

## **Educating Pre-service Teachers on Fathers' Involvement in Raising Children with Disabilities**

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*Abstract: Research suggests that pre-service teachers need better preparation to collaborate successfully with families. In much of the available literature regarding parent perspectives on children with disabilities, participants are predominantly mothers. There are few studies that focus on fathers' perspectives. Therefore, this study involved 36 pre-service teachers conducting one-on-one interviews of a father who has one or more children with disabilities. Through pre- and post-reflection journals as well as focus groups at the conclusion of the interviews, this study examined how conducting interviews of fathers changed pre-service teachers' perceptions of the father's role in raising children with disabilities. Themes emerged in the areas of attitudes about father involvement, how fathers want their children to be treated and viewed, and the responsibility of teachers. The majority of pre-service teachers indicated their perception of the father's role changed as a result of the interview.*

*Keywords: family-school collaboration, fathers' role, special education, pre-service candidates, teacher preparation programs, reflection, focus groups*

There is concern expressed in the literature that, because special education teacher preparation programs minimally address the skill of home-school collaboration (Latunde & Louque, 2012), pre-service teachers are not being prepared to collaborate successfully with parents (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004; Caspe, Lopez, Chu, & Weiss, 2011; Council for Exceptional Children, 2015; Collier, Keefe, & Hirrel, 2015; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Hiatt-Michael, 2004, 2006; Patte, 2011; Smith & Sheridan, 2019; Symeou, Roussounidou, & Michaelides, 2012). According to Latunde & Louque (2012), establishing rapport is one of the most cited strategies for effective home-school partnerships, yet little direct instruction is offered by teacher preparation programs for building trust and rapport with families. In a survey completed by 200 pre-service teachers in their junior and senior years of undergraduate training, over 40% reported learning no specific content or teaching strategies related to developing successful family-school partnerships (Patte, 2011). Patte (2011) suggests that lacking training in family-school collaboration, pre-service teachers will draw on their own personal experiences and background knowledge, which may or may not include collaborating with family members who are raising children with disabilities.

Pre-service teachers studying both elementary and special education have reported a lack of confidence and perceived competence, as well as negative perceptions of parents (Bingham & Abernathy, 2007; Evans, 2013; Hansuvadha, 2009; Marshall, Ralph, & Palmer, 2002; Murray, Curran, & Zellers, 2008). As Evans (2013) notes, it is difficult for pre-service teachers who have not had the experience of being parents to relate to the experiences of students' parents and families. Without teacher preparation and transformative field experiences, pre-service teachers' knowledge of collaboration strategies is limited to collaboration strategies that are vague or traditional in nature (e.g., parent-teacher conferences, open houses, allowing parents to volunteer at the school) (Patte, 2011). They tend to express a self-centered view of collaboration (i.e., how family collaboration will benefit me as the teacher), rather than a view that expresses the mutual benefits of collaboration and recognizes the importance of the family as being the experts on their child (Patte, 2011). They also tend to "talk at families, not with them" (Amatea, Mixon, & McCarthy, 2012), particularly if they ascribe to a separation paradigm, viewing themselves as the experts who are responsible for the child's education (Amatea, Cholewa, & Mixon, 2012). According to Hansuvadha (2009), negative teacher attitudes toward families create significant barriers to successful home-school collaboration. When 11 first-year special education teachers were interviewed, 73% expressed negative or self-centered attitudes when asked to identify perceived challenges to implementing family-centered service delivery (Hansuvadha, 2009). It is imperative that personnel preparation programs engage pre-service teachers in activities that result in the transformation of teacher candidates into "a reflective, respectful partner in the educational experiences of children" (Bingham & Abernathy, 2007, p. 40).

