

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### Creating New Pathways for Dialogue: Collaboration of Diverse Voices

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Early Head Start (EHS) is based on the assertion that all children have explicit needs and can benefit from a comprehensive developmental program. Children benefit when families and educators work together to support young children's development. Yet, research suggests that parents and educators often do not collaborate about children's education, which can have negative impact on school readiness. This project studied EHS programs that have utilized narrative observations, referred to as *Journey of Discoveries*, to examine collaboration between parents and teachers. The qualitative case study used interview transcripts from three EHS programs. Findings revealed four central themes: (a) connection, (b) partnership, (c) building of relationships, and (d) the value of teacher and parent shared understanding. Findings indicated that *Journey of Discoveries* creates a pathway of collaboration for EHS teachers and parents by capturing children's learning and development through the sharing of narrative observations.

*Keywords:* Early Head Start; collaboration; partnership; school readiness; learning stories; *Journey of Discoveries*

Academic and social-emotional skills are important, closely related to young children's healthy development, and linked to positive school readiness outcomes (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010). Yet, there is an alarming rate of young children who are not able to sustain academic success throughout formal education (Puma, Bell, Cook, Heid, Broene, Jenkins & Downer, 2012). The topic of school readiness is a rising concern for educators and parents (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2001). School readiness has become a social and political concern of many policy decision makers, increasing public awareness on the issue (Saluja, Scott-Little, & Clifford, 2000). Furthermore, the topic of school readiness is an ongoing debate among researchers; many studies focus on the importance of preparing young children to enter kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett, 2000; Deming, 2009; McAllister, Wilson, Green, & Baldwin, 2005).

Early Head Start (EHS) is a family-focused program that provides comprehensive and community-based services to address developmental goals for children from birth to three years of age, including services for prenatal families. Early Head Start is based on the assertion that all children have explicit needs, and children from low socioeconomic families, in particular, can benefit from a comprehensive developmental program (National Head Start Association, 2012).

In addition, EHS offers support to parents in their development of child-rearing roles, involvement in school activities and work-related issues, and participation in training programs, while linking families to community services (NHSA, 2012). An important service to EHS families includes family engagement where the family is the central force in helping prepare children for school and life (ECKLC, 2014). Family engagement involves family members, as leaders, making decisions in their role as primary educators of their children (NCPFCE, 2014).

To support school readiness, it is important that educators understand parental practices and parents' expectations of their children's academic success (Seginer, 2006). Research shows that parents and family members are more likely to become engaged in young children's development and learning when they have positive and trusting relationships with supportive teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). However, teacher perceptions of their relationship with children and parents can impact a child's development (Howes, Phillipsen, & Peisner-Feinberg, 2000). Additionally, the warmth, the level of responsiveness, and sensitivity of the parent can also support healthy development (Chazan-Cohen Raikes, Brooks-Gunn, Ayoub, Kisker, & Fuligni, 2009; Grossmann, Grossmann, Fremmer-Bombik, Kindler, Scheuerer-Englisch, & Zimmermann, 2002; NICHD 2003; Roggman, Boyce, & Cook, 2009).

Parent-child activities can support positive relationships between children and parents. For example, parents who provide literacy activities for young children can foster closer connection. Research shows parents reading to their child daily is a predictor of later school success (Bradley, Corwyn, Burchinal, McAdoo, & Coll, 2001; Love, Kisker, Ross, Raikes, Constantine, Boller, & Vogel, 2005; NICHD ECCRN, 2002). Moreover, activities provided by parents, such as storytelling, reading, singing songs, and discussing topics of interest with children can impact future academic achievement (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). Parenting practices, such as these, that incorporate everyday activities from the home environment are associated with positive child outcomes (Dunst, C. J., Bruder, M. B., Trivette, C. M., & Hamby, 2006). Programs can also foster closer parent-child bond through implementing techniques such as, sending home a special message to parents by carefully safety-pinning the message to the young child's outer clothing, thus, creating a note which sends a specific, positive message about the child's learning or social interactions (Lally, Mangione, & Honig, 1988).

Unfortunately, research also indicates that educators often do not recognize parent perspectives about education (McAllister, et al., 2005; Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996; Tveit, 2009). Teachers who do not have a shared understanding about school readiness cannot effectively collaborate with parents regarding school readiness. As a result, there is a critical need for teachers to collaborate with parents on the education of children. In addition, there is limited research that demonstrates *how* educators and parents can collaborate in the school readiness process to ensure student academic success. Often educators want to unite with parents in the education of children, but there is inadequate understanding of how teachers can create opportunities for parents to have an authentic voice and join in collaboration in the school readiness process.

Thus, the role of the parent in school readiness must be underscored. The earlier that parents and educators can initiate early learning experiences can have profound influence later in children's lives as a predictor of school readiness and future success (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Deming, 2009; El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; Espinosa, 2002; Pan, Rowe, Singer, & Snow, 2005; Nye, Turner, & Schwartz, 2006; Wood, 2002).

Head Start programs encourage parents to take leadership roles and become advocates for the children's education. However, teachers and parents may differ in their perceptions of school readiness; teachers may express contrary views of a parent's perception of their child's level of school readiness (McAllister, et al., 2005; Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996; Tveit, 2009). Head Start parent perceptions of school readiness are not always recognized or emphasized. It is important that Head Start educators understand parents' perceptions and give parents the opportunities to have a voice in the education of their children, in order to support healthy development and school readiness skills.

### Third Space

Creating opportunities for educators and families to engage in authentic dialogue through shared written narrative observations of children's learning was considered through the theoretical framework of Third Space. Gutiérrez, et al. (1999) proposed that educators can work to promote family engagement in a child's learning process by creating a Third Space. The authors defined third space as zones of development that expand student learning. The Third Space creates a neutral place where teachers and EHS parents unite, focusing on the child at the center and celebrating growth and development. Third Space offers an alternative paradigm by changing the arena and increasing the probability of respectful, responsive, and reciprocal interactions between parents and teachers. The Third Space can be formed through the intersection of primary and secondary discourses, where students' primary discourses are used in the community, in the home, and in informal social interactions with others and the secondary discourses are encouraged in school and other institutional settings (Gutiérrez, et al., 1999). Through partnership, educator and student analysis of discourse and literacy practices can foster a culture of collaboration where hybrid activities, roles, and practices can lead to productive context of development (Gutiérrez, et al., 1999). Gutiérrez, et al. (1999) posit that educators need to be more attentive to the idea of developing Third Spaces in school settings and applying the concept of Third Spaces to the school curriculum and pedagogy, with more intention towards incorporating the student's home culture, prior knowledge and lived experience.

It is through *Journey of Discoveries* written narrative observations that EHS parents can authentically engage with teachers in the school readiness process through a collaborative Third Space. However, to reach this collaborative Third Space, according to Barrera and Corso (2003) we have to believe that it exists. To engage with Head Start parents in the school readiness process, teachers must accept that there is no one version of reality, but rather multiple realities (Barrera & Corso, 2003). It is through a Third Space and the mutual exchange of narrative observations that teachers can welcome and honor Head Start parent voices and attend to each person's version of reality. By engaging with families and sharing multiple voices in a neutral Third Space, young Head Start children can be ready for school with a love for learning that will remain with them throughout their lives and result in future success.

