Addressing Parent Voice and Perspectives for Improvement of Engagement and Social Connectedness within the Multicultural Fabric and Culture of Schools

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Our Research team acknowledge that we are located on Treaty Six Territory, and respect the history, languages, ceremonies and culture of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit and all Indigenous Peoples of Canada.
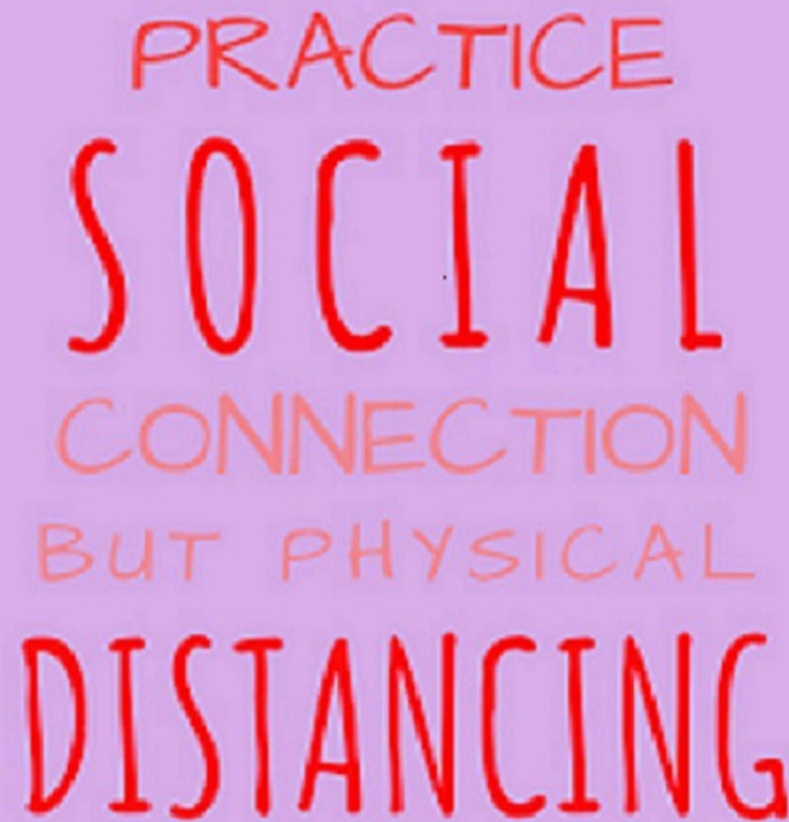
Alberta Government

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- Alberta Education Research Branch

- Research partner universities: Simon Fraser University and University of Alberta

Outline

1. Introduction and background to our research

2. Selected findings from our research

3. Discussion

By now, we all know we need to put physical distance between ourselves and others to slow the spread of COVID-19. But physical distance doesn't have to diminish social connectedness. In fact, to mitigate the psychological toll of social isolation, finding ways to connect is more important than ever (Mental Health Commission of Canada).

# 1. Introduction and Background to our Research

Research Partners

- Principal Investigator: **Dr. Malcolm Steinberg**, Simon Fraser University

- Co-Investigator: **Dr. Paul Wozny**, Aurora Academic Charter Schools

- Co-Invesigator: **Dr. Owen Livermore**, EPSB

- Co-Investigator: **Dr. Nicole Ofosu**, University of Alberta

- Co-Investigator: **Dr. Paul Veugelers**, University of Alberta

- Research Partner Administrator: **Jan Favel**, EPS

Research Partnerships Program Call for Proposals

- **Alberta Education RPP (Round 2)**
  - Implementation of Professional Practice Standards for teachers and leaders
  - Indigenous education (acting on the Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students study's findings and furthering the research)
  - Supporting diversity

- **Research Collaboration between Charter and all Alberta school jurisdictions**
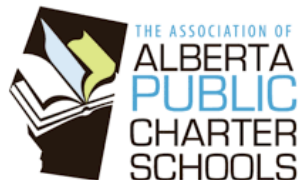
Theoretical model for understanding the social and ecological structures supporting adolescent connectedness to school

