Home-School Partnerships in Singapore's Special Education Schools: A Case Study

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Home-School Partnerships in Singapore's Special Education Schools: A Case Study

by

Marilyn Ang Swee Liang

A THESIS
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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions and experiences of parents of children with disabilities regarding home-school partnerships in special education (SPED) schools in Singapore. The research involved nine parent participants who had been involved in home-school partnership for more than seven years.

Key findings revealed several factors facilitating a positive home-school partnership. These included the parents' beliefs, values, and cultures; the school leader and professionals' attributes, communication practices, and the perceptions of parents and their children; parental involvement opportunities in the school. Similarly, there were several factors that hindered a productive collaboration. They were parallel to the positive factors, but with the addition of the following: parents' perceived lack of knowledge and skills, constraints related to their time and work, differences between parents and the school about educational pathways and goals for students, time and location of individualized education plan meetings, and the absence of a national policy. These factors interacted and intersected with one another to depict the multi-dimensionality and complexity of home-school partnerships in the Singapore SPED context.

Besides these, the findings also showed that there was a disconnect between the rhetoric and the practice of home-school partnerships in the Singapore special education schools. This disconnect could best be addressed by taking into consideration the beliefs, values, expectations, perceptions, and opinions of the SPED parents.

*Keywords*: case study, special education, home-school partnership, facilitators, barriers.
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To my amazing participants who volunteered, thank you for the time given and willingness to share your stories with me. Indeed, I have learnt so much from you.

Finally, to my brother, Alan, his wife, Mien, and his son, Timothy, thank you for allowing me leave the shores of Singapore and return to Canada to pursue my studies.
Dedication

To my heavenly Father,

To Him be all glory and honor.

To my late parents,

Who gave me loving support and made financial sacrifices so that I could pursue an overseas post-secondary education.

To my family, Alan, Mien, and Timothy,

Your understanding and support have made it possible for me to complete my doctoral degree.

To the SPED parents and their children with disabilities,

Who gave me the inspiration to embark on this inquiry and make a difference in your lives.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>APSN</td>
<td>Association for Persons with Special Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autism Syndrome Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>AWWA</td>
<td>Asian Women's Welfare Association</td>
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<td>CE</td>
<td>Compulsory Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCA</td>
<td>Co-curricular Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLD</td>
<td>Culturally and Linguistically Diverse</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMPASS</td>
<td>COMmunity and Parent in Support of Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFREB</td>
<td>Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCE</td>
<td>General Certificate of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDB</td>
<td>Housing and Development Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOD</td>
<td>Head of Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSBC</td>
<td>Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Individual Education Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITE</td>
<td>Institute of Technical Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLW</td>
<td>Living, Learning and Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MID</td>
<td>Mild Intellectual Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Normal</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Normal Academic</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCSS</td>
<td>National Council of Social Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Normal Technical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Ordinary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Occupational Therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAP</td>
<td>People's Action Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAR</td>
<td>Participatory Action Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSG</td>
<td>Parent Support Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Public Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSLE</td>
<td>Primary School Leaving Examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADeaf</td>
<td>Singapore Association for the Deaf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPED</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSO</td>
<td>Social Service Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>S2W</td>
<td>School-to-Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VWO</td>
<td>Voluntary Welfare Organization</td>
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<td>WPLN</td>
<td>Workplace Literacy and Numeracy</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Parents matter. They matter considerably as they play a vital role in education. When parents partner with schools, they contribute much to the work of educators. As primary caregivers with the best firsthand knowledge of their child, parents are able to provide important information to help educators to better understand and assess their child (Loughran, 2008; Starr & Foy, 2012). They can also provide the connection between classroom learning activities and learning that takes place at home (Loughran, 2008) and even serve as a bridge to other families with children in the school and to the community (Epstein, 2010a). Additionally, they can assist schools to improve their school programs and school climate (Epstein, 2010a). Through their involvement and engagement, "schools become increasingly rich and positive places to teach, learn, and grow" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 5). More importantly, on a daily basis, parents do not just influence, they also support their child's academic outcomes (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). As parents do matter, all schools should develop and maintain a healthy or positive relationship with parents so that the student's potential can be developed to the fullest.

A review of literature has shown that there is a plethora of studies done on parental perception of home-school partnership or parental involvement in schools (An & Hodge, 2013; Chu, 2014; Dobbins & Abbott, 2010; Hsiao, 2016; Jegatheesan, 2009; Jegatheesan, Miller, & Fowler, 2010; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Lindsay & Dockrell, 2004; Stoner, Bock, Thompson, Angell, Heyl, & Crowley, 2005). However, specific to Singapore, there is a dearth of literature about parental perceptions of and involvement in special education schools (Poon, Musti-Ra, & Wettasinghe, 2013). This discovery left me, a former vice-principal of a special education (SPED) school and someone who is passionate about special education, wondering: What views
do parents of children with disabilities have concerning home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools? Given that the home-school partnership is important to the success in school and life of children with disabilities (Patrikakou, 2011), my rationale for this study was to gain insight into how home-school partnerships were perceived and experienced through the lens of parents with children with mild intellectual disabilities. Understanding SPED parents' perceptions and experiences were important, as I hoped the findings of my study would help SPED schools to better align their current practices of home-school partnerships with stakeholders' needs, specifically, the need to support inclusive education (Ng, 2016). Currently, there is no legislation on the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools in Singapore (Lim & Sang, 2000; Walker & Musti-Rao, 2016). However, as Singapore desires to become an inclusive society, steps have been taken to facilitate the inclusion process (Lim, Wong, & Tan, 2014; Wong, Poon, Kaur, & Ng, 2015a). Thus far, only students with mild disabilities who can access the mainstream curriculum have been integrated into mainstream schools (Poon et al., 2013; Walker & Musti-Rao, 2016). This partial form of inclusion has therefore segregated the students in SPED schools from those who are in the mainstream schools. This does not only marginalize the SPED students in SPED schools, but also their parents. To ensure that these parents do not become marginalized further, it is important for SPED schools to build and strengthen home-school partnerships with the parents. As home-school partnership is important for a SPED child's success in school and life, this inquiry provided SPED parents with a voice to express their perceptions of the current practices of home-school partnerships so as to mitigate this marginalization, and will potentially promote a better alignment between the SPED schools' current practices of home-school partnerships and SPED parents' needs.
This chapter begins with an overview of the context and background that frames this inquiry. This is followed by an overview of special education in Singapore, the problem statement, the statement of purpose, and the research questions. My research approach, perspectives, and assumptions are presented thereafter. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the rationale and significance of this inquiry, and definitions of some of the key terminology used.

