* = 72) and the other half was assigned to complete a different set (*n* = 73).

One FSS interview was incomplete and therefore, the final sample of FSS interviews is 144 (Aikens et al., 2017; Hurwitz et al., 2021). FSS participants included in this study will be drawn from the group of FSS participants who completed the interview module about working with families and opposed to the module on community engagement (*n* = 72).

Participants

Of the parents who participated in the family engagement interviews and for whom demographic data were available (*n* = 280), 35% were White, 22% were African American, and 37% were Hispanic/Latino. Most mothers had a high school diploma or GED (35%) or some college/vocational/technical training (34%). English was the primary language spoken at home for 75% of the families. Most families were composed of both a biological/adoptive mother and biological/adoptive father (49%) or only a biological or adoptive mother (42%) (Aikens et al., 2017).

Of the family services staff (FSS) who participated in the family engagement interviews (*n* = 145), 42% were White, 21% were African American, and 30% were Hispanic/Latino. Most of the FSS were female (97%). Most of the FSS had education beyond a high school diploma: some college (15%), associate degree (14%), bachelor's degree (42%), or a graduate or professional degree (18%). The average number of years the FSS who participated in the family engagement interviews worked in Head Start is 11.4 years (Aikens et al., 2017).

Based on a review of other qualitative investigations of parent-provider relationships, I selected 20 parent interviews and 10 FSS interviews for this study. The choice to select more parents than FSS is based on the proportion of FSS who were in the original study (approx. 2:1

Parent:FSS interviews). The sampling strategies discussed next will be used in this study to reduce sample size from its original 449 interviews.

As with the original study, implicit stratification was used. First, the FSS interviews were sorted based on which set of questions the FSS answered. This was to be sure that the included FSS interviews include responses for the specific questions about FSS relationships and experience working with parents (*n* = 72). Then, sampling decisions were made for both parents and FSS.

First, I stratified the parent and FSS samples based on self-reported race and ethnicity. Then randomly selected parents and FSS from each racial and ethnic category so that this study sample was representative of the larger sample. In this sample, parents and FSS could not be linked to each other (i.e., parents and FSS did not answer questions about each other or about a specific dyad). Therefore, hypotheses about whether the self-reported racial or ethnic identities of the FSS and parent are related to their relationship could not be tested; because I could not link the parents and FSS, I, instead, aimed for a sample that closely represented the original sample. To do this, after I completed the original sampling, I checked the other demographic characteristics of the parents and FSS, such as level of education and gender to ensure that the random sample closely resembled the original sample.

Due to disclosure risks, further demographic information that might be useful to confirm the resemblance between the sample and the larger study cannot be revealed in this paper. However, randomization checks were completed, and the study sample was representative of the larger study on several demographic markers such as race, age, average income, and level of education.

Measures

Both the parent and FSS family engagement interviews asked participants to broadly describe their family engagement and Head Start experiences. The qualitative items, which are the focus of this study, were sourced from the Head Start Family Voices interviews (Aikens et al., 2014). This study focuses on data used to answer one research question from the parent and FSS interviews, "How do parents and staff characterize their relationships and interactions with one another?" Some example interview questions for parents are, "What kinds of things do you talk about with your child's teacher?", "Thinking of all the staff at your Head Start program, what are some examples of ways they have made you feel welcome?", and "Do you feel that staff from your Head Start program understand what's important to you when it comes to the goals that you have for your child?" Some example interview questions for FSS are, "What types of things do you talk about with families?", "How do you work with families to identify specific goals?", and "When there is an issue related to a child's learning and development, how do you involve and work with the family?" The interviews also included some close-ended survey items drawn from the parents-FSS FPTQ short form, the Strengths-Based Practices Inventory (SBPI), and the FACES 2009 parent interview (Aikens et al., 2017; Hurwitz et al., 2021). The full interview protocol is accessible via the Child and Family Data Archive (https://www.childandfamilydataarchive.org/cfda/archives/CFDA/studies/38027/datadocumentation#).

Figure 1

Summary of Data Sources

	Data Sources	
	The Cocaring Relationships Study	**Family Engagement Plus Study (i.e., "Plus Study")**
Participants	Parents (*n* = 85) and Teachers (*n*=38) in child care setting	Parents (*n* = 20) and Family Services Staff (FSS) (*n* = 10) in Head Start setting
Type of Data	30 item questionnaires for both parents and teachers; similar items for each (i.e., CRQ) Data can be used to create summed scores of four dimensions of the cocaring relationship – Support, Endorsement, Agreement, and Undermining	Interview responses from parents and FSS; different questions for each around similar construct
Parent-Provider Dyad	Yes	No

Analytic Approach

All quantitative analyses for this study were conducted in Stata 17.9 and SPSS Version 28. Qualitative analyses were conducted using Excel via the Child and Family Data Archive Virtual Data Enclave.

Research Question 1: How do parents and early childhood teachers/family services staff perceive their relationship with each other?

To answer my first research question, I used both the "Plus Study" and the CRQ. First, with reference to the CRQ data, like the comparison studies mentioned above, I created a new categorical variable for each of the cocaring dimensions, except the undermining dimension, that represent the level of agreement between parent and teacher responses on a 4-point scale (Cook et al., 2018; Minke et al., 2014). A categorical score was not created for the undermining dimension because for both the parent and teacher responses there is not enough variation in the responses for the groupings to be meaningful. Interestingly, there is more variation in teachers' ratings of the undermining dimension than parents.

I decided the cutoffs for the levels of agreement by reviewing the distributions of both the raw and standardized scores for all the cocaring dimensions for both parents and teachers. The "Positive Agreement" group was composed of dyads for whom both parents and teachers rated the cocaring dimension at least 1 SD above the mean sum score. Because the data are skewed, the mean sum scores on the cocaring scales reflect a relatively positive perception of the parent-teacher relationship. The "Relatively Positive Agreement" group was composed of dyads for whom both parents and teachers rated the cocaring dimension within one SD above or below the mean sum score. The "Negative Agreement" group was composed of dyads for whom both parents and teachers rated the cocaring dimension below one SD of the mean sum score. Finally, parent-teacher dyads whose ratings on a cocaring dimension did not fall into the same sum score range were assigned to the "Disagreement" category. The categorical scores allowed me to gather an understanding for the overall level of congruence or discordance in each of the cocaring dimensions and look at trends across the dimensions, such as whether agreement on one dimension is related to agreement on another. The specific cutoffs for each level of agreement can be found in Table 5.

I used a variety of statistical tools to analyze the descriptive statistics and correlational analyses for the overall dimensions and items in the CRQ to assess the relationships between the two ratings (i.e., parents' and teachers') of the parent-provider relationship. Correlational analyses have been used in previous research comparing parent and teacher ratings of their relationship (e.g., Elicker et al., 1997; Iruka et al., 2011), and this approach is most often used to compare their ratings of child behaviors rather than their ratings of their relationship.

Next, I conducted a paired samples t-test to examine the differences between teacher and parent ratings for the CRQ dimensions. Conceptually, paired samples t-tests have been used in previous studies of parent and teacher agreement. In most cases, these studies compare parent and teacher ratings of a child-level construct (e.g., Heyman et al., 2018; Schneider et al., 2020; Tassé & Lecavalier, 2000; Taverna et al., 2021). In the case of parent-provider relationships, because parents and teachers are both reflecting on the same construct – their relationship – the precedent from previous research supports this analytical choice. Specifically, the hypotheses for the paired-samples t-test for all four cocaring dimensions were as follows:

H_0: $\mu_1 = \mu_2$ ("the parent and teacher ratings of this dimension of the cocaring relationship are equal")

H_1: $\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$ ("the parent and teacher ratings of this dimension of the cocaring relationship are not equal")

Using the "Plus Study," I employed both inductive and deductive analyses to look for patterns within each group (i.e., parents and family services staff) and to identify converging and diverging themes across both groups. In this first stage, I read each interview three times. First, I read the interview to get a sense of the content/context. Next, I read the interview and highlighted any content that might align with the cocaring dimensions – my a priori codes. Finally, I used different colors to refine and add to my previously highlighted text to align the content with the four cocaring dimensions and sorted the text into separate worksheets in Excel.

Next, I revised the coding scheme by following Spradley's (1980) steps for domain[6] and taxonomic analysis. First, I used the interview texts as a guide and identified included terms that closely resembled the text. These categories included words or phrases from the interviews, such as "chit chat," "talk about behavior," "follow up on referrals," and "talk at pick up." Next, I created semantic relationships to link the included terms from the text and the possible cover terms. Finally, I looked for possible cover terms to fit the semantic relationship. Some examples of cover terms I used are "relationship building/connection" and "information sharing between parents and teachers/FSS." Figure 1 displays an example of this process for one domain. I repeated this process in an iterative fashion and created a list of all identified cover terms and domains. Finally, I reviewed the descriptions of the cocaring dimensions from Lang et al. (2017, 2020) and organized the domains into groups based on the cocaring dimensions (e.g., Information shared by parents and teachers/FSS was grouped into the support cocaring dimension).

---

[6] Domain specifically refers to the categories established during qualitative analysis; it does not refer to the cocaring *dimensions*. Domains often include smaller (sub)categories. The cover term is the name for a specific domain (e.g., Information shared by parents and teachers/FSS) (Spradley, 1980).

Figure 2

Example of Domain Analysis

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Cover Term: Information shared by parents and teachers/FSS</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">↑ Semantic Relationship: is a kind of ↑</td></tr>
<tr><td>Parent Included Terms: talk about child behavior, talk about how child is doing in class, ask teacher about her own children</td><td>FSS Included Terms: discuss how to meet needs, provide info about community events and activities, information about health-related topics</td></tr>
</table>

The purpose of these analyses was to identify potential differences in parents' and FSS' perspectives about their relationship with each other. As shown in Figure 1, whereas the cover terms for parents and FSS might be the same, the specific included terms or semantic relationships differed between the two. This difference between parents and FSS is represented in a complete taxonomy that is organized by three of the four cocaring dimensions and includes both parent and FSS responses. There were not enough examples of undermining in either the parent or FSS interviews to conduct a full taxonomic analysis. The full taxonomy for examples/kinds of each cocaring dimension is available in an Excel sheet that can be found by clicking on the link in Appendix A.

Research Question 2: Which items in each of the Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire dimensions and themes from the Head Start interviews are driving parent and family services staff perceptions of their relationship with each other?

To answer my second research question, I used both correlations and confirmatory factor analysis using the CRQ responses. First, I reviewed the bivariate correlations between the items and the overall dimensions (for correlations between the cocaring dimensions see Table 7). Then, I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and evaluated the model fit and factor loadings for each of the items in the CRQ dimensions. In practice, the CFA reports how well each of the CRQ items is predicted by the latent factors (i.e., the cocaring dimensions). Factor loadings will be interpreted as the correlation between the CRQ item and the cocaring dimension (Rahn, 2012).

I evaluated the model fit and the statistical significance of the factor loadings. Assuming a good model fit, if the factor loading was statistically significant, then the cocaring dimension was related to how people would respond to the item from the CRQ. I also examined the factor loadings to understand the relationship of each CRQ item to its respective cocaring dimension. Although the parent and teacher data are nested within classrooms and centers, respectively, the models did not include an adjustment to the standard errors of the parameter estimates. Previous research (Yuan & Bentler, 2007) recommends fitting the CFA model separately at each level, but for this study the sample size was too small to accurately accommodate the nested nature of the data. In addition, the modification indices and the standardized residuals were used to determine if any model respecification is necessary to yield a better overall model fit.

To assess whether there are differences in priorities or perceptions for parents and teachers, I compared the parent and teacher factor loadings for the items in each cocaring dimension. In an ideal scenario, tests of measurement invariance would be used to evaluate the group differences in the factor structures. However, because the factor structures for parent and teacher ratings of the cocaring dimensions were not identical, using measurement invariance was not possible. Instead, more descriptive comparisons of the factor loadings were used to understand which items in each of the dimensions are driving parent and teacher perceptions of their relationship with each other. Items that have larger and statistically significant factor loadings were considered “drivers” of parents’ and teachers’ perceptions.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter contains three sections, preliminary analyses, results from research question 1, and results from research question 2. I will first discuss the ways I ensured the data were suitable for the proposed analyses. Then I will share the results for the two main research questions.

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to conducting my analyses, I performed pre-analysis screening to determine if the data met the assumptions for analysis. First, I checked the assumptions related to correlations and t-tests, including linearity, via scatterplots and P-P plots, and normality, via histograms (Field, 2018). Although the parent and teacher responses for each dimension are not normally distributed, the central limit theorem advises that for large samples (usually $> n = 30$) the sampling distribution has a normal distribution. Proceeding with a paired samples t-test rather than a nonparametric alternative is appropriate (Field, 2018). In addition, because both parents and teachers are reflecting on their relationship with each other (i.e., the same construct), the assumption of independence is not met, and a paired-samples approach is recommended (Field, 2018). Tables 1 and 2 report the demographic information for both parents and teachers in the Cocaring Relationships Study sample. Initial data screening, including a review of both histograms and descriptive statistics for each of the dimensions of the CRQ, was also conducted. Information about the distributions of the CRQ dimensions for both parents and teachers can be found in Table 3.

