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The Impact of Transformational Leadership Practices on the Cultural Responsiveness of Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) Implementation

Sally Seana Lehmann

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, THE IMPACT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON THE CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS OF ACADEMIC PARENT TEACHER TEAMS (APTT) IMPLEMENTATION, by SALLY SEANA LEHMANN, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

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THE IMPACT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON

THE CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS OF ACADEMIC PARENT

TEACHER TEAMS (APTT) IMPLEMENTATION

by

Sally Seana Lehmann

Under the Direction of Yinying Wang, Ed.D.

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Research has shown that family engagement has a positive impact on student academic performance; however, schools that serve increasingly diverse communities often struggle with forming meaning partnerships with their parents. The primary purpose of this case study was to investigate the impact transformational leadership has on stakeholders' perceptions of the cultural responsiveness of family engagement, in schools that have implemented Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT). Additionally, this study investigated teachers' and families' perceptions of the cultural responsiveness of APTT. Research Methods: This dissertation was guided by the theoretical frameworks of transformational leadership and cultural responsive school leadership. The case study was conducted at a Title 1 elementary school with a diverse

population that had implemented APTT. Data was collected through interviews of school leaders, teachers, and families as well as observations of APTT meetings. NVivo, qualitative data analysis software, was used to code and analyze the data using coding themes developed from the theoretical frameworks. Findings: The findings revealed four themes that described the leadership practices that affected the cultural responsiveness of APTT implementation: (a) leaders establish a mission that encouraged culturally responsive actions; (b) the *parent center* played a strong leadership role in the execution of the school's mission, as well as APTT implementation; (c) teachers' focused on communication with parents in a family friendly manner; (d) parental engagement efforts were designed to meet the needs of the community. The findings also revealed two themes that explained how transformational leadership practices impacted stakeholders' perceptions of the partnerships: (a) the increase in family engagement helped inform school leaders about resources that families needed including the presence of unknown barriers to cultural engagement; and (b) more effective communication with parents resulted in the majority of teachers confirming positive perceptions of parent/teacher partnerships. Implications for Research and Practice: This study supports the need for state and local policy makers to train and build the capacity of educators to establish meaningful partnerships with students and their families. The findings also support the correlation between the theories of transformational school leadership and culturally responsive school leadership.

INDEX WORDS: Transformational Leadership, Culturally Responsive School Leadership, Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT), Family Engagement

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing family who supported me through the entire journey. To my parents who always offered to watch James so I could work or would prepare meals for me so I didn't need to cook. To Jeremy, your words of encouragement kept me going when I wanted to quit. To James, your willingness to help and telling me how much you love me means more than you will ever know. To Dave, I couldn't have finished this without your constant support, love, and encouragement. I love you all.

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1 THE IMPACT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON THE CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS OF ACADEMIC PARENT TEACHER TEAMS (APTT) IMPLEMENTATION

Schools across the country are serving an increasingly diverse population of students and families. In many schools, the diversity of teachers does not represent the communities they serve, and research has shown that traditionally white middle-class teachers frequently struggle with relating to others who do not have the same backgrounds they have (Frankenberg, 2009; Watson & Bogotch, 2015). A recent study showed that teachers who were predominately white, females often hold racial stereotypes which influence their interactions with diverse families (Allen & White-Smith, 2018). As a result, diverse families often feel disengaged and not welcomed into the school environment (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Cooper, 2009; Crawford, 2017; Khalifia, 2012; Ouimette, Feldman, & Tung, 2006; Scanlan & López, 2014).

Research has also linked the different roles that families play in their child's education with their academic achievement (Mapp & Kuttner, 2014). Due to this, there has been an increase in attention placed on family engagement programs. However, educators and leaders, especially those who serve diverse populations, have struggled with implementing family engagement initiatives that effectively increase the involvement of all their families (Calzada, Huang, Soriano, Acra, Dawson-McClure, Kamboukos & Brotman, 2015; Crawford, 2017; Ishimaru, Torres, Salvador, Lott, Williams & Tran, 2016; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Mapp & Kuttner, 2014; Miller, Robinson, Valentine & Fish, 2016; Paredes, 2011).

Educators are facing an increasing population of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Scanlan & Lopez, 2014). In many schools, CLD students are the majority, not the minority (Scanlan & Lopez, 2014). In these diverse schools, leaders play a critical role in

identifying the inequities that exist and developing a school vision that creates a sense of belonging for all students and families (Anderson, 2011; Ishimaru, 2017; Palmer & Louis, 2017). Research has shown that when parents are more involved, children are more motivated to increase their engagement at school which leads to higher achievement (Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Mo & Singh, 2008).

One family engagement model that has grown in popularity is Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT). This family engagement model utilizes individual student data to form authentic teacher-family partnerships with the purpose of increasing student achievement ("Academic Parent-Teacher Teams," n.d.). APTT addresses many families' need for specific instruction and activities to assist in their child's academic progress at home. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) has partnered with WestEd since 2014 to implement APTT in 23 counties throughout Georgia ("Academic Parent-Teacher Teams," n.d.; Georgia Department of Education, 2017). Data collected by the GaDOE in 2016 revealed that when parents participated in APTT, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding their academic goals increased by 20% (Georgia Department of Education, 2017). However, on average, only 20% of parents choose to participate in APTT at their child's school (Georgia Department of Education, 2017).

Background of the Problem

Public schools have been experiencing significant demographic shifts in their student population. The nation's White population has been declining while minority populations (African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino Americans) are predicted to make up half of the nation's population by 2044 (Jensen, 2001, Scanlan & López, 2014). These changing demographics have resulted in significant numbers of culturally diverse students and families who feel disengaged and not a part of the school environment (Cooper, 2009; Ouimette et al., 2006;

Scanlan & López, 2014; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). Educators who serve diverse populations are challenged to implement initiatives that increase the engagement of all their families. Schools have implemented a variety of family engagement initiatives; however, they might not be effective if they do not address the specific needs of families (Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Paredes, 2011).

Schools are also serving more students and families who live in poverty. Approximately one in five children live in poverty and two out of every five children will spend at least one year of their childhood in poverty (Bellani & Bia, 2019). Research has shown that children from poverty are at an academic disadvantage (Bellani & Bia, 2019; Haushofer & Fehr, 2014; Lichtenstein & Donovan, 2018; Mani, Mullainathan, Shafir, & Zhao, 2013; Noble, Houston, Brito, Bartsch & Kan, 2015; Quinn, 2015). Children from poverty are "less prepared academically, more likely to struggle with behavioral issues, and less likely to graduate" (Lichtenstein & Donovan, 2018, p.1). "Although school staff might be sympathetic to basic aspects of family need, when families do not meet other expectations of school staff [helping with homework, communicating with the school …], blame and frustration more commonly arise" (Lichtenstein & Donovan, 2018, p.5). This disconnect between families and teachers often leads to unproductive or even nonsexist partnerships between them.

Another challenge that educators are increasingly facing are issues surrounding undocumented immigrant families. In a 1982 Supreme Court decision, *Plyer v. Doe*, the courts decided that undocumented students could not be denied a K-12 education; however, this ruling does not provide any protection to their parents (Crawford, 2017). Undocumented families might be less engaged with the school due to fear of deportation (Crawford, 2017; Dematthews & Izquierdo, 2017).

Problem Statement

Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) is a relatively new family engagement program, and as a result, limited research is currently available. Research has shown that family participation in APTT results in higher academic achievement in students (Paredes, 2011). APTT is implemented at numerous Title 1 schools across Georgia and the United States. Data shows that when parents participate in APTT, it has a positive impact on their child's academic success; however, schools are still struggling with increasing the number of families that attend. During a recent study that involved APTT, the researcher reported a disproportional representation of parents who attended APTT compared to the student population (Ferguson, 2017). This study investigates how transformational leadership practices impact the cultural responsiveness of APTT implementation. The researcher theorizes that the implementation of a more cultural responsive family engagement program will increase the participation of diverse families.

Guiding Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact transformational leadership has on stakeholders' perceptions of the cultural responsiveness of family engagement in schools that have implemented Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT). The following research questions guide this study:

1. How have transformational leadership practices affected the cultural responsiveness of APTT implementation?

2. How have transformational leadership practices transformed stakeholders' perceptions of partnerships at APTT schools?

Definition of Terms

1. *Academic Parent Teacher Teams* (APTT): APTT is a data-driven family engagement model designed to create authentic teacher-family partnerships which focus on student academic achievement ("Academic Parent-Teacher Teams," n.d.).

2. *Culture*: Culture has been defined in several different ways, and the researcher agrees that culture is a frequently changing dynamic (De Gaetano, 2007). The researcher also recognizes that there are risks in creating a definition of culture by "assigning a set of characteristics or particular behaviors to a group without taking into account the many differences that exist within groups and the context in which the group finds itself" (De Gaetano, 2007, p. 148). For the sake of this study, culture is defined as the basis of preferred behaviors or traditions that is primarily transmitted by parents to their children (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005; De Gaetano, 2007). These preferred behaviors could be derived from a families' background, religion, and/or socioeconomic status.

3. *Family engagement*: Family engagement looks at multiple ways that parents and family members can be involved in their child's education. It moves past the traditional view of how parents have been involved in the past and provides families with new options for meaningful involvement in their child's education and the overall success of the school.

4. *Poverty*: Poverty is a term that can be defined or described in different ways. In the most basic terms, poverty is the "gap between one's needs and the resources available to fulfill them" (Mani et al., 2013, p. 976). Poverty can also be described as having insufficient income and a variety of other obstacles and stresses that has a negative impact on all family members (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014).

5. *Stakeholders*: The stakeholders this study focuses on are school leaders, teachers, and parents.

Literature Review

Shifting from parental involvement to family engagement.

Current research has started to make a distinction between traditional parental involvement and family engagement. The traditional view of parental involvement primarily focuses on when parents are in the school building (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016; Hamlin & Flessa, 2016; McWayne, Melzi, Schick, Kennedy & Mundt, 2013; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Pomerantz et al. (2007) defines parental involvement as either occurring at school or home. The parental involvement that happens at school includes attending school meetings, communicating with the teacher, and volunteering (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Other school-based activities include joining the PTA, attending school events and participating in parent-teacher conferences. These activities engage parents as "passive listeners, clients, or fund-raisers" (Ishimaru et al., 2016, p 853). The traditional parental involvement that occurs at home includes helping with homework, creating a space for studying, helping with projects, watching educational television, and reading to their child (Pomerantz et al., 2007). This view is still commonly held among many educators, although it mainly supports white middle-class families and not culturally and linguistically diverse families (Frankenberg, 2009; Ishimaru, 2017).

Educational policy and research have placed more emphasis on family engagement, and it has "emerged as a popular lever for closing race- and class-based educational disparities in the United States" (Ishimaru, 2017, p 4-5). Family engagement looks at multiple ways that parents can be involved in their child's education (Baker et al., 2016; Epstein, 1986; Ishimaru et al., 2016, Mo & Singh, 2008). Several studies have found that families value being involved in their

child's education. However, their descriptions of what it means to be involved vary (Barnes et al., 2016; Curry & Holter, 2015; Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2005, Robinson, 2017). Some families believe their role is to prepare their child for school through meeting their physical needs, teaching social skills, and making sure they do their homework (Curry & Holter, 2015). Other families believe their role is to partner with the school, sharing the responsibility of ensuring the academic success of their child (Curry & Holter, 2015). Families can also be engaged through their relationship with their child, collaborating with their child's school, and encouraging their child's educational aspirations (Mo & Singh, 2008).

