Peering in windows: An autoethnographic inquiry of a parent/educator with a young child in school

by

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Abstract

The intent of this dissertation is to document my reflections and experiences of parent inclusion as both a mother and educator, through a practitioner inquiry. Using autoethnography as the research methodology, I elicit memories from my past and recent history. The inquiry follows a timeline of events that are captured through narrative vignettes and poetry. They relate to my experiences with my mother, who cared a lot about my school life, my interactions with the parents of my past and current students, and my desire to be included in my daughter's learning journey. Through analyzing my narrative vignettes and poetry, I seek a balance between being an overly involved parent and a parent who is justifiably involved in my daughter's education to support her. Building on previous understandings around parent involvement, engagement, and participation, this inquiry contributes new ideas to the conversation through the notion of parent inclusion. In essence, parent inclusion suggests creating more meaningful relationships between parents and educators so they can positively interact and support each other, while simultaneously supporting the children in their lives. Findings from this study include the importance of parental inclusion within public education as a tool for helping children in their academics, using learning to connect families to school, and for building a more equitable teaching practice.

Keywords: parental inclusion; parent engagement; parent involvement; autoethnography; poetic inquiry; metaphor; equity in education

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this inquiry to my parents, husband, son, and dearest friends who have always stood behind me. A special thank you to my daughter for permitting me to share our stories. I will be forever grateful for my family's unwavering support and patience throughout this journey.

I am very appreciative of the time and financial assistance provided to me by the school district that I have spent my entire career working in. This process has given me a great opportunity to learn about educational practice. I continue the journey to be a better educator today than I was the day before. Through their dedication and wisdom, my colleagues are wonderfully inspiring. I appreciate that they are more than just people I work with but have also become some of my closest friends. I am so thankful to my students and their families. You teach me more than I could ever learn in the pages of a book or inside the walls of a school. I have enjoyed learning from you all.

Acknowledgements

I would sincerely like to offer my deepest appreciation to everyone who has guided me on this incredible journey. This experience has been my trek to 'Mount Everest', and you all helped me navigate the rougher terrains. I am finally admiring the view from the top, and it feels better than words can describe!

I am extremely appreciative and grateful to Dr. Margaret MacDonald who has guided me through the entire process. Our conversations and meetings at Café Divano were always productive, extremely helpful, and something that I looked forward to. I could not have done this without your care and guidance. A special thank you to Dr. Cher Hill for coming onboard as a co-supervisor and offering your time to assist me. Your feedback always demonstrated how much you believed that we could all succeed in this program. I remember our first conversation when I tried to convince you that I could manage an educational practitioner inquiry even though I had no idea what that was, at the time… I hope I made you proud! A special thanks to Dr. Michael Ling. Your kind way with words makes me feel like I am a celebrated writer and scholar. Although there are too many to list, I also want to thank the students and professors in my Educational Practice cohort. I am so fortunate to have learned beside a wonderfully diverse and brilliant group of people.

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List of Acronyms

ADHD   Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

BC   British Columbia

BCCPAC   BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Council

BIPOC   Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour

CHSF   Canadian Home & School Federation

DPAC   District Parent Advisory Council

IEP   Individualized Education Plan

LST   Learning Support Teacher

PAC   Parent Advisory Committee

PTA   Parent and Teachers Association

SPC   School Planning Council

"Oh, what fun it'll be, when they see me through the glass in here, and can't get at me!"

~Alice, Through the Looking Glass

Chapter 1.   Through the Looking Glass

Figure 1. Photograph of the residence at Brescia College, Western University Campus. London, Ontario.

https://s3.ap-south.amazonaws.com/gotouniv/cover_photo/896/cover_photo_1500X500.jpg

1.1.   Far away from home

Seventeen years old, four foot ten inches, ninety-seven pounds, and four thousand kilometers away from British Columbia (BC). A few months after graduating high school, I left my family and friends for my next stage of life. Luckily, I had my mother attend the orientation my new university set up for me. My mother came with me on the journey from BC to the university that I would be attending in Ontario. I would be living far away from home.

My mother and I arrived a few days before I would officially move into my all-girl, Catholic residence. Because I was from a different province, we visited the residence earlier than the other students and we were able to tour the building. During the tour, I felt like I was walking through a museum. Eyes wide, I was wondering if I

was moving into a convent. I will never forget entering the formal dining room complete with a 'courting' chair. I had never seen anything quite like it. The wooden chair, covered in soft, pink velvet, had two opposite ends but had one arm that stretched across the two sides. It reminded me of a playground teeter-totter. I imagined a girl, about my age, sitting on one end and her guest, on the other chair. They would just be staring into each other's eyes and holding hands, too nervous to speak because a nun would be supervising their visit and potentially glaring at them from across the room.

The tour continued to the dormitory area. On one end of my dormitory floor was a locked double door. I was told that this was where the sisters' quarters were, and I was not authorized to go through those doors. I instantly pictured women in black and white habits behind the thick doors kneeling and praying with their rosaries. As we weaved in and out of the different rooms, we entered one space that far exceeded the rest.

"This used to be a library, but the space was converted into a dorm room," the residence manager said.

I could tell my mom was impressed. The large, oriel window faced out and gave an extended view of the beautiful, main campus. It felt so regal.

My mother quickly chimed in, "has this room been assigned to anyone, yet?"

"We usually save the larger rooms on this level for our international students. They must spend much more time here because they can't go home for holidays."

I could tell my mother was thinking, "w*hy would you show us this room if it wasn't an option?"*

"Well, she's coming from BC. She won't be returning home for many holidays," my mom chimed in.

My mother possessed magical determination through willful thinking. She usually got what she wanted, and I knew that she wanted this room for me. I didn't know it then, but I was standing in what could be considered the most beautiful dorm room on the entire Western campus. Without much protest, the residence manager was reassigning the spacious room with the magnificent bay window to me. The window was high enough on the building for me to obtain an extended view of the beautiful campus scattered with red, brick buildings. Conversely, the window was also high enough for no one to be able to see me through the glass.

***

As I consider this story later in life, I find meaning in the relationship between parent, student, and school but I also find importance in the metaphor of windows. Interestingly, windows allow people to see out but don't always let others see in. They can create opportunities for reflection and when they are stained, a window's property changes. The colour can alter the view to the outside world. As my inquiry, examines the experience of being a parent alongside my young daughter in her learning journey, windows have provided me a metaphor to help me consider an overarching question, *standing on the outside looking in, how might I be provided a clear view?*

1.2. Focus of the Inquiry

Through this autoethnographic inquiry, I have grown into a researcher who navigates my feelings surrounding the experience of my daughter entering kindergarten and attending public school. My projection of what it might be like to be an involved parent and meaningful collaborator in my daughter's learning experiences did not materialize into my reality. This inquiry details my experience as a parent and educator who was initially excited to be a meaningful part of my daughter's learning journey and felt twinges of disappointment because there were few opportunities presented for meaningful engagement. I was hoping to be able to relate and connect with her more through learning experiences provided by 'windows' into her classroom. Moreover, I wanted to understand her journey so that I could assist her in building a strong foundation in academics and social emotional learning.

I wholeheartedly believe that my daughter has had many kind and wonderful teachers over these past few years; however, I felt there were opportunities lacking for meaningful engagement in her learning. I had hoped that my daughter and I would be offered more opportunities to learn together and that would help us develop a stronger connection. Furthermore, I was excited to develop relationships with my daughter's teachers as we worked together to navigate my daughter's learning strengths and challenges. Although I am an educator and I understand the ongoing demands that occur in a typical classroom, I still desired a clearer understanding of what my daughter's school day looked like. With more transparency of her classroom and a fuller understanding, I felt like I could better support her in the challenges she might be facing and champion for her success. As a teacher, I thought that I should naturally have a

better grasp of the inner workings of my child's classroom. I also wondered if I was offering opportunities for meaningful engagement in my classroom, in the way that I desired it. Therefore, the focus of this inquiry is twofold. Concurrently, I will examine parental inclusion through my experiences as a parent and reflect on my experiences as a teacher engaging with my students' parents.

1.3.   Clarifying the terminology used in this inquiry

There is a wide range of terminology presented in the research that relates to parents and their contribution to their child's education. The terms parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent inclusion can be commonly read about in the literature and can often refer to different aspects of the parent-child-school relationship. When examining the research, the inconsistent terminology can create confusion (Sinay et al., 2009). The terms can refer to similar aspects or different concepts under the umbrella of 'parent participation'. For this inquiry, it is important to distinguish between involvement, engagement, and inclusion.

To provide some clarification early in this inquiry, I will not be using the terms interchangeably. I use the term *parent involvement* to refer to the various ways parents interact with the school and classroom. Parent involvement has the objective of getting parents involved with school life that are already determined by the school (Lynch, 2022). Some instances of parent involvement are attending parent-teacher conferences, filling out school forms, or volunteering for the class fieldtrip. In short, a parent can be involved with the school without being engaged in their child's learning process. To illustrate this further, I was a member of Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) at my

daughter's school last year. I attended two meetings a month, ran two fundraisers that year, and helped implement special events. Although this type of volunteerism is important, it can be considered parent involvement, not parental engagement, because I was not directly engaged in my daughter's learning.

As I was keenly interested in my daughter's academic and social emotional progress, a focus throughout the inquiry is *parent engagement*. In this inquiry, parent engagement refers to parents interacting with their child's learning (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014) Furthermore, I believe that engaged parents are often extremely helpful to a child's academic progress, especially in the early years. Harris and Goodall (2008) suggest that parents are essential to learning and an extension of the pedagogic process. Examples of parent engagement includes a parent collaborating with a teacher about a learning plan or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for their child, assisting a child with homework, understanding their child's learning profile (i.e., understanding their strengths and challenges as a learner), looking at pictures of their child's work on a digital portfolio. To exemplify this, I invite parents to answer questions relating to their children before creating or updating students' IEPs. Including both the student and parent voice in this document, helps it become more authentic to the goals of the teachers, family, and student.

Lastly, this inquiry also highlights the notion of *parent inclusion.* This refers to how the school or teacher mindfully welcomes and facilitates opportunities for parent involvement or engagement. Parent inclusion is part of the teacher, school, or district's planning process and seeks to consider how parents can be a meaningful part of the

learning experiences of their children. In the classroom, when parents, teachers, and students dialogue about a child's report card, term goals, or IEP, and all three commits to working together to benefit the child, it is inclusive. It is not solely the teacher deciding what is best for the child. The child receives support from their team of advocates. More importantly, parent inclusion contributes to more equitable practice in public education. Aguayo (2022) suggests that parent inclusion incorporates policy as the practice of power. This includes reimagining/restructuring the institution of public education, co-constructing policies by prioritizing the voices of marginalized families, and ensuing "actions to disrupt settler colonial power" (Aguayo, 2022, p.2). This would involve a heightened awareness of the challenges Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) and other marginalized children experience in the public school system. By incorporating the voices of diverse groups of parents there can be initiatives to make significant changes to the school or district policies, especially around inclusion.

1.4.   Outline of chapter one

This introductory chapter explores my rationale for writing a dissertation based on my experiences as an educator and a parent of a young child in school. The chapter opened with a reflective vignette and a brief discussion about the dual perspectives I shift between throughout this autoethnographic inquiry. Throughout this dissertation, I navigate between my roles as an educator and a parent. I further explore my identity by recognizing my heritage and the privileges I experienced as a child, and currently experience as a parent. I then situate myself as a researcher and how I consider my perspectives as a parent and educator throughout this inquiry. I continue by situating parent inclusion within its current scholarly and cultural contexts. I provide the timeline

and context in which the autoethnography took place. Subsequently, I clarify the research problem and research questions. I briefly explain the process of the inquiry, which exists in chapter four. This is when I share my story, through autoethnographic vignettes and poetry, and travel along my personal timeline. Lastly, I consider the significance of the study, preview each of the subsequent chapters, and end the introduction with my overarching goal for the inquiry.

1.5.   Exploring my identity

1.5.1. My personal history

I was born and raised in a large suburb near Vancouver, Canada. Although I was a young child during the recession of the 1980's, when interest rates hovered around 18%, my parents were somehow able to build a nice home in a wonderful community. I viewed my family as one with mixed heritage due to my European and South Asian backgrounds; however, I always felt a sense of belonging in my predominately white neighbourhood.

My mother was from European decent. Her father was German, and her mother was Russian. My grandparents moved to Alberta, Canada and raised six children in a farming community near Edmonton. My mother recalls her feelings of isolation, especially after her father passed away when she was only eight. They did not have a car, because my grandmother could not drive. So, they counted on neighbours to take them to the few places they went, like church on Sunday mornings. After attending university in the United States, my mother followed her sisters and moved to BC as a young woman.

My father grew up in Sri Lanka and immigrated to Canada as a young adult. He and his brother attended English boarding schools away from his parents. They had homes in Columbo, and a guest house in the coastal town of Galle. My uncle still runs the family's beautiful guest house as a hotel now. Although my father came, from what would probably be considered a wealthier upbringing in Sri Lanka, he built his career from the ground up, when he came to Canada. He started working as an orderly in a hospital but later attended technical school to become an electrical technologist. His career at the electricity company, spanned most of his life until he retired shortly after his granddaughter, my daughter, was born in 2013. I would imagine that my father must have faced some challenges or discrimination being an immigrant and a person of colour. However, I also gather the sense that my father was colonized enough from growing up in another colonized nation, and attending English boarding schools, that he was effectively able to assimilate into a Eurocentric country like Canada. He made friends by getting involved with committees, churches, clubs, and through his gainful employment. One of his brothers, who became a doctor, and his sister, who works for a university, had similar experiences emigrating from Sri Lanka to Australia. My father says he feels more like a Canadian today, than a Ceylonese person from Sri Lanka. I am not entirely sure what he means by that, but I believe he watches more ice hockey than cricket these days.

Despite a few significant personal challenges, such as, my parents' turbulent marriage, and eventual separation when I was eleven years old, I can easily look back on my childhood and realize how fortunate I was. I had a wonderful childhood and felt a strong sense of belonging in my community. In the cul-de-sac, where I grew up, there were several kids my age and we played outside from dawn until dusk. Our

neighbourhood crew had a leader who was a couple of years older than me. He was the mastermind behind many of our adventures. He brought all of us neighbourhood kids together to play tag games, street hockey, and we even built a triple-level tree fort in the forest which was dangerous but also extremely fun. Our leader was the editor-in-chief of the Cul-de-sac newspaper and we all submitted news and comic contributions to him. He also organized the events and schedule for the annual Cul-de-sac Olympics. Sometimes, he would even ride on his BMX, blaring Michael Jackson from his stereo, and attempt to sell ketchup flavoured chips for a quarter. It was great fun growing up in the 80's and 90's. Now that all of us neighbourhood kids are adults, we lead different lives working in the film industry, education, medicine, or have careers with big corporations. Like friends who naturally grew apart over time, we keep in touch through pictures and brief messages on social media.

In terms of my schooling, I was also fortunate. I have the awareness now to recognize how privileged I am that the educational system worked on my behalf and that I grew up in a very stable environment. I attended one elementary school, with many of my neighbours and friends, followed by a junior and then senior high school. This provided me with a strong sense of community. Even though I was not the best student, I was also not the worst, and I believe that my teachers seemed to notice my work ethic and some potential in me. I found this to be extremely motivating, so I felt a responsibility to do well. I was a competitive figure skater and a member of the high school cheerleading team. While some of my peers were busy dating, dancing at all-night raves, or experimenting with street drugs, my extra-curricular activities kept me focused on athletics and out of trouble. With the encouragement and support I received

from my family, teachers, and coaches, I put forth a strong effort in both curricular and extra-curricular activities. After high school, I was selected to tryout for the Western University Cheerleading team in London, Ontario. This opportunity came with built-in support from my teammates, who also became my friends. Plus, living in a dormitory for my first year of university, helped me to build a bigger network of friends from different parts of the world. As I worked towards my first degree in Sociology, I found that school was still working for me, plus I continued to feel that sense of belonging.

After I returned home to BC, learning became one of my passions and I decided to pursue a career as a teacher. In the years following my teaching certification, I earned a post-baccalaureate followed by a master's degree in Early Childhood Education. This has all led to building a challenging, yet rewarding, career in education for almost twenty years. I have enjoyed the variety of teaching children and youth, being mentored and mentoring colleagues, and building connections with the families of students that I teach.

1.5.2. Situating myself as a researcher

My personal journey has led me to seek clarification on how my positionality has impacted my life and has helped me understand my biases, especially in my roles in education as a teacher and scholar. I consider what it means to live with privilege and be in the fortunate circumstance to have continued support from my family, community, workplace, and society at large. Although I have benefited from the systems that supported me, I recognize that others may not share my experiences. I am aware that although school played primarily a positive role in my life, others may see it from a very different perspective. I have come to learn how traumatic school has been, and continues

to be, for marginalized groups of people. I recognize the necessity of continually monitoring my own preconceptions, to bring forth ideas for further change that challenge the current paradigms in schools.

As a researcher, I realize that my work has limitations based on my positionality. I have chosen autoethnography so that I can position myself as the main subject of research. However, as many of my stories are relational, they include other people and I endeavour to consider their perspective as I reflect and write this inquiry. I recognize that I carry many privileges into the research experience, especially in my role as a parent. When I do get the brief opportunities to peer through the 'window' of my daughter's classrooms, I can quickly notice and understand what I am seeing and not seeing. I am conscious of the fact that as an experienced educator and doctoral student, I might hold a deeper understanding and ability to navigate the school system better than the average parent. I further recognize that my history with education might serve to privilege my daughter throughout her educational pathway.

As a parent who is highly involved in my daughter's education, I understand that for some, participation is not a choice or option. Barriers and inequities exist for many people. Developing family-school relationships can help to build equitable practices in education, especially with marginalized groups. Schools must begin to build stronger relationships with BIPOC, low-resourced, or other marginalized families because they are often expected to function with middle class norms which continues to widen the discrepancy and further disadvantages some families (Aguayo, 2022; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru, 2019; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Even with the privilege that I hold, I still feel like I am kept at an arm's length from my daughter's education.

Therefore, I can only empathize with how other parents may feel, especially BIPOC, people with low resources, special needs, and other marginalized parent groups who might feel unwelcome or unable to access the necessary resources for their children. I believe that efforts should be made so that all parents feel welcome in their child's learning journey. Although my inquiry is specific to my own context, I hope I can also shed some light on the challenges due to inequitable practices that many parents have faced when interacting with schools. My underlying aim is to seek out improved ways of including parents so that more children can benefit from the support of their family, regardless of their circumstance or background.

1.6. Two sides of stained-glass windows

To illustrate the use of different perspectives I view as a parent and educator, I relate to a metaphor of multicoloured, stained-glass windows. These stained-glass windows first appeared in the classroom when I taught kindergarten in 2010. The windows were small and although they were not completely opaque, they made it difficult to see images clearly. Often, I would see parents wanting to get a glimpse of the classroom or more specifically, wanting to see their child in the classroom, but their view was obscured. Despite their best efforts, they could not see in completely. From my perspective, as the kindergarten teacher, I wondered why they wanted to see in at all. At that time, I felt a parent's presence was intrusive and I thought they should just leave their children with me to let me teach them.

Upon deep reflection and growth, my feelings have changed. Now that I am a parent of a young child in school, I am seeking a clearer image and I can relate to parents

who desire a robust understanding of the learning that takes place inside the classroom. As an experienced educator, I must remind myself to keep my emotions and any judgments in check. I want to be perceived by my daughter's teacher as supportive and kind. One of my main intentions would be to build a relationship with her teachers so they can feel like they can interact with me about my daughter's learning and know that I will support my daughter in any way that I can.

Throughout this inquiry, one perspective I hold is from the point of view of the parent who feels underutilized and missing the connection that can be created from being on the educational journey alongside their child. As the situation has reversed, I am now the parent trying to catch glimpses of my daughter through these metaphorical stained-glass windows. I want to see in, and I desire opportunities to be more involved. It may seem surprising, to even my daughter's teachers, that I do not have a clear view or complete understanding about what is happening for my daughter in school, despite the fact I am an educator myself. This perspective is one that I continue to examine throughout my research.

In addition to the parent's perspective, I also share the vantage point and experiences of an educator who is standing on the other side of the stained-glass window. Educators are pivotal in providing opportunities for parents to gain access to their child's learning but can also be the ones to create barriers for parents to feel welcome or get more involved. This dissertation examines the opportunities for educators to invite and include parents into the learning journey of their children, so they become a more meaningful part of their educational experiences.

1.7. Public school for my daughter

I have attempted to create a similar upbringing for my daughter that I experienced and appreciated as a child. Although she attends school in a different district than I did growing up, I feel like her elementary school, neighbourhood, and friendship circle are similar to the positive ones that I experienced as a child. Many of the neighbourhood children meet at the bus stop in the mornings and take the yellow school bus to and from school. Sometimes, the children play together when they get home and invite each other to their birthday parties. My daughter has been at the same school since kindergarten. Luckily, she has made many close friends and I believe having these connections are the highlight of her school experience. The plan is for her to continue to attend the same elementary school until grade seven and then move to the local high school, when she enters grade eight.

Although I work full-time, I have tried to get to know some of the other mothers through my daughter's friends at school. Building a relationship with the 'other mothers' is helpful to schedule activities like playdates. Also, the other mothers can be a great resource and I prefer to ask them questions about the day-to-day things that are happening at the school. This way, I do not have to 'bother' the teacher with random emails and I can primarily keep my communications with the teacher focused on my daughter's learning. I generally have had, and continue to have, pleasant interactions with my daughter's teachers. Occasionally we communicate by email or the class digital portfolio platform (i.e., Class Dojo). I receive occasional updates about the special activities at school, which are sent by the principal. I also stay involved and give back to the school community through volunteering and supporting the PAC's initiatives.

When my daughter was in kindergarten, I was on a part-time educational leave from work. My daughter's teacher allowed me into her classroom to volunteer from time to time. Upon reflection, this was the only time I felt like I had a clear picture of the inner workings of the classroom because I saw the learning activities that were happening in the classroom first hand. Despite my past involvement, I became more curious. I desired more transparency because I clearly wanted to know what my daughter was learning about at school and how she was managing with the curriculum. I felt that understanding what was happening in the classroom would help me be a highly engaged parent and I could be more supportive of her learning. I began to wonder how this type of engagement could be offered by educators and achieved by parents.

1.8. Background of the study

This inquiry is informed by the extensive research of Joyce Epstein (1995, 2001, 2018) and builds on the notion that parental involvement has positive effects on student learning. In her research, Epstein has defined and expanded upon the notion of parental involvement to include building a partnership between home, school, and community to increase student success.

