TeleNGAGE: Promoting Transformative Equitable Collaboration Between Families and Schools

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate, through the lens of Adult Learning Theory, the perceived influence of TeleNGAGE on educators' and families' capacity to collaborate in equitable and transformative ways. Findings suggest that educators' and families' capacity for collaborative problem-solving was enhanced through TeleNGAGE. This social learning space, which supported adult preferences and motivations for learning, created a synergy that led to equitable social status, the application of new knowledge, and innovative approaches to problem-solving. These findings provide insight into equitable collaborative initiatives as educators seek to find solutions to complex problems in their schools.

Key Words: transformative equitable collaboration, family engagement, professional development, online, virtual collaborating, ECHO, TeleNGAGE, family–school–community partnerships, families, teachers, administrators

Introduction

Family engagement has been an integral part of school reform across the United States for decades (Sanders, 2014). The most recent revision to the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), requires schools to reserve at least 1% of their Title I funding to support family engagement. Specifically, ESSA requires schools to develop, in collaboration with parents, a written policy that explains how the school will involve families in education (Texas Education Service Center, 2021). These efforts align with evidence in the literature citing benefits of family engagement including improved grades and test performance (Gonzalez & Jackson, 2013; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) and enhanced student motivation, behavior, attendance, and optimism toward schooling (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; McConnell & Kubina, 2014; Oberg De La Garza & Moreno Kuri, 2014).

Despite these understandings, evidence suggests that collaboration between schools and families is quite rare (Rispoli et al., 2018). Explanations for this rarity include White, middle-class paradigms that drive most engagement efforts yet alienate minority or underresourced families (Alameda-Lawson, 2014), limited educator understandings of student cultural contexts (Epstein et al., 2011), and socioeconomic factors that hinder family access to schools (Bardhoshi et al., 2016). Most recently, Ishimaru (2019) argued for more equitable, less schoolcentric approaches to collaborative efforts. This approach, which Ishimaru termed "transformative equitable collaboration," differs from family engagement by positioning families as co-contributors of knowledge and decision-making. Ishimaru explains that by providing families "a place at the table to contribute their expertise in shaping the education agenda" (p. 2), families, communities, and schools are able to work collaboratively to support students.

Statement of the Problem

While benefits of family engagement are well established, educator approaches to family engagement may not always reflect collaborative efforts, especially in diverse communities (Walker & Legg, 2018). For example, school leaders often rely on traditional, symbolic forms of partnerships that satisfy policy mandates but do little to authentically engage families (Auerbach, 2010). Additionally, communication with parents is typically based on a need to pass on information with little regard for input from parents as a resource to meet student needs (Hirsto, 2010).

In contrast, modern conceptualizations of engagement situate families as active participants in partnership efforts. These collaborative approaches recognize family members as adult learners with corresponding needs of independent learning, recognition of social status, application of knowledge, and self-motivation, key tenets of Adult Learning Theory (Isenberg, 2007; Merriam, 2001). Specifically, by including families in efforts to enhance family–school partnerships, the concurrent development of educator and family dispositions, skills,

and knowledge may support sustainable partnerships (Ishimaru, 2019). The rigorous challenges of the teaching profession and the increasing demand for better educational outcomes have further increased the need for professional development that is grounded in the robust theoretical framework of adult learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

An opportunity for this type of collaborative learning between families and educators was established through Project ECHO in the TeleNGAGE ECHO line. TeleNGAGE was created at Oklahoma State University as a form of professional development that connects families, community members, and school staff (including teachers and leaders at the building and district levels) to strengthen relationships that support student learning. This online professional development platform, established in the Fall of 2020, provides opportunities for one hour twice each month for families, school staff, and community members to engage in authentic conversations through case-based problem-solving, didactic presentations, and dialogue. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate, through the lens of Adult Learning Theory, the perceived influence of TeleNGAGE on educators' capacity to collaborate with families in equitable and transformative ways.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult Learning Theory was utilized to develop research questions and to explain the findings of the study. Adult Learning Theory, introduced by Knowles in 1968, has been espoused in the classical works of Knupp (1981), Langer and Applebee (1986), and Zemke and Zemke (1995). Two pillars enrich the understanding of Adult Learning Theory: andragogy and self-directed learning (Merriam, 2001). Knowles (1980) described andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 43) and pedagogy as "the art and science of helping children learn" (p. 43). The underlying assumptions of andragogy describe an adult learner as someone who directs his own learning, learns from and with a wealth of experience, has needs for learning from a social status, is interested in the application of knowledge, and is self-motivated (Isenberg, 2007; Merriam, 2001). The purpose of self-directed learning is to develop the learner's capacity, foster transformational learning, and promote emancipatory learning and social action (Isenberg, 2007; Merriam, 2001). These assumptions offer insights into how learning opportunities may be designed to meet the specific needs of adult learners.