Family engagement focuses on families having "options for meaningful involvement in their child's education and in the life of the school" (Francis, Blue-Banning, Haines, Turnbull, & Gross, 2016, p 329). Traditional parental involvement is a "deficit-based model" that emphasizes "normative school-centric behaviors" while family engagement seeks to integrate culturally diverse families into the school culture (Ishimaru, 2017, p 3). In 2014 the United States Department of Education released the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, which emphasizes the need to build the capacity of both educators and families to create effective partnerships that increase student achievement (Ishimaru et al., 2016). This framework provides resources for schools to enhance their family engagement programs ("Family and Community Engagement | U.S. Department of Education," n.d.). It describes schools that have established effective partnerships as schools that honor their families' contributions, create inviting cultures, and connect family engagement to students' learning ("Family and Community Engagement | U.S. Department of Education," n.d.). Another important component of the framework is it "broaden[s] the focus from parents (exclusive to the parent-child dyad) to families (including siblings and multi-generational caregivers)" (Ishimaru, 2017, p 5). To shift from the traditional

view of parental involvement to family engagement, there must be "intentional efforts by the school to recognize and respond to parents' voices and to help school staff to better understand how to address barriers parents have identified" (Baker et al., 2016, p 163). This shift from parental involvement to family engagement encourages educators and families to hold a broader view of how they can collaborate with each other to positively impact academic success.

Need for culturally responsive family engagement.

Research has supported the importance of family engagement on increasing student achievement and closing the achievement gap (Ishimaru, 2017; Mo & Singh, 2008; Pomerantz et al. 2007). However, research also shows that the needs of diverse families are not being met due to the existence of policies and practices that inadvertently support the existing state of affairs (Francis et al., 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Paredes, 2011). Students who come to school from a background of chronic poverty are at a disadvantage compared to students from more privileged backgrounds (Berends, 1995; Mo & Singh, 2008; Paredes, 2011). Also, families from diverse backgrounds and those that do not represent the status quo often feel unwelcome and not valued in their child's school (Ishimaru et al., 2016). In their research, Larson and Murtadha (2002) state that "education for marginalized populations requires a dialogical process that puts the needs, interests, and concerns at the center of their learning and liberation" (p 146). As the diverse student population grows, educators need to be more aware of various family dynamics to better address their needs (Baker et al., 2016).

The diversity of students and families are increasing while the overall demographics of school staff has not changed (Francis et al., 2016). The educators who serve diverse populations with backgrounds different from their own face the challenge of implementing initiatives that increase the family engagement of all students (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Many schools have

implemented a variety of family engagement initiatives. However, they might not be effective if they do not address their students' and families' specific needs (Francis et al., 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Paredes, 2011). The majority of family engagement efforts still utilize conventional efforts to "socialize nondominant families into school-centric norms, expectations, and agendas" (Ishimaru et al., 2016, p 864). Many family engagement models can be "well-intentioned" yet "[reinforce] power inequities between families and school and consolidate dominant institutional authority" (Ishimaru, 2017, p 4).

Understanding differences in cultural and family backgrounds is necessary for educators to provide the equity that culturally responsive and socially just education demands (Jost & Kay, 2010; Paredes, 2011). During the 2015 Connecticut Family Engagement Conference, the Connecticut Education Commissioner, Dianna R. Wentzell, highlighted this call to action by stating, "It's vital to understand that promoting educational equity necessitates family engagement. It is when parents are authentically engaged and listened to as active partners that our students reach their full potential and graduate college and career ready" (Carson & Wood, n.d.).

Barriers to family engagement.

Schools that serve diverse and low-income populations report difficulties in engaging their families (Francis et al., 2016; Ouimette et al., 2006; Robinson, 2017). As a result, several research studies have been conducted to examine the existing barriers that prevent some families from being engaged with their child's education. Some of the common barriers that have been identified include existing power imbalances, psychological issues/stress, lack of information, life/work conflicts, ineffective communication, socio-economic issues, and differences in culture (Baker et al., 2016; Geenen et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Ouimette et al., 2006).

The research of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) looks at why families decide not to be actively involved in their child's school. They find three main reasons: (a) parents' view of their role in the education process; (b) parents' ability to successfully help their child with school work; (c) parents' perception of being welcomed and needed at school. Many families believe that they play an important role in their child's academic success. However, families might have different views of their role, or they are uncertain of how they should be involved (Curry & Holter, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Ouimette et al., 2006; Robinson, 2017). Some families view their role as preparing their students to be successful in school; while other families view their role as being an equal partner with their child's teacher (Curry & Holter, 2015). Other parents' feel uncertain on how to be involved, due to the feeling that teachers are not receptive to partnering with them (Robinson, 2017). Ambiguity can also occur when parents feel incapable of helping their child with subjects that they struggled with in school, like math (Curry & Holter, 2015; Robinson, 2017).

One form of stress that can create a barrier for some families is the fear that exists of being an undocumented immigrant (Crawford, 2017). One study found that families were willing to volunteer at the school but chose not to when they were presented with the need for a background check (Baker et al., 2016). Parents' legal status has been an understudied component of family engagement but can be an essential factor for many families (Brabeck & Xu, 2010). Many of these families do not feel comfortable participating in traditional forms of parental involvement at school, so they choose to be engaged with their child's education at home (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005).

Research has also identified some school-based barriers. These can include a lack of a schoolwide plan for partnering with parents, schools focusing only on information broadcasting,

educators having rigid ideas of what it means for a parent to be engaged, and cultural mistrust and limited understanding of educators on how to engage with families (Francis et al., 2016). Other school-based barriers include deficit views educators hold for some of their families. Some educators believe they "can determine a parent's interest in their child's education based on the normative ideals found in schools and classrooms" (Watson & Bogotch, 2015, p.269). Instead of viewing the parents who work more than on job to provide for their family as hardworking and responsible, they are viewed as not caring about their child's education because they don't have time to help with homework (Watson & Bogotch, 2015). When schools work towards changing these policies and practices and removing existing barriers for families, it can positively impact diverse families to become more engaged in their child's education (Baker et al., 2007; Jost & Kay, 2010; Paredes, 2011; Watson & Bogotch, 2015).

Opportunities to increase family engagement.

Increasing family engagement is one of the six critical areas of reform targeted by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 ("Family and Community Engagement | U.S. Department of Education," n.d.). One foundational study on family engagement aimed to provide an understanding of parents' perspectives toward public education, their experiences with conventional forms of parental involvement, and their reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement (Epstein, 1986). The study showed that overall parents' were satisfied with their child's school and teacher; however, they felt that teachers needed to do more to involve parents in learning activities at home (Epstein, 1986). Families feel more empowered when educators take intentional actions to collaborate with them (Curry & Holter, 2015; Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Epstein, 1986, Geenen et al., 2005; Hamlin & Flessa, 2016; McWayne et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2016; Paredes, 2011).

The desire to increase family engagement has resulted in several research studies which emphasize the importance of schools having a vision of family engagement, purposeful hiring practices, and professional development that focuses on high expectations of family engagement (Barnes et al., 2016; Francis et al., 2016; Geenen et al., Ouimette et al., 2006). A school's vision should be culturally responsive and explicitly state the role that families play in the success of students (Ouimette et al., 2006; Scanlan and Lopez, 2014). Whenever possible, quality teachers should be hired that represent the culture of the community (Francis et al., 2016; Ouimette et al.). In addition, the capacity of educators needs to be increased, so they understand how to partner effectively with families (Ishimaru, 2017). Family engagement practices are more likely to be implemented when school staff members believe that parents play an important role and look for opportunities to support students beyond their academic needs (Barnes et al., 2016; Curry & Holter, 2015; Geenen et al., 2005; Ouimette et al., 2006). Therefore, educators need to understand the needs of their families and what methods they should implement to create effective partnerships with them.

Research has discovered several common themes in the strategies schools have implemented to increase family engagement successfully. One of these themes is meaningful communication. Meaningful communication can include asking for parents input, responding to parents' concerns, offering suggestions versus telling parents what to do, providing positive feedback, encouraging timely communication, and having a friendly and approachable staff (Baker et al., 2016; Francis et al., 2016; Geenen et al., 2005; Ishimaru et al., 2016). On the other hand, teachers view effective communication as families providing accurate contact information, families

expressing a commitment to their child's success, appreciating teachers' efforts, and sharing relevant information about students that could impact classroom performance (Francis et al., 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2016).

Another common theme found in the research is schools establishing a sense of belonging for all families (Francis et al., 2016). Schools can create a sense of belonging by having school leaders who are approachable, staff that enjoys coming to work, students who experience a sense of family in their classroom, and teachers who focus on students' strengths in order to meet their needs (Barnes et al., 2016; Francis et al. 2016; Geenen et al., 2005; Ouimette et al., 2006). It is also essential for schools to try to eliminate barriers that might exist for families to participate in school activities like providing childcare, food, translation, and transportation (Baker et al., 2016; Francis et al., 2016; Geenen et al., 2005).

The research has also focused on the need for schools to build the capacity of teachers and families to partner effectively with each other (Francis et al., 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Teachers not only need to be aware of the diverse needs of their families, but they also need to demonstrate a commitment and the ability to guide students to academic success (Francis et al., 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Teachers demonstrate this commitment through providing high-quality instruction, smooth transitions between grade levels, collaboration with other educators, and demonstrating genuine care for students and their families (Epstein, 1986; Francis et al., 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2016). The capacity of families can be strengthened by increasing family leadership opportunities in the school (Francis et al., 2016). For this to occur, school leadership must be willing to distribute responsibility among families and staff members (Ishimaru et al., 2016). Schools can also build the capacity of families by explicitly introducing them to specific

activities they can do at home that will positively influence the academic success of their child (Curry & Holter, 2015, Epstein, 1986, Geenen et al., 2005).

Gaps in the extant literature.

Although the existing literature contains a great deal of strengths that the researcher's current study is grounded upon, there are also some weaknesses and gaps in the literature that the present study aims to address. With the student population growing in diversity, educators need to develop a better awareness of the needs of these culturally and linguistically diverse families (Baker et al., 2016). Educational leaders have been challenged with closing the "racialized achievement (opportunity) gap" (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016, p. 127). However, the majority of the research that focuses on increasing family engagement does not look specifically at meeting the needs of diverse families; especially in schools where educators do not represent the communities they serve. Research has also shown that many school leaders lack the capacity to effectively lead diverse schools, implement culturally responsive initiatives, or facilitate discussions about diversity (Young, 2010). The researcher plans on investigating how school leaders are engaging in culturally responsive conversations in more detail.