**Background and Context**

Home-school partnership is a well-documented topic. There is an abundance of literature in this area, and research studies have consistently shown that home-school partnerships generate many benefits (Cox-Petersen, 2011; Epstein, 1995, 2010a, 2011; Kinkead-Clark, 2017; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005; Stringer & Hourani, 2013). These benefits include increased attendance (Cox-Petersen, 2011; Gordon & Louis, 2012; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002), improved behaviour (Gordon & Louis, 2012; Harris & Goodhall, 2008), better social skills (Gordon & Louis, 2012; Kinkead-Clark, 2017), improved school discipline (Cox-Petersen, 2011; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002), better two-way communication between the home and school (Cox-Petersen, 2011), and high student achievement (Cox-Petersen, 2011; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gordon & Louis, 2012; Kinkead-Clark, 2017; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012). Other benefits also include enhanced "student learning and emotion / psychological well-being" (Stringer & Hourani, 2013, p. 170), increased parental knowledge about school curriculum and pedagogical approaches to support student learning (Stringer & Hourani, 2013), and increased school understanding of home circumstances that affect a child's learning (Stringer & Hourani, 2013). Specifically for students with disabilities, strong home-school relationships have significant effects on students' development and learning (Beveridge, 2005).
Despite the benefits, the literature has documented tensions (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012) and challenges associated with home-school partnerships (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). To begin with, there is no clear or agreed definition concerning partnership (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Bastiani, 1993; Pinkus, 2003). According to Bastiani (1993), the term partnership can mean "different things to different people" (p. 113). As a result, tensions can arise because how the schools and parents define, construct, and interpret "involvement and operational processes that support partnership" (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012, p. 155) may differ considerably. Moreover, research has shown that home-school partnerships involve a range of factors such as culture, beliefs, values, communication, and knowledge, that can impact the effectiveness of home-school partnerships (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle, 2004; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Ludicke & Kortman, 2012). When factors from the home and school interact, they challenge the construction of equal home-school partnerships (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; Muscott, 2002; Pushor, 2010; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Tveit, 2009) or even cause a disconnect between the rhetoric of partnership and how it is actually practiced (Epstein, 1992). As a result, parent-professional relationships may be viewed as "problematic" (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008, p. 637). It is for this reason that home-school partnership "remains an important area of inquiry" (p. 637) that warrants further research.

**Special Education: The Singapore Context**

Singapore is an island city-state that is located in Southeast Asia. Lying at the southern tip of peninsular Malaysia, it has a land area of 719.9 kilometres (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2018). The country has a population of over 5.6 million people (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2018), and it has been ranked as one of the "third most densely populated" (Bhavsar, 2017, para. 1) and highly urbanized countries in the world. As a small nation with
limited natural resources, Singapore has, since obtaining its independence in 1965, transformed itself from a third world nation to a first world nation (Vaish, 2006). Today, Singapore is recognized for her many world-class accomplishments. For example, Singapore is acknowledged as the leading maritime capital of the world (Williams, 2017), and the country is also well-known for having one of the best airports, and one of the most high-performing education systems in the world (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012).

As a nation with a strong educational system, Singapore maintains a dual system of education, where one is mainstream education and the other being the special education schools (Lim & Sang, 2000; Poon et al., 2013; Walker & Musti-Rao, 2016) (see Appendix A). The mainstream education takes place in three stages: primary education, secondary education, and pre-university education. Primary education begins for all children when they turn six years of age. The students go through six years of primary education before they take the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). Upon passing their PSLE, they proceed to secondary schools where they are streamed into various tracks depending on their PSLE performance. At the secondary school level, students pursue one of the three tracks depending on academic ability—the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Normal Academic (NA) track, GCE Normal Technical (NT) track, or GCE Ordinary (O) Express track. The latter is academically more challenging, and students who do well in the GCE O level examination that is held at the end of their fourth year in a secondary school, can opt to either enter a junior college or a polytechnic institute. Students who successfully complete their junior college or polytechnic education may use their results to apply for undergraduate studies at a local or overseas university. Students doing the GCE NA level may take the GCE O level examination after a year of study, or advance towards technical education. Those doing the GCE NT level may move on to advance towards
technical or arts education after successfully completing their GCE NT level examination that is held at the end of their fourth year in a secondary school. On the other hand, the SPED schools in Singapore, with the exception of three schools, do not offer mainstream education. Instead, they offer diverse curriculum and programs to meet the varied needs of the SPED students. However, similar to the mainstream students, SPED students go through six and four years of primary and secondary education respectively. Following their secondary education, SPED students are prepared for entry into the workforce. Capable SPED students do a vocational certification course while all others are placed on the school-to-work transition programs.

It has been reported that there are 18,000 mainstream school students in Singapore who have been identified as having "mild special educational needs" (Lim, 2016, para. 12). Since 2005, these students have received "unprecedented" (Poon et al., 2013, p. 61) mainstream school support as a result of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's inauguration speech in 2004, in which he shared his vision of building a nation where the elderly, less educated, and disabled will not be left behind (Lee, 2004). Other than receiving support from the mainstream schools' Allied Educators in Learning and Behavioural Support or from teachers who are trained in special needs, some students with mild disabilities may also receive additional support from special centres like the Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA) and the Singapore Association for the Deaf (SADeaf). While most students with mild disabilities have been integrated into the mainstream schools, Singapore's "current education system with standards-based assessment and high-stakes testing (e.g., PSLE, GCE O Level) continues to necessitate that students with moderate to severe disabilities receive their education in the special education school system" (Poon et al., 2013, p. 62).
Generally, SPED schools are managed by social service organizations (SSOs), known as voluntary welfare organizations (VWOs), as the Singapore government firmly believes that they are the "best agencies to run special schools, as they [have] a strong sense of mission, and their autonomy [allows] them greater flexibility to respond quickly to new needs and demands" (Tan, 2016, para. 15). Today, there are 19 government funded SPED schools with each customizing its curriculum and programs to meet the needs of its students. While there is a great emphasis on the teaching of life skills, SPED schools may, depending on their students' cognitive level, offer students functional academics, such as basic literacy and numeracy, that are needed for daily living. SPED students who can access mainstream curriculum attend one of the three SPED schools that prepare them to take the national examinations, such as the PSLE: Canossian School, a school that caters to students with hearing impairment, Lighthouse School, a school for the visually and hearing impaired, and Pathlight School, a school that caters to students with mild to moderate autism spectrum disorder (ASD). As SPED students require additional support, all SPED schools maintain small class sizes so that their specially trained teaching staff are able to provide the attention and support needed by each student. The schools also draw up an individual education plan (IEP) for each student, make special accommodations for their students, and maintain their own team of allied health professionals, such as psychologists and therapists, to provide support to their students and their families. Additionally, SPED schools are "differentially resourced with equipment and material" (Poon et al., 2013, p. 62) to support their students. For example, some SPED schools may have specialized facilities, such as hydrotherapy pools, while others may have assistive technology such as Braille machines (Poon et al., 2013). In terms of the level of parental involvement, this may differ from one SPED school to another because of differences in curriculum offered and IEP outcomes set.
In recent years and increasingly, SPED students with mild intellectual disabilities are being prepared for entry into the workforce. Today, two SPED schools—Metta and the Association for Persons with Special Needs (APSN) Delta Senior School offer vocational education programs to eligible 16-year-old SPED students. These programs lead to national certification in selected industries like food, hotel, landscaping, and retail. Both schools also offer the School-to-Work (S2W) Transition Program to capable SPED students who are not undertaking the vocational certification pathways. Aimed to bridge students' transition from SPED schools to the workplace, the S2W Transition Program begins when the students are in their final year at school and extends for another year following their graduation. In the student's final year at school, SG Enable, an agency committed to enabling persons with disabilities, will work closely with SPED schools and the families to "match work-capable students with its network of employers to suitable post-school job training options" (Ministry of Education, 2018b, para. 12). Upon graduation, these students continue to receive another year of support from job coaches from SG Enable. The support given is intended to help SPED students eventually gain possible employment.