Rumi, the 12th century poet, offered advice about how to see another's point of view. He said, "Out beyond ideas of right doing and wrong doing there lies a field. I'll meet you there" (Gonzalez-Mena, 2001). The Third Space framework allows examination of an alternative pathway and creates this type of alternative space of neither right nor wrong to give EHS parents a voice in the school readiness process. The Third Space helps frame the idea of the *Journey of Discoveries* as opportunities for parent and teachers to find an alternative way to meet in a

neutral setting through the sharing of their written narrative children observations. *Journey of Discoveries* was developed to support a Head Start program's assessment practice, to strengthen teacher and parent collaboration, and to offer the opportunity to see children's learning and development from different perspectives through a Third Space.

*Journey of Discoveries* was developed from learning stories based on the cultural context of a Head Start program and was used in conjunction with an existing children's assessment instrument tool. The child assessment instrument is utilized as an observation tool to provide educators with a means to assess children's learning. The child assessment instrument is used to measure children's development, plan learning activities and curriculum instruction (California Department of Education, 2015). The *Journey of Discoveries* was modeled from learning stories and used as a qualitative approach to observe and document a child's learning process. Learning stories has been successfully used by New Zealand's Ministry of Education for their national early childhood education assessment (Carr, 1998; Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012) as a method to observe and document children's experiences, seeing them as competent and active participants in their journey of learning. The learning stories are written narratives shared between children, teachers, and families to exchange and collaborate on documenting the child's learning experience (Carr, 1998; Carr 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012). Using a storytelling format, learning stories capture the meaningful elements that influence a child's learning process (Carr & Lee, 2012). The elements in a child's learning story include: the child's strengths, interests, achievements, their interactions with adults, peers, family, and the influence of their culture, community, and family heritage (Carr & Lee, 2012).

It is from the theoretical framework of Third Space (Gutiérrez et al., 1999) that this study focused on parent and teacher collaboration in the school readiness process through use of *Journey of Discoveries*. It is through *Journey of Discoveries*' written narrative observations that EHS parents can authentically engage with teachers in the school readiness process through a collaborative Third Space. The study examined *Journey of Discoveries* creation of a Third Space where educators, EHS parents, and community can collaborate and share their written observations, as they witness the extraordinary learning and lived experiences of young children. The purpose of this study was to understand EHS teacher and parent collaboration through the use of *Journey of Discoveries*. The primary research question guiding this study was: (a) *Does collaboration occur between parents and teachers through Journey of Discoveries?* And in addition, if so, *in what ways does this collaboration occur?*

## METHOD

### Research Design

The qualitative research method was a single-case study design (Yin, 2009) based on what Yin (2013) posits as the examination to explain a particular phenomenon through questions of "how" or "why". The purpose of this study was to conduct a case study of a EHS program using *Journey of Discoveries* observations and the possible impact on collaboration between teachers and parents. This research study specifically examined "how" and in "what ways" collaboration occurred through implementing *Journey of Discoveries*. Explicitly, this design allowed examination of EHS staff and parent's perspectives about their experience of completing the *Journey of Discoveries* narrative observations through the use of interviews to thoughtfully

explore collaboration between EHS teachers and parents (Yin, 2009). The *Journey of Discoveries* written observations were used by the KidsCAN EHS program as evidence to rate California Department of Education, Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) children's assessment tool. This study examined the *Journey of Discoveries* narrative observations as a way to examine parent participation and collaboration with EHS staff in the school readiness process using *Journey of Discoveries* documents (White, 2015).

## Case Selection

A convenience sampling was used to select the participants because of the easy access and proximity to the Head Start agency. (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A pseudonym (KidsCAN) is used for the Head Start agency that was recruited for this study. KidsCAN is an agency that administers Head Start and EHS programs in Northern California. KidsCAN has four program models: 1) Head Start preschool classrooms, 2) EHS infant and toddler classrooms, 3) Partnership programs, including family childcare through EHS Childcare Partnership and, 4) EHS home visitation programs. Agency-wide, KidsCAN has 32 Head Start and EHS classrooms, home visitation programs, partner programs and family childcare homes. Convenience sampling was used to select the participants because of their accessibility and proximity as a result of the researcher's employment with the KidsCAN Head Start agency (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher worked with the KidsCAN where EHS sites were recruited. At the time of the study, the researcher was not in a supervisor position and participants volunteered to participate in the study. No incentives were offered for participation in the study.

Three EHS programs sites were recruited from the KidsCAN Head Start agency. The sites for this study were comprised of: 1) one EHS infant and toddler classroom with sixteen children, four teaching staff, and one center site supervisor 2) two home visitation programs with a total of 24 children and two home visitors. The ages of the children and their families recruited for this study included an EHS infant and toddler center serving children from birth to three years old and two EHS home visiting programs for children from birth to three years of age, including prenatal families. As a result of the researcher's established relationship with KidsCAN, EHS staff from each of these sites were included in this study. By including the EHS program staff and parents in the study, data were able to be gathered on the proposed prototype model for collaboration between parents and educators.

EHS staff was recruited during scheduled trainings that were provided for all staff members. Approximately, seven staff from the three EHS sites were recruited for this study (Table 1). EHS staff received recruitment packets that included information on informed consent and the purpose of the study. Interviews were conducted with four EHS teachers, one site supervisor, and two EHS home visitors to gather data on the use of *Journey of Discoveries*. The amount of work experience in the field of early childhood education (ECE) varied among participants. In addition, two of the staff from the home visitation programs were previous Head Start parents.

TABLE 1  
EHS Staff Demographics

Staff	Position	EHS Site Name	ECE Work Experience (yrs)	KidsCAN Work Experience (yrs)	Ethnicity	Gender
T1	Teacher	Baby	17	1.5	Caucasian	F
T2	Teacher	Baby	2	1.5	Caucasian	F
T3	Teacher	Baby	26	14	Caucasian	F
T4	Teacher	Baby	6	3	Caucasian	F
SS	Site Supervisor	Baby	8	2	Caucasian	F
HV1	Home Visitor	Bambino	17	17	Caucasian	F
HV2	Home Visitor	Bebé	7	7	Latina	F

The staff recruited EHS parents at scheduled home visits, parent meetings, and their program site and shared with parents the purpose of the study. The flyer information for staff and parents contained minimal disclosure of the purpose of the study to limit participant bias (Cozby, 2007; Suter, 2012). Parents were selected based on the enrollment of their child in the EHS program, their availability, and their willingness to participate in the study. The KidsCAN agency EHS program parent ethnic/racial composition includes Caucasian, Latino, Native American, Asian, and African American. However, eighteen Caucasian and Latino parents from three sites were included in the study. Parents were enrolled in the program from four months to five years, with the average length of parent enrollment around two years. Table 2 lists the EHS parent demographic information.

TABLE 2  
EHS Parent Demographics

EHS Program Name	Parent Name	Ethnicity	Gender
Baby	Baby P1	Caucasian	F
	Baby P2	Latina	F
	Baby P 3	Caucasian	M
	Baby P 4	Caucasian	M
	Baby P 5	Latino	M
	Baby P 6	Latina	F
	Baby P 7	Latina	F
	Baby P 8	Caucasian	F
Bebé	Bebé P1	Latina	F
	Bebé P2	Latina	F
	Bebé P3	Latina	F
	Bebé P4	Latina	F
	Bebé P5	Latina	F
	Bebé P6	Latina	F
Bambino	Bambino P1	Caucasian	F
	Bambino P2	Caucasian	F
	Bambino P3	Caucasian	F
	Bambino P4	Caucasian	F

Parents were provided with instructions and information needed to complete *Journey of Discoveries*; EHS Staff reviewed children's portfolio and gave information regarding the choice to use voice dictation with translation or to handwrite the child observations. Throughout the

duration of the study, the researcher met with the staff to offer training and support, as needed. EHS staff worked with parents on a regular basis to offer support on completing the *Journey of Discoveries*.