Another weakness in the literature is the available research about APTT. The majority of the research has been quantitative and has focused on family attendance and student academic data (Ferguson, 2017; Paredes, 2011). There has been some research and interviews conducted about people's perceptions of APTT, however there is no current research that specifically focuses on the cultural responsiveness of APTT ("Academic Parent-Teacher Teams," n.d.; "Parents as Partners in Student Achievement," n.d.; "School, Family, Parent, Teacher Engagement in Education — WestEd," n.d.; Smith, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

  The conceptual framework for this study is transformational leadership and culturally responsive school leadership. These frameworks are closely aligned since they both involve the commitment to self-reflection, analysis of the current climate, and the commitment to challenge the existence of imbalances and unjust practices (Cooper, 2009). APTT is a family engagement model that requires a significant leadership commitment to effectively implement, especially school-wide. Leaders must develop a plan for training teachers, provide needed resources, plan for three yearly meetings, and create a communication outreach plan. This level of commitment requires a transformational leader, who is a culturally responsive and can address the needs of a diverse population.

  Transformational leadership monitors the status of the organization and develops a vision for the future (Hooper & Bernhardt, 2016; Kurkland et al., 2010). If schools are experiencing imbalances among families who are engaged, culturally responsive school leadership would develop a vision of family engagement that addresses the diverse needs of all families. This gap between the status of a school and the vision for culturally responsive family engagement creates distress and a motivation to act (Kurkland et al., 2010). The research questions for this dissertation study aim to investigate the actions taken by leaders to reduce this gap.

  Transformational and culturally responsive school leadership guided this study by providing a focus for the actions leaders have taken to understand the diverse needs of families and how to implement the essential elements of APTT to meet those needs. Transformational leadership informed the study by creating a framework for understanding how schools have transformed as a result of APTT implementation. Culturally responsive school leadership will also

informed the research by helping the researcher investigate how school leaders attempted to overcome any existing inequities.

Conclusion

The focus of this study is understanding the impact transformational leadership has on the perceptions of culturally responsive family engagement in APTT schools. More specifically, through the theoretical frameworks of transformational leadership and culturally responsive school leadership the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How have transformational leadership practices affected the cultural responsiveness of APTT implementation?

2. How have transformational leadership practices transformed stakeholders' perceptions of partnerships at APTT schools?

As a result of this study, the researcher hopes to contribute to the current literature by analyzing leadership practices on the effectiveness of APTT through the lens of cultural responsiveness.

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2 THE IMPACT OF TRANSFORMATION LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON ACADEMIC PARTENT TEACHER TEAMS (APTT): PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

A family's socioeconomic status can have an impact on a child's academic success in school, and frequently students from low income families are at a disadvantage compared to their middle-class peers (Berends, 1995). Educators are also facing an increase in the population of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Scanlan & Lopez, 2014). In many schools, CLD students are the majority, not the minority (Scanlan & Lopez, 2014). School leaders play a critical role in identifying the inequities that exist between these groups and developing a school vision that creates a sense of belonging to all students and families (Anderson, 2011). Research shows that when parents are involved in their child's education, they motivate their children to increase their participation at school, which leads to higher achievement (Mo & Singh, 2008). High levels of family engagement are beneficial to students' success, however, schools with large populations of low-income students or minorities have reported difficulties in involving their parents due to lack of opportunities, not feeling welcomed, and misunderstandings about what it means to be involved (Ouimette, Feldman, & Tung, 2006). This study provides school leaders with insight into both families' and teachers' perceptions of family engagement, and how this insight can help schools create a plan that positively meets the needs of their diverse community.

Research Questions

This dissertation study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How have transformational leadership practices affected the cultural responsiveness of APTT implementation?

2. How have transformational leadership practices transformed stakeholders' perceptions of partnerships at APTT schools?

Significance.

Research has shown that even though family engagement is beneficial to students' academic success, schools with diverse populations experience difficulties engaging their families (Ouimette et al., 2006). Culturally responsive school leaders are challenged with identifying existing inequalities and developing a vision of family engagement that creates a climate of belonging to all students and families (Anderson, 2011). The results of this study can be a resource for school leaders in understanding stakeholders' perceptions of family engagement, which can support the development of family engagement plans that meet the needs of diverse families.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational leadership theory, along with the perspective of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL), was used in this study to examine the effectiveness of APTT in meeting the needs of diverse families. Transformational leadership focused the study on the leadership behaviors involved in the implementation of APTT as a family engagement model. CRSL narrowed that focus down to the transformational practices that lead to the implementation of APPT in a culturally responsive manner.

Bass's (1999) four dimensions of transformational leadership are Idealized Influence, Inspiration, Intellectual Stimulation and Individualized Consideration. This was the baseline model the researcher used to compare Khalifa's (2016) four dimensions of culturally responsive school leadership, which include Critical Self Awareness, CR Curricula and Teacher Preparation, CR and Inclusive School, and Engaging Families in Community Contexts. Leadership behaviors

from all eight dimensions were identified; then CRSL behaviors were connected to similar trans-

formational leadership behaviors. The identified CRSL behaviors were chosen because of their

connection to transformational leadership and their ability to provide data that addressed the re-

search questions. The table below displays the connected leadership behaviors used in the study

(Bass, 1999; Cooper, 2009; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-

Lazarowitz, 2010; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004).

Table 1

Comparison of Transformational Leadership and Culturally Responsive School Leadership Behaviors

Transformational Leadership				Culturally Responsive School Leadership			
Idealized Influence	Inspiration	Intellectual Stimulation	Individualized Consideration	Critical Self Awareness	CR Curricula and Teacher Preparation	CR and Inclusive School Environments	Engaging Families in Community Contexts
Influences the ideals of others Creates a desirable vision for the future Sets high standards of performance	Sets an example others want to follow Displays determination and confidence Develops sense of urgency to reduce gap between the school's vision and reality	Help others become more innovative and creative Encourages others to find solutions to difficult problems Acts as a mental stimulator	Takes care of the individual needs of followers Support and coach development of others Attempts to create environment inclusive to everyone	Self-reflective about race and culture and how they impact the school Creates inclusive environment of learning for all students Aware of inequalities that negatively affect students Uses data and family feedback to measure cultural responsiveness	Guides teachers into questioning assumptions about race and culture States a vision that supports culturally responsive teaching Provides professional developments on cultural responsiveness Conducts walkthroughs to monitor for culturally responsive practices Reforms practices to be more culturally responsive	Discusses inequities that exist in the school Promotes a culturally affirming environment Challenges normative practices that result in exclusionary and marginalizing behaviors Models CRSL for staff	Advocates for community-based issues Promotes the partnership of school and community Respects native students' languages and cultures Creates structures that accommodate lives of families Denounces deficit beliefs of students and families

Methodology

The researcher used a qualitative, descriptive case study that focused on the leadership practices in a school that implemented APTT. The research questions for this study "seek to explain some present circumstance" which according to Yin (2014) lend themselves to the use of a case study (p. 4). The present circumstance the research aimed to explain was how leaders' actions have influenced the cultural responsiveness of APTT implementation. Conducting a qualitative, descriptive case study allowed the researcher to look closely at the actions of the school leaders through in-depth interviews with school leaders, teachers, and parents. Ultimately, the researcher aimed to explore the role transformational leadership played in implementing a culturally responsive family engagement program "using the case [APTT] as a specific illustration" (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 95).

Yin (2014) explains that there are three key features of a case study, which the researcher utilized to confirm that a case study was an appropriate methodology. First, a case study "copes with the technically distinctive situation" (Yin, 2014, p. 17). This study focused on transformational leaders who have implemented APTT, which is a unique and innovative family engagement model. Second, a case study "relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (Yin, 2014, p. 17). Data for this study was collected through interviews and observations of APTT meetings. The research questions were addressed by analyzing and triangulating the data to identify any common or emerging themes. Finally, in any case study, the research "benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (Yin, 2014, p. 17). The theoretical frameworks for this study guided the interview questions and the analysis of the data. The identified leadership behaviors (see Ta-

ble 1) were compared to the study's research questions to develop the interview protocol questions for school leaders, teachers, and parents (see Appendix B). Understanding the common and unique behaviors of transformational and culturally responsive school leaders helped the researcher identify the specific actions that assisted in the implementation of APTT in a culturally responsive manner.

Site selection.

The school selected for this study (which was given the pseudonym Cherokee Elementary School) is a Title 1 school located in a Metro-Atlanta school district. Four elementary schools in this district had implemented APTT. Cherokee Elementary was selected by analyzing each of the four school's attendance data to determine which one had the highest attendance percentage that was also representative of their demographics. High attendance was determined by the percentage of parents who attended at least two APTT meetings during the 2017-2018 school year. Cherokee Elementary had 83% of their parents attend at least one APTT meeting and 51% attend two or more meetings during the 2017-2018 school year. The percentage of parents attending was also representative of their overall demographics: 59% Hispanic, 16% African American, 4% Asian, and 3% Caucasian.

School history.

Cherokee Elementary School opened as a Title 1 school in the fall of 1993 with 1,200 students representing 43 different countries. The school was named after a district school teacher from the early 1920s, who dedicated her life to serving her community. Over the years the school continued to grow in size until the school population reached 2,200 students. In 2015, the district opened another elementary school to relieve Cherokee's growing population. Cherokee's fourth principal and several other staff members and teachers moved to the newly opened school. As a

result, Cherokee Elementary received its fifth and current principal and numerous new staff members.

The current principal, Dr. Miles (pseudonym), came to Cherokee Elementary as a new principal with a vision and mission for her new school: to educate, equip, and empower. This vision has influenced her hiring practices, instructional framework, and parent engagement programs. Cherokee Elementary has developed strong partnerships with their parents and community. Parents regularly visit the Parent Center, which is run by two full-time staff members, the Parent Instructional Coordinator, and the Parent Outreach Liaison. The Parent Center provides English classes, finance classes, APTT workshops, and offer support for parents to help foster involvement in their child's learning at home.

At the time of the study, the school had an enrollment of 1,186 students with the following demographic makeup: 72% Hispanic, 19% African American, 5% Asian, 3% Caucasian, and 1% multiracial. 63% of the students were classified as English Language Learners (ELL) and 12% were classified as special education. 92% of the students received free or reduced lunch based on their family's economic status (see Table 2).

Table 2

Student Demographic Information

Student Demographic	Percentage
Free/Reduced Lunch	92%
ELL	63%
Special Education	12%
Hispanic	72%
African American	19%
Asian	5%
Caucasian	3%
Multiracial	1%

Cherokee Elementary has students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through 5th grade with 97 classroom teachers and 50 support staff members. The administrative leadership team consists of one principal and four assistant principals.

Since opening in 1993, Cherokee Elementary has seen a steady increase in their student population. However, the current principal explains that in the past few years there has been a decrease in enrollment (see Table 3). Dr. Miles believes this decline is due to the "current rhetoric about immigrants." From 2016 to 2017, there was an increase in the number of arrests of immigrants with no criminal records (322.9%) as well as an increase in the number of deportations (117.5%) in the county that Cherokee Elementary serves ("How Metro Atlanta Became A 'Pioneer' Of Immigration Enforcement," n.d.). Dr. Miles also believes that families are moving out of the community due to fear of deportation.