Next, I assessed univariate outliers by computing z-scores for the continuous variables and examining box plots. These analyses provided the motivation for one participant to be removed from the data set as their responses were identified as influential cases. This determination was the case because the values of the summed scores for the cocaring relationship dimensions in the box plots exceeded the upper quartile by at least three times the IQR (Field, 2018). An additional participant was removed before beginning analyses based on study notes from the team that originally collected these data (S. Lang, personal communication, August 2021). Finally, incomplete responses by either parents or teachers were removed to ensure that the data set included complete responses on the CRQ for each dyad. Multivariate outliers were assessed in post-analysis screening.

Finally, I evaluated the descriptive statistics with a focus on the type of variables (i.e., continuous or categorical) and the correlations between variables to ensure the data were suitable for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Kline, 2015). First, I confirmed that the variables were continuous. Additionally, the correlations between the items for each of the latent constructs were not too high; this suggests that the items might be related to each other and to the latent construct, but they were not measuring exactly the same thing. There were several instances where there were moderate correlations between the items across different cocaring dimensions. The presence of moderate correlations between items across the cocaring dimensions might indicate that the items are cross-loading on to multiple factors or that there is not multidimensionality in the factor structure. However, because there is precedent from Lang et al. (2017) and the correlations were not concerningly high, it is appropriate to proceed with the intended analysis. I also made sure there are at least three items loading on to each factor. This is important because CFA models with less than three items are under identified and therefore the model cannot be estimated (Kline, 2015).

Research Question 1

Levels of Agreement Between Parents and Teachers

The parent and teacher ratings of the cocaring dimensions can be found in Table 3. The distribution of the categorical variable representing the levels of agreement can be found in Table 6. Between one-third and two-thirds of parent-teacher dyads disagreed about their perception of their relationship on the endorsement, agreement, and support cocaring dimensions. This variation, and specifically discrepancy, motivates the necessity for further inquiry, using the CRQ responses, about which aspects of the relationship are most important to parents and teacher (i.e., RQ2[7]). In addition, further inquiry into other roles and parent-provider relationships might offer insights into the varying perspectives about the relationships between parents and providers.

Correlational Analyses

The bivariate correlations between parents and teachers for each of the cocaring dimensions can be found in Table 7. In total, 363 correlations were assessed. Based only on chance, I expected 5% of correlations to be significant at $p<.05$. However, across all items, 62% of the correlations were statistically significant at $p<.05$ or $p<.01$ level. The specific correlations between items across the cocaring dimensions are available in an Excel sheet that can be found by clicking on the link in Appendix B.

The correlations of greatest interest were the ones between the same cocaring dimensions for teachers and parents (e.g., parents' rating of the endorsement dimension and teachers' rating of the endorsement dimension). There were no statistically significant correlations between the same cocaring dimension for parents and teachers. Put another way, on the summary score for each cocaring dimension, parent and teacher ratings varied from each other. This apparent discordance motivates further inquiry into how parents and teachers perceive their relationship, in terms of which dimensions were most positively rated for each group, whether specific items (as opposed to subscales were correlated), and which items were contributing the most to parents' and teachers' scores on each cocaring dimension (i.e., RQ2).

---

[7] This research question (RQ2) only uses the CRQ results.

However, at the item level, there were some significant correlations, which implies there were some similar perceptions by parents and by teachers. For the endorsement dimension, teachers' belief that the child's parent is a good parent was significantly correlated with the following parent responses: "My child's teacher pays a great deal of attention to my child" (r =.23, p<.05), My child's teacher and I have the same goals for my child" (r =.27, p<.05), "I feel close to my child's teacher when I see him or her with my child (r =.22, p<.05), and "My child's teacher has a lot of patience with my child" (r =.35, p<.01). There were no other statistically significant correlations between the endorsement dimension items.

For the support dimension, teachers' perception that the parent makes them feel like the best possible teacher for this child was statistically significantly corelated with the following parent responses: "When I'm at my wits end as a parent, my child's teacher gives me the support I need" (r =.23, p<.05), "My child's teacher is willing to make personal sacrifices to help take care of my child (r =.24, p<.05), "I try advice from this teacher about how to help my child" (r =.26, p<.05), and "This teacher takes advice I give him/her about how to help my child" (r =.28, p<.05). Teachers' perceptions that communication with a parent is open and easy was correlated with parents' beliefs that communication with the teacher is open and easy ($r = .26, p < .05$) and parents' beliefs that the teacher takes the advice the parent gives about how to help the child ($r = .28, p < .01$). There were no other statistically significant correlations between the support dimension items. There were no statistically significant correlations between any of the parent and teacher undermining or agreement dimension items.

There were several statistically significant correlations between items across the cocaring dimensions. Most correlations were in the weak to moderate range (range $r = |0.22 \text{ to } 0.38|$). Of note, the item from the parent measure, "My child's teacher and I have different standards for my child's behavior" was statistically significantly correlated with eight items from the teacher measure. This item was correlated with items from all the remaining three dimensions – support dimension (1 item), agreement dimension (3 items), and undermining dimension (4 items). From the teacher measure, the item "This parent tries to show that she or he is better than me at caring for his/her child" was correlated with items across the support (2 items) and endorsement (4 items) dimensions.

Paired Samples T-Test

Similarly, from the paired samples t-tests (Table 8), there were no statistically significant differences between parents' and teachers' responses on the endorsement and support dimensions ($p = 0.17$ and $p = .44$, respectively). These results indicate that parents' and teachers' perceptions of the support and endorsement cocaring dimensions were not statistically meaningfully different from each other (i.e., they were similar). There were statistically significant differences between the parents' and teachers' responses on the undermining and agreement dimensions ($p = <.001$ and $p = .00$, respectively). These results indicate that parents and teachers were not in agreement in their perceptions of the undermining and agreement cocaring dimensions.

Thematic/Taxonomic Analysis of Family Engagement Plus Interviews

The results from the qualitative data further illustrate the differences in perceptions of the relationship between parents and providers. Later I will discuss how this information can be used to develop role-specific measures about the relationship between parents and providers. First, I will discuss the findings for three of the cocaring dimensions – support, endorsement, and agreement. There were not enough examples of undermining present in the Family Engagement Plus Study interviews to explore that dimension in-depth. In general, parents and FSS agreed about how their relationships function and what is important. However, the differences in perceptions become clearer when looking into the various sub-categories associated with each domain.

At this point, it is also important to note that in the interviews, parents and FSS were not always reflecting or speaking about their relationship with each other. For example, some of the interview questions for parents specifically ask about their relationship with their child's teacher or with the center. So, there were instances in the interviews where parents referred to the teacher as the provider not the FSS. Relatedly, the FSS sometimes referred to the teachers' roles in the classroom and sometimes referred to their own roles either working with the teachers and Head Start staff or providing support to families outside the classroom context. A potential reason for this type of cross-referencing is that family engagement in Head Start was explained by the participants from the "Plus Study" FSS interviews in the following ways, "everybody works on [getting families involved in program activities and in their children's learning and development] together… that's really important for everybody… obviously we work as a team and everybody has a job for the specific situation."

Support Dimension. The support dimension focused on parents' and teachers' perceptions of support from each other. Aspects of the relationship such as validation, encouragement, collaboration, and communication are included in the conceptualization of the support dimension (Lang et al., 2017, 2020). The support dimension included five domains of analysis shared by parents and FSS with several associated sub-categories that included both shared and different components. The domains were information sharing, types of communication, relationship building/connection, tangible supports, and inclusion and belonging.

Communication in Parent-Provider Relationships. Communication is an essential element of the parent-provider relationship, and the content and ways that parents and FSS communicate were reflected in the support cocaring dimension (Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). Whereas parents and FSS were both involved with communication, and specifically sharing information, the content of the communication was different across the two groups. A side-by-side comparison of the type of information shared and types of communication highlights these differences in perceptions (Figures 2 & 3).

Regarding information sharing, the first apparent difference was whether parents and FSS were seeking information or sharing information. For the most part, parents talked about seeking information from their child's teacher about the child's behavior and what they were learning. For example, one parent said,

> I talk about my son's behavior, and how he's been doing, and if she sees any progress...I also ask what they've been learning in class, so that way I can bring it back to the house so I can refresh him for the next day.

FSS talked about asking parents to share information. One FSS said,

> Some of them are [very open], and you play all these different roles, from just a resource, to an adult who works at their kid's school, to a friend. So, it totally depends on the family. Most of the time, we talk about the child, how they're doing in school, what medical needs or physical needs they might have, if there's any question or concerns, making sure that they're up-to-date on immunizations, their well-child check, their dental treatments, those types of things. If there are any referrals, so all the health aspects for the kiddo.

However, most parents did not specifically mention they spoke with FSS or teachers about all the topics mentioned by the FSS, especially health-related topics, when they were asked about communication with Head Start or their child's teacher.

Parents and FSS shared information about what they spoke about with each other or with their child's teacher. Most often, parents talked about their child in these conversations. A few parents mentioned that they shared personal information with their child's teacher and that they valued the confidentiality the teacher provided. Parents were not specific about whether that personal information was about their child or themselves. In general, parents had a hard time speaking about what they were gaining, personally, from the program outside of child care support. For FSS, the information they shared focused on both the child and the family. This speaks to the features of the FSS role and the two-generation program attributes in Head Start. For example, FSS shared information about health-related topics, resources to meet family needs, and community events. Their range of information sharing was also more diverse than what the parents discussed.

Figure 3

Coding Taxonomy – Support Dimension (Information Sharing)

- Parent Sub-Categories
    - Parents talk to teacher about child behavior
    - Parents ask teacher about child learning
    - Family & teacher discuss private matters/confidential information
- FSS Sub-Categories
    - FSS shares information & asks about child and parent wellbeing
    - FSS shares information about health-related topics for children (e.g., insurance, dentist, immunizations)
    - FSS discusses how to meet family needs (e.g., housing, ELL classes, job readiness)
    - FSS addresses parents' questions or concerns about the program or their child
    - FSS provides information about community events and activities
    - FSS coordinates/provides information and support for kindergarten transition/school readiness

Figure 4

Coding Taxonomy – Support Dimension (Types of Communication)

- Parent Sub-Categories
    - Parents ask/share ideas/suggestions at parent meetings
    - Parents and teachers have "chit chat" and informal conversations at pickup/drop-off
    - Communication about collaborating on child's learning during conferences
    - Families receive physical materials (e.g., newsletters, packets)
    - Parents make and receive phone calls
- FSS Sub-Categories
    - Parents ask/share ideas/suggestions at parent meetings
    - FSS have informal/daily communication with families
    - Communication about collaborating on child's learning during conferences
    - FSS share information through word of mouth
    - Families receive physical materials (e.g., newsletters, packets)
    - Communication with bus drivers is highly valued
    - FSS use phone calls to communicate with families

One aspect of the relationship where there was more alignment was regarding the types of communication. Parents and FSS mentioned that there was communication during "parent meetings," "conferences," at "pickup," or via physical materials, such as "newsletters" or "packets," and via "phone calls." The packets of work or ideas for activities to do at home were consistently mentioned by both parents and FSS. This seemed to be one of the biggest strategies for home-school engagement. Parents explained that they used the packets as "family time" and that it "brought [them] all closer." One FSS talked about the way both they and the teachers use the packets. The FSS said,

> In the classroom [FSS and teachers] send home activities. Like if a teacher has a parent-teacher conference and the parent says, "I would like to work on recognizing letters or

> whatever," we would make something. Or if we already had something, we would just send that home with the parents so that way they would have that support.

Parents and FSS also talked about sending and receiving "fliers" for "not just the kids" about activities or resources.

Both parents and FSS also mentioned instances of informal communication. Parents characterized this type of communication as "chit chat" and specifically mentioned talking to their child's teacher "pretty much every day" or "on a [regular schedule]" at pickup and drop-off. FSS highlighted the importance of "word of mouth" in their role and checking in with parents when they see them in the center. They said,

> If they come to me, like word of mouth is huge. Then just follow up, just making sure that they don't need any extra support. Or if they do need support, then who would I – I find out who I need to contact.

The FSS explained how communication was a value that was embraced by the entire Head Start program. They talked about the role that bus drivers play in facilitating communication with parents and recognizing signs of concern to share with FSS. This collaboration between bus drivers and FSS was described like this,

> issues are identified by maybe the [aides] and they bring, you know, the concern to me, then, I could reach out to the family. You know, if they see the power's out or something – you know, if they see something that's going on, maybe I can reach out to the family and see what I can do to help them.

The parents did not discuss this aspect of communication.

Relationships Do Not Appear, They Are Built. Aside from communication, relationship building and connection was a shared theme for parents and FSS. For parents, relationship building most closely resembled aspects of trust and a sense of welcoming from the teacher and Head Start staff. Parents described the program as being "like they're your family" and shared that they like being greeted "with a smile" from the staff. Parents also emphasized that they valued confidentiality and that they "don't have to worry about [the teacher] talking to anybody else." Another shared priority that was highlighted by FSS was the importance of confidentiality in their work with families. Additionally, when they spoke about building relationships with parents the content was associated with welcoming/valuing parents' perspectives and collaborating about children's learning and development. A feature of relationship building that was unique to FSS and not mentioned by the parents was being approachable and available for parents, especially for questions and concerns. In terms of being approachable, FSS often mentioned that they have an ”open door" for parents to come and talk with them. Specifically, one FSS said,

> I mean we always remind the parents that our door's always open, and they could come at any time that they want if they have a question or concern, if they have a need they could come and talk to us. Our parents, I mean we build our relationship early in the school year, our parents are usually pretty good at that, letting the teaching staff or myself know when they have a need. You know, they come and they ask me for different resources I provide, other resources they need, and then I follow up.