## Data Collection

This study relies on one primary source of data. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with individuals to assure ample data collection (Maxwell, 2005).

*Semi-structured interview.* From February through March 2015, six interviews were conducted. These interviews ranged from sixty to one hundred and twenty minutes each, most of which lasted between sixty and seventy-five minutes, for a total of approximately seven hours of audio recordings. The interviews consisted of four focus groups and two individual interviews. Focus Group 1 with the EHS classroom staff interview lasted approximately 120 minutes in length. Focus Group 2, the EHS classroom parent interview, was approximately 60 minutes long. Focus Group 3, the Bambino parent interview, lasted approximately 60 minutes. Focus Group 4, the Bebé parent interview, was approximately 65 minutes in length. Individual Interview 1 with Home Visitor 1 (HV1) lasted approximately 70 minutes. Individual Interview 2 with Home Visitor 2 (HV2) was approximately 60 sixty minutes.

Using a semi-structured interview format (Appendix A) of key prompts to gather participant responses (Creswell, 2009), data was collected through staff and parent interviews and focus groups allowing in-depth examination of parent and teacher perceptions of the use of *Journey of Discoveries* and collaboration in school readiness. Additional clarifying questions were included to ensure that parent responses were clearly understood.

All interviews were digitally recorded on two separate devices for duplication and effective audio recording. Moreover, for Spanish-speaking parents, the home visitor provided Spanish translation during the EHS home visitation parent interview. The home visitor translated the survey questions to Spanish and parent responses to English. The home visitor was able to provide additional clarification to parents in Spanish and translate their responses to English to ensure accurate interpretation of the parent responses. At the EHS infant toddler center, a majority of the parents spoke Spanish, with some English-speaking parents. Consequently, a certified Spanish translator was obtained to translate the parent responses. Accordingly, the certified translator translated the survey questions and the English speaking responses to Spanish and the Spanish speaking responses to English to ensure that all parent responses were understood by both the Spanish and English speaking parents.

Transcription began immediately after the first interview and continued throughout the interview process, totaling over 211 pages of double-spaced text. Careful review of all transcriptions allowed for clearer understanding and interpretation of the data. All Spanish translations of parent responses were transcribed by a professional transcription service company. Though the EHS home visitor and the certified Spanish translator provided translation during the parent interviews, professional transcription services were utilized for all Spanish interview translations to ensure further accurate interview transcription. Upon completion of all transcriptions, detailed themes had emerged, which later formed the basis for the coding system.



*Written Narrative Observations.* In addition to data collected from interviews and focus groups, the EHS staff and parent responses of their use of *Journey of Discoveries* written narrative observations from the KidsCAN 2014-2015 school year were included in the data. The *Journey of Discoveries* is a unique observational approach where the observations are written by staff and parents and given *directly to the child* in the first person narrative. During the KidsCAN 2014-2015 school year, the *Journey of Discoveries* written observations that document children's development and growth were shared between teachers and parents and placed in children's portfolios. This case study method of analysis consisted of parent and teacher interviews from the use of *Journey of Discoveries* observations.

Collaboration occurred between the EHS staff and the KidsCAN's Child Development Specialist throughout the 2013-2014 school year to develop the *Journey of Discoveries* observation tool. The *Journey of Discoveries* tool was derived from a "learning stories" (Carr 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012) narrative assessment and adapted based on the cultural context of the KidsCAN Head Start and the current children's assessment and portfolio system of the EHS program. As part of the study, training and coaching on the implementation of the *Journey of Discoveries* observational process were provided to the EHS staff during summer and fall, 2014. Bi-weekly trainings and consultation were offered at each EHS site that participated in the study. Trainings were also available for parents on the *Journey of Discoveries* process, upon request by the EHS staff. EHS staff received electronic copies of the *Journey of Discoveries* observational tool. The *Journey of Discoveries* parent version was also translated into Spanish for parents who preferred Spanish copies. The EHS staff distributed hard copies of the English and Spanish parent version of the *Journey of Discoveries* to parents to complete at home.

The use of iPads and tablets were utilized to expand opportunities for EHS staff and parent collaboration through voice dictation of *Journey of Discoveries* observations. EHS staff and parents were given the option to either handwrite their *Journey of Discoveries* or use iPads or tablets for voice dictation to complete the *Journey of Discoveries*. The EHS staff began to use iPads and tablets to transcribe their audio recorded *Journey of Discoveries*. Upon completion of the transcription, the *Journey of Discoveries* were printed and placed in children's portfolios. The children's portfolios were reviewed and discussed with parents during scheduled home visits and at the classrooms. In addition, *Journey of Discoveries* that was voice recorded by parents in Spanish was translated into English using the iPad program, *Google Translate*.

Being mindful of possible parents with limited time, such as single working parents, and parents who were illiterate or preferred to orally share their *Journey of Discoveries* observations, teachers and home visitors used multiple strategies to support parent completed *Journey of Discoveries*. Parents with limited time were given the opportunity to verbally share their observations with the teacher or home visitor who would then write down the *Journey of Discoveries* for the parent. Parents had the option to verbally share their *Journey of Discoveries*, referred to as "stories" at morning drop off or afternoon pick up at the classroom, during home visits, and parent meetings. Parents who had limited time or preferred to share via technology were encouraged to send teachers and home visitors text or email observations, photos, or videos. Additionally, staff offered to create the *Journey of Discoveries* using the parent observations and photos. Upon completion of *Journey of Discoveries*, EHS staff and parent use of *Journey of Discoveries* were then analyzed as a potential model for collaboration and family engagement in the school readiness process.

## Data Analysis

This intrinsic case study consisted of data analysis of EHS staff and parent responses for their use of *Journey of Discoveries*. MAXQDA was used to code the parent and teacher interviews and focus groups. The MAXQDA is a PC-based program that helps with systematic evaluation, interpretation, and coding the transcripts (Creswell, 2009). Open axial coding was utilized to analyze the parent and teacher interviews and focus groups responses for completion of the *Journey of Discoveries* narrative observations and investigation of collaboration between staff and parents. Open coding was used to develop labels, and axial coding was used to recognize relationships between identified codes. Additionally, a selective coding process was used to extract main themes that emerged from the data analysis (Creswell, 2009). One researcher coded the data, while additional member checks were conducted in order to assess the accuracy of the participants' responses (Yin, 2009). A random sampling for member checks was utilized to ensure validity of the participant responses.

Merriam (2009) suggested for researchers to pursue a process of identifying categories and incorporate open coding and refinement through axial coding to allow for identification and deeper understanding of emerging themes before moving to the next data set. However, movement from one transcription data set to the next in the current study helped identify what Merriam (2009) refers to as the “deeper meaning” throughout the EHS staff and parent interviews analysis. Multiple levels of codes were outlined into lists where sub-codes were created based on the research question. For example, the most prominent level codes revealed were: (a) connection, (b) partnership, (c) building of relationship and (d) the value of shared understanding. These four themes demonstrated how collaboration occurred between EHS staff and parents through use of the *Journey of Discoveries*. Thus, the carefully selected measurement tools using axial coding and MAXQDA for data analysis supported possible future replication of the study and ensured validity and reliability (Suter, 2012). The data was analyzed to look for rich themes and descriptions in the parent and staff responses from the interview and focus groups regarding their use of *Journey of Discoveries*. The data provided both the range and complexity in the data collection processes and offered an intensive, holistic description and study characteristic of a case study (Merriam, 2009). This intrinsic case study analysis included the EHS teacher and parent surveys use of the *Journey of Discoveries* as a potential prototype model to provide opportunity for parents and educators to further collaborate in the process of school readiness.