Other than differences in curriculum and support given, SPED schools also differ from mainstream schools in Singapore in two additional ways. First, unlike the mainstream schools that are funded and regulated by the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE), the SPED schools have "joint administration and funding from the Ministry of Community Development, Youth, and Sports and MOE" (Poon et al., 2013, p. 61). Second, many mainstream schools have set up parent support groups to serve as a "social platform" (Wong, Ng, & Poon, 2015b, p. 3) for parents to volunteer for school activities, develop closer ties between parents and educators, and network with other parents. However, "no such platforms are ... available for parents of children
with disabilities in mainstream or special schools" (p. 3). In a SPED school where I served as a vice-principal, a parent support group (PSG) was only set up following the secondment or attachment of a MOE school principal. The secondment was a move to enhance "professionalism in [SPED] school leadership" (Gan, 2007, p. 6) as SPED schools had encountered difficulties attracting "quality leaders" (p. 5) to head their schools.

Before 2019, children with a physical or intellectual disability were exempted from compulsory education. Although Singapore has a Compulsory Education (CE) Act that was implemented in 2003, this Act exempted children with a physical or intellectual disability from compulsory education. This was because the CE committee that was set in 2000 recognized that "enforcement of CE may be unduly harsh on such parents" (Ministry of Education, 2017a, p. 2). However, in November 2016, the MOE announced that "children with moderate-to-severe SEN [Special Educational Needs] who are of compulsory school age will be included within the compulsory education framework established by the CE Act" (p. 3). This new law came into effect in 2019 and was considered as an "important milestone in Singapore's continuing drive towards national inclusiveness" (Ng, 2016, para. 15).

Research Problem

The problem—the disconnect between the rhetoric of partnership and the actual practice of partnership—referred to earlier, also occurs in Singapore. For example, in the "Quality Assurance Framework for Special Education Schools" (Ministry of Education & National Council of Social Service, 2011), Singapore's MOE has acknowledged the importance of partnership by identifying it as one of the six key areas in contributing to SPED student learning outcomes. Yet, Poon et al. (2013) have observed that while parents of students with disabilities have been deemed to be "crucial … [they are] still unequal partners in the support process with
special education being largely child and school centric" (p. 63). According to Patrikakou (2011), having a relationship that is an equal partnership is deemed even more important for students with disabilities, as this contributes to their development and success in school and life. Having once served as a vice-principal in a special education school in Singapore, I affirm Poon et al.'s (2013) observations because I have, on numerous occasions, witnessed a one-way communication, where the school often tells SPED parents what to do. In addition, the SPED parents of that school, whom I am still in contact with and met during a recent trip to Singapore, shared with me their experiences with school professionals who had not taken their views into consideration (S. Khoo, personal communication, August 25, 2017). Their stories further affirmed my own concern with the disconnection between the rhetoric of partnership and how it was actually practiced in the SPED schools in Singapore.

To date, there is some local literature on home-school partnerships in Singapore. However, the research studies done in this area have focused mainly on the mainstream schools (Khong & Ng, 2005; Manzon, 2004; Manzon, Miller, Hong, & Khong, 2015; Wong et al., 2015a, 2015b) rather than SPED schools. This could possibly be attributed to the mission of the Singapore education service that has been to "mould the future of the nation" (Ministry of Education, 2004, para. 2), and this is underpinned by the belief that "the people are its only and most precious resource and therefore the survival and success of the nation lies in its people" (Konza & Tan, 2006, p. 113). One might argue that such a statement includes students of SPED schools; however, the reality is that, in fulfilling the mission, the resources and attention have been devoted to mainstream education. This has worked to place students with disabilities as outside the construct of the "human resources" (p. 113) necessary for Singapore to "effectively meet the challenges of the competitive world" (p. 113). This belief is so "deeply entrenched in
the populace" (p. 113), and it is only in recent years that special education has gained currency in Singapore (Poon et al., 2013) because of the Singapore government's vision to be an inclusive society. In the "3rd Enabling Masterplan 2017 – 2021," described as a "national roadmap that will guide initiatives for the disability sector from 2017 to 2021" (Goy, 2016, para. 1), calls are made for research or studies "to study the needs of … persons with disabilities … [so as to] help identify service gaps and inform the Government and service providers on the types of services and support required by persons with disabilities in Singapore" (Ministry of Family and Social Development, 2016, p. 36). Clearly, this is indicative of the need to advance the local literature in the field of special education. Anecdotally, my own meeting and discussions with two Singaporean academics at the National Institute of Education, a teacher training institute, also confirmed this paucity—the lack of literature pertaining to parental perception about home-school partnerships in Singapore. This therefore made it a necessity to address the gap in the literature that was specific to home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools.

**Purpose**

In light of the above, the purpose of this study was to explore and understand the SPED parents' perceptions and experiences regarding home-school partnerships in Singapore. I believed that a better understanding of the phenomenon of home-school partnerships would allow SPED schools in Singapore to nurture a positive collaboration between the home and school. A positive home-school partnership would provide SPED students in Singapore with a greater opportunity to reach their fullest potential and allow them to "participate and pursue a

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1 The Enabling Masterplan was launched in 2007, and it "charts the development of [programs] and services in the disability sector" (SG Enable, 2015, para. 1) in Singapore. It is a 5-year national roadmap to help Singapore fulfill her vision to be an inclusive society, where "persons with disabilities can be integral and contributing members, empowered to reach their potential" (Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2018, para. 1). The document is reviewed every five years. It is now in its third iteration.
productive and meaningful life in our society” (Ministry of Education, 2017b, para. 2). Also, this partnership should help the SPED schools to journey closer towards achieving "educational excellence" (Ministry of Education & National Council of Social Service, 2011, p. 1) as school leaders would be able to incorporate evidence-informed practices to help them promote effective home-school partnerships in their schools. At the same time, the insights obtained from this study may prompt policy makers to develop a home-school partnership policy that is relevant for Singapore SPED schools in the near future. At the moment, there is no such legislation (Lim & Sang, 2000).

**Research Questions**

In seeking to understand the research problem, one overarching question and three sub-questions framed this inquiry. The primary question was: What are special education parents' perceptions about home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools? In this question, the word "perceptions" included the concept of understanding about and experiences of home-school partnerships. This was evident in the sub-questions that assisted the overarching question. The sub-questions were:

a. What are the special education parents' views about what contributes to a positive home-school partnership?

b. What do special education parents identify as barriers to or inhibitors of a positive home-school partnership?

c. What do special education parents suggest to improve home-school partnerships?