Overall, many of the ways that FSS discussed building relationships with families relied on their desire to hear from families (e.g., sharing ideas, expressing concerns, collaborating about learning).

Parents and Providers Also Rely on Receiving Tangible Supports. In terms of tangible supports, for parents, the prevailing way they supported the program was by volunteering in their child's classroom. Some parents shared that volunteering was not possible for them because of work or they "have [family care responsibilities] so [they] can't." Many said they tried to stay and help in the class when they could. One parent talked about the ways she was involved with her child's learning that did not specifically involve volunteering in the classroom, such as attending holiday events and reading at home.

FSS spoke about the many ways they provided tangible support to parents. These can be organized into three sub-categories: FSS coordinated referrals and follow-up, FSS shared information about child development, and FSS shared resources to help families meet their goals. Referrals and follow-up were mentioned by nearly every FSS. This was not only a main way to support parents, but also an important aspect of the FSS role. They spoke about doing what they could to help parents get the resources they need, including providing phone numbers and giving parents rides to appointments. Following up with parents was also important. FSS reported that most of the time parents followed through on the referral because they really needed the resource, but that it is not always successful and sometimes it "depends on the kind of services they are looking for." Relatedly, a large portion of the information sharing and communication that FSS did with parents was about accessing resources and helping families meet their needs. However, parents did not speak about receiving or using referrals in any patterned or consistent manner. Whereas referrals and follow-up were such an essential part of the FSS role, only one parents acknowledged that they received "just a lot of referrals."

A Sense of Inclusion and Belonging Strengthens the Parent-Provider Relationship. The last dimension of support that came across both parents and FSS responses was inclusion and belonging. However, parents and FSS each characterized inclusion and belonging differently. For example, parents did not mention anything related to culture and language and FSS focused mostly on these aspects. For parents, inclusion and belonging were related to the child being happy in the program and the parent considering the center to be a safe and healthy environment. They talked about feeling comfortable because there is a "gate around the building" and that "they keep an eye on things there." For parents, there seemed to be a stronger emphasis on belonging and comfort than cultural aspects of inclusion. FSS approached inclusion and belonging from a place of acknowledging and incorporating families' culture or heritage into the Head Start program. They shared that when they have "different cultures in the center, we have that parent come in and share their culture with us." They also talked about giving the children access to toys and books that reflect the cultures of the children in the classroom.

FSS shared they also make sure that the materials sent home are translated for families who do not speak English (primarily translated into Spanish). FSS also talked about their awareness of the challenges families face regarding immigration and legal documentation. They have supported families in finding medical clinics that treat immigrants without insurance, and they have worked with families on their immigration paperwork. It is possible that the ways FSS acknowledge and share families' cultures in the Head Start program contributed to families' sense of happiness and safety.

Endorsement Dimension. The endorsement dimension represents parents' and teachers' confidence in each other as caregivers and is best characterized by affirmations (Lang et al., 2017, 2020). Unlike the support dimension, the endorsement dimension was associated with different (albeit similar) domains for parents and FSS. The parent domains in the endorsement dimension were positive view of/affirming teacher and endorsement of child development outcomes/learning. For the FSS, the endorsement dimension could be summarized into approval/affirmation of parents with associated sub-categories reflecting parents' desire for their child to be successful, teachers' invitations for parents to help in the center, and father involvement.

Teacher Attributes Contribute to Parents' Satisfaction and Relationship Perceptions. When parents talked about their child's teacher, the described several positive characteristics/attributes of the teacher, such as sharing that the teacher is "wonderful," "really sweet," "nice and friendly all around," and "easy to talk to." These attributes showed up in the other ways that parents describe their approval or affirmation for their child's teacher. Parents talked about feeling understood by their child's teacher and that "[the teacher] can relate" to "whatever you say." In this domain, parents also expressed appreciation for their teachers' ability to give individual attention to their child. One parent said,

> they both made sure that they gave all the kids some individual attention, as much as they could give to each child, because I know it's busy for them with that many kids in there, so I think that really helps that they would focus one-on-one if one was struggling.

Parents’ overall approval of their child’s teacher unsurprisingly impacts their perceptions of their relationship with their child’s teacher. Recruiting and retaining high-quality educators are important considerations for maintaining strong parent-provider relationships.

Children’s Learning Outcomes Are a Feature of Parental Endorsement. Parents also conveyed their endorsement of their child’s teacher when they talked about their child’s learning and developmental outcomes. Many parents remarked that their child had “learned a lot” in Head Start. Several parents specifically mentioned that their child had learned “the basic stuff that every preschooler should know.” These basics included things like knowing the “A, B, C’s,” “how to organize the colors,” “the numbers,” “the shapes,” and “how to write their name.” Not only did parents express confidence in the teachers’ capabilities in academic subjects, but they also shared that their child’s social skills and manners improved in Head Start. One parent said,

> I feel like it helped him be a little bit more social. He was a little timid before, and now I feel like he will engage with other kids, and he’s not so afraid to lead a little conversation with some other student. Also, academically, I feel like he’s grown. I feel like he’s developed very appropriately, and they helped him, not only social, but development also.

Interestingly, when FSS talked about children’s social and academic outcomes, they spoke about this in terms of the shared goals between parents and teachers. The way they conceptualized children’s social and academic outcomes more closely aligned with the agreement cocaring dimension and will be discussed later.

Parent Volunteering Is Highly Valued by FSS. The FSS talked about affirming parents' choices and wants. When they endorsed parents, it was less associated with appreciation for certain attributes or aspects, but more associated with approval or acknowledgement of the parents and their efforts. For example, the FSS acknowledged that parents "want their children to be successful – especially for the ones that are transitioning to kindergarten." This represented a way that FSS are confident in the parents' caregiving because there is alignment around school transition. This example also represented approval of the parents. Likewise, when FSS and teachers invite parents to the Head Start center, they are demonstrating confidence in the parents. One FSS specifically mentioned how when a parent volunteers, they "become the leader for that child." This appreciation for parents' involvement in the classroom underscored that parents are valued by Head Start as essential partners. Finally, FSS specifically acknowledged the efforts that fathers were making in their child's lives. The FSS appreciated and affirmed that showing up and "bringing their children to school" was an important aspect of their involvement.

Agreement Dimension. The agreement dimension captures parents' and teachers' perceptions of agreement with each other and is specifically related to "child rearing practices or caregiving behaviors" (Lang et al., 2017, 2020). For parents, the agreement dimension was best characterized by the ways they collaborated with their teacher about their child's learning. For FSS, this dimension was best represented by the process of setting and aligning goals for the family and the child.

Collaboration About Special Education Affirms and Enhances Parent-Provider Relationships. When parents talked about collaborating with their child's teacher, they specifically discussed collaboration around special education plans/disability services and the activities they received from Head Start that they completed at home. Parents described asking for things to incorporate at home and the teacher providing examples of “different ways that could help [their] child.” The practice of asking for and sharing ideas to support children’s learning represented an important aspect of parent-provider partnerships, shared goals, and agreement about how to achieve those goals. In terms of special education or disability services, parents talked about their child making progress after receiving disability services and working with the program to figure out different ways of communicating to support children’s learning.

FSS also talked about special education/disabilities when they talked about shared goals. When FSS talked about special education/disability services, they talked about the ways they “work a little extra with [families]” to “make sure the family is doing okay.” They also talked about the importance of families’ “consent” or “authorization” for services. One FSS said, “we don’t do anything without the parents’ approval, authorization.” Another FSS said, “we ask the parent if it’s okay before we can refer them.” This demonstrated how important it is for FSS to connect with parents and make sure they are on the same page before proceeding with any services.

Shared Goals Are a Priority for Parents and FSS. Alignment of family and child goals were also important to FSS. FSS described the process of helping families identify and set goals by asking them “what’s the one thing that’s more important to you to work this school year?” or by sharing some ideas from previous conversations with that family. During the process of identifying goals, they talked about making sure they “figure out what goal is going to be most important for the parent, and not necessarily what goal we think is most important for [parents].” The agreement aspect was slightly more difficult to identify in this case, but it showed up when

FSS aligned themselves with the families' needs and goals and prioritized that rather than their personal agenda. This was, again, a feature of the FSS role, and it was related to how well they connected with families. Similarly, when discussing goals that parents have for their child, FSS helped parents with expectation setting (i.e., what's developmentally appropriate) and affirmed shared goals such as "potty training" or "school readiness."

Research Question 2

Model Fit

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was computed using Stata to evaluate the measurement models. Model-fit measures were used to assess the models' overall goodness of fit for the four-factor model (Table 4). The chi-square test of model fit examined the fit between the model-implied variance-covariance matrix and the variance-covariance matrix for the actual data. A significant p-value indicated a mismatch between the two matrices. Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values below 0.08 were considered acceptable fit. CFI values above 0.90 were considered acceptable (Kline, 2015).

The chi-square values and associated p-values for the parent model were significant (P<0.00). The RMSEA value was 0.097. However, the confidence interval's lower bound did not include 0, and the test of close fit indicated a higher probability that the RMSEA was above 0.5. The CFI for the parent model was 0.829. The chi-square values and associated p-values for the teacher model were significant (P<0.00). The RMSEA value of 0.121 indicated a poor model fit. The CFI for the teacher model was 0.700 (see Table 4).

Model Fit Conclusions. These results indicated that the models were a poor fit relative to the baseline model where none of the items were correlated. Taken together, the model fit indices suggested that overall, the parent model might be considered close to an acceptable fit, but the teacher model was not a good fit to the data.

In previous publications (Lang et al., 2017), this four-factor model was reported as fitting the data well for the parent model. However, the model specifications the authors used to achieve their model fit statistics did not make theoretical sense for this study. Therefore, the models for this study were presented with free parameters. Table 9 shows a comparison table of the factor loadings for the parent CFA model for the free model, constrained with the fewest correlated item errors to achieve good model fit, and the model published by Lang and colleagues in 2017. The differences between the factor loadings for the three models were quite small. This demonstrated that the factor loadings did not change drastically with the modified model, suggesting that the freely estimated factor loadings should be interpreted cautiously, but can certainly be considered for the exercise of comparing teacher and parent ratings of the relationships. In comparison, despite up to approximately 70 model respecifications, the teacher model never achieved goodness of fit. This difference alone suggests that there are differences in parent and teacher perceptions of their relationships when measured using like-items. A review of the qualitative data from the Head Start Family Engagement Plus Study will strengthen this assertion.

Comparison of Factor Loadings

Because the model fit statistics indicated a poor fit, the standard interpretation of the factor loadings (i.e., a one-unit higher score on the cocaring dimension is associated with a [number] higher score on the item) is not necessarily relevant, and overall, the results should be interpreted cautiously.

To assess whether there were differences in priorities or perceptions for parents and teachers, I compared the parent and teacher factor loadings for the items in each cocaring dimension. Items that had larger and statistically significant factor loadings were considered “drivers” of parents’ and teachers’ perceptions. As previously mentioned, questions for parents and teachers were similar, but the factor structures were slightly different for the dimensions between parents and teachers. For the purpose of making direct comparisons using the factor loadings, I only compared the items that were assigned to the same cocaring dimension for both teachers and parents. Table 10 shows the items that were assigned to the same cocaring dimension for both teachers and parents. It also shows the factor loadings and the difference between parent and teacher responses on the like-items. The first thing to note is that across all the items considered for comparison, the largest difference between the factor loadings was |0.21|. However, in most cases, the difference between the factor loadings was less than |0.10|. Across multiple items, this indicated that in general, the responses from parents and teachers were correlated with their corresponding cocaring dimension in similar ways. There were some notable differences too.

For example, in the endorsement cocaring dimension, the item “this teacher/parent pays a great deal of attention to his/her child,” had the highest factor loading for both parents and teachers. If I were only looking at the like items within the factor structure, this item would be considered the driver, and it appeared that parents and teachers agreed that individual attention to the child was a priority. Importantly, the item that was most strongly correlated with the endorsement cocaring dimension for parents was “mismatched” in terms of which cocaring dimension it aligned with. For parents, the item, “My child’s teacher and I have the same goals for my child" was most highly correlated with the endorsement dimension. For teachers, this item was considered part of the agreement cocaring dimension. The largest difference in the factor loadings within this cocaring dimension was between the item, "I believe this child's parent/teacher is a good parent/teacher." This item was more strongly correlated with the endorsement dimension for teachers than for parents (difference = |0.20|). Believing that the other caregiver was good at their job seemed to be more important to teachers than to parents.

In the support dimension, the items that were the most highly correlated with the support dimension were different for parents and for teachers. For teachers, the driver was, "This parent appreciates how had I work at being a good teacher." Notably, the difference between the factor loadings for this item was |0.18|. For parents, the driver was, "This teacher makes me feel like I am the best possible parent for my child." The difference in the factor loadings for this item were quite small, indicating some level of agreement about their perceptions and how much that aspect of the relationship is associated with the support dimension. Another discrepancy, the largest across all items, was for the item, "If I have a conflict with this parent/teacher I will speak to him/her about the issue." This item was more highly associated with the support dimension for parents than for teachers.