Parent inclusion is conceptually not a new idea (Brooks, 1918); however, the approaches to parent involvement and communication between home and school has changed drastically over my seventeen-year career as an educator. Over my career, I have noticed that the use of technology has greatly transformed education and increased the methods educators use to involve parents more readily in student learning and classroom activities. Communication with parents includes more traditional methods

such as face-to-face meetings, photocopied newsletters, and report cards. More recently technology has added other ways to communicate including teacher websites, group emails, and digital student portfolios.

Should an educator decide to use digital mediums, smart phone applications are more readily available. This can aid communication with parents by way of sending photo documentation of children's learning, and potentially engage in three-way conversation between parents, teachers, and students regarding learning activities. As a working parent, who cannot be physically present before and after the school day, I can be notified and quickly check my child's digital portfolio, for example. This might let a parent, like me, more opportunity to understand their child's day and connect more deeply with their children regarding their learning experiences.

Even more recently, when the Covid-19 pandemic ensued, communication with parents became even more technologically based. Meetings that were typically face-to-face were now remote parent-teacher meetings or three-way conferences. In my own experience, during the phase of home-based instruction due to the pandemic, I was asked to download lesson materials, set up remote workstations for my daughter, create accounts for online access to learning websites, and view or manage lessons for my daughter. Although there were some challenges, I became more responsible for my daughter's learning experiences. This led me to gain more access into classroom activities and develop more insights into my daughter's capacities as a learner. Through home-based learning, I found that I was provided more opportunities for meaningful communication with the teacher. Eventually, school returned to in-person learning but as a parent, I continued to await the same opportunities to be included consistently in my

child's learning journey. I again felt the walls were up and the window that was wide open for a short time was now shaded from full view.

1.9.   The significance of the inquiry

As a parent of a young child in school, and as a teacher, I was surprised to learn that I do not seem to really grasp the inner workings of my daughter's educational experiences. I often find myself chatting with my daughter's friends' parents who are not in education. They occasional come to me seeking answers. For example, I might be shown a comment on a report card that they would like clarification on or be asked to provide suggestions to help develop a skill their child is not yet proficient in. Some find it challenging to ask the 'right' questions to the teacher and they come to me to see if they should really be concerned. It seems that without fully understanding what is happening, parents naturally create their own baselines and compare their children with their own past school experience or to other children. This is a cause for concern for me because I want to be a relevant and helpful part of my daughter's learning. If I am not provided opportunities to know what my daughter is learning about and really understand her specific strengths and challenges, I have difficulty fully supporting my daughter in meaningful ways. I do not think I am alone in my desire to have a better understanding of my child's school experiences. The early years are important for building a strong foundation of literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills and I believe that many parents would like to be meaningfully involved in this process of development. Through this inquiry, I question if parents are being included as much as they could be, as recommended by educational researchers (e.g., Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Deslandes, 2015; Pushor, 2018). Although this inquiry focuses on my experiences within

my classrooms and my daughter's early learning journey, I ultimately advocate for more opportunities for the inclusion of all parents through this research. I believe that all parents can support the foundational learning in the early years of schooling and beyond.

1.10. Framing the problem

At the onset of my research, I had a feeling that being an educator and sending my daughter to school would be enlightening for my teaching practice. Using autoethnography as a methodology, I wanted to document and be attuned to the emotions associated with my experience as a parent with a young child in school. I also could not help but consider my experiences though the lens of an educator. I left space for the emergence of my questions. However, it was not long after my daughter began kindergarten that I started experiencing disquieting feelings and wonderings. I started to notice how, why, and when parents were included in the learning conversations around their children. Although there was regular communication about the happenings of the classroom and school through group messages, there was little transparency as to what my daughter was learning, what she could achieve academically, and how I could better support my daughter to further her learning as she faced some challenges. On my end, communication from teachers felt rather generic. For example, it was often suggested to read with my child every night. There is not anything inherently wrong with being told to read with my child, but I already did that. I also know that there are other ways to support children and extend the learning from school to home. I was looking for more insights into my daughter's strengths and her specific areas of improvement as a learner. Overall, I felt some disconnection from my daughter when she went into kindergarten

and this feeling grew through the subsequent years. From my perspective as a parent, I desired more personalization and guidance throughout the year.

When I looked at the situation from my perspective as an educator, I realized how challenging and time consuming my expectations of consistent, personalized communication were given the limitations that most educators face. As an educator myself, it seems that there is never enough time to completely individualize learning and communicate precise information to parents about every child in the class. However, I remembered that as a parent, I was still looking to be included. I took notice of what other educators were doing to support a home-school connection. I also tried to take advantage of the technology the district offered to support this aim. I worked towards developing my relational practice to support parental inclusion and I attempted to offer, through invitations (not expectations) more opportunities for parents to build the home-school connection in my own classroom. The aim was creating opportunities for parents to find meaningful ways to support their children in the topics and skills they were learning about in the classroom. I did not want parents or children to feel bombarded with information, extra homework, or daily emails. My intention was for children to feel wrapped in support from both home and school, so they felt empowered to reach their full potential.

1.10.1. Exploring my perspective as a parent

When a child enters public school for the first time in kindergarten, there is the hope among parents that public schools provide a positive start and sound educational experience (Gerlach et al., 2017). As an educator who recently transitioned into the new

role of parenting a young child at public school, I wondered about the ways I would be invited to be a resource in my child's learning. Putting my background as an educator aside, I noticed my feelings as a mother who simply wants what is best for her daughter at school. I believe that many parents want to be engaged in their child's education. I do feel torn between these two extremes of completely letting go (i.e., stepping back and letting the professionals do their job) and wanting to take a highly active role in my child's learning. If I chose to, I could sit back and let my daughter weave her way through the education system and hope that she builds the foundational skills and competencies necessary to find fulfillment later in life. The problem is that I do not fully trust that the public school system will be able to assist my daughter in fully reaching her academic potential.

Like many students, I know that my daughter needs some accommodations to fully reach her academic goals, but she will likely not qualify for much direct support. Before my daughter entered school, I always felt like she was developing in a typical manner and reaching most of her developmental stages or milestones as expected. She never looked, behaved, or seemed different, in comparison to my friends' children, or the children at her daycare. I recall looking at charts on the internet to ensure that her growth and weight were 'normal' along with measuring other typical developmental milestones (e.g., gross motor skills, language acquisition etc.). As time progressed, it became more apparent to her teachers that there were a few areas of her learning where she was developing her skills and not considered proficient. I felt like she could use more support in the classroom, but I did not know what supports were available for her. Knowing first hand the challenges that many educators face in the classroom, I believe my expectations

of what resources could or should be available for my daughter, might have been unrealistic.

As an educator for almost twenty years, I still have many challenges meeting the needs of all my learners. When I taught middle school for example, I was consistently scheduled an educational assistant for only the last fifteen minutes of the school day to help my four students with ministry identified learning differences. I recall in my first teaching contract at a middle school in 2006, there was one resource teacher who supported four classrooms. Nowadays, there is often only one resource teacher to support eight classrooms. Something that can be additionally problematic, due to a current concern around teacher shortages in BC, is that often resource teachers are redeployed to cover classroom teachers who are absent. When that situation arises, often the additional supports for students are cancelled. The Ministry of Education and Childcare (2021) reports that class sizes have decreased 10.8% for students in the intermediate levels from 2015 to 2021; however, in my experience the supports for teachers and students with special needs have also decreased. The reduction in support for students does not align with the statistics in the 'Education by the numbers' report from 2021. The data shows that there was an increase of 1,073 students with special needs in the province from 2019/2020 to 2020/2021. To give further context, out of the 563,514 full-time students enrolled at one of 1,571 public schools in BC during the 2020-2021 school year, 78,305 students were designated with a special need. Therefore, if all schools in BC were equally populated, that would average to about 49 students with special needs per school. This data suggests that is inequitable and there should be more allocation of support teachers in schools. It is also challenging for teachers because they

are asked to compensate for the lack of service provided to students with special needs. There is a further need to address this issue so children, families, and educators will not continually feel the impacts of fiscal cuts among social challenges.

At the end of the school day, it is no wonder that I often feel mentally exhausted. My students have a wide spectrum of abilities and there is unfortunately not as much additional support to meet these diverse needs beyond what I can offer as the classroom teacher. Many of the accommodations that students receive must be planned and implemented by me. This is yet another reason why I believe that parents should be given more access into the learning activities in the classroom so they can provide additional supports from home (e.g., through practicing skills). I am learning, from what the research suggests, that my presence in her education and being a partner in her learning is important for her success (Epstein, 2011; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Deslandes, 2015; Jordan, 1994; Pushor, 2012). Through the process of inquiry, I am developing a deeper understanding around the home-school connection and what it means to be an engaged parent who supports learning.

1.11. Organization of the inquiry

Chapter one is foundational and serves to clarify the topic and context of the inquiry. I introduce the topic of this dissertation by briefly introducing my methodology where I am influenced by the work of autoethnographers Ellis (2004), Muncey (2011) and Chang (2008). I frame the main question and intent for my inquiry as one where I deepen my understanding of parent inclusion. These ideas are based on my experiences of how I felt when I was included, or subsequently the times I did not feel included as a

parent with a daughter in public school. I also consider my personal timeline and reflect on my own childhood for ways in which parent inclusion in schools may have grown or changed over the years. I explore how my own personal history has baring on this topic of inquiry. As well, I consider my role as a former early childhood educator and the times that I included or hindered parents from obtaining a clearer view of their child's learning journey.

The next chapters provide more background and insights into the importance of this topic. Chapter two reviews the literature and builds on the extensive research on parental involvement conducted by Joyce Epstein (1995, 2001, 2018). I explore current scholarly conversations about the importance of parent inclusion. Using a continuum that shifts from parental involvement to engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), I consider ways parents can be involved in their child's learning in different ways. These studies are imperative to deepen the understanding around specific ways parents can be involved and parents can further support their child's learning journey.

Chapter three outlines my chosen methodological approach, autoethnography. I explain how autoethnographical research adds depth to my thinking through layers of narrative inquiry which include reflections, poetry, metaphors, and personal analysis. Chapter three also investigates questions around why, what, and how. Why is parental engagement important for educators, parents, and children? What might be some important considerations for educators to become more inclusive of parents? How might parents, educators, and children benefit from meaningful parental engagement? Despite the powerful nature of autoethnography as a methodology, there are some 'pitfalls' that might occur as one takes on autoethnographical research (Chang, 2008, p. 57); therefore,

these challenges must be considered. Chapter three concludes by considering some challenges inherently faced by using an autoethnographic methodology.

In chapter four I explore my experiences as a child, student, educator, and parent/educator. Through autoethnography, I share vignettes and extend the theme of each vignette with a parallel poem to generate a more evocative experience for myself. My poetry and vignettes follow my personal timeline and are the techniques I used to evoke my own emotional responses which helped facilitate a deeper understanding of my topic. Throughout the inquiry, I navigate between these positions and perspectives. I especially consider the contrast between being a parent and being an educator.

In addition to considering this topic from the perspective of a parent and as an educator, I use metaphor in two ways to deepen understanding. First, I explain that the journey parents take with their children can be likened to writing a book. It might be considered that children begin to write their own life story when they enter school. However, I believe that parents can be important characters within the pages. Secondly, I use colour as a metaphor. By using different colours for the titles of the reflections and the poems I symbolize the stained-glass windows that were in my first kindergarten class that I taught in years ago. I remember that in this class, the parents would peer in the small, square windows to view their children; although, their view was obstructed by the coloured glass. Chapter four ends with the consideration of building relationships between educators and parents. The theme of creating meaningful relationships to benefit students funnels through the inquiry as a central concept.

The aim of chapter five is to explore the significance of the inquiry through analysis, and deeply consider my vignettes, poetry, and metaphors that are presented in the preceding chapter. I take some guidance from Chang's (2005) suggested strategies for analysis and interpretation, and moving across my personal timeline, I revisit the narratives and poetry. I use a layered approach by examining my understandings from the inside out – shifting from the personal to the transformational. I consider the value of autoethnography to be one that analyzes one's findings to seek further social significance. I hope to challenge 'what is' and consider the opportunities of 'what could be' for the families with students in school. Based on the research presented throughout this inquiry, I identify places where there might be room for some possible shifts in understanding parental involvement, engagement, and inclusion.

Chapter six concludes this inquiry by reviewing the work in its entirety. I open the chapter by considering the feeling of future gazing into the horizon from behind a big window. I revisit the literature that helped frame my understandings. I also acknowledge the limitations of this inquiry, suggest options for further study, and offer new questions that have emerged. This inquiry has prompted a deeper awareness as a parent with a child in school and has provoked many changes for my work as an educator; therefore, I make note of these findings in this chapter. Before the sun figuratively sets on the horizon of my inquiry, where I share some final thoughts, I reveal the significance of this project.

Chapter 2.   Opening curtained windows

Window coverings are often used to block out the light or prevent others from looking through the glass and viewing the events on the other side. Many window coverings are kept closed and do not permit anyone to see through. Through inquiry and research, scholars help part the window curtains to create openings for others to take a glimpse into the worlds and experiences of others. Offering these opportunities gives us a chance to make sense of our world or think about things in a new light. The following chapter reviews the literature of scholars, who have parted the curtains on parent involvement, engagement, and inclusion. This research supports me to better understand this topic and make sense of my own thinking and emotions around parental inclusion.

2.1.   Introduction and outline of chapter two

This chapter reviews key research that informs my exploration of parental involvement, engagement, and inclusion in schooling. The research I highlight within this chapter has resonated with me and has influenced my theoretical understandings around home-school connections, teacher-parent partnerships, and the processes that incorporate parental inclusion. To begin, I will include an overview of research on the topic of parental involvement including Epstein's (2001) influential framework. In response to Epstein's framework, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) created a continuum that explores parental involvement and parental engagement which will be further explored. Expanding on Epstein's (2001) studies, Canadian researcher, Deslandes (2015) explores the process of parental involvement suggesting that there are existing tensions in the parent-teacher relationship. Canadian researchers, Pushor and Amendt (2018) offer

critical elements that are deemed essential when working with parents. This chapter will also explore opportunities for parents to be involved in education, the rights parents have, and how they can exercise those rights. This inquiry took place in part during the Covid-19 pandemic and consequently moved education to a new frontier of remote learning. Therefore, this chapter will also include contemporary research that highlights parental involvement during the pandemic, especially noting how educators responded to their students' parents during this unique time.

2.2.   The leading frameworks on parental involvement

Joyce Epstein (1995, 2001, 2018, 2020) continues to be an influential and leading researcher in parental involvement as well as school, family, and community partnerships. Her research includes many studies involving school and family connections and is extensively cited and reviewed by other researchers interested in the subject of parental involvement (Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002). Furthermore, her research demonstrates a positive correlation between building strong relationships between families and schools, and improved student achievement. The model she presents in her research focuses primarily on school-initiated parental involvement. Additionally, Epstein produced a practical handbook for educators and parents to encourage this type of involvement (Epstein et al., 2018).

Epstein's (2001) framework is helpful to understand the varying ways that parents can be involved in their child's education and learning. She identifies different ways parents are involved or engaged (Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000). Foundational to obtaining a better understanding of ways parents can be included , Epstein (2001)

identifies six different types of parental involvement: *Parenting* is the first component, and it includes encouraging a supportive home environment for learning and disseminating information to all families (versus the few families that can attend meetings or actively communicate with the teacher). *Communicating* provides opportunities for two-way communication. This includes day-to-day school information as well as class information. An example of this type of communicating could be the school/class website. *Volunteering* are ways that parents can be recruited to support in the school. An example of this could be the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) fundraisers to raise money for school initiatives. *Learning at home* presents information, ideas, and tools for parents to help their children in school-related activities. For example, as a parent, I might receive homework activities to support building phonetic awareness for my daughter. As an educator, I might ask parents to help their children work towards goals outlined in feedback or reports that are sent home with their children. Next, *Decision making* gives parents opportunities to understand choices and involve families in the school programming. One notable example of this could be a PAC meeting where the administration and parents meet to support each other in implementing ideas or initiatives. The final tier in Epstein's framework is *Collaborating with community* which brings community services to schools. Parents can benefit from these services as they provide activities or childcare for their children. They are located within the schools and are often affordable. Sometimes, the costs of these programs may be subsidized. An instance of collaboration with the community could be an 'Active Kids Club' or 'Before/Beyond the Bell' activity group that may run by an outside organization, such as

the municipal parks and recreation department or the local soccer association but is hosted at the school.

This framework for understanding parental involvement and the techniques offered by Epstein (1996) is widely accepted and utilized by educational researchers and school districts. Furthermore, this framework helps educators meaningfully build connections with parents and engage with families using different structures and methods. Other researchers have contributed to an extended understanding of parental involvement and engagement. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) present a model for the "progression from parental involvement with schools to parental engagement with children's learning" (p. 399). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) explain that parental engagement entails a bigger commitment to a child's learning and is separate from school involvement. The primary goal of increasing parental engagement is a "distribution of agency so that parents and schools can work together with young people to support the best possible outcomes" (p. 402). The concept of parental engagement in Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) continuum provides an extension to Epstein's model because there is an understanding that, "there is some feeling of ownership… This means that parental engagement will involve a greater commitment, a greater ownership of action, than will parental involvement with schools" (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 402). While Epstein's (2001) model is based on ways that the school can engage the parent, Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) three-point continuum suggests a shift in relational agency. Instead of developing the relationship between parent and school, the shift happens when the focus for the parents is on their child's learning. This is further explained through exploring the three points of the continuum.

First point: Parental involvement with the school

This initial stage of the continuum is a starting point for schools and families. Within *First Point,* the school has control of the parental involvement and directs information to the parents. If a parent is involved in an activity, it is primarily coordinated by the school. An example of this could be a parent-teacher night where parents meet their child's teachers. With events like these, parents receive a lot of information about the school or classroom but there is little time or opportunity for discussion. Parents also do not receive much insight into their children as learners.

Second point: Parental involvement with schooling

Next in the continuum is the *second point: parental involvement with schooling.* Goodall and Montgomery (2014), acknowledge a shift in relationships at this point of the continuum. An example of this is when parents assist their children in the homework sent from the school. "Here, the nature of parental engagement with children's learning is becoming apparent as the interchange is between the parent and the child" (p. 405). Through more intentional dialogue, parents are invited to be more involved in their child's learning. Activities that promote parental involvement are meetings where a child's learning and problem solving is authentically discussed by teachers and parents or when parents help their child with the homework assigned by the school.

Third point: Parental engagement with children's learning

The final point in the continuum includes more agency for parents. Although parental engagement could be connected to helping a child with homework, it is more involved than that. Third point occurs when parents believe that they have a role to play

in their child's education. Moreover, engagement occurs after parents become more involved. "Parents at this point are engaged with the learning of their children not due to dictates from the school but because of their own perceptions of their role as parents" (p. 405). Parental engagement can lead to many positive outcomes for children namely, raised achievement, self-esteem, motivation, engagement, and aspirations (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Harris & Goodall, 2008). In short, parental engagement, in the third section of the continuum, represents the attitude and beliefs held by the family towards learning which can occur in and out of the walls of the classroom. These attitudes and beliefs can be represented in the process parents have engaging in school to promote success.

2.2.2. Developing the foundation for parental engagement

Home-school partnerships

Canadian researcher, Rollande Deslandes, explores different facets of parental involvement and engagement. Deslandes (2001) posits that children's learning and success can be influenced by their family. Furthermore, partnerships between home and school can more readily develop when collaboration is incited by the school. Deslandes (2001) views the home-school partnership as a goal and "a path for the future that requires a complete change in our ways of thinking and acting" (p. 21). Deslandes and Barma (2016), were interested in the behaviours and processes associated with parental engagement. Their research recognizes, that even with some supports or resources in place, there are tensions and ambiguity in the responsibility of a child's success. Their recommendation is to bring all parties (i.e., teacher, student, and family) together which helps "to give adolescents a better voice and act as mediators" (Deslandes & Barma,

2016, p. 23). The intention behind collaborative meetings, is there can be more ownership of the students' success by all parties. For a meaningful collaboration to occur between the parties, Deslande and Barma (2016) suggest building a trustworthy, caring relationship. This is foundational and can be built through repeated school-home interactions that are not always negative or framed around a child's perceived weaknesses. Teachers can develop this type of relationship through their home communication and encourage parents to be partners in their child's education. They posit that students of all ages can continually benefit from parental support and involvement. Deslande and Bertrand (2005) theorize that parent involvement increases when students initiated this type of exchange. Therefore, teachers can include parents by encouraging this type of family partnership directly with their students. This can further help to build normalcy around students asking for family support. As family support provides benefits for children of all ages, it is arguably a highly important consideration for teachers and schools.

Looking at parental engagement through an educator's lens, Ridnouer's (2011) book entitled, "Everyday Engagement" explores ideas around creating opportunities for meaningful engagement with students and parents. She suggests including parents in the educational process in the same way she engages her students. She further considers that parents, like students, need to feel "seen and known" (p.4). She posits five essential elements to engaging parents. These include laying the ground work for parental inclusion by finding ways every person can contribute, welcoming parents and student participation, cultivating interpersonal responses by providing support and encouragement to parents, dealing effectively with engagement challenges that are

related to connecting, and extending the learning community with outside resources

(Ridnouer, 2011, pp. 4-5).   The goal of these elements is to provide the groundwork for

collaboration between schools, students, and parents. She also suggests that once these

elements are established in practice, the partnership "becomes as much of a part of the

classroom environment as curricula, pencils, and paper" (p. 6). Parents can then choose

how they want to engage and potentially seek out new opportunities for engagement.

Critical elements of parent engagement

Canadian researchers, Debbie Pushor and Ted Amendt (2018) offer that parent

engagement can be understood as a philosophy and pedagogy. It can be uniquely driven

by school leaders and be responsive to the social and cultural context of their school.

Pushor and Amendt (2018) discuss critical elements that are essential "to establishing

strong philosophical and pedagogical foundations to underpin their work with parents,

families, and community" (p. 209). It is suggested that after a process of building

relational trust, school staff (e.g., administrators, teachers, educational assistants, youth

workers, counsellors) have opportunities to be vulnerable with each other. School leaders

can ask staff to interrogate their own unexamined values, understandings, or assumptions

in a safe and educative learning environment with each other (Pushor & Amendt, 2018).

For example, staff can share stories of their home or culture, and describe how these

experiences impacted their own schooling. Next, relationships can be built with parents

and community members through shared professional development opportunities. This

provides an opportunity for 'mingling' and building shared understandings through

scaffolding authentic experiences for staff. Additionally, bringing teachers into the

community or families' homes especially "in low socio-economic communities where

families have been marginalised, and media fuels a looming sense of despair for the community" gives opportunity for staff to readjust their unwarranted beliefs, fears or preconceived biases in order to better build relationships (Pushor & Amendt, 2018, p 211). Examples of community-based professional development could include a community walk where participants introduce themselves and chat with people from the area or a special guest talk from a community member (i.e., food bank director). School leaders continue to scaffold the process by inviting staff to reflect on their school environment by ensuring the visuals in the school represent newfound values, the community, a welcoming feeling, and space in the school for parents and/or teachers to gather and connect. When staff and families have opportunities to work together, they can establish shared beliefs with parents and the local community. The critical elements, as presented, leads to more meaningful and relational correspondences between families and educators for the purpose of making school a welcoming hub for the community that would ultimately benefit the students. Parents may take the time and effort to become more involved when they have been given the opportunity to feel more comfortable sharing their ideas in a welcoming environment. When parents receive the invitation to become involved, it then becomes the responsibility of the schools to acknowledge, listen, and value the contributions that parents bring.

