

**WHEN TEACHERS ARE ALSO PARENTS WHAT EFFECT DOES THIS HAVE  
ON THEIR ABILITY TO FORM PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER PARENTS?**

**By**

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First Reader

*Linda Pickett*

Second Reader

*Janey Elizabeth Carson WBO*

For Len and Kathy,  
my inspiration and motivation.

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## CHAPTER 1

### PURPOSE

#### Thesis question

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the question, *does being a parent make teachers more effective in forming partnerships with the parents of the children they teach?*

#### Introduction

As the director of a large child development center, I have learned that one of the key aspects of a successful program is forming strong partnerships between parents and teachers. It is these partnerships that ensure the policies of the center meet the needs of the families, that the curriculum is supported in the home and at the center, and most importantly, that each child is wrapped in a relaxed cocoon of understanding love and support all day.

This study took place in our center and therefore, the results came from the context of this center. We enjoy the financial support of a large union and company that allows us to keep teacher/child ratios low and give teachers planning time together. We also offer excellent salaries and benefits to teachers, which undoubtedly factors into low turn over and high retention of teachers. We require at least an associates degree in early childhood education from our teachers, so they come to us with some understanding of child development principles, classroom management ideas and the importance of forming partnerships with parents. Our administrative team values community building within our staff and with the families we serve. It was important to me to learn more

about how partnerships between teachers and parents are formed. This thesis question addresses one aspect of building teacher/parent partnerships and helped me narrow the scope of the issue.

The work I did in this project was with four parents. I had developed relationships with them through discussions on other issues at various times while their children were at our center. Some of the discussions were regarding transitioning their child to the toddler or multi-age classrooms. A discussion with one parent, I will call Jane, took place because her child had difficulty moving to his new classroom and new teacher, and Jane was very distressed about leaving him when he was upset. While I listened to her I learned to know her better. Jane was feeling the guilt that so many mothers feel about leaving their child, and his distress at separation time was intensifying these feelings. She wondered if she was doing something wrong, or if something was wrong with her son. I didn't have any "magic" answers. I took time to listen and express genuine empathy for a difficult time and reassurance that her son was fine and she was behaving appropriately. That response seemed to help lessen her anxiety. We also brainstormed ideas about how to make the separation time easier for her and her son. She expressed a great deal of confidence in his new teacher and, with time, her own confidence grew and her son's distress lessened considerably.

Another mother, I will call Mary, wanted to change her child's toddler primary caregiver because she had difficulty relating to the caregiver assigned to her. She knew the caregiver her child had was competent, but Mary did not feel connected to her. My discussion with Mary helped me understand that Mary needed a teacher with a more

gregarious personality than the one caring for her child at that time. Although she did view the teacher as competent, she had difficulty trusting a teacher who was quiet and reticent. We made the change and Mary was much more content.

It is important to note that although these changes are significant for mothers, it is also imperative to work closely with the teachers while making this change. Teachers MUST know the change is not a result of any inadequacy on their part in order to maintain their confidence in their competence.

Another mother, I will name Sally, and I had a conversation when her child was bitten in the toddler room. Biting toddlers is a highly emotional event for the mother of the child who was bitten and the mother of the child who bit. Sally did not demonstrate the high level of distress many mothers feel when their young child is bitten. She was easily reassured once she understood we would be watchful and work to prevent a recurrence. Sally had an older child and was much more relaxed in her approach with this second child.

The fourth mother, named Ann for this project, and I had several conversations about her child's progress, his new teacher, and how she could assist us with a special project the center was sponsoring. When her son was very young, she needed reassurance that she was doing well as a mother. She had excellent instincts and was willing to share her feelings very honestly. She worked hard to establish close relationships with all her son's teachers, which raised her level of confidence in her parenting skills. Ann liked contributing to the center's activities, so we had many opportunities to become acquainted.

Conversations with parents always give me insights into the personality and value systems of mothers. I learn about whether they are interested in academic activities or developing their child's social skills. I hear about family problems and issues that increase stress in their lives. Sometimes I can give a teacher some clues about a parent's concerns that will help them in creating their partnerships with the parents. Occasionally just listening lessens the parent's anxiety about an issue and helps them relax with their child and teacher. I knew some of the mothers in this study better than others, because we had more intense and frequent conversations, but I was acquainted with them all in some way. I chose these mothers with the assistance of the teachers involved in my project. They represented a variety of ages, experience as mothers, and cultural backgrounds. They had all established strong, positive relationships with their children's infant teachers when their children were in an infant room.

I have known and supervised the two teachers in this project for more than five years. They are both in their mid thirties and each has one child. The teacher I will call Teacher 1, has a boy and the teacher I name Teacher 2, a girl. They both came to our center with less than five years of teaching experience. When this study began, they had been at our center long enough for me to have the opportunity to work with them on committees and in individual evaluation sessions. Teacher 1 has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and Teacher 2 has an associate's degree in early childhood education. I chose these teachers because each was employed at our center when she gave birth to her first child. This meant that I had known them as infant teachers before they were mothers and after they became mothers. It also meant that I would have access

to parents who had known these teachers before they were mothers and parents who had known them after they were mothers. This study was designed to investigate whether or not the quality of the relationships these teachers created, with the mothers of the infants in their care, was perceived differently after they gave birth to their own children.

It is hoped that results from this investigation will help me more effectively assist our teaching staff in their work with parents. This study is action research and uses my prior knowledge of the teachers and parents involved, as well as interviews with the parents, to investigate what is effective in relationship building. Specifically, I want to investigate; do teachers who are also parents develop partnerships with mothers of infants in a more effective manner than those teachers who are not parents?

The parent/teacher relationship is crucial to the success of a teacher of young children. Balahan writes, "If we enjoy our day with children - that means being tired, of course, but satisfied; if we take pleasure in changes - both large and small-that occur in children; if we feel great when our actions help a child give up a negative behavior for a positive one; if we regard our responsibility to parents as equal to our responsibility to children; if we see ourselves as learners as well as teachers, then professional experience becomes meaningful and growth producing and contributes to the development of the youngest children who are in our care and their families" (1992, p.67). An important part of my job, as the director of our center, is to assist teachers in their relationship building with parents. Establishing strong relationships with parents is frequently more difficult for teachers to do than creating warm, trusting relationships with young children. As reported in a recent study of three teacher interns, "For all of the participants, developing

relationships with parents was considered a rewarding yet challenging process. Maya, for example, seemed to need extra time to establish relationships with parents, saying ‘I still have not had the opportunity to talk with the majority of the parents. I need to make more of an effort with this.’ Francesca shared her feelings about what she learned from visiting her key child’s family in their home by stating, ‘The home visit has enhanced my knowledge of how important it is to connect home and school. Really observing and taking the time out to talk to parents makes a big difference. We can both share our observations together.’”(Recchia & Loizou 2002, p.139).

During my many years in the early childhood education profession, I have listened when teachers were discussing their relationships with parents and they often commented that they understood parents so much better after they became parents. I have also heard parents say, “She (a teacher) doesn’t understand because she doesn’t have kids.” As an early childhood education administrator, who has worked with and supervised numerous teachers, I came to this study with the view that the character traits and commitment level of teachers have a stronger impact on relationships between mothers and teachers than whether or not the teachers are also parents. I believe that being a mother may deepen a teacher’s understanding of parents, but that being empathetic is possible for all teachers and that may be a more important factor in relationship building than whether or not a teacher is also a mother. Over time I have developed a belief that these character factors have a stronger influence on the teacher/parent relationship and wanted to do a study about that idea. The process of studying one aspect of the teacher/parent relationship should give me further insight into

many facets about how these relationships work, insights that I can share with the teachers in our center. This information and knowledge should help teachers gain added confidence in, and dedication to, establishing strong, trusting relationships with the parents of the children in their care.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Involving parents in the education of their children has been an important part of early childhood education from the very beginnings of the kindergarten movement. Froebel's book *Mother's Songs, Games and Stories* written in 1840, illustrates his interest in involving parents in his ideas of early childhood education (Gordon, 1996, p. 267). This book was Froebel's method of sharing with mothers some of the activities and materials, which Froebel learned from mothers, and thought was helpful in the development of young children. Later parent education developed in two different directions. One was the development of the PTA and parent cooperative nurseries following Deweyian thought. The aims of this movement were to learn about rearing your own child in order to better society as a whole. Dewey's ideas about how education needs to be a democratic, real life process also connected education with developing a better society. A democratic education system provides support for partnerships with parents. "What can be done and how can it be done, to bring the school into closer relation with the home and neighborhood life-instead of having the school a place where

the child comes solely to learn certain lessons?" is one question Dewey asks in his speech to the PTA at his University Elementary School in February 1899 (1996, p.150). The second direction for parent educators was the mainstreaming approach to assist immigrants into the flow of community life. This second plan used home visits as a technique and pamphlets for parent education were published. Notable among these publications were "National Society for the Study of Education 1929 Yearbook, *Preschool and Parental Education*; books by John B. Watson and Arnold Gesell. Also included were "the series of Iowa child welfare pamphlets of the 1930's and early 40's, including one by Ralph Ojemann (1941) on reading" (Gordon, 1996, p. 268). These efforts also indicated that those working on the education of young children in the early years before WWII understood the importance of the role of mothers in the education and well being of their young children.