Researchers have examined ways to develop these competencies and dispositions in pre-service teachers, including concept maps, videos, guest speakers, home visits, parents as teachers, interviews, and focus groups (Bingham & Abernathy, 2007; Kim & Vail, 2011; Murray, Handyside, Straka, & Arton-Titus, 2013; Novak, Murray, Scheuermann, & Curran, 2009; Prosser, 2009; Sauer & Kasa, 2012). Murray et al. (2013) conducted a study in which pre-service teachers and parents of children with disabilities jointly participated in a special education course. Embedded parents served as both participants and co-teachers in the course. Participants in this course completed a software module (i.e., *Virtual Family*) that was modeled

after the child of the parent assigned to their group (Curran & Murray, 2008; Murray & Curran, 2008; Novak et al., 2009). Participants also spent time with the families of the embedded parents, either in their homes or in the community (Murray & Curran, 2008; Murray et al., 2013). These researchers found that while parents were empowered through this model of reciprocal partnership training, mutual respect between parents and pre-service teachers was also gained. Pre-service teachers expressed increased professional efficacy as well as empathy toward parents (Novak et al., 2009). Rather than referring to parents as “uncaring” (Novak et al., 2009, p. 38), they recognized that parents face barriers to home-school partnerships and gained a new appreciation for the knowledge and insights that parents provide (Murray, Curran, & Zellers, 2008). Collier et al. (2015) included parents of children with disabilities as teachers in a graduate teacher preparation course, along with requiring a home visit that included a dialogue between the graduate student and host family members. Following the home visit, graduate students wrote reflection papers about the narratives that parents shared with them. Collier et al. (2015) found that students’ understanding and appreciation of home-school collaboration increased as a result of the collaboration activities they participated in; in addition, teacher candidates reported an increased sense of trust between themselves and the parents following the opportunity to listen to a parent’s narrative about raising children with disabilities. In an attempt to develop more reflective, analytical teachers, Sauer & Kasa (2012) had pre-service teacher’s interview families. Pre-service teachers reported that they gained confidence in their ability to work successfully with students with disabilities and their families. This study also found that the pre-service teachers emerged as more critical thinkers (Sauer & Kasa, 2012).

If pre-service teachers are to acquire collaboration skills and develop positive dispositions and transformed attitudes toward family collaboration, personnel preparation programs must offer opportunities for pre-service teachers to partner and interact with parents (Curran & Murray, 2008; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Kim & Vail, 2011; Latunde & Louque, 2012; Murray et al., 2008). Hansuvadha (2009) recommends that personnel preparation programs “create specific and meaningful opportunities for students to observe and interact with real families” (p. 357). The knowledge, skills, and values necessary for successful home-school collaboration require personnel preparation programs to explicitly incorporate activities that foster family and community involvement (Morris & Taylor, 1998; Redding, 2005). Following these family and community-based field activities, reflection on the fieldwork is recommended to create attitudinal change in pre-service teachers (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003). In addition, more research is needed to examine the impact of teacher preparation in parental involvement on the knowledge and practice of pre-service and beginning teachers (Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Kim & Vail, 2011).

In much of the available literature regarding parent perspectives on children with disabilities, participants are predominantly mothers (Collier et al., 2015). In a systematic literature review (Shurr & Hollingshead, 2017), examining research published between 2002 and 2015 and focused on programming for individuals with severe disabilities, 62% of the articles included solely mothers as participants (38%,  $n = 13$ ) or more mothers than fathers (24%,  $n = 8$ ). In the Murray et al. (2013) study in which parents of children with disabilities were embedded in a special education course with pre-service teachers, 94 parent participants were mothers (i.e., 94.3%), and 4 parent participants were fathers (i.e., 5.6%). There are few studies available involving fathers’ perspectives, and more research in this area is recommended (Cheuk &