2.3. Acknowledging parents' views

It is important to recognize the many ways parents can be a meaningful part of their child's learning journey and also acknowledge the ways educators can invite parents to be included. Furthermore, it is essential to consider parents' perspectives on education and hear the requests made on behalf of their children. Pushor and Murphy (2010)

explain that when parents "tell of their experiences with teachers and administrators, we pull forward narrative threads that make visible how parents are marginalized when schools are structured and administered as protectorates" (p. 25). Therefore, it is important to listen to the stories and receive honest feedback from parents. Educators cannot always assume that they know what is best. Pushor and Murphy (2010) further suggest that when educators fail to acknowledge a parent's voice, they risk positioning themselves as experts and make the *heavy* decisions about children (e.g., class placements, curriculum, discipline). Parents are then placed in a marginalized position and are invited to mainly make *light* decisions (e.g., school fundraisers, contracting workers for a new playground). Although light decisions can be important, they do not always ensure that parents to feel like valued members of the school community or give credence to their input.

2.3.1. Timely consultation when behavioural issues arise

In the case of behaviour and discipline, which would often be considered a *heavy* decision, maintaining school or classroom order is the generally seen as the responsibility of the school and educators. When students are not upholding the school or class conduct, discipline has most often been the responsibility of the teacher or school administration. This is a perfect example of when parents could be consulted in a meaningful and timely way.

In one case, Pushor and Murphy (2010) share the story of a grade two student who was relegated to the hallway, outside of his classroom, for seven months as he was labeled a challenging student. Even during the parent-teacher meetings, which happened

throughout the year, the boy's mother was not told about the child's placement in the hallway. It was only when the child's sibling disclosed to the mother, "What's really hard is seeing my brother sitting outside the classroom every day" (p. 35), that the mother confronted the teacher and questioned the disciplinary practice. In this example, the mother then initiated a meeting with her son's teacher. Only when she confronted the school with the newfound information, was she given information about her son's behaviour and the teacher's plan to address these types of issues.

Often a parent can be more than simply informed about a plan. A parent could be consulted meaningfully and in a timely manner. Typically, a parent would want to know when challenges are developing so they can be a thread in the plan's design from the beginning. Pushor and Murphy (2010) share another story about a mother's desire to receive time sensitive information to create positive change:

> I'm so shocked when I open the report card and it's like… your child is in danger of failing. Like… to me, if there's a problem, they should let me know… and it seems like, they say, —Well, we'll do it in the school. No, that's not what it's all about because… For example, this year, my daughter almost got kicked out in October. They told her that if her behavior didn't change they were going to kick her out of school. So, I had to have a meeting with the teachers and the principal and the vice principal. And I was pretty upset because I said, you know, "Why did you let it escalate that far? All you had to do was give me a call at home or give me a call [at work] or come over to my house. You know what I mean? (p. 33)

In this case, a promising solution might be found by involving all parties (i.e., teachers, student, and parent). Given that parents are not often at the school during the day, they do not necessarily have the same opportunity to know about the challenges that are happening in the classroom or the struggles that their child may be facing. In short, parents should be given timely opportunities to receive communication about a student's challenges. For example, a parent can be notified with a teacher's concerns before a term completes and comments are written permanently on a report card. With assistance from the school, parents may be able to engage with their children in a way that offers the child more support from both home and school. The partnership between parents and school is essential and must be developed as concerns arise. This is so both the teacher and parent have an opportunity to offer their viewpoints or suggestions and proactive measures can be established to best support the learner. Only after authentic two-way communication, can a parent choose to be engaged and offer consistent support for their children.

2.4. Parental engagement in practice

2.4.1. A historical consideration

In the early 1900's Brooks (a former school principal, superintendent, and Professor of Education) asked: "Can a public school be conducted so that the assistance of the parents may be entirely eliminated? If such a school is possible, is it desirable?" (Brooks, 1916, p. 188). Brooks' narrative account recalls that parents, at that time, were not to interfere with the school methods at home. According to a historical review of homework in the United States by Gill and Scholossman (1996) homework was perceived as 'a sin against childhood' in the late 1890's (p. 27). However, Brooks (1916)

explained that when his son's reports gave warnings to potential failure, unless they made improvement, he began to provide home study again. Through his research, Brooks (1916) observed children progressing faster when parents took an interest and supervised home study. He concludes, "Where the parents are capable of guiding the child and are inclined to supervise the home study their children succeed in school" (Brooks, 1916, p. 193). Given that it is over a century later from Brooks' (1916) accounts, I wonder about how the theories around parent involvement, engagement, and inclusion have evolved. There continues to be significant research in support of parent involvement and positive effects of homework on achievement (Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Van Voorhis et al., 2013). As mentioned throughout the chapter, parent involvement can be categorized in different ways to identify different types of involvement including, how parents can engage in their child's learning. Additionally, parent involvement has been reframed to include partnerships with the family, which garners additional benefits (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

2.4.2. An example - assigning reading practice as homework

At first glance, assigning reading for homework might seem like a simple task for parents to do with their children. Parents are commonly encouraged to read with their children in earlier grades. Smith-Adcock et al. (2019) suggests that this task is offered to families because books are easily accessible in the home or borrowed from the library. Furthermore, the task can be completed relatively quickly, is generally not burdensome, and is deemed beneficial for developing literacy skills (Smith-Adcock et al., 2019). Also, research suggests that parent-school partnerships are positively correlated with reading

success. However, assigning reading for homework without supporting parents by providing useful strategies, to further support their children, may not yield the expected results. Brown et al. (2018), for example, found that families were not always able to differentiate between books that were meant for read aloud as opposed to books more suitable for independent reading. Building literacy skills also requires targeting interventions around building approaches to learning (i.e., practicing attention, persistence, organization, and flexibility) and developing these learning skills are paramount to increased reading achievement (Smith-Adcock et al., 2019) .

I believe that teachers are often well-meaning when assigning this type of homework. As an early learning educator, and before I had my own children, I encouraged this activity without much consideration for the many challenges that parents may face while reading with their children. I thought this would be a positive experience and that children and their parents would connect over books. I imagined parents snuggling with their children every night and reading story books as their child fell asleep to the soothing sounds of their parents' voice. I believed this to be true because this was my experience. I recalled my father reading classic books, like Alice in Wonderland or telling me stories about his childhood adventures in Sri Lanka, every night before I fell asleep. Despite my good intentions, I was essentially placing the responsibility on families to contend with teaching their child to read. At the beginning, I was not providing enough information about the strategies involved with learning this skill. For some families, the joy of reading might have easily turned into a burden.

When I became an early learning teacher, I quickly began to realize that I did not understand how to teach reading; therefore, I sought mentorship from more experienced

teachers in the district and completed a Master's of Early Childhood Education (M.Ed.) degree. My capstone paper to complete my M.Ed. involved researching reading strategies and reading programs through a self-regulated learning lens. Even after my M.Ed., I did not consistently share the information I was learning to the families of the children that I was teaching. I continued to simply tell parents to keep reading with their children at night. This disservice finally dawned on me when I was chatting with a mother about her child's reading progress. I remembered her telling me that she would cover all the pictures in the book so that her son would focus on only reading the words. However, it became apparent that she did not know how important the picture cues were to a developing reader, who might use this strategy to build context or schema and associate the picture with an unfamiliar word. Although, I was more capable to teach reading to young children, I failed to meaningfully invite parents into their child's learning. I could have helped parents by thoroughly explaining the reading strategies that we were using in class.

Supporting parents to deliver a home reading program

Educators can provide more support, information, and structures to promote learning skills in conjunction with their home reading program. In one study, teachers and faculty members made several changes to their home reading program. First, they labeled the books with different coloured stickers and the words *me* or *we* were written on them. This easily indicated to parents, which books were to be read independently by children and which were to be read aloud by parents to the children. Second, they rotated the literacy practice so at times children were reading to their parents and other times, parents were reading to their children. The parents were also educated on the skills they

were trying to help expose their child to such as, word identification, gaining fluency, comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, modeling fluency. Lastly, games and activities accompanied the books given from a lending library. The authors suggest, "teachers must listen to students' families and redesign literacy assignments that may conflict with families' at-home literacy practices or result in families' confusion or inappropriate application. (Brown et al., 2018, p. 32). Furthermore, the results from the Brown et al. (2018) study was informative for teachers to help them learn more about home literacy practices and guide families in choosing books that might better support their child's reading development. It is noted that teachers can do a lot to encourage parent participation and minimize frustration with home-based activities. Educators can further personalize homework experiences to aim for more success for each child. Ultimately, parents must be informed of ways to support their children. Information and dialogue about a student's learning creates space for more meaningful opportunities for parents to assist, which may help to increase their child's success.

2.4.3. Technology provides opportunities for remote parent engagement

When communicating between home and school, Epstein (2001) asks a pertinent question, "how can conferences be designed, scheduled, and conducted to increase the attendance of parents who work outside the home?" (p. 56). The global pandemic that started in 2020, due to Covid-19, had many ramifications for students and their families. One of the major implications happened when schools changed to an online format and there was limited face-to-face interactions. As schools were following important safety protocols, when students returned to their classrooms for in-person learning, parents were often asked to not enter the school building.

During this time, video meetings were often scheduled instead of face-to-face conferences. Although, meeting with parents virtually is a bit untraditional, there are some benefits that are undeniable. Grundmeyer and Yankey (2016), conducted a study on virtual parent-teacher conferencing and concluded that parents and educators found this type of communication positive. However, it was noted that there were some limitations to *one-way* video messages (versus face-to-face conferencing). A major limitation is the lack of direct interaction (e.g., questions, comments, or insights) in real time. Even though parents could reply to the teacher using the same application, many did not. Therefore, web-based applications provide a window into the classroom, but it is still beneficial for parents and teachers (and plausibly students too) to connect in person. However, the pandemic shifted parents and teachers to meet using *two-way* applications. From my experience, digital meetings that were held on applications, such as Teams or Zoom, were quite effective. In this respect, digital forms of communication are an "and & both" scenario. Digital communication may not be a viable option for replacing all traditional forms of communicating student learning (i.e., report cards, parent-teacher conferences, welcoming conversations, student-led conferences) but can serve to enhance it.

Through technology, parents can be offered more knowledge about their children's achievement before the report card is sent home or conference date is set. Emails, teacher websites, digital student portfolios (e.g., FreshGrade, Class Dojo, or Facebook) generate opportunities for additional connection with parents in an efficient manner. Parents who are not able to be physically at the school, can still communicate during preferred times with the teacher, through email or video conferencing for example.

This may indicate that changes need to follow in more traditional types of communication practices. Parents can also reply to the teacher about questions, concerns, or comments regarding their child's learning. Often parents, irrespective of their socio-economic status, language barriers, or lack of time (i.e., typical barriers to parental involvement or engagement), can receive messages through email or check their child's digital portfolio. For example, instead of meeting face-to-face with my student's mother who only spoke Korean, she preferred to write to me through email because she could utilize translation features (e.g., Google Translate). Furthermore, in the district that I work in, student equity is considered. Therefore, students who are unable to supply their own technology are provided a laptop or iPad for the school year. This is important because I can be sure that parents can gain access using their child's computer to communicate with me digitally if they do not have a device at home.

Providing 'windows' into the classroom, through websites or applications like Microsoft Teams, adds transparency into the learning environment. Parents can be more involved because they can obtain a clearer view of their child's school experience through technological platforms. This leads to more opportunities to engage in children's learning experiences from home and be a more meaningful part of their child's learning journey. As a parent, I appreciate when teachers offer glimpses into the classroom and learning activities through digital applications. I feel I can ask better questions to my daughter around her learning and I have more understanding about class activities.

2.4.4. Using goal setting in conferences to engage parents

Conferences or meetings are a common way for parents and teachers to interact about a single student. In these meetings, academic goals may be a topic of interest. Teachers may set goals on behalf of the student and parents may also have goals they have deemed important for their child as well. A study by Vroland-Nordstrand et al. (2016), highlights the importance of including parents in student goal setting. In this study, children were able to give additional information about what was important to them and could create achievable goals for themselves. Interestingly, defining the goal was not enough to ensure success. What helped lead to more successful goal attainment was the participation of the child's parents at home, consistent practice with task-oriented homework, and follow-ups with the family and practitioner (p. 595). Knowing that students can identify and recognize goals but still require adult supports and structures, to achieve the goal, is foundational in understanding that parental engagement is key in supporting children's learning journey in educational settings.

2.4.5. Parent advisories for systemic engagement

It appears most parents are involved in their children's learning in some capacity. As parents feel more connected to their child's learning and school by receiving meaningful correspondence about their child and developing plans with the teacher, they may choose to become more actively engaged in their child's learning. Some parents will choose to engage in their child's learning directly or get involved by supporting the school through volunteerism. Opportunities for parents who wish to engage more deeply

in education can volunteer their time in their school, district, provincial, or federally organized advisory councils.

The British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education recognizes that parents are essential for children's learning. School Planning Councils (SPC) are "advisory bodies made up of: three parents, one teacher, the school principal and one student from Grade 10, 11, or 12 where applicable" (BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, 2010, p. 3). In addition to SPCs are Parental Advisory Councils (PAC) which help with decision-making at the school level in conjunction with the principal of the school. The District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) functions to, "advise the school board on any matter relating to education in the school district. DPACs advocate for parental inclusion in the education system and give input into the development of education policy and curricula" (BC Confederation of Parent Advisory councils, 2010, p. 4). On a provincial level, the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) consults with the Ministry of Education. According to the BCCPAC (2021) website, there are two annual conferences, a board of directors, and a brief history of the evolution of parental participation in BC schools. Finally, there is a federal level for parents to be involved in education through the Canadian Home & School Federation (CHSF). This council "informs and advises the national organizations and the federal government on issues in public education" (BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, 2010, p. 3). Parents have different opportunities for engaging with and for their children in their educational journey, if they are even aware that these councils exist. Parents can affect decisions through participation with advisory boards for the school, district, and/or province; therefore, they can be involved and support their children in direct and indirect ways. To summarize,

parents can partake in different roles to support their own child's learning, contribute to the school or district, or be more involved federally. Parents can have some influence on the BC or Canadian school system at large and be a part of creating progressive systemic changes.

2.4.6. Addressing issues of inequities

Unfortunately, education systems continue to be plagued by inequities that have devastating effects on children and families. Many researchers (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Ishimaru, 2019; Sampson et al., 2020; Aguayo, 2022) posit that the system is resistant to change, and there is a necessary re-imagining and re-structuring of education. Part of this re-imagining of education includes parental inclusion through the co-construction of educational policies that include the ideas and voices of minority groups. Aguayo (2022) suggests that "parental inclusion requires a materialized shift of reality and knowledge production" (p. 2). As parents do not always feel welcome or validated in the current or local educational conversations, there have been occasions when parents have been forced to unite and act on their own. For effective change, more effort can be placed on developing equitable policies by providing opportunities to engage diverse groups of parents and hear what their thoughts are, especially around topics involving equity. For example, schools might invite people who identify Indigenous to assist in embedding authentic Indigenous content into the schools in respectful and meaningful ways (Milne, 2017).

An example of parent engagement that addressed inequity

Aguayo (2022) notes in his inquiry that Black mothers were not comfortable joining groups like the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA). Factors for not joining the PTA involved not feeling welcome or not feeling represented. In many instances, there were not enough BIPOC parents participating to make their voices heard or votes even count. Therefore, Black mothers and concerned citizens united to form their own collective group. This group had a goal of engaging parents in education and counteracting Black youth being overdisciplined in school. After initiating the relationship by inviting school board representatives to join in their community Sunday dinners, for dialogue and strategizing, the invitation was reciprocated. The group eventually met with the school board to discuss topics that would bring more ethnically diverse teachers to the community through a diversity recruitment program that sponsored (minority) high school students wanting to pursue careers in education. As Aguayo (2022) shares, the power for change came from the courage to form a group that challenged the status quo in education and included parent voice. It was through the initiative of the misrepresented parents, fueled by their concern about inequitable practice, who formed a separate community and inspired the impetus for change within the educational system. In this case the change was initiated by engaged parents and community members who felt they did not belong in the parent groups being offered. As education strives to be more inclusive, there need to be assurances that more diverse voices are being represented. When this is not the case, there needs to be an inquiry and follow up into the reasons behind the lack of involvement or engagement. Parents and school staff that are involved in these groups can consider how far-reaching their

inclusionary processes are. Together, they can work towards creating more opportunities for engagement through calls for agenda items and offer occasions for open dialogue.

2.5.   Early childhood education during the pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 transformed teaching practices as most North American schools, and many schools globally, pivoted to learning remotely from home. Incidentally, this greatly impacted families and their children's learning. For early childhood teachers, there was an inherent shift to involve parents more than ever. During this time, parents were asked to understand learning intentions, deliver curriculum and instructions, and navigate technology (Pramling Samuelsson et al., 2020). In a study about the impacts of Covid-19 on Early Childhood Education and the challenges associated with remote teaching and learning, Timmons et al. (2022) interviewed both parents and educators to determine challenges and successes during this time. Throughout these interviews, parents reported feeling like they were pressured or forced into engaging. Parents who were juggling many roles at home, felt incompetent to teach their children, experienced difficulties with technology, or had more than one child at home reported that they felt stressed. Despite the multitude of challenges parents also shared that they enjoyed spending quality time and "developing their own understanding of what teachers do on a daily basis" (Timmons et al., 2022, p. 894). Teachers in this study expressed that parent participation was varied along a spectrum because some parents could not be contacted; therefore, might not have engaged in home learning with their child. Some parents participated in the online sessions but did not complete the corresponding activities with their children. Finally, some parents did all the activities in conjunction with the online sessions. Many educators expressed their need to incorporate

high levels of flexibility into their programming and deliberately offered a lot of choice. Furthermore, educators indicated that many of the flexible systems and communication methods that were put in place during remote learning would be consciously carried forward with the return to classroom-based learning. One educator explained, "I think that if/when we return I will maintain a website, just because I have parents give comments about knowing about the songs and videos we are doing at school. I will continue this when they go back in" (Timmins et al., 2022, p. 17). Many educators stressed the importance of offering flexibility with the timing and types of assignments. This flexibility was aimed to enhance equity because some parents were working in various locations and felt uneasy about instructing their children. Also, children were not always able to use devices because other siblings or working parents had priority to the household technology. Parents revealed that they noticed educators were cognisant of the discrepancies in their students' homes and tried to navigate the inequities. According to the study by Timmons et al. (2022) educators were known to circumnavigate many challenges by surveying parents about supplies they already possessed at home and dropping off any necessary supplies for various projects (e.g., paint for art supplies), making additional technology available (e.g., loaning iPads/laptops), having a week's worth of assignments ready to print for Monday morning so parents could print them before their workweek started, and recording video lessons in advance to be watched at the convenience of the family. Educators often realized there might be friction and frustrations with these changes and encouraged parents to prioritize building connections and bonding with their children during this challenging time. In reference to online assignments, one educator suggested, "I have been really clear with parents saying 'you

know it's here for you to use, if you would like to, you know best what the energy level is like in your house, and what the child can manage. And what I really don't want is for anything like this to cause friction in your home. So, if anyone is starting to get frustrated, just stop, and snuggle up and read a book together.'" (Timmins et al. 2022, p. 16). From the research, and despite the inherent challenges faced by remote learning, parents and educators realized the potential in connecting though digital mediums. During this time, many parents and educators collaborated to keep learning engaging and meaningful for young children.

2.6. Summary of chapter two

The object of the literature review was to provide relevant research and develop understanding around the topics of parent involvement, engagement, and inclusion. Educators can invite parents into the classroom, in person or through virtual access, so they have opportunities to see the activities their child has participated in. This information helps parents understand their child's progress firsthand. Additionally, parents can feel welcomed and recognized as an influential and meaningful part of their child's learning journey. The literature review explores parental involvement, engagement, and inclusion. When examining the scholarship on parental involvement, Epstein's (2001) research on developing partnerships between families and schools is particularly influential. The literature review included a summary of her framework explaining how parents can be involved or engaged in their child's learning. A second continuum of parental involvement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) was examined as an extension to Epstein's framework. The literature explored the role and importance of parental engagement. Through this, the role of homework, technology, and goal setting

were explored as they are common methods of interacting with parents and can be structured to permit more transparency in the classroom. This transparency may assist in creating an environment that makes space for more substantial parental engagement and ultimately higher student achievement. Although, it might be determined that children are capable to view their homework experiences through their own perspective, educators and parents can lead meaningful, collaborative discussions with students without controlling their learning goals but through supporting them. Pushor and Amendt (2018) question why parent engagement continues to be lacking in schools despite the years of research promoting it. They suggest leadership can assist school staff in examining their innermost beliefs around parents. Furthermore, parents can fit within the structures of learning to make a more meaningful impact. Additional research suggests ways that parents can engage in education systemically through organizations that occur at different levels (i.e., school, district, provincial, or federal). Although more work needs to be done to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusivity parent councils are a more typical way for parents to be involved and have a voice in their child's schooling and activities beyond the classroom (Aguayo, 2022).

Research that was emphasised during the Covid-19 pandemic, revealed that educators can provide flexible opportunities to support parents and assist them when engaging in their child's learning. The support that educators provided parents during the pandemic can continue to be implemented during regular programming and educators indicated that many of their parent inclusive, connection-based practices would continue post-pandemic (Timmons et al., 2022). It also became clear that educators could design

their curriculum to incorporate flexibility to serve varying family structures and promote equitable practices.

The literature reviewed in this chapter has the overarching theme of shifting perspective and approaches to be more inclusive of parents. Parents can be permitted access to understanding their child's learning better through 'windows' into the school, classroom, or their learning experiences. With more transparency into the learning that happens in schools and by navigating potential barriers, parents can develop a stronger understanding to help support their child's learning in a meaningful way. Educators can continue to work to build parent-educator connections by creating welcoming environments where all parents can feel valued and safe to express their ideas. School leaders can develop intentionality around parent inclusion with their staff, which lends itself to more equitable practices in education and serves to benefit all learners.