**Research Approach**

For this single case study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine SPED parents who had been engaged in home-school partnerships for at least seven years in Singapore.
The interviews allowed me to gather data about the SPED parents' perceptions and experiences of home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools. In addition, I utilized relevant documents, artifacts, field notes, and my own reflective journal entries to help me gain insight into the phenomenon I investigated. These varied sources allowed me to gather further data related to SPED parents' views about what contributed to positive home-school partnerships, what barriers inhibited positive home-school partnerships, and what needed to be improved in home-school partnerships. Moreover, these data sources helped me to confirm the participants' interview accounts.

**Researcher Perspectives**

I was a Singaporean educator with more than 20 years of teaching experience before coming to Canada to pursue my graduate studies. During my professional career, I had the opportunity to be a teacher, head of department, and vice-principal. While I was in Singapore, I spent a significant portion of my career working in the mainstream schools, where I taught and managed the English Language and Literature department simultaneously. After 17 years in the mainstream schools, I went on to become a vice-principal in one of the SPED schools in Singapore. During my three years at the SPED school, I not only developed a great passion for special education, but I also had the opportunity to actively interact with the parents of the school's children and attend their PSG meetings. Although I have left the school, my interaction with some parents continues to this day. Hence, as a researcher, I brought to this research process my passion for special education as well as knowledge and understanding of the educational context.

Due to my pre-existing relationship with some SPED parents, I acknowledge that this relationship brings with it some assumptions. That is, in conducting a constructivist and
interpretivists study, I recognized that my assumptions were intrinsic to my own sense of reality and, therefore, were a part of what I brought to the research. I saw this subjectivity as a strength; I brought insights to the research that might not have been apparent to external researcher. However, when engaging with participants, I adhered to the guidelines for case study by being cognizant of my own assumptions, acknowledging multiple realities, and differentiating between my perspective and the perspectives of my participants. By undertaking these steps, I believe I have rendered an authentic account that engenders deep understanding of my research problem.

**Researcher Assumptions**

There were several underlying assumptions of this study. First, I assumed that there was a disconnect between the rhetoric of partnership and the actual practice of partnership in SPED schools. Second, I assumed that the SPED parent participants in this study perceived themselves as unequal partners and had experienced some forms of unequal partnership. Third, due to my pre-existing relationships with some parents, I assumed that these participants, along with those with whom I had no pre-existing relationships, who had agreed to be interviewed, would respond to the questions in an open and honest manner. Fourth, I assumed that the use of a case study methodology and methods were appropriate for the purpose of this study. Finally, I assumed that the phenomenon under investigation was researchable and would benefit SPED professionals in Singapore.

**Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The rationale for this study as aforementioned stemmed from my desire to better understand SPED parents' perceptions and experiences of home-school partnerships in Singapore. As aforementioned, having such an understanding was important as this would help SPED schools to better align their current practices of home-school partnerships with
stakeholders' needs. Such an alignment should help to foster a positive home-school partnership which ultimately leads to better student outcomes.

I see my study as being significant in three ways. First, my study is an answer to a call made in literature. According to Wong et al. (2015b), there are to date very limited studies on home-school partnerships in Singapore. Poon et al. (2013) have noted that there has been little research on "parental perception and aspirations" (p. 63) of SPED parents in Singapore. As my study focused on investigating SPED parents' perceptions about and experiences of home-school partnerships in Singapore schools, my study therefore addressed a literature gap and will contribute to local literature.

More importantly, I see my study answering a national call. The call was for research or studies to assist the government and service providers to identify services and support that were required by persons with disabilities. In view of this, I see my inquiry as both timely and invaluable to the education sector. I envisage the study's findings to assist the SPED schools to review their home-school partnerships and align their practices to meet the stakeholders' needs. Specifically for the MOE, the insights obtained from this study may help policy makers to develop a home-school partnership policy that is relevant for Singapore. As there has been little research about home-school partnerships, this study may also serve as a baseline study for Singapore.

Finally, this research was a response to Mr. Chan Chun Sing's 2014 speech. As the then Minister of Family and Social Development, he had urged community "partners to come forward to look for sustainable solutions and most importantly, develop local solutions for local community challenges" (Chan, 2014, para. 12). I saw Chan's appeal as a clarion call. Unless there was a platform to enable parents to step forward, SPED parents would likely remain at the
margin. This study therefore serves as this platform; it has provided SPED parents with the opportunity to step out "from the margin" (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011, p. 83) and share their concerns and desires so that present home-school partnerships can be enhanced, and the recommendations concerning caregivers of "3rd Enabling Masterplan 2017 - 2021" be realized.

**Definitions of Key Terminology**

A number of key terms are defined for the purposes of this inquiry. These terms are listed below.

1. **Case study.** A case study is a research methodology that involves "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 40).

2. **Disability.** This refers to "the interaction between persons with impairment and attitudinal and environmental barriers" (Disabled People's Association, 2015, p. 26) Persons with disabilities may include those who have physical, mental, intellectual, visual, or sensory impairments. Their disabilities may prevent them from full participation in society and being treated on an equal basis with others (Disabled People's Association, 2015).

3. **Families.** This term refers to "parents, grandparents and adult siblings ... and in the absence of families, this may refer to legal guardians or foster parents excluding domestic helpers" (Ministry of Education & National Council of Social Service, 2011, p. 38).

4. **Home-school Partnership.** This term refers to families working together with schools "as equal partners to make educational decisions" (Patrikakou, 2011, p. 131) for students with disabilities. In this study, this term will be used synonymously with parent engagement (Manzon et al., 2015).
5. **Intellectual Disability.** In Singapore's context, a person with this disability will have significant difficulties in cognitive and adaptive functioning. Cognitive functioning refers to "the ability to concentrate, formulate ideas, reason, and remember. Adaptive functioning refers to the ability to handle daily demands in life independently" (Ministry of Education, 2012b, p. 12) like communication and self-care. A person diagnosed with mild intellectual disability is able to communicate his or her needs, hold a conversation, and care for himself or herself independently. He or she also has some basic literacy skills and may need help in understanding complex and abstract ideas, managing a budget, and completing a form (Disabled People's Association, 2015). In this inquiry, I use the term **mild intellectual disability** to refer to a person who has an intelligence quotient that ranges between 50 to 70 and "significant limitations both in intellectual disability and adaptive behaviour, the limitations being present before the age of 18 years" (Association For Persons With Special Needs, n.d., para. 1).

6. **Mainstream Education.** In Singapore, this term refers to students accessing the national curriculum in regular schools (Poon et al., 2013).

7. **Parent.** In this inquiry, parent refers to biological parents, surrogate parents, birth mother's partner, and adoptive parents.