In the agreement dimension, the items that were most highly correlated were different for parents and teachers. For teachers, the driver was, "This parent and I have different ideas about how to raise his/her child" – a reverse coded item. For parents, the driver was, "My child's teacher and I have different ideas regarding his/her child's eating, sleeping, potty and/or other routines" – also reverse coded.

However, like the endorsement dimension, the item that is most strongly correlated with the agreement cocaring dimension for teachers is “mismatched” in terms of which cocaring dimension it is aligned. For teachers, the item, “This parent and I have different standards for his/her child’s behavior” was most highly correlated with the agreement dimension. For parents, this item was considered part of the endorsement cocaring dimension, and it was not as strongly correlated with the factor (difference = |0.34|). This was the largest discrepancy between factor loadings across all items. However, because these items were associated with different factors, the difference should not be considered beyond its function to illustrate the differences in parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of the relationship. Overall, the correlations between the items and the agreement cocaring dimension were higher for parents.

In the undermining dimension, the item “this parent/teacher tries to show that she or he is better than me at caring for this child,” had the highest factor loading for both parents and teachers. This item also appeared to correlate more strongly with the undermining cocaring dimension for parents (difference = |0.14|).

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter begins with a summary of the interpretations of the results from the two research questions to frame a discussion about the salient themes and conclusions of this study. My conclusions are largely focused on the importance of context (i.e., Head Start vs. child care) as an essential aspect of variation when considering the parent and provider perceptions of their relationships. My study highlighted that not only are the contexts important but also the ways in which parent and provider roles differ within that context are important. In addition, the measurement issues I researched prior to my study and encountered in my research might be improved by focusing on the roles of parents and providers in context. Next, I will discuss some suggestions for future research. Finally, I will share some limitations I encountered during this research, and how I navigated them to ensure my research was rigorous and methodologically sound.

Interpreting the Results

The first research question was, “How do parents and early childhood teachers/family services staff perceive their relationship with each other?” The approaches used to answer this question focused on identifying whether parents’ and providers’ perceptions of the relationships were numerically and statistically different. First, the Cocaring Relationships Study data were used to compare levels of alignment, review correlations between cocaring dimensions and the items within the cocaring relationships scale, and conduct t-tests for the responses to the cocaring dimensions for parents and teachers. In summary, there were three key takeaways from the analyses of CRQ data:

1. There was moderate disagreement between parents and teachers in their perceptions of their relationship across different cocaring dimensions.
2. There were some significant correlations at the item level, indicating some similar perceptions between parents and teachers.
3. Parents and teachers generally agreed on the endorsement and support dimensions, but not on the undermining and agreement dimensions.

These takeaways call attention to one of the most important aspects of parent-provider relationships: communication. Moderate levels of agreement on the support and endorsement dimensions between parents and teachers highlights the potential for strong communication, which can impact the relationship. Furthermore, the disagreement on the undermining and agreement dimensions highlights areas where communication and collaboration may breakdown and weaken the perceptions of the parent-provider relationship.

In analyzing the Family Engagement Plus Interviews, I focused on identifying similarities and differences between parents and FSS across the four cocaring dimensions. This enabled me to unpack the cocaring dimensions. I was able to note how observed differences were in part reflective of the context of the parents and providers. For example, there were significant differences in the ways the four cocaring dimensions showed up in the Family Engagement Plus Interviews, which might be explained by the different roles of parents and FSS in the Head Start center.

As mentioned in the results above, although the domains were largely similar across the cocaring dimensions, the details and perceptions are where the differences between parents and FSS are most apparent. A succinct statement of these differences is as follows: parents mostly spoke about their child’s experience and learning in the Head Start program (e.g., learning “the basics,” being “more social,” and their child being happy in the program). They also spoke a lot about the feelings they had in the center (e.g., being greeted at the door, feeling like their child is safe, feeling comfortable talking to their child’s teacher, and having a sense of confidentiality). FSS were focused on the whole family, and, most essentially, on making sure families’ needs were met via referrals and other tangible supports. FSS also emphasized being available to talk with families often, both to check in and to address any apparent concerns. Additionally, FSS relational work and procedural work such as family goal setting, helping families with paperwork, and kindergarten enrollment seemed to go hand-in-hand.

The second research question asked, “Which items in each of the cocaring dimensions are driving parent and teacher perceptions of their relationships with each other?” To answer this question, I used Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). These results indicate that the models are a poor fit relative to the baseline model where none of the items are correlated. Taken together, the model fit indices suggest that overall, the parent model may be considered close to an acceptable fit, but the teacher model is not a good fit to the data. The items that were most highly correlated with each dimension were different for parents and teachers, indicating differences in their perceptions and expectations of the relationship. Interestingly, there were items that were considered part of one dimension by parents, but part of another dimension by teachers, indicating discrepancies in how they view certain behaviors. These differences underscore the complexity of parent-provider relationships and the importance of considering the context and roles of each individual in understanding these relationships.

Parent and Provider Roles in Context

The main contribution of this research is to highlight the contextualized nature of parents' and providers' perspectives about their respective roles and their relationship with each other. Not only are parents' and providers' roles different from each other, but in this study the roles of the two types of providers (teachers and family services staff) are also different. In reviewing existing literature, I noted that communication and trust building were apparent as important for parent-provider relationships. However, how both of these domains of parent-provider relationships were manifested in practice differed (Owen et al., 2000; Perlman & Fletcher, 2012; Reedy & McGrath, 2010). Furthermore, I noted differences across child care teachers and family services staff, the primary staff who work with families in child care and Head Start programs (Trull, 2015), and in the parents' role in the these two different contexts. The findings of this study can be explained by highlighting the variations in these contexts.

As I have alluded to several times, one major explanation for these differences is, in fact, that parents and FSS have different roles in the Head Start center. Therefore, how they conceptualize their interactions and relations with each other will be based on their perspectives in the context of their respective roles. Discrepancies in how parents and providers interact based on their roles are not entirely surprising. Provider roles, for teachers or FSS, are socially, historically, culturally, and contractually defined (Lerner, 2018). In addition, parents learn about their roles through iterative and dynamic processes where they attempt to understand the expectations and obligations in a specific context and modify their behavior based on feedback. For example, if parents think they are doing something great to help their child, and the teacher informs them they are not, the parents might rely on the teachers' advice to change their behaviors when working with their children at home (Hoover-Dempsey & Jones, 1997; Lerner, 2018). The type of reciprocity just described is noted in both the CRQ and Family Engagement Plus measures.

One way I organized the “Plus Study” data was to code the open-ended interview data guided by the four dimensions of the Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire (CRQ). When I did this, I learned that parents and FSS might have the same perspectives about something (e.g., importance of children’s learning outcomes), but the function it served (as agreement or endorsement) within the cocaring framework differed. For example, in the Head Start setting (i.e., “Plus Study”), not only were there often different domains associated with each cocaring dimension, but also there were often different sub-categories or examples within each domain based on parents’ and FSS role. One of the most compelling findings from the interviews is that for FSS, talking about children’s learning showed up as an aspect of collaboration or working toward shared goals. For the parents, this same type of collaboration and talking about children’s learning more closely aligned with how parents were affirming teachers’ caregiving and abilities – which is more similar to the endorsement cocaring dimension.

The function of “talking about children’s learning” for parents and providers as it relates to the parent-provider relationship can be explained by the roles parents and FSS or teachers have in early childhood settings. For FSS, supporting families’ goals is part of their role, and it makes sense that their perception would best align with the agreement cocaring dimension (Head Start Act Section 648A(c), 2007, in Trull, 2015). Likewise, for teachers, this type of agreement about children’s learning outcomes can be seen as a function of collaborating with parents about a shared goal. As for parents, it is important for them to have their views heard, and they want to be collaborators in their child’s learning and development (e.g., helping set learning goals) (McGrath, 2007; Sharpe, 1991). When this occurs, the way it contributes to the parent-provider relationship is via the endorsement cocaring dimension – parents expressing confidence in their child’s teacher and what they are learning.

Relatedly, the communication patterns I noted in my study are consistent with prior research (e.g., Perlman & Fletcher, 2012; Reedy & McGrath, 2010; Swartz & Easterbrooks, 2014). The differences in communication were most apparent when reading the parent and FSS responses in the “Plus Study.” Parents and FSS talked about communication not only with each other but about the teacher’s communication too. As noted in the summarized findings, the topics of conversation and the reported frequency of communication differed between parents and FSS. As Figures 2 and 3 show, although parents and FSS are both involved with communication, and specifically in sharing information, the content of the communication was different across the two groups. Most often, parents talked about their child in these conversations. For FSS, the information they shared focused on both the child and the family. FSS also mentioned talking about family goal setting, child and family health-related needs, and other challenges that were coming up for the family. In general, the range of information shared by FSS to parents was more diverse than what the parents brought up with the FSS or their child’s teacher. The CRQ measure did not assess the various or in-depth ways teachers communicate with parents. Most parents and FSS in the “Plus Study” mentioned talking to parents and pickup and drop-off, emphasizing “chit chat” or just short conversations. Put another way, the content and frequency of communication between parents and providers differed depending on their roles, with family services staff engaging in more diverse and extensive communication with parents than child care teachers.

I argue that the differences in communication can be attributed to role differences between parents and FSS. In the section about role theory and parent-provider relationships, I discuss the ways in which early childhood provider roles very strongly operate within specific contexts. Most importantly, both child care teachers and family services staff (FSS) roles include being the primary people assigned to work with families in child care and Head Start programs (Trull, 2015). However, the pre-service and in-service training about effective ways to communicate with or how often to communicate with families for these two roles may be different. Also, the depth of expectations for family engagement may differ for these two roles – with FSS being more intensively involved in family engagement. This is important because it has implications for how providers partner with families. This is related to communication, because if a provider’s time is split between so many different tasks, communication may be limited or impersonal (e.g., standard packets of work, newsletters, minimal communication outside of parent-teacher conferences).

If parents’ and providers’ perceptions of communication vary (including types of communication, topics of communication, and the characteristics relationship building) the responses to a survey that ask similar questions to parents and teachers will necessitate different ratings. Based on my assessment of both data sets, the questions in the CRQ were best aligned with how parents characterize their relationship with providers. It might not be within the realm of parents’ roles to send home newsletters or communicate to other parents about classroom events, but it is something researchers should be asking teachers about in regard to family engagement or parent-provider partnerships. Even though these differences exist, they are not necessarily indicators that parents and providers perceive the relationship in entirely different ways. Instead, these differences may also be related to important aspects of parents' and providers' roles that were not captured in the CRQ measure.

In my study, it did not appear that parents, teachers, or FSS perceived communication as one-sided or controlled entirely by the provider. The content may have been more controlled by the provider but the opportunities and encouragement to communicate was not one-sided. For example, in both the CRQ and the "Plus Study," parents shared they felt comfortable sharing their concerns with each other. The FSS responses in the "Plus Study" highlight one reason why this might be the case. FSS, as a function of their role, ensured parents knew the procedures for voicing their concerns and had the opportunities to do so. This variation can also be attributed to the program context. Overall, these findings have implications for how providers can partner with families and foster effective communication and engagement in early childhood education settings with an eye toward the importance of context.

Power Differentials as a Feature of Contexts

It is necessary to consider the power differentials in the two early childhood settings as a feature of each context that may help to understand the findings of this study. There are two primary ways I am thinking about this power differential. First, the difference in roles between parents and providers may contribute to an imbalance of authority in the classroom context. In addition, the income discrepancy between parents and providers in each early childhood setting may further complicate the power dynamics. Considering how the power differentials function in their respective contexts and inform my understanding of the results is essential for this research.

As previously mentioned, family participation in Head Start began as something that was “professionally controlled” and has moved closer toward a partnership model in more recent years (Powell & Diamond, 1995). Still there are aspects of the early childhood context that may position the teachers and schools as the authority. It is quite possible parents did not mention bringing up as many concerns or asking as many questions without being prompted by the FSS due to the imbalance of authority (McGrath, 2007). They may have feared legal intervention or may want to protect the inviting feelings they experienced at their Head Start program by trying to stay agreeable and out of any trouble/needing anything. This sort of peacekeeping may also be related to how schools typically set the rules and expectations for parental involvement (e.g., volunteering, attending family nights, and attending conferences), and parents intentionally or unintentionally maintain that institutionalized way of engagement (Lareau & Calarco, 2012). Head Start, especially, is governed by many regulations. Part of the FSS role may be to implement procedural elements, such as explaining to parents how to voice their concerns or maintaining certain forms or paperwork for each family.