Chapter 3.   Creating stained glass

Although creating stained glass is not something that I am at all familiar with, I would imagine that the process is like many other forms of art – messy, beautiful, and personally transformational. Creating a stained-glass window must entail a significant process before the smooth, colourful story is illuminated by the sun for others to view. The creative risk and tapped emotion are often hidden in the stories within the glass images, and this helps to create a profound piece of art. Similar to the process of creating stained-glass, an intentional process was required so that I could share my perspectives and make sense of them in a creative way. This chapter describes the chosen methods that were foundational in the creation of this inquiry.

3.1.   Introduction and outline of chapter three

I formally started my inquiry in 2017 as I was a parent to a child entering kindergarten. During this time, I eagerly awaited meaningful learning opportunities to engage in at home with my daughter and I was excited to connect with her through these experiences. Concurrently, I was an educator to a class of grade four and five students. In my role as an educator, I more thoughtfully acted as a conduit between my students and their families to extend meaningful learning opportunities from the classroom to their homes. As a reflective practitioner, I have always learned through my experiences as an educator inside of the classroom walls; however, employing autoethnography as a methodology helped guide me to form understandings around deeper issues. As a parent on the outside of the classroom walls wanting to look in, I was exploring this new

identity. I was considering what it meant to be a parent of a child in school and how my understandings would relate to the teacher I was, I am, and I would become.

Through autoethnographic accounts, such as writing vignettes and poetry, I ask the questions: what does this experience really mean to me as a mother and educator? How will what I learn benefit my daughter or my students? What might this inquiry mean to others; specifically, other educators, but also the education system at large? The experiences that I have attuned myself to have unearthed emotions that resulted from reflecting and writing about moments along my personal timeline. I believe my experiences may resonate with others, especially other educators and parents. My hope is that educators may examine their practice in relation to becoming more intentional when creating learning opportunities that include parents. My inquiry may also encourage parents to build more meaningful and deeper connections with their children around learning. Furthermore, by examining my own experiences, I can understand more about the school culture in which many of us are associated with through the education of our children. As an educator, I am hoping to learn how to make meaningful and positive changes within the school culture.

Within this chapter, I briefly clarify the purpose and outline the conceptual frameworks I have utilized and embedded into my inquiry. I explain my own understanding of autoethnography based on the writings of other autoethnographic researchers. I describe my rational for layering my autoethnographic inquiry with narrative vignettes, poetry, and metaphor. By utilizing a range of autoethnographic strategies I am better equipped to personally connect to my topic, by recapturing past emotions, related to the topic of parent inclusion. I describe the inquiry design and the

strategies I will later use for the analysis. The chapter ends with explaining the ethical

considerations I have made and how I address concerns of legitimacy, which naturally

exist when sharing anecdotes through an autoethnographical inquiry.

3.2.   Developing a personal understanding of autoethnography

3.2.1. Relating to autoethnography through definitions

Although there are various interpretations of autoethnography, my understandings

align with the definitions provided by Ellis and Bochner (2006), Chang (2008), Muncey

(2010), Starr (2010), and Williams (2021). In my view, autoethnography encapsulates a

personal inquiry utilizing different creative forms but leans towards a more critical

understanding of a sub-culture (i.e., parents' involvement, engagement, and inclusion in

school). Viewing works by other autoethnographic researchers helps me understand the

purpose of my inquiry through the explanations and definitions they provide. To create a

deeper understanding, Chang (2008) promotes analyzing the narratives and interpreting

them within a 'broader sociocultural content' (p. 46). For example, when I consider my

experiences of parental involvement and engagement with my daughter in school, I

uncovered more about this topic than I had first anticipated. I heard and read about

heartbreaking stories of parents who were very concerned about the negative treatment of

their children in school (Pushor, 2012). As Muncey (2010) suggests, "an

autoethnographic account should attempt to subvert dominant discourse" (p. xi).

Additionally, Denzin (2017) posits that critical qualitative research helps society through

the tiny moral tales that the ethnographer writes (p.10). Therefore, I believe that one of

the deeper purposes of this autoethnographic inquiry is to help make positive changes in

society by revealing more progressive practices in education. By synthesizing these definitions, I aim to conduct research that is not only personally meaningful and promotes my own self-growth, but also explores "unexamined assumptions that govern everyday life" (Muncey, 2010, p. xi). Using autoethnography as a method for understanding more about the topic of parent inclusion, I uncover some of the underlying beliefs about parents and the complexities that exist between parents and educators. Furthermore, this inquiry searches for opportunities where educators can include parents in a meaningful way that benefits children's learning experiences and alters dominant discourse.

3.2.2. Why autoethnography?

I believe that there are many assumptions about parents that continue to be perpetuated in current school culture. This can be problematic as many parents have a desire to be more involved in their child's education, but they do not know where they fit in or how they can best support their child. I have noticed some of the tensions that exist between parents and educators over my career and now I continue to feel this tension as a parent with a young child in school. Autoethnographic methods help me explore these tensions through the processes involved, especially through writing creatively and analysing my vignettes and poetry. In alignment with the goal of subverting the dominant discourse of educational culture (Muncey, 2010), autoethnography helps inform and guide the direction of positive changes that can be implemented into the current educational system. As Star (2010) notes, "The cycle of enlightenment, reflection, and action, as a critical process of self-analysis and understanding in relation to cultural and social discourses make autoethnography a valuable tool in examining the complex, diverse and sometimes messy world of education" (p. 2). I develop a stronger

understanding regarding the topic of parent inclusion by challenging my own preconceived ideas and exploring my 'sometimes messy' history with my students' parents as an educator. To make positive changes in education it becomes important to recognize how the system has experienced shortcomings. I must thoughtfully consider why parental inclusion is necessary to change systems in education and advance student learning. This can begin by acknowledging where inequities have been perpetuated, by broadening narrow ideas of how the system has functioned and counteroffering new structures to replace the more harmful ones that continue to exist today. This autoethnography looks poignantly at parental inclusion, which is a subtle issue and often unspoken topic within public education. Using autoethnographic strategies, such as sharing my narratives and poetry, I illuminate many tensions that exist with parent-educator relationships. I maintain the belief that educators can promote more equitable practices in schools, and this comprises of including parents in a more meaningful way.

3.2.3. Evoking emotions through autoethnography

I often think how we can feel the experience of another person and it enables us to build empathy and connect more deeply to that person. Empathy is necessary to begin creating the cultural shifts the researcher is calling for when sharing their insights through story. In chapter four of this inquiry, for example, I write about a past memory that stemmed from an early teaching experience as a kindergarten teacher. I clearly remember the parents of my students peering into my classroom. Through reflective writing, I visualize the faces of the kindergartener's parents glaring through the small, square, stained-glass windows. I remember feeling like I was being observed and internalizing this experience as judgement against me or my teaching methods. As an

early career teacher, I could not understand why the parents were even there. My confidence was shaken, and I desperately wanted the parents to leave. Many years later, when writing about this experience, my heart still feels heavy as my chest tightens, and I recall this moment of feeling inadequate as a teacher. Through writing about the experience through reflection and poetry, I create an emotive response that I hope others can possibly relate to. Even if someone has not gone through the exact same experience, I wonder if others might connect to similar feelings of inadequacy or feeling judged when they were newly hired in their job. To extend this example further, a post-secondary educator who works with preservice teachers, might share my story with their practicum students so they feel prepared, especially if they start to feel inadequate in their teaching abilities. This example can highlight how preservice teachers might navigate the uncertainty of inexperience and manage feelings of judgement; while meaningfully including parents, despite their initial fears to do so.

One of the aims of using autoethnography as a research method is to create emotional responses from the stories shared within the inquiry. Bochner and Ellis (2016) claim that autoethnography is a methodology that seeks a way of knowing through the evocation of an emotional response by the researcher and reader. Furthermore, Durham (2017) implores that our lived experience shapes our interpretations of culture and by playing with language, through story or poetry, a researcher connects the reader to an emotional experience. Through autoethnography, the researcher shares their own relatable experiences because the researcher and their story are ingrained in the research. Inviting the reader to connect to the experience through their own emotional responses provides opportunities for them to make their own connections and interpretations for

themselves. Muncey (2010) suggests that the researcher becomes vulnerable when telling their story and are therefore 'connecting social science to life' (p. 35). When a researcher can evoke an emotional response through their story, it helps the reader to resonate and develop their own fuller understanding of the topic. In my opinion, the emotional response that is created in my mind and heart when I read other autoethnographies or narrative inquiries (e.g., Britton, 2013; Hibbits, 2009; Jung, 2020) has made a lasting effect and promoted positive changes within me. This is why I value the emotional connection created between the researcher and the reader. The resonance of emotional connection is why I have chosen autoethnography as my methodology for this inquiry.

3.3. Inquiring through narrative vignettes and poetry

As I reflect more on my autoethnographic accounts, I see using narrative and poetic inquiry as layering pieces. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) see narrative inquiry metaphorically as a three-dimensional inquiry space which is pointing the researcher backwards and forwards, inwards and outwards, as well as locating them in place. In her dissertation, Hibbits (2009) shares how her narrative shifts through time as she chose to divide the process into the following categories: living, writing, and reflecting backwards and forwards. To this point, I see how my autoethnographic accounts can flutter in and out of different dimensions. I reflect in time progressions between the past, present, and future. For example, I start my story as a child in school, progress to a beginning teacher, and then a more established one. I also reflect on the different roles that I experience in my life. I navigate between different roles as a parent of a young student, an educator,

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and a researcher analyzing my experiences within the public school system. Acknowledging that I shift into different dimensions helps me allocate emotions to different times and roles. Furthermore, this provides an opportunity to visualize and feel the stories which adds vulnerability to my research. By configuring my autoethnography using different writing forms and understandings, I consider this work to be layered.

As I delve further into my reflections, I notice how impactful the use of poetic language and devices can be within narrative and poetry pieces. Poetry helps to bring me back to the places and emotive spaces I have encountered throughout my inquiry. Reflecting on these experiences through poetry helps me to make sense of my feelings, question my ingrained biases, and to challenge these biases through critical reflexivity. This creative process helps me to consider why my experience is profound (Williams, 2021). The fluidity within my role as a researcher, lends itself to explore, theorize, and analyze within the creative spaces of my inquiry and through the stories that I share. I appreciate the richness and depth that going through this process has offered me as I reflect on my personal experiences as an educator and parent. I enlist poetry to co-construct and add dimension to my inquiry. Muncey (2010) suggests that poetry can offer new ways of thinking. Leggo (2005) invites his preservice teachers to write autobiographically. He suggests poetry can be used to release emotion and be more effective, motivated, and joyful in a demanding career that can often lead dedicated teachers to burning out. Furthermore, poetry is a valuable research tool, especially for researchers "who wish to channel the power of poetry into their work" (Faulkner, 2019, p.14). Faulkner (2017) uses poetry for many reasons including activism, methodology, and for pedagogical purposes. Through my poems, I have a humble goal of personal

learning. I hope to learn more and improve myself within my craft as an educator. I also want to understand more about my role as a mother to a young child in school. I choose to use this inquiry as a platform to transform my thinking and act in more equitable ways as an educator. I have chosen to be vulnerable to these emotions by writing autoethnographic vignettes and poetry, and to build more insights into transformational shifts in education. Even though I will be grounded in my goal of personal learning, I will gently nudge educational practice forward to ultimately benefit children. As Leggo (2018) offers, poetry makes space and provides more opportunities for learning and to be "living well". Just as a stargazer scans the night sky for new stars, I too consider alternative ways of thinking to challenge the status quo and hold greater possibilities for children, parents, and educators.

3.4.   The power of metaphors in autoethnography

Within the realm of autoethnographic research, metaphors can be a powerful method to illustrate a story or challenge perspectives by illuminating new understandings (Black, 1977; Carpenter, 2008; Muncey, 2010; Ortony, 1975). Using metaphors can be helpful when creating qualitative research such as autoethnographic reflections or poetic inquiry, because they can provide "an opportunity to examine phenomena from a unique and creative perspective" (Carpenter, 2008, p.274). Ortony (1975) notes how the widespread use of metaphors is more than a literary device and further suggests that they are important for communication by offering excellent educational value. Therefore, metaphors can be used to teach or more easily explain ideas to others. In this way, metaphors can be used to bridge more complex ideas with simpler ones and make the case for accessibility.

Arguing against their simplistic nature, Black (1977) reveals that metaphors are complex enough to invite analysis and can show insight into how things are within many facets of ordinary life. In short, metaphors can be an effective way to explain the phenomena of everyday activities. Throughout my research, I use the metaphor of windows and 'peering through stained glass' to reflect on my feelings. I deepen my understanding of why parents might desire more transparency into the learning experiences that their child engages in within the classroom.

In addition to creating relatability or opportunities for easily understanding a concept presented by the researcher, metaphors can shed light on a current or mainstream way of thinking. Muncey (2010) shares that a metaphor can be useful by providing a new way of thinking about a particular topic. Carpenter (2007) further suggests that metaphors can be used as a tool to evoke emotion. Although metaphors might initially be considered simplistic or trivializing (Donovan & Mercer, 2003) they are accepted in qualitative research to be an effective approach to express ones ideas, experiences, or emotions in a relatable and clear way. I exemplify this throughout my research when I use the metaphors of windows, in each chapter title and before the chapter's introduction, as it relates to a different part of this inquiry. Furthermore, the metaphor of windows helped me develop an understanding and connect to a deeper theme that emerged of exclusion and inequities within the school systems. At the beginning of this dissertation, I wrote the reflective vignette about the bay window in my university dorm room. Through this metaphor, I began to see significance in how glass could be one-sided. Only upon this reflection did I notice that I could see out of my beautiful window overlooking the campus, but others could not see in. For me, this metaphor helped me to

transform my thinking because I realized that windows could create a view in but might exclude others. I then was able to extend my metaphor to my first kindergarten classroom where the small squares of stained-glass windows did not give parents a clear view of the classroom. As the teacher, I was limiting the view that parents had of their own children, and I had to reconcile why I was afraid to invite parents into the classroom. By utilizing the power of metaphor within my narratives and poetry, I was able to connect my heart and mind. This helped me create more understanding around the topic of parent inclusion for myself.

3.5.   Research design plan for my inquiry

Although there is guidance from other researchers who have ventured out before me, I have equipped myself with a map that creates a pathway towards my destination of creating an autoethnographic inquiry. LeCompte and Schensul (2010) metaphorically suggest that "research designs are to researchers as road maps are to vacationers or blueprints are to architects and contractors" (p. 4). Although autoethnography can be critiqued for not offering enough structure, there are many approaches that are non-prescriptive yet provide a helpful framework for conducting this method of research (Dull, 2021). These frameworks help the researcher stay on route as they inquire using an autoethnographic methodology. Many autoethnographies are informed from personal, painful experiences; however, my topic is rooted in my curiosities and a jolt of discomfort that I felt when my daughter entered school. During the inquiry, my feelings of uncertainty remained nagging and constant. Instead of pushing away distant feelings

and emotions, I recognized that my feelings were valid, embraced them, and understood that there was something more to uncover.

3.5.1. Collecting, documenting, and reflecting on my data

Excavating my data

Autoethnographers use different strategies to excavate their memories and collect data. In the book, *Doing Autoethnography* (Pensoneau-Conway et al., 2017), Ellis and Bochner (2006) suggest gathering data from recollections and memories. Chang (2008) offers further guidance to data collection by advising researchers to recall their personal memories and acknowledge these memories as primary sources. Based on these suggestions, I mined my former experiences for data. I collected data by first examining my own timeline for narratives that included stories related to parents and education. I specifically wanted to resurface memories that included parents at school, such as times when my mother was involved with my schooling. As I reminisced, the memories emerged visually, and I was 'transported' back in time. I recognized and connected emotions within these experiences from times when I was a young student, classroom teacher, and parent with a young child in school.

I became more informed about my topic by reading about the experiences of others. Through the experiences I read, I was able to connect emotionally and the often-painful stories around their child's education became a part of me. I was able to dig deeper into some raw moments by feeling empathetic to the parents' experience. By challenging the dominant perceptions and attitudes around parental involvement, I was able to envision what parent inclusion ideally could entail.

3.6. Autoethnographical analytical strategies

It is important to carefully consider the methodological strategies I want to implement to ensure that they reflect the aim of my study. After looking deeply at the meaning behind my inquiry and analyzing it using Chang's (2008) suggested methods, I see potential for social significance and change. I offer my experiences through story, layered with poetry, and hope they might resonate with an audience. In addition to improving my own practice, this inquiry provides insight into our education system. More specifically, this dissertation might be relevant for other educators or parents, teachers, and administrators. Furthermore, I hope that readers connect to the stories, interpret meaning for themselves, and use the inquiry to create positive changes to their own educational or parenting practice.

3.6.1. Analyzing commonalities or exceptionalities

When I apply Chang's (2008) analytical strategies, I first considered common themes. A topic that occurs repeatedly in the data may hold significance to the research (Chang, 2008). These topics may include people, places, ideas, or activities. Finding these recurrent ideas, topics, or themes is a powerful technique to analyze data within my inquiry. When I search for repetitive elements or recurrent ideas, I noticed how much I documented about the feelings of connection. Therefore, the notion of connection will be a theme explored more deeply throughout this inquiry and will specifically consider how educators create connection with parents. My feelings about my daughter's teacher became so admirable when she connected with us during the pandemic because my daughter was feeling very emotional during this time.

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Themes of inclusion also emerged and that led me to question how that impacts equitable practice in school. For example, when I consider Aguayo's (2022) study about Black mothers creating their own parent committees to help their children at school, I began to realize how a welcoming environment in which teachers listen, include, acknowledge, and act on behalf others is essential to making equitable changes. This further led me to question my own educational practice and times when I have listened, included, acknowledged the parents of the students that I teach so I could provide authentic opportunities for agency. I discuss this further in chapter four, when I reflect on my most recent teaching experiences as a learning support teacher connecting with families. Highlighting these themes was very important in truly understanding how I continue to shift my practice as an educator to be more understanding, inclusive, and equitable; moreover, building connections. I believe these concepts are pivotal in creating transformational thinking within myself and my readers.

In a similar method to searching for repeated topics, I searched my accounts for cultural themes. Cultural themes can be defined as "a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behaviour or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society" (McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005, p. 78). These themes exist across the data and "pop up in many different spots… too abundant and palpable in the data to miss after a quick reading" (Chang, 2008, p. 132). The repeated themes will guide the process of analysis and help to offer conjecture into culturally meaningful understandings. When I think about culture within this inquiry, I mainly consider the school culture and how parents are treated. I relate my experiences to a notion within school culture where teachers talk about '*that parent*', who can make

their job even more difficult than it already is. Conversely, parents talk together about not wanting to become known as '*that parent*' because they fear their requests will seem demanding. Instead of helping, a parent might fear that they are inadvertently hindering their child.

Chang (2005) posits that a one-time or life-changing experience can be an important opportunity for exploration in an inquiry. Although these experiences are not a pattern or theme, they can provide a lot of information about self. Data can be analyzed and explored around life altering or pivotal exceptionalities. The Covid-19 pandemic created an important opportunity to examine parental inclusion. During this time, parents were often asked to be a major component of their child's learning when schools were closed during this time. This exceptionality changed what many parents and educators would consider common practice and offered different opportunities for more parent engagement.

3.6.2. Analyzing relationships across time

Correlating the past with the present or future can elicit some interesting insights. Although these correlations are not determined through 'scientific methods', Chang (2008) argues that these connections between time periods can be observed and qualified by the autoethnographic researcher. This interpretive strategy gives autoethnographers opportunities to determine if their thoughts or behaviours are possibly the result of past events. Within my inquiry, I recall my early experiences with my mother, who was quite protective of me. I consider this when I reflect on the early interactions I had with parents as a classroom teacher and my interactions with my daughter's teachers. These

three points in time (i.e., past, present, and future) hold significance when I consider the theme of building strong, communicative relationships with families as an educator and how important it is for me to develop similar relationships with my daughter's teachers.

When analyzing relationships, it will be imperative to consider my own biases as a parent who is also an educator. I must continue to be open to other ways of knowing and doing. Furthermore, I consider that most parents do not have experience in the field of education, beyond their own school or intergenerational experiences, and I need to welcome conversation, opinions, and ideas that may not coincide with my own. I must also understand that instances of differences might be an opportunity to grow my own thinking and change my actions in more progressive ways. Alternatively, I must consider that some parents might be uncomfortable with being welcomed into schools if they experienced trauma during their own schooling or intergenerationally. Trust and relationship is an important factor when asking a parent to be a participant in their children's school-based learning journey.

3.7. Addressing concerns within this inquiry

3.7.1. Ethical considerations

Although my autoethnographic inquiry is framed around my own practice as a parent and educator, I will be reflecting on my encounters with others. Muncey (2010) highlights the importance of providing "sufficient background about the perspective of the researcher" (p. 128). This results from ethnographic researchers in the past using subjects without including their perspectives; therefore, creating power dynamics

between the researcher and subjects. She further argues that "autoethnography addresses the power imbalances that can arise from more traditional forms of research" (p. 128). As I am researching my own experience, the Research Ethics Board at Simon Fraser University reviewed my research proposal and determined that it had met the exemption requirements because it falls outside of the scope of research ethics review. Although I am focusing on my own practice, power imbalances could potentially arise from writing about others whose stories intersect with my own narrative, including my daughter, her teachers, my students and their families. To address this concern, I anonymize the data as much as possible to protect others in my inquiry. The focus, first and foremost, is my own learning and is ascertained from my perspective. I believe that using autoethnographic methodology includes transparency in relation to myself as the researcher.

3.7.2. Addressing concerns of legitimacy

As the researcher shares their personal recollections, within an authoethnography, there may be concerns around legitimacy. Since the authenticity of the stories that I share could be questioned, I must ask, "what extent does memory play a part in the veracity and accuracy of the story?" (Muncey, 2010, p. 90). I make every attempt to share my memories with truthfulness in mind. In addition, I have shared my work with my family and friends who know me well and would question the reliability of my memories. Muncey (2010) suggests that even work that is not 'truthful' can still give clues into the human condition. Therefore, even if my stories were fictional, I believe they would still be impactful and highlight the importance of parental inclusion. Borbasi (1994) suggests this method can be considered "insider research" and may present reliability or validity

concerns because the researcher is primarily the target of the research. Reed-Danahay (1997) counters this argument by positing that autoethnography is more authentic than traditional ethnography because the voice of the insider is assumed to be truer than that of the outsider.

It is highly important to be cautious as I consider others I have written about in my personal narratives. Chang (2008) suggests researchers be mindful and avoid pitfalls when using autoethnography methodology (p. 57). These pitfalls include focusing excessively on self, over-narrating and not analyzing the stories for cultural significance, relying exclusively on personal memory, acting negligently when including others in the research, and calling research autoethnography inappropriately (p. 57). While sharing my stories and poems, I must be aware, mindful, and diligent. While I created an authentic autoethnographic experience, I protected the identities of those that appeared in my research. I did this through sharing stories in a general manner with no names or specific locations mentioned. Family members, including my daughter, father, and mother have given permission for me to write about them and my interpretation of our experiences in this dissertation. My daughter's parents (i.e., father, stepfather, and stepmother) have learned about my work and provided their consent. My daughter's teacher from the story, 'Pandemic' is also aware that this story was used. Lastly, friends that have known me for thirty years or more have read the work and not questioned the legitimacy of the stories shared. With these considerations in mind, I believe I have aligned my work with the suggestions made by other autoethnographers.