8. **Professionals.** This term refers to "those using their expertise ... [to interact] with [parents or families]and /or their children with disabilities" (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005, p. 251). In Singapore, this includes school leaders, teachers, teacher aides, job coach or instructor, and allied professionals that include psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, art therapists, and social workers. I note
that participants of my study referred specifically to school leaders, but referred to all
other professionals as teachers. They did not differentiate professionals according to
their titles or roles. In the Singapore SPED schools under this SSO, this is not
unusual. Thus, in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, even though a participant may refer to
a "teacher," I refer to "school professionals" to signal that any professional, other than
the school leader, may have been referred to by a participant. In addition, in many
cases, participants cited "the school" as the voice of any or all professionals (e.g., the
school requires homework, the school phoned the parents).

9. Special Educational Needs. In Singapore's context, this term applies to a child that
"has been diagnosed with a disability, has great difficulty in learning as compared to
the majority of his peers of the same age, ... [and] requires additional resources
beyond what is generally available for the majority of his peers" (Ministry of
Education, 2012b, p. 6).

10. Special Education School. A school that specifically makes special education
provision in terms of additional support for SPED students (Disabled People's
Association, 2015).

Organization of the Thesis

This chapter began with an overview of the context and background that frame this
inquiry. The chapter also provided an overview of special education in Singapore. The problem
statement, the statement of purpose, and the research questions were articulated. My research
approach, perspectives, and assumptions were also described. The chapter concluded with the
rationale and significance of this inquiry and definitions of some of the key terminology used.
The next two chapters of this proposal set up the study, and this constitutes the inquiry framework. Chapter Two is comprised of the literature review and provides details of the conceptual framework. Chapter Three explains the research methodology and methods chosen for this study, addresses ethical considerations, and discusses the trustworthiness and the delimitations and limitations of this proposed inquiry. Chapter Four presents the key findings obtained from nine in-depth interviews while Chapter Five provides interpretive insights into these findings and a more holistic understanding of home-school partnership in Singapore SPED schools. The final chapter presents conclusions and actionable recommendations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

To support the research, the following critical literature has as its focus SPED parents' perceptions about and experiences with school professionals. I reviewed literature primarily from North America, Europe, and Australia because this body of work provided an understanding of the history and context concerning how partnership was conceived, defined, developed, and carried out in schools. Additionally, I reviewed the literature pertaining to immigrant parents from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) groups that resided in western nations. In particular, I focused on Asian research as it held relevance for Singapore as an Asian nation as well as an "immigrant society [that is] most open to ... Western influence" (Kumar, 2016, p. 166). Some literature related to other Asian countries is also included.

I undertook the following steps to help me conduct my literature review. I first identified keywords related to my topic, purpose, and research questions to help me in my search. They included parents' perceptions or views or experiences, special education, needs or disabilities, partnership, collaboration, home-school partnership, parent-professional relationship, parent involvement or engagement, barriers, enablers, and improvement. I next established my time frame for my literature search—1960s to the present. I chose to begin with the 1960s because my literature search showed that it was during this period that the notion of working together with parents with special needs children began to appear (Hawkins, Peterson, Schweid, & Bijou, 1966; Santostefano & Stayton, 1966, Studholme, 1964). Thereafter, I identified my sources of information. I chose to use multiple sources that included scholarly research articles, books, reports, monographs, doctoral dissertations, and government websites, such as the Singapore government website to access speeches, reports and relevant press releases. These were accessed
through ERIC, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. From the sources gathered, I identified recurring factors and surfaced themes in home-school partnership literature. These were then reflected in my conceptual framework (see Figure 1) found towards the end of this chapter.

To engage with the body of literature, I have organized my literature review into five sections: literature related to home-school partnerships, factors affecting home-school partnership, improvements on home-school partnership, my conceptual framework, and a summary of the chapter. The first section that is sub-divided into four sub-sections, focuses on the literature on home-school partnerships. The first sub-section seeks to examine the definition of partnership as it appears in literature. The second sub-section presents theoretical perspectives on home-school partnerships. The third and fourth sub-sections discuss the different roles taken on by parents and their involvement in special education respectively. The second section looks at how the various factors found in the home, school, and external environment could serve as barriers and enablers that impact positive home-school partnerships. In the third section, improvement to home-school partnerships is examined. The fourth section introduces and explains my conceptual framework as informed by literature. A chapter summary of the literature review on home-school partnerships in special education is provided in the concluding section.

Throughout my review, I attempt to highlight and discuss similarities, differences, and gaps in the literature as and when they become apparent. I also close each section with a synthesis that focuses on its possible research implications. I conclude by showing how literature has informed my understanding of home-school partnerships and how the materials will contribute to the ongoing development of my conceptual framework.
**Definition of Partnership**

In this section, I will start with the dictionary definition as a representation of how the term partnership is defined in the English Language. I will then show how this word is used in different contexts and policies.

Both the Collins (2017) and Merriam-Webster's Collegiate dictionaries (2017) define partnership to be a relationship. It involves "two or more people, organizations, or countries" (Collins, 2017) working closely and having "joint rights and responsibilities" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2017). A common term, it is often used in the business and education sectors. In the educational field, developing partnership has been widely acknowledged to be important by families, countries, and governments. For families, working together with the schools enable them to help their children to learn "more effectively" (Kelley-Laine, 1998, p. 342). For many countries, having families work in close partnership with the schools would result in "higher student achievement" (p. 342). For governments, a partnership between families and schools would make schools "more accountable" (p. 342) to the "society that funds them" (p. 343) and help them address the demands made by parents (p. 343).

Literature has shown that the commonly used term "partnership" has "no universally accepted definition" (Pinkus, 2003, p. 131). Rather, there are various definitions (Armstrong, 2002; Bastiani, 1993; Deslandes, 2001; Dobbins & Abbot, 2010; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Summers, et al., 2005b). The simplest definition is perhaps seen in the Plowden Report (Department of Education and Science, 1967), which describes close partnership between parents and teachers as being "one of the essentials for educational advance" (p. 37). Since this report, many other definitions concerning partnership have surfaced. For example, Armstrong (2002) states that partnership implies "(1) mutual respect; (2) complementary expertise; (3)
willingness [of parents and teachers] to learn from each other" (p. 18). While Epstein (1992) acknowledges the shared responsibility between the parents and school in educating the child, she has chosen to put family instead of parents in her home-school partnership construct. She contends that the word "family" (p. 1140) is "broader [as] it recognizes the importance and potential influence of all family members, not just parents" (p. 1140). For Epstein (1992), the term partnership implies a "formal alliance and contractual agreement to work toward shared goals and to share the profits or benefits of mutual investments" (p. 1140). With the shift in the United States' federal, state, and local policies towards connecting families and communities, Epstein's construct expanded to include the community as she believes that developing this form of partnership could "improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents’ skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work" (Epstein, 1995, p. 701). By doing this, Epstein (1992) makes her approach to school, family, and community partnership more comprehensive, "inclusive," (p. 8) and "holistic" (Wong et al., 2015b, p. 2).