Table 3

Historical School Enrollment

School Year	Student Enrollment
2014-2015	2200
2015-2016	1406
2016-2017	1261
2017-2018	1203
2018-2019	1186

Participants.

In order to explore how transformational leadership practices affected the cultural responsiveness of APTT implementation and stakeholders' perceptions of partnerships, the researcher interviewed school leaders, teachers, and parents. The school leaders included the principal, assistant principal, parent instructional coordinator, and parent liaison. These leaders were chosen

because of their direct role in implementing APTT as well as other family engagement initiatives. Three teachers and four parents were also selected to participate in interviews. The participants were all females from variety of ethnic backgrounds.

Table 4

Participants

Interview Position	Participants	Ethnicity	Gender	Date	Time	Length of interview (min)	Pages transcribed
Principal	Dr. Miles	African American	Female	11/28/18	8:30 PM	45	18
Assistant Principal	Ms. Harris	African American	Female	11/28/18	4:00 PM	40	12
Parent Instructional Coordinator	Ms. Smith	African American	Female	11/6/18	1:00 PM	55	21
Parent Outreach Liaison	Ms. Taylor	Hispanic	Female	11/7/18	3:00 PM	40	12
Teacher #1	Ms. Peters	Pacific Islander	Female	11/14/18	5:30 PM	30	10
Teacher #2	Ms. Stevens	White	Female	11/10/18	2:00 PM	25	11
Teacher #3	Ms. Shepherd	Hispanic	Female	12/8/18	10:00 AM	26	13
Parent #1	Ms. Torres	Hispanic	Female	12/18/18	9:00 AM	22	8
Parent #2	Ms. Allen	African American	Female	12/18/18	9:30 AM	18	5
Parent #3	Ms. Clarke	African American	Female	12/18/18	10:00 AM	20	7
Parent #4	Ms. Landers	Hispanic	Female	12/18/18	10:30 AM	31	11

There were a total of 11 participants selected to participate in this study (see Table 3). The principal of Cherokee Elementary School is Dr. Miles. Dr. Miles is an African American female between the ages of 35-44. At the time of the interview, she was in her 17th year in education overall and her fourth year as a principal. Previously she served as a classroom teacher, Reading Recovery teacher and an Assistant Principal, all at Title 1 schools. Dr. Miles explained that she decided to become a principal because she wanted to impact more students by being able

to "execute her instructional vision." Dr. Miles described herself as an "instructional geek" and stated that she loved "figuring out how each student learns."

Cherokee Elementary School has four assistant principals. Ms. Harris is in charge of the Title 1 program and the implementation of APTT. Ms. Harris has a diverse background in education, and has worked as a classroom teacher, early intervention teacher, literacy coach, and a parent instructional coordinator. Ms. Harris is an African American female between the ages of 35-45. At the time of the interview, she was enjoying her fourth year as an assistant principal at Cherokee Elementary School. Ms. Harris described herself as a servant leader who is always willing to "do the work" alongside her teachers.

The school has two full-time staff members dedicated to supporting their parents and community. Ms. Smith has served as the parent instructional coordinator at Cherokee Elementary School for the past three years. Previously she worked as a parent instructional coordinator at a middle school for six years. She is an African American female between the ages of 50-60. Ms. Taylor serves as the parent outreach liaison. She is a Hispanic female from Puerto Rico between the ages of 50-60. Ms. Taylor is also an active member of the community and speaks fluent Spanish.

Classroom teachers were also interviewed as a part of this research study. The researcher utilized a two-phase approach to determine the teachers selected to participate (Yin, 2014). The sampling method used for choosing these participants was a maximum variation strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This strategy allowed the researcher to utilize criteria that differentiate participants and maximizes the differences to obtain a variety of perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The first stage involved collecting quantitative data about the teachers based on set crite-

ria. These criteria included grade level and their APTT attendance rate. An equal number of primary teachers (kindergarten, first, and second grades) and intermediate teachers (third, fourth, and fifth grades) as well as an equal number of teachers with high and low APTT attendance rates (percentage of parents attending two or more meetings the previous year) were invited to participate in the study. This information allowed the researcher to purposefully choose the participants from the available population that provided the needed information to answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Once the information for the first stage was collected, the researcher invited eleven teachers to participate in the study. Three teachers agreed to be interviewed.

The first teacher interviewed was Ms. Peters, a Pacific Islander female between the ages of 25-35. At the time of the interview, Ms. Peters had three years of teaching experience at Cherokee Elementary. She taught second grade and only 33% of her families attended two or more APTT meetings. Ms. Peters is a first generation immigrant and believes that she connects with many of her families because she can "see [her] parents in the parents [she] has."

The second teacher interviewed was Ms. Stevens, a Caucasian female between the ages of 45-55. In 2017-2018, Ms. Stevens was a third-grade teacher and is currently teaching the same group of students in fourth grade. She has taught in the school district for fifteen years, always at Title 1 schools. 70% of Ms. Stevens' families attended two or more APTT meetings. During the interview, Ms. Stevens was asked why she believed she had such high attendance at her APTT meetings. She responded that she always showcased a project her students recently completed at the beginning of each meeting. She would tell parents, "come early and read your child's project with your kid." By doing this, Ms. Stevens makes her APTT meetings feel more personal for the parents.

The third teacher interviewed was Ms. Shepherd, a Hispanic female between the ages of 45-55. Ms. Shepherd started her teaching career later in life and has taught for ten years at Cherokee Elementary. At the time of the interview, she taught third grade and only 17% of her families attended two or more APTT meetings. Ms. Shepherd believes she maintains open communication with her parents, and even though she doesn't speak Spanish, her parents are comfortable with her because she is older and Hispanic.

There were also four parents interviewed for the study. These parents were chosen by the assistant principal, Ms. Harris, based on the age of their children and their attendance at APTT meetings. Each parent was interviewed in the Parent Center since they all have a relationship with Ms. Smith, the Parent Instructional Coordinator, and/or Ms. Taylor, the Parent Outreach Liaison.

The first parent interviewed was Ms. Torres who has one student at Cherokee Elementary. At the time of the interview, the student was in fourth grade. Ms. Torres is Hispanic and only speaks Spanish so Ms. Taylor interpreted during the interview. Over the years Ms. Torres has utilized several of the resources available in the Parent Center but did not regularly attend APTT meetings.

The second parent interviewed was Ms. Allen, who has had two students at Cherokee Elementary. Ms. Allen moved into the school district in the middle of the 2017-2018 school year. At the time of the interview, her oldest child was in middle school and her youngest was in kindergarten. Ms. Allen is African American and a single parent. She regularly attended APTT meetings.

The third parent interviewed was Ms. Clarke, who has one student at Cherokee Elementary. During the interview, the student was in first grade. Ms. Clarke is Hispanic and bilingual so an interpreter was not needed. She had attended all APTT meetings over the past two years.

The final parent interviewed was Ms. Landers, who had one student at Cherokee Elementary. During the interview, the student was in third grade. Ms. Landers is Caucasian and, during the time of the interview, it was unknown if she was a single parent or not. 2017-2018 was her first year at Cherokee Elementary and she had attended all APTT meetings so far that year.

Possible bias.

Stake (2010) describes bias as "ubiquitous and sometimes desirable," meaning it is unavoidable so researchers must learn how to manage it effectively. Stake (2010) also describes bias as both the lack of objectivity and subjectivity. Therefore, researchers need to both understand when to be objective and when to accept their subjectivity to minimize the effect any biases have on the research. In qualitative research, this can be accomplished through effective "research designs, triangulation, and skepticism" (Stake, 2010, p. 166). The researcher of this dissertation study recognizes that she has personal beliefs about the need for more culturally responsive practices to effectively implement family engagement models like APTT. Therefore, it was important for the sampling procedures to yield maximum variation in participants to gather a wide range of perspectives.

Another possible source of bias is "the degree to which [the researcher was] open to contrary evidence" (Yin, 2014, p. 76). The researcher currently has an assumption that a school leader who chooses to implement APTT will be a transformative leader striving to meet the needs of their culturally diverse families. However, during the study, the researcher remained

open to the idea that there could be other reasons why a school leader would decide to implement APTT that had nothing to do with being culturally responsive.

Types of information gathered.

The types of information gathered to answer the study's research questions were interviews and direct observations. Interviews were the primary data source collected in this study. Interview questions were developed utilizing the theoretical framework; however, the researcher understood that case study interviews more often resemble a "guided conversation" to follow the needed line of inquiry in an unbiased manner (Yin, 2014, p. 110).

Various data collection methods (interviews and observations) acquired from a variety of sources (leaders, teachers, parents) were utilized in this study to allow for multiple perspectives and to strengthen the credibility of the study. Observing the APTT meetings was an important source of information to understand the school's implementation plan in action. The researcher utilized the APTT Facilitator Observation Form (see Appendix A). Specific elements of the APTT meeting were highlighted that connect to the identified leadership behaviors from the theoretical framework. Key components of transformational leadership and CRSL were the basis of the analysis of these pieces of data, such as respecting families' native languages, using structures that accommodate families' schedules, and attempting to create an environment inclusive of everyone.

During the collection of data, the researcher aimed to ensure credibility, dependability, transferability, and trustworthiness. In case study data collection this is accomplished through the triangulation of multiple sources of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Yin, 2014). The two main types of triangulation used in the study were data triangulation and investigator triangulation (Yin, 2014). The goal of collecting data through interviews and observations was to develop

"converging lines of inquiry" (Yin, 2014, p. 120). Yin (2014) explains that analyzing converging evidence from several sources of data provides "multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (p. 121).

Data collection.

The data collected for this research study came from interviews and observations. A protocol was used during each interview which allowed the data being collected to provide information that addressed the research questions (see Appendix B). This study utilized transformational leadership along with the perspective of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) to examine the effectiveness of APTT in meeting the needs of diverse families (see Table 1).

The researcher began by conducting independent interviews with the school leadership team (principal and assistant principal) as well as the Parent Instructional Coordinator and Parent Outreach Liaison. These interviews gave insight into their roles as school leaders, regarding both the vision and implementation of APTT. Following these interviews, the researcher interviewed classroom teachers and parents. The school leader and teacher interviews were all conducted over the phone and digitally saved on the researcher's fingerprint protected cell phone. Within two days the researcher personally transcribed each audio recording; then the audio recording was deleted from the cell phone. After the transcription was completed, a copy was sent to each interviewee in order to verify that her intentions and thoughts were accurately recorded. Each transcription was then uploaded to a qualitative data analysis program, NVivo, and stored on the researcher's password protected computer.

The researcher utilized the principals of data collection described by Yin (2013). The first principle is using multiple sources of evidence to create triangulation. The multiple sources of evidence came from the 11 diverse interviews with school leaders, teachers and parents that the

researcher conducted. The second principle is to create a case study database. The purpose of creating a database is to organize all the evidence in a retrievable form. The researcher utilized NVivo to create a database to easily store and analyze the collected data. NVivo allowed the data to be organized in multiple ways according to predetermined topics as well as emerging themes. The third principle is maintaining a chain of evidence to allow anyone to "follow the derivation of any evidence from initial research questions to ultimate case study conclusions" (Yin, 2013, p. 127). During the collection of each piece of data, the researcher recorded the date, time, and source (location, individual) of the data. This information was recorded in the database to allow for various chains of evidence to be generated if needed.