3.8. Summary of chapter three

Autoethnography is undeniably a powerful methodology when rigor and research components are carefully considered. My aim is to tell my stories, through narrative vignettes layered with poetry, in a way that elicits emotions and provokes thoughtfulness around developing relationships with parents in school. As autoethnography grapples with social issues, I intend to promote a shift in education by offering insights into what I consider would be more equitable practices through parent inclusion. I know that going through the process of analyzing my data has already created change in myself as an educator and a mother. I have chosen to apply many of Chang's (2008) recommendations on analyzing autoethnography to shed light on alternative points of view. I do consider that although parent engagement is encouraged, teachers are not given much support, opportunity, or incentivization to increase their skills or given much time to engage with parents. In short, I hope that my stories, insights, and analysis will be impactful for educators and parents who read my work, but ultimately, I hope this inquiry benefits children.

Chapter 4.   The other side of the window

Imagine that you, the reader, and I, the writer, are staring at each other. The only thing separating us is a sheet of glass. Evidently, you and I are both looking through the same window but what I see is a view that is entirely different from yours. As, I document and share my experiences in this inquiry, you are welcome to join me on my side of the window, by considering my perspectives and trying to understand why these accounts hold significance to me. I encourage you to also see what you can from standing behind your side of the window. My narratives act as a window, and they have helped shape me as I have reflected and considered different ideas as a parent and educator. As you look through the window, I hope this reflective chapter of the inquiry holds meaning for you too.

4.1.   Introduction to chapter four

I often ask myself as an educator, and as a mother, what does it mean to feel deeply connected to the children that I interact with in my life? I also wonder how other parents stay continually connected to their children; especially, during the times their children are gaining independence? As a mother, especially one who shares custody of her daughter and works full-time, I would say building and maintaining that close connection with my daughter requires thoughtfulness and can be challenging at times. Now that my daughter is in elementary school, she is beginning to write the chapters of her own book of life, and I seem to become less and less a main character in her story. However, I feel drawn to ensuring that I remain a delicate presence within those pages of her book. Within the pages of her educational chapters, I have a strong desire to be a

supporting character. I feel it is important to understand my daughter's learning and help her navigate her learning journey. My inquiry is designed to help me understand my place in my daughter's learning journey and additionally guide others in education to consider the parents' perspective.

The autoethnographic vignettes and poetry that I have chosen are curated from standout memories from my past. They offer my perspective, emotions, and thoughts along my personal timeline and have been selected to help me better understand the parents' role in a child's learning journey. The focus, and seemingly more relevant memories that have been captured in this inquiry, are the reflective vignettes and poetry from more recent years. These include when my daughter enters her first few years of public school. Within these reflections and poetry, I use the metaphor of colourful stained-glass windows; like the ones that my students' parents would peer through when I taught in my first Kindergarten classroom. I write my poems in colour to reflect and capture the essence of the metaphor. Each colour represents peering through a different window along my timeline. An underlying theme throughout the inquiry is navigating the balance between finding my place alongside of my daughter's learning journey and letting her go to experience her education on her own.

In the initial stages of my inquiry, I did not hear educators talk about including parents more in their children's learning. The opposite was more likely to be true, where educators wanted parents to step back and let teachers do the teaching. There had been times in my own career where I considered an overinvolved parent to be somewhat annoying. I also did not hear parents complaining about not being included more. They

were not voicing any concerns about feeling excluded, at least to me, their child's teacher.

During my daughter's kindergarten year and through most of grade one, I was feeling disconnected and excluded in my own daughter's learning journey. I wanted to understand the importance of these feelings by disentangling events along my timeline. I had started to deconstruct the layers of my emotions of feeling excluded and then a pivotal moment in time occurred globally. Unexpectedly, the educational system changed almost in an instant.

In March 2020, it was announced by health officials locally and globally that Covid-19, a coronavirus, was so dangerous that people were encouraged to distance from others and isolate by staying home. This greatly impacted public education because for two months in British Columbia, schools were closed. Most children were not able to enter a school building, play on a playground, or learn alongside their friends. During this time, many children were learning from home. If parents were ever considered by educators to be an annoyance or afterthought, they were now considered a tool. Many parents were alarmed because they were now in the forefront of helping their young children learn and assisting their children's teachers deliver an online curriculum.

During this time, I went from feeling unnecessary in my daughter's learning journey to becoming a conduit for my daughter's education. During the pandemic, when I became an essential part of my daughter's learning, I was afforded a unique opportunity. This opportunity thrust me into her learning environment and further helped me develop a more meaningful relationship with her teacher. In terms of my inquiry, I

took notice. The pandemic gave me a completely different vantage point and lens to see

my daughter and her education through. I explore my thoughts and feelings in more

detail throughout this chapter via reflective vignettes and poetry.

4.2.   Outline of chapter four

This chapter takes the reader on a journey along my personal timeline. I have

chosen events that have connected emotions to my topic of parental inclusion, and I aim

to capture these emotions through autoethnographic vignettes. Immediately following

the vignettes, I layer the personalized stories with poetry to deepen the reflection and

unearth stronger feelings, emotions, or connections. In the background of my

imagination, I picture the colourful, tinted windows from the first kindergarten classroom

that I taught in. Teaching kindergarten for the first time in a brand-new school, I

remember seeing the mothers of my students peering into the classroom from the

colourful square windows. I remember wondering what they were doing and asking

myself, 'why are they peering in? Can't they go to yoga or coffee or work or

something?' These colourful windows are the foundation of my symbolism.

Metaphorically, I write my poetry from both sides of the windows of colourful, stained

glass. On one side of the window, I am an educator that is learning to look from the

inside out and deeply understand the feelings of my students' parents. I feel like I have

not always meaningfully included parents in their child's learning journeys. On the other

side, I am a mother quite desperately trying to peer into the glass, while trying to view a

clear image of what is happening in my daughter's classroom. My desire is to be

meaningfully included and I wonder how I can support my daughter more in her learning

journey. Now that I can see from both sides of the stained-glass windows, I can learn more and grow as both a mother and educator. The reflective pieces I write about capture moments in time that would normally be insignificant to me. Without being deeply attuned to some uncomfortable feelings, I would not likely notice the questions, thoughts, or emotions that I experienced during these times after reflection.

As an educator, I feel like I have more understanding of the educational system than the average parent which makes it easier for me to notice any underlying implications around my daughter's learning. I recall memories of my own mother being candid with my teachers throughout my educational journey in the vignette, Thinking Back. After reading my reflections to my mother we both agree that she always had my best interest at heart. She understands that there were times I felt a bit embarrassed with her involvement because, from my perspective as a young child, I felt like she was causing a scene. As a parent, I am very careful with my interactions with the school because I do not want to be perceived as challenging or difficult to the teachers at my daughter's school. The chosen vignettes, paired with poetry, reveal my perspective of how parents, without feeling like a nuisance, can meaningfully fit in the learning journey of their children and how educators can support this.

4.3. A timeline of reflection through vignettes and poetry

4.3.1. 1985

Thinking Back

I was a November baby, and I was small. My mother considered holding me back from starting kindergarten. Looking back at that scenario I realize there was no right answer. If I had been held back, I would have been the oldest in the class and perhaps people would have assumed that I was not capable intellectually or emotionally mature enough. I can only think of a few of my peers that were held back and unfortunately, that was the impression I had of the kids who had 'failed a grade'. Those kids were teased. Maybe my mom was ahead of her time in even deliberating about holding me back but since I could read, she enrolled me in kindergarten.

Physically, I developed later than most of my peers. I was only four at the start of kindergarten and even then, I was not nearly the size of the average four-year-old. I was usually one of the smallest kids in the class. Flash forward to Junior High and I was nominated to be the shortest girl in grade 10. I was so proud to be noticed for something by my classmates and a photo was taken with me in front of the tallest kids in the grade for the yearbook, which made me look even smaller. Being short caused me a lot of grief, and I was teased with a lot of nicknames. It also gave me some form of attention which also shaped my identity.

Because of my small demeanor, my mother was always on standby. She was ready to fight any battle on my behalf to ensure that I was being treated fairly. The first memory I have of this was a time in kindergarten when they used the same peanut butter

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knife to spread the Cheese Whiz on the celery sticks. I ended up with a severe allergic reaction to the cross contamination of the peanut butter being unintentionally smeared into the cheese whiz. When I was a child, schools or classrooms were not peanut-free, and allergies were not as big of a concern. I suppose my mother felt like it was her job to educate people on allergies and she did this with assertiveness. Granted, I probably came home sick, wheezing, and covered in hives due to my anaphylactic peanut allergy so I must give my mom some credit here in paving the way to more understanding around allergies in schools. Even though I was not there in person, I can imagine her storming into the school to express her concerns about the incident in full 'mama bear' mode. I can only assume the volume and tone in my mother's voice was not gentle during her interaction with the school. Although I do not know for certain what the encounter between my mother and my kindergarten teacher may have looked like, I predict it was not entirely pleasant. There are several other instances of when my mother would step into protect me during events from early childhood into adulthood. As I write this memory, I can feel tightness grow in my chest. There was no doubt in my mind or heart that my mother loved me and wanted to protect me; however, I never knew how my mother would react in the face of conflict.

Tow the Line

Mothering feels like a

Circus Ring

Controlling daring feats

flying

    juggling

tight-rope walking

Some mothers seem to seek

Control.

Having control means what?

poised?

organized?

better than the other mothers?

Decisions?

Multiple variables

Multiple results

Impact our children more than us

Sometimes there is

no way to know

which way to go

It's easy to

Get in line

and

Tow the line

But is it ever safe to undermine?

Storm trooper

Mama bear

Crazy

Uncomfortable with the label

Uncomfortable with obliviousness

Uncomfortable with indecision

It's easy to be quiet

It's easy to be polite but…

Sometimes there is

no way to know

      which way to go

Which decisions will come back to haunt us?

Big or small…

Which ones will play out?

As if there wasn't a decision being made at all?

4.3.2. 2009-2010

Peering Through Colourfully Tinted Windows

I started teaching kindergarten in 2009. In 2010, we were all moved into a brand-new facility and the old school was eventually torn down. Although new and modern, the building looked and felt industrial with a tin roof that pinged when it rained. One of the design features on the white, floor-to-ceiling concrete blocks were square, cut-outs in colourful patterns resembling stained glass. The feature added some colourful light into the classrooms but also added a peephole for parents to peer inside. Often, I would see the blue, red, or yellow faces of parents staring into these colourful squares, hoping to see their children in the class. As the faces appeared, it reminded me of characters from Alice in Wonderland. Perhaps, I was Alice going on a journey and keeping these strange characters at a distance on the other side of the looking glass.

As a newer, younger teacher who was inexperienced in teaching kindergarten, those concrete walls served as protection from parents glaring in, but the windows were

still there. When I saw those faces, I felt judged as the teacher. I could not understand why they would want to know what was happening in the classroom. I had the mentality that the classroom was like my office, and I would not go to other people's office and stare at them while they were doing their job. The colours of the glass could only divert attention but never hide my inexperience or lack of early childhood pedagogy. At that time, I did not realize how it felt to be an outsider peering in through little squares of colored glass, just wanting to see a glimpse. Now that I am a parent, I do. I want a stained-glass window to see inside the classroom too.

Obstructed View

Even if the view is clear

Is it possible to fully hear?

I wonder how one can clearly see

Or even peer through stained-glass perfectly

The narrative is foreign, lips can't be read

Imagine the thoughts rummaging through their heads.

An obstructed view can misconstrue

But a tinted one is distorted by the hue

What's the point, if only to criticize?

Ruin one's confidence? tell oneself lies?

If you're not able to be objective

Tinted windows are barely reflective

Only in stories can you cross through

We know Alice ended up with a stranger view

As a parent, I only want to know

Without trying, my children will grow

What lies between omniscient and an ostrich with her head in the sand?

I need more than nothing… WHAT IS THE PLAN?

4.3.3. 2012-2013

Grey-Area Kid

A 'grey-area kid' is not an official term in education. However, I am sure that educators and parents know very well what it means to teach or raise a child that fits into this sub-category. I recall chatting at my classroom door with a parent over their concerns raising a grey-area kid and the supports their child was allotted in school – which amounted to basically nothing. During this time, funding cuts were made, and class-sizes were increased. This meant supports for all children, directly or indirectly, were reduced. This child did not have a diagnosis that would garner funding or additional support from an educational assistant or learning support teacher, the parent was concerned that their child would fall through the cracks. This was a sweet, calm, quiet child who demanded little attention and struggled to keep up with many of the learning outcomes. It was hard to watch, harder to provide the extra supports myself, and extremely hard to face this parent because I was not sure how I could help. Consequently, I am sure we both felt very lost.

Lost in Grey Clouds

Won't come last

But won't come first

Never the best

And never the worst

Too many things to overcome

Does anyone know where they are coming from?

Thinking about what next to do

Wait to see what happens. Will they be pushed through?

Lost in grey clouds, what does that mean?

Can't be heard and won't be seen

Such wonderful qualities stuck inside

Please know my child so they won't ever hide

4.3.1. 2018 -2019

Releasing and Letting Go

Figure 2. Impromptu photographs of my daughter's first day of kindergarten (2017)

Bittersweet excitement for the journey begins

Holding on, squeezing tight

I'm not sure I'm ready to let go

There's apprehension because I know…

> the world is not always kind

> and some are left behind

Emotions aside

I slowly release my embrace

It's time for her to stand on her own

> She can be free

> The world needs her more than me

Our First Three-Way Conference

Already feeling awkward standing in the hallway with my daughter and her father (i.e., my ex-husband), we flipped through the neat pile of my daughter's work left on a table by the teacher. We oohed and ahhed over her art portfolio, printing book, and drawing journal left in the hall. I immediately wanted to look through the other books and compare, or rather assess, my daughter's work against that of her classmates. I wondered why this conference was such a big deal to me. I already thought I knew the answers as to how my daughter stood academically. I reminded myself that it is important to show

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up to meetings like these. Ha! Here I am, writing a dissertation on the topic of parental involvement and I do not really feel like I need to be at her first meeting. But I am here, and I am interested in this experience for the sake of my daughter.

When our turn arrived, we sat at a U-shaped table on the opposite side of the teacher. The teacher spoke about how much she enjoys having our daughter in the class. The teacher showed us all her report card. The concise, single page report said a little about her friendships and how she needs a few reminders to help clean up her materials. Although it is not a formal goal, it is something the teacher would like her to work on. We also discuss a 'collaborative' goal. The teacher has pre-written in the goal section that my daughter can work on letter sound recognition and indicates that she can improve upon the 12 letter sounds she currently knows. "Phonemic awareness," I think to myself, but the report refrains from using any 'edu-speak' or teacher language.

I jumped in and I suggested a second learning goal could be added around building more friendships. I shared that my daughter has been feeling left out and is saying that nobody likes her at school. The teacher listened and offered to change the goal but clarified that she was going to write only one goal on the report card. She even held her index finger up, further indicating that only one goal was necessary. I said to myself, "it is not like I want ten goals… just two." But I backed off and did not push the issue any further. We all thanked the teacher, and she assured us again that she enjoys having our daughter in the class. We returned to the hallway where more families were waiting, looking at their child's neatly piled workbooks.

I left the meeting with my brain turning. Yes, this meeting was for my daughter, but it was also a place for me to reflect. It was the first three-way conference that I had attended as a parent. I knew over time that my daughter would meet this goal of learning all of her letter sounds, as most children do, but I was not sure what the plan was for my daughter to achieve it. For me personally, goal setting is very important, and I use goal setting strategies in my daily life. One question that I wish I had asked was, 'What are ways my daughter will work towards meeting this goal in class and at home?'. After reflecting, I realized that collaborative goals, although agreed upon, may not need to be preconceived. Time could be spent around authentically creating a goal together and a simple plan of action, as well as providing some resources to achieve the goal. A subtle but important shift in my pedagogical understanding had been sparked.

What's My Role?

Collaboration is idealistic

But is it even realistic?

When educators say, 'meaningful consultation' what do we mean?

Are things as meaningful or collaborative as they seem?

As a parent, I want to know, where's my say?

My perspective has changed in an inverted way

I see things differently with my own child

I don't want an abundance of words on reports, just to be filed

Algorithms, procedures, goals, and cognitive understanding

For a small child, are these expectations too demanding?

The experts say early intervention is the key

It's so paradoxical, if you ask me

Overthinking is not good for the soul

Underthinking means that I lose control

I shake my head, exasperated. I ask, 'what is my role?'

Volunteering Experiences

When my daughter was in kindergarten, I was available to volunteer one day a week in her class. One beautiful, autumn day the students were learning about how to write a perfect letter 'P'. I looked through the windows at the sun shining and I wondered about the importance of repeatedly writing the letter 'P' in a printing book. In no way am I being judgmental of my daughter's teacher because I did similar letter writing activities when I taught primary students. But looking through my lens as a parent, I could not help but wonder. I wondered about the amount of time children spend inside learning when they could be outside, in nature, playing. I have often fought an internal battle about what is more important and what counts as learning. What are kids learning when they play? What do they gain from being in nature?

Luckily, both my daughter's kindergarten and grade one teachers tried to balance seatwork with nature exploration. My daughter experienced many walks to explore the closest ravine to the school. And as a parent volunteer, I was able to spend time in the class and as an extra helper on these walks to the ravine which occurred later that spring.

Perhaps some learning is transcendent and learning within nature is like that. The learning that occurs cannot necessarily be documented by assessments but through the feeling we gain from being a part of the natural world that surrounds us. As a teacher, I feel the dichotomy of learning through exploration and 'real' learning that happens in the classroom. I notice a lot of, 'yeah… but' when talking about outdoor education or play in the early years. In one breath I think, 'it is nice to play, it is nice to learn outside', in the other breath I think, 'yeah… but, what are they learning?'. Being able to volunteer and see with my own eyes, I now more deeply understand the interaction of the students and their interaction with nature. It was imperative to be on this part of my daughter's learning journey so I could resolve my own feelings of 'yeah…but'.

In December 2018, I volunteered to do a science experiment with the kindergarten class. It was interesting seeing my daughter's reaction to me teaching. Part of my class management style is to point and make clicking sounds. I suppose it is the same management style used to direct a horse. I thought my teaching strategy was great and I had no idea how this would embarrass my five-year old daughter. I thought that she would be so excited to have me teach her class and be a part of her learning journey in a more formal way. I was disappointed when she said to me, "that's embarrassed" but I knew she meant that she was embarrassed and worse, I was embarrassing to her. I did

not realize that being so eagerly part of her learning journey would be met with resistance.

Sometimes, I envision how the perfect scenario will play out in my mind, like how things might happen so perfectly as if life was like a television show. When my intentions result in a different way than I envisioned, I question how I should proceed. After my daughter told me that she was embarrassed of me, I wondered if I was supposed to be a part of her learning journey. Was I wrong to want to be a part? Is volunteering more about the parent than the child. In other words, was this more of a benefit to me than her?

It was February 2019, and coincidently my daughter's sixth birthday, when I volunteered for the '100 days of School' party. I helped my daughter create a costume and sprayed her golden hair grey so that she would look like she was 100 years old that day. I went into the class filled with little boys, some in pant suits with suspenders, and little girls wearing glasses on chains and pearl necklaces. I helped students design their 100 days art project and count their 100 objects they brought from home. Although counting to 100 is not part of the kindergarten curriculum anymore in BC, I suppose this is a way to make learning come alive. I joined up with my daughter, and another student, and we sat on the carpet. Although the pair was heavily distracted and challenged to count past twenty, we attempted to count the 100 objects. I cannot say that I enjoyed this volunteer experience as much as I had hoped. My daughter and many of her classmates were buzzing around the room and it was at that point I felt like being part of the learning journey was not all it was cracked up to be. I felt like I was at work in my role as a

teacher and not the *fun* parent volunteer bonding with my daughter in her learning environment.

When I reflect on my volunteering experiences with my daughter and her kindergarten class, I realize that I was looking forward to creating a closer bond with her. I even wanted to connect with her classmates so that I could create some positive opportunities for my daughter outside of school. My hope was for my daughter and her classmates to view me as a 'cool' mom or a 'fun' mom. I wanted my daughter to want me there; moreover, want me to be a part of her learning journey. It was a hard discovery to learn that there were times that I felt like more of a nuisance to my daughter. She seemed indifferent to the fact that I was inserting myself into her learning experiences. I had so badly wanted her to want me there! In April of 2019, my volunteer experiences in my daughter's kindergarten class came to an end when I accepted a full-time district mentoring position. My daughter never asked me why I could not volunteer anymore, and I am not actually sure that she noticed that I was no longer visiting her classroom. Although I feel that volunteering was helpful for me to see the inner workings of her classroom I question if it was too forced. I wanted the experience to be meaningful. I wanted to be a positive part of her learning journey; moreover, I wanted her to want me there and I am not certain that she did.

Embarrassed

A sweet little toddler face, ready to take on the world.

I had hoped to always be her hero; would she always be my little girl?

The first time that I realized that this was not the case,

we both had some feelings that we wanted to erase.

I was sad that I had embarrassed her

I understood her feelings, for sure.

I had to take her feelings into consideration

I was also embarrassed, it was an important realization

To evaluate the situation, I needed to take my away my pride

I needed to be more empathetic and be on her side.

In the end, I figured out that I would never be her teacher

I would need be her mom, if I was ever going to reach her

Entering my daughter's learning journey turned out to be an imposition

The solution was pretty simple, all I had to do was listen.

Hot Dog Homework

My daughter 'graduated' from kindergarten with an elaborate ceremony, mortar board and all. She entered, what would turn out to be, the most interesting grade one year. One evening, early in September, my daughter was assigned some sharing homework. Homework in grade one should not be complicated, and it wasn't really. My daughter was asked to create a drawing about something that she liked. I thought this would be easy, I thought that this would be quick, I thought that it might even be fun, but I thought wrong!

Not being the best artist myself, I suggested drawing something simple. My suggestions were met with a major meltdown. That evening I was in disbelief at the strife this assignment was causing, and I was foreshadowing her teenage years of her yelling at me, 'you don't understand me at all!' The calamity of this homework assignment will forever be etched in my mind. I couldn't believe how things escalated to an extreme place of tears and near rage. After many suggestions and some much needed 'calm down time' in her room, my daughter settled on drawing her favourite food… a hot dog!