To date, there are many studies conducted on home-school partnerships (Chrispeels, 1996; Deslandes, 2001; Dobbins & Abbott, 2010; Smit, Vanderwolf, & Sleegers, 2001; Summers et al., 2005b). However, each study has defined the term differently. For example, Chrispeels (1996) has defined home-school-community partnership as "the mutual collaboration, support, and participation of families, community members and agencies, and school staff, at home, in the community, or at school, in activities and efforts that directly and positively affect

\[ \text{Equation} \]

2 Like the United Nations Human Rights Council (2016), I acknowledge that the term "family" is defined differently by different countries. Epstein's definition of family, as it appears, reflects how Singapore's Ministry of Education and National Council of Social Service have defined the term "family" in relation to education. This can be found on p. 16 in this dissertation.
the success of children's learning and development" (p. 299). For Chrispeels (1996), community refers to both "locales … and social interactions (e.g., relations among a network of social service providers) that can occur within and transcend local boundaries" (p. 299). A contrast to Epstein's (1995) definition of community—"all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just with those children in the schools" (p. 705), Chrispeels' (1996) definition is clearly more explicit than Epstein's (1995). This comparison therefore indicates that the terms home or family, school, and community partnership cannot be taken at face value. Rather, each term requires careful thought and unpacking to surface its nuances.

Specifically in the special education context, partnership has its own definition. For example, in a study on measuring the quality of family-professional partnerships in special education services, Summers et al. (2005b) define partnership as "mutually supportive interactions between families and professionals, focused on meeting the needs of children and families, and characterized by a sense of competence, commitment, equality, positive communication, respect, and trust" (p. 66). However, in a study on parental perception of partnership in special education schools in Northern Ireland, Dobbins and Abbott (2010) define partnership as "mutually valued relationship existing between parents and teachers in special school, whereby relations are transacted within a continuum of collaboration that [included] power, control, and knowledge that can enhance or detract from desired outcomes" (p. 23). Clearly, there are differences between the studies in terms of who and what is involved in partnership because of context.

A similar phenomenon is seen at the governmental level. Different governments have their own views and ideas concerning partnership. In the Australian Family-School Partnership
Framework that was endorsed in 2008, the Australian government viewed effective partnerships as demonstrating the following characteristics:

- responsive to students and family needs and aspiration
- purposefully co-designed with clear goals
- commitment to collaboration
- mutual trust and respect
- equal valuing of the different roles in the partnership
- sharing of responsibility and influence
- open dialogue and effective communication
- appropriate and adequate resources. (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017, para. 6)

Unlike the Australian government, Manitoba's provincial government has defined school partnerships as "all parent and community councils, committees or groups whose function is to assist schools in providing safe, caring, appropriate, and inclusive education" (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005, p. 2). Similar to the Australian government, the Manitoban government has identified a set of characteristics not to describe effective partnership, but as an attempt to operationalize their effective school partnership construct.³

In my own nation of Singapore, partnership is viewed as a "collaborative and complementary" (Ministry of Education, 2012a, para. 4) effort between the parents, school and community. Seen as "stakeholders in education" (Khong & Ng, 2005, p. 2), they work closely

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³ I acknowledge that Australia has a national education system while Manitoba has a provincially based education system. My purpose for citing these examples is to show how both governments, be it national or provincial, have viewed partnership in an educational setting.
together" to reach a common understanding of the goals and outcomes that they want to achieve for children’s learning and development" (Ministry of Education, 2012a, para. 4). Five principles have been identified to help the stakeholders work together: "trust the foundation, remember the child, understand shared responsibilities, seek common ground, and together, work towards common goals" (para. 5). Manzon et al. (2015) have observed that Singapore also uses the "terms parent engagement and school-home partnership" (p. 5). However, they have yet to establish whether the users in Singapore have consciously made a distinction between the two terms. This, then, "makes it difficult to identify which studies authentically 'engage' parents and ... determine whether parent engagement definitively and universally improves students' lives and learning outcomes" (p. 5). From the three given examples, it is evident that all three governments recognize the child or student as the heart of home-school partnership. What sets them apart is how they have each viewed and constructed partnership within their respective context. This therefore makes partnership a "context specific" (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008, p. 51) construct.

From the above, it is evident that the term partnership poses a challenge. First, the term is hard to define as partnership means "different things to different groups of people" (Swain & Walker, 2003, p. 549) and organizations. A close examination of the term shows that partnership can be a "set of ideas or practices" (Bastiani, 1993, p. 113). This then makes partnership "complex and elusive in nature" (p. 113). Without a clear or agreed definition (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Bastiani, 1993; Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2013; Mackintosh, 1992; Pinkus, 2003), multiple definitions and inconsistencies have arisen. Fan and Chen (2001) have noted that multiplicity in the definition of parental involvement makes it operationally difficult to define and empirically measure. This same observation can likewise be said for the home-school
partnership definition. Additionally, the term home-school partnership has been synonymously used with other terms like school involvement (Epstein, 1995) and parent engagement (Manzon, 2004; Manzon et al., 2015). As literature has defined these terms differently, this adds to further confusion (Manzon et al., 2015). Also, as partnership is a context-specific construct, this implies that there can be a wide range of possible partnership constructs characterized by "ground rules that reveal different patterns of authority and relationship and different ways of working" (Bastiani, 1993, p. 113). In sum, as a term, partnership is "difficult to pin down" (p. 113). Hence, it is perhaps best to view partnership as "a process or something to work towards rather than something that is fixed or readily achievable" (p. 133).

Other than challenges, the term home-school partnership can give rise to tension. While the term partnership with parents and home-school partnership implicitly suggests equality (Lareau, 1996), in practice, however, parents do not perceive that they have been accorded an equal footing with the professionals when it comes to educational decision making (Bastiani, 1993; Beveridge, 2005; Gwernan-Jones et al., 2015; Pinkus, 2003; Poon et al., 2013; Wolfendale, 1982). Such a disconnect between rhetoric of partnership and the actual practice of partnership (Epstein, 1992) is seen throughout much of literature (Fylling & Sandvin, 1999; Gwernan-Jones et al., 2015; Johnson, Pugach, & Hawkins, 2004; Keen, 2007; O'Connor, 2008; Swain & Walker, 2003), and studies have suggested that such tension between the parents and educators could hinder successful home-school collaboration for attending to students' needs (Beveridge, 2005; Deslandes, 2001; Ludicke & Kortman, 2012).

Theoretical Perspectives on Home-School Relationships

This section presents three perspectives of home-school relationships. They are selected because they have influenced government policy or guidelines on home-school partnership (John
Hopkins University, 2020; Ministry of Education & National Council of Social Service, 2011) and are used to discuss home-school partnership framework (Beveridge, 2004) as well as analyze research findings on home-school partnership (Murray et al., 2014; Pang, 2011). The strengths and weaknesses, if any, of each model are also presented.