Data analysis.

Yin (2013) describes four general strategies for analyzing data collected during a case study. The researcher used two of these strategies during the study. The first is to utilize the theoretical framework(s) of the study to guide the data analysis. Transformational leadership and culturally responsive school leadership was utilized in the development of the research questions for this study and was used to guide the development of the interview and observation data collection protocols. The leadership behaviors identified from these two frameworks were also used as the preliminary themes for coding and analyzing the data (see Table 4).

Table 5

Example of Codes of Transformational Leadership and Culturally Responsive School Leadership Behaviors

Selected Dimension	Description of Dimension	Selected Descriptive Code
Idealized Influence	Influences others by creating a desirable vision for the future that is culturally responsive	Vision; mission; goal; ideal; influence; future
Inspiration	Inspires others towards making the vision a reality; challenges inequalities	Inspire; reality; inequalities; fairness

Intellectual Stimulation	Encourages others to find solutions to difficult problems (existing inequalities, assumptions about race and culture)	Challenges; solutions; assumptions about race and culture
Individualized Consideration	Attempts to create an environment that is inclusive of everyone's needs	Professional learning; native language/culture; accommodating families' needs

An iterative process was used to analyze the data collected during the study: reading and taking notes, describing, sorting, and interpreting. The data analysis process consisted of multiple phases of coding. During the initial coding phase, the researcher sorted the data into categories based on the four dimensions of transformational leadership with an emphasis on the CRSL behaviors that connect to each dimension (see Table 2). Following the initial coding phase, additional rounds of coding were conducted to allow for emerging themes with a constant comparative analysis of the leadership behaviors identified in the theoretical framework.

The researcher also used Yin's (2013) strategy of "examining plausible rival explanations" (p. 140). This strategy encourages the researcher to examine if the observed data or outcomes were the result of influence other than the one(s) being researched. The researcher for this study intentionally collected data for any other influences other than transformational leadership practices, which could impact the cultural responsiveness of APPT implementation or the stakeholders' perceptions of partnering with each other. Yin (2013) explains that some rival explanations do not appear until the researcher is in the data collection process which requires the researcher to begin attending to those additional explanations.

Findings

The results of the study are summarized in Table 5. Through multiple rounds of coding and analysis, the researcher discovered six themes aligned with the research questions established in this study. The first four themes align with how transformational leadership practices

affect the cultural responsiveness of APTT implementation. These themes include: (a) leaders establish a mission that encourages culturally responsive actions, (b) the parent center plays a strong leadership role in the execution of the school's mission, as well as APTT implementation, (c) teachers' focus on communication with parents in a family friendly manner, and (d) parental engagement efforts are designed to meet the needs of the community.

Two additional themes were discovered that aligned to the second research question which sought to understand how transformational leadership practices transformed stakeholders' perceptions of partnerships at APTT schools. Each theme focuses on the different perspectives of stakeholders and include (a) the increase in family engagement helps inform school leaders of resources families need, as well as the presence of new, unknown barriers to cultural engagement and (b) more effective communication with parents results in the majority of teachers confirming positive perceptions of parent/teacher partnerships.

Purposeful school mission.

The first major theme found in the research is that the presence of a strong, school mission will drive the work of the school. Cherokee Elementary's mission statement is simple: educate, equip, empower. This mission statement was stated and discussed numerous times during the researcher's conversations with school leaders, teachers and parents.

Cherokee Elementary's mission to educate, equip, and empower applies both to students and parents. During my research, the administration spoke specifically about how APTT directly aligned with the school's mission. Assistant Principal Harris explained that APTT "falls right along with [the school's mission] – educate, equip, empower – that is really what we are doing with our parents." Principal Miles explained that she decided to implement APTT because of how well it aligned with her personal mission:

> We are educat[ing], equipping, and empowering our parents to help their children. With APTT it is very clear how it is done. With the data, we are educating our parents on where their child is. We are equipping them with the tools to help their child with this core skill that empowers them to be able to help their child.

APTT focuses on empowering parents to support their children regardless of their home language or level of education. According to Ms. Harris, APTT makes parents feel empowered because they are "being taught by a teacher how to help their child."

Table 6

Example of Codes of Transformational Leadership and Culturally Responsive School Leadership Behaviors

Research Questions	Findings	Final Themes
1. How have transformational leadership practices affected the cultural responsiveness of APTT implementation?	• Principal establishes a mission statement that is utilized throughout the school. • Implementation of APTT aligns with the school's mission. • Teacher leaders see how their role aligns with the mission. • Parent center provides a variety of supports for teachers, parents, and students. • Implementation of APTT by classroom teachers focuses on educating and equipping parents. • Parents appreciate the knowledge and resources they receive. • School is aware of barriers that exist that can have a negative impact on APTT implementation. • Leaders have taken actions to overcome existing barriers.	1. Leaders establish a mission that encourages culturally responsive actions. 2. Parent center has a leadership role in the execution of the school's mission as well as the implementation of APTT. 3. Teachers' focus on creating a positive, family-friendly environment. 4. Family engagement efforts are designed to meet the needs of the community.
1. How have transformational leadership practices transformed stakeholders' perceptions of partnerships at APTT schools?	• There has been an increase in parents utilizing the Parent Center. • Parents share information with other parents in the community • The Parent Center has resources to meet the changing needs of parents. • Teachers and parents have more effective communication. • The increase in family engagement has confirmed many of the perceptions teachers held about their parents. • The increase in family engagement revealed less visible barriers that exist for families.	5. The increase in family engagement helps inform school leaders of resources families need as well as the presence of new barriers. 6. Increase in family engagement results in stakeholders confirming positive perceptions of parent/teacher partnerships.

The researcher also found that Cherokee Elementary's mission plays a significant role among teacher leaders. Ms. Smith (Parent Instructional Coordinator) and Ms. Taylor (Parent Outreach Liaison) serves the school community through the parent center. They both described their most important role as empowering parents. Ms. Taylor stated, "I am empowering them; I am teaching my parents something they didn't know." Ms. Taylor educates parents through supporting the implementation of APTT and offers workshops that focus on topics like learning English as a Second Language and handling personal finances. Cherokee's mission inspired Ms. Taylor, "When I see their faces, that they feel so empowered that they have the knowledge, that is why I do [my job]." Ms. Smith also saw a direct connection between APTT and the school's mission, "For me, the implementation [of APTT] is all about empowering the parents and creating a community based on that. We are teaching and empowering them." Ms. Taylor and Ms. Smith staff the parent center and focus all their outreach and support efforts on the mission of educating, equipping, and empowering parents.

The classroom teachers did not specifically discuss the alignment of the school's mission with APTT; however, they shared experiences that described how they were educating, equipping, and empowering their parents. A second-grade teacher, Ms. Peters, described her experience with APTT the past two years:

> During APTT parents get to see where their child is. When they see the progress graph, something clicks for them, and they are like wow! I feel like that is where the conversation really starts in the room, because when they first come it is usually silent, and when they see [the graph] they become worried and start asking questions. What can I do to help?

When parents see the progress their child is making compared to the rest of the class, the parents get motivated to learn how they can support their child at home. The format of each APTT meet-

ing teaches parents specific skills and activities they can easily use at home. During my interviews, teachers shared that many parents expressed being unsure how to help their child at home. However, as parents attended more APTT meetings, they felt more confident and were motivated to support their child's academic progress.

Parents also shared how APTT had educated and equipped them to support their children at home. Parents were very open and expressive as they explained that by learning how their children were doing at school, they were able to learn the skills at home to support them. Several parents specifically discussed how APTT had educated them about the new math strategies that were being taught in school. Ms. Landers explained, "It has been hard transitioning to the new way [math is taught]. But APTT has explained it to me and it has really helped!" Ms. Torres also shared, "APTT has helped me relearn math." The parents all expressed that this new knowledge increased their confidence in having a more active role in their child's education.

Cherokee Elementary's purposeful school mission has had a direct impact on the implementation of APTT. As a result, all stakeholders (school leaders, teachers, and parents) have experienced how APTT educates, equips, and empowers the parents who participate.

Parent center plays a leadership role.

The second major theme that emerged in the research was how the parent center played a leadership role in the execution of the school's mission as well as the implementation of APTT. Ms. Smith and Ms. Taylor staff the parent center and have significant leadership roles in Cherokee Elementary's support of parents.

Principal Miles shared that she first learned about the APTT program from her parent outreach liaison, Ms. Taylor. Ms. Taylor had attended an APTT meeting at another elementary school as a grandparent:

My grandkids went to a different school and that is how I learned about APTT. I went there as a grandma and I loved it! I went back and told Dr. Miles that we have to have this at Cherokee, and Dr. Miles had the same heart and said she would love to do it too. I love it! I could see the data and activities; it wasn't like a parent-teacher conference or a Title 1 workshop. I fell in love because you are in the room with the teacher and parents, see the data, and the next time I went I could see my granddaughter's progress. It was amazing! She was reading better and doing better in what she was learning.

Ms. Taylor believed that Cherokee's mission and implementing APTT would show teachers how to educate, equip, and empower parents. She convinced Dr. Miles to visit an APTT meeting at another school, which eventually led to APTT becoming an important program at Cherokee Elementary.

Ms. Taylor and Ms. Smith both collaborated with the administration team during the staff training and implementation of APTT. Ms. Smith provided training for new teachers as well as continuous professional learning throughout the school year. The trainings were frequently focused on showing teachers "different points of view as to why we do what we do" and tried to "appeal to their emotional side." Some teachers expressed to me that they felt like APTT was just "one more thing on their plate." So Ms. Taylor and Ms. Smith tried "to show them that they need to think of [APTT] in a different way, in a positive way that will help your students in the long run." One way the parent center supported teachers during the execution of APTT was by preparing all materials for the teachers, scheduling interpreters, and contacting parents. The teachers expressed how much they appreciated the support they received from the parent center. This support was essential for teachers to be committed to APTT.

Another important leadership role Ms. Taylor and Ms. Smith had was the coordination and training of classroom interpreters for each APTT meeting. Due to Cherokee's large Hispanic population, each classroom received a Spanish interpreter. These interpreters were recruited

throughout the district and were paid hourly with Title 1 funds. Ms. Taylor and Ms. Smith provided the interpreters with snacks and tried to schedule them to come back and support the same classroom for each meeting so they could "feel like a part of that [classroom]." They also provided the interpreters with the presentation the teachers used during APTT in advance for them to review. This allowed the interpreters to feel confident in training the Spanish speaking parents in the classroom simultaneously, instead of simply interpreting what the teacher said.

As teacher leaders, Ms. Taylor and Ms. Smith have played significant roles in the cultural responsive implementation of APTT at Cherokee Elementary. They are bridging the gap between the needs of teachers and parents and the mission of the school.