I had always visualized my daughter and I getting through life's big and small challenges as a team. Whatever the situation was, we would get through it together. The teacher in me believed that I could easily coach my daughter along to greatness. One evening, we were sitting at the dining table, ready to do her homework and I soon realized that my 'expertise' as a teacher was not welcome there. I knew this wasn't a case of her inability to do the homework, so I couldn't understand what was happening and why she was so resistant. Also, she couldn't and wouldn't verbalize her frustrations.

The way I pictured the harmonious experience taking place in my mind was a far cry from what transpired. Unfortunately, this was a sign of things to come. Working alongside my daughter became a yearlong struggle and one that I was not entirely prepared for. The worst part was thinking about all the homework assignments that I had assigned children (and their parents) over the years. I had heard parents complaining about how much they hated doing homework with their children. I really had no clue about what the struggle at their homes might be, but I gained some insight into what homework for many families may entail. Eventually throughout the year, I found a few

creative ways to circumnavigate the battle of doing homework, such as, creating pretend YouTube videos of her doing homework or using flat-out bribes. These strategies that I came up with would lose their appeal quickly and I would have to invent more.

Part of the Learning Journey

Not a day the world will turn

where there isn't something more that I can learn

Starting within myself

And importance of my own health

'Put the oxygen mask on first' they say,

'or you won't be much good to anyone else, anyway'

I want to learn how to be good to the people in my life

I need to learn how to be a better daughter, mother, and wife

Learning more about subjects in school seems so trivial

Relationships with people and our Earth are finally starting to rival

Drilling kids to learn times tables seems so outdated

Memorizing facts in school may be antiquated

I am relearning what I thought was once more vital

It's all part of the learning journey, not just the title

4.3.2. 2019

Pandemic

I became more aware of the Coronavirus when my colleague's trip to Italy to visit Reggio Emilio was cancelled in February 2020. At that moment, I had no idea what this would mean for education as a system. As well, what this would mean for me as a parent

of a school-aged child. My interest in being a part of my daughter's learning journey was about to magnify. The word, 'homeschooling' was thrust upon me and many other parents around the world. It was interesting to take note of the changes that occurred in almost a blink of an eye.

On March 14, 2020, the first day of Spring Break, we were awaiting news about what school might look like after our two weeks of vacation. When we found out that school would not be resuming to in-class instruction, many of us were scrambling to learn or become better acquainted with online programs that would help us to teach remotely and connect with students, parents, and our colleagues. As a district mentoring teacher, my role before I went on maternity leave was to help teachers that were just hired into the district. When we were given notice that school would be conducted remotely, and students across British Columbia would be learning from home, our mentoring jobs quickly shifted to helping transition teachers to online learning platforms. The question around including parents in home-based learning piqued my interest and became very relevant to me, given my interest in the role of the parent in a students' learning journey. Teachers' main questions were about passing on information to families while still engaging children who were learning from home. For children, especially young children, parents became a necessary consideration in the plan to transition to home-based learning. In many cases, parents were no longer the bystander to learning; thus, becoming the means of instruction between the student and the teacher.

When my maternity leave started, my daughter was beginning her home-learning experience. Not only was I recovering from a caesarean and parenting a newborn child, but I was also preparing to provide learning experiences at home. My daughter's teacher

embraced the challenge of transitioning her classroom from a physical space to a digital platform. Parents were emailed links to access different online mathematics, reading, and digital portfolio platforms. She sent schedules explaining when she would be meeting with the students as a class and in small groups through a video communication platform. I had to download, set up, and learn to navigate new digital applications to help instruct my daughter while subsequently learning different ones to help the teachers that I was mentoring. Daily, the teacher would send instructional videos to teach a particular concept or lesson. As a parent, I would show the videos to my daughter, but my role did not end there. My daughter was unable to complete any of the assignments independently. This meant that we would sit down together for hours to complete assigned work. Often, my daughter would need additional support or instruction that she normally would have received at school. Luckily for me as a teacher, I had ideas and ways of supporting and adapting learning in my 'teacher's tool belt'. Conveniently, I even had manipulatives and hands-on materials to help my daughter apply mathematical concepts in a concrete manner. Even though I am a teacher, likely having more strategies for instruction than the average parent, there was a major limitation that I had to navigate… my daughter did not want me to be her teacher. Perhaps this was not the experience shared by all parents, but I found teaching my own child to be a major struggle. It was hard! The distractions of daily life, setting up a new routine for learning, and being quarantined together for days with a newborn did not prove to be the necessary components for a highly successful home learning experience.

One day stands out in my mind and highlights the exchange that can be shared between a teacher and a parent. This exchange reminds me of the adage, 'it takes a

village to raise a child' and it began when my daughter saw her little brother after he came home from the hospital. I thought that bringing home a little brother would be an exciting time for the entire family. I thought that introducing my daughter to my newborn son would be a joyful experience. My daughter, who is normally resilient and has a 'go with the flow', demeanor became sullen and seemed depressed or angry. It had just been my daughter and I for several years and having a new little brother would take an adjustment for the whole family; however, my own post-partum symptoms made me feel uncompassionate, more irritated than normal, and not at all equipped to handle my young daughter's big feelings. When it came to doing a home-learning math assignment, my daughter was uncooperative, to say the least. After many attempts to complete the task and both of us emotionally drained, I reached out to her teacher by email. I explained how I needed some help explaining the assignment and she was feeling blue about this big change in our household. As hard as it was, I had to admit that things were not going well. The teacher called my daughter through video chat. Before going over the math assignment, she did a social-emotional check-in and talked to her about these big feelings that she was having. Afterwards, she took extra time to read a book with my daughter and also encouraged my daughter to read to her. I cannot tell you how this exchange between my daughter and her teacher turned things around for us in a positive way. That call made a big difference for both my daughter and me. I knew that if I were unable to teach the lesson material to my daughter, I could reach out for support from her teacher who had an amazing connection with her.

As a teacher, I knew the curriculum and the teaching methods, but I also knew my daughter was not feeling very positive about the surmounting changes that were being

imposed on her. Unfortunately, I am not sure if anything that I could have done in that moment would have been enough to turn her negative state of mind around. I felt grateful that I could reach out to the teacher for support. Even though there were difficulties becoming one of my daughter's teachers, I also saw the impact of having more of a direct role in my daughter's learning journey. This experience of working more intensely and side by side with my daughter led me to have a deeper understanding of her interests, learning needs, methods of motivation among other important factors in her learning.

That's Not How My Teacher Does It

Picture perfect moments

 I imagined in my head

Like, I love you mommy or cuddles

Or reading stories together before bed.

Like a robin showing her chick how to first use her little wings,

I thought teaching my daughter might be one of those picture-perfect things.

What I had imagined in my head were not the picture-perfect dreams

I knew things were a bit off-course when all I heard were screams.

THAT'S NOT HOW MY TEACHER DOES IT! Loudly rolled out

BUT I'M A TEACHER TOO, AND A GOOD ONE! I would shout

Why is the relationship between a mother and child so utterly hard?

This certainly challenges what I thought I knew and puts me on guard.

I don't want to strain relationships, neither mine nor the families in my care.

Tensions and dynamics are certainly something I must be aware.

It's not my idea of perfection, so I thought I might learn and share.

4.3.3. 2020

What are you hoping for?

After my maternity leave ended, I returned to teaching. This time, I was at a new school and teaching a grade I hadn't taught since the beginning of my career. I was returning as a middle school teacher and things had sure changed. In fact, the last time I had taught this grade, students didn't have laptops on their desk and smart phones did not exist yet. Electronics in the classroom was a game changer but this did not shock me as much as the self-awareness and talk of mental illness. Students were openly sharing their diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, anxiety, or feelings of being constantly stressed or overwhelmed.

Although many of my students had significant learning or medical needs, one student was hard not to notice. This student would enter the school with their toque

nearly covering their eyes and their gaiter style, corona virus face mask up as high as it could go. Their head would be facing down so I could barely see their eyes peeking out. They wouldn't say much except to complain, whine, or even cry sometimes. Even when talking to them directly, their voice was very quiet, and they were hardly audible. When I spoke to them, they would get tears in their eyes. I started to notice other things too. For example, they would self-harm by picking at their skin until it would bleed. They would email me to tell me that they were tired and too overwhelmed to complete their assignments. I reached out to the limited resources available at the school and I also reached out to my student's parents to get more background information.

Once contact had been made, the parents would communicate with me almost daily. Some of emails would incorporate a suggestive and demanding tone about what I should be teaching and what resources should be made available. A lot of these requests were not resources that were available to me (or available at any school). I did attempt to make realistic suggestions about how I could support their child in class. If I requested that certain paperwork be documented or that someone from the medical community would need to provide some suggestions or context, there was a reason why that could not happen. Not being able to provide adequate support for a child or family in need felt very disheartening.

From my perspective in situations like these it often seems that no good deed goes unpunished. When asking a parent how they want me to help their child, their requests can often seem unrealistic or unattainable. I become the problem. I am not doing enough. The blame game begins. I blamed them and in return, I felt like they blamed me.

For example, when one parent asked for 'extra help' at school for their child, I asked them what 'extra help' they were hoping the school would provide. Even when I listed the choices that were within my realm, I did not get an answer. I was left feeling like it was my job to fix their child not just teach their child.

I am anxious, stressed, and overwhelmed.

Want more. What's more?

"They're depressed," they say.

"How do you know?" I respond.

"I just know," they fight back.

"I believe you," I propose, "are you going to take them to the Dr.?"

"We're too busy," they blurt out, "what are you going to do for us?"

"I'll find out our options," I reason, "leave it with me."

"They can't do gym. They can't go outside. They can't do too much homework. They're bored. They won't eat."

"Okay," I offer, "They can rest during gym. They can stay inside during lunch. They can work on their own inquiry. They can eat anytime during class. They can do half the homework."

"They still need more," they insist.

"What *more* is there?" I whisper to myself, defeated.

4.3.4. 2022

That parent

I know that my daughter, like many other children, will experience a few challenges throughout the duration of her school life. When my daughter was first identified with a learning difference, it did not come as a shock to me. In fact, it helped me understand my daughter and her capabilities more. Her recent psycho-educational assessment revealed many strengths that were not being utilized because there was so much concentration placed on overcoming her challenges. With every new teacher, in every new grade, I will have to explain how my daughter learns best. Although I hope that her teachers build a relationship with her and see her capabilities over any of her perceived weaknesses, I will continue to advocate for any ongoing learning needs. However, this is not always easy to do. My advocacy, as polite and informed as I am, is not always welcome with the teachers or administration.

Recently I was at my daughter's friend's birthday party. I was chatting with some of the other mothers at the party. All our daughters attend the same school and have been classmates off and on for years. I was expressing my disappointment that my daughter was the only friend from her group that was placed in a different class. I told them that I had requested that my daughter be switched to the class with her peers because her teacher was leaving the school. My rationale was that with her recent diagnosis, it might be best for my daughter to move to a new class near her supportive peers. I was informed that this was not possible. From my experience as a teacher, students switching classes mid-year is not common; however, it is entirely possible. I explained to the other mothers that I had a choice to make. As unpopular as it might make me, I could fight this

decision. I could show up at the principal's office and make my case. I could even bring my request forward to the superintendent if I chose to pursue it further. When I explained my plight to the other mothers, one of them responded, "well, you don't want to be *that parent!"* And with that, I sighed, and I stayed silent.

Sweet but Sticky

You say there's nothing wrong

How can that be?

How are you sure?

Are you more sure than me?

I'm not one to brag

And I'm not one to gloat

But something about this seems

like you are letting this float

I will not feel reprieve

When I am vindicated

In fact, I will feel worse

If she's medicated

I know you don't know

Because I don't know either

But don't say it's nothing

4.3.5. 2023

Pathways to Graduation

I have recently moved into a learning support teacher role at an alternate education high school, and I work with a diverse group of learners. Most of the students that attend this school have experienced many challenges in life and throughout their schooling. For many of the students that attend this program, graduating with a high school diploma is not a guarantee. I hold the First Peoples Principle, *Learning involves patience and time*, at the forefront of my mind and heart when I work my students (BC Ministry of Education and First Nations Education Steering Committee, 2006). I have realized that there are many opportunities for adult students beyond the public school system. It could be argued that it is more important for students at this school to recognize the importance of lifelong learning over meeting graduation requirements. Furthermore, it could be more beneficial to know and apply the qualities of a learning, than to endure stress and pressure of meeting the precise timeline of graduation resulting in the demise of mental health. Although I hold these beliefs about learning, often families believe graduating from high school on time is the priority despite the challenges

that I see their children are facing. Moreover, I feel my role is to support the goals and desires that the families hold over my own beliefs.

Over the past few months, I have met with the grade twelve students on my caseload, and their families, to create pathways to graduation. After listening to the students and their parents share their plans for the future outside of school, and goals they would like to accomplish this year in school, I start to formulate pathway to graduation visuals. Even though my students are older and in their last year or two of public education, I feel like including parents in this discussion helps on many levels. First, it provides an opportunity to connect with the parents so that we can communicate regularly. Additionally, I hope that my students and their family see me as a person who is there to support them towards their future aspirations. Including parents in the learning conversations feels like a very meaningful and purposeful way for me to be relational and support learning.

A parent texts me, 'Do you have a moment to talk?'

"Of course," and I call the parent right away.

"It's not going well this week. Their anxiety is so high, and they do not want to come in today. They haven't been there all week either. I don't know what to do. It's not logical, it's just anxiety but there is no talking them out of it. At this rate, they will never graduate on time."

I reply, "I'm sorry it has been so difficult this week. I will text them and hopefully they will choose to come tomorrow. Are they still going to work?"

"Yes. That has never been an issue."

"Great. I think it is important that they are still committing to their job right now. We'll be ready and I will be here for them when they're ready to come back." I realize that this is not enough but it's all I can do at this point. I can only hope my message offers this frustrated and frightened parent some consolation.

Just message me

> *End of the line*
>
> *End of their rope*
>
> *At this stage of the game*
>
> *There's not much more hope*
>
>
> *I reassure, it will be okay*
>
> *I want to be there relationally*
>
> *Anytime, anywhere*
>
> *Just message me*

4.4.   Summary of chapter four

The autoethnographic inquiry chapter begins as a metaphor for writing a book. I use the notion of writing a book to symbolize my experience as a parent of a young child. As a parent, I am not sure if I am the author, or my daughter is the writer of her life book. I am trying to navigate this with thoughtfulness and intention as I want my daughter to begin to find her own way in the push-pull of me letting her go to discover her own pathways of her story.

I use a second metaphor – stained glass windows (from the first Kindergarten class that I taught in) to represent the idea that parents may want a clearer view of their child's education. Looking through stained-glass does not create an opening for parents to see clearly into the classroom nor their child's learning. Stained glass also may distort how the teacher may view parents. As a parent, I now understand the desire to see what my child is learning in a less obstructed way. Having a clearer picture provides opportunities for me to continually walk alongside of my daughter as she moves along her learning path.

As a teacher, I feel extremely guarded because I have been in situations where my professional boundaries have been crossed. Although these demanding parent-teacher relationships usually end naturally after a year or two, (i.e., once their child has moved onto another grade and teacher), my cautionary feelings remain. I'm worn down with unreasonable requests and left feeling burnt out.

Entering the inquiry, I select six different life experiences and I reflect through autoethnographic vignettes. I deepen the emotive experience through poetry. The rhymes help me to think carefully about the experiences and carefully determine the words to select. Furthermore, the poetry and rhymes helped me highlight my feelings and give me deeper insights into tensions that have arisen throughout these narratives. My vignettes and poetry stem from a multitude of experiences as a parent and educator.

Throughout the chapter, I navigate my experiences through the mindset of a parent contrasted with that of a teacher. I consider my daughter's experience as she has moments of independence and needs guidance or assistance. The chapter ends with a

provocation to educators to hold space for the parent-child and parent-teacher

relationships. These relationships must be better understood if educators want parents to

work with their children more at home. Relationships like these must be maintained, and

not strained, if parents want to be characters in their child's 'learning journey' story.

Chapter 5. Dimensions - Gazing into a trifold mirror

Figure 3. Photograph of a Mirror Maze

http://www.fairmontresort.com.au/discovertheresort/kidszone/mirror-maze-arcade/

5.1. Introduction and chapter outline

I remember being a child standing in the changing room of a department store. I would be waiting for my mom to try on clothes in the fitting room and I would play with the trifold mirrors. I would adjust the angles of the trifold mirrors in such a way that I could see my reflection cast back over and over and over. I consider the metaphor of 'windows' that I use throughout this inquiry. Mirrors are just unique windows that have a painted coating under the glass and instead of being transparent, they offer reflection. Trifold mirrors are especially interesting to me because they reflect the same image from different angles and create images that are reflections of reflections. When I look into a trifold mirror, the sensation makes me feel like I have entered different dimensions. This chapter of analysis seeks to enter different dimensions of understanding. By looking at

my inquiry through layers of analysis, I formulate new ideas and deepen my understanding within the topic of parent inclusion. As I metaphorically gaze into a trifold mirror, I contemplate the same scenarios from my past, and I view them in my mind many times over. I postulate new ways of thinking about these memories and ideas. As I add dimension to my thinking, I endeavor to connect my analysis to the exploration of new understandings and the cultural significance behind this project.

5.1.1. An invitation

I understand that an aim of autoethnography is "the study of space between the self and practice" (Starr, 2010, p.2). Although my experiences are only my experiences, I remind the reader that they are welcome to journey with me as I try and make sense of the space between myself and my practice. I also encourage the reader to metaphorically enter their own trifold mirror and notice their own reflections in different ways. Starr (2010) suggests that through the process of engaging, the autoethnographer and the reader can experience transformational thinking. Perhaps by re-reading selections of the vignettes and poetry that most resonate with you, pausing to reflect, making connections, or forming your own questions, you may transform your own thinking. I have come to realize that whenever I engage more in the process of reflecting and re-reflecting, I see more, feel more, uncover more, and learn more.

5.1.2. Recentering by restating my intention

This inquiry came to fruition organically from my own personal experiences when I became a parent of a young child in school. I developed a desire to share my feelings within this inquiry through reflective vignettes and poetry. As I wrote and

reflected, I naturally shifted between the perspectives of being an educator and being a parent to a young child at school. I use the notion of different dimensions to analyze my personal experiences so that I can provide relevant thoughts around parent engagement and inclusion. By working through the iterative process of reading, thinking, re-reading, and writing, I continue to learn more about myself and my identity as a parent and educator.

In my everyday life, I am usually very quick to dismiss many of my feelings to bypass emotion and move forward in my busy day. However, in this inquiry, I made efforts to scan my memories and select relevant moments along my timeline that offered sparks of emotionality. When I felt a twinge of emotion, I was led to take another look at that past moment and consider it to be an important moment worth sharing in the context of parent inclusion. I look forward to also exploring these moments through an analytical process and think about what they might mean in the broader context of education through discussions around parent inclusion. By illuminating my own feelings throughout my timeline of reflections, I am processing my data and layering my understandings dimensionally. The first two dimensions move from personal to transformational perspectives and I consider implications in the third dimension. I keep these synthesized yet overarching questions in mind while I travel through the dimensions: ***How might educators connect through relationship with parents and invite parents to opportunities for more meaningful engagement within their child's learning journey? Additionally, how might parent inclusion lead to more equitable experiences for children in school?***

5.2.   First dimension: My personal perspectives

Within my inquiry, I connected my personal history as a child in school to, what I like to call, a 'very caring' (versus overbearing) mother in the vignette, 'Thinking Back'. I also recalled my experience with parents as an educator in the vignette 'Peering Through Tinted Windows'. Furthermore, I reflect on the recent past, as a mother of a young child in the public school system. These reflections are noted in the vignette, 'Volunteering Experiences' and the poem, 'Obstructed View'. By connecting my past to the present, I noticed how I became more aware of parents' presence as an educator. I became very attuned to my students' parents who were supportive or conversely critical. This impacted my role as an educator because I was making the choice to let parents have agency and I did not perceive myself as having full control. My mother was an instrumental person in keeping me safe and protected. I believe that when parents responded to my teaching, it resonated with me more deeply because of my personal history with my mother. I wanted parents to know that their feelings were being taken into consideration and their voice would be heard.

5.2.1.   Connecting timelines as a parent and educator

Due to my personal history, I can better understand and relate to the 'mama bear' or 'very-caring' mother. I understand why she wants to protect her children from any harm. Therefore, when parents are protective of their children (i.e., my students), I make attempts to see their point of view. As I reflect on my experiences over my career as an educator, I became more comfortable including parents in the conversation and activities of their children. This was especially true after I gained more experience and confidence

around my teaching abilities. I found, for the most part, parents to be an excellent resource and that we were on the same team – both wanting what was best for their child. I more quickly recognized when a parent was asking for more than I could give, as expressed in the poem, 'Want more, What's more?'. I began to establish professional boundaries by clarifying my role as an educator to parents.

As I am a parent with a child in public school, I seek out the opportunities to be invited into the learning journey of my daughter. I am mindful that I do not want to appear overbearing or judgemental, or embarrass my daughter, but I want to create space for meaningful collaboration with my daughter's teachers. I want them to view me as an asset or resource and not as a 'Storm Trooper', 'Mama Bear', or 'Crazy' as I wrote about in the poems 'Tow the Line' and 'That Parent'. I realize there may be times that I need to advocate for my daughter because she is a 'grey-area kid'. Without my advocacy, and honest conversations with her teachers, I fear that she will go unnoticed and will not have the support needed to progress like many of her peers.

By connecting my timeline from the past to the present, I have been able to analyze my narratives and look more deeply at my relationships that I have formed with the parents of the students I have taught over the years. I feel like it is worthwhile to spend more time as a teacher, building relationships with all types of parents. I strive to build better partnerships and strong, working relationships with all my students' parents. My hope is that this helps parents deepen their connection with their children around learning because they feel more involved. I have learned, through experience and research, that developing a strong relationship between home and school can be a great asset to moving a child's learning forward in a positive way.

5.2.2. Examining feelings of connection and disconnection

When I think about linking new ideas to themes, I notice the words *connections* or *connected* appear many times in my inquiry. Chang (2008) explains that themes may surface in many places of the data. They are "too abundant and palpable in the data to miss" (Chang, 2008, p. 132). It is impossible to ignore the impact that the word *connection* holds for me and what meaning it might signify for others. I postulate that most parents desire a loving connection with their children, and I am certainly no exception. Although at times parents might comment in jest that they cannot wait for their children to go back to school after a break, such as the kids returning to school after summer vacation, I do not believe that they want to lose any of the connection they formed in the times that they did spend together. I relish in the times that I get to spend with my daughter, and it seems that every day that my daughter leaves for school is challenging for me. Buckley (2015) suggests that autoethnography can help analyze emotions and recollecting memories can regenerate a physiological response. I am challenged to articulate exactly how I feel about my daughter going to school each day. After I hug her, and we say 'good bye' to each other in the morning, I can only describe it as I feel my heart tighten in my chest and a tear wells up in the corners of my eyes. As I mentioned, I am not a very emotional person so I cannot explain why this continues to happen almost daily. I empathize with parents who desperately want to stay connected to the children they love so much. Admittedly, when I taught kindergarten for the first time, I saw the parents of the children that I taught as an annoyance, especially when I saw their faces framed through the stained-glass windows. This experience was documented in the vignette, 'Peering Through Colourfully Tinted Windows'. Parents may naturally

have a desire or curiosity to see their children learning in action. In my case, I want to know more about my daughter's life at school because she is not very forthcoming about her day, even when I attempt to engage her in conversation about it.