Lashewicz, 2015; MacDonald & Hastings, 2010a). And this is a universal issue, as researchers in the United Kingdom (Carpenter & Towers, 2008; MacDonald & Hastings, 2010a; 2010b), Canada (Cheuk & Lashewicz, 2015), and New Zealand (Ballard, Bray, Shelton, & Clarkson, 1997), as well as the United States of America (USA) (Collier et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2013; Parette, Meadan, & Doubet, 2010; Shurr & Hollingshead, 2017), are emphasizing the need for pre-service teachers to understand a father's perspective. Carpenter & Towers (2008) acknowledge the growing interest in understanding the needs of fathers of children with disabilities. Rather than treating fathers as an "afterthought," (Parette et al., 2010, p. 382), educators should make an effort to understand the fathers' roles and responsibilities, as well as their needs and life circumstances. Because fewer studies focus exclusively on the perspectives of fathers (Ballard et al., 1997; MacDonald & Hastings, 2010a; 2010b), and it is important for educators to understand the father's role in raising a child with a disability, this study involved pre-service teachers conducting 1:1 interviews of a father who has one or more children with disabilities. In addition to offering pre-service teachers this opportunity to interact with fathers, this study required the students to reflect on their perceptions pre- and post-interview (Campbell et al., 2003). The following research questions were addressed in this study:

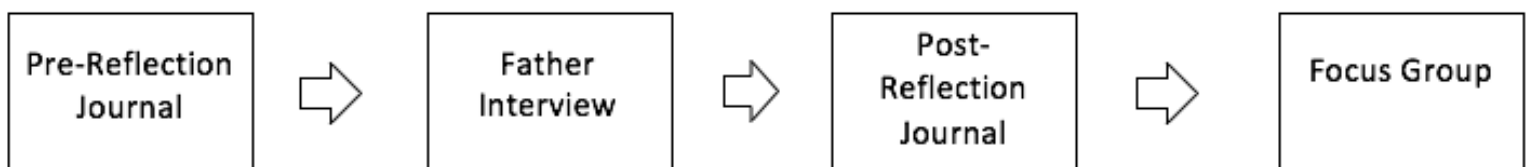
1. What are the perceptions of early childhood and special education pre-service teachers regarding the fathers' role in raising children with disabilities?
2. How do pre-service early childhood and special education teachers perceive fathers of children with disabilities after conducting a semi-structured interview with a father of children with disabilities?
3. How does interviewing fathers of children with disabilities prepare pre-service teachers for their careers in education?

### Method

This qualitative case study was conducted as part of a required one-semester, junior level, undergraduate course in an early childhood and special education degree program at a small rural liberal arts college in a northeast state in the USA. All students in this course were dual majoring in early childhood education (PK-4) and special education (PK-8). The course focused on the topics of collaboration, communication, and advocacy, including collaboration with parents and families.

Prior to interviewing a father who has one or more children with disabilities, students completed a pre-reflection response journal on their perspective of fathers' roles in raising children with disabilities. Then, they interviewed a father in either a face-to-face format or via telephone. Each father interview involved 9 semi-structured questions (see Appendix A), which were representative of Sauer and Kasa (2012) and Hansuvadha (2009) interview questions and also included self-developed questions by the co-investigators. Following the father interview, students completed a post-reflection journal. Finally, students were asked to participate in a focus group during class time to further explore their perspectives of fathers' roles in raising children with disabilities (See Figure 1).

**Figure 1.**



## Participants

The participants of this study included 36 (i.e., 33 females, 3 males), undergraduate (i.e., ages 19-21 years), early childhood and special education dual major pre-service teachers enrolled in a course entitled *Collaboration and Communication – Advocacy, Leadership, and Ethical Practice*. None of these pre-service teachers were married or had yet had the experience of being a parent, which can make it difficult for them to relate to their students' families and their experiences (Evans, 2013). In this study, 92% of the participants identified as female, and 100% were White. These percentages are slightly higher than recent trends reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which reports that 77% of teachers in the USA identify as female, and 80% are White (NCES, 2019).