Self-Directed Learning

Andragogy assumes that adults have an innate psychological need to self-direct their own learning. Self-directed learning does not mean that adults desire to learn independently or in isolation. Rather, they seek to be active agents in

the learning process instead of passive recipients of transmitted information (Knowles et al., 2005). Environments tend to satisfy the need for self-direction when they structure learning as a process of mutual inquiry and position learners as co-constructors of knowledge (Knowles et al., 2005).

Learning From Experience

The second assumption of andragogy is that an adult's accumulated life experiences are a rich source of learning (Knowles, 1980). Specifically, experiences form connected webs of knowledge known as mental models that adults carry with them into new learning spaces. Adults, then, use these existing mental models to filter new information and add meaning to new ideas and concepts they encounter through learning (Clapper, 2010; Mezirow, 1997). Ultimately, these shared experiences become the foundation for the co-construction of new knowledge.

Need to Learn for Social Roles

Another assumption of andragogy is that adults are motivated when learning aligns with the roles they fulfill (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Connecting learning with an adult's social role enhances meaning and the ability to apply new information. The social role of a learner, therefore, has been shown to be a primary reason adults engage in learning activities (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Application of Knowledge

Adults learn new information, ideas, and values most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations (Knowles et al., 2005). Adult learners discern how knowledge is *immediately* relevant to their life situations, particularly how it might be used to solve complex problems they face in their daily lives (Knowles et al., 2005). Therefore, environments conducive to adult learning structure the learning process around problems that adults may encounter or tasks they may complete in practice.

Motivation

The final assumption of andragogy is that when learning opportunities allow for self-directed learning, integration of learners' experiences, equitable social roles, and opportunities to apply new knowledge, the context is likely to ignite intrinsic motivation to engage in the learning process authentically (Knowles et al., 2005). A further explanation is found in theories of motivation such as self-determination theory, which posits that individuals are motivated and self-determined to learn when the environment supports their needs to be active and autonomous learners; to see how learning is relevant to their daily lives; to experience social belonging and connection with a community of learners; to feel competent in their roles; and to find the learning activities

personally meaningful and challenging (Kalenda & Kocvarova, 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Self-determination theory suggests that when these basic needs are met, individuals are motivated for learning (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Literature Review: Families and Education

Students typically experience positive returns when families and schools connect through shared concern to support student learning (Olivos, 2019). Family–school collaboration encourages better grades, enhanced student motivation and engagement in school, increased high school completion rates, and academic improvement (Borgonovi & Montt, 2012; Chang et al., 2015; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Perna & Titus, 2005; Topor et al., 2010; Wilder, 2014; Xu et al., 2010). Further, the benefits of family engagement on student outcomes (Castro et al., 2015; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Olivos, 2019) have been documented in studies regarding learning in early childhood (Ma et al., 2016), elementary (Lee & Bowen, 2006), middle (Hill & Tyson, 2009), high school (Jeynes, 2007), and even through the freshman year in college (Jeynes, 2007).

Research reporting the benefits of family engagement have had, however, limited effects on partnerships between families and schools (Gordon & Louis, 2009). For example, Smith et al. (2011) describe family engagement as "elusive" (p. 73). Further, policy implementation, which depends upon individual and local factors for success, has resulted in many failed attempts to facilitate authentic and meaningful partnerships (Ishimaru, 2019). Specifically, Hands et al. (2019) explain that community members are engaged in schools "only peripherally, if at all" (p. 468), and Keyes and Gregg (2001) state, "while an urban school is located *in a community*, it is not often *of the community*" (p. 32).

In contrast, transformative equitable collaboration calls for school staff and families to collaborate in ways that mutually support family and educator capacity-building, relationship-building, and, ultimately, systemic capacity-building (Ishimaru, 2017). Grounded in the work of community organizing (Ishimaru, 2014), this process stands in contrast to deficit-based strategies where school personnel and families doubt the capacity and motivation of the other (Ishimaru, 2017; Olivos, 2006). Transformative equitable collaboration seeks to disrupt traditional power structures to include all families, including families of color and low-income families, to promote educational change through context-specific strategies (Ishimaru, 2019). Taken together, the dimensions of goals, strategies, roles, and context challenge the "rules of engagement" in traditional partnership efforts (Ishimary, 2019, p. 5) to recognize cultural wealth that is present in all neighborhoods (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005). Importantly, transformative equitable collaboration repositions leadership as a collective effort (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018). These understandings are important because

race, power, culture, class, and language have been overlooked in many engagement efforts (Baquedano-López et al., 2013), leaving educators with limited knowledge regarding how to effectively engage families in diverse contexts. Further, findings by Smith et al. (2011) indicate that families have varying perceptions regarding their roles in education, and these roles often diverge from school perceptions and expectations. These differences can demotivate the most marginalized families in a community for engagement, despite school efforts.