The next major movement in parent education occurred with the "War on Poverty" in the 1960's and 70's. Longitudinal studies of young children were established and well-known programs such as Head Start began. Ira Gordon, one of the important leaders of parent involvement during this time, states "Cultural themes common to these parallel lines of middle class and mainstreaming in Europe and the United States, can be summed up in three statements: (1) the home is important and basic for human development; (2) parents need help in creating the most effective home environment for that development; and (3) the early years of life are important for lifelong development" (Gordon, 1996, p. 269).

These themes of parent support and the importance of early development continue. Powell writes of the major premises and anticipated outcomes of families and early childhood programs to form and maintain partnerships and for work toward enhancing the family's childrearing role (1990, p. 3). His first premise is "Doctrine of parental rights." Powell sites laws that require parental involvement in decision-making regarding their children. He also states " Teachers or caregivers have authority over children by virtue of parental extension or delegation of parental authority. The parental rights doctrine has contributed to a view of the parent as *de facto guardian* who selects a preschool program that ensures support of family values" (1990, p. 4). The second premise is, "Familial influences on the child." This premise acknowledges the key role of the family in socializing a child. Powell cites studies that support the importance of the family influence on academic performance and socialization of children. He also says, "Acknowledgement of the family's role as a major socialization force also has contributed to the notion that preschool experiences must be reinforced at home if the preschool is to have long term impact on the child" (1990, p. 5). He names his last premise "Democratic process." This premise relates to the idea that parent involvement in planning community action programs for their young children is consistent with our democratic ideals (1990, p. 5).

Bredekamp and Copple (1997) in *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*, an important and highly regarded reference in early childhood education, also addresses the importance of parent/teacher partnerships.

"Developmentally appropriate practices derive from deep knowledge of individual

children and the context within which they develop and learn. The younger the child, the more necessary it is for professionals to acquire this knowledge through relationships with children's families" (1997, p. 22). These editors present these guidelines for practice:

- A. "Reciprocal relationships between teachers and families require mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility, and negotiation of conflicts toward achievement of shared goals.
- B. Early childhood teachers work in collaborative partnerships with families, establishing and maintaining regular, frequent two-way communication with children's parents.
- C. Parents are welcome in the program and participate in decisions about their children's care and education. Parents observe and participate and serve in decisionmaking roles in the program.
- D. Teachers acknowledge parent's choices and goals for children and respond with sensitivity and respect to parents' preferences and concerns without abdicating professional responsibility to children.
- E. Teachers and parents share their knowledge of the child and understanding of children's development and learning as part of day-to-day communication and planned conferences. Teachers support families in ways that maximally promote family decisionmaking capabilities and competence.
- F. To ensure more accurate and complete information, the program involves families in assessing and planning for individual children.
- G. The program links families with a range of services, based on identified resources, priorities, and concerns.
- H. Teachers, parents, programs, social services and health agencies and consultants who may have educational responsibility for the child at different times should, with family participation, share developmental information about children as they pass from one level or program to another."

Newsweek's reporting of the findings of the recent brain research in 2000 includes a list of the needs of children from Drs. T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley Greenspan. "Every baby needs a warm, intimate relationship with a primary caregiver over a period of years, not months or weeks. This is far more important to emotional and intellectual development than early cognitive training or educational games. If this

relationship is absent or interrupted, a child can develop disorders of reasoning, motivation and attachment. Infants, toddlers and preschoolers need these nurturing interactions most of their waking hours” (2000, p. 35). In order to meet this important need, working parents must build a partnership with the teacher/caregiver of their child that will last a significant amount of time. Early childhood educators address the need for partnerships by creating “primary care” groups in infant/toddler programs. These groups are created with each caregiver/teacher who takes responsibility for the care of a specific group of children so the teacher can create a bond with each of these children. “The irreducible core of the environment during early development is people. Relationships matter. They provide the nurturance that strengthens children’s security and well-being, offer the cognitive challenges to exercise young minds, impart many essential catalysts to healthy brain growth, and help young children discover who they are and what they can do” (Thompson, 2001 p. 30). This quote from *Caring for Infants and Toddlers* also emphasizes the importance of relationship building in early childhood education.

Current literature often focuses on this relationship building between parents and teachers. One example is the research done by Claesson and Brice as reported in the *American Educational Research Journal* in spring, 1989. Their study focused on early childhood teachers who were also mothers and how that dual role affected their professional lives. How parents perceived teacher effectiveness when teachers were also parents came up during the course of this study (p.11). The teachers reported that parents perceive them more positively if they know the teacher is also a parent. These teachers

also reported that they were more confident when working with parents after they became parents themselves. These comments came from the perspective of teachers, not parents, and may have more to do with the increased level of confidence teachers had than actual perception of parents.

Another study funded by the Spunk Fund, Inc in the 90's was *Parent/Teacher Relationships*, (Galinski, 1991). This study looked at the attitudes of different groups of teachers and parents toward each other. One significant finding was that more affluent and educated mothers were held in higher regard by teachers than were those mothers of lesser means. The study identified this as a significant problem. "It is a sad comment on our ability to live in a diverse world that when parents were more advantaged, they were the beneficiaries of better relationships." (p. 24).

All the parents in my study are from very similar economical circumstances. In order to be eligible to come to our center, someone who is an active union member and company employee needs to provide at least 50% of the support of the child. Although our population is diverse in many ways, most are not of "lesser means." It has been my observation that if any of our teachers "judge" parents it is due to the teacher's perception regarding how much attention the parent is giving their child. Often I have worked with teachers to help them increase their empathy for parents when the parents were well off financially.

Nancy Balaban's article in the July 1992 issue of *Young Children* discussed the role of childcare professionals and included building relationships with parents as a key

part of the caregiver role. The November 1995 issue of *Young Children* included an article titled “Adult-Child Relationships in Early Childhood Programs.” In this article Elicker and Fortner-Wood says ”Having secure attachment relationships with parents *and* teachers provides the greatest positive influence on young children’s competence with peers” (p. 74).

Recchia and Loizou (2002, p. 146) studied new teachers of infants and toddlers and stated, “New infant caregivers need to develop close relationships not only with children, but also with parents and colleagues in order to provide optimal care.” They continued their discussion of the importance of these relationships to the care and understanding of the children and included some statements from the teachers in the study that illustrate the concern those teachers had for good relationships with parents. “A.’s parents caused some uncomfortable feelings in me just in the way they interact with each other... I also feel that M.’s parent is kind of distant from me, although I have already introduced myself as M.’s key caregiver. It may just take more effort on my part to approach her” (p. 139). This study also recognizes the importance of teacher’s personal and professional attributes in providing care for young children. “They (teachers) must become comfortable with a certain degree of ambiguity as they work to balance what sometimes appears to be the opposing needs of infants and toddlers and their families” (p. 134).

Most recently, the July 2002 issue of *Young Children* featured a series of articles on relationships in early childhood education. “Extending the Dance” by Edwards and

Raikes addressed relationships in infant/toddler care in particular. “The teacher-child relationship is an extension of the primary parent-child relationship and teachers invest in building supportive relationships with families around their common interest, the child” (p. 12). All these articles support the interest in relationship building between parents and teachers in early childhood education. My thesis question addressed one aspect of this relationship, namely: how does being a parent effect teachers when they work with the parents of the children they teach?

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **METHOD**

The research question was: *Does being a parent make teachers more effective in forming partnerships with the parents of the children they teach?* While I thought the best way to get at an answer was to talk to parents, I didn’t want to ask parents the question directly, because I thought it would bring out their bias toward the subject and not necessarily what they actually experienced. Instead, I wanted to discuss their relationships with the primary care teacher of their infant children, and see whether teachers being parents surfaced in the discussion as a factor in the relationship. I planned to interview two sets of parents. One set of parents would be those whose child’s teacher was not yet a mother. The other set of parents would be those whose child was with the teacher, after she became a mother. I wanted to see if there was a difference in how the two sets of parents perceived their relationship with their child’s teacher.

I knew that my knowledge of the teachers and parents involved would be a factor in the outcome. My plan was to use my relationship with the parents to make the interviews as rich as possible with their insights and perceptions. Using the constant comparison method applies a discipline to the analysis by reworking the essential parts of each interview to compare them. I also was aware of my belief that teachers also being parents would not be a major factor in the relationship between parents and teachers would affect the study. Being aware of my viewpoint, kept me alert during the interviews to listen and work hard not to ask leading questions. I did not use a scripted list of questions for the interviews. I kept my questions open ended and followed the lead of the parents in their discussion of their experiences. I found that I became very interested in their experiences and kept the discussion focused on their ideas and not specifically on the subject of whether or not the teachers they had worked with were parents.