Family friendly environment.

The third major theme that emerged during the research was that the classroom teachers focused mainly on creating a positive, family-friendly environment during APTT meetings. By creating an environment that was welcoming and providing information that was easily understandable, parents felt more comfortable attending APTT meetings.

One essential element of the APTT framework is to begin each meeting with an ice breaker activity to give parents a chance to talk to each other. However, Ms. Smith explained that after their first year of implementation they decided to redesign this portion of the APTT meeting in order to create a "climate of trust" among the parents and teachers. They wanted this opening activity to set the tone for the rest of the meeting, so the parents would "know that we love them and have their best interest at heart." During their second year of implementation, they focused on having the teachers greet all the families as they arrived and spend a few minutes casually mingling with them. Next, they planned two ice breaker activities. The first was a fun group activity (i.e. create the tallest structure using marshmallows and toothpicks). This activity

was designed to allow for cooperation among parents regardless of any language barriers. The second activity was designed to allow parents to connect with each other by talking about their children. For example, in small groups, they would be asked to share something their child loves to do at home and something they hate to do at home. One teacher shared the change she had seen in her parents after these activities were completed:

> When they come in some of the parents will build somewhat of a relationship. From the first meeting to the last meeting there is a switch in the dynamic among the group that comes. Like with the ice breaker, you see them start to say, 'Oh hi, good to see you!' It's like a mini family that starts to form.

When asked about these ice-breakers, parents expressed how much they enjoyed talking with other parents. One parent shared that she liked learning that "I'm not the only one who fights with my child to complete their homework!" Allowing parents to connect with each other creates a sense of community and encourages parents to return to the next APTT meeting.

Another element that the teachers focused on was how they taught the academic skills to their parents. One fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Stevens, shared that many of her parents "fear that they don't know. They might only have a third-grade education and feel very uncomfortable going into a fourth or fifth-grade classroom." In order to overcome this fear, the teachers focused on spending more time modeling each activity for the parents. One third-grade teacher, Ms. Shepherd, explained:

> When we model for [the parents] the different activities it really helps them. Not only are we teaching the parents, but we are teaching them the same way we teach the students. And you can see that the parents start to feel more confident helping their children at home.

Many parents struggle with supporting their children at home because they learned the same skills very differently growing up. Modeling the activities is important because it allows parents to "teach things at home the same way we teach them at school."

Meeting the needs of the community.

The fourth major theme that developed from the research is that the parental engagement efforts at Cherokee Elementary were designed to meet the needs of the community. These efforts had a significant impact on the success of APTT implementation. APTT was designed to meet the individual needs of each student, and school leaders have proactively addressed the barriers that exists within their community to meet those needs.

Prior to APTT, Cherokee Elementary focused their parental engagement efforts on typical school events such as literacy night, math night and science night. One teacher explained that these events required "lots of planning and work and we weren't having the turnout." Another teacher compared her experience with APTT to those previous events, "I had no connection with those events. It wasn't specifically for my kids; it was for the whole school." APTT is more personal for parents. Parents meet with their child's teacher, see their child's academic progress, and leave with specific activities they can use at home to support their child's progress.

During the study, Cherokee Elementary was a Title 1 school with 92% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Administration, school leaders, teachers, and parents all mentioned the negative impact living in poverty can have on family engagement. Many parents worked multiple jobs or had irregular work schedules which made it difficult to attend events at the school. Other parents simply couldn't afford to take time off work to attend. The parent center tried to ensure that if parents could not attend a meeting that they still had access to the information. One parent shared her experience when she did not attend a meeting:

> The parent center invited parents who missed the meeting to come in during the day to learn how to use the APTT materials. The teacher sent the materials home with my child and I was also able to watch a video recording of the meeting on the school website. I prefer going to the meeting, but if I can't attend I appreciate that there are other ways I can get the information.

The school did not want a parent's work schedule to prevent them from receiving the information provided during APTT meetings. By offering make-up meetings during the day and posting videos of the meetings online, any parent who wanted the information had the opportunity to receive it. Another way that Cherokee Elementary tries to support their parents is by providing resources to help parents meet the basic needs of their family. Principal Miles believes that "once we take care of a lot of [the families'] basic needs, it opens the door for their academic needs to be taken care of." Through the parent center, families can sign up for a free vision screening, dental care, and financial workshops. Ms. Taylor, who teaches the financial workshop, explains that she wants to educate parents about the resources that are available so that their financial situations can improve. Improving their financial situation gives parents more time and energy to support their children with their academics.

Another barrier that leaders at Cherokee Elementary have to address often is the assumption that because of the population they serve, they would never have a lot of family engagement. Surprisingly, this negative assumption is also prevalent among the parents. Assistant Principal Harris explained that they have heard parents express that they do not expect support from the school because "everyone in the neighborhood says the school won't help you." School leaders have worked to change these assumptions. They utilized word of mouth and encouraged parents that have had positive experiences with the school to share these positive experiences with others in their community. One teacher shared that she has seen APTT attendance increase due to "word of mouth. Parents will go back and say, 'Oh this happened and we tried this and it will excite other parents to come.'" Principal Miles has also seen more trust within the community:

> Parents trust us because they may or may not know themselves how to [academically support their child] but they trust that we have their children's best interest at heart. They see that we work hard on behalf of the interest of their kids.

Prior to APTT, Dr. Miles knew that a negative perception existed among her teachers. Many of the teachers believed that family engagement at Title 1 schools was always low. Dr. Miles strategically focused on these negative perceptions when she started implementing APTT. She created an exploratory committee to send the "nay-sayers" to schools that had successful APTT programs. She asked these teachers to share their experience with their grade levels. Dr. Miles explained that after these initial observations and discussions "everyone was excited about it." The teachers saw firsthand that high family engagement was possible even at a Title 1 school.

Before APTT, Dr. Miles had to work to overcome the language barrier that existed for their significant Hispanic community. She hired bilingual staff throughout the school and, as a result, alleviated that problem.

> Our whole front office staff speaks Spanish and so do many other staff members throughout the building. We still have to convince new parents that the support is available, but once they realize there are so many bilingual people at Cherokee they become more comfortable. You can hear Spanish spoken all over the building.

The parent center is also an available resource for teachers when partnering with families that do not speak English. Teachers can arrange for Ms. Taylor to call parents and to translate materials being sent home. Another tool that the school uses to overcome language barriers is a cell phone application called Class Dojo. Class Dojo connects parents to their child's teacher and allows them to send messages to each other that can be translated into multiple languages. One parent shared that "being able to communicate with the teachers through Dojo has been a life changer for sure."

Increase in family engagement informs leaders.

The second guiding question of the research investigated how leadership practices transformed stakeholders perceptions of creating partnerships with each other. One of the themes that

developed from the research shows that an increase in family engagement helps inform school leaders of resources families need as well as the existence of new, unknown barriers.

APTT is a program that requires a lot of materials to be prepared in advance by the school. When asked how the parent center handled this work, the researcher found that the majority of it was completed by parent volunteers. Ms. Taylor explained that she had several parents who were always willing to come volunteer at the school, especially when it involved more clerical tasks. These parents were often less willing to attend school events that were focused on academics. Some parents felt intimidated because they had no formal educational experience in this country. Therefore, Ms. Taylor used this opportunity to prepare APTT materials to show them what APTT was all about:

> We use a lot of parents as volunteers to get the folders ready, and I talk to them about APTT. They get excited: 'Oh we are going to get all of this?' And I say yes, you will get all the materials at the meeting. So for me, I am empowering them in a way. And when the meeting comes they can say I was a part of getting this ready. They are completely a part of it. They are proud that they helped and tell their friends to come too. We all play a role – it's a partnership.

This partnership between the parent center and volunteers also create opportunities to learn more about the parents' needs. Ms. Smith shared that after the first APTT meeting, several of the parents were talking about how they felt uncomfortable having the interpreter speak to them in Spanish after the teacher spoke in English. They felt like all the other parents were watching them as the interpreter talked to them. Therefore, Ms. Smith decided to train the interpreters in supporting the Spanish speaking families alongside the teacher, instead of simply waiting to interpret what the teacher said. This change not only helped the Spanish speaking families feel more comfortable, but it also allowed for the meetings to finish earlier.

Another result of the increase in family engagement is the school becoming more aware of less visible barriers that prevent some families from being engaged. The most significant barrier is the number of families that are undocumented immigrants. The county that Cherokee Elementary's community resides in has seen a significant increase in the number of arrests of undocumented immigrants ("How Metro Atlanta Became A "Pioneer" of Immigration Enforcement, 2018). Dr. Miles shared, "the political issues can get in the way of our parents coming to the school. They are afraid to come; they don't always trust us." Dr. Miles also believe that the current political climate has caused the decline in enrollment they have seen the past several years. Parents who are undocumented are often unaware that the school is a safe haven and that they cannot be arrested. Ms. Smith explained that this fear also has a negative impact in other areas:

> This year we are trying to get parents to sign up for an online program called My Payments Plus so they can view and sign our annual Title 1 documents. These are documents that they have signed every year, just this year they do it online. They don't want to make a My Payments Plus account because they are afraid that it tracks them and they don't want anyone to know they are undocumented.

The Parent Center tries to support these parents by providing them with information to ease their fears. However, one parent expressed "it's hard to have a relationship with my child's teacher and the school. It is hard to trust them."

The political climate is also having a negative impact on the students of undocumented parents. During this study, Dr. Miles expressed that Cherokee Elementary had a lot of parents who were undocumented and teachers often did not understand the trauma they had experienced coming to the United States:

> We have a boy right now in third grade who is traumatized. He was in one of those fenced in camps and he was separated from his mom for two months. When he came to us he wouldn't talk for the first month and he still bites people when he becomes upset.

Dr. Miles also shared the story of another student who was having flashbacks of crossing the border with his mom. These flashbacks were causing him to have sleep issues. During my research, many stories like these were shared by administration, school leaders and teachers. Fortunately, the increase in family engagement Cherokee Elementary has experience has allowed the school to connect with many of these families in order to learn more about the support and resources they need. One important resource the school provides is information. They inform parents that even though they are undocumented there are resources available to them and their children. One of these resources is mental health care. The school has partnered with CETPA (Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services) to provide additional support for students and families due to the trauma they have experienced.

Confirming previous perceptions.

The final theme that developed from the research is that an increase in parental engagement results in stakeholders confirming positive perceptions of parent/teacher partnerships. Some negative perceptions were also confirmed; however, for the majority of stakeholders the personal nature of APTT allowed for more positive partnerships.

For some teachers and parents, their experience with APTT simply reinforced the negative perceptions of partnerships they held. Several teachers shared that due to language barriers and/or the lack of formal education among parents it was difficult for parents to academically support their children at home. Even if materials were translated, one teacher shared, "there is very little that will happen at home in terms of support." The majority of the negative perceptions that teachers expressed focused on parents' socioeconomic status. Teachers shared that

many parents don't have the accessible resources and were in "survival mode." One teacher expressed, "I just think most families get busy and things get pushed to the side." Another teacher expressed a similar belief,

> I think honestly we have done everything we can do. I mean I just feel like we have put on all the bells and whistles we can, but other than going to the house and picking them up, I don't know what else we could do.