Context: The ECHO® Platform

As a result of his work as a hepatitis specialist, Dr. Sanjeev Arora created Project ECHO® in 2003 at the University of New Mexico to provide professional development to healthcare workers in rural, remote areas in the state (Arora et al., 2007). Soon after, Dr. Aurora's work expanded to training for healthcare providers across various specialties, including diabetes, obesity, mental health, infectious disease, and others. The ECHO® platform transformed medical practice in New Mexico by taking learning to physicians in resource-scarce communities through online access to training in specialized care. Today, ECHO® is replicated and adapted in 40 countries around the globe (University of New Mexico, 2021). These ECHO® lines rely on technology through semi-monthly synchronous zoom meetings to offer on-demand and interactive training. Each ECHO® session consists of: (a) problem solving through real-life, anonymous, case presentations; (b) short (10–15 minute) didactic presentations; and (c) dialogue to "unpack" the teaching cases and to highlight real dilemmas of practice. Following the "all teach/all learn" mantra of ECHO®, all participants actively engage in collaborative discussions around the case and didactic presentations.

TeleNGAGE

In 2018, the educational leadership faculty at Oklahoma State University, in collaboration with the Center for Health Sciences at Oklahoma State University, adapted ECHO® to the field of education by creating education-related ECHO® lines to provide action-centered, relevant, and goal-oriented professional development for educators. The ECHO® line relevant to this study, TeleNGAGE, was launched in Fall 2020 to meet the needs of educators as they sought to engage families in education. The TeleNGAGE Hub Team, or planning team, consists of one rural school principal, one parent representative, a consultant from a national nonprofit parent engagement initiative, one leader from a tribal nation in Oklahoma (who is also a parent), a classroom teacher, an assistant professor from Oklahoma State University, and a school psychologist. In addition to planning, the Hub Team also assumes responsibility for recruiting TeleNGAGE "Spoke Site" participants. Recruitment is

typically done casually through phone calls, social media, in-person visits, and email. "Spoke Site" participants can include anyone who wishes to participate in TeleNGAGE, and motivation for participation is typically a shared interest in the topic presented. Spoke Site participants have included families, educators (both teachers and leaders), community members, leaders at the State Department of Education, and others who had an interest in education who chose to voluntarily participate in TeleNGAGE. For Fall 2020, the first Spoke Site participants were primarily families and educators with close network connections with the Hub Team. Participation expanded as first-time participants of TeleNGAGE were encouraged to invite their colleagues, friends, neighbors, or community members.

The philosophical underpinning of TeleNGAGE is that collaboration between families and schools will be enhanced as families and schools feel empowered and begin to "see themselves" and "the perspective of the other" in engagement initiatives. Since TeleNGAGE began in Fall 2020, attendance has remained consistent at approximately 40–50 participants per session. Notably, TeleNGAGE began during a very difficult time as schools experienced closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and families and schools were required to work more closely together to support student learning. (Additional information about TeleNGAGE may be obtained from the authors upon request.)

Research Questions

Through the lens of Adult Learning Theory, how did participation in TeleNGAGE foster transformative equitable collaboration between educators and families? Sub questions guiding this inquiry included:

1. How, if at all, has participation in TeleNGAGE met participants' need for self-directed learning?
2. How, if at all, does communication in TeleNGAGE foster participants' wealth of experience?
3. How, if at all, has participation in TeleNGAGE influenced participants' perceptions of their social status?
4. How, if at all, has participation in TeleNGAGE led to the application of new knowledge?
5. What are participants' perceptions of their self-motivation for learning in TeleNGAGE?

Methods

This study utilizes a qualitative case study design. Merriam (2009) defines a case study as an investigation of a subject conducted in the natural setting with

results presented descriptively or as a narrative. Through the distinguishing characteristic of a focus on a bounded system in which a particular phenomenon cannot be separated from its context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), we sought to illuminate educator and family capacity to collaborate in equitable and transformative ways through TeleNGAGE.