Students were told at the beginning of the semester that their grade would not be impacted by participation in the research study. An alternate project was provided for students electing not to participate ( $n = 3$ ). All students that participated signed a consent form that indicated their willingness to participate. All 36 pre-service teachers who conducted a father interview also participated in the focus groups, as well as answered the pre- and post-reflection journal questions. All fathers signed consent to participate in the study, and 33 of the 36 fathers provided some demographic information (see Table 1). The study had IRB approval.

**Table 1. Father Characteristics (n=33\*)**

Marital Status	Percentage ( $n=33$ )
Married	94% (31/33)
Divorced	3% (1/33)
Single, never married	3% (1/33)
Primary Caregiver	
Both father and mother	67% (22/33)
Mother	18% (6/33)
Father	15% (5/33)

\*Denotes demographic information for 33/36 fathers interviewed.

## Data Collection

Two types of data were collected as a part of this qualitative case study. They included pre-service teachers' perceptions of the fathers' involvement in raising children with disabilities garnered through journal questions posed before and after father interviews, and focus group datum.

**Pre-reflection journal.** A pre-reflection journal consisting of two questions was completed by all participants prior to completing an individual interview of a father of one or more children with disabilities. The pre-reflection journal questions were as follows:

1. Describe your perception of the father's role in raising children with disabilities.

2. What past experiences have shaped your perception of the father's role?

**Post-reflection journals.** After completing the father interviews, students responded to the process through a post-reflection journal. The post-reflection journal contained the following four questions:

1. After interviewing a father of one or more children with disabilities, describe your present perception of the father's role in raising children with disabilities.
2. Did the interview you conducted change your perception of the father's role in any way? If so, how?
3. What did you learn about the father's perspective on disability from conducting this interview?
4. How can you apply this knowledge in your career as a special educator?

**Focus Groups.** Students also participated in a focus group. Students were put into four groups, which aligned with the course section they attended as part of the class. These four focus groups allowed investigators to gain further insight on the students' perceptions of fathers of children with disabilities. Patton (2014) explained focus groups as a format for participants to provide responses in a social environment where they can also consider their thoughts and feedback in context with participants' views. The guiding questions used within the focus group were self-created by the co-investigators and included the following:

1. Describe something that impacted you while interviewing the father.
2. Describe something you might change in the interview process.
3. Describe how the interview process will make you a better special educator in the future.
4. What did you learn from the research project?
5. Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share?

### Data Analysis

Data were recorded and transcribed verbatim using thematic analysis, and transcriptions were checked against the tapes for accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Liamputtong, 2013). The co-investigators and a graduate assistant independently read the transcriptions several times and coded the data line-by-line. While reading, the co-investigators and graduate assistant all independently assigned codes in the form of a descriptive word or phrase to significant ideas in the participants' comments (e.g., the impact of the father interview on the students' perspectives). These codes were derived from data and were not preconceived.