Some parents also expressed negative perceptions of partnering with their child's teacher. Ms. Torres shared that she still did not trust most teachers. She explained that she does not trust them because they "scream at the kids and the kids don't want to come to school." Other parents expressed that teachers do not want to learn what *they* know about their child. Teachers tell parents what they know about their child, but never ask the parents to share. Ms. Clarke explained that she would like to have …

> good communication with respect. Parents believe that respect goes both ways. Teachers need to listen to the parents and parents need to listen to the teacher. This two way communication is needed to have a good understanding of the student.

These negative perceptions existed for some stakeholders before the implementation of APTT and had not changed.

Although some negative perceptions remained, the majority of stakeholders experienced confirmed their positive perceptions. The most prominent perception that school leaders and teachers held was that all parents loved their children and did what they could to support them. Ms. Stevens shared that she had experienced the positive impact of parental support with students from all cultures and backgrounds. Another teacher expressed similar experiences:

> My parents love their kids as much as any other parent and they want what is best for their kids. Their life experiences might just be different. You can't expect people to know something they don't know.

The staff at Cherokee Elementary believe that even though they have some parents that lack the knowledge or resources to maximize their academic support at home, it does not mean that these parents lack the desire to provide support at home. Ms. Peters shared that her experience with APTT confirmed for her "that some parents just need some more help in how to help their children. They want to help; they just don't necessarily know how."

During the study, parents shared how their experience with APTT had confirmed their positive perceptions of partnering with the school. Parents expressed that overall their experience with Cherokee Elementary had been positive and they felt that the staff was there to support them. Ms. Clarke shared that her child's teacher, "always lets us parents know what exactly is going on in class with our children. She always has time for whatever question or doubt we have and clears everything up." This overall feeling of support was expressed by all the parents. Parents also expressed how APTT specifically supported them and their child. Ms. Allen explained, "because the students are out of school more than they are in, APTT will help parents support their children to study and learn while they are away from school."

The increase in family engagement at Cherokee Elementary allows leaders, teachers, and parents to understand each other. Stakeholders understand that they both want their children to succeed and partnering with each other can accomplish that goal.

Implications

The results of this study revealed several important leadership practices that affected the cultural responsive implementation of APTT as well as stakeholders' perceptions of partnerships. The final themes that resulted from the data were: (a) leaders established a mission that encouraged culturally responsive actions; (b) the parent center had a leadership role in the execution of the school's mission as well as the implementation of APTT; (c) teachers focused on creating a

positive, family-friendly environment; (d) family engagement efforts were designed to meet the needs of the community; (e) an increase in family engagement helped inform school leaders of resources families needed as well as the presence of new barriers; (f) and an increase in family engagement resulted in stakeholders confirming positive perceptions of parent/teacher partnerships. The implications of these final themes are discussed below with regard to how they relate to the practices of school leaders and leadership teams, theoretical implications, and policy implications.

Implications for school leaders and school leadership teams.

In this study, school leaders worked closely with their leadership team to guarantee the successful implementation of APTT. Principal Miles established a mission for Cherokee Elementary that the staff believed in, and the school leadership team worked towards ensuring that the implementation of APTT was aligned with that mission.

The results from the study revealed the transformational leadership practices of Principal Miles. As a school leader, not only did Principal Miles establish a successful school mission but she also recognized when there was a need among the staff and developed a plan to support their development in that need. (Bass, 1999; Kurland et al., 2010; Leithwood & Sun, 2010). Other members of the school leadership team recognized these needs as well. For example, the parental instructional coordinator expressed the need for cultural responsive training:

> We need to establish a training where we share with them [staff] the caliber of students we have and show them the community and what our school is all about. So they don't have those negative ideas about why the students are not learning.

Transformational school leaders offer resources, establish leadership teams for cultural responsiveness, mentor teachers, and provide ongoing professional development (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Transformational school leaders also need to employ purposeful hiring practicing in order to increase the number of staff members that represent the ethnicity and culture of their community. By employing staff members with similar backgrounds as their students, school leaders can include these staff members on leadership teams to help make decisions based on the needs of the community. School leaders and leadership teams should work together to recognize the needs of their staff and community in order to work towards making their vision a reality.

Another strategic way transformational leaders establish their school mission is to make sure that staff members participate in decisions and distribute leadership among the staff (Leithwood & Sun, 2010). School leadership teams should strategically consider who participates on the team, especially if they are working towards the implementation of culturally responsive family engagement practices. When creating a leadership team that focuses on culturally responsive family engagement, the involvement of the parent center is essential. At Cherokee Elementary the parent center is staffed by the parental instructional coordinator and the parent outreach liaison. Their goal is to bridge the gap between the home and school and to provide support and resources that meet the needs of families. The parent center is often the first impression parents have of the school and are the ones who frequently learn what the parents need. The parental instructional coordinator, Ms. Smith, explained, "I work with students and parents when they have problems, it is my job to get involved. However, sometimes I don't know when there is a problem." During my interview. Ms. Smith told the story of a student whose parents asked for her help because the student did not want to come to school. Ms. Smith discovered that the teacher was getting angry with the student because she wasn't doing her homework; however, the teacher did not know that the student was having to take care of her younger siblings because her single mother worked two jobs. Having a team where teachers and school leaders have the

opportunity to work with the parent center allows the parent center staff to better serve as the liaison between the school and the community.

Other crucial members that school leadership teams should consider are parents from the community. My research shows that an increase in family engagement results in the school becoming more aware of the barriers that exist for families. Having parents as active members of the school leadership team, allows the school to make more informed decisions when it comes to developing culturally responsive family engagement. One parent that was interviewed expressed several ideas that she felt would make APTT easier for more families to attend and wanted the opportunity to share them with the school. Principal Miles shared that she would like parents to know that "we want you at the school and we want to hear your concerns and we want to hear what is going good." Having parent representatives on the school leadership team would allow these conversations to happen and would give parents the opportunity to share important information with their community. Over the past several years, Cherokee Elementary has experienced more meaningful partnerships with parents due to word of mouth. When parents started sharing the positive experiences that had at the school, more parents became willing to participate in school activities. This intentional collaboration between the school and parents create a safe, informative space where positive understandings between students and families can be further developed (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Understanding the needs of families is the ultimate responsibility of all staff members, but the call to action to provide necessary resources and supports is the responsibility of a culturally responsive transformational leader (Bass, 1999; Khalifa et al., 2016). Leaders also must train and support staff members in engaging students, families, and communities in culturally responsive ways (Khalifa et al., 2016). These intentional actions are critical for transformational leaders

as they inspire their followers to make their mission a reality (Bass, 1999, Leithwood & Sun, 2010).

Theoretical implications.

The theory of transformational leadership guided this study by providing a framework for investigating the leadership practices that led to culturally responsive family engagement and positive perceptions of partnership among stakeholders at a school. This study also examined the correlations between the theories of transformational leadership and culturally responsive leadership (CRSL). The assumption was made that in order for a leader to promote culturally responsive practices they also need to exhibit transformational leadership practices as well. The results of this study confirmed this assumption.

Bass (1999) specifically identifies four dimensions of transformational leadership. One of these dimensions is idealized influence. Idealized influence "encompasses influence over ideology, influence over ideals, and influence over bigger-than-life issues" (Bass, 1999, p.19). A transformational leader articulates a vision or purpose that inspires their followers (Bass, 1999; Hooper & Bernhardt; Kurkland et al., 2010; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). The mission that Principal Miles developed for Cherokee Elementary embodied all of those characteristics. The mission to educate, equip, and empower is a mission that Dr. Miles had developed over her many years of teaching at Title 1 schools. Dr. Miles explained that her mission was to empower the students she served "so that they just don't become what society tells them they are, to give them the tools to be thinkers and to become whoever they desire to be." The staff at Cherokee Elementary believe in their mission and they have a leader who inspires them to make their mission a reality. Principal Miles explained the reason for the school's mission:

> Ultimately our kids have to compete against [students from non-Title 1 schools]. It
> doesn't matter how much money our parents had when they were born or how much

money their parents have now. These things do not matter when it is time for the SATs or when they apply for college. Our kids still have to compete with those other children whose parents have given them those experiences.

A transformational leader establishes a mission that serves a specific purpose that their followers believe in (Bass, 1999; Kurland et al., 2010; Leithwood & Sun, 2010). These leaders create tension between their current reality and where they want to be (Kurkland et al., 2010). The staff at Cherokee Elementary feel that tension and believe that the implementation of APTT educates, equips, and empowers parents to help close that achievement gap. Dr. Miles also utilizes the school's mission to influence the school's family engagement efforts and to emphasize the role that families play in the success of students (Ouimette et al., 2006; Scanlan and Lopez, 2014). These efforts were designed to be inclusive for all stakeholders, which is aligned with the CRSL theme of critical self awareness (Khalifa et al., 2016). Critical self-awareness includes when leaders are aware of inequalities that negatively affect students and create an inclusive environment for all students (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Another dimension of transformational leadership identified by Bass (1999) is individualized consideration. This dimension focuses on leaders knowing their followers' needs and "raising them to more mature levels" (Bass, 1999, p. 14). Individualized consideration is closely related to a dimension of culturally responsive school leadership. A culturally responsive school leader recognizes that teachers are primarily not culturally responsive, and therefore develops a plan to ensure that teachers become and remain culturally responsive (Ishimaru, 2017; Khalifa et al., 2016). Although the teachers who participated in the study all expressed positive perceptions of partnering with parents, many teachers shared negative perceptions as well. Principal Miles and other school leaders are fully aware of these perceptions. The parental instructional coordinator shared that Cherokee Elementary has a lot of new, young teachers who do not understand the background or culture of the students they teach. When these teachers have students who do

not complete their homework they assume that the student and their parents do not value school. Veteran teachers also held on to these negative perceptions, "being a parent myself I know what it is like to come home and have a lot on your plate, but you still help your child."

The final dimension of transformational leadership seen in the results of this study was intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1999). This dimension involves encouraging others to find solutions to difficult problems (Bass, 1999, Leithwood & Sun, 2010). At Cherokee Elementary this resulted in teachers and school leaders thinking of innovative ways to improve the effectiveness of APTT. Some of these innovative ideas include providing fun child care activities so students can encourage their parents to attend, giving families free books during the meetings, and training interpreters to effectively support families during the meetings. One fourth-grade teacher, Ms. Stevens, shared how she was able to get 70% of her parents to attend APTT:

> This year and last year my kids had finished their writing project, so I tied that into the APTT meeting. I told parents they could come in early and have their child present their project. I try to use those ties to bring them in. Trying to make it more personal.

Ms. Stevens also explained that this practice is not something she has shared with her colleagues; it is just what she has decided to do with her class. The transformational theme of intellectual stimulation led stakeholders to discover innovative solutions to meet the need of their diverse population by creating structures that accommodate the lives of families (Khalifa et al., 2016). This intellectual stimulation led school leaders and teachers to develop culturally responsive and inclusive environments which is an important theme of CRSL (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Policy implications.