Data Source and Sample

TeleNGAGE met a total of 16 times, twice each month for one hour, during Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. Data for the study were collected from all TeleNGAGE didactic PowerPoint presentations and notes. Examples of titles of didactic presentations included, "Managing Conflict in Times of Stress," "Keeping a Strategic Pulse on Family Needs," "Tweaking 21st Century Skills in a Post-Pandemic World: A School-Home Approach," and "Building Bridges of Trust: Relying on Family and Community Values." Data were also collected from TeleNGAGE recorded sessions, interactions in the "chat" feature, and a total of 12 interviews with Hub Team and Spoke Site members. Six Hub Team and six Spoke Site members were invited for semi-structured interviews through purposeful criterion sampling. The invited Hub Team members held a variety of roles including district leader, building leader, classroom teacher, parent, representative from a nonprofit family engagement network, and school psychologist. The purposeful selection of these participants provided access to diverse perspectives. Spoke Site participants included two school building leaders, one district leader, two parents, and one community stakeholder. All participants were invited for the purpose of gaining diverse perspectives. Including data from multiple sources allowed for triangulation of findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), utilizing within-method triangulation to enhance the validity of the data collected (Fusch et al., 2018). The purposefully selected sample is believed to be representative of the larger sample of Hub team members and Spoke site participants.

A potential limitation of the study is that participation in TeleNGAGE required access to basic technology (i.e., phone or computer) and the internet. Families with barriers to these resources are less likely to participate in TeleNGAGE, and therefore, their perspectives would not be captured. While this study followed strict qualitative design to enhance reliability of results, it is possible, and perhaps likely, that the families who participated in TeleNGAGE were some of the most involved families. These families would, therefore, be more likely to persist in their participative efforts, and they would likely possess more efficacy for engagement than their peers who are less engaged. Findings should be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

Data Analysis

All data were analyzed in a constant comparative manner in which the collection and analysis of data were conducted simultaneously (Merriam, 1985). Interviews were used as the primary source of data, and other sources (PowerPoint presentations, field notes from observations, interactions in the chat feature of Zoom) were used as supplementary data. Field notes were taken during observations of TeleNGAGE sessions, and these notes were triangulated with interview data. These notes were also uploaded to the TeleNGAGE website as a resource for participants, serving as a form of member checking. All researchers attended every TeleNGAGE session, and all sessions were recorded so that researchers could go back to rewatch them.

All PowerPoint presentations from the didactic presentations were uploaded to the website. The first step of analysis involved InVivo coding, identifying "a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (Saldana, 2016, p. 128). This coding process helped to identify data chunks that were relevant. After selecting codes, we mined the data to see what might be left out. We then began the second round of coding and reshuffled codes according to how they aligned with the principles of Adult Learning Theory. We did not classify codes that were outliers, codes that did not seem to fit into the principles of Adult Learning Theory. In those few cases, a content analysis process was employed—a process of examining and teasing out core themes from the data collected (Patton, 2002). Themes that emerged included: (a) relationship, (b) authenticity, (c) practical application, and (d) changes in perception. The themes were then utilized to answer research questions. Finally, the theoretical framework was applied in the discussion of the findings.

Researcher Positionality

Consistent with the constructivist approach of enhancing qualitative research validity (Merriam, 1998), it is essential for researchers to acknowledge positionality within the study. All researchers for this study were facilitators and participants in TeleNGAGE. Two of the researchers, the two faculty members, serve on the Hub Team of TeleNGAGE. The three additional researchers are regular participants in TeleNGAGE and other education-related ECHO® lines. Through purposive sampling in this study, we were able to leverage our understandings as university-based researchers to gather data to aid in the understanding of participant perceptions of TeleNGAGE. Therefore, leaning on our constructivist bent, we examined and made sense of data, and we drew on this sensemaking to triangulate and strengthen our findings.

Findings

Relationship

The theme of "relationship" was evidenced in participant comments. Participants explained that they felt they had "a learning network" or "a group of educators who help me learn." One participant explained that she was surprised at how relationships developed over time. She stated, "At first, I thought I would be afraid to speak up, but everyone made me feel comfortable. I really look forward to discussions now." Another participant expressed the same sentiment: "With university professors leading the sessions, I thought we were going to be 'talked to.' What really happened was that we learned together. I appreciate this opportunity to be involved with a network of learners."

Relationship also was stated as a reason that participants "showed up" each time. For example, a participant explained, "I never wanted to miss [a session] because I wanted to see everyone." The value of relationships seemed to be especially important during the pandemic. Participants' schools were mostly closed during Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. TeleNGAGE provided an opportunity to connect with other people during a time when many felt isolated and were searching for answers regarding how to relate during the pandemic. The educators involved expressed appreciation for the opportunity to hear from parents. These relationships deepened as time went on. One educator participant explained, "I would never have thought about the problem that [parent's name] presented in that way. I have gotten to know her through TeleNGAGE, and I think I understand where she is coming from." During a TeleNGAGE discussion of how one parent supported her son's learning during the pandemic, one educator stated, "Wow. You really came through. How can we encourage other parents in our districts to do the same things?" This discussion deepened the relationship between this parent and educators, and it also provided the parent an opportunity to explain the actions that she had taken to support her son's success in school.