In order to ensure the anonymity of each of the EHS sites, pseudonyms were developed for each EHS program. The three EHS sites that were included in the study are referred to as Baby, Bambino, and Bebé. Comments for the interviewees are quoted directly from the transcripts from the semi-structured interviews and focus group conversations, including full sentences, partial sentences, sometimes adverse phrasing, incorrect grammar and use of the English language. [Brackets] were used around text to show words that were added to further explain details, remove uncertainty, or to emphasize words previously mentioned by an interviewee along with previous dialogue. Focused attention was used to ensure that the bracketed words and phrases represented the interviewee's intentions and did not change the meaning of their words.

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS

The main research question for this study was: *Does collaboration occur between parents and teachers through Journey of Discoveries?* In addition, *if so, how and in what ways does collaboration occur?* Interviews with EHS staff and parents at the three EHS sites revealed evidence demonstrating collaboration through use of the *Journey of Discoveries*. Upon review of the data, four central themes across all three EHS sites were identified (a) connection, (b) partnership, (c) building of relationships and, (d) teachers and parent shared value and understanding of children's learning. These four themes significantly demonstrated how collaboration occurred between EHS staff and parents through use of the *Journey of Discoveries*.

### Collaboration Through Connection

Data revealed that the three EHS sites interviewed shared a deeper connection through their participation in *Journey of Discoveries*. Each EHS staff implemented the *Journey of Discoveries* following the KidsCAN adopted procedure. However, each EHS staff member was in different phases of implementation of the *Journey of Discoveries*. For example at EHS Bambino site, HV1 dictated the *Journey of Discoveries* from parents' verbal sharing during home visits. HV1 would then transfer her notes to a hard copy of the *Journey of Discoveries* and place them in the child's portfolio. The portfolios were shared during weekly home visits. At the EHS Bebé site, HV2 audio recorded the parent *Journey of Discoveries* and transferred the transcription to files stored on an agency computer. HV2 shared the electronic documents of the *Journey of Discoveries* during weekly planned "Socializations." The Socialization offered EHS enrolled children and their parents/guardian opportunity to socialize, support each other, eat a meal together, and participate in a parent-child activity. All but one, EHS Baby teachers completed the *Journey of Discoveries* through hand written observations. The handwritten *Journey of Discoveries* were placed in the child's portfolio and shared with parents during class hours or quarterly scheduled home visits. There was one EHS Baby teacher who piloted use of an iPad to complete the *Journey of Discoveries* via audio recording and transcription. At each of the EHS sites, the staff and parents referred to their experience using *Journey of Discoveries* as a means for deeper connection, thus, fostering collaboration through the connection that occurred between staff and parents. For instance, one EHS staff said,

I think it also shows the parents how we feel about them, the things we write about, the words that we use...shows them our connection to them (T1 at Baby).

I [the teacher] find myself wanting to share the *Journey of Discovery* [with the parents], "Oh, let me tell you"...And then they [the parents] want to read it [*Journey of Discovery*] or they want to hear more about it. So, it's communication, it's definitely opened up (T1 at Baby).

The EHS staff indicated that when the *Journey of Discoveries* was first offered to parents, a deeper connection and collaboration occurred.

I started connecting more with my parents. It was right when the *Journey of Discoveries* started, so I think it was highly effective (T1 at Baby).

Furthermore, the EHS staff illuminated this same feeling of connection with parents through the *Journey of Discoveries*. The *Journey of Discoveries* helped staff develop more openness to collaboration with parents throughout the time the families were enrolled in the program.

I think that the stories [*Journey of Discoveries*] we write, we kind of open ourselves up to them; and they do the same with us. And it just carries out throughout their time here, and we just talk about [their child] more (T1 at Baby).

EHS staff also posited that through the *Journey of Discoveries* a sense of connection was created with parents. This connection occurred even when the parents were not present at the center. It also helped parents to understand the teacher's feelings toward their children.

We've [teachers] connected with them [parents] physically [when they are at not at the EHS site] through the *Journey of Discoveries*. So I think it, it makes them feel, you know, back to [feeling] safe, and trust [safe and trust with the EHS teachers], that they know what their child's doing and, and how their child's growing (T1 at Baby).

With the *Journey of Discoveries* and the pictures that we add, it's a whole book of memories that [when] a lot of parents drop their children off and feel like they're missing out. Now they don't have to feel like they're missing out (T1 at Baby).

I think it makes, it helps the parents understand better how we feel about their children. It just makes it clearer for them that we're thinking about them and caring for them (T3 at Baby).

Doing the *Journey of Discoveries*, I think has brought us closer to the children. And which makes it harder when they leave [when they leave the program] (T1 at Baby).

The EHS staff reported that parents often have busy schedules and full lives. EHS staff shared that time constraints often created barriers for collaboration with parents. However, EHS staff also indicated that the *Journey of Discoveries* offered opportunity for parents to connect by creating feelings of closeness, thus strengthening a willingness to collaborate.

I think we will get a lot more parent *Journey of Discoveries* because the bonds are so close between teacher and parent that you get a ton of stories just off of when they're asking, "How was your night, how was your weekend?" How, you know. Checking in with them (T4 at Baby).

When we work together... When they [share], their experience, we are more close. We—we connect. We—we are humans (HV2 at Bebé).

I can hear her saying it [reading the *Journey of Discoveries* out loud]. So, just a parent reading that will be like, I can hear it...they're going to be able to just connect with it [*Journey of Discoveries*] (T1 at Baby).

The *Journey of Discoveries* also revealed collaboration through family engagement in close, personal ways. Opportunities for collaboration became available through *Journey of Discoveries* as staff was able to engage families through building on their funds of knowledge, connecting to their culture, and lived experiences.

For Mexican families. They celebrate *la rosca de reyes*. They cook a piece of bread, y [and] they share, the family share. This—it's more about sharing, about family, tradition, culture. And they try to include that in our—in their journey [*Journey of Discoveries*], too, because it's part of their life (HV2 at Bebé).

You know, it's a very valuable [the *Journey of Discoveries* is], good and connects the mother with the child (HV2 at Bebé).

I [teacher] hope they [referring to parents] all write to their child, because it just, you know, it shows a deeper level of connection (T2 at Baby).

The EHS staff and parents identified a sense of connection, which created feelings of openness towards each other and led to deeper connection. For example, at EHS Baby site, T1 shared, “Since the *Journey of Discoveries*. If you think about it, our communications is [*sic*] a lot more open.” Similarly, T2 at the Baby site responded, “Right from the beginning, it started that open communication [from] them writing stories, and teachers writing stories.” The *Journey of Discoveries* increased connection, open dialogue, and sharing for both EHS staff and parents.

### Collaboration Though Partnership

At each of the EHS sites, teachers, home visitors, site supervisor, and parents viewed partnership occurring through collaboration. Partnership included the collaborative efforts that took place through sharing ideas, planning, working, and reflecting using the *Journey of Discoveries*. Furthermore, partnership was considered as being fully present in the moment. This type of partnership fostered respect and care for one another.

Collaboration to me is working together, and, and planning and reflection. (HV1 at Bambino).