My first step was to look at our list of teachers and identify those who had given birth to their first child while they were teaching at our center. There were 13 teachers in this category. Next, I narrowed down the list by looking at those teachers in one age group, the infant group. I was especially interested in this age group, because the new brain research has validated the principle behind assigning primary caregivers for infant care and the importance of consistency in the care of infants. As Brazelton says in his discussion of this new research, "The seven needs we have identified provide the fundamental building blocks for our higher-level emotional, social and intellectual

abilities (sidebar). The first and most basic of these is the need for consistent nurturing care with one of a few caregivers” (Brazelton, 2002, p. 34).

“All young children have seven irreducible needs.

1. Ongoing nurturing relationships

Every baby needs a warm, intimate relationship with a primary caregiver over a period of years, not months or weeks. This is far more important to emotional and intellectual development than early cognitive training or educational games. If this relationship is absent or interrupted, a child can develop disorders of reasoning, motivation and attachment. Infants, toddlers and preschoolers need these nurturing interactions most of their waking hours.

2. Physical protection, safety and regulation

Both in the womb and in infancy, children need an environment that provides protection from physical and psychological harm, chemical toxins and exposure to violence.

3. Experience tailored to individual differences

Every child has a unique temperament. Tailoring early experience to nurture a child’s individual nature prevents learning and behavioral problems and enables a child to develop his or her full potential.

4. Developmentally appropriate experiences

Children of different ages need care tailored to their stage of development. Unrealistic expectations can hinder a child’s development.

5. Limit-setting, structure and expectations

Children need structure and discipline. They need discipline that leads to internal limit-setting, channeling of aggression and peaceful problem-solving. To reach this goal, they need adults who empathize as well as set limits. They need expectations rather than labels, and adults who believe in their potential but understand their weaknesses. They need incentive systems, not failure models.

6. Stable, supportive communities and culture

To feel whole and integrated, children need to grow up in a stable community. This means a continuity of values in family, peer groups, religion and culture, as well as exposure to diversity.

7. Protecting the future

Meeting all these needs should be our highest priority. If we fail, we will jeopardize our children’s future.”

These principles address the special importance of the mother/child/teacher relationship in infant care. They are also discussed in *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*. “Caregivers help parents feel good about their

children and their own parenting by sharing with them some of the positive and interesting things that happened with their children during the day. Parents are viewed as the child's primary source of affection and care. Parents always feel welcome in the childcare setting; caregivers warmly receive and support nursing mothers who are able to come in for breastfeeding. Caregivers and parents confer in making decisions about how best to support children's development or to handle problems or differences of opinion as they arise" (1997, p. 80)

Because my interest in parent/teacher relationships was strongest in infant care I began looking at our infant staff. There were four teachers in the infant age group category that met the criteria of becoming first time mothers while working at our center, and of those four, two had been at our center for more than five years. I selected these two teachers because they had the most experience at our center before they became mothers and after they became mothers. They had both taught for more than three years before they were mothers. One had taught at another center for three years before she was employed with us and the other had extensive student teaching and summer time experience before she began working at our center. After I selected the teachers for my study, I asked them if they would recommend two mothers that they had worked with, that I could interview. I needed them to select one mother they worked with before they had given birth and the other mother needed to be someone they worked with after the teachers became parents. The teachers were very cooperative, perhaps because I am their Director, and recommended a list of parents for me.

I selected mothers from the list based on the fact that they still have children attending our programs and are easy to access. I used only mothers, not fathers, to keep some control over the variables and because, I have observed that at our center, mothers are still usually the parent most responsible for the care of infants. The mothers I selected were in the age range of 25 to 35 years at the time of the interviews. In the interest of clarity and confidentiality, I have assigned pseudonyms to the mothers I will call Jane, Sally, Ann and Mary. Jane's infant is a boy and she also had older children. Sally's infant is also a boy and she had one older child. Ann's infant is a boy and he was an only child. Mary's infant girl is also an only child. Jane, Sally and Ann are Caucasian and Mary is of mixed racial heritage. I spoke informally to these mothers and asked if they would be interested in participating and they readily agreed. I then shared with them the formal statement of agreement from my proposal and they signed it (Appendix A). Next, I wrote a questionnaire to give to the mothers before the interview. I wanted to get some basic information about their relationship with the teachers involved before the interview. The questions asked were:

When did you know (name of teacher)?

How long did you know her?

How old was your child?

Describe your family life at that time.

Describe your experience with (name of teacher)

Three of the mothers completed the questionnaire and I had further insight into their situation and relationship with the teachers before the interview. (Appendix B) This information, plus my personal knowledge of the mothers gave us a head start into

the discussion and made the interview richer in three of the four interviews. Sally did not return a questionnaire.

The next step in my process was to set up interviews with each mother. I set them up at times convenient for the mothers, and they all asked that we do them at the center before they picked up or after they dropped off their child. I did the interviews a month apart, so I could spend time analyzing and learning from each one before I did the next one. This process was consistent with the constant comparison method as described by Anderson, Herr and Nihlen. “The constant comparison method of analysis comes from the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967); as soon as a researcher begins to collect data, he or she also begins coding it and examining it in the light of more data. Thus, the researcher is constantly collecting, coding, and analyzing, and comparing data.” (1994, p. 167). It also meant I felt renewed before I attempted another interview. The interviews were open ended and although the questions I asked were similar I did not have a prescribed script for the interviews, but let the discussions flow as they developed. The length of the interviews varied from 40 minutes to 90 minutes.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

I used the “Constant Comparison Method” as described in *The Art of Classroom Inquiry*” by Hubbard and Power as my guide in creating this study (1993, p. 86). They describe Glaser and Strauss’ steps as:

1. “First, analyze your data in terms of categories and concepts. Look at the categories you have listed and ask yourself: What concepts are represented in

these categories? How do these categories relate back to my original question? What new ideas have emerged based on my observations and other data? How can I define my categories?

2. Next, make the effort to *integrate* the conceptual categories and the properties of these categories. How are these categories and their properties related in some larger scheme or framework?
3. This third step comes later in your analysis, after you have collected most of your data. Here, you begin to define your emergent theory or to make some theoretical claims about what you have learned. As you narrow your focus further, you will “test” against the data. Does this category work to handle the new data as it emerges? How do these categories need to be further refined?
4. Now write up the theory by describing and summarizing it.”

After I transcribed the interviews I separated out the comments from the mothers that directly related to their relationship with the teachers in my study. Then I put these comments in three major categories. Those comments that related to: (1) the relationship between the mothers and the teachers, (2) comments that related to the parents perceptions of the relationship the teacher had with their child and (3) comments that related to the mothers’ perceptions of the care the teachers gave their child.

After studying these three categories, I again followed the “Constant Comparison Method” and discovered that they could be broken down into smaller categories. These smaller, more detailed categories fell into two major headings; 1) those comments relating to the teacher and child and 2) those comments relating to the teacher and mother. These more specific categories were: a) a sense of family relationship between teacher and mother, b) actions of teachers at separation time, c) the child’s reaction to the teacher, d) teacher’s care of the child, e) similar styles of caring between mother and teacher, f) teacher understanding of parent concerns, g) communication

ability of teacher, h) teacher personality, i) level of familiarity between teacher and parent, j) advice teacher gave parent, k) grateful attitude toward teacher and l) miscellaneous. I listed the categories and separated the comments into the appropriate lists. The content of some of the comments overlapped categories and I used those comments in all appropriate lists. After studying the comments in each category, I created charts to assist me in further analysis.

**MOTHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER/CHILD RELATIONSHIP**  
(Charted by teachers)

Before mothers knew the teacher before the teacher became a parent

After mothers knew the teacher after the teacher became a parent

	Sense of family relationship between teacher and mother	Actions of teacher at separation time	Child's reaction to the teacher	Teacher's care of child	Similar styles of caring between teacher and mother	Miscellaneous
<b>TEACHER 1</b>						
Jane (Before)	0	1	1	3	0	0
Mary (After)	2	0	0	5	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>TEACHER 2</b>						
Ann (Before)	2	2	0	2	2	2
Sally (After)	2	1	2	3	5	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Totals (Both)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>

**MOTHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER/CHILD RELATIONSHIP**  
(Charted by mothers)

Before mothers knew the teacher before the teacher became a parent

After mothers knew the teacher after the teacher became a parent

	Sense of Family Relationship between teacher and mother	Actions of Teacher at Separation Time	Child's Reaction to the Teacher	Teacher's Care of child	Similar Styles of Caring Between Teacher and Mother	Miscellaneous
<b>Before Mothers</b>						
Jane (teach 1)	0	1	1	3	0	0
Ann (teach 2)	2	2	0	2	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>After mothers</b>						
Mary (teach 1)	2	0	0	5	0	5
Sally (teach 2)	2	1	2	3	5	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Total (both)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>

**CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTHER/TEACHER RELATIONSHIP**  
(Charted by teachers)

Before mothers knew the teacher before the teacher became a parent

After mothers knew the teacher after the teacher became a parent

	Teacher understanding of parent concerns	Communication ability of teacher	Teacher personality	Level of familiarity between teacher and parent	Advise teacher gave parent	Grateful attitude toward teacher	Mis
<b>TEACHER 1</b>							
Jane (Before)	2	2	1	2	0	0	0
Mary (After)	0	6	6	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>TEACHER 2</b>							
Ann (Before)	1	2	2	4	1	1	2
Sally (After)	2	4	0	3	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total (both)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

**CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTHER/TEACHER RELATIONSHIP**  
(Charted by mothers)

Before mothers knew the teacher before the teacher became a parent

After mothers knew the teacher after the teacher became a parent

	Teacher understanding of parent concerns	Communication ability of teacher	Teacher personality	Level of familiarity between teacher and parent	Advise teacher gave parent	Grateful attitude toward teacher	Mis
<b>BEFORE MOTHERS</b>							
Jane (Teacher 1)	2	2	1	2	0	0	0
Ann (Teacher 1)	1	2	2	4	1	1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>AFTER MOTHERS</b>							
Mary (Teacher 2)	0	6	6	1	0	0	0
Sally (Teacher 2)	2	4	0	3	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Total both</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

There was only one comment from the interviews with these four mothers that was directly related to the question posed in this thesis. *Does being a parent make*

*teachers more effective in forming partnerships with the parents of the children they teach?* Ann said, “And it wasn’t that Teacher 2 was a mother, she wasn’t at the time, but that she had so much more experience with babies than I did even giving birth and then I could ask her. “‘What’s this what’s that? Do I worry about this?’”.... She gave me advice on things that I really had no idea about.” This comment supports my view that the teacher also being a parent is not a strong indicator in predicting the success of a parent/teacher partnership. Ann’s comment indicates that this parent had formed a trusting relationship with this teacher knowing that the teacher herself was not a parent. We understand from this comment that Ann valued Teacher 2’s knowledge and advice about her infant and that she understood the teacher’s experience came from being a teacher, not a mother.

Although there were no other comments directly related to the proposal question in the interviews, I did learn about the relationships that were formed between these teachers and parents. I knew from the beginning, due to my experiences as the director of the center where these teachers are employed and from the mother’s comments on the questionnaire they completed before the interviews, that all four had successful experiences with these two teachers. As a result of these successful partnerships, all the comments from the mothers about their relationship with the teachers were positive. I learned from these interviews more about what teachers do that is effective in creating good relationships with mothers. The mothers I interviewed were very sincere in their descriptions and comments about their relationships with our teachers. Even though the mothers and teachers had distinct personalities, certain themes about their relationships

kept repeating throughout the interviews. These themes were important to establishing strong partnerships and were not about what doesn't work in relationships.

The two categories that had the greatest number of comments were communications and family-like relationships.

### Communications

The teacher's ability to communicate with the mothers in a genuine manner formed the bases for their relationships. Comments such as, "She was really good about telling me about things that had happened the day before..." or "She would tell me the little stories..." and "She would call me at work and let me know, maybe he has a temperature or something." validated the teacher's communicating talents. As Powell states from his study of relationships between teachers and parents, "As communication frequency increased, then, so did the probability of a parent and caregiver forming and sustaining a consistent, stable relationship with one another." (1990, p. 62) This ability to communicate well with parents became a pervasive theme that occurred in other categories as well as in all the relationships. Since this ability to communicate was easy and effective for these teachers with these mothers, additional positive outcomes occurred.

### Family-like relationships

Sally, Ann and Mary expressed the partnership with their teacher as being like a family relationship. This expression of a family-like relationship was a strong theme in these 3 interviews with comments such as, "Almost like a family affair. It was like leaving him with a sister." and "treated them as if they were her own." This sense of a

family-like relationship was an expression of the level of trust and comfort that occurred between these mothers and teachers. Jane was the only one who did not mention having a sense of family with Teacher 1. Jane's sense of communication and trust with Teacher 1 was on a more professional basis, as indicated by, "She was very good about knowing what to do..." however, she did indicate that Teacher 1's personality was an important element in the success of their relationship by saying, "She's just easy to talk to, she's comfortable to be around, friendly and open." Powell also noted the friendships that form between parents and teachers. His study found, "about one fourth of the caregivers reported that they considered some of their parents to be friends." (1990, p. 64)

Other notable categories were personality and understanding.

#### Personality

Ann and Mary also mentioned the teacher's personality as a reason they were easily able to form a bond with the teacher. Mary said, "I just felt that she was really being herself. She wasn't putting a front on, because this was her job." And Ann said, "Yes it was genuine and it did make a difference." The aspects of the teacher's personality that were cited are closely related to her ability to communicate. Smiles, openness, teachers being genuine and themselves all contribute to forming trust and effective communication.

#### Understanding

Understanding was another characteristic of the teachers that mothers frequently mentioned that closely relates to communication. Each mother expressed how difficult it was to leave her very young child. Their discussion of incidents when teachers demonstrated their understanding of their dilemma revealed how much that

understanding contributed to their peace of mind. These comments are among those that indicated their appreciation of understanding: “She was very good about it and understood what I, my point of view, what I was saying.” And “Understanding my fear.” And “Understands that we’re not the average divorced couple.” These reactions are closely related to what Powell reports in his study. “The most common responses to parent concerns by both center and home providers included: asking questions, offering sympathy, presenting alternatives, and just listening.” (1990, p. 63)

A teacher’s ability to be genuine and communicate easily and openly is something I have observed in successful teacher/parent relationships in the more than twenty years I have been in early childhood education. This attribute came through strongly in these interviews and was much more essential than the teacher being a parent herself. When teachers have enough self-confidence to take responsibility for establishing a good relationship with parents, they are usually genuine in their desire for good communications with them. As Cartwright says, “Clear and consistent evidence of a teacher’s inner security is truly important for good teaching” (2000, p. 15). I have observed, and these parent interviews supports, this is also true for building partnerships with parents. Teachers who are tense due to insecure feelings sometimes have difficulty being friendly and open with parents, especially if they wonder what a parent thinks of them. If this stiffness continues, communication is limited and then when problems happen they often become larger than necessary because trust has not developed between the teacher and the parent. When teachers feel secure about themselves and their teaching they usually approach parents in a smiling, friendly manner even if the parent is

reserved, or appears angry. This opens up communication and helps the parent express what is on her mind. When a parent discovers that the teacher is interested in her input about her child, she can begin to form a trusting relationship. That is why I changed the primary caregiver for Mary. Communication between Mary and her first caregiver was not occurring easily, so the level of trust between this teacher and parent was not growing strong. It is critical for parents to form a trusting relationship with the teacher of their young child. It is also the reason that building teacher confidence is vital. Constant support and encouragement for teachers is critical to their development so teachers can gain the confidence and sense of security necessary to become good partners with parents.

In their Harvard study of *Family-Centered Child Care*, Lopez and Dorros (1999, p. 15) said, "A good relationship exists when parent and teacher affirm the shared nature of caregiving and the importance of mutual support. They seek common ground in doing what is best for the child's safety and well being, and his or her positive development. To achieve this goal involves a mutual learning process in which communication plays a vital role." They also emphasize the importance of good communication between parents and teachers by saying, "Consistent and frequent communication between parent and teacher builds secure relationships between them. For many providers the best way to support parents is by listening and asking questions that clarify parents' attitudes and feelings. Good communication is essential when imparting child development information, especially to young or inexperienced mothers" (p. 16). This study looked at best practice of family-centered care for children and as stated above found that good

communication between parents and teachers was an essential part of these excellent programs.