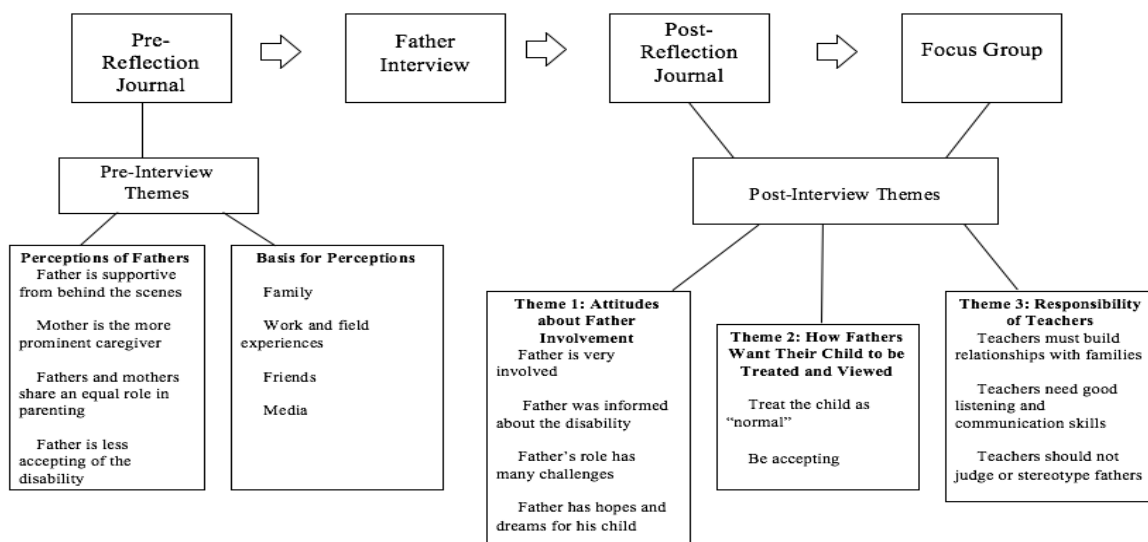
The codes were not restricted, and eventually formed the themes and sub-themes identified in the Results section below. Pre-reflection journal data was analyzed separately in order to determine participants' initial perceptions. Then, a qualitative analysis of the post-reflection journal data and focus groups data was conducted. After individually developing codes, the co-investigators and graduate assistant collectively compared the codes to establish subthemes, and these were merged to form themes. When a discrepancy occurred, the co-investigators and graduate student re-read the specific entries in order to re-code and gain consistency. During these discussions, the researchers took into account if themes and subthemes represented the views of all participant groups, and rich descriptions were used to illustrate sources. The final themes were checked against each other and back to the original data set to ensure that no relevant aspect of

these themes was overlooked (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Trustworthiness of the data was enhanced by having three researchers independently code and interpret the data, prior to any discussion (Liamputtong, 2013). In addition, corroboration was achieved when codes and subthemes occurred across data sources (e.g., post-reflection journal data and data from the four focus groups) (Angell, Stoner, & Shelden, 2009; Creswell, 2002).

## Results

When analyzing the pre-reflection journal questions related to the participants' perceptions of the father's role in raising children with disabilities, as well as what had shaped their perception, several themes developed (see Figure 2). When analyzing the post-reflection journals and focus group datum, three primary themes developed related to the impact of interviewing a father of children with disabilities. These themes included the following: (a) attitudes about father involvement, (b) how fathers want their children to be treated and viewed, and (c) the responsibility of teachers (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Themes and Subthemes Which Developed from the Journal Questions and Focus Groups**



### Pre-Interview Perceptions of Fathers of Children with Disabilities

The first question in the pre-reflection journal asked students to provide their initial perception of a father's role in raising children with disabilities. The largest theme to emerge from this prompt was the idea that students felt the fathers' roles was not direct. Many students explained their view of fathers included support that was passive or "behind the scenes" and included such acts

as being a financial provider and less involved with things like educational support. Along the same lines, students perceived mothers to have a more active or prominent role in caring for the children and more involved in school matters. One student described the mother as “more aware of what is happening” and perceived that “they go to the IEP meetings.” However, not all students perceived that fathers were the financial providers while mothers were the primary caretakers. Some students perceived that parents had an equal co-parenting role and shared responsibility in raising the children.

One theme that was not expected was the pre-interview perception that fathers tend to be less accepting that their child has a disability. One quote that illustrates this perception is as follows:

The dad’s (sic) I know try to just shrug off that their child has a disability. Or the dad knows their child has a problem, but will not have them tested because they do not want them labeled.

### **Past Experiences that Shaped Father Perception**

The second question in the pre-reflection journal addressed the past experiences students had that shaped their perceptions of a fathers’ role. The responses to this question in the pre-reflection journal were open-ended. Some students listed more than one influence on their perception of the role a father played in raising children with disabilities. Most often, the students’ individual families had the biggest influence on their perception. Many subscribed to a more tradition perception that the mother stays home and takes care of the children, and the father works outside the home during the day. Other students said that their perceptions of the father’s role in childrearing was influenced by their observations working at summer camps and day cares, and the field experiences they had participated in for their college course work. If the participant had a friend who was disabled, or who had a sibling that was disabled, their pre-perceptions were influenced by observing their friend’s family dynamics. Finally, some students reflected that books and movies had influenced their perceptions of how involved the father is in raising children with disabilities.