Another important aspect to consider when thinking about possible imbalance of power is the income discrepancy between teachers and FSS and parents. Tables 1 and 2 show the demographic information for parents and teachers in the Cocaring Relationships Study. Parents’ median income is more than twice that of their children’s teachers. Whereas in the previous example, teachers were positioned as having more power than parents, the social positioning that comes from having more money may also influence the relationship dynamic. For instance, parents may feel that they are paying for a service (i.e., the relationship is transactional), and therefore, expect the teacher to agree or comply with their requests and expectations. Teachers may also feel required to agree or align their teaching with parents' expectations. This might be one reason for teachers' higher and statistically different rating on the agreement cocaring dimension. Teachers feel they are working hard to meet the shared expectations of parents. The power differential or expectations of parents may be associated with parents' lower ratings. For example, they may feel like their goals for their children are misunderstood by the teacher. It is also possible that parents who make more money than their child's teacher face demands in the workplace that limit their involvement with their child's education. One study talked about how it is difficult to build a relationship with parents when they "zoom in and out so quickly"; they attributed parents' in and out behavior to the demands of their job (Mahmood, 2013, p. 67).

Another possible understanding of the power differential between parents and providers based on class is that teachers who make significantly less money than the parents in their center might experience some level of deprofessionalization, which can contribute to inequality between parents and teachers along class lines (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). This perspective aligns with findings from McGrath (2007) regarding the paradox teachers face being professionally in charge of the classroom and individual interactions with families, while also feeling undervalued by parents at the institutional or center level.

Although the specific incomes for FSS and parents in the Head Start sample cannot be disclosed, it is generally the case that parents and FSS have closer incomes reflecting the tendency for Head Start programs to hire folks from the community or who share some lived experiences with the families. There is some evidence in the K–12 literature that class relationships (e.g., "parents being of similar or lesser social class than [providers]") can strengthen mutual respect in the parent-provider relationship (Baquedano-López et al., 2013, p.

160). Still, similar challenges related to communicating at drop-off and pickup can be noted, albeit for different reasons, for lower income families (Mahmood, 2013).

One other important aspect to consider is the messaging around family involvement for lower-income families. It is often the case that family engagement is framed as a way to increase families' capacity or to increase their involvement in their child's education in ways that align with the center's goals and practices (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). This may explain why FSS in this study focused on both procedural and relational aspects when connecting with families. In many ways, cultural practices or values from that are best aligned with middle-class culture take precedence – yet another way power and powerful structures reproduce inequality in the parent-provider relationship (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). There is an opportunity for centers to prioritize families' funds of knowledge about their child rather than their lack of funds (Yosso, 2005). Parents bring various types of cultural wealth into the early childhood space which can help strengthen providers' knowledge of child and family well-being and enhance the classroom environment in ways that best represent the families in the center; thus, creating the potential for stronger parent-provider relationships, even across class lines. A deep understanding of parent and provider roles in context must pay attention to the different or similar contexts that families and providers experience not only within the early childhood center but in other settings too.

Measurement in Context

I encountered several challenges related to measurement that I argue need to be addressed to improve how researchers capture parent and provider perceptions of their relationship. First, parents and providers spoke in vastly different ways about inclusion and belonging – neither of which were specifically included in the CRQ but did show up in the "Plus

Study" interview responses. Next survey items were not differentiated by role (i.e., parent and teacher) or to a specific early childhood context (e.g., daycare, Head Start, etc.). Furthermore, the difference between or lack of model fit for the CRQ measure is consistent with the conclusion that parents and providers, for the most part, perceive their relationship differently and this is not represented in the tools used to measure parent-provider relationships.

Variations in Perceptions of Inclusion and Belonging

In preparation for this study, several measurement tools I reviewed lacked any attention to how perceptions of relationships are culturally embedded (e.g., Elicker et al., 1997; Green et al., 2004). Furthermore, like several of the prominent measures of parent-provider relationships, the CRQ has not been validated on specific cultural groups, and results using this measure are likely not representative of diverse populations in U.S. (e.g., Parent-Caregiver Relationship Scale and Caregiver-Parent Partnership Scale were developed and validated on mostly White middle-class families) (Elicker et al., 1997; Owen et al., 2000). In addition, the CRQ does not ask any questions about parents' or teachers' experiences with inclusion and belonging. There is no mention of respect or acknowledgement of cultural practices. There is also no mention of specific ways that parents or teachers feel like they are welcomed and safe. One question in the parent survey asks whether the parent feels comfortable being in the teachers' presence at pickup and drop-off, but otherwise the content is lacking. This is not surprising; although conceptually inclusion and belonging are considered essential to the parent-provider relationship, the measurement tools have, for the most part, not included items assessing this aspect of the relationship (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services et al., 2018).

However, in the Family Engagement Plus interviews, both parents and FSS spoke about inclusion and belonging, although they conceptualized it very differently. Parents did not mention anything related to cultural practice, religion, or language, but the FSS mostly focused only on these aspects. One potential explanation for this difference might be the strong emphasis on culture and cultural sensitivity in school settings over the last several decades (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1995).

For parents, inclusion and belonging were related to their child's safety and the Head Start environment. Belonging is considered by some as a fundamental human need. The concept of belonging underscores the importance of psychological and physical safety and is guided by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Stratigos et al., 2014). In this way, safety is a precursor to belonging and is a necessary quality of early childhood learning environments. Especially for parents who have faced inequity, oppression, violence, abuse, or other risk factors, parents prioritize early childhood education spaces that can "provide children with socialising and outdoor play opportunities in a secure environment" (Kernan, 2010, p. 201; "Promoting Safety and Belonging for Children, Families, and Early Childhood Professionals during Times of Uncertainty," 2022). A sense of belonging is essential for children and families to thrive.

Another possible explanation for the parents' descriptions of inclusion and belonging is based on Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural wealth. In terms of how parents speak about inclusion and belonging in the interviews, they often demonstrate features of aspirational capital (e.g., wanting their children to learn, and be successful and prepared for school) and elements of navigational capital (e.g., knowing how to voice concerns, navigate health systems [as an undocumented person], and request referrals). In some ways, familial capital is also present when parents feel a connection to their Head Start community and neighborhood – this represents a "broad understanding of kinship" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) that is characterized by "maintaining a healthy connection to [your] community and its resources." (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Specifically, "isolation is minimized as families 'become connected with others around common issues' and realize they are 'not alone in dealing with their problems' (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, p. 54 in Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Finally, parents use and acquire social capital through participation in Head Start. Parents often mention feeling safe and supported both physically (i.e., a gate) and emotionally (i.e., being welcomed at the door). Expanding the notion of inclusion and belonging to include more than multicultural festivals and handouts in multiple languages helps explain the differences for parents and FSS in terms of this aspect of how they perceive their relationship. Measures that consider family and program cultural contexts may better reflect parent-provider relationships than those that do not.

Lack of Differentiation by Role and Model Misfit

Although neither CRQ model fits well for parents nor teachers, after many iterations I was able to manipulate the model specifications to make the model fit for parents. However, for the teacher model this was not the case. I was not able respecify the model in any way to make it fit the data well. To confidently state that there are four distinct dimensions of the cocaring relationship, it is essential that the items errors are not correlated across factors, which was the case in the previously published models (Lang et al., 2017). Although, theoretically, the four dimensions of cocaring might be distinct, empirically they might not be as unique as I first considered. As previously stated, the difference in model fit suggests that parents and teachers may perceive the relationship differently, because of their role construction and the context – necessitating different items rather than like-items.

Put another way, this finding also suggests that the CRQ items for the teachers may not have been capturing the ways teachers perceive, provide, or receive support in the parent-provider relationship. It is also possible that, in terms of the CRQ, parents and teachers were not using the survey in the same way. There is no way to explicitly know the frame of mind or how each was perceiving the use or intent of the survey when they were completing it. This is a limitation.

Although the CFA results need to be interpreted cautiously, items where the factor loadings are different for parents and teachers (see Table 10) are also quite interesting based on the Family Engagement Plus interview responses and may help explain why creating measures that are more specific to parent and provider roles can strengthen measurement and conceptualization of the parent-provider relationship. The responses to items answered by teachers that were more highly correlated with the support dimension also happened to be some of the items parents mentioned they often do in the Family Engagement Plus interviews – when referring to teachers or FSS. For example, teachers had a higher factor loading on items such as “This parent asks for my opinion on issues related to caring for his/her child,” This parent tries advice I give him/her,” and “This parent rarely asks questions about how to help his/her child.” (which is an item that is reverse coded). In the interviews, parents spoke a lot about seeking advice from their child’s teacher or asking about how to help their child. Teachers’ higher correlations with the support dimensions on those specific items bolsters and affirms what parents said about how they engage with their child’s providers in a supportive manner from the interviews. In this way, the teacher CRQ responses alongside the parent interview responses highlight some essential aspects of the parent-provider relationship the parents and providers agree on: focusing on the child and collaboration. In future measures, the wording of the questions may need to be different for parents and teachers to quantitatively capture these nuances.

As demonstrated above, the qualitative results helped put some of the previously mentioned quantitative discrepancies into context and convey some specific aspects of the cocaring dimensions – some of which were captured in the Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire and some that were not. For example, in the CRQ, one of the parent items states, “We often discuss the best way to meet my child’s needs.” Several of the domains that were identified in the thematic analysis were focused on meeting child and family needs. Another item from the parent CRQ states, “I try advice from this teacher about how to help my child.” This question is related to the responses by both parents and FSS about the materials families receive to work on together at home (i.e., “packets”) and the information parents asked teachers about to help their child reach certain learning goals like writing their name. Another CRQ parent item states, “If I have a conflict with the teacher, I will speak to him/her about the issue.” In the interviews, parents and FSS spoke about feeling comfortable speaking to their child’s teacher if there was a conflict because of the teachers’ attributes (e.g., “sweet” and “friendly”) and because of the guarantee of confidentiality. Similarly, the FSS encouraged parents to share any concerns with them and made sure parents were aware of the process for expressing any concerns. Finally, many of the interview responses from both parents and FSS emphasized the importance of communication. In the CRQ, one of the parent items states, “Communication with this teacher is open and easy." Most of the teacher CRQ questions were identical to the parent ones except for switching the word "teacher" to "parent." For example, one of the items in the teacher CRQ states, "This parent and I have different ideas regarding his/her child's eating, sleeping, potty and/or other routines." When parents and FSS talked about levels of agreement it was primarily learning and social developmental outcomes and parents often demonstrated trust in the teachers' abilities – another CRQ item. Based on the information gained from the "Plus Study," differentiation in the CRQ items based on role may facilitate better model fit and a better understanding of parents' and teachers' perceptions of their relationship.

Future Directions in Conceptualization and Measurement

This study highlights the importance of addressing measurement challenges to better capture parent and provider perceptions of their relationship in early childhood settings. The study encountered several challenges related to measurement, including the lack of differentiation between parent and provider roles, the absence of questions on culture and inclusion, and the differences in how parents and providers conceptualize inclusion and belonging. This study also generated questions about the purpose of measuring the parent-provider relationship and potential best practices for understanding this relationship.

As previously mentioned, questionnaire and satisfaction scales used to understand the parent-provider relationship tend to be one-sided and highly subjective. In the CRQ, although some items are reverse coded in the analyses, many of the questions are not phrased in a strengths-based or positive way. This reveals some of the authors' subjective views about parent-teacher relationships and reinforces the characterization by McGrath (2007) that parents and teachers are often "ambivalent partners." Although it is useful to have measures where parent and provider responses can be directly compared, quantitative measures that have this aim must work toward improving model fit for both parents and providers. It may be the case that because of the differences I describe in this study, similar questions do not make sense for making direct comparisons between parents and providers.

As it relates to the CRQ directly, I selected this measure because of its intentional multidimensional design, however, it may be the case that there is not a clear 4-factor structure. As the qualitative data showed, there is overlap in the questions and where they “sit” in the model. The data also suggested that there may be more than 4 factors that are related to parent-provider relationships. It might be helpful to, first, clearly differentiate the four dimensions of the cocaring relationship that may improve future measures using this conceptual framework (e.g., how are endorsement and agreement dimensions conceptually different?) The processes of further operationalizing these definitions can include doing additional interviews to better understand the differences between teachers and parents and then formally (and succinctly) defining each of the four cocaring dimensions, so it is clear how they are unique from each other. It may also be the case that attempting to quantify the parent-provider relationship is not the best way to gain an understanding about this phenomenon.

As demonstrated by this study, the “Plus Study” data did not simply support or explain the quantitative findings but extended the current understanding of the parent-provider relationship to demonstrate some missed aspects in current surveys and questionnaires and help understand some of the aspects (e.g., communication) that have been so clearly stressed in previous research, but not dissected as has been done in this study. It is possible that role-specific interviews or observations of parent-provider interactions may better capture the phenomenon than quantitative instruments alone. The findings of this study support mixed-method approaches and underscore the importance of qualitative data in differentiating between parent and provider perceptions of their relationships.

It is essential to consider how these findings might help move toward better measurement of parent-provider relationships and what the goals of measurement should be. For example, is it more important to have a measure that captures agreement on specific items or that focuses on alignment of the different roles and functions of the roles in parent-provider relationships (i.e., different items for parents and providers)? This study strengthened the argument for the latter by showing how each actor in the partnership has slightly different roles and priorities and is responsible for a different aspect of the entire relationship.