Authenticity

Discussions during TeleNGAGE sessions addressed a variety of topics, including cancellation of school cultural events during COVID, administrators accused of racism by students, bullying, parent concerns regarding the use of social media, forgiveness in the workplace, parent misuse of activity funds, and a school's attempt to partner with a Black church to support student learning. Each case represented "real-life" scenarios occurring in "real-time." Cases were presented anonymously by a Hub Team member to protect the identity of all individuals. Discussions went "deep" during problem-solving opportunities as

participants related cases to their own experiences. One educator explained, "These cases really hit home. I think we can all relate [to the topic being presented]." During a TeleNGAGE session, when speaking about accusations of racism, a parent empathized with educators and stated, "You were really in a 'no win' situation. How can you discipline without being perceived as racist?" During the same session, another stated, "We all feel the pressure, but hearing these cases makes me know we are in this together. It helps when people are real about their challenges." Interactions that ensued during sessions represent traits of authenticity among participants, a tendency to behave in ways that reflect deeply held feelings and values for one another. It is important to note that, similar to the theme of relationships, the authenticity of conversations developed over time.

Practical Application

A third theme that emerged during data analysis was the practical application of the suggestions made during case-based problem-solving and didactic presentations. For example, when the topic of forgiveness was addressed, one participant stated, "I never thought about forgiveness being important in the workplace. I have introduced this idea to my teachers. It is making a difference." Another stated, "Attending TeleNGAGE has given me a lot of new ideas to try at school. I have learned so much." When the topic of parent misuse of activity funds was discussed, a participant explained, "This discussion helped me understand how important it is to give someone the benefit of the doubt. I usually jump to conclusions, and that discussion made me realize that I need to really understand what is going on [before deciding to act]."

The theme of practical application was emphasized by almost all participants. Participants stated that they had applied their learning in "quite a few situations" in their places of work or at home. The ability to apply what they were learning was appreciated by participants. During an interview, one participant stated, "It keeps me coming back. I always learn something that I can use."

Changes in Perception

During interviews, participants indicated that because case-based discussions and didactic presentations were relevant and current, they were motivated to reflect upon their own perspectives and beliefs. For most cases presented during TeleNGAGE sessions, participants indicated that they were experiencing, or had experienced, situations that were similar to the presented case. For example, when a parent was offended by a change in policy at her school before the pandemic that made her feel "unwelcome" in the building, TeleNGAGE participants made comments such as "we have made changes too [similar to

the one presented]. I didn't realize how those changes made parents feel." These discussions led to ideas about how to make parents feel needed and welcome, even during school closures. Educators attending this TeleNGAGE session agreed that the pandemic provided significant challenges to effective communication with families. Ideas were then exchanged regarding how to connect even while schools were closed.

A related topic addressed the cancellation of cultural events, such as dinners and social gatherings, during the pandemic. This case included parent explanations of the sense of loss they experienced and the disconnect they felt because of the inability to connect with others in a culturally relevant context. During the session, educators expressed that "they did not realize the depth of difficulty these cancellations had caused [for families]." Educators explained that, after this session, they had a new appreciation for how important it is to understand and celebrate the cultural diversity of their communities. Evidence from TeleNGAGE discussions suggested that having the opportunity to engage in collaborative problem-solving while they are experiencing these challenges caused participants to reflect upon how they were handling similar situations in their own schools and districts.

Answers to Research Questions

TeleNGAGE and Participant Need for Self-Directed Learning

TeleNGAGE provided a platform where participants, who all joined voluntarily and with various learning needs, could express their own insights that reflected their social positions and perspectives. For example, as cases were presented, participants were free to ask clarifying questions and provide suggestions for solutions to problems presented in each case. Because all cases came from real situations or problems, each participant's comments/suggestions enriched discussions and promoted shared understandings. For example, a case from a new school leader who wanted to find solutions for working with parent volunteers provided an opportunity to hear from educators and parents concerning actions a leader could take to enhance relationships with parent volunteers. Comments and recommendations were recorded and uploaded on the TeleNGAGE website to create a resource for future reference.

Parents also indicated that they participated in TeleNGAGE to learn about school policies regarding COVID protocol. This opportunity was especially meaningful because policies were constantly updated and changing as the pandemic progressed. Family members and educators were able to discuss the development of policies and explain how the implementation of those policies influenced all stakeholders. Additional COVID-related resources were

discussed during didactic presentations, including support for psychological needs, transportation, and meal delivery; the latest updates of state policy that influenced local schools were also discussed. Moreover, participants learned how families were facilitating learning at home and the stresses they were experiencing. Because each participant could apply this learning to his/her specific needs, participants' need for self-directed learning was met as this platform addressed their specific, role-related needs.