"How was your day?" I ask.

"Gouda!" she replies excitedly without going into any more details.

Feelings of connection between my daughter and me were splintered when my daughter entered kindergarten because I did not know what was happening for most of her day. I did not always know what she was learning, plus my daughter did not disclose the events and learning experiences that took place throughout her day. I felt more disconnected from her, and I attributed this feeling to being absent in her learning journey. Although I knew I had to release to let go, I also wanted to remain knowledgeable, be as present in her life as possible, and provide positive support towards her educational experiences. Navigating the act of letting go and being present created an unsettling paradox. I recognize that I must let her go so that she can experience her life unfold in her way, but it is equally important for me to also be a guide on her journey.

I continue to find ways to support my daughter in her learning. Early in the school year, I offer invitations to her teachers to contact me about anything in hopes of initiating a meaningful connection with them. I explain my desire in supporting my daughter in her school-based activities as best as I can from home. I would try and ease their mind by letting them know that I am a teacher too and I understand the demands of the classroom in hopes they do not see my requests as personal attacks against their teaching. I wanted to help build a strong team for my daughter around her learning. I

considered this question, who will be helping my daughter and be on her school-based team?

5.2.3. Advocating for my daughter's learning needs

As I further reflect on my opposing feelings of disconnect between parent and child in the poems, 'Tow the Line and Obstructed View'. I realize that I want to feel included because my daughter is not able to self-advocate yet nor understand the nuances of the education system. Although my daughter is getting older, I do not feel that my wish to be a more welcome and relevant part of my daughter's learning journey will change anytime soon. However, even though my daughter was becoming more mature, and I was aiming to step back even further, I could not let go of the feeling that her learning needs were not always being taken care of at school. This feeling of not knowing who is on my daughter's learning team has prevailed for many years. It began as I started to notice my daughter's learning difference and I was told by the school that they believed I was mistaken. Except, I was not wrong. Further testing, that I pursued privately, clearly identified learning gaps. This further indicated that some accommodations would have to be made available to my daughter, if she was going to progress academically in the areas that were more challenging for her. After all the testing had been complete but not finalized, I was asked to provide these accommodations myself. Like a student who must wear glasses, my daughter must bring her own device to school so she can access technology-based supports until the psychologists report is finalized and her IEP is in place. To me this signifies a loss in time and appropriate resources that could have been implemented sooner and more consistently to better support my daughter and her learning challenges. Five years of my

daughter's schooling has been without specialized support and her teacher has been the only consistent member on her school-based team that I have been aware of. I am fortunate to be able to navigate an already confusing system. I continue to wonder how many other families are noticing their children struggle but have little background knowledge or understanding on what to do or how to navigate the system to pursue help for their child. Plus, families that pursue private assessments, may have to pay a substantial fee which acts is a barrier to receiving this type of service.

5.2.4. Minding the gap

As I do not always feel that my daughter is learning to the best of her abilities at school, I feel a great sense of responsibility for helping my daughter at home. However, working with my daughter at home is not always as positive as I had hoped it would be. This is disappointing because I thought we would develop a closer bond participating in some of her school activities together. Despite my advantage of being a teacher, my familiarity with teaching methods, and having a strong understanding of the curriculum I found that my daughter was difficult to teach! This was exemplified in the vignette, 'Hot Dog Homework' and the poem, 'That's Not How My Teacher Does It'. I felt more disconnection and I felt frustrated at times with my daughter. I feel vulnerable disclosing that as I grew discouraged engaging in homework activities with my daughter my exchanges were not always as positive as I had hoped they would be. I came to realize that I was displacing my frustration and that many of my negative feelings were a derivative of how I felt excluded from the learning experience my child was participating in at school. This made me further question why parental engagement was not encouraged more with simple, consistent engaging homework experiences to build

regular times for families to connect over learning. These small home learning experiences also help provide parents valuable insights into their child's learning and are an indicator to what supports their child might need.

5.2.5. Appreciating the connections made with teachers

It became clear to me that as a parent, that although I did not want to be intrusive at my daughter's school, I still wanted to be a valuable part of her learning journey. I also wanted to create a positive relationship between my daughter's teachers and myself. This positive relationship between parent, teacher, and child was recognized in the vignette, 'Pandemic'. During this time, I connected with my daughter's grade one teacher because my daughter was experiencing extremely sad feelings due to the birth of her new baby brother. Furthermore, she was having a difficult time being away from school, because of the pandemic, and found it challenging learning from home. My appreciation for my daughter's teacher grew when I felt connected, and my daughter was receiving extra support from her during this unusual time. I became more aware that I was not just a demanding parent who was looking to exercise her privilege. I was looking for genuine support for my daughter at a time when she really needed it. When we experienced this care and support from my daughter's grade one teacher during the pandemic, it brought peace to our home at a time when there was some struggle. Over the years, several of my daughter's teachers responded to my requests about my daughter or her learning needs with kindness, care, compassion, or support. When these extra efforts were made, they did not go unnoticed, and they have not been forgotten. This led to the feelings of connection that I was hoping for between school and home. This also inspired me as an educator to continue to develop relationships with my students'

families so that I could offer kindness, care, compassion, or support at times when the families of my students most need it.

5.2.6. Examining the connections made with families as an educator

Prioritizing children who are struggling

When working to build connections with parents, I often feel like time is not on my side. I generally must prioritize students who are most struggling over students who are generally meeting curricular expectations and working towards their learning goals. Therefore, I gravitate to communicating more with parents of students who have some challenges in school. For example, I communicated extensively with the family as expressed in the narrative, What are you hoping for? Instead of taking additional time to explain to a parent how their child is doing well or how a parent can extend learning at home, I most often focus my time communicating with the parents of my most struggling students. I consider this a, 'no news is good news' scenario because although I am not communicating bad news, I feel like I am barely communicating beyond what is a requirement of my job. This was noted in the poem, No News is Good News – a Haiku where I recall instances when I have expressed the sentiments that 'no news' is better than 'bad news' to parents.

When parents are 'very-caring'

There were also times when I assured parents that their interest in their child's learning was unnecessary because their child was doing the best they could already. I assured them that they did not require additional homework and I promised I would let them know if anything changed. I imagine my younger self, somewhat condescendingly,

patting the back of a parent who cares about their child's learning, ushering them out the classroom door suggesting that they do not have anything to worry about.

Over the years I have also tried to keep some parents at an arm's length for different reasons. I feared some of these parents because I was afraid that my boundaries as a professional would be crossed. These parents were perhaps known by other teachers to be challenging and this was communicated to me when I was teaching their child. I was afraid that a parent might be critical of me, my approaches, or my methods of teaching. This fear has held me back over the years and I feel like I have not done enough to create an open, welcoming environment for *all* the parents of the students that I teach. Part of parent relationships can involve experiencing uncomfortable feelings, like conflict and I try to avoid these tensions at all costs. Despite my disdain for expressing negative information to parents, I recognize that at times it is an unfortunate factor of my job that cannot be avoided. Parents should be made aware of situations that arise with the intention that their child will receive more support (i.e., from home and/or school) so the child experiences more positive outcomes.

5.2.7. Increasing communication with families

As an educator, I see how parents serve a very important role in their child's learning. Parents are most often the constant person who is watching their child develop and helping them to progress over time. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, after children returned to in-person learning, parents were not permitted physically inside the school building. Parents could not meet the teachers in person or see the classroom where their child attends each day. During this exceptional time, it became difficult for parents to get

a detailed sense of what was happening in the classroom and teachers had a very important role to play in facilitating a connection between home and school. Furthermore, it became essential for me, as an educator, to find alternative ways to build relationships with my students' families. Often, communicating through technology with video chat helped bridge the gap so relationships with parents could still be formed.

Now that school has returned to in-person learning, and parents were able to enter school buildings, offering the option of online meetings creates more opportunities to include parents. In a recent example, I had a meeting with a parent and a child's caseworker online. Conveniently, the caseworker spoke the same language as the parent, so she was able to translate to and from English during the meeting which improved our communication. I believe that the meeting would not have been as helpful or productive for the student if it was in person. Finding points of access through inclusion helps to increase parental engagement and this has become a goal of mine as an educator. I notice accessibility is an ideal that is given more consideration in our world today, and this is true within the education system as well. For example, some schools provide technology for students to use, and it can also be used by parents for connecting with the teacher digitally, if the family does not have access to a computer. I hope efforts to promote accessibility and facilitate a welcoming environment helps further build connections and parents feel more included, especially in the cases of marginalized families. The recurring theme of 'feeling connected' to my daughter during her learning journey motivates me to communicate meaningfully with the families of the students that I teach. Furthermore, as an educator, I want to be more understanding and cognisant of parents'

feelings and their desired level of involvement or engagment into the learning journeys of their children.

5.3. Second dimension: Transforming my perspectives

5.3.1. A standout year in my timeline helps me develop a lens for equity

During the timeframe of writing this dissertation there were three exceptional moments in time that viscerally affected many people in Canada and around the world, me included. The first being the Covid-19 pandemic which halted in-person learning for many students, including my daughter. The second being the protests held in Vancouver and globally that supported the Black Lives Matters movement in response to the deaths of George Floyd and other Black victims inflicted by police brutality. The third being the shocking news of 215 unmarked graves that were first revealed near a former residential school near Kamloops, British Columbia. This devastating news was profoundly felt by the local peoples of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, as well as other Indigenous communities (Thorne, 2022). Although I do not center my inquiry on these events, I feel that I must recognize these exceptional moments in time because they resulted in transformational shifts in my own thinking around equity in education and the further need for parent inclusion. I believe that the value of this dissertation "is the capacity of autoethnography to initiate positive change" (Starr, 2010, p. 2). Thinking of my autoethnography through a lens of equity is an important for me as an educator because I am working towards building positive change in my own educational practice. Had these events not occurred, I am not sure I would have been able to look past my own narrative, so that I could truly consider the topic of parent inclusion being connected to acts of

equity. Understanding equity through schools increasing their efforts towards more parent inclusion has greatly impacted my personal goal of transformational understanding and progressive development as an educator.

Considering the pandemic, parental inclusion, and equity

The pandemic was a challenging time for families, educators, and children in school. Upon reflection, I learned so much about my feelings towards parent inclusion. This was an amazing example of educators not only connecting with their students but also the families of the students that they teach. Educators had an opportunity to extend teaching opportunities to willing and able parents who then became a necessary part of their child's learning journey during this time. In my case, I found that reaching out to my daughter's teacher and explaining that my normally easy-going, resilient child was having a hard time adjusting only led to a more positive outcome. As the teacher was able to support my daughter, I was also able to support the teacher. I was able to listen to video lessons and help my daughter with her assignments. My daughter was able to receive learning support at home. Through this experience, albeit very challenging at times, helped me develop more feelings of connection with my daughter and provided opportunities to understand her abilities better. The relational feelings of learning are mentioned in the poem, 'Part of the Learning Journey'. Through this exceptional time of 'pandemic learning', I felt like I was a more relevant part of her learning journey which has subsequently changed our relationship to one where I can continue to assist her with more home learning experiences.

Exploring this exceptionality has brought about more insights into my own feelings around my daughter's learning and how I would build connection with parents

moving forward. I can create more opportunities for families to be a part of their child's

learning journey. Although learning from home was complicated, I recognize that I was

lucky to have additional time to spend with my daughter because I was on maternity

leave. I was also fortunate to have my personal experience in education to help me

navigate the transition to online learning for my daughter. Although I was balancing the

demands of a newborn baby, my recovery, and my daughter, I recognize that I had only

one child that was learning from home and I could focus a lot of attention on her. This

experience naturally left questions in my mind about how other children were receiving

their education in different family situations and structures.

Thinking and seeing parent inclusion through a lens of equity, I considered the

parents who were not able to directly support their children. The literature around the

topic of equity during the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted many issues that arose for

families who struggled with home learning for various reasons (MacDonald & Hill,

2022). Not all parents were able to support their young children directly. Some parents

were working during the time of instruction. Other families prioritized limited

technology, such as computers, to the older children. Other families did not have

resources, such as technology at all. Some educators struggled to reach all their learners

and teach relationally over the computer (Epstein, 2020). Although I personally

experienced some positive learning experiences with my daughter, I recognize that this

experience might have negatively impacted others. Although it was a time of connection

for my family this could have also been a time of deep disconnection for others. As the

pandemic continued, it became clear that some children were left out of the equation.

This made me consider ways that teachers could connect more with students and families

during this exceptional time. As difficult as this significant time period was, it also gave way to new connection-building ideas that educators and families might choose to continue well past the pandemic. Some of these ideas promoted more parental participation such as parent-teacher meetings over video, broadcasting school events, and sending parents regular video communications. These strategies for communication provided opportunities for more working parents to be a part of school-based conversations. Furthermore, parents could often interact with teachers based around their schedules. When educators had to creatively problem solve the delivery of their programs to students learning away from school, it led to some enlightenment around parent inclusion. Some of these changes have informed educators on new practices and helped them to develop more methods of connecting with parents.

5.3.2. Individualizing parental nm n

Even though I see value in developing relationships by connecting with families, it is important for me to individualize my approach by considering diverse needs. As an educator it is crucial to recognize that every family is unique, and therefore have their own beliefs, understandings, traumas, or personal histories in relation to their perspectives with school. Comparing and generalizing families is not beneficial to the students that we teach. Regrettably, I have thought negatively about certain families, especially during times when I have felt discouraged, unappreciated, or blamed after failed attempts to connect or help. By understanding that not all families are alike, I see the need to err on the side of positive thinking and continue to act professionally. Even if it is not in my allusive 'job description', connecting with families and meeting them where they are at, in terms of their level of engagement, is helpful in developing a more

inclusive practice. Through professional development and developing their parental

inclusive practice consciously, I can gain knowledge from the different frameworks,

continuums, and current models of research that support parent engagement (Epstein,

2001; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Deslandes, 2001; Jordan, 1994; Pushor, 2012). I

can form deeper understandings of children and their families to build important

connections and help support families to become more engaged in their child's learning

journey. For some families, all it will take is a simple invitation and for other families, it

might need more time and patience to form that bond. I think it is important to also

realize that despite my best efforts to be inclusive, through providing opportunities for

meaningful engagement and reducing as many barriers as possible, families still have the

right to participate at any level they choose. When parents resist connecting, I must

consider any potential barriers the family might be facing and find ways to navigate

these. By creating a welcoming environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging,

parents will hopefully see themselves as valuable members of the class community.

Moving forward, I can continue to support the child, so the family gains a sense of trust,

and they soon realize that my intentions are to positively help the development of their

child.

Considering potential barriers to parental engagement

Within this inquiry, by including relevant literature and sharing my sentiments, I

demonstrated that parents have often been discounted or even excluded as active

participants in their child's learning journeys. More importantly, I have questioned why

this might be the case and why parents are continually discounted even though they are

often deemed an important part of their child's learning. Although, as an educator, I can

connect with most parents through regular communication mediums, I know that there might be barriers of communication for others. During my years as an educator, I have noticed common barriers to be a lack of understanding of the curriculum, a lack of understanding technology, English being an additional language, a negative experience with their own education (e.g., working through their own learning difference), or a personal struggle (e.g., mental illness). I must find ways in which connections can be made equitable so that more parents are feeling included. If teachers encourage parents to provide support and be more involved with their child's learning, teachers can find more time to further assist students who may require additional support. After developing a strong parental inclusive practice, it is important for educators to notice and support children who are in more vulnerable situations and aim to establish deeper connections with families who may be in challenging situations. Some families may desire connection with their child's school and teachers, but might need additional time, resources, or support in doing so.

It is imperative to recognize that some parents might be hesitant to be a part of their child's education and building a trusting relationship is essential. All parents need to feel valued and know their support matters. Navigating engagement through my role as a parent is captured in the poems from my inquiry, 'What's my Role?' and 'Part of the Learning Journey'. Educators might find that some parents want to be more engaged in their children's learning than other parents. All children deserve to have a caring connection or an advocate to support their learning. In this way, all children receive the advocacy to support them along their learning journey. When parents support their child's academics, educators may feel relief because they are not solely responsible. I see

my role as both a parent and educator to continue to promote inclusive practices for parents. If I am feeling like I am being left out of the learning conversations pertaining to my daughter, I must vocalize this. Additionally, I can also use my voice and understanding of parental inclusion to advocate for other parents to be included as well.

5.4. Third dimension: The implications of parent inclusion

5.4.1. Parent-educator partnerships

Embracing the tensions

As both a parent of a young child in school and an educator, I continue to feel tensions that require further exploration. I expect a lot from my child's teacher, but on the other hand, I know how demanding the workload for educators is. While I'm sympathetic to my daughter's teachers having to navigate the wide spectrum of learners that likely exist in their classrooms, I continue to gently nudge for more opportunities for engagement so I can understand my daughter's learning needs. Despite knowing what it feels like to have a 'very-caring' parent peer into my classroom, I still desire more transparency into my child's classroom. I see both sides of the parent-teacher relationship and feel the push and pull that exists. I believe that educators can find a balance that considers a parent's desires for their child but also maintains professional boundaries. This gives parents a chance to better understand their child's teacher and how to approach this relationship. With clear boundaries identified, parents can communicate their child's needs with respect for the teacher. Educators can reframe their language around *'that parent'* and develop a fuller understanding of the 'very-caring' parent. Perhaps this parent simply wants to be highly supportive, dialogue in some

honest conversation, and has the desire to feel a small sense of control over their child's learning experiences. Teachers can include parents in more of the decision-making opportunities around their child's learning and strive to value parents' insights surrounding their student. My belief is that this will lead to better relationships and parent-educator partnerships for the benefit of the student.

Technology transforms communication

With more accessibility through digital platforms, like student portfolios, it is easier to connect with parents and find ways for them to gain virtual access into the classroom. Using digital platforms, I was able to establish ways for all parents to see and comment on fun, educational activities that we did in class. I found this was a promising way to build connection, be interactive, add transparency into the learning environment, and generate a trusting relationship. This was exemplified with my daughter's teacher during the Pandemic.

In the school where I am working with now, parents seem anxious to see their child graduate from high school. I aim to be there to support them, and I am just a text away. Messaging with technology helps me be more responsive and relational with parents in real-time. Parents who would like to participate but are unable to attend meetings, during school hours for example, can still participate digitally. Although communicating in person might be feel more relational, having the option to use technology generates a quicker response time, and frequent check-ins with parents.

Truly meaningful engagement

I believe that developing stronger communication practices between parents and educators is an important step towards creating more opportunities for parental engagement. However, there is a need to clarify the importance of meaningful engagement. I theorize that meaningful engagement cannot be explicitly defined because it must be established through the individualized partnership of a family and educator. Incidentally, I feel this inquiry has led me to better understand the significance of offering families agency over their child's education after reflecting on my own experiences. When I am invited to participate alongside my daughter with her school activities, I can see her progress and it feels wonderful. However, when I am offered some voice and choice around my daughter's learning experiences, I feel valued as a partner in her learning. Furthermore, I feel more connected to my daughter in addition to highly appreciating her teachers' efforts. Because of this, as an educator, I strive to include parents in meaningful ways that best suit them. I hope they too feel like they are valuable, insightful members of their child's learning team. Even when issues arise, I value the times when I can problem solve collaboratively with a parent.

5.4.2. The implications for students

Navigating with my daughter

The research cited in this inquiry strongly suggests that academic achievement is positively connected to parent engagement. Furthermore, most parents, teachers, and students desire to see home and school work together to foster a collaborative, reciprocal relationship that will improve student education (Epstein, 1995). When I started writing, my daughter was five years old and about to enter kindergarten. As I conclude my

inquiry, my daughter is only a few days away from turning ten. I thought that my presence and advocacy would lessen over the years but my intention to be a meaningful part of my daughter's learning journey has only grown. I cannot help but feel that my daughter still seems mildly lost at school and I document this feeling in the poem, [Lost in Grey Clouds](). As a parent I will continue to communicate my daughter's needs to her teachers on behalf of her. In time, I see myself supporting her to advocate for herself. As she continues to develop and understand more about her own learning needs, I can see myself standing less in the window but more in her reflection. I am not ready to [release and let go]() just yet because I feel that my presence is still warranted. This leads me to question when children should be able to write the pages of their own learning story. From my experience, I feel like I am a major supporting character in her book and that feels like the perfect role for me at this time. My hope as an educator is that I will offer parents the opportunity to be heard. I wish for them to be a valued part of their child's learning story in the ways that works best for their family and their child.

5.5.   Summary of chapter five

This chapter deepened the understanding of parent inclusion through the perspective of a parent and educator. To process my inquiry, Chang's (2005) methods of data analysis and interpretation assisted me. By using these methods, I navigated my own feelings and challenged myself to better support the families of the students that I teach. Throughout this inquiry, I have maintained that inviting parents into the learning journey of their children will be purposeful, help parents relate better to their own children around learning, and gives parents an opportunity to better support academics

happening in the classroom from home. This ultimately leads to feelings of connectedness and stronger relationships between children, families, and schools.

By reflecting on my timeline of vignettes and poetry, I layered my understandings dimensionally. The first dimension of understanding was guided by my experiences as a parent and educator. In this dimension, I examined how parent inclusion can transform education positively. The second-dimension generated ideas on how educators can support parental inclusion and individualize it to each family. Lastly, in the third dimension of understanding, I shared the implications of parental inclusion for parents, educators, and students. I end this chapter with my wish for all parents to accept opportunities for meaningful engagement, when invited into their child's learning journey.

Chapter 6.   Looking out the window to the horizon

I visualize myself standing in front of a large window at sunset and I set my gaze to where the Earth meets the sky. From my perspective, the horizon is a call, not only for contemplation, but also for seeking a glimpse into the unknown or the future. By 'broadening my horizons', I have gained new perspectives as a parent and educator. I conclude this inquiry by emblematically looking out the window to the horizon. More than just changing my views and actions as a parent and educator, I believe that this inquiry offers opportunities for positive change within education.