Measures must also be mindful of culture and cultural sensitivity. However, this begs the question of how best to assess the parent-provider relationship in culturally sensitive ways. In this study, the qualitative data helped demonstrate the ways that FSS spoke about culture and belonging during their interviews and the cultural wealth that parents (indirectly) referred to in their interviews. On the one hand, researchers should seek to create measures that explicitly account for parents' and providers' experiences with culture and belonging. On the other hand, researchers should consider more expansive ways of understanding the parent-provider relationship that do not rely on static, quantitative measures. One suggestion is to consider ethnographic approaches. The benefit of using ethnographic approaches, such as participant observations, is that researchers can understand get a more comprehensive view of the relationship between parents and providers and truly focus on how that relationship functions in a specific cultural context. It is also possible to collaborate with parents and providers and use features of community-based participatory research to guide decision-making around measurement and results.

Of course, the methods and measures future researchers use will be guided by their understanding of the purpose of measurement. Is the purpose of measuring parent-provider relationships to inform potential changes in how providers are in relationship with parents? Is the purpose to assess how that relationship is associated with other outcomes for families and children? I argue that understanding measurement in context requires researchers to know the limits and potential of the measurement tools they are using. Researchers should consider whether the traditional ways of measuring parent-provider relationships are sufficient for the scope of their research, and whether those measures do justice to the complexity and context of the parent-provider relationship.

Limitations

This study extends research on the multifaceted nature of parent-provider relationships in early childhood contexts and does so with specific attention to the relationship itself as opposed to the associations between the parent-provider relationship and subsequent child social and academic outcomes. However, as with any study, there are some limitations that are important to highlight.

Limitations Regarding Cocaring Relationship Questionnaire

Perhaps the most important limitation to mention is that for both the parent and teacher CRQ surveys, the model fit was poor. In many studies using a CFA approach, this would be reason enough to revise the survey or report no findings. However, since this survey had already been validated, I decided to cautiously continue with my planned analysis of the factor loadings

(Lang et al., 2017). Another related limitation is the factor structure itself. I hoped to compare the factor loadings for the parent and teacher responses, but the factor structures were not identical. I addressed this concern by comparing only the items that were aligned with the same factors. This led to a few difficulties. First, for some of the factors, there were only a few (e.g., for agreement dimension there were 2) items and factor loadings to compare. In addition, the factor loadings, again, needed to be interpreted cautiously. This is not only because of the poor model fit but also because for parents and teachers there were other items that contributed to the factor structure that were not considered. So, this was not a true comparison of the factor loadings because the weights of other items that were not the same across parents and teachers might have influenced the factor loadings of the items I was comparing. With this in mind, I was still able to answer my second research question by looking both at the "like items" in the factor structures and the items with the highest factor loading overall for each factor. This way I could identify the potential driver (i.e., what is important to teachers and parents) even if the factor structures were different.

The responses from parents and teachers on the CRQ were not randomly selected and were self-report measures. The lack of random selection has implications for the generalizability of the data beyond the scope of this project. In addition, causal relationships could not be assessed using the CRQ data. Earlier, I discussed that self-report measures are usually rated highly positive with little variation. Although these data are negatively skewed, there is variation within the cocaring dimensions (see Table 3 and Table 6). Finally, the cocaring data was only collected at one time point. I mentioned before that the parent-provider relationship has a developmental quality and likely changes over time. These data do not allow for understanding how the parent-provider relationship changes over time. Despite these limitations, the benefits of exploring the multiple dimensions of the parent-provider relationship in specific dyads extends what we already know about the general importance of these relationships toward more specific conceptualizations and understandings about the drivers of the relationship.

Limitations Regarding the Family Engagement Plus Study

Regarding the “Plus Study,” these data were originally designed to answer related, but different, questions about family engagement in Head Start. Considering the interviews were not specifically about the parent-provider relationship, but more broadly about family engagement, the interviews may not include specific, relationship-based information. Furthermore, because these data are reserved for protected use the analyses had to be conducted on a secure virtual desktop and the results had to go through a process of disclosure review. The virtual desktop for this project did not have qualitative coding software to conduct my analysis. I instead highlighted text in PDFs and created several Excel spreadsheets to organize my results. Therefore, I was not able to conduct any “counts” of codes to use the qualitative data to help answer my second research question. It is quite possible that some of the findings would be different if I had been able to use qualitative coding software. Although, some of the results were double coded by my advisor and all were reviewed by a second person to ensure rigor and to ensure that I was not missing anything critical. Finally, some of the data I would have liked to report (e.g., demographic information about parents and FSS) was excluded due to disclosure risks. This also affected some of the quotations I used in this study. Many were modified, slightly or significantly, to ensure there was no disclosure risk. I did not have control over these decisions. It is possible that revising the quotes took away from the overall meaning of the quote or the voice of a parent or FSS. I tried to limit this as much as possible to maintain and honor the voices of the participants; I made this commitment when I started this research. Despite these limitations, capturing even a general understanding of how parents and FSS talked about their relationship and collaboration proved to be a valuable contribution to the literature.

Conclusion

This study was innovative in that it used a multidimensional and multi-method approach to understanding parent-provider relationships in early childhood contexts. The CRQ data included parent-teacher dyads, which allowed for more in-depth analysis of their perceptions of the specific relationship, not just the concept of parent-provider relationships. I used a variety of methodological approaches to evaluate parent-provider relationships. My methodological choices and suggestions for future research address a long history of limited thinking and unidimensional perspectives about parent-provider relationships. In addition, using data from both Head Start and child care centers allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship across multiple settings. In developmental science, context matters immensely; in the context of the parent-provider relationship it matters too and using two data sets helped highlight the possible variation in parent and provider roles and importance of context when studying the parent-provider relationship. Overall, this study underscores the importance of developing and validating measures that account for cultural and contextual factors to better understand parent-provider relationships in early childhood education.

The title of this study frames the question, “Are parents and providers of young children on the same page?” My assessment is, unsurprisingly, it depends. Parents and providers showed a lot of similarities or differences that were too small to be statistically significant. When I looked closer, it was clear parents and providers agreed on what was important in the relationship, but the details and the paths to get there differed. Parents and providers of young children are likely on the same page of a cookbook, per se, but they might be reading two different editions that contain slightly different recipes.

References

Aikens, N., Bandel, E., Akers, L., Lyskawa, J., & Jerald, J. (2014). *Family voices: Piloting a new qualitative measure of family engagement for head start and early head start staff and families* (OPRE Report 2014-28; p. 236). Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Aikens, N., Cavadel, E., Hartog, J., Hurwitz, F., Knas, E., Schochet, O., Malone, L., Tarullo, L., & others. (2017). *Building family partnerships: Family engagement findings from the Head Start FACES study* (OPRE Report 2017-102). Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Baquedano-López, P., Alexander, R. A., & Hernandez, S. J. (2013). Equity Issues in Parental and Community Involvement in Schools: What Teacher Educators Need to Know. *Review of Research in Education*, *37*, 149–182.

Bernhard, J. K., Lefebvre, M. L., Kilbride, K. M., Chud, G., & Lange, R. (1998). Troubled relationships in early childhood education: Parent-teacher interactions in ethnoculturally diverse child care settings. *Early Education and Development*, *9*(1), 5–28. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed0901_1

Blitch, K. A. (2017). *Parent-teacher relationships and communication in early childhood: A comparative, mixed methods study of white and ethnic-racial minority parents*.

Bornstein, M. H. (2015). Children’s parents. In R. M. Lerner (Ed.), *Handbook of Child Psychology and Developmental Science* (pp. 1–78). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118963418.childpsy403

Bronfenbrenner, U. (2002). *Preparing a world for the infant in the twenty-first century: The research challenge*. The Infant and Family in the Twenty-First Century. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203890295-11

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. A. (2007). The bioecological model of human development. In *Handbook of Child Psychology*. American Cancer Society. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470147658.chpsy0114

Chazan-Cohen, R., Ayoub, C., Pan, B. A., Roggman, L., Raikes, H., Mckelvey, L., Whiteside-Mansell, L., & Hart, A. (2007). It takes time: Impacts of Early Head Start that lead to reductions in maternal depression two years later. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, *28*(2), 151–170. https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.20127

Child care options. (2022). Childcare.Gov. https://childcare.gov/consumer-education/childcare-options

Cook, K. D., Dearing, E., & Zachrisson, H. D. (2018). Is parent–teacher cooperation in the first year of school associated with children’s academic skills and behavioral functioning? *International Journal of Early Childhood*, *50*(2), 211–226. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-018-0222-z

Crnic, K., & Ross, E. (2017). Parenting stress and parental efficacy. In K. Deater-Deckard & R. Panneton (Eds.), *Parental Stress and Early Child Development* (pp. 263–284). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-55376-4_11

Daniels, D., & Moos, R. (1988). Exosystem influences, family environment, and child functioning. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, *3*(4), 113.

Development of a measure of family and provider/teacher relationship quality (FTPRQ). (2015). Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation | ACF. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/development-of-a-measure-of-family-and-provider-teacher-relationship-quality-fptrq

Downer, J. T., & Myers, S. (2009). Application of a developmental/ecological model to family-school partnerships. In S. L. Christenson & A. L. Reschly (Eds.), *Handbook of School-Family Partnerships* (0 ed., pp. 21–47). Taylor & Francis Group. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203876046-7

Elicker, J., Noppe, I. C., Noppe, L. D., & Fortner-Wood, C. (1997). The parent–caregiver relationship scale: Rounding out the relationship system in infant child care. *Early Education & Development*, *8*(1), 83–100. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed0801_7

Epstein, J. L. (Ed.). (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (2nd ed). Corwin Press.

Family engagement in QRIS. (2022). Child Care Aware® of America. https://www.childcareaware.org/child-care-resource-and-referral/consumer-education-engagement/family-engagement-in-qris/

Fantuzzo, J., McWayne, C., Perry, M. A., & Childs, S. (2004). Multiple dimensions of family involvement and their relations to behavioral and learning competencies for urban, low-income children. *School Psychology Review*, *33*(4), 467–480.

Feinberg, M. E. (2003). The internal structure and ecological context of coparenting: A framework for research and intervention. *Parenting*, *3*(2), 95–131. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327922PAR0302_01

Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE.

Forry, N., Bromer, J., Chrisler, A., Rothenberg, L., Simkin, S., & Daneri, P. (2012). *Family-provider relationship quality: Review of conceptual and empirical literature of family-provider relationships: (537912013-001)* [Data set]. American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/e537912013-001

Goodall, J., & Montgomery, C. (2014). Parental involvement to parental engagement: A continuum. *Educational Review*, *66*(4). https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.781576

Green, B. L., McAllister, C. L., & Tarte, J. M. (2004). *The strengths-based practices inventory: A tool for measuring strengths-based service delivery in early childhood and family support programs*. *85*, 9.

Heyman, M., Poulakos, A., Upshur, C., & Wenz-Gross, M. (2018). Discrepancies in parent and teacher ratings of low-income preschooler's social skills. *Early Child Development and Care*, *188*(6), 759–773.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Jones, K. P. (1997). *Parental role construction and parental involvement in children's education*. 37.

Hurwitz, F., Heckler, A., Aikens, N., & Kopack Klein, A. (2021). *Head Start family and child experiences survey (FACES 2014) family engagement plus study user's manual*. Mathematica Policy Research.

Iruka, I. U., Winn, D.-M. C., Kingsley, S. J., & Orthodoxou, Y. J. (2011). Links between parent-teacher relationships and kindergartners' social skills: Do child ethnicity and family income matter? *The Elementary School Journal*, *111*(3), 387–408. https://doi.org/10.1086/657652

Jordan, J. V. (2017). Relational–cultural theory: The power of connection to transform our lives. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, *56*(3), 228–243. https://doi.org/10.1002/johc.12055

Julius, G. D. (2017). *The importance of parent-provider -relationships in early education*. 3.

Kernan, M. (2010). Space and place as a source of belonging and participation in urban environments: Considering the role of early childhood education and care settings. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, *18*(2), 199–213. https://doi.org/10.1080/13502931003784420

Kim, E. M., & Sheridan, S. M. (2015). *Foundational aspects of family-school connections: Definitions, conceptual frameworks, and research needs*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-13838-1_1

Kline, R. B. (2015). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling*. Guilford publications.

Knight, G. P., & Hill, N. E. (1998). Measurement equivalence in research involving minority adolescents. *Studying Minority Adolescents: Conceptual, Methodological, and Theoretical Issues*, 183–210.

Koshyk, J., Wilson, T., Stewart-Tufescu, A., D'Souza, M., Chase, R. M., & Mignone, J. (2021). The ripple effect: Examining the impact on parents of an Abecedarian early child care intervention in an urban social housing development. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, *19*(1), 40–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476718X20966696

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, *32*(3), 465–491. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465

Lang, S. N., Jeon, L., Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., & Wells, M. B. (2020). Associations between parent–teacher cocaring relationships, parent–child relationships, and young children's social emotional development. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, *49*(4), 623–646. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-020-09545-6

Lang, S. N., Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., & Jeon, L. (2017). Examining a self-report measure of parent–teacher cocaring relationships and associations with parental involvement. *Early Education and Development*, *28*(1), 96–114. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2016.1195672

Lareau, A., & Calarco, J. M. (2012). Class, cultural capital, and institutions: The case of families and schools. *Facing Social Class: How Societal Rank Influences Interaction.*, 61–86.