Participants' Experiences and Co-Construction of Knowledge

The capacity for collaboration seemed to be most influenced through authentic conversation that allowed collaborative problem-solving. Each case-based scenario led to participant suggestions regarding how to address the problem(s) identified in the case. Participants brought their individual experiences, training, and expertise to sessions, all of which were shared to collectively address problems identified in the case. Suggestions for how to address each of these scenarios came from participant training and experiences, including veteran educator experiences and expertise, family member knowledge of how each case influenced family engagement and student learning, theoretical understandings presented by university faculty, specialized knowledge from school psychologists and others with specific expertise, and knowledge of policy initiatives from Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) participants. One example of co-constructed knowledge occurred when a parent participant emphasized the resources available in her church. This parent explained a tutoring and mentoring program that the church made available to all students in the district. As a result, a discussion ensued about how to connect with community partners to address learning gaps exacerbated by the pandemic. The combination of knowledge, expertise, and experience created a wealth of information participants could glean and apply to situations they all were experiencing.

TeleNGAGE and Equitable Social Status

Perhaps one of the most important findings from this study was the ongoing development of relationships that emerged as a result of participation in TeleNGAGE and the crucial role that these relationships played in constructing a new form of parent and educator collaboration—one that gave all participants equitable social status. The structure of TeleNGAGE is designed to value and provide a platform for all voices, as reflected in the "all teach; all learn" mantra of Project ECHO®. Although the learning process was structured to engage educators and parents as co-contributors, there was notable reluctance among parents to share during the first several TeleNGAGE sessions. In early sessions, the facilitator prompted parents to share their perspectives, and

even then, their responses often reflected beliefs that they were not "experts" on the topic. Due to the lack of responses given by parent participants, educators often offered their own experiences as parents.

However, as relationships formed among participants over time, parents became eager and willing to contribute to the discussion during sessions, and positive educator responses to parent ideas seemed to validate their position as co-contributors in the learning process. An example occurred when a parent presented her concerns regarding the influence of the pandemic on learning. Educators indicated that they recognized the effort that she had made to help support her son's learning during school closures. An educator stated, "We have all been thinking about learning losses. This parent did an amazing job with her son [during school closures]. We need to rethink the needs of our students as they are returning to us." Another educator asked, "How can we encourage more families to do what [this parent] has done? How can we extend these efforts [past the pandemic]?" During this discussion, perspectives regarding pandemic closures shifted from that of having just experienced an unprecedented crisis to perhaps having a new opportunity to collaborate with families to support student learning. Suggestions were made for supporting and encouraging collaboration even after the pandemic.

The "all teach; all learn" collaborative problem-solving experience seemed to alter perceptions about how to work together. One family participant explained, "My focus has changed from 'us-them' to 'we.' We all have to work together to help our students learn." One educator stated, "[TeleNGAGE] encouraged me to view family engagement from a different lens." Interestingly, educators often shared perspectives from their experiences as parents. Over time, the lines that had distinguished parent and educator roles seemed to blur, and participants shared equal status in solving the problems presented in the case discussions. Even this diverse population of participants (family members, teachers, administrators, university professors, educational specialists, and community members) became more like-minded in perspectives regarding engagement.

TeleNGAGE and Application of Knowledge

TeleNGAGE was perfectly positioned as a learning opportunity to meet educator and family needs when the pandemic struck. Families and schools relied on TeleNGAGE sessions to stay abreast of the new reality. Parents expressed that TeleNGAGE helped them adjust to the changes that the COVID-19 pandemic "propelled [them] into." Participants explained that they had learned how to utilize the knowledge acquired during TeleNGAGE and were motivated to "try these new ideas." For example, an educator described a method that

she had used to communicate more efficiently with families during the pandemic. She stated, "When [name of participant] made this suggestion, I knew it was something we had to try in our building." In reference to the suggestion of another TeleNGAGE participant about how to engage students during distance learning, one of the comments in the chat session stated, "I love the suggestion of also getting feedback from students. We will try this! It keeps them engaged!"

In addition to the case-based scenarios that characterize TeleNGAGE semi-monthly sessions, didactic presentations provided current information regarding theory, policy, legislation, and reform initiatives. After each short didactic presentation, participants discussed how to apply this new knowledge. Further, didactic presentations were intentionally planned to reinforce ideas and information needed in case-based scenarios. Examples included understanding forgiveness in the workplace, the importance of trust, legal cases involving student First Amendment rights, transformative leadership conversation, and supporting student social and emotional needs during a crisis. Furthermore, numerous comments were made regarding how educators intended to integrate collaborative practices in their districts. One participant stated, "We can't do this alone. We are very dependent on families to help students learn. Knowing what they care about will help us support them." Another stated, "It keeps me coming back. I always learn something that I can use." As participants discussed ways to apply their learning, family and educator practices seemed more aligned, and participants expressed that they had a better understanding of "where [the others] were coming from."