#### Degree of caring

Other frequently made comments were those regarding the mother's perception of the degree of caring for her child from the teacher. For example, one mother said, "... she had stomach aches and she'd rock her and you know, that was something that comforted me because she comforted my daughter when I could not do it. She was the one that was walkin' with her and rockin' her and tryin' to make her feel better and if she felt warm she was right there takin' her temperature, you know, that was another thing that really eased...". This comment is a strong indication of the gratitude and relief that Mary felt knowing her daughter was being cared for with empathy similar to her own. It is easy to hear the sense of security that came to Mary when she said this care eased her mind while she was gone. She knew she could trust this teacher to care for her child. Or, "I felt like someone was looking out for him in particular", again Jane is reassured when she senses that the teacher is careful about paying attention to her child. Mary also said, "... just watching her the way she was with my daughter. Even the way she held her or picked her up, fed her, you know." This comment indicates how closely mothers watch teachers to see how they respond and care for their children. Mothers look for indications that this teacher is bonding with her child and is comfortable and happy about her day with the child. How the teacher reacted to her child was of critical importance to these mothers and their relationship with their teacher. Mother know what is cited in *The future of children*, "The essence of caregiving that supports child development is a relationship

with an adult who is both attentive and responsive to the infant's or toddler's concerns, discoveries, and achievements. It is people who matter most to babies." (2001. p. 9)

### Role boundaries

Each mother wanted to know that the teacher cared deeply about her child and at the same time understood that the child was the mother's. Such as, "But when I wanted to, when I came to pick him up, I wanted him to be MY baby. And the way that Teacher 2 would just hand him over or give him up like that, it made the transition a lot easier for me in leaving him." This comment from Ann, expresses the vital importance of the delicate balance a teacher must establish between caring deeply about providing good, competent, loving care for the child AND constantly being aware that the child is the mother's child and the teacher's role is secondary to the bond between the mother and the child. In fact, an important part of the teacher's job is to support the bond between mother and child and if a mother believes that the teacher is usurping the mother's role with the child, that belief would destroy the relationship between the teacher and the mother. The balance these teachers struck between caring deeply for the child, providing developmentally appropriate activities and remaining constantly aware of and valuing the relationship between the mother and the child, was essential to a successful partnership with the mothers. They achieved what Powell cites as difficult in our profession. "Thus it is unusual for an early childhood setting to see its mission as primarily or totally instructional, leaving noninstructional functions to the family. This state of affairs leads to two related consequences of significance to the study of parent-staff relations: (1) the work of early childhood practitioners is likely to be viewed as similar to the tasks of

parenting and , as a result, (2) territoriality issues stemming from unclear role boundaries are likely to be problematic.” (1990, p. 55)

#### Similarity of care

Another theme related to how important the care of their children was to the mothers, was the similarity between the mothers and the teachers in how they played and cared for the infants. Sally and Ann were reassured by the knowledge that the teacher’s ideas and practices in raising children were similar to their own. These mothers mentioned that their value systems and backgrounds were very much like the teacher’s. For example, Sally said, “I guess the same more or less the same parenting styles. I guess she would, you know, use the same, she would react to him how I would.” Ann said, “Would take care of him and had the same kind of values as I did about raising him.” Although the total number of comments in this area was not the highest, for Ann and Sally this idea was important and it is closely related to knowing their child was getting good care. Our profession is paying an increased amount of attention to issues of culture implied in the above parental statements. For example, the revised edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, devotes an entire section on this issues and states, “As children grow, they learn to balance their needs and wishes with the constraints and freedoms of the social world in which they live-to express their developmental predispositions in ways that are consistent with their family’s and culture’s practices’ (Bowman & Scott 1994, 120). When the cultural rules of the home and the early childhood program are congruent, the process of learning is eased.” (1997, p. 43)

### Separation time

Jane, Ann and Sally specifically expressed watching the teachers very closely at separation time to see how the teacher behaved with their child. These incidents closely relate to their perception of how their children were cared for. Powell also reports that this is the time when the greatest amount of communication occurs between parents and teachers (1990, p. 61). Balaban states that one aspect of the role of childcare professionals is, "We are facilitators of parent child separations." At a very young age Mother is the child's whole world and losing her is frightening. A child's emotional stability requires that the child feels secure with the person Mom is entrusting with the child's care and that the child knows Mom will return. Balaban describes the caring actions of two different teachers of toddlers at separation time. One teacher helped a sad little girl feel reassured her mommy would come back by suggesting the child "paint a picture" to give to her mommy when she came to get her. Another teacher helped a screaming little boy express his anger at his father for leaving him by helping him "write" an angry letter to his Daddy. The letter wasn't necessary in a few days. These actions indicate that these teachers understood that separation time is a key time of day for parents and children (1992, p. 70). In my study, Jane was very grateful that Teacher 1 could see that she and her child needed time to separate and that her child needed a calm, quiet presence to take over when it was time for mother to leave. Sally watched how Teacher 2 hugged and kissed her child and was reassured that she was very "motherly" to him. Ann described how Teacher 2 knew to take her child while she completed paperwork and got ready to leave and then return her child to her to say her goodbyes.

All of these mothers describe the “dance” that Edwards and Raikes discuss that develops between mothers, babies and teachers when the relationships are growing in a healthy manner (2002). Edwards and Raikes said,

“For a new child just entering, the educator must take the initiative, become attuned, get into the rhythm with the child, following the child’s lead. Because a young child enters the programs “in the arms” of parents, the educator also enfolds the parents in this process” (p. 17).

This article, describing relationship building based programs, goes on to say:

“The people participating in public services for infants and toddlers engage in continual improvement of quality through active information sharing and exchange with families as well as with researchers from Italy and other countries. In particular, they have worked on developing a gradual, individualized, and respectful period of entry, or transition (called *inserimento*), as a way for families, caregivers, and children to co-construct a sense of belonging and mutual trust” (p.15).

Mary did not talk about separation time specifically, but the majority of her comments during the interview were about the excellent care her child received from Teacher 1. Many of her observations of this excellent care, were probably made at separation time.

Two mothers also discussed watching their children’s reaction to the teacher at drop off time. They noticed their children’s pleasure at seeing their teacher. Sally said, “He never cried when I left him. Not once, so I was very glad” and “ (Child 2) really

kind of, grew attached to them.” Jane noted, “It seemed like (Child 1) bonded with her too.” For them that realization was an important way to tell that the teacher cared about their child. These mothers were comforted about leaving when they could see that their child liked their teacher and readily went to her.

#### Genuine caring manner

When I combined the total score from these categories, separation time, child’s reaction to the teacher, similar value systems and care of their child, this general category of teachers’ manner with the children received the most comments as to what was important to parents in their relationship with their teacher. The teacher’s ability to care in a genuine way for their child was the single most important aspect of the success of the relationship between these mothers and teachers. “The teacher-child relationship is an extension of the primary parent-child relationship, and teachers invest in building supportive relationships with families around their common interest, the child” (Edwards & Raikes, 2002, p.10). “Throughout the world, wise approaches to infant/toddler care embed the child in close, rhythmic relationships with caring people” (Edwards & Raikes, 2002, p.15).

#### Familiarity

Another theme that came out strongly in the interviews was that it was important to the mothers that they become familiar with the teachers. They wanted their relationships with the teachers to go “beyond professional”. The mothers liked knowing the teachers in a personal way and felt that they were or could be friends outside of the center setting. Mothers obviously wanted to be valued as people in their own right, as

demonstrated by the following statements; Jane indicated, “I was upset about all that and the next morning when I talked to Teacher 1 about it she was very good about it and understood what I, my point of view, what I was saying.” Sally said, “She wanted to know how I held him and how I rocked him.” Ann responded, “It was just much easier to leave him with a friend than a stranger or someone who didn’t want to get to know me.” All of the mothers linked their sense of trust in the teachers with getting to know them in a personal way. Mary and Ann mentioned that the teacher was “like family.” Ann described seeing the teacher outside of the center setting and enjoying her company as a friend. The mothers wanted their child rearing values to be honored and when they felt the teacher agreed with their ideas about raising children it reassured them about leaving their child with that teacher. This was especially important to Ann who described her need for support of her ideas. “(Father’s mother) and I had very different beliefs about how things should be done. So I needed somebody who was a little bit ... Whereas (father’s mother) who was close, or even his sisters who were closer to (father) and not necessarily myself, they just had much different views upon things and Teacher 2’s and mine ran much more close.” And Ann stated, “If I hadn’t felt comfortable with Teacher 2 it would have driven me crazy!” Statements from Jane include; “That’s why I try to work in their classrooms a little bit, so I get to know that teacher. So there’s a connection. I think that’s really important.” Sally said, “ She would share stories of her daughter... things they’ve done that are similar to what we’re doing.” Mary said, “I felt that if I had any, if there were any problems that I could come to her.” All the mothers expressed a need for a close relationship with their child’s teacher. This close

relationship was necessary for them to build a framework of trust around their child.

They needed to know the teacher as a person in order to trust their child with the teacher.

All four mothers expressed other reasons for the growth of a trusting relationship between a mother and a teacher. For example, Jane said, "she probably listened and she is much more tuned in, I think, with what people are feeling..." and "She's just real easy to talk to, she's comfortable to be around, friendly and open." Sally expressed it this way, "she was somebody I could believe in and trust in."