[When parents were asked to define collaboration through partnership they responded] Be present. Be there. Participate (P1 at Bebé).

Partnership included seeing and utilizing each other as a resource of support. As partners, EHS staff and parents opened up to each other, shared needs, and worked together towards solutions. It was only through shared dialogue and collaboration that EHS staff and parents were able to share about the intimate details of their lives.

Is [it is important] to have parents be on-board as partners with you. And to plan together, to wonder together, to rejoice together. And when parents maybe have concerns, you know, they'll bring them to me. Or, or if I have concerns, I bring them to them, and it's a very open-ended relationship. Partnership is how I like to look at it (HV1 at Bambino).

Yeah. It's nice, literally, to have somebody else also have an eye on your child. She [the home visitor] caught my son's, lazy eye, and she's also been very interested in us taking him to the doctor, which is something I was doing very minimally [before she enrolled in the EHS program]. I did go to the doctor, and I probably wouldn't have normally taken my kids to the doctor and they caught anemia for [my child], and a lazy eye... And [the home visitor] caught it through pictures [pictures that were included in the *Journey of Discoveries* document] (HV1 at Bambino).

We [EHS staff] are not robots. We listen [to parents]. We pay attention. We catch [what they are saying]. We can see what they need. We can see what they are looking for. You see. Maybe it's like a little door opens, to support the family (HV2 at Beb e).

Collaboration in partnership has been a part of the Head Start cornerstone principles for many years. However, when they began implementing the *Journey of Discoveries*, EHS staff and parent relationships improved when they considered parents to be partners. EHS staff worked to get parents to "buy in" to the new *Journey of Discoveries* observation process.

I think it [collaboration as partners] helped when we started doing the parent *Journey of Discoveries* (T2 at Baby).

I [the home visitor] had to make it like important to the parents. Like, "Oh, it's, you know, I really need your [the parent] help. And you're like, your child's first teacher. And you see a lot more of your child than I do. So I really need you on board with this [the *Journey of Discoveries*], and let me teach you how this works." So that's what I've done (HV1 at Bambino).

We started off [at the time of enrollment of a new family into the EHS program] that [the teacher] would be writing a letter [*Journey of Discoveries*] to him [the child] every week, and that she [the mom] could write letters to him [her child] too; and that they [the teacher and parent] could basically create this portfolio [collection of the *Journey of Discoveries* documents] or baby book together. And the mom was extremely excited that she would be able to add to it, as well, and that it would be a collaborative project (T1 at Baby).

Partnership did not start immediately or often easily. It took time to build trusting relationships. EHS staff's work involved consistency with the families. They saw the children and families daily at the centers during drop off or pick up of the children. For home visitors, they visited the families in their homes weekly for Socialization. The purpose of the parent-child activity was to strengthen the bond between the parent and child; the EHS staff partnered with parents in the parents' role as the primary educator of their child.

I feel like it's been a developing partnership. I feel like I've been slowly... As [my child has] gotten older, it's become more clear... but it's taken a little bit of time, I think (P2 at Bambino).

Just coming every week [the home visitor provides weekly home visits in the parents' home] observations [*Journey of Discoveries*], It's,... it's [*Journey of Discoveries*] been an obvious part of the that partnership, and it's been very helpful, you know, just to have someone else's... that's not family, or close friends' observations (P2 at Bambino).

The *Journey of Discoveries* offered opportunity for the EHS staff and parents to share about the children's learning, discoveries, and development. The sharing of information, as partners, supported closeness and offered new insight and knowledge to both the EHS staff and parents. Sharing also created a sense of belonging and equal investment by EHS staff and parents in the collaborative efforts through of *Journey of Discoveries*.

The journey [*Journey of Discoveries*], for me, it's personal... I save time, but at the same time, I can complete my job with the family and be more close, because when they [have] their experience, they share it with me at the same time [the parents share their experience with the home visitor through the *Journey of Discoveries*] (HV2 at Bebé).

They're [the parents] excited to see me [the home visitor] and to share with me little, little milestones or, or accomplishments that they've experienced (HV1 at Bambino).

It's like writing it [*Journey of Discoveries*] to the child, it makes us [the parents] stop and see what the child's learning, and then writing it to the teacher so that they know how he's learning at home (P6 at Baby).

We're sharing in their child's discoveries and their child's journey... And through that sharing in the journey and the discovery [*Journey of Discoveries*], they're gaining knowledge and their child is growing and expanding (HV1 at Bambino).

The data revealed a pathway through implementation of the *Journey of Discoveries* that created partnerships between EHS staff and parents. Furthermore, it enhanced families as valued partners. Partnering through the use of *Journey of Discoveries* revealed that the families were valuable members in the partnership.

They have the opportunity—parents have the opportunity to include more things, like neighbors. Grandparents. You see. And put [they include the relatives in the *Journey of Discoveries*] names! Because, they tell me, the names, — cousins... 'look in the picture [Photos are often included in the *Journey of Discoveries* document]. [For example] It's your cousin sitting next to you. You—you're eating together *tortillas*' (HV2 at Bebé).

I do feel, that we're, like, it's like a team, the teacher [referring to home visitor] and me [the parent] at home, so she says to me, "It's where the child is [developmentally]," so we're [my family] going to work at home, and she [the home visitor] here [at the classroom], both—we're both, forming a team (P2 at Bebé).

It [*Journey of Discoveries*] opened up more communication...The teachers asked more about them [the children (P6 at Baby)].

The EHS staff and parents indicated that they felt they were not alone in supporting the children. They had a new sense of partnership, connecting them together for a common purpose and goal of collaboration. At Bebé, P1 stated, “We’re together in this experience” [Referring to collaboration through the *Journey of Discoveries*] (P1 at Bebé). Furthermore, EHS staff viewed *Journey of Discoveries* as a new opportunity to encourage parent collaboration as partners in sharing their stories of children’s learning. The teachers encouraged parents to partner through the *Journey of Discoveries*. For example, T2 at Baby posed,

The process—on home visits [EHS teachers conducted home visits three times per year]. So even just at pick up or something, you know, we show them stories that we might have written that week [referring to the *Journey of Discoveries*], or something that we saw. And it makes them want to do that [to write their own *Journey of Discoveries*]. I’m like, ‘Oh, here, let me offer you this parent *Journey of Discoveries*,’ and then they get to add their own stories to their book [child’s portfolio], [and give] their input (T2 at Baby).

Collaboration through partnership took time and trust. The *Journey of Discoveries* offered EHS teachers and parents a tool for collaboration that led to meaningful partnerships.

### Collaboration Through Building Relationships

The data revealed the theme of collaboration that occurred through the building of relationships. The home visitor referenced collaboration transpiring through careful construction of relationships, HV2 at Bebé is quoted as saying, “Collaboration is—is a bridge. It—is a—is something we can connect” (HV2 at Bebé). Collaboration can be interpreted as a process that connects EHS staff and parents together, bridging and connecting the partner members together.

It’s like holding hands and being in a circle, so it all goes hand to hand (P1 at Baby).

I do feel like from writing the stories [the *Journey of Discoveries*] does increase the collaboration...because we’re sitting down, together, and talking about things (P3 at Bambino).

[The role of the home visitor is to connect to families to resources] To support, yes. Their-their necessity. Whatever they need. Can be in education. Can be in health. Can be in nutrition (HV2 at Bebé).

It’s a teamwork. We need to work together. It’s a collaboration, because I have—I can connect the family to the different resources in the community, but at the same time, the family need to be connected. It is my part, [to] connect and create that bridge between our [EHS program] services, the community, and the family (HV2 at Bebé).