### **Post-Interview Perceptions of Fathers of Children with Disabilities**

When analyzing the post-reflection journals and focus group datum, three primary themes emerged related to the impact of interviewing a father of children with disabilities: (a) attitudes about father involvement, (b) how fathers want their children to be treated and viewed, and (c) the responsibility of teachers.

**Attitudes about father involvement.** When students were asked for their perception of the father’s role in raising children with disabilities, after completing the one-on-one interview of the father, the majority of students stated their perception of the father’s role was that he is very involved and an equal in the parenting process. Prior to this interview, they were not aware of how involved the father may be in child raising. Two quotes that illustrate this change in attitude are:

My father was also very involved. I mean, I think that he’s retired and the mom still works, so he’s more involved in the stuff that my mom was involved with, so like



running him to school, you know getting his breakfast, and taking him to afterschool activities, helping him with his homework. But I think the mom is also very involved as well, but I was very surprised by that.

I always thought the father would be involved, but more of an assistant or helper to the mother. Instead, I saw an extremely hands-on father. It sounds like they are more like a team in raising their child.

A student interviewed a father who is unable to attend many of his child's school events and IEP meetings due to his work schedule. This student originally presumed that fathers are "pretty uninvolved in their child's school-life," yet after interviewing a father, this student realized that "fathers still do a lot for their child." This student went on to say,

Even though they may not be directly involved in the special education process, fathers still care a great deal for their child and want them to succeed in school.

Several students acknowledged a perspective shaped by stereotypes that changed as a result of the father interview. One student shared the following:

Unfortunately, my perception was based on stereotypes. Thankfully, this interview opened my eyes and broadened my perspective in a positive way. It was clear that this father was just as involved as the mother, even at times when he was away for work.

Not only did students learn that fathers are more involved than they realized, they also learned that fathers are more informed about their child's disability than they realized. One student shared their father

...really invests himself into the disability that his daughter has by gathering and learning as much information about it as he could. He even gave me a website to go to for me to be able to learn more information about her disability.

Students further explained that they learned that the father's role is not easy and comes along with many challenges. One student stated,

I think a father goes through just as much hardship as the mother when raising a child with disabilities. Sometimes I think the father will take on more of a silent role, but not necessarily be passive. Their desire to help their child in any way possible is just as strong as the mother's.

Despite the challenges that fathers expressed, students also heard about many of the fathers' hopes and dreams for their children. One student conveyed how exciting it was when a father "spoke passionately about his dreams for his son, his son's strengths, and the challenges they have overcome." Another student was touched and thought "it was such a good thing to say" when the father said that "he really wishes and hopes that his son finds love other than his family."

**How fathers want their child or children with disabilities to be treated and viewed.**

Students were asked what they learned about a father's perspective on disability from conducting a father interview. The largest subthemes indicated fathers shared that they wanted to treat their children with disabilities as "normal" and be accepting of them. They also want others to treat their children as "normal" and to be accepting. The following three quotes illustrate the recurring theme related to fathers wanting their children with disabilities to be treated and viewed just like anyone else:

I learned that he does not view his child as having a disability. He views her like any other child and treats her just the same as his other children. Throughout the interview he states that he has the same expectations for her as he does his other children.

"...she's just no different. And I wish people would understand. I want her to be treated normal. I want her to get all the same opportunities as everyone else"...it really stood out in my mind because he kept repeating it to me and reminding me of it.

I think the biggest thing with going through and talking to my father was that he just really wanted people to know, and I guess it just seems so basic because we kind of have a background in special education, but he just wanted people to know that his daughter is not any different than anyone else.