6.1.   Introduction to chapter six

Throughout this autoethnography, I use the metaphor of windows to represent transparency, reflection, and perspective shifts around the topic of parent inclusion. I posit that inclusion involves inviting parents to figuratively peer through the windows of the classroom. I have learned that windows afford more opportunities for parents to build connection with their children around learning and offer great potential for more student success. In addition to having opportunities to support children, developing strong, working relationships between parents and educators can serve children well. Building on new ideas around parent involvement and engagement, parent inclusion is a practice that creates effective and strong relationships between parents and educators. Together, parents and educators can positively interact and support each other, and in turn support children. Parents can benefit from regular communication with educators beyond what is prescribed by the Ministry of Education. However, for this type of relationship to develop, educators require necessary supports for the learners in their classrooms.

Educators will then have more time and energy to devote to parent inclusion and create more opportunities for parental engagement.

6.1.1. Recapitulating my experiences

As a parent

Within the years that I spent documenting and reflecting for the purpose of this inquiry, there were four significant events that altered my perceptions and challenged my views. First, my daughter entered kindergarten and I felt an uneasiness about 'letting her go'. This led to me questioning why educators might not include parents more meaningfully, despite the research and prevalent belief that parent participation improves student success. The following year, learning went online because of school closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As the situation demanded, educators and parents had to connect and work together if they were to successfully facilitate learning for children who would typically be in school. This was especially true at the earlier levels of schooling because most young children could not easily navigate the technology and digital platforms required to receive instruction. I subsequently learned how much support my daughter required to complete her school work. From my experience, this phenomenon made space for my daughter's teachers and I to build a more meaningful connection around my daughter and her learning.

Over the timespan that I spent documenting my experiences, I paid close attention to the tensions that I was feeling before I presented my requests for more assessment and need for service to the school. During my daughter's schooling, I was not noticing much progression towards her academic goals. I believed that becoming more vocal about

what I was observing was necessary for the benefit of progressing my daughter's learning forward. My perspective around the importance of parent inclusion was solidified when I asked my daughter to be assessed at the school. I was certain that my daughter was experiencing a learning difference because she was struggling to complete certain components of her schoolwork. However, the results of their testing suggested no such problem and the teachers expressed little apprehension about my concerns. I quickly recognized this issue as I had seen this situation occur before. I recall a conversation with a mother, of my grade one student, who was deeply concerned about how funding cuts would most hinder her, as she termed it, 'grey-area kid'. As a parent with my own, 'grey-area kid' I was anxious and frustrated. Without ministry funding allocated for support teachers, I felt that I would have to compensate at home. My engagement around her learning would be centered around her challenges and I would rarely have the time to explore other meaningful learning opportunities with her. I now realize that my participation in my daughter's learning should not be based out of necessity due to lacking student supports from declining resource allocation and funding in schools. Therefore, as a parent I want to be included to support my daughter's learning, but I do not want to become *the support* for her as she continues her learning journey.

As an educator

This inquiry also forced me to question my own practice. Throughout the inquiry, I looked for occasions when I could be more inclusive and provide more opportunities for parental engagement, especially when I though that it would benefit my students' development. More provoking questions arose when I joined a district leadership group on the topic of equity in education. My participation in this group, combined with the

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horrific news of the death of George Floyd and the shock of 215 unmarked graves found

by a former residential school, contributed to my deeper realization that parent inclusion

needs to be made more equitable for all parents, especially BIPOC families.

Additionally, I noted that many of the relational gains that developed between parents

and educators, despite the pandemic, ended soon after students returned to in-person

learning. This led me to believe that there is more that educators can do to build and

facilitate connection with all parents regardless of their socio-economic background, the

language spoken, or the family's heritage. Building connection with parents is important

to better serve all the children that we teach as educators.

As an educator, I have taught children who required more support but did not

demonstrate *enough* challenges to qualify for the testing to access the funding necessary

to receive additional supports. For example, I knew my daughter was also a 'grey-area

kid' and her challenges were not considered severe enough to warrant support at first. I

also believed that my view to her classroom window was being obstructed as the curtain

on this matter was closed. She would receive no further assessment to determine why her

learning gaps were expanding. Knowing that my daughter was struggling at school,

receiving little additional support with her learning in class, and was not being assigned

any homework for extra assistance from me, left me feeling terrible as a parent. In

response, I privately hired a psychologist to complete further assessments. This

assessment was postponed for three years due to Covid-19, and there were long waitlists

to contend with; however, the assessment was completed in early 2023. The results of

the private assessment indicated that my daughter was deserving of a formal designation

due to a learning disability.

Although I believed that my daughter's teachers were doing everything they could during this time, without this formal designation she would not receive the funding to merit further support and an IEP. It seems unfortunate that several years had passed before my daughter would be assessed privately and eligible for the additional support she required and deserved. This led me to understand that even well-meaning educators can be wrong and should consider, moreover trust, the intuition of very-caring parents. Even if my intuition had been trusted, I cannot place blame on the teachers and I must look at the situation through a systemic lens. I believe that there would have been little chance my daughter, a grey-area kid, would have been selected for this type of testing. Due to funding restrictions, there are not many psychologists hired by districts and each school is only granted a few evaluations per year. Most often, students that present with the most significant challenges are the ones who receive the assessment, designation, IEP, and ongoing support. What can educators do if the clear solution is out of reach? This is all to say, educators need to be empowered with adequate supports so they can act on behalf of parents requests for the benefit of their students.

6.2.   Outline of chapter six

Chapter six provides conclusions related to the ideas presented in the first five chapters of this inquiry. This chapter begins by recapping the main events of the timeline that outlined my pathway through this inquiry. I recap the literature I used to frame my inquiry and then address the significance of the study. I consider how my practice as an educator has transformed because of this work. I further acknowledge the limitations that must be considered when engaging in autoethnographic research. Furthermore, I examine how this inquiry contributes new knowledge within the field of education

through a major perspective shift in parent-teacher relationships. Before I share my final sentiments, the chapter will conclude by gazing into the horizon for future possibilities.

6.3. Returning to the literature

As an educator who previously thought that public education was progressing well, I have now come to question that notion. Parents' dissatisfaction around student achievement has been on a downward trend over the last decade (BC Ministry of Education, 2015). As I am also a parent, with a young child in school, there are times that I have felt unwelcome or patronized; therefore, I can understand where some dissatisfaction may stem from. I want to reiterate that I have also experienced many positive interactions with my daughter's teachers during her years in elementary school. I have contrasted these experiences so that I can better understand why encouraging parent engagement and being inclusive of parents is essential to support best practice as an educator. The frameworks, continuums, and suggestions on parental involvement and engagement provided by Epstein (1995), Goodall and Montgomery (2014), and Deslandes (2001) cause me to think more deeply about my experiences as a parent. Furthermore, I saw firsthand how they translated into more successful experiences for my daughter and provided more opportunities for my daughter and I to build connection around her learning. Epstein's (1995) prominent research gives strength to the idea of developing meaningful home-school connections through parent-educator partnerships. These meaningful partnerships can be co-created between parents and educators to positively impact the lives of children and help progress their learning. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) have helped me differentiate between being an involved parent and an engaged one through their continuum. Engaged parents are an essential person in a

child's learning; furthermore, parents hold more agency and there is more collaboration between school and home. Deslandes (2001) recommends that parents can support their child's increased ownership of their learning through a partnership between school and home. The concept that parents can positively influence their children's learning, without taking over the experience, but through providing ongoing support is consistently reinforced within the research.

6.4.   Gained perspectives - Where am I now?

6.4.1. My transformations as an educator

Parent interactions

As an educator, this inquiry has informed and transformed the way that I relate with parents. Educators can create opportunities for parents to 'peer' into the classroom, so they have a fuller understanding of what their children are learning. This further gives parents a chance to provide more support from behind the scenes and encourage their child's passions, which leads to more student success. I recognize that if parents are afforded more agency to share their ideas and perspectives, then educators must also shift in the ways they relate to parents and honour alternative ideas. Parental concerns must then be respected by educators, who in turn might have to navigate the solution with the parent.

Now that I am a high school teacher, I can often problem solve with a student directly; however, there are occasions when I must express concerns to a parent. In these instances, I do not pretend like I have everything figured out. Instead, I clearly outline the available options that might best support the student, and together we develop a plan

based around the options presented. Furthermore, I ask whether they have alternative suggestions to the ones that I proposed. Generally, I ask a lot more questions and do a lot more listening when asking parents their thoughts on how to handle situations that arise with their children.

Although I do feel like I am honouring parents' ideas or concerns, I cannot help but wonder if they wished I was an expert with all the answers and could offer a quick fix, like going to the doctor and receiving a pill. As, I embrace a collaborative approach to problem solving with parents, I hope they view the experience positively. When my daughter's teachers are collaborative with me, I can appreciate how we can figure things out together. It certainly helps me feel safer to articulate my concerns around my daughter's needs and seek out solutions that most benefit her. As an educator, I also feel it is necessary to create a safe space with parents so they can feel comfortable sharing their ideas and navigating solutions with me.

Utilizing technology to be more inclusive

It might seem to educators that many parents are unavailable or unwilling to be present in their child's learning. At first glance, my daughter's teachers might assume this about me as I am balancing my career, my studies, and my family. Therefore, I do not often get the chance to be physically present at many school events. Although I am a busy working parent, there are many ways that I can be utilized to extend my daughter's learning. Technology has served to help bridge the home-school connection and even offer some advantages such as increasing the flexibility beyond the 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. mould (Dei et al., 1997). In a recent example, when a parent confided in me that they were uncomfortable speaking English during a meeting, I saw the benefits of meeting

virtually. This way it was much easier to include a translator, so the parent could participate and share their ideas. Therefore, technology creates opportunities for parents and teachers to connect beyond the classroom walls, especially when it is distributed to students in an equitable manner.

Over my career, I have noticed how technology has created additional ways to welcome parents into learning conversations, and more importantly, into the learning journeys of their children. Through parent inclusion practices, an educator can support and facilitate engagement, notably through digital mediums such as class websites and digital student portfolios. When parents have more information and opportunities to access their child's classroom, they have more background knowledge and reasons to support their child. I believe that technology opens the curtains of the classroom windows. Furthermore, teachers can use the power of technology to be inclusive and promote engagement opportunities. Personally, technology has given me access and provided more insight into some of the learning activities my daughter experiences at school. Pictures posted digitally of class activities, helps me to segue into conversations about learning at home. I am appreciative when I can converse with my daughter about school and learning because I have better understanding of her life at school.

Addressing equity as an educator

I believe that opening the window, and conscientiously inviting all parents, makes room for more connections to be built with students and their families. Through inclusionary practices, more voices can be heard, especially from marginalized communities. Education must maintain a growing commitment to power sharing with students and parents as well as, hearing the voices of marginalized groups (National

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Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2015; Dei, et al., 1997). This leads me to believe that if education in BC truly wants to be inclusive of families, there needs to be a more deliberate changes and support for more equitable practices.

It is important to realize that these shifts in practice might be driven by the parents in our school communities. I recall an experience when a parent shared a presentation about more inclusive practices at an elementary school-based professional development day. Among other suggestions, she offered possibilities for the types of books, toys, colouring materials we should have in the classroom to promote cultural inclusion. From that point forward, I thought about the concept of belonging in a different way and I more thoughtfully considered about how offering a range of culturally inclusive materials supported BIPOC children to see themselves represented more in their classrooms. That year, I used my one-hundred-dollar funds that was given to me by our PAC to purchase these items for the class. Although I fear that equitable practice continues to remain an underlying issue in education, one way that educators can demonstrate more equity is by providing opportunities for all parents to be meaningfully included in their child's learning journey. By doing so, educators can offer the possibility of all voices to be heard. I realize that when I am open and receptive to change, I can learn new, and often simple, ways of being more inclusive. This further leads to more equitable practices as an educator.

Shifting myself into alignment with my beliefs

Through this inquiry, I have gained a more robust understanding on the topic of parent inclusion. I will continue use my understanding of parent inclusion to promote more opportunities for parents to engage with the school or their child's learning. For

example, I advocate on behalf of parents in staff meetings by gently encouraging other teachers to consider the parents' point of view. I offer the questions; *how would I want my child treated in this situation?* And, *how would I want to be included, if I was the parent of this child?* I continue to shift my practice forward by considering parent inclusion and methods of generating more invitations for engagement.

I think about where I have arrived as an educator through engaging in this inquiry. I find change exhilarating and as a result, my career has shifted from teaching at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, as well as mentoring early career teachers. Most recently, I have transitioned to a Learning Support Teacher (LST) role at an alternate-education high school. This recent change has demonstrated how this inquiry has impacted me as an educator. As an LST, I create plans and programs that individualize learning to some of our district's most emotionally fragile learners. In addition, I am integrating parent inclusion practices because it is an important aspect of this role. In a typical high school, parents are not always included as often because high school students are generally viewed as more independent. However, the inclusion of parents is the backbone of this alternate-education program. Students are given voice and choice over their learning pathways and their parents are incorporated into these conversations. I appreciate that how parents are welcome to give input during the development of plans that involve their children. In the future, the school counsellor and I are planning to introduce parent engagement sessions, which is an exciting development given my interest in parent inclusion.

In my mind and in my heart, I have found a role where learning is personalized through education plans, personal goal setting, relationship building, and parents are

genuinely included in the decision-making process. There has not always been an LST at this school to support students and liaise with parents. To obtain this position, the principal had to secure the funding from ten additional students. I believe that the work that I am engaging in will benefit the lives of many of my students and their families, so the role I am in is imperative. Furthermore, there should be more roles like this one in all schools. I am becoming the type of educator that I have been envisioning while writing this dissertation. Moreover, this has been an incredible opportunity for me to align my career with my beliefs around parental inclusion.

6.4.2. Transformations as a parent

Finding my voice

With opportunities for engagement, parents have more occasions to build connections with their children around learning. Throughout this inquiry, I have maintained a strong desire to be a meaningful part of my daughter's learning journey. As I gain more access and understanding into my daughter's learning, I have gained enough clarity to find my voice. I continue to request to be included in learning conversations because the research strongly indicates that my presence and support is connected to her success as a learner. After this inquiry, I can be more direct with my daughter's teachers about her learning needs. I continue to be kind and nonconfrontational, but I do ask for more from the teacher. By checking in regularly, I can continue to monitor my daughter's challenges. I gently insist that incomplete work be sent home, despite a teacher's no homework policy, because I want to ensure that I know what my daughter is learning in school, and she is progressing towards her academic goals. Because I feel like my requests are not always received well by the school, and I am nervous that I

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might be labeled *that parent,* I always remember to show my gratitude and appreciation to the teachers who make concerted efforts to support my daughter in her learning.

Even though I know how challenging a teacher's job is, and how limited resources are, I maintain my desire to be engaged in her schooling. For the foreseeable future I will be concerned that my daughter will continue to slip through the cracks and her struggles will go unnoticed. I am the constant person in my daughter's life that will be there to support her throughout her education. Given that I feel like I know her best, I can offer the teachers a lot of insight into her learning needs. Until teachers are provided the supports they need to integrate parent engagement into their practice (e.g., prep time, professional development, support teachers, smaller class sizes), I feel like it is necessary to trust my instincts and use my voice to make requests on behalf of my daughter.

Homework

Occasionally, my requests for homework are granted. I especially hold on to the moments where my daughter, albeit sometimes begrudgingly, works with me on her academics. When schoolwork is challenging for my daughter, it is difficult to watch her struggle. However, when we work together, these moments can turn out to be magical because I see her gain more confidence in her ability to persevere and combat against her challenges. I have gained a window into my daughter's learning, but also into her heart and mind. I can see how creative, funny, and hardworking she is. Instead of feeling like a 'very-caring' mama, I feel invested, relational, and loving. I care so much about my daughter's success and encouraging lifelong learning. What I learned from Alice in Wonderland, when she entered the looking glass, is that curiosity is the pathway to many learning adventures. I am excited for what my daughter and I can continue to create

together along her learning journey. I am a proud mama, and nothing feels better than that.

6.5.   Limitations of the study

This inquiry expresses the feelings behind my experiences as a parent with a young child in school. Despite connections that could be made by others, Méndez (2013) suggests, "the most recurrent criticism of autoethnography is of its strong emphasis on self, which is at the core of the resistance to accepting autoethnography as a valuable research method" (p. 283). This autoethnographic inquiry is no exception. The vignettes and poetry are based on personal accounts; therefore, they are not necessarily generalizable to other parents' feelings towards their child's school experiences. To counter this, my vignettes and poetry offer my insights through my experiences of both a parent and an educator. I trust that my gained perspectives will serve other parents and educators as a possibility for reflection and positive change, as much as they have served me within my journey for self-growth as a parent and educator.

Within autoethnography, Méndez (2013) further considers, "Another limitation is the exposure it implies of the researcher's inner feelings and thoughts, which require honesty and willingness to self-disclose" (p. 282). I attempt to reveal my personal accounts with authenticity, but I am deeply aware that I am sharing stories that contain people with whom I might have a close relationship. Although I am willing to disclose my inner emotions and thoughts, I am cognisant that the stories I share may evoke unpleasant feelings since the connections that readers make to my reflections cannot be predicted (Bochner & Ellis, 1996). I am mindful of the stories that I share that involve

my daughter, my mother, some of my students and their families, my colleagues, and my daughter's teachers. My intention is that sharing and analyzing my personal accounts goes beyond my own learning. This inquiry is important so that positive change can occur in education. This positive change will benefit children, as parents will be considered a valuable force and important factor in a child's success at school.

I must further recognize my personal and cultural limitations. I am often speaking from my heart and recalling details about stories, events, and understandings that may be shared between myself and someone else. They may, for example view education differently or have experienced school-related trauma. I feel it is important to recognize these limitations when I have shared my insights or perspectives. I have been privileged with an extremely positive association with school and I assumed that school is a wonderful place for everyone. I tend to project a lot of positivity around the idea of learning in school with my students, but I am realizing this is not always the way my students feel towards their education. With these limitations in mind, I contend that this dissertation provides new perspectives, and offers alternatives to traditional approaches. These gains will generate more opportunities for equitable practice in school through more parent engagement and inclusive practice. I believe that providing more opportunities to include all parents meaningfully in their child's education is one way that I am becoming a more equitable practitioner. I assert that others can learn more about the value of parent inclusion after reading this dissertation and how it further relates to building more opportunities for equitable practice.

6.6.   Future recommendations

Recommendations for further study and future directions are based on the knowledge and feelings that I have unearthed from going through the process of this inquiry. As I am nearing the halfway mark of my career, I welcome more progressive shifts to the way that inclusion, especially parent inclusion, is approached and supported in schools. I believe this inquiry answers *why* parent inclusion is important. Although this inquiry provides some outcome possibilities, the recommendations bring new questions around *how* to implement changes. Anderson and Herr (1999) advise, "rigorous practitioner research, rather than simply solving a problem, forces the researcher to reframe the problem in a more complex way, often leading to a new set of questions/problems" (p. 16). The outcome of this inquiry is not to provide all the solutions; however, I can create new openings to shift practice and develop new structures around parent-teacher relationships.

6.6.1. Trusting Relationships

Throughout this inquiry, I offer more transparency into the classroom can help build ongoing trust with parents. This is important because not all parents have had a positive experience with school, and I believe that trust can be rebuilt over time. Along with finding out what is most helpful to parents, studies can include asking parents what educators can do to build a trusting relationship. More importantly, future research needs to be dedicated to including marginalized groups, so thoughts around creating positive, trusting relationships can be extended to more families.

6.6.2. Goal setting processes

Very recently, a friend expressed that her daughter has self-reported the same academic goal over the past few years at the student-parent-teacher conference and nothing has really progressed in terms of advancing towards a new goal. I then realized that this has been a similar experience for my daughter as she has been self-identifying and working towards the same objective for many years. This makes me question the goal setting and achieving process. If year after year, a goal remains the same, the students are clearly acknowledging their challenges and can make individual goals. They are not often provided a lot of support, feedback, or consistent follow up to help reach the goals they have predetermined. As I believe parents can be a part of the solution to this issue, further research could assess the effectiveness of goal setting in student-parent-teacher conferences and if students are more likely to achieve their goals when parents are more involved in the process.

6.6.3. **Developing meaningful parental inclusion**

From my experiences, I feel that building relationships with parents can be easier said than done. I remember times when early career teachers have expressed feeling awkward or hesitant communicating with a child's parents. One colleague stated their concern because they were feeling like they were telling a parent how to parent. They felt uncomfortable doing so because they were younger and not a parent themselves. I personally recall this feeling very well. Preservice and early career teachers might feel more equipped and comfortable with parent inclusion if they are given more information about how it benefits students, families, and educators. Furthermore, practical ideas

around encouraging parent engagement can help early career teachers begin to envision parents as resources (Epstein, 1995; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Deslandes, 2001; First Nations School Association of British Columbia, 2022). Remembering my first experience as a kindergarten teacher, I was very cautious when including parents because I truly feared judgement. I had this deep-rooted belief that I was not good enough as an educator. I absolutely did not want parents to see me fail as I was honing my skills. I gained more confidence as I refined my teaching abilities, so I naturally became more comfortable developing stronger relationships with parents. I wish that this topic was more commonly spoken about during my preservice experiences and through ongoing professional development, so I could have built a stronger practice around parent inclusion earlier in my career. I am continually working towards creating better opportunities for school-home connections. Therefore, further study can identify how mentoring early career teachers, and providing ongoing professional development, around the topic of parent inclusion can be beneficial for developing more meaningful family-school relationships.

Support for educators

Further research can help educators better understand the value of parental inclusion. It is important to realize that students will benefit from efforts made from developing parent-teacher partnerships and encouraging parent engagement. However additional questions must also consider how funding changes increases or decreases parent engagement. It is important to support educators to continually develop their practice. Overall, educators require support for the diverse learners that are present in their classrooms. Educators cannot be expected to develop their parental inclusion

practices or parent partnerships without more support. These relationships take time and energy to build and maintain. With many benefits to be gained, I hope the future yields more opportunities for educators to develop their practice around inclusion so they can create meaningful relationships with families.

6.7.   Sun setting on the horizon – my final sentiments

Metaphorically, I have completed my journey through the looking glass and back, found the meaning in stained-glass windows, and reflected in many ways by staring into a trifold mirror. I know more than I did before as I have considered new perspectives. I have learned more because I examined my personal history through the way I grew up, the privileges I have been afforded, and the challenges I have encountered as a parent with a young child in school. As an educator I continue to incite positive change in the education system through relational methods. As a parent I move forward and continue to develop strong connections with my children, especially around learning. I will continue to use their schooling as a springboard to discover more about their world and learn more about my children as individuals. I know this inquiry has given me new ways of thinking and it has also transformed my way of being a mother and educator. Maya Angelou famously provokes, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." I can't think of a more poignant way of concluding this inquiry. I wholeheartedly believe that this inquiry seeks to transform education by considering the value of parent-teacher relationships. By realizing the benefits of parent inclusion, we can do better for our children.

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