Collaboration occurred through the relationship by building trust in each other. Trusting relationships supported collaboration, sharing, and networking of ideas. Trust built confidence and reassurance that another person would be there when needed. This included the different “seasons” in life that build a sense of interdependence and the need for each other. Relationships were important in building communities that collaborate together.

Maybe it is at the moment when *Mami* [Mommy] feel comfortable to me [to open] up to say it, something about, a situation difficult at home, because she is not able to say it before [Home visitor referring to the parent sharing thorough the *Journey of Discoveries*] (HV2 at Bebé).

When the parents see the, the trust and the bond we have with their children, then we form a bond and the trust with the parents (T1 at Baby).

Some of my parents talk to me [the teacher] about things almost like I am a mother figure because I have young moms (T1 at Baby).

The things that some of my parents tell me, it just shows me how much they trust us [teachers] and trust me. So that I’m a little surprised that they tell—I appreciate that they involve me in their whole family; but sometimes it surprises me, the stuff that they share. It makes me feel good that they want to share with us (T2 at Baby).

I think it [the *Journey of Discoveries*] helps us [teachers] get insight into their home life. Just doing home visits is more of an observation because we’re only there an hour, [or] hour and a half. But this [the *Journey of Discoveries*] is a little more detailed into their personal life, [for example] their bedtime routine. You know, if a parents writes a *Journey of Discovery* about how they read bedtime stories every night, you know that that’s something, and a routine that they have established at home. So it’s nice for us [teachers] to know that too, and we can always bring that into the classroom if it’s something to, you know, make the child feel that home to school bond (T3 at Baby).

EHS program staff looked for ways to strengthen relationships with parents, open doors to collaborate, and build on the families’ strengths. *Journey of Discoveries* strengthened the foundations of these relationships by encouraging EHS program staff and parents to listen to each other. Dialogue that occurred between EHS staff and parents, with the child at the center, inspired a sense of connection.

So maybe there’s, the writing styles of the parents [*Journey of Discoveries*], it’s like our [the teachers] little, our little gateway into, you know, how it really is [for the child at home] (P1 at Baby).

[A] mom wrote to her [child], “We went to the park, and you saw this,” and “when I sing to you, you respond like this to me.” And that was, it just was a whole nother level of personal. And so it was really, it was really nice (T1 at Baby).

I think that they realize now that we’re not just teachers, we’re not just babysitting; that

we love these children, and we take care of them like they're our own. I mean, this is like our little second family. And we would do anything for these kids (T1 at Baby).

The *Journey of Discoveries* helped parents to focus intently on their children. It also provided parents opportunities to share with staff about their lived experiences outside of the context of the EHS program, which built these authentic relationships.

It [*Journey of Discoveries*] gets us [parents and home visitor] talking more about my kids and I think that's is really good. It increases our chance to have focused time with them [parent spend more time with their children] (P1 at Bambino)

And we are more close. You see? And not just [the home visitor] looking [at the child] during playgroup [Socialization]...Mom tells me what she does with [the child] during Sunday and at church. (HV2 at Bebé)

But now [as a result of] the *Journey of Discoveries*, they are sharing more of their life experience. (HV2 at Bebé)

The building of relationships was a key aspect of collaboration between EHS staff and parents. As young children, such as EHS infants and toddlers, started to learn about themselves, others, and their world, close, caring relationships with their parents and teachers played an important role, which can be seen through *Journey of Discoveries*. These caring relationships were strengthened through the interactions, exchanges, and dialogue that took place between EHS staff and parents. It was evident from the data that EHS staff and parents placed importance on their relationships with each other. The *Journey of Discoveries* provided a space for deepening relationships, family engagement, and the health and well-being of young children

### The Value of Teacher and Parent Shared Understanding

This study revealed that both EHS staff and parents valued their experience using the *Journey of Discoveries*. Furthermore, *Journey of Discoveries* was found to create mutual feelings of value and shared understanding about their lived experiences and provided a deeper understanding of the challenges parents face in their lives.

Because I'm listen [ing] [to] what they [the parents] tell me [through the *Journey of Discoveries*]. I share that kind of experience [at] the same time...of course, that open [s] one new space between us. You're creating bonding, you know, that kind of affection, or respect, or values, or understanding (HV2 at Bebé).

[The parent will tell the home visitor] Why, sometimes, she [the parent] cannot come to the playgroup [Socialization]. Why, sometimes, she's tired. Because, when she tell [me], during the journal [*Journey of Discoveries*], she does this, this and this. I can understand, "Wow, she's tired. She has a lot to do." [It] is more like comprehensive... I listen more to the reasons. (HV2 at Bebé)

The *Journey of Discoveries* provided EHS staff with opportunities to “check-in” with parents about the staff’s level of understanding of the content of parents’ communication. It created a checks and balances system, where assumptions and biases were minimized.

I can see it. I mean they’re engaged with me. And they’re talking and then I’m writing [home visitor transcribes the parent verbal reported *Journey of Discoveries*] and I am asking them, “Is this what you said? Did I capture it right?” And it’s something that they feel sure of because they’re expressing it. It’s not something that we’re trying to get out of them, that they’re unsure of what we’re looking for. And it’s real and, you know, and that we care enough to, to write that down. I mean, that’s important (HV1 at Bambino).

Collaboration through using the *Journey of Discoveries* created more awareness for the EHS staff and formed shared understanding through sensitivity and respect.

She [the parent] can tell me [home visitor] more about [child’s] attitude, behavior, if he’s happy or not, if he is mad, or he don’t like this, or he—he like another one (HV2 at Bebé).

I think they’re [the parents] so used to me [the home visitor] saying and noticing things that, that, you know, it’s just auto, they just think, “Oh, that’s just [the home visitor].” But when they see it written [*Journey of Discoveries*] down in a formal way with pictures, I think that it’s like more, it means more to them that I took the time to capture [what they said] and that they value that. And I think that causes them to value [the *Journey of Discoveries*] (HV1 at Bambino).

Acknowledgement of the parent perspective, lived experiences, potential barriers, and perceived success was powerfully exchanged between EHS staff and parents through the *Journey of Discoveries*. Consequently, these exchanges were valued and generated mutual understanding.

They both [parents], enjoy [the *Journey of Discoveries*] and I [the home visitor] feel it’s really important because actually it’s a formal acknowledgement of their child. It’s like concrete. It’s like, “Yeah, you’re always acknowledging things that you see or, you know, or parent interaction.” Like I always try to say, “Wow, I really like, you know, the way you two are doing this activity together [parent and child],” or whatever. You know? You [the home visitor] acknowledge the parent. You acknowledge their engagement. You acknowledge all of that (HV1 at Bambino).

Well, I mean you’re valuing what they [the parents] have to say if they’re telling you a story and you’re writing it down word for word. [*Journey of Discoveries*] That in itself is acknowledgment and value (HV1 at Bambino).

It’s [*Journey of Discoveries*], just like a formal acknowledgement in a sense of them and their child. And whenever you are acknowledging a person’s child, you’re acknowledging them... because they’re so closely tied (HV 1 at Bambino).

*Journey of Discoveries* created a level of shared understanding that supported collaboration between EHS staff and parents, leading to similar perceptions of school readiness.

It's [*Journey of Discoveries*] a building block. It's a building block and a tool at this point. And [*Journey of Discoveries* builds] shared understanding of school readiness (HV1 at Bambino).