TeleNGAGE and Motivation for Learning

Findings from this study offer unique insight into the motivation of educators and families to participate in collaborative learning spaces, especially when they are designed using principles of adult learning. As participants explained their reasons for voluntarily attending TeleNGAGE, their participation seemed intrinsically motivated. Reasons for their ongoing participation in TeleNGAGE included the opportunity to build relationships and engage in a network of learners; the relevance and practical applicability of learning; and the ability to "solve problems together." Andragogy, along with self-determination theory, provides an explanation for why TeleNGAGE participants were motivated by these factors. As educators and parents built relationships and saw themselves as members of a learning network, they felt a sense of belonging and connection which motivated them to engage in the learning process (Freeman et al., 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2017). When they saw the relevance of new ideas and were able to apply them in their respective contexts, they found value

in learning (Knowles et al., 2005). The "all teach; all learn" aspect of TeleNGAGE positioned participants as active contributors which satisfied their need to feel autonomous and self-directing.

Discussion

This study integrated two bodies of literature—andragogy and family engagement—to explore how TeleNGAGE influenced educator capacity to collaborate with families in equitable and transformative ways. Evidence in this study suggests that this professional development initiative, which built upon adult preferences and motivations for learning, created a synergy that led to enhanced collaboration and motivation. Findings from this study not only fit within these larger bodies of literature but also extend knowledge in these areas.

Andragogy

Viewing this professional development platform, TeleNGAGE, through the lens of Adult Learning Theory provides insight into professional development in collaborative, self-directed learning environments. Instead of providing information for TeleNGAGE participants to learn or memorize, participants were engaged in solving problems, using reasoning and life experience to respond to case-based challenges and scenarios. Additionally, creation of knowledge was a cumulative process as participants engaged and shared their expertise. This disposition and style of learning connect with Adult Learning Theory in that andragogy highlights the assumptions that adults "come to the table" with their own set of life experiences and motivations, are able to facilitate their own learning, have needs for learning from social status, are more disposed to learning by doing, and are inclined to apply their learning to concrete situations (Merriam, 2001). In describing an environment conducive to adult learning, Knowles (1968) stated that "spontaneity is welcome" (p. 15) and added, "individual, critical thinking is perhaps the best description of the democratic method" (p. 15) for adult learning. At the core of this theory is the assumption that adults are intrinsically motivated to engage in learning when they perceive the environment to meet these needs (Knowles et al., 2005). This study expands this body of literature by exploring adult learning in social learning spaces when these environments are designed to meet the learning needs of adults.

Transformative Equitable Collaboration

Scholars have begun to redefine family and school engagement in the literature, particularly in how the roles of educators and parents are understood. While collaboration with families has long been a goal of schools, evidence suggests that many efforts to engage families have proven less than satisfactory

(DeSpain et al., 2018; Gordon & Louis, 2009). One reason for this challenge is that historically, school-centric approaches to engage families may have demotivated families for engagement. These models framed families as "clients or beneficiaries" (Ishimaru, 2019, p. 353) rather than as decision-making agents, and they alienated families from schools by not recognizing the cultural or social capital that they bring (Ishimaru, 2019). Ishimaru (2019) argued that transformative equitable collaboration—in which families are understood as active agents in shaping educational systems—can, perhaps, bring transformational change to student outcomes.

In contrasting conventional or traditional forms of family–school collaboration with equitable collaborations, Ishimaru (2019) explored differences in the individual vs. collective, the directionality of communication and flow of information, and the directionality of power dynamics. In conventional forms of collaboration, parents offer input that pertains to their individual child (i.e., parents advocate for support their child may need), whereas in equitable collaborations, the focus is on collective and systemic change (i.e., parents advocate for changes that would support *all* children; Ishimaru, 2019). This approach stands in stark contrast to communication in traditional family engagement, which has primarily been unidirectional as educators relay information to parents while family expertise is ignored or underestimated. In equitable collaboration, communication and exchange of knowledge are reciprocal because all parties are understood as bringing valuable expertise to address issues for which all groups share responsibility (Ishimaru, 2019). Finally, power dynamics in conventional collaborations are unidirectional and hierarchical, as educators are viewed as experts and the primary agents of change. Equitable collaborations reposition power from hierarchical to relational (Ishimaru, 2019).