Source: Waters et al., 2009
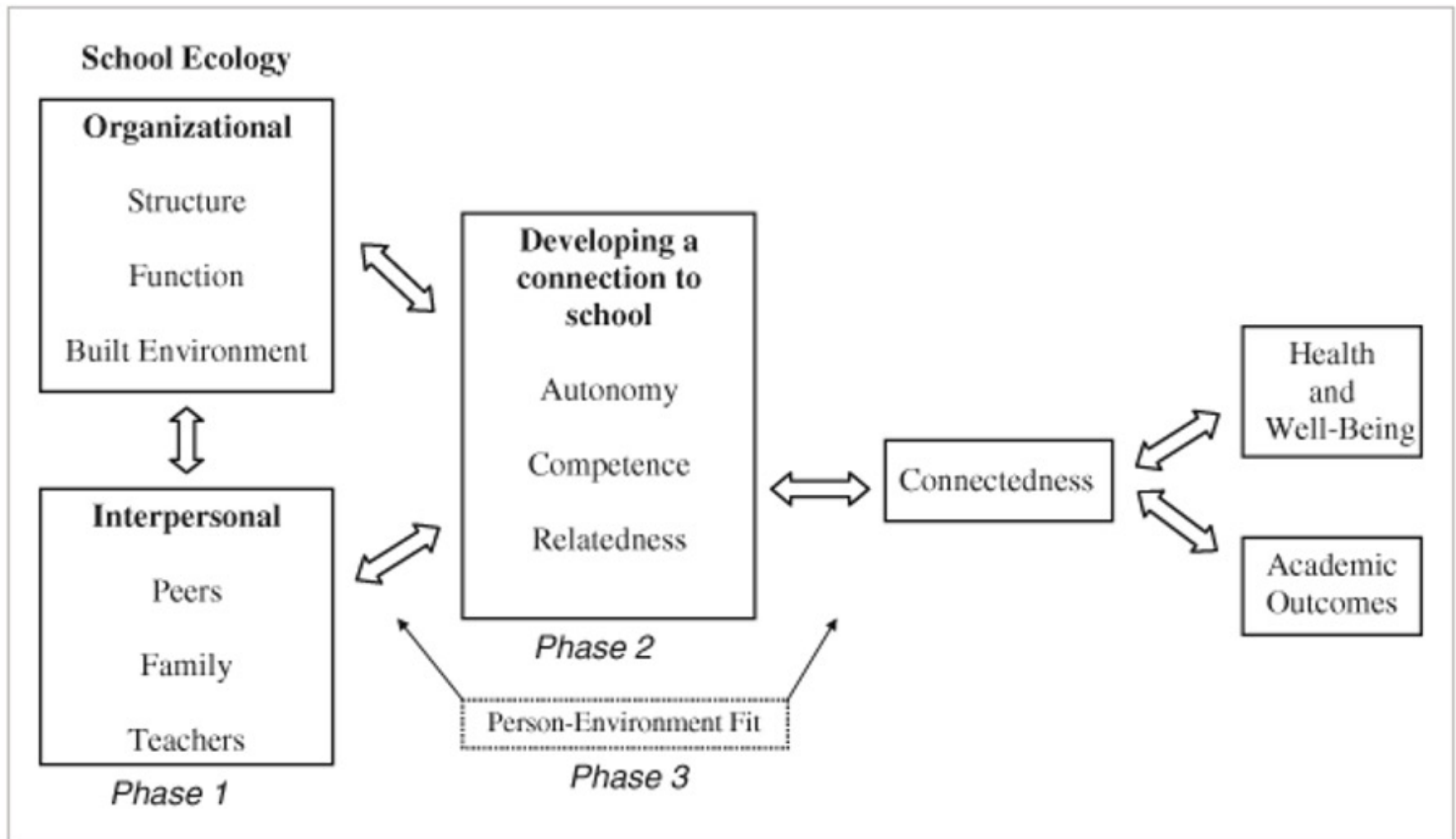
Research Proposal

- **Purpose:** To improve engagement and social connectedness within the school community

- **Title:** Parent/Guardian Voice and Perspectives for Improvement of Engagement and Social Connectedness within the Multicultural Fabric and Culture of Schools

- **Objective:** To assess the engagement of parents in parent-teacher interview processes

Research Hypothesis and Questions

☐ **Research Hypothesis:**

■ Improved parent/teacher engagement coupled with healthy and robust social connectedness, within school communities, will address student and community diversity and improvement of student academic outcomes and well-being.

☐ **Research questions:**

■ What are parents'/guardians' perceptions about, and suggestions for

☐ the improvement of social connectedness within school communities, and;

☐ the strengthening of Parent – Teacher engagement?