Parents expressed deep appreciation for the EHS staff for sharing their perspective of their children's learning and development. It was evident that EHS staff took great pride in their *Journey of Discoveries* and demonstrated care through the carefully written stories of the children's encounters, specifically considering the social and cultural context of these encounters. These encounters included their interactions with peers, adults, materials, and the environment, creating an exchange of stories between EHS staff and parents.

The teachers, when they write their notes [*Journey of Discoveries*], they're either telling us about how they're [the children] helpful or how they smile, or how—what they enjoy, so that helps us [the parents] also see at home more what's going on (P2 at Baby)

They [the parent] know us. So it's [*Journey of Discoveries*] never going to be wrong. It's never going to be, oh, this wasn't written [*Journey of Discoveries*] very well. They're, they're from us. They're going to love it; it's about their child. They're going to love it no matter what. (P1 at Baby)

So you just kind of know what they [the parents] perceive and you add to it or you sort of broaden their understanding. But you've got to always acknowledge what they bring to you and value it in order for them to value what you have to say. (HV1 at Bambino)

[EHS teacher] has a family where the mom is also a teacher, and works long hours. And so grandpa drops off and picks up, and so she's [the mom] not getting to be here [at the classroom], and seeing, you know, kind of what's going on in the classroom. ... She can't come to the parent meetings. But she gets to still see what [the teacher] is doing with her child every single day... she does get to read those stories [*Journey of Discoveries*], and so she's understanding what's going on at the school, even though she's no longer here [physically present at the EHS center]. (T1 at Baby)

And it [*Journey of Discoveries*], gives us [teachers more understanding], that's where it's nice, because it gives us more insight to how it is as home. (T1 at Baby)

EHS staff saw the *Journey of Discoveries* as an opportunity to write a letter, describing the children's encounters of their experiences while they were in their care. This was reported by P1 at Baby: "They [the parents] immediately understand [the teachers *Journey of Discoveries*]. It's like... It's like a letter of love (P1 at Baby)" This idea of creating value through letter writing was also confirmed by a teacher who referred to *Journey of Discoveries* as the "lost art of letter-writing" (T1 at Baby). This was also reiterated by a parent and a teacher at Baby: "We write it like a personal letter" (P2 at Baby). "They're... it's like looking at just a bunch of little letters or stories" (T1 at Baby). These *Journey of Discoveries* "letters" carried personal messages

written directly to the child and shared by teachers, home visitors, parents, and community. EHS staff, parents, and children were intricately connected and woven together through the sharing of these lived experiences. *Journey of Discoveries* strengthened relationships, partnership, and collaboration between parents and teachers creating a shared understanding of children's learning and development.

## DISCUSSION

Head Start has a long history of partnering with parents (ECKLC, 2014). In recent years, Head Start has focused on family engagement (ECKLC, 2011). By offering social support to parents, Head Start programs have historically had a positive impact on parent-child relationships (NCPFCE, 2013). As a result of positive teacher and parent relationships, young children have the opportunity to learn important social skills needed to be successful in different environments (Rogoff, 2003), such as home and school. The EHS sites that participated in the current study were in the process of identifying ways to document and report seven outcomes, identified in the Parent Family Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework (ECKLC, 2011). As a result, the EHS programs were seeking ways to further collaborate with EHS parents and families and increase family engagement. This study examined the prototype model, *Journey of Discoveries*, as a possible tool for teachers to collaborate with families.

The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' and EHS parents' incorporation of *Journey of Discoveries* narrative observations as a method for capturing children's learning and development. Description and analysis of teachers' and EHS parents' use of *Journey of Discoveries* was investigated as a possible pathway for collaboration as an essential aspect of school readiness (Cowan, et al., 2004; McAllister, et al., 2005). This form of collaboration was revealed through the process of using *Journey of Discoveries*, where EHS staff and parents shared written narrative observations to document children's learning process. Four central themes emerged: (a) connection, (b) partnership, (c) building of relationship, and (d) the value of teacher and parent shared understanding. Each of these themes show how *Journey of Discoveries* created collaboration between teachers and EHS parents.

*Journey of Discoveries* created collaboration by establishing close connections between EHS teachers and families through shared narrative observations. Research indicates that parents are more likely to share about the children's home experience when they have close, trusting relationships with teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). *Journey of Discoveries* is an example of one model used to document the children's daily routines to improve connection between children, families, and staff. EHS staff and parents shared and collaborated with each other about what occurred during these daily routines through shared narrative observations. To establish connection with EHS parents outside of KidsCAN, EHS home visitors met weekly with each parent and child in the home setting to support the parents' and child's goals and to provide comprehensive services and referrals that connected families to community resources. These interactions and support services are examples of ways that EHS staff and parents established connections to reveal children's home experiences through *Journey of Discoveries*.

Partnership was also a crucial aspect of the program, as it demonstrates collaboration occurring between EHS staff and families. The *Journey of Discoveries* showed partnership occurring through collaboration between EHS staff and parents who dialogued together about children's learning processes. Partnership included parents as equal partners with EHS staff.

According to the PFCE Framework from Early Childhood Knowledge Learning Center (2011), “Parents share their knowledge about their child’s interests and progress at home, and together staff and families use this information to set and work towards goals for the child in the classroom, home, and community” (ECKLC, 2011 p. 4). Partnering with parents through *Journey of Discoveries* supported the PFCE’s framework of family engagement in the child’s learning process and demonstrated the essential role of parent and staff partnership in children’s success. Each of these aspects of partnership was established through the collaboration that occurred between EHS staff and families’ use of *Journey of Discoveries*.

Building relationships as a bridge that links EHS programs to children’s home environment was a key aspect of collaboration in this study. EHS parents were often busy with demanding work and school schedules. Thus, EHS staff found it difficult to collaborate and build relationships with parents (Haines, Summers, Turnbull, & Turnbull III, 2015). Yet, the *Journey of Discoveries* provided a pathway for EHS staff and families to deepen their relationships by accommodating parents with busy schedules. This was an important aspect of the study because Head Start comprehensive services can be complex and require additional time for parents to document services received, often contributing to an adverse impact on parent relationships with EHS staff. The sharing of information through the *Journey of Discoveries* supported building healthy relationships, which lays a foundation for future academic success for children (Ackerman & Barnett, 2000; Deming, 2009; McAllister et al., 2005). Relationships between EHS staff, parents, children, family members, and the community was a central aspect of *Journey of Discoveries*. Relationships were strengthened through the sharing of diverse perspectives. Each member was valued as equal partners in the *Journey of Discoveries*. At each of the three EHS sites, the parent and teachers shared how they valued collaboration through the supportive relationships that were established by the use of *Journey of Discoveries* narrative observations. Staff and EHS parents’ practice of *Journey of Discoveries* fostered mutual understanding of children’s learning experiences, revealing the collaborative nature of *Journey of Discoveries*.

Collaboration is necessary as children’s early learning experiences are reinforced by caring, trusting adults who join forces on their behalf (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Often, teachers and parents do not collaborate about the education of young children (McAllister, et al., 2005; Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996; Tveit, 2009). Yet, research shows educators and parents who work together in collaboration can better support young children’s learning and development (Epstein, 2001; Bryk & Schneider, 2003). School readiness begins before children enter formal education (Bransford, et al., 2000). Research studies also indicate that promoting high quality early learning experiences for young children supports early brain development (Bransford, et al., 2000; NICHD, 2003). This demonstrates how children’s early learning experiences can be supported by educators and parents who collaborated through the sharing of *Journey of Discoveries* narrative observations. It is vital that during early development, educators collaborate with parents to support school readiness and the education of young children (Cowan, et al., 2004; McAllister, et al., 2005).