**Epstein.** Prior to Epstein's (2010b) model of overlapping spheres of influence, there were three perspectives on schools and families: separate, shared, and sequential responsibilities. Each perspective is "profoundly different" (Epstein, 2010b, p. 26). The first perspective, which is separate responsibilities, is based on the assumption that "school bureaucracies and family organizations are directed respectively by educators and parents whose different goals, roles, and responsibilities are best fulfilled independently" (p. 26). This perspective argues that the purposes of both institutions can be best attained "when teachers maintain their professional, universalistic standards and judgments about the children in their classroom and when parents maintain their personal attention and particularistic standards and judgments about their children at home" (p. 26). Contrary to this perspective, is the shared responsibilities perspective. Based on the assumption that both institutions are jointly responsible for the "socialization and education of the child" (p. 26), this perspective also emphasizes the importance of "coordination, cooperation, and complementarity of schools and families and encourage communication and collaboration between the two institutions" (p. 26). In the sequential responsibilities perspective, however, the assumption made is that, with the support given by the "social and educational agencies" (p. 27), parents will take on the role of a teacher and help prepare their child for school. When the child formally goes to school, it then becomes the teacher's responsibility to provide the child with formal education. With "changing times" (p. 28), Epstein (2010b) advocates for a developmental framework that reflects "new patterns of communication to
accommodate different types of families" (p. 30). Influenced by Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1986, 1994) ecological model of human development (Deslandes, 2001), Epstein's model—the overlapping family and school spheres, accounts for "history, student development, and the influence families and schools have on each other" (Epstein, 2010b, p. 28). The model is based on the assumption that there are "mutual interests and influences of families and schools that can be more or less successfully promoted by the policies and programs of the organizations and the actions and attitudes of individuals in those organizations" (p. 35). In this model, "maximum" (p. 33) overlaps will take place when families and schools work frequently and closely together on varied parental involvement programs. Within this theoretical framework, Epstein (2010a) has identified six types of involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community. Each one includes "many different practices, ... [and] presents ... challenges that must be met in order to involve all families, ... and [may] lead to different results for students, for parents, for teaching practice, and for school climate" (Epstein, 2010a, p. 85-86).

Epstein's theoretical model has both strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, it illustrates "a global and holistic vision of partnership" (Deslandes, 2001, p. 11). It also allows for a "holistic analysis of the obstacles and facilitating factors associated with school-family partnership and of the significant role played by the actors involved in childhood education throughout the life cycle" (p. 20). On the flip side, Mapp and Hong (2010) have argued that the term involvement is too "narrow" (p. 349) as it suggests "individual participation" (p. 349). The term engagement is preferable as it implies "more of a joining together, a connection and partnership with others" (p. 349). Moreover, it suggests a more active, participatory relationship with others ... to support student achievement" (p. 349). Additionally, Deslandes (2001) asserts
that Epstein's model is unable to account for a parent's motivational decision to be involved. She states that the model is "inadequate, since it fails to describe the effects of family and individual psychological characteristics on the school-family partnership, and these characteristics must be examined in order to determine effective activities for encouraging partnership" (p. 20). Finally, Manzon et al. (2015) have highlighted that Epstein's model has failed to recognize "under Type 4 [Learning at Home], the prevalent practice of private supplementary tutoring" (p. 12) or "shadow education" (Bray & Lykins, 2012, p. x), a phenomenon seen in "East Asian societies like Japan, Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, ... Taiwan" (Zhang & Bray, 2015, p. 85), and Singapore. Additionally, they assert that the "types practiced should also be sensitive to parents' genders, children ages, and cultural and national context" (Manzon et al., 2015, p. 12). The need to consider cultural factors is consistent with literature (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; Park & Turnbull, 2001). Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1998) ecological model that I present hereafter addresses "some" (Manzon et al., 2015, p. 12) of the Epstein model's weaknesses.

**Bronfenbrenner.** Bronfenbrenner (1977) argues that the "understanding of human development ... requires examination of multi-person systems of interaction ... and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject" (p. 541). In his socio-ecological model, Bronfenbrenner (1986) has identified five nested systems that shape the child. Each system, represented as a set of concentric circles that surround the child, is interrelated. There are also interactions between and amongst the systems.

The microsystem is the first or closest layer to the child and consists of structures and systems that the child has immediate contact with. The layer also includes the interactions and relationships that the child has with the immediate social environment that can include settings
like the home, school, and day care. The mesosystem on the other hand, involves the interconnections and interrelations among the various microsystems. An example of this is the relationship between the families and teachers when they interact to discuss the child's educational outcomes. Unlike the mesosystem, the exosystem represents the external environment that indirectly influences and impacts the child's development. The parent's workplace and schedules for instance, can impact the parent and child's contact time. Operating at the "broadest level of influence" (Mapp & Hong, 2010, p. 350) is the macrosystem, and it comprises the "sociocultural context" (p. 350). Cultural values, practices and beliefs, along with political and social policies, can have a "cascading influence throughout the interactions of the other layers of the system" (p. 350). As for the chronosystem, it encompasses "the dimension of time as it relates to the child's environment" (p. 350).

Literature has indicated that Bronfenbrenner's model is perhaps a preferable model to explain home-school partnership (Beveridge, 2005; Manzon et al., 2015). First, it helps to provide a better understanding of the idea of the overlapping spheres as the model provides an explanation for why the "home, school and relationship between them are so significant for children's development" (Beveridge, 2005, p. 7). Second, the model stresses how "important it is that the child be [recognized] as an active participant in both the home and school contexts" (p. 7). Additionally, the model suggests that the development of a child is dependent on the contributions from the multiple contexts in a child's life (Beveridge, 2005; Manzon et al., 2015). In the special education field, this may include "child health centres [and] speech and language therapy clinics" (Beveridge, 2005, p. 8). It may also include the "relationships between different professionals" (p. 9) with whom the child is involved. Also, as families and special education educators are required to come together to develop the child's IEP, the model suggests that the
failure or success in establishing strong links between the home and school will impact "how well children are able to adapt to the learning demands that are made for them and how well supported they feel" (Beveridge, 2005, p. 9).

**Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler.** Taking a psychological perspective is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model (see Appendix B). The model explains "why parents become involved in their children's education and how their involvement influences their subsequent work" (Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, & Ice, 2010, p. 37).

At the base is Level 1, and this level includes three different categories of motivation: personal motivators, parent's perceptions of invitations to be involved, and life context factors that can impact parents' involvement with the school. Level 1.5 depicts four different forms of involvement that parents have—values, goals, expectations and aspirations, home-based activities, home-school communication, and involvement in school activities. Level 2 illustrates four learning mechanisms that parents can use to support their children's learning. Level 3 depicts how children perceive their parents' actions. An alignment between the children's perceptions and parents' intentions is needed for children to be able to feel and internalize their parents' "beliefs and behaviours" (Manzon et al., 2015. p. 8). For the positive impacts of engagement to be realized, the children need to reciprocate to their parents' actions and intentions. At level 4, the children develop the different attributes needed to help them reach their academic goals at level 5.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model has both strengths and weaknesses. The model "expands on Epstein's model by emphasizing the importance of the parents' philosophy ... and the role of the student in school-family relations" (Deslandes, 2001, p. 20). It also describes the "effects of family and individual psychological characteristics on the school-family
partnership" (p. 20) that Epstein's model has failed to do. In terms of limitations, the model is "linear and unidirectional" (Manzon et al., 2015, p. 10). Moreover, unlike Bronfenbrenner's model that looks at multiple contexts that can affect the child's development and home-school partnership, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model has restricted the concept of parental involvement to the home and school contexts (p. 10). Finally, this model has yet to be "tested in an Asian context" (p. 10).