Our findings are consistent with Ishimaru's description of equitable collaboration. The focus of TeleNGAGE is on the collective rather than the individual as educators and families collaboratively solve problems that affect *all* students. The "all teach; all learn" approach creates a flow of communication that is reciprocal, allowing for equitable discussions in which all perspectives are valued. While school-centric approaches to family engagement have brought families and schools together within a power structure that is inherently hierarchical, the structure of TeleNGAGE honors both families and educators as equal co-contributors in problem-solving and decision-making processes. The power resides not in roles or positional authority but rather within mutual relationships. This equitable structure is demonstrated in the following statements: "We need to be able to apologize sincerely when we make mistakes and laugh with families about our missteps. We are learners, too. We need to be genuine" and "I think it is important to listen as much as share."

This study offers insight into the challenges that may emerge when pursuing transformative equitable collaboration. The collaborative structure of TeleNGAGE alone was insufficient in eliciting parent engagement during early sessions. Parents entered the collaborative space with deeply rooted mental models that defined their perceptions of their roles in the process and thus determined how they interacted. Parent participants, however, demonstrated an increase in vulnerability, a greater willingness to share, and a more active role in the learning process as the interaction progressed. For example, a participant stated, "It's getting easier [to participate]. I didn't know, at first, if my opinion would matter." This shift occurred *gradually* as relationships among participants developed. This finding is important because, while collaborative structures may bring families and educators together, entrenched mental models and mindsets may interact with these structures to influence how participants engage (Caniëls et al., 2018). This finding suggests a need for "undoing" and reframing mindsets that have long been shaped by educator-dominated collaborative efforts. Just as participants' models formed over time based on repeated experiences and interactions, building new models for collaboration will likely require time and repeated shared experiences between families and educators.

Finally, TeleNGAGE operates differently than most professional development or family engagement opportunities in that it positions educators and families as "learners" in a social learning space. This collaborative approach to problem-solving seemed to promote school and family connections that were meaningful to both families and school staff. These findings are important because research has consistently shown family engagement to significantly predict positive student outcomes (Topor et al., 2010; Wilder, 2014; Xu et al., 2010). As educators and families collaborate, platforms such as TeleNGAGE may provide motivation for shared educational responsibility for student learning. Specifically, the understanding that parents are a child's "first teachers" and educators assume the role of "in loco parentis" does not necessitate a division or separation of responsibility as a child ages. Instead, shared responsibility for student learning extends throughout a student's formal schooling. Parent engagement tends to taper off as children age (Jeynes, 2016); however, Jeynes (2016) found a significant relationship between parental involvement and academic outcomes from pre-elementary, through high school, and even into the freshman year in college. The current study provides insight into development of relationships between families and schools in a collaborative environment that may be sustainable across time.

Implications

Implications for theory include the expansion of Adult Learning Theory to social learning spaces, including online spaces. We have utilized the principles of Adult Learning Theory to explain collaborative practices between families and schools. One of the core concepts of Adult Learning Theory is that adults are motivated for learning when the learning context is designed to meet their unique needs (Knowles et al., 2005). When collaborative efforts are structured around understandings of adult learning, these practices can potentially transform relationships between families and schools. Future research is needed to explore the long-term effects of adult learning and motivation in social learning spaces across time.

Finally, implications for practice include the convergence of perspectives as knowledge was co-constructed through collaborative problem-solving and dialogue. This form of professional development engaged educators and families in a common space that promoted understandings that facilitated relational connections. Professional development resembled relationship-building rather than learning a set of guidelines regarding how to engage families. TeleNGAGE provides an example of professional learning that may be sustainable because it is embedded in the workday for only one hour twice each month, following a low-dose and high-frequency engagement practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2011). While the mid-workday scheduling of sessions may present challenges for some families, the online format allows busy parents and educators from various places to convene together, regardless of geographic barriers that often exist in rural, remote areas.

Conclusion

This study illuminates equitable practice that celebrates the strength and diversity of families and educators and presents a new pathway for collaboration, communication, and shared understanding. Research supports the contention that involving families and community members in decision-making and problem-solving is essential for children's academic and social success (Perna & Titus, 2005; Topor et al., 2010; Wilder, 2014; Xu et al., 2010). Bequeathing educators and families with culturally responsive skills could be a hallmark of effective transformative equitable collaboration. This study provides insight into collaborative learning that may be extended to include all families. Because TeleNGAGE is readily available, at no cost, flexible, and inclusive, it may be a platform upon which schools and families could meet and work collaboratively to transform student learning. It is well recognized, however, that not all

families have access to the technology that makes TeleNGAGE possible. In response, schools could offer families the use of their library or computer labs to enable all families to participate in TeleNGAGE sessions. For families who are not able or comfortable attending sessions on a school campus, schools may be able to work with community organizations or businesses to help families get devices and internet at home or grant families internet access at public places such as a local coffee shop or community center. These additional efforts may help to ensure that all families, especially the most marginalized, have access to conversations and problem-solving that can support the success of all students.

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