## IMPLICATION FOR PRACTICE

In order for educators to support young children’s learning, it is important to consider how educators view children’s development, including their acknowledgment of the significance of

parent-child relationships (Lester & Sparrow, 2010). Educators need to foster collaborative relationships with parents to support young children's learning and development (Lester & Sparrow, 2010). This study examined one model that successfully demonstrated collaboration between educators and parents through the use *Journey of Discoveries* narrative observations.

Collaborative efforts may be thwarted when parent and teacher perceptions differ. For example, Head Start and EHS families' perceptions about school readiness may differ from Head Start policy and the expectations of educators. It is important for educators to understand Head Start and EHS parents' perceptions and goals for their children in order to engage with families in the education of their children. Head Start and EHS programs may benefit from teamwork, such as the teamwork used in *Journey of Discoveries*, as a method to help teachers understand parent perceptions and desires for their children's education. It is critical that an alliance between educators and parents occur to support school readiness. A KidsCAN grandparent (custodial guardian) expressed, "The importance of Head Start school readiness is to establish a foundation for learning. It means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children." Furthermore, Elkind (2007) posits, "Hurrying children into adulthood violates the sanctity of life by giving one period priority over another. But, if we really value human life, we will value each period equally and give unto each stage of life what is appropriate to that stage" (p. 221).

Educators need to collaborate with parents through embracing children's learning from a holistic approach, while validating parent household practices and connecting to families funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). A parent sharing his or her lived experiences with teachers legitimizes parent experiences and encourages understanding from teachers, which can lead to enhanced family engagement in the child's learning process. It is vital for educators and program administrators to consider new opportunities for collaboration, such as *Journey of Discoveries*, as an approach that leads to enhanced parent engagement in the school readiness process.

## IMPLICATION FOR POLICY

This study underscores the critical need for Head Start programs to work diligently to collaborate with parents on the education of their children through the inclusion of strategies that can support the development of children's school readiness skills. Important studies have confirmed the social and economic benefits of early education for children, especially for those who are low-income (Doyle, Harmon, Heckman, & Tremblay, 2009; Ludwig & Phillips, 2007). Children who attend effective early childhood development programs are better prepared for kindergarten and have higher language and cognitive skills in the first years of elementary school (Deming, 2009). Head Start policy should include children's assessment practices that create authentic opportunities for parents to ensure connection between home and school experiences. Policy needs to include assessment practices, such as *Journey of Discoveries*, where parents are the central force, as the leader in children's education. Thus, the importance of early learning supported through educators and parent collaboration is essential in the school readiness process.

### Implications for Research

Researchers should look for innovative Head Start agencies that implement assessment practices to engage families in authentic collaboration. KidsCAN management and EHS teachers were

successful in developing deep, caring relationships with parents because the KidsCAN agency looked for pioneering ways to build meaningful interaction with families. The KidsCAN management and teachers were invested in and devoted to identifying areas of needed growth in their relationships with parents. They worked diligently to find creative solutions to engage families in the school readiness process. By working together with Head Start programs, such as KidsCAN, researchers can support authentic partnership and collaboration with families by evaluating program practices and policies that increase cooperation with families in the school readiness process. Research should include families and Head Start teachers and administrators as co-collaborators in future research through a participatory action method (Merriam, 2009).

## LIMITATIONS

Research indicates that low SES families and teacher education level may influence the results of the study. (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2003). The participants in this study were predominantly highly trained staff; while the parent participants were from low socio-economic status (SES) families. Research has indicated that adults with a higher education levels have longer conversations with children compared to adults with less education who have been shown to have fewer conversations and to primarily give commands when communicating with children (Hoff, 2006; Levine, Miller, Richman, & LeVine, 1996). Furthermore, teachers with minimal college education may not have adequate training and knowledge of the importance of parent engagement and school readiness. Thus, they may demonstrate poor effective communication skills with parents. Further investigation of teachers with varying experience may be necessary and produce different results.

In addition, another limitation of this study includes this study's sample size of EHS parents. Parents were from a small geographic area located in Northern California. This small sample size of parents may contribute to issues of generalizability. The limited number of parents included in the study cannot be generalized to all populations. Further research with other early education programs using *Journey of Discoveries* may be warranted. A larger, more diverse parent population may produce different results. Moreover, future research needs to include a larger sample size comprised of parents of various types of programs. For example, families who have children enrolled in family child care, Head Start preschool programs, private and varying publicly funded programs using *Journey of Discoveries* may provide differing results. A larger, diverse population of families with varying SES may offer valuable information and further the investigation of *Journey of Discoveries* as one possible method for collaboration that may lead to enhanced parent engagement in the education of children.

Future studies need to examine parent and teachers use of *Journey of Discoveries* from larger cross-cultural populations (Cozby, 2007). A larger study examining cross cultural populations using the *Journey of Discoveries* may generate different results (Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006; Weisner, 2002). Diverse cultural practices using the *Journey of Discoveries* may produce differing outcomes (Gonzales, et al., 2005; Rogoff, Moore, Najafi, Dexter, Correa-Chavez, & Solis, 2007). Additional demographic variables should be considered to provide further understanding of the use of *Journey of Discoveries* as a technique for educators and parents to collaborate and enhance parent engagement in children's education (Cozby, 2007; Suter, 2012). It is essential that future research consider all possible factors through careful selection of



measurements to help minimize limitations while conducting research studies on the important topic of collaboration (Aspland & Gardner, 2003; Cozby, 2007; Suter, 2012).

## CONCLUSION

*Journey of Discoveries* offers a broader understanding of collaboration between parents and teachers. *Journey of Discoveries* is a representative model of partnership and a novel approach to establishing open, two-way communication between parents and educators, where young children's learning is valued and paramount. This study revealed that teacher and EHS parent collaboration can occur through *Journey of Discoveries*, and it appears to be a promising practice that can lead to enhanced family engagement. Connection, partnership, building of relationships, and the value of teacher and parent shared understanding were central themes identified in this study. Though the study findings cannot be generalized to other populations, *Journey of Discoveries* is an innovative model that captures children's learning and development by generating new pathways of collaboration through teachers and families in the school readiness process.

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## APPENDIX A

*Journey of Discoveries* Staff and Parent Interview Survey Questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself – your background
2. Do you see yourself as a central force in helping prepare your child or children for school? If so, how?
3. Do you see yourself in a collaborative partnership with your children’s teacher or parent? Please describe in detail.
4. Does the process of *Journey of Discoveries* increase collaboration with your teacher/parent?
5. Do you think this experience has changed your understanding of school readiness? If so, how?
6. Have you had a child go through the Early Head Start or Head Start program previously? What was your experience with the level of communication with your teacher from the old method to the new method of using the *Journey of Discoveries*?
7. How effective has your experience and participation in using *Journey of Discoveries* been with your communication with staff/parents?
8. Has your experience and participation in using *Journey of Discoveries* helped your communication with staff/parents? If so, please describe.
9. Has your *Journey of Discoveries* changed your interactions with children? Please describe in detail.
10. Please describe your experience writing the *Journey of Discoveries* observations in the first person (writing directly to the child). Please describe in detail.
11. Has *Journey of Discoveries* created a shared understanding between you and your teacher/ parents? If so, please describe.
12. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with using *Journey of Discoveries*?
13. Do you have any else you would like to share?