I did not see a difference in the depth of trust or friendship between the relationships before the teachers became parents and after they became parents. Again, the two major themes that all four mothers expressed as reasons for the success of their relationship with their teachers were (1) communication and (2) competent caring of their child. This held true for both "before" mother and "after" mothers. There were some variations on how those themes were expressed and some differences in emphasis in what the mothers needed from the teachers. For example, Ann expressed a much greater need of a personal relationship with the teacher; as demonstrated in the above statements of her need for agreement with her values as opposed to her differences with her in-laws and also in her statement, "So I needed to talk to somebody who was a little bit more on my level, who could guide me. And she became that person for me. She was my source of information." While the others wanted friendship as well, they emphasized a stronger need to see that the teacher genuinely loved their baby. Jane described the "dance" she and Teacher 1 developed at separation time that was reassuring to her. "She was able to

take him, she would almost always every morning have to take him and go to the window or walk around and do something with him. She was very good about knowing when to, to do that I mean she didn't bombard him when we came to the door, right in his face, oh good morning child I, she knew he needed to come into the room and I needed to sit with him and to get a little acclimated let us have our little time and then she would come over and start talking to him in a quiet kind of voice. Then she would try to take him from me. She was very good at that." Sally said, "I mean I think he would have done well with anyone, but I think her, she is more, I guess motherly.... I could sense, you know, that she was toward him, you know. She was toward him was more motherly." Mary expressed, "One thing I liked was Teacher 1 would get down and play with her or hold the ball to her or read stories. Using different shapes of the, like the donuts in the rings."

I looked at the individual unique themes expressed by the mothers to see if there were any similarities between the mothers with each teacher or between the "before" mothers and the "after" mothers. Some patterns do seem to emerge. Jane's, greatest emphasis was on the care of her child especially at the time of separation and the understanding personality of Teacher I. She also felt it was important to become familiar with her child's teacher. Mary was also impressed by Teacher 1's personality and care of her child was a strong reoccurring theme for her. Both of these mothers noticed Teacher 1's personality and were confident of her care of their child. Jane used phrases such as "getting familiar" and "making a connection," and "she listened." While Mary said things like "good communications" and "teacher liked what she was doing," and "she was herself, no fronts." Both Jane and Mary said Teacher 1 demonstrated she cared about their children. Jane said, "I felt like someone was looking out for him in

particular.” She also said, “You know to be looking after your child.” Mary expressed Teacher 1’s caring this way: “She was real gentle with my daughter... soothing for her.” Another statement from Mary was, “Just watching the way she was with my daughter. Even the way she held her or picked her up or talked to her, fed her.” Mary also said Teacher 1 was “motherly” to her child. These themes were consistent in both the “before” mother (Jane) and “after” mother (Mary) working with Teacher 1.

Sally, repeated how motherly Teacher 2 was with her child, similar to the way Sally would be, and how they were friends. She described this with phrases like, “Just her demeanor, how she was with him, and the mothering instinct...” and “feel like she would, you know, really take care of him, as I would. You know, the same way I would.” Her description of Teacher 2’s personality was, “She’s just real easy to talk to, she’s comfortable to be around, friendly and open.” Sally agreed that her relationship with Teacher 2 was more than professional and described it this way: “She would share her stories of her daughter, you know and how she is, you know, things that they’ve done, you know, are similar to what we’re doing, you know, stuff like that.” Ann, with Teacher 2, also discussed her friendship with Teacher 2 and how close they became. She too expressed having similar values as Teacher 2 and a sense of a family-like relationship with Teacher 2. She expressed these ideas with, “Almost like a family affair. It was like leaving him with a sister.” And “I don’t know if I just got lucky and finding a match as Teacher 2 was....Teacher 2 believed the same things.” Again, these themes were consistent in both mothers who worked with Teacher 2 regardless of whether or not she was a parent. These two teachers have different styles in forming partnerships with parents and it appears to show in how the parents related to them. Teacher 1 has a

friendly/professional style that is open and caring with a clear idea that the teacher is in the role of a professional and not part of the infant's family. Teacher 2 does create a sense of family in her relationships. Both styles were successful, in the cases studied, since the important aspect of trust was developed and their roles were clear. Patterns of relationships between the "before" mothers (Jane & Ann) and the "after" mothers (Mary & Sally) were more difficult to see. There were a greater number of comments about the separation time from the "before" mothers, Jane and Ann, than the "after" mothers, Mary and Sally, and more comments about communication from Mary and Sally than the "before" mothers. The "before" mothers, Jane and Ann, were happy with their communication with their teachers, but didn't mention it as often.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

The major ideas that I gained from this study did not come as big surprises. Most people would probably guess that mothers look for someone they feel comfortable with and can communicate with easily to care for their child. It is also important to them that a person cares for their child in a warm, loving manner. They want someone to know and love their child and be competent in the care of their child. These themes were to be expected. What touched me was the depth of the mothers' feelings when they discussed the experiences they had with their teachers. The gratitude they felt toward these teachers was heartfelt and difficult to convey when you are using only words and not seeing their faces and listening to the tone of the discussions. The non-verbal gestures and tones all the mothers used made the intensity of their feelings very clear to me.

Talking about their infant children elicited strong feelings from all the mothers and being able to leave their children in the care of a teacher they trusted and liked was immensely important to them.

The interviews with these mothers renewed my conviction that low teacher/child ratios are important for parent/teacher relationships as well as teacher/child relationships. We are fortunate at our center to have enough financial support to enable us to reduce the ratios required by our State's licensing agency. Our infant teachers care for three (3) infants instead of four (4) giving them more time with each child and mother. Teachers need time to spend with each parent as they leave and pick up their baby. Pick-up and drop-off time can be very hectic for teachers when both children and parents need their attention. The "dance" that Edwards and Raikes (2002) describe came through again and again in the interviews. Mothers are watching very closely to see whether or not it is OK to leave their child. The mothers I interviewed made it clear that they needed deep understanding of the difficulty of separation time. They also wanted someone to care for their child who enjoyed doing it and was competent. When we ask teachers to give this much thought, time, attention and caring to each infant/parent duo in their care we need to give them the resources to be successful. An essential part of this is to keep the number of children in their care not only manageable, but stress free and enjoyable. Teachers need time to focus on each parent/child entry and leave taking everyday. If a teacher has too many children to care for at those crucial times, families will be poorly served because they will not have enough opportunity to build the relationships they need with the teacher, to trust one another. The good communication between teachers and mothers that was so important to mothers during the interviews in this study, takes time

to accomplish. As the director of our center I need to ensure that this time is available to mothers, children and teachers. Sometimes pressures to meet budget guidelines means low ratios are questioned. It is my responsibility to communicate the importance of time for a relaxed “dance” at separation time, to decision makers. This study will help me articulate that need.

Parents need to know that their child is cared for by someone who is not only knowledgeable and enjoys doing the caring, but also gains great satisfaction from the caring of this child. This idea was also expressed in my interviews with the mothers in my study. Neither parents, nor children nor teachers benefit from getting by with minimal standards for teacher/child ratios. Each needs to know and experience the flexibility and freedom of the teacher having enough time and energy to care for each child with warmth and enthusiasm. Teachers need time to take breaks from the routine of caring and time to plan activities for each child’s development and note each child’s progress. It is also important it have extra people at pick-up time to help with children while teachers are discussing the child’s day and other issues with parents. In addition, teachers need time with parents apart from daily pick-up and drop-off time. They need time to conference with parents at greater length to discuss the child’s progress and individuality. This time is essential in building partnerships and being sure the child’s needs are being met. As a director, I need to ensure there is time provided when just the adults caring for the child can be together to cement their relationship and plan for the care of the child. This time also costs money and this project has given me examples in real lives about how important it is. These examples will again, help me to articulate the issue with those who determine the amount of our resources.

The major ideas of what mothers wanted and needed in their relationship with their child's teacher was the same for all four. These were: good communication between them and the teacher, knowing the teacher was competent and loving in the care of their child, seeing that their child liked and related well to the teacher, and similar values in their ideas of parenting. There did seem to be some differences in the style of these relationships. The mothers that worked with Teacher 2 emphasized their friendship and similarity of values more than the mothers that worked with Teacher 1. Is this difference significant? Does a teacher's personality dictate the type of relationship she will have with all the mothers she works with or is she responding to parent needs or does the relationship develop from a combination of both ideas? I have more questions than answers.

I have more questions than answers in other areas as well from doing this study. I wonder if there is a way to predict which mothers and teachers will most likely create strong partnerships. Can we interview mothers and learn enough about them to pair them with a teacher most likely to fulfill their needs as well as their child's? Ann, in particular, seemed more focused on her relationship and needs from the caregiver than her child's. The two were very closely related for her and I doubt that she would have been content if she thought her child was unhappy, but the relationship she had with the teacher was an important friendship for her. This friendship validated her ideas of parenting and increased her confidence. This was especially important since she felt so bombarded by input from well intended, but uninformed people. Would another personality, such as a teacher who worked in a more distant and professional manner, have worked for her? Ann had frequent questions regarding parenting and the friendship she built with the

teacher was very reassuring to her. I suspect the friendship was important to the teacher's confidence too. Can we predict good outcomes for partnership building by looking at the styles of teachers and mothers' needs? How much of style is related to the cultural background of mothers and teachers? How important is it to consider in pairing teachers and parents?