**Responsibility of teachers.** When students were asked to reflect upon the question, "What is something that impacted you while interviewing the father?" many students mentioned they were impacted by fathers' statements regarding the struggles they had related to their child's school. For example, one student shared their father participant said, "...he sees special educators talk to the parents in a clinical way, as if their child is a case study or a challenge to be solved, and that frustrates him." One student learned through the interview how important it is for educators to take the parents' perspective "into all of your decisions" and elaborated "...So you have to see things from their point of view and through the interview like this, it definitely gives you more of a perspective of what they're going through." Another student shared how important it is to really listen to the father:

My father emphasized that the fact that as an educator you need to listen to the parent which we've been taught but to actually follow through with that because he said so many times that teachers like have trials and errors and they could've figured it out by just like talking to the parents.

Students were asked to provide perspectives on how participating in a father interview project prepared them for future work in the field of education and will make them a better special educator in the future. Students indicated they could apply their learned knowledge as a future special educator to build effective relationships with families in order to learn about the whole child. One student stated, "I will look at the whole child and truly try to understand each child to ensure their needs are met." Another observed that teachers should "...refrain from passing judgments without taking the time to consider multiple perspectives and factors." Similarly, a student stated, "I will also not judge family situations. Each family is different and the parents will have different roles in the child's life."

Also, a few students emphasized how important it is to have good communication with the parents and really listen to them. A student was given this advice from the father she interviewed, "...listen, understand, and appreciate." Another student stated,

And so, a teacher should always make sure to regularly ask for the input of *both* parents, and allow for plenty of time for questioning, and should never assume that if the parents are quiet, that implies that they fully understand.

Another said, "Many fathers are fully involved in their child's life. Knowing this, it is important to communicate with the *families* of your students, not just the mother."

Two communication strategies that emerged from the focus groups related to reducing the use of educational jargon and planning for on-going communication with parents and families. Two quotes that illustrate this follow:

The father mentioned there was a lot of educational jargon being used so he never understands what the school is telling him. I realized that as the teacher I must explain things to parents so they understand what is occurring in the classroom with their child.

In IEP meetings, I will direct questions and comments to both of the parents, not solely the mother. The father should be treated as a valued member of the IEP team, even if the mother has special education knowledge or previous experience.

Another concrete suggestion for effective communication with parents was expressed in this way:

Instead of simply talking to these parents at meetings, I will also invite them into the classroom and talk to them throughout the year. This will help me to create a professional relationship so that I can better serve them and their child.

Overall, the students shared it is important to focus on the family. Many students learned from conducting a father interview that teachers should listen to the advice given by parents because "they know the child best." Many students ( $n=15$ ) shared that the process will help them better see the parents' perspective and will assist them in supporting and communicating with families. Simple stated, one student said, "It is important to include the whole family...I learned that fathers want to be included too." One student shared:

I think another is to not only get to know the child, but to also get to know the family, because everything that the child has gone through has affected the family in some way, and how the family reacts to that also affects the child so I think that's really important to know and my father really stressed that he really wants people to know like how the family, what the family goes through and everything they try to do to help their son.

**Impact of the father interview on the students' perspectives.** The majority of students' responses indicated their perceptions of the father's role in raising children with disabilities did change or somewhat changed following the father interview. All of the students

that indicated their perception changed also stated they felt fathers were more involved than they once considered. Some students also stated that the father they interviewed was very knowledgeable about special education and wanted to be more involved than they were. The students who indicated that their perceptions of the father's role had not changed, followed this by saying that they assumed the father was involved in child raising prior to the father interview, and that the father interview strengthened that perception.

In the final opportunity for students to share their thoughts within the focus groups, students indicated the interview process was a positive experience that changed their perspective on fathers and family. One student stated that "I think interviewing any dad with a child with any kind of disability is very eye-opening for the rest of us." Another concluded,

I'm so happy that you did have this for us because I didn't really have a good perspective of the father, I thought, before this, and afterward, like it completely changed the way I thought about the father. And I think that they were, well my father at least, was excited to talk about this and he's probably like happy that we did this so that's a good thing.