The Role of Parents in Special Education

In this section, I am drawing from the American literature to provide the historical background to parents' role in special education because there is no literature for Singapore in this area. Understanding the historical background is important for two reasons. First, it helps us to understand the work that professionals do today (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shrogen, 2015, p. 115). Second, "history lessons may assist families and professionals to overcome today's challenges" (p. 115).

History has shown the changing role of parents in special education process. They began as passive recipients of information. Decision making concerning what programs children with disabilities should participate in lay in the hands of the professionals (Turnbull et al., 2015). It was only when the United States (U.S.) Congress gave parents the right to be decision makers and overseers of their children's education that parents became active collaborators. Today, families rather than parents are recognized as "partners" (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 125) and families-professional partnerships are cultivated to promote the role of families as partners (Epley, Summers, & Turnbull, 2010).

Literature has highlighted the numerous roles that parents with children of disabilities have undertaken (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997; Turnbull et al.; 2015; Wolf, 1982). Turnbull et al.
(2015) have identified eight major roles during the course of history. They are parents as a cause or source of their child's disability (1880-1930s), as organization members (in the late 1940s and 1950s), as service developers (1950s-1960s), as teachers (1960s-1970s), as political advocates (1950s-1970s), as educational decision makers (1975-present), and as partners (1980s to present).

Perhaps the most historical and significant milestone made in the area of special education was seen in the 1970s when parents and family members with children of disabilities took on the role as political advocates. Having endured two decades of limited educational services for their children, the parents with children of mental retardation "won a lawsuit against the state to obtain a free, appropriate education" (Turnbull et al. 2015, p. 123) for their children. Their historic success led other parent groups that represented other areas of disability to press for a "comprehensive legislation requiring the states to provide all students with disabilities a free appropriate public education" (p. 123). The first federal legislation act—Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law (P.L.) 94-142) was passed by the United States (U.S.) Congress in 1975. Since then, four major amendments have taken place—1978, 1983, 1986, and 1990 (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997, p. 9) and they have helped to "[reshape] special education in America" (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 123).

Since the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, parents have taken on the role as "educational decision makers" (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997, p. 10). Now known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Act recognizes parents as having the legal right to participate in educational decision making with educators concerning their children. Despite this recognition, the majority of the parents still remain as passive participants in educational decision making. Several reasons have been cited for this—lack of
motivation, skills, knowledge, time (Turnbull et al., 2015), and language. The lack of skills, knowledge, and language is consistent with literature particularly with parents from diverse cultures and backgrounds (Chu & Wu, 2012; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Lo, 2009; Siu, 1996). Meanwhile, in the field of early childhood education, the role of parents as decision makers took on a new direction in the 1980s. Early education practitioners, along with policy makers and researchers, undertook a paradigm shift where they moved from the traditional provider or professional-centred to family-centred model of service provision (Osher & Osher, 2002; Epley et al., 2010). With this shift, the professionals, who, in the previous model, were once considered an experts "by virtue of their training" (Osher & Osher, 2002, p. 53) in the previous model, no longer took on this role. Instead, they now deferred to the family in decision making as the family was recognized to have "expert knowledge, gained from [their] experience and/or training" (Osher & Osher, 2002, p. 54). Parents and families now assumed the role of a collaborator and according to Turnbull and Turnbull (1997), "the role of parents as collaborators presumed that families will be equal and full partners with educators and school systems and that this collaboration will affect the student and school system operations as well" (p. 11).

Today, the focus is on the "role of family as partners" (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 125). Epley et al.'s (2010) study confirms this. They have found that family-centred practice has increasingly included "family choice and a strength-based perspective" (p. 281). The term family is now adopted by policy makers and professionals for the following reason:

[they] now recognize that partnerships should not be limited to parents only (especially to mothers only). Partnership can and should involve relationships between professionals and other family members, such as fathers, grandfathers, brothers, and even close family
friends. Each of these people can support and enhance the educational outcomes for students with exceptionalities. (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 125)

While this partnership can improve the "life chances" (Russell, 2008, p. 107) of students with disabilities, it can also pose innumerable challenges for families and schools. The literature that comes hereafter highlights some of these challenges.

**The Involvement of Parents in Special Education**

This section focuses on studies done in parental involvement in special education. It will include some early studies done in this area to show when parents became involved in special education and what issues were raised. It will also highlight the diverse types of studies that have been undertaken in this area. Some studies have looked at a specific group of parents' perceptions concerning their involvement with the schools. Others have investigated factors associated with parents' positive and negative experiences with school involvement, issues related to parental empowerment, and tensions involved in home-school partnerships. As the studies undertaken in this area have been so diverse, this has implications for parent involvement in special education. Once again, I have drawn from North American and British literature as there is a lack of Singaporean literature in this area.

The topic of parent involvement has attracted much debate and discussion. Both the parents and educators have welcomed and endorsed the idea and they cite "parent involvement as a needed link between the home and school" (Marion, 1979, p. 43). According to Marion (1979), both groups also viewed parent involvement in varied ways. For example, the educators viewed parent involvement as counselling with parents, parent education, and as a "conference where information is exchanged and reported between equals" (p. 43). As a result, these educators viewed their role as "planners and convenors of parent group meetings ... [and] as referral agents,
directing parents to community and other support agencies" (p. 43). The parents, on the other hand, perceived their involvement as:

as teacher/learners being taught specific competencies by professionals, ... as information seekers and conduits of that information to others, ... as advocates [who] agitate vigorously for changes in the educational plans for their children ... [and] as consultant to teachers. Therefore, they seek to maintain an equal posture in the teacher learner process.

(p. 43)

Kelly's (1973) American study has shown that parental involvement in special education began as early as the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and England. In undertaking an extensive literature review on parent involvement in both general and special education contexts, Kelly's (1973) cited several successful studies in parent involvement in special education (Fudala, England, & Ganoung, 1972; Hawkins, Peterson, Schweid, & Bijou, 1966; Santostefano & Stayton, 1966; Studholme, 1964). He also noted a "trend [in special education] that [emphasized] the relative importance of parents in many program efforts" (p. 362) and concluded that there was a growing number of educators who favoured "a variety of active home-school working relationships" (p. 362).

It was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that the "partnership language" (McDermott-Fasy, 2009, p. 33) appeared in special education literature (Feldman, Byalick, & Rosedale, 1975; Wolfendale, 1982; Wolf, 1982). Feldman et al.'s (1975) study, entitled "Parents and Professionals: A Partnership in Special Education," is an example of early American study research specific to partnership. They emphasized the need for open communication to take place between parents and professionals and recommended that schools and professionals "vigorously" (p. 554) pursue the notion of equal partnership. Then, in 1982, Wolfendale published a report
entitled "Parents: Clients or Partners?" Her title suggests a sudden shift in the thinking about parent-school partnership. Reviewing the British government reports