The mothers' need of familiarity with the teachers, points out the age-old issue of the boundaries between mothers and teachers? Powell says, "Proponents of an open, two-way flow of information and influence between family and early childhood program generally hasten to add a qualifier that underscores the need to respect the boundaries and special contributions of family and school. Such qualifiers typically acknowledge the desire of many teachers to limit parental tampering with their professional judgments, and the wish of parents to avoid professional intrusion into family affairs" (1990, p. 54). Where are the boundaries between these roles in the friendships built? Are these boundaries different depending upon the age of the children involved? Where is the boundary between caring for the child in a loving manner (one mother liked the hugs and kisses her child received), and assuring the mother that the teacher understands the child is hers? (Another mother was reassured when the teacher gave her child back to her whenever the mother arrived, no matter what the teacher was doing.) This principle of boundaries deserves further study.

It seemed these mothers needed a personal relationship with the teacher in order to trust their child with the teacher. I have seen a sense of dissatisfaction from mothers at our center, who did not have a close, friendly relationship with their child's teacher. I have also seen teachers burned out from being so close to families they felt burdened

with their problems. How do we help teachers be supportive without becoming burdened? When do teachers become intrusive in family life instead of enhancing it? Are healthy boundaries different between “pre-speech” infant caregivers and parents and preschooler teachers and parents? How does a mother use her instincts to know the love another woman shows her child is not threatening to her relationship with her child, but supporting it? Some of the comments by Ann speak to these ideas. How much of this instinct is dependant upon the mother’s level of confidence in her parenting skills? How is this related to how well mother and child are bonded? I think more needs to be done to address these questions to help our teachers build strong relationships with parents, which is based on supporting the bond between mother and infants, not undermining it.

Finally, my study did not show any noticeable difference in the success of the partnerships between teachers and mothers when the teacher was a mother or not yet a mother. These partnerships were successful because the women were able to establish consensus as to what constituted good, loving care of the child, and a level of respect and friendliness between them, which led to trust. Also mothers perceived a level of competence in the teachers as indicated by the comment from Ann, “And it wasn’t that Teacher 2 was a mother, she wasn’t at the time, but that she had so much more experience with babies than I did...” These elements can be established whether or not the teacher is also a parent. If a teacher is also a parent that fact may influence her level of confidence in working with parents. It may also deepen her sense of empathy for parents and both of these characteristics help teachers build good relationships. However, becoming a parent probably did not create within these teachers empathy for other parents if they didn’t feel empathy before they became parents. Nor did becoming a

parent create self-confidence when there wasn't any before. Becoming a parent did not significantly change these teachers' personalities or styles of communication. Ability to be genuine in communications and be empathic is critical to relationship building and both these teachers had these abilities before they were mothers.

This study has deepened my conviction that it is imperative that we form excellent partnerships between mothers and teachers of infants, and provide teachers with enough support to accomplish these partnerships. It also made clearer some critical aspects of excellent relationships. Listening to these mothers talk about their relationship with the teachers of their infants gave me a strong sense of how critical that relationship was for them and their babies. Two mothers started with a less than satisfactory experience (one experience was at another center and one was at our center) before they came to the partnerships in this study and the contrast between how they spoke of the unhappy relationship and the good relationship was dramatic. This difference in experience and how it affects parents and children in the long term is another important matter for further study.

Much of this study is not generalisable, but it was extremely useful in my setting. I will use this information in developing staff training activities and in gaining continued support for the process of building partnerships from the decision makers for our center. So much more needs to be done to help us support strong teacher and parent teams to form good partnerships. We need to know more about the bond between mothers and infants and how that affects the teacher/child/parent triangle. Are there cues that parents give us that can help us predict which teacher would most likely form a successful

partnership with this parent? Since there are more infants in group care now than in the past, it is vital information for the future of our very young.

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**APPENDIX A**

**UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN - FLINT**  
**INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**  
**Study of**  
**Parent Perceptions of Teachers**

You are invited to participate in a research study looking at parent's perceptions of teachers in order to understand better how parent/teacher relationships work. This research is in partial fulfillment of my Master's thesis at the UN-Flint.

**Purpose:** The overall purpose of the study is to gain insight as to how parents perceive teachers. Learning about the relationship between parents and teachers will be useful in my work to help facilitate effective parents/teacher partnerships and may benefit other teachers.

**Participation:** Your participation in this study involves a taped interview of approximately 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary: you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decline, the service available from the Center will not be affected in any way. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw from the study at anytime. If you withdraw from the study, any tapes of your conversations will be destroyed and the information will not be used.

**Confidentiality:** Pseudonyms will be used, so your name and the name of the center will not be recorded in any manner. No reference will be made in any oral or written reports that could link you to the study. The tapes will be securely stored in a locked file in my home office and destroyed upon completion of my thesis. The information in the study records will be kept confidential.

**Contact:** If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study please call Karen Eaton at (810) 736-0211 or Eric Worch, my academic sponsor at University of Michigan-Flint, 762- 3260 .

**Consent:** I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

  
 Parent's Signature

10/5/01  
 Date

  
 Investigator's Signature

10/5/01  
 Date

**APPENDIX B**

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE  
FOR  
MASTER'S THESIS

When did you know (name of teacher)? When [redacted] started attending day care.

How long did you know her/him? - Since [redacted] started day care

How old was your child? 13 wks old.

Describe your family life at that time. - We were in the process of moving to our new house. [redacted]

Describe your experience with (name of teacher)

She has been wonderful with [redacted]. Her child rearing views are very similar to mine. She is very informative when noticing changes in behavior and/or eating habits with [redacted], and always would check with me on these things and other things also. [redacted] feels secure with her and many other of the caregivers. I also feel very secure leaving [redacted] in her care. I believe that his care in the infant room was excellent. [redacted] has benefited from having a good relationship with [redacted], and he still continues to benefit from that bond.

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE  
FOR  
MASTER'S THESIS

When did you know (name of teacher)? [redacted] was 7th S - Mar 96

How long did you know her/him? Since Mar 96

How old was your child? 7th S

Describe your family life at that time. Married - 2 working parents on different shifts

Describe your experience with (name of teacher)

very helpful, gave advice, listened to frustrations!

PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE  
FOR  
MASTER'S THESIS

When did you know (name of teacher)? Sept 97 to Present

How long did you know her/him? My child was in her care 9/97-6/98 - Aprox 10mo.

How old was your child? 15mo to 24 mo.

Describe your family life at that time. working? etc.

-How many in family? - Both parents

Describe your experience with (name of teacher) [REDACTED]

Both parents working. 3 Children at home. Ages of other children at that time, 7 & 5 (Boys). Also, stepson, age 13 came to live with us on perm. basis at that time.

[REDACTED] was one of the first teachers we met when [REDACTED] began at the center at 15mo. old. Since birth, [REDACTED] had been cared for by a woman in her home who had cared for my other boys when they were babies. She only had [REDACTED] and loved to sit & rock or read to him. She loved babies so [REDACTED] rec'd lots of loving attention. She was no longer available is why we came to the center. I had many reservations about putting [REDACTED] into group care at this young age. This was the youngest that any of my children began in a group care setting.

[REDACTED] was very open and welcoming. I felt very comfortable with her from the beginning. She was the one who was there in the mornings when I dropped him off although at that time she was not his designated "primary care giver". This room seemed to be going thru many changes of staff during that year. [REDACTED] primary

caregiver was changed, I believe about 7 times in our first few months at the center. However, [redacted] was always a constant and was my main contact. I was very frustrated and upset by the constant changing of staff. I did not feel this was good for the children and especially for my child. [redacted] was very understanding when I expressed my frustration. She did explain that even though they designated certain teachers to each child as primary care that they were all and especially she was very involved with [redacted] so there was consistency for him. Finally when another change in staff was taking place, [redacted] asked me if I would want her to be Mitchell's primary care giver. I was greatly relieved and happy about this as I thought she would remain a constant, stable presence for [redacted].

[redacted] was always very easy to talk to. Each morning she would give me details concerning [redacted] days. Even though, we were given a written report each day, talking with the person whose been with your child all day and hearing personal stories mean so much more and make you feel more connected with your child's time there. I feel it is very important to have a connection with your children's teachers. This is easier to do with some teachers than others. [redacted] made us feel very comfortable and was very easy to connect with. I think a lot of this is personality. Sometimes you mesh, sometimes you don't. [redacted] made it much easier to leave him each day.