Educational policy and research have focused on family engagement as means for reducing educational gaps that exist for marginalized students (Ishimaru, 2017). According to Title 1 Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) each Title 1 school is required to develop and

implement a family engagement policy ("Title I, Part A Parent and Family Engagement - Title I, Part A (CA Dept of Education)," n.d.). It is left to the individual school to collaboratively develop their family engagement plan with their staff and families. The results of this study show that the needs and barriers that each community faces are unique. Schools implement different family engagement programs; however, to be effective they need to address the needs of their community (Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Paredes, 2011). The requirements established by ESSA places the responsibility of developing a family engagement policy on the local school, which allows school leaders to make decisions based on their communities. Unfortunately, research has also shown that although local schools are given the authority to design their own family engagement initiatives the needs of diverse families are still not being met due to the focus of more traditional family engagement practices (Francis, Blue-Banning, Haines, Turnbull, & Gross, 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2016; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Paredes, 2011). These traditional events are not designed to support the needs of all parents and are catered towards "normative school-centric behaviors" (Ishimaru, 2017, p 3).

To assist local schools in the development of their family engagement policies, the United States Department of Education published the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships ("Family and Community Engagement | U.S. Department of Education," n.d.). This framework provides school leaders with the "goals and conditions necessary to chart a path toward effective family engagement efforts that are linked to student achievement and school improvement" (Mapp & Kuttner, 2014, p.6). The results from this study show that even though the majority of the stakeholders at Cherokee Elementary have positive perceptions of their partnerships with each other, many educators still hold on to more traditional views and expectations of family engagement (Frankenberg, 2009; Ishimaru, 2017). Even though policies

exist that emphasize the importance of family engagement, the capacity of local schools and educators to form effective partnership with diverse families needs to be increased (Ishimaru, 2017). Local policy makers need to provide more specific support and guidelines to encourage school leaders to develop more culturally responsive family engagement policies.

Suggestions for future study.

While the findings of this research are insightful, a more comprehensive study involving a larger sample of schools would allow for greater generalization of results. By utilizing a larger sample of schools, a greater variety of perspectives would be gained. The school examined in this research was selected due to its high family attendance during APTT meetings. Further studies might include schools that have lower attendance rates or serve different populations of students. Cherokee Elementary's population is mainly Hispanic families with low socio-economic status. The needs their families expressed are unique to their situation. A school that serves a different population would most likely experience different challenges.

It would also be beneficial to study the leadership practices and stakeholders' perceptions over a long period of time. Since Cherokee Elementary is just beginning some intentional cultural responsive professional learning, it would be informative to see the impact this learning would have on teachers' perceptions and future relationships with their students and parents over a special period of time.

Limitations.

The researcher found several limitations to the implications and conclusions of this study. First, at the time of the study the researcher worked at a school that had also implemented APTT. Therefore, there may be some bias regarding the impact of APTT on increasing partnerships between teachers and parents. Also, only four parents were interviewed for the study which limited

the parents' perceptions to their personal experiences. There were also limitations concerning the size and scope of the study. The study only looked at one large school that implemented APTT in a Metro-Atlanta school district. Since only one school was studied, the results might not be transferrable to other schools, especially those that have not implemented a program like APTT.

Conclusion

A growing number of schools are serving diverse and high-needs communities, and the middle-class teachers in these schools often struggle with connecting to those who do not have matching backgrounds (Allen & White-Smith, 2018; Frankenberg, 2009). Research shows that increasing family engagement leads to an increase in a child's motivation, engagement, and academic achievement (Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Mo & Singh, 2008). Therefore, it is important for school leaders to identify existing inequalities and develop a plan for overcoming those inequalities (Anderson, 2011; Ishimaru et al., 2017; Palmer & Louis, 2017).

Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) is a family engagement model that provides schools with a framework for partnering with parents so that they can feel confidence assisting with their child's academic progress at home ("Academic Parent-Teacher Teams," n.d.). However, this study revealed that it is through the intentional actions of a transformational leader that a family engagement program can effectively meet the needs of a community. This study revealed that this begins with leaders establishing a mission for the school that influences the decisions and actions of all staff members. This strong mission creates a common purpose of educating, equipping, and empowering the community they serve. The front office staff, parent center, and classroom teachers work together to create a positive, family-friendly environment that meet the needs of their community. This study also showed that family engagement will increase

when families feel more welcomed at the school. The Spanish speaking families felt more comfortable coming to the school and attending APTT meetings because they knew that interpreters were always available. This increase in family engagement also helped inform school leaders of additional resources families needed as well as additional barriers that prohibited them from being fully engaged with the school. By having a more productive two-way communication system between the school and families, schools are better able to focus their support efforts to meet more current needs. Meaningful partnership between the school and parents also creates better understanding and often leads to the confirmation of positive perceptions of these partnerships.

As expressed by Cherokee Elementary's mission statement, the goal of all educators is to educate, equip, and empower their students. One way to accomplish this goal is to educate, equip, and empower families. This study provided further research to support that the actions of transformational leaders can positively impact the cultural responsiveness of family engagement practices.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

APTT Facilitator Feedback Observation Form

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS	STRATEGIES FOR DELIVERY	EVIDENCE
Welcome & Team Building (15 Minutes)	☐ Communicate purpose and value of APTT meetings ☐ Express gratitude to families in attendance ☐ Model and explain Icebreaker activity ☐ Icebreaker is fun, engaging, and interactive ☐ Families get to know other families better ☐ Families share strategies that support learning ☐ Teacher participates with families ☐ Families are more relaxed and interactive ☐ Closure is provided by communicating the importance of building a strong team that works together to improve student learning outcomes	**Teachers:** • Explained purpose and value of APTT meetings • Explained and modeled activity • Explained importance of team • Expressed the value that each family brings to student learning • Emphasized the classroom as a safe space for sharing and learning **Families:** • All participated in activity
Review Foundational Grade Level Skills & Share Data (15 Minutes)	☐ Clear explanation of the skills using visuals ☐ Clear explanation of why the skill is critical to grade level success and beyond ☐ Check for understanding with open-ended questions and opportunity for discussion ☐ Academic vocabulary is explained in family-friendly terms ☐ Model and explain how to read the bar graph ☐ Model and explain how to interpret data ☐ Families are clear that data is actionable ☐ Families use graph and assessment in the family folder to follow instructions and find their student ☐ Check for understanding with open-ended questions and opportunity for discussion ☐ Families examine and discuss data outcomes ☐ Clearly articulate high expectations ☐ Families are informed that follow-up data will be available to them at the next APTT meeting	**Teachers:** • Clearly explained the skill and why it is critical to master it (urgency) • Used visuals for instruction • Checked for understanding by asking open-ended questions • Allowed think time • Clearly explained and modeled how to read the graph in its entirety • Clearly explained and modeled how to interpret the data • Gave opportunities for questions and discussion • Set high expectations (urgency) • Took time to celebrate student growth (APTT 2 & 3)
Model Practice Activities (15 Minutes)	☐ Model and explain two practice activities ☐ Use visuals and manipulatives to model activities ☐ Use the "I Do; We Do, You Do" teaching strategies ☐ Check for understanding with open-ended questions and opportunity for team discussion ☐ Ask families to provide ideas for extending the activity for added challenge	**Teachers:** • Modeled two activities using visuals • Used "I do, we do, you do" strategy for modeling • Checked for understanding with open-ended questions and dialogue

Facilitate Family Practice of Activities	☐ Circulate around the room and interact with families to ensure engagement and understanding ☐ Encourage families to support each other ☐ Encourage families to contact the teacher anytime they have questions or need additional resources ☐ Closure is provided by emphasizing the value of practice and good study habits at home	**Teachers:** • Interacted with families and ensured engagement and understanding during practice **Families:** • Practiced two activities • Expressed confidence with using activities at home
Facilitate Setting 60-Day S.M.A.R.T. Goals	☐ Model S.M.A.R.T. goal setting by providing a visual example using a fictitious student on the graph and completing the goal template for all to see ☐ Check for understanding with open ended questions and opportunity for team discussion ☐ Express high expectations and encourage rigor ☐ Articulate urgency, ownership, and accountability ☐ Tell families that you believe they can do it ☐ Collect the teacher copy of the family goal	**Teacher:** • Modeled goal setting • Checked for understanding • Supported families as they wrote their goals **Families:** • Fully completed goal sheet and turned in teacher copy

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS	Strengths	Areas of Refinement
Welcome & Team Building		
Review Foundational Grade Level Skills & Share Data		
Model Practice Activities		

Facilitate Family Practice of Activities	
Facilitate Setting 60-Day S.M.A.R.T. Goals	

Appendix B

Interview Questions

For School Leaders:

<u>Idealized Influence</u>

1. What role does the school's vision and mission play in APTT implementation?

<u>Inspiration</u>

2. What inequalities, if any, have you noticed that are negatively affecting students and families?

    a. What have you noticed specifically with APTT implementation?

3. What changes do you feel needs to occur to reduce these inequalities, and what steps have been taken so far?

<u>Intellectual Stimulation</u>

4. What conversations have you had with staff members that have challenged their assumptions about race and culture?

    a. How have these conversations changed APTT implementation practices?

<u>Individualized Consideration</u>

5. What are some of the specific needs of teachers, students, and families in developing meaningful partnerships?

6. How has the cultural responsiveness of your staff been development since APTT has been implemented?

7. What structures have been put in place for APTT meetings and materials to be accessible to all families?

8. Of all the things we have talked about, what aspect of APTT implementation is the most important to you in meeting the needs of all families?

For Classroom Teachers:

Idealized Influence

1. Ideally, how should schools and families partner with each other?

2. Do you feel like the school shares the same vision?

Inspiration

3. What inequalities, if any, have you noticed that are negatively affecting students and families?

4. How has the leadership team attempted to reduce these inequalities?

5. What role has APTT played in either contributing to existing inequalities or in reducing inequalities?

Intellectual Stimulation

6. In what ways has the implementation of APTT changed or confirmed your views of race and culture?

Individualized Consideration

7. How has the implementation of APTT been designed to meet the specific needs of teachers, students, and families?

8. Since APTT, how have you changed your practices to meet the cultural needs of your families?

Closing Questions

9. Of all the things we have talked about, what aspect of APTT implementation is the most important to you in meeting the needs of all families?

For Families:

<u>Idealized Influence</u>

1. Why do you think the school decided to implement APTT? What do you see as the goal of APTT?

<u>Inspiration</u>

2. What inequalities, if any, exist that is negatively affecting your child or your family within the school?

    a. What have you noticed specifically with APTT implementation?

3. How has the school tried to overcome these inequalities? What still needs to change?

<u>Intellectual Stimulation</u>

4. How does APTT meet the needs of families of different races and cultures?

<u>Individualized Consideration</u>

5. What are some of your specific needs in developing meaningful partnerships with your child's teacher?

6. In what ways are APTT meetings and materials meeting your needs? In what was are they not?

<u>Closing Questions</u>

7. Of all the things we have talked about, what aspect of APTT implementation is the most important to you in helping you support your child's academic success?