### Discussion

The pre-service teachers involved in this study held generally positive views about fathers of children with disabilities, unlike the negative attitudes about families expressed by some beginning special education teachers (Hansuvadha, 2009). They viewed the mother as having a more active role in child raising, and fathers having a less direct role (e.g., supporting the family financially). While the pre-service teachers involved in this study generally held a favorable view of the involvement of fathers in raising their children with disabilities, their perceptions did improve as a result of interviewing a father. In the post-interview reflections and focus groups, the majority of the students said that they now viewed fathers as more involved in raising their children with disabilities than they had realized. Some stated that their pre-interview perception was based on stereotypes, and that they now viewed fathers as equally involved as mothers in child rearing. Similar to the pre-service teachers in previous studies (Collier et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2008; Novak, 2009), the pre-service teachers in this research project were able to articulate the barriers that fathers face in participating in school meetings and activities, yet stated that many are knowledgeable about special education and their children's disabilities. They also expressed an appreciation for the father and his role (Collier et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2008), and learned how important the father is to his children.

In the post-reflection journals as well as the focus groups, the majority of the pre-service teachers stated that they could apply what they learned from the father interview in their careers as future educators by working to establish effective relationships with both fathers and mothers, in an effort to learn about their children and better meet the children's needs. Consistent with the post-course communications of pre-service teachers in earlier studies (Amatea et al., 2012; Bingham & Abernathy, 2007; Collier et al., 2015; Morris & Taylor, 1998; Murray et al., 2008), the post-reflection journals recognized the need for a more reciprocal, collaborative interaction with families and indicated a respectful tone when describing their new insights into the father's role in child raising.

Post-interview reflection papers as well as focus groups indicate that the father interview assignment did increase the understanding for students of the active role of the father in raising children with disabilities, his knowledge of his children's disabilities, and his desire for his children to be treated "normally," or like other children. It also emphasized for pre-service teachers that, in order for them to adequately understand the whole child, home-school collaboration and communication is essential. Yet, developing the skill of communicating effectively with families is difficult to cultivate in traditional teacher preparation programs (Evans, 2013; Smith & Sheridan, 2019).

Therefore, having pre-service teachers conduct an interview of a father who has one or more children with disabilities during their teacher preparation programs offers a feasible and valuable strategy for professors aiming to develop their students' competency in family-school collaboration and communication.

### Recommendations for Future Research

It is recommended that future research on strategies for preparing pre-service teachers for working effectively with families include home visits as a teacher preparation course requirement (Collier et al., 2015). In addition, longitudinal studies (Collier et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2008) are recommended to assess the long-term benefits that interviewing a parent has on pre-service teachers' confidence and competence in home-school communication.

Although this study did not have a longitudinal component or incorporate home visits, having pre-service teachers interview fathers as a part of their teacher preparation programs contributed to their ability to view parents (i.e., both fathers and mothers) as essential to the educational process. Patte (2011) states that "a formidable challenge facing university faculty is shifting pre-service teacher candidates' self-centered views of family-school partnerships to a more collaborative view of families as their child's first and most prominent teacher" (p. 155). Conducting father interviews is one strategy teacher preparation programs can utilize to shape this view.

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## Appendix A

*Father Interview Questions*

1. Tell me about your child.
2. Can you describe what has gone well in school?
3. Can you tell me about any struggles you have had?
4. What do you wish everyone would know about your child and your family?
5. What are your hopes and dreams for your child in the future?
6. What do early childhood and special education teachers need to know and be able to do to work with families of children with disabilities?
7. Describe a typical day of interactions with your child.
8. Describe and explain any transitions you and your child have gone through (i.e., school, moving, routines, etc.)
9. Do you utilize any supports within the community for yourself and/or your child (i.e., support groups, counseling, etc.)?