**APPENDIX C**

**TEACHER REACTIONS TO CHILD:****Comments regarding motherly or family sense:**

“Just her demeanor, how she was with him, and the mothering instinct.” (II)

“Would have done well with anyone, but I think her, she is more motherly I guess.” (II)

“It was because of her natural love for children” (III)

“Almost like a family affair. It was like leaving him with a sister.”(III)

“You know, she seemed like she just uhum, treated them as if they were her own.” (IV)

“She was very motherly to her.”(IV)

**Comments regarding separation time:**

“she was very good about knowing what to do...she knew he needed to come into the room and I needed to sit with him...start talking to him in a quiet kind of voice. Then she would try to take him from me.” (I)

“He never cried when I left him. Not once so I was very glad.” (II)

“To know that I could go to work and not feel guilty about leaving here.” (III)

“She was always happy to see him. She knew his name; she knew my name, from the beginning. (Teacher said) “I am so glad you are here!” You know she was instantly ready to take him... She would give him back to me so I could say my good byes and then she'd take him again. (see sister comment above)(III)

**Comments regarding child's reaction to teacher:**

“ It seemed like (child I) bonded with her too.” (I)

“she really kind of, (child II) really kind of, grew attached to them.” (II)

see “never cried” comment (II)

**Comments about knowing teacher cared about child:**

“I mean I felt like she cared about him.” (I)

“I felt like someone was looking out for him in particular.” (I)

“You know to be looking after **your** child.” (I)

“use the same, she would react to him how I would, you know, I would see her, you know, he would do something and then she would react to him the same way I would or tell him what I would have said.” (II)

(see mothering comments) (II)

“She kissed him. And you know, when she was, you know, just when he especially when he was a baby she'd hold him close and cuddle him and kiss him.” (II)

(see separation comments) (III)

.....it was nice to know that my baby was with someone who cared about him.” (III)

“ I liked was teacher (1) would get down and play with her or hold the ball to her or read stories.” (IV)

“I just felt really comfortable with it and I was really pleased with the way the teachers were handling my daughter and it felt good.... She was real gentle with my daughter ... soothing for her.” (IV)

“I think that just watching her the way she was with my daughter. Even the way she held her or picked up or talked to her, fed her, you know.” (IV)

(see motherly comments) (IV)

“she had stomach aches and she’d rock her and you know, that was something that comforted me because she comforted my daughter when I could not do it. She was the one that was walkin’ with her and rockin’ her and tryin’ to make her feel better and if she felt warm she was right there takin’ her temperature, you know, that was another thing that really eased.. (see communications comment) (IV)

#### **Comments regarding similar “how to care for” views:**

“Like she had the same views I did.” (II)

(see reaction to child comments) (II)

(see communications comments)(II)

“That made me felt, feel like she would, you know, really take care of him, as I would. You know, that same way I would.” (II)

“so she wanted to know how I held him and how I rocked him and how I feed him and you know, what positioning I used for that so that made me feel like she really cared about making him feel comfortable. So she tried to do things the same way I would, kind of, you know, use the same patterns I do..” (II)

“And I don’t know if I just got lucky and finding a match as teacher II was,..” (III)

“And teacher II believed the same things.” (III)

#### **Miscellaneous comments:**

“To know that I could go to work, I never felt guilty about leaving here.” (III)

“because again that we hit it off so thickly, that it was easier.” (III)

“They worked a lot with development skills.” (IV)

“Working with the babies to make sure they were pretty much where they should be.” (IV)

“I just, I just felt, I don’t know, I had no worries here.” (IV)

“I never had a problem, my daughter never had a diaper rash. That was another thing I liked the diapers were always changed. Quite regularly you know, and always checked.” (IV)

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHERS THAT HELPED MOTHERS RELATE TO THEM:**

#### **Comments regarding teachers understanding:**

(Upset over having to keep child home with fever incident.) “she was very good about it and understood what I, my point of view, what I was saying.” (I)

“she probably listened and she is much more in tuned, I think with what people are feeling...” (I)

“I guess understanding, compassion for you know, your child.” (II)

“Understanding my fears..” (II)

“Understands that we’re not the average divorced couple..” (III)

**Comments regarding communication:**

“She was really good about telling me about things that had happened the day before...even the little things that she would think of, which I always like to hear. She always asked, you know, about the night before...” (I)

“She would tell me the little stories, what ever you know that obviously she had one on one interaction with him throughout the day. Something he’d done that was funny or how he’d reacted to another child.” (I)

“some of the stories, you know, she would tell me that he had done.” (II)

“I would tell her, you know, what I would recommend or do and she it would be the same way or tell her what she thinks.” (II)

“they would tell me if he did something particularly funny that day or if they thought it was cute you know what he had done. To kinda keep me posted because I wasn’t there all the time to see all his first doing. You know, this and that, they would let me know that he did something different today or played with this today, or he really like this or that you know so.” (II)

“ she would call me at work and let me know, maybe he has a temperature or something. Just keep me posted in how he was... (II)

“It was good the know she and I could talk about his rearing, even at that age.” (III)

“talking to teacher (2) and about how hard that was and her validated that it would be hard, but that it was OK and was probably a right thing to do. It made me feel better that OK...” (III)

“that was another thing that really eased my mind about the security and the safety, of you know that, nothing would happen to my daughter, I mean I would be contacted immediately.” (IV)

“if there were any problems that I could come to her. I didn’t have to take it a step further..” (IV)

We had good communications between the two of us.” (IV)

“if in a situations she would take criticism well. Because of the way that she opened herself up to let you know that if you had problems with me, please let me know and we will try to work with it....” (IV)

“She let me know the things that (child 4) did. Ahh if she crawled or if she was real active uhum. She, I mean everything, if she had good bowel movements...” (IV)

“Everything they did whether it was motor skill, or ahh all the other different things they did, you know, she was always making notes for me and or taking with me, if I called from work wantin’ to know how she was doin’ she didn’t rush me.” (IV)

**Comments about teacher's personality:**

"She's just real easy to talk to, she's comfortable to be around, friendly and open." (I)

"No one ever made me feel as though I was putting them out....they never made me feel as though I was imposing." (III)

"yes it was genuine and it did make a difference, because you can tell when someone is not genuine with you, it makes you feel as though they are lying about everything." (III)

"I felt that she really liked what she was doing." (IV)

"I think she was professional when she needed to be. But I think it went beyond that." (IV)

"I just felt that she was really being herself. She wasn't putting a front on, because this was her job." (IV)

(see opened herself up comments in communications) (IV)

"she has no prejudisisms (sic).... That she liked everybody...that openness gave you confidence...always seemed to be happy always had a smile on her face. You know that was good with me because I wanted that around my daughter." (IV)

"Her overall, appearance of her, and her ah, just I guess maybe her emotional side." (IV)

**Comments about getting know each other/primary care:**

(with this teacher there was)"definite instant connection where as others, there is a little more of a working to get that connection." (I)

(what helped with connection?) "Getting to know them a little bit... getting familiar with them." (I)

"I felt really good, that they were with somebody I could believe in and trust in. It made me feel better going to work...it makes you more comfortable with it" (II)

"Yeah she still is and she moved up with the toddler room with him, so she's still with him.... I love that... I was really glad that one or the other you know, that he was with, you know, would be with him so he would be more comfortable in the next room you know, so.." (II)

*(speaking of relationship with teacher) "She would share her stories of her daughter, you know, and how she is you know, and how, you know, things that they've done are, you know are similar to what we're doing you know, stuff like that. (II)*

"if I hadn't felt comfortable with teacher II it would have driven me crazy and I definitely would have changed something." (III)

"it was a draw for each of us to be able to become friends. And again it was just much easier to leave him with a friend....than a stranger or someone who didn't want to get to know me. And that was what made teacher II so important was that as soon as we realized that we had some kind of connection, that we wanted to get to know each other and in that desire it again brought more trust into the ....relationship" (III)

"This was one person and she was going to take care of him and she loved him. And I knew her and I thought she was OK." (III)

“We just bonded quickly..... And so that gave me time, especially when he was asleep and I’d be rocking him, then teacher II and I would just sit and chit chat. That way we got to know each other.” (III)

(speaking of relationship more than professional) “I just felt that it coulda went beyond that had we been in a different situation or...(social club) yeah, I would have introduced her and you know, it probably would have been vice versa is how I felt with her. (IV)

**Comments about teachers giving help/advise etc.**

*“And it wasn’t that teacher II was a mother, she wasn’t at the time, but that she had so much more experience with babies that I did even giving birth and then I could ask her. “What’s this what’s that? Do I worry about this?....She gave me advise on things that I really had no idea about.” (III)*

**Comments about mothers expressing gratitude:**

(after telling about reading that it is helpful to express gratitude to teachers) “and I tell them” “I could not do this, you guys are great, thank you.” (III)

(expressing trust in teacher) “eased it up for her.... (IV)

**Miscellaneous comments:**

(expressing teacher knowing to hand the baby back to mother when mother arrived,) “she would stop midway through the diaper change, wait until I got there (she was in the room) and let me finish changing his diaper.” (III)

(expressed confusion after a difficult pregnancy) “But it was good that teacher II was there doing the things she did, I didn’t have to worry about that part (III)