■ How can Parent – Teacher interview processes be improved to enhance parental engagement and social connectedness?

Anticipated Outcomes

1. Parental feedback may inform development of novel parent-teacher interview protocols to improve engagement and social connectedness.

2. Capacity development and ongoing improvement of parent/teacher interview processes with a lens to improve social connectedness with all stakeholders.

3. Insights into future research to strengthen community connectedness.

Research Methodology

❑ **Study participants:**

- Parents/guardians of Kindergarten to Grade 12 students in the participating schools (Aurora Academic Charter Schools & Edmonton Public Schools)

❑ **Data collection:**

- In-depth interviews: volunteer sample of participants per school setting
- Focus group discussions: (5 to 6 participants per FGD)

❑ **Research approach:**

- Our research is grounded in a participatory approach
- Our research is informed by Community Advisory Boards (CAB) and Indigenous research methodology
- We analyzed our data thematically

What is Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)?

- A process of engaging community members in **what is** (i.e. the needs, resources and constraints within their present community) and **what could be** (i.e. the community they envision) (Mayan, 2009)

- A **transformative research opportunity** to unite the growing interest of professionals, academics and communities in giving underserved communities a genuine voice in research, thereby increasing the likelihood of the success of the intervention (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010)

- A process that fosters **collaborative relationships** between the academic institution and community partners throughout the entire research process

The Purpose of a Community Advisory Board (CAB)

□ To promote a participatory approach and support an accountable governance process for the tenure of the project

□ Our vision of a relationship with a CAB is that this is informed by the **OCAP Principles*** developed for Indigenous related research. Our intention is not to appropriate these principles but rather to let them inform a relationship with our CAB that is build on respect, trust and accountability