Lasky, S. (2000). The cultural and emotional politics of teacher–parent interactions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *16*(8), 843–860. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(00)00030-5

Lerner, R. M. (2018). *Concepts and theories of human development* (Fourth edition). Routledge/Taylor&Francis Group.

Lightfoot, S. L. (1977). Family-school interactions: The cultural image of mothers and teachers. *Signs*, *3*(2), 395–408.

Mahmood, S. (2013). First-Year Preschool and Kindergarten Teachers: Challenges of Working With Parents. *School Community Journal*, *23*(2), 55–86.

Marvin, C. A., Moen, A. L., Knoche, L. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2019). Getting ready strategies for promoting parent–professional relationships and parent–child interactions. *Young Exceptional Children*, 1096250619829744.

McDonald, D. (2009). *Evaluating the Field: Using NAEYC early childhood program accreditation to support and reach higher quality in early childhood programs* (p. 20) [Public Policy Report].

McGrath, W. H. (2007). Ambivalent partners: Power, trust, and partnership in relationships between mothers and teachers in a full-time child care center. *Teachers College Record*, *109*(6), 1401–1422.

McWilliam, R., McMillen, B., Sloper, K., & McMillen, J. (1997). Early education and child care program philosophy about families. *Advances in Early Education and Day Care*, *9*, 61–104.

Mendez, J. L. (2010). How can parents get involved in preschool? Barriers and engagement in education by ethnic minority parents of children attending Head Start. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *16*(1), 26–36. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016258

Milner, H. R. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher*, *36*(7), 388–400. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X07309471

Minke, K. M., Sheridan, S. M., Kim, E. M., Ryoo, J. H., & Koziol, N. A. (2014). Congruence in parent-teacher relationships: The role of shared perceptions. *The Elementary School Journal*, *114*(4), 527–546. https://doi.org/10.1086/675637

Minuchin, P. (1985). Families and individual development: Provocations from the field of family therapy. *Child Development*, 289–302.

Murphey, D. (1992). Constructing the child: Relations between parents' beliefs and child outcomes. *Developmental Review*, *12*(2), 199–232. https://doi.org/10.1016/0273-2297(92)90009-Q

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2014). *NAEYC early childhood program standards and accreditation criteria & guidance for assessment*.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2019). *NAEYC Early Learning Program Accreditation Standards and Assessment Items*.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (2022). *NAEYC early learning program accreditation standards and assessment items*.

National Center on Education Statistics. (2022). *Enrollment rates of young children*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cfa/enrollment-of-young-children

Nzinga-Johnson, S., Baker, J. A., & Aupperlee, J. (2009). Teacher-parent relationships and school involvement among racially and educationally diverse parents of kindergartners. *The Elementary School Journal*, *110*(1), 81–91. https://doi.org/10.1086/598844

Owen, M. T., Klausli, J. F., Mata-Otero, A.-M., & Caughy, M. O. (2008). Relationship-focused child care practices: Quality of care and child outcomes for children in poverty. *Early Education and Development*, *19*(2), 302–329.

Owen, M. T., Ware, A. M., & Barfoot, B. (2000). Caregiver-mother partnership behavior and the quality of caregiver-child and mother-child interactions. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *15*(3), 413–428. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006(00)00073-9

Perlman, M., & Fletcher, B. A. (2012). Hellos and how are yous: Predictors and correlates of communication between staff and families during morning drop-off in child care centers. *Early Education and Development*, *23*(4), 539–557. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2010.548766

Powell, D. R. (1978). Correlates of parent-teacher communication frequency and diversity. *The Journal of Educational Research*, *71*(6), 333–341.

Powell, D. R., & Diamond, K. E. (1995). Approaches to parent-teacher relationships in us. Early childhood programs during the twentieth century. *The Journal of Education*, *177*(3), 71–94.

Powell, D. R., Son, S. H., File, N., & San Juan, R. R. (2010). Parent-school relationships and children's academic and social outcomes in public school pre-kindergarten. *Journal of School Psychology*, *48*(4), 269–292. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2010.03.002

Promoting safety and belonging for children, families, and early childhood professionals during times of uncertainty. (2022). *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, *47*(3), 165–167. https://doi.org/10.1177/18369391221120333

Rahn, M. (2012, September 10). Factor analysis: A short introduction, part 1. *The Analysis Factor*. https://www.theanalysisfactor.com/factor-analysis-1-introduction/

Reedy, C. K., & McGrath, W. H. (2010). Can you hear me now? Staff-parent communication in child care centres. *Early Child Development and Care*, *180*(3), 347–357. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430801908418

Riley, S., Brady, A. E., Goldberg, J., Jacobs, F., & Easterbrooks, M. A. (2008). Once the door closes: Understanding the parent–provider relationship. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *30*(5), 597–612. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2007.11.011

Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R. C., Cox, M. J., & Bradley, R. H. (2003). Teacher-rated family involvement and children’s social and academic outcomes in kindergarten. *Early Education and Development*, *14*(2), 179–198. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed1402_3

Rosenblatt, Z., & Peled, D. (2002). School ethical climate and parental involvement. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *40*(4), 349–367. https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230210433427

Saïas, T., Lerner, E., Greacen, T., Emer, A., Guédeney, A., Dugravier, R., Tubach, F., Tereno, S., & Guédeney, N. (2016). Parent-provider relationship in home visiting interventions. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *69*, 106–115. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2016.08.004

Schaefer, E. S. (1987). Parental modernity and child academic competence: Toward a theory of individual and societal development. *Early Child Development and Care*, *27*(2), 373–389.

Schneider, H., Ryan, M., & Mahone, E. M. (2020). Parent versus teacher ratings on the BRIEF-preschool version in children with and without ADHD. *Child Neuropsychology : A Journal on Normal and Abnormal Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, *26*(1), 113–128. https://doi.org/10.1080/09297049.2019.1617262

Schneirla, T. C. (1957). The concept of development in comparative psychology. *The Concept of Development*, 78–108.

Sharpe, P. (1991). Parental involvement in preschools, parents' and teachers' perceptions of their roles. *Early Child Development and Care*, *71*(1), 53–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/0300443910710105

Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Parents' Social Networks and Beliefs as Predictors of Parent Involvement. *The Elementary School Journal*, *102*(4), 301–316. https://doi.org/10.1086/499705

Shpancer, N. (1998). Caregiver–parent relationships in daycare: A review and re-examination of the data and their implications. *Early Education and Development*, *9*(3), 239–259. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed0903_3

Singer, J. (2007). The Brazelton Touchpoints^{TM} approach to infants and toddlers in care: Foundation for a lifetime of learning and loving. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, *35*(3), 4.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant Observation*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. https://books.google.com/books?id=sQClDJXc5vkC

Stratigos, T., Bradley, B., & Sumsion, J. (2014). Infants, Family Day Care and the Politics of Belonging. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, *46*(2), 171–186. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13158-014-0110-0

Swartz, M. I. (2009). *Understanding the connections between home and child care: The nature and circumstances of parent-provider relationships in infant and toddler classrooms* [PhD Thesis]. Tufts University.

Swartz, M. I., & Easterbrooks, M. A. (2014). The Role of Parent, Provider, and Child Characteristics in Parent–Provider Relationships in Infant and Toddler Classrooms. *Early Education and Development*, *25*(4), 573–598. https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2013.822229

Tassé, M. J., & Lecavalier, L. (2000). Comparing parent and teacher ratings of social competence and problem behaviors. *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, *105*(4), 252–259. https://doi.org/10.1352/0895-8017(2000)105<0252:CPATRO>2.0.CO;2

Taverna, L., Tremolada, M., Bonichini, S., Intra, F. S., & Brighi, A. (2021). Assessing children's gross-motor development: Parent and teacher agreement. Implication for school and wellbeing. *Journal of Physical Education and Sport*, *21*, 560–566.

Trivette, C. M., Dunst, C. J., & Hamby, D. W. (2010). Influences of family-systems intervention practices on parent-child interactions and child development. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, *30*(1), 3–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121410364250

Trull, L. H. (2015). *A mixed-methods study of head start family service worker qualifications and family services utilization: Implications for policy and leadership* [Ph.D., James Madison University]. https://www.proquest.com/docview/1685390388/abstract/F240A7A630E44553PQ/1

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2019, January 16). *Education requirements for family services managers and staff*. https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/publication/education-requirements-family-services-managers-staff

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, & National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. (2018). *Head start parent, family, and community engagement framework* (p. 25).

Ware, A. M., Barfoot, B., Rusher, A. S., & Owen, M. T. (1995). *Caregiver-parent partnership scale*.

Wasik, B., & Bryant, D. (2001). Theories and Principles of Home Visiting. In *Home Visiting: Procedures for Helping Families* (2nd ed., pp. 29–52). SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452225616

Watson, K. C., Kieckhefer, G. M., & Olshansky, E. (2006). Striving for therapeutic relationships: Parent–provider communication in the developmental treatment setting. *Qualitative Health Research*, 647–663.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006

Yuan, K.-H., & Bentler, P. M. (2007). 3. Multilevel Covariance Structure Analysis by Fitting Multiple Single-Level Models. *Sociological Methodology*, *37*(1), 53–82. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9531.2007.00182.x

Zellman, G. L., & Perlman, M. (2006). Parent involvement in child care settings: Conceptual and measurement issues. *Early Child Development and Care*, *176*(5), 521–538. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430500147490

Zulauf-McCurdy, C. A., & Loomis, A. M. (2022). Parent and teacher perceptions of the parent–teacher relationship and child self-regulation in preschool: Variations by child race. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-022-01341-2

Table 1

Demographic Information for Families

	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Family Income (per year) (*n* = 76)	91308.21	75500.00	80093.24	1.73	4.02	804.00	400000.00
Parent Bachelor's Degree or Higher. (*n* = 88)	0.76	1.00	0.43	- 1.25	- 0.45	0.00	1.00
Currently Employed (*n* = 88)	0.90	1.00	0.30	- 2.67	5.25	0.00	1.00
Parent's Gender (1 = Female) (*n* = 87)	0.89	1.00	0.32	- 2.46	4.13	0.00	1.00
Child's Gender (1 = Female) (*n* = 88)	0.35	0.00	0.48	0.63	- 1.64	0.00	1.00
Child's Age (Years) (*n* = 84)	2.07	2.18	0.60	- 0.18	- 1.22	0.99	3.20
Subsidized Child Care (*n* = 87)	0.23	0	0.42	1.32	- 0.30	0.00	1.00
Time in Class (Months) (*n* = 82)	11.48	10.00	6.38	1.64	3.60	3.00	37.00
Latino/Hispanic (*n = 88)*	0.05	0.00	0.21	4.44	18.13	0.00	1.00
Black (*n* = 87)	0.23	0.00	0.42	1.31	- 0.30	0.00	1.00
White (*n* = 87)	0.68	1.00	0.47	- 0.78	- 1.43	0.00	1.00
Other Race (*n* = 88)	0.14	0.00	0.35	2.16	2.71	0.00	1.00

Table 2

Demographic Information for Teachers

	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Income (per year) (*n* = 35)	28371.43	29000.00	5012.25	- 0.07	0.27	18000.00	40000.00
Teacher Associate's Degree or Higher (*n* = 40)	0.65	1.00	0.48	- 0.65	- 1.66	0.00	1.00
Teacher's Gender (1 = Female) (*n* = 40)	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.93
Latino/Hispanic (*n = 40)*	0.03	0.00	0.16	6.33	40.00	0.00	1.00
Black (*n* = 40)	0.25	0.00	0.44	1.20	- 0.59	0.00	1.00
White (*n* = 40)	0.73	1.00	0.45	- 1.05	- 0.95	0.00	1.00
Other Race (*n* = 40)	0.05	0.00	0.22	4.29	17.29	0.00	1.00

Table 3

Cocaring Dimensions for Parents and Teachers

	Mean Sum Score	Median	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Cocaring Dimensions – Parents							
Endorsement (*n* = 85)	30.99	33.00	5.54	- 1.53	1.98	12.00	36.00
Support (*n* = 85)	54.06	56.00	13.05	- 1.14	1.72	4.00	72.00
Undermining (*n* = 85)	0.79	0.00	2.61	4.98	26.72	0.00	16.00
Agreement (*n* = 85)	15.71	17.00	3.46	- 2.13	5.12	0.00	18.00
Cocaring Dimensions - Teachers							
Endorsement (*n* = 85)	32.00	33.00	4.22	- 1.68	3.88	14.00	36.00
Support (*n* = 85)	55.52	57.00	12.22	- 1.16	1.78	12.00	72.00
Undermining (*n* = 85)	4.71	3.00	5.44	2.37	8.71	0.00	33.00
Agreement (*n* = 85)	17.89	20.00	5.90	- 0.94	0.00	2.00	24.00

Table 4

CRQ Questions, Dimension, and Standardized Factor Comparisons

Teacher Question	Teacher Dimension	Teacher Factor Loading (Standard Error)	Parent Factor Loading (Standard Error)	Parent Dimension	Parent Question
1. I believe this child's parent is a good parent.	E	0.79 (0.06)**	0.59 (0.07) **	E	1. I believe my child's teacher is a good educator.
2. This parent asks for my opinion on issues related to caring for his/her child.	S	0.74 (0.05)**	0.66 (0.07)**	S	2. My child's teacher asks my opinion on issues related to caring for my child.
3. This parent pays a great deal of attention to his/her child.	E	0.82 (0.05)**	0.79 (0.05) **	E	3. This child's teacher pays a great deal of attention to my child.
4. This parent and I have the same goals for his/her child. [c]	A	0.77 (0.07)**	0.92 (0.02) **	E	4. My child's teacher and I have the same goals for my child. [c]
5. It is easier and more fun to be with this parent's child alone than it is when the parent is present. [c]	U	0.51 (0.09)**			5. It is easier and more fun to be with my child alone than it is when my child's teacher is present. [b c]
6. This parent and I have different ideas about how to raise his/her child. [a]	A	0.72 (0.07)**	0.77 (0.06)**	A	6. My child's teacher and I have different ideas about how to raise my child. [a]
7. This parent tells me I am doing a good job or otherwise lets me know I am being a good teacher.	S	0.78 (0.05)**	0.64 (0.07)**	S	7. My child's teacher tells me I am doing a good job or otherwise lets me know I am being a good parent.

8. This parent and I have different ideas regarding his/her child's eating, sleeping, potty and/or other routines. [a]	A	0.64 (0.08)**	0.81 (0.06)**	A	8. My child's teacher and I have different ideas regarding my child's eating, sleeping, and/or other routines. [a]
9. This parent sometimes makes jokes or sarcastic comments about the things I do as a teacher. [c]	U	0.38 (0.10)	0.74 (0.07)**	A	9. My child's teacher sometimes makes jokes or sarcastic comments about the things I do as a parent. [c]
10. This parent does not trust my abilities as a teacher.	U	0.67 (0.07)*	0.80 (0.05)*	U	10. My child's teacher does not trust my abilities as a parent.
11. This parent is sensitive to his/her child's feelings and needs. [c]	E	0.40 (0.10)**			11. My child's teacher is sensitive to my child's feelings and needs. [b] [c]
12. This parent and I have different standards for his/her child's behavior. [a c]	A	0.82 (0.05)**	0.48 (0.09) **	E	12. My child's teacher and I have different standards for my child's behavior. [a c]
13. This parent tries to show that she or he is better than me at caring for his/her child.	U	0.76 (0.06)**	0.90 (0.03)**	U	13. My child's teacher tries to show that she or he is better than me at caring for my child.
14. I feel close to this parent when I see him or her with his/her child. [c]	S	0.60 (0.07)**	0.81 (0.04)**	E	14. I feel close to this teacher when I see him or her with my child. [c]
15. This parent has a lot of patience with his/her child.	E	0.68 (0.07)**	0.77 (0.05)**	E	15. My child's teacher has a lot of patience with my child.
16. We often discuss the best way to meet his/her child's needs.	S	0.68 (0.06)**	0.69 (0.06)**	S	16. We often discuss the best way to meet my child's needs.

17. When all three of us are together, this parent sometimes competes with me for his/her child's attention.	U	0.74 (0.06)**	0.70 (0.06)*	U	17. When all three of us are together, my child's teacher sometimes competes with me for my child's attention.
18. This parent undermines my authority as the teacher (or in teaching). [b c]			0.76 (0.06)**	U	18. My child's teacher undermines my parenting. [c]
19. This parent is willing to make personal sacrifices to help take care of his/her child. [c]	E	0.45 (0.10)*	0.43 (0.09)**	S	19. My child's teacher is willing to make personal sacrifices to help take care of my child. [c]
20. This parent appreciates how hard I work at being a good teacher.	S	0.80 (0.05)**	0.62 (0.07)**	S	20. My child's teacher appreciates how hard I work at being a good parent.
21. When I'm at my wits end as a teacher, this parent gives me the extra support I need.	S	0.67 (0.06)**	0.68 (0.06)**	S	21. When I'm at my wits end as a parent, my child's teacher gives me the extra support I need.
22. This parent makes me feel like I'm the best possible teacher for his/her child.	S	0.76 (0.05)**	0.80 (0.04)**	S	22. My child's teacher makes me feel like I'm the best possible parent for my child.
23. This parent doesn't like to be bothered by his/her child. [a c]	E	0.55 (0.09)**			23. My child's teacher doesn't like to be bothered by my child. [b c]
24. This parent doesn't like to be bothered by me. [a, b]	A				24. My child's teacher doesn't like to be bothered by me. [b]
25. If I have a conflict with this parent I will speak to him/her about the issue.	S	0.41 (0.09)**	0.62 (0.07)**	S	25. If I have a conflict with the teacher I will speak to him/her about the issue.

26. This parent tries the advice I give him/her.	S	0.78 (0.05)**	0.77 (0.05)**	S	26. This teacher takes advice I give him/her about how to help my child.
27. I take advice from this parent about how to help his/her child.	S	0.67 (0.07)**	0.76 (0.05)**	S	27. I try advice from this teacher about how to help my child.
28. This parent rarely asks questions about his/her child's day. [a]	S	0.66 (0.07)**	0.56 (0.08)**	S	28. This teacher rarely asks questions about my child's time at home. [a]
29. When this parent picks up or drops off, I feel uncomfortable or tense in his/her presence. [c]	U	0.79 (0.05)**			29. When I come to drop off or pick-up my child, I feel uncomfortable in this teacher's presence. [b c]
30. Communication with this parent is open and easy.	S	0.76 (0.05)**	0.78 (0.05)**	S	30. Communication with this teacher is open and easy.
χ 2		χ 2 (344) = 772.28, p < 0.00	χ 2 (269) = 485.16, p < 0.00		
RMSEA		0.121	0.097		
CFI		0.700	0.829		

Note: 1) x^{a} indicates question is reverse coded, x^{b} indicates question was dropped from the respective parent or teacher questionnaire, and x^{c} indicates that the dimensions differ for teachers and for parents. 2) *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01 3) S = Support; E = Endorsement; U = Undermining; A = Agreement

Table 5

Categories for Level of Agreement Variable

Cocaring Dimension	Positive Agreement		Relatively Positive Agreement		Negative Agreement		Disagreement
	Parent	Teacher	Parent	Teacher	Parent	Teacher	
Endorsement	≥36.53	>36.74	25.46<x<36.52	27.79<x<36.73	≤25.45	≤27.78	P≠T
Support	≥67.11	>67.74	41.02<x<67.10	42.31<x<67.73	≤41.01	≤43.30	
Agreement	≥19.17	>23.80	12.25<x<19.16	12.00<x<23.79	≤12.24	≤11.99	

Table 6

Levels of Agreement between Parents and Teachers on Cocaring Dimensions

	Agreement Category	Frequency	Percent
Endorsement	Positive Agreement	5	5.9%
	Relatively Positive Agreement	35	41.2%
	Negative Agreement	2	2.4%
	Disagreement	43	50.6%
Support	Positive Agreement	3	3.5%
	Relatively Positive Agreement	48	56.5%
	Negative Agreement	2	2.4%
	Disagreement	32	37.6%
Agreement	Positive Agreement	6	7.1%
	Relatively Positive Agreement	21	24.7%
	Negative Agreement	3	3.5%
	Disagreement	55	64.7%

Table 7

Bivariate Correlations for Cocaring Dimensions Between Parents and Teachers

	Endorsement_P	Support_P	Undermining_P	Agreement_P	Endorsement_T	Support_T	Undermining_T	Agreement_T
Endorsement_P	--							
Support_P	0.61^{**}	--						
Undermining_P	$-\ 0.42^{**}$	$-\ 0.43^{**}$	--					
Agreement_P	0.38^{**}	0.39^{**}	$-\ 0.52^{**}$	--				
Endorsement_T	0.09	- 0.13	0.04	0.02	--			
Support_T	0.16	0.06	0.06	0.13	0.31^{**}	--		
Undermining_T	$-\ 0.34^{**}$	- 0.03	- 0.04	- 0.21	$-\ 0.28^{**}$	$-\ 0.57^{**}$	--	
Agreement_T	0.26*	0.02	0.13	0.00	0.43^{**}	0.41^{*}	$-\ 0.59^{**}$	--

Note. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

Table 8

Paired Samples T-tests

	Paired Differences							Significance	
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Endorsement	-1.01	6.67	0.72	-2.45	0.43	-1.40	84.00	0.08	0.17
Support	-1.46	17.30	1.88	-5.19	2.27	-0.78	84.00	0.22	0.44
Undermining	-3.92	6.13	0.66	-5.24	-2.60	-5.89	84.00	<.001	<.001
Agreement	-2.19	6.83	0.74	-3.66	-0.71	-2.95	84.00	0.00	0.00

Table 9

Model Fit Statistics Comparison

Variable	(1) Free Model - Coefficient	(2) ML Final - Coefficient	Difference (1-2)	(3) Lang (2017) Coefficient	Difference (2-3)
p2cocareq1	0.5939	0.5909	0.0030	0.6057	-0.0147
p2cocareq3	0.7933	0.8069	-0.0135	0.8123	-0.0054
p2cocareq4	0.9243	0.9172	0.0071	0.9124	0.0048
p2cocareq12_r	0.4798	0.4774	0.0024	0.4755	0.0019
p2cocareq14	0.8075	0.8067	0.0007	0.8059	0.0008
p2cocareq15	0.7692	0.7873	-0.0180	0.7866	0.0006
p2cocareq2	0.6574	0.6358	0.0216	0.6459	-0.0101
p2cocareq7	0.6394	0.6038	0.0356	0.6005	0.0033
p2cocareq16	0.6908	0.7037	-0.0129	0.6913	0.0124
p2cocareq19	0.4316	0.4288	0.0027	0.4229	0.0060
p2cocareq20	0.6156	0.6066	0.0090	0.5990	0.0076
p2cocareq21	0.6793	0.6276	0.0517	0.6215	0.0061
p2cocareq22	0.8028	0.7843	0.0185	0.7820	0.0023
p2cocareq25	0.6211	0.6191	0.0020	0.6237	-0.0045
p2cocareq26	0.7686	0.7774	-0.0088	0.7703	0.0071
p2cocareq27	0.7626	0.7461	0.0165	0.7403	0.0058
p2cocareq28_r	0.5641	0.5808	-0.0167	0.5860	-0.0052
p2cocareq30	0.7774	0.8103	-0.0329	0.8177	-0.0074
p2cocareq10	0.7976	0.8113	-0.0137	0.8081	0.0032
p2cocareq13	0.8966	0.9071	-0.0105	0.9102	-0.0031
p2cocareq17	0.7032	0.6234	0.0798	0.6211	0.0023
p2cocareq18	0.7597	0.7229	0.0368	0.7256	-0.0027
p2cocareq6_r	0.7732	0.7955	-0.0222	0.7957	-0.0002
p2cocareq8_r	0.8056	0.7864	0.0191	0.7851	0.0014
p2cocareq9_r	0.7401	0.7534	-0.0132	0.7561	-0.0027
χ 2	χ 2(269) = 485.16, $p < 0.00$	χ 2(250) = 286.94, $p = 0.054$		χ 2(246) = 272.55, $p = 0.118$	
RMSEA	0.097	0.042		0.036	
CFI	0.829	0.971		0.979	

Table 10

CRQ Questions, Dimension, and Standardized Factor Comparisons by Cocaring Dimension

Question	Teacher Factor Loading	Parent Factor Loading	Factor Loading Difference
Endorsement			
I believe this child's parent/teacher is a good parent.	0.79**	0.59**	-0.2
This parent/teacher pays a great deal of attention to his/her child.	0.82**	0.79**	-0.03
This parent/teacher has a lot of patience with his/her child.	0.68**	0.77**	0.09
Support			
This parent/teacher asks for my opinion on issues related to caring for his/her child.	0.74**	0.66**	-0.08
This parent/teacher tells me I am doing a good job or otherwise lets me know I am being a good teacher.	0.78**	0.64**	-0.14
We often discuss the best way to meet his/her child's needs.	0.68**	0.69**	0.01
This parent/teacher appreciates how hard I work at being a good teacher.	0.80**	0.62**	-0.18
When I'm at my wits end as a parent/teacher, this parent/teacher gives me the extra support I need.	0.67**	0.68**	0.01
This parent/teacher makes me feel like I'm the best possible parent/teacher for his/her child.	0.76**	0.80**	0.04
If I have a conflict with this parent/teacher I will speak to him/her about the issue.	0.41**	0.62**	0.21
This parent/teacher tries the advice I give him/her.	0.78 **	0.77**	-0.01
I take advice from this parent/teacher about how to help his/her child.	0.67 **	0.76**	0.09
This parent/teacher rarely asks questions about his/her child's day.	0.66**	0.56**	-0.1
Communication with this parent/teacher is open and easy.	0.76**	0.78**	0.02
Undermining			
This parent/teacher does not trust my abilities as a parent/teacher.	0.67*	0.80*	0.13
This parent/teacher tries to show that she or he is better than me at caring for his/her child.	0.76**	0.90**	0.14

Agreement			
This parent/teacher and I have different ideas about how to raise his/her child.	0.72**	0.77**	0.05
This parent/teacher and I have different ideas regarding his/her child's eating, sleeping, potty and/or other routines.	0.64**	0.81**	0.17

Note: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

Appendix A

Full “Plus Study” Coding Taxonomy

Appendix B

Cocaring Item Correlations