*OCAP Principles = Ownership, Control, Access, Possession

4. Selected Findings from our Research
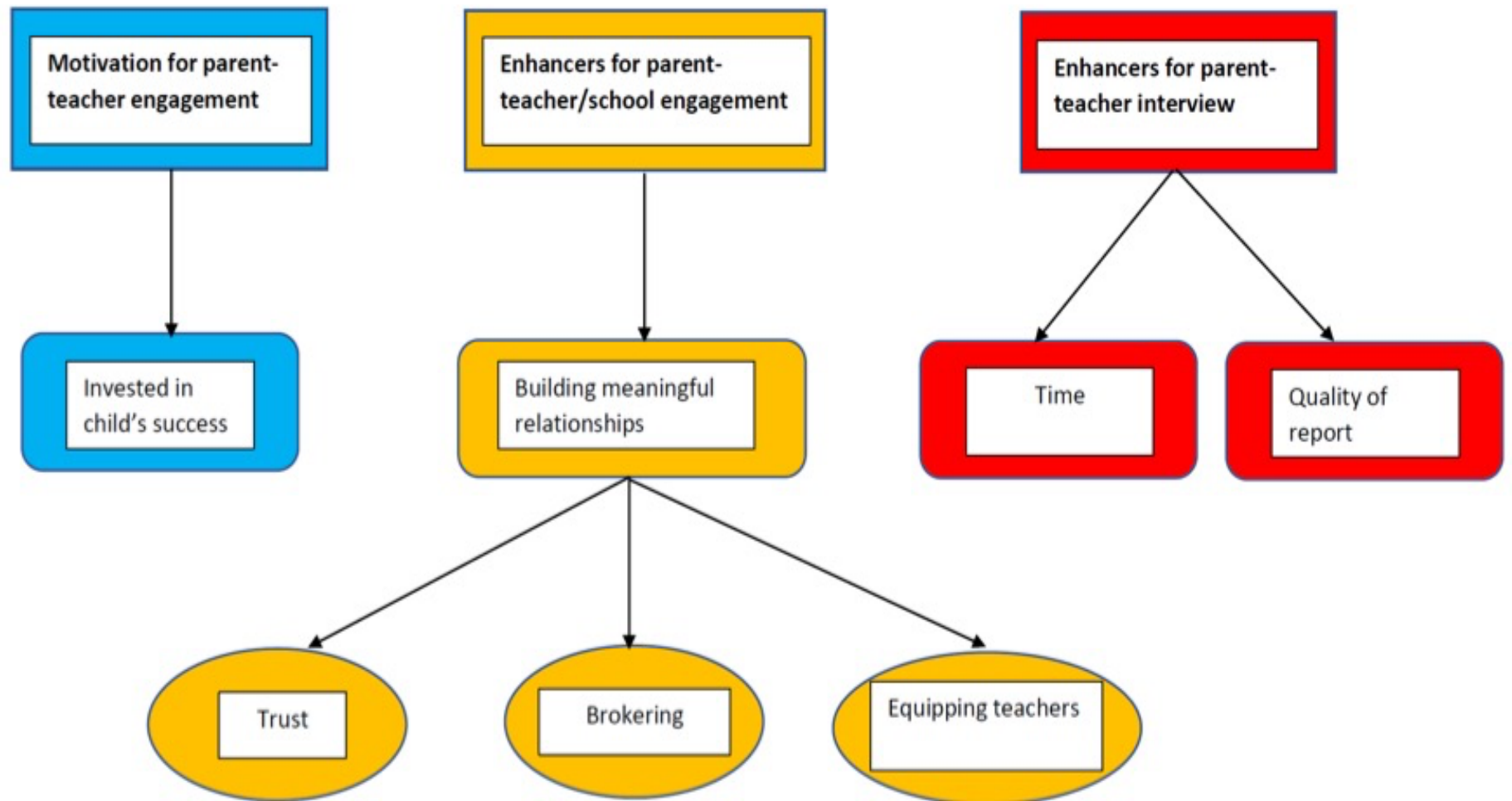
Thematic findings

Fig. 1 Framework for understanding parents/guardians perspectives on enhancing connectedness between parents and teachers

Motivation for parent-teacher engagement

□ **Invested in child's success**

- ■ *"I go [for parent-teacher interviews] every time because I am truly invested in him being successful. So, I think how I can do that is to remain engaged with his teachers".* (Eralia)

- ■ *"Like the reason why the kids are here is because of the White Cloud program. Because they were really great giving you know… We don't know Cree. So we learn Cree, another language, and being Cree. It's awesome! We do encourage that".* (Marcela)

Enhancers for Parent-Teacher School Engagement – Building Meaningful Relationships

☐ **Trust**

- *"It's good to get to know the teachers on a personal level just so that you know that they don't have a negative attitude. So, it's comforting, I guess you could say".* (Tony)

- *"Maybe even at the beginning of the year, have a barbecue so that all the parents can come in … and go from there … have a shirt that says I'm grade one teacher … It's kind of, you crack the shell. You start knocking on that shell when you go out to meet people … Just explain who you are and say that you really like to see the kids achieve this year … In whatever way, that you're there to help the kids. (Star)*

Enhancers for Parent-Teacher School Engagement – Building Meaningful Relationships

□ **Brokering**

- ■ *"If the teachers took into account… I mean my understanding is that a lot of kids have different methods of learning. If the teachers asked the parents what the child's strengths are as far as how they absorb knowledge, perhaps any special needs that a child has as far as gaining knowledge, you know sort of their learning styles".* (Tony)

Enhancers for Parent-Teacher School Engagement – Building Meaningful Relationships

- **Equipping Teachers**
  - *"I think teachers and workers here in every school should have this kind of training too that we attend so they know what's going on with [different cultures], so you understand these people and us also, as coloured people. Understanding different cultures is not only because they [the teachers] grew up here, they stay here and they work here, they understand everything because they're educated. It is not that. I mean they have to deal with those kinds of things also".* (Lillian)

Enhancers for parent teacher interview

- **Time**
  - *"You know, I have four kids. When I come here for parent teacher interview, it's very tough for me …. Yeah! I'm running. Exactly!"* (Hamda)

- **Quality of Report**
  - *"When I go to a parent-teacher meeting and he just says it's green and good, and... Now I know there is always room for improvement. There is always! [If] the teacher cannot identify that room for me, where we can improve, I think the teacher didn't pay attention. And this interview is not solving this problem that much".* (Hamda)

Intervention considerations raised by our research

1. Enhanced Parent/Guardian-Teacher Engagements
2. Building a Shared Framework
3. Parent/Guardian-Teacher Conferences
4. Community Advisory Board
5. Shared Parent/Guardian-Teacher Frameworks
6. Culture of "Not about us, but rather with us in a strength-based research relationship"

Future research considerations

- Developing and testing novel parental-engagement frameworks and enhanced community engagement strategies in multiple settings, possibly with controls, based on the learnings from this study

Discussion

Complete Research Report Accessible online at:
https://www.auroraschool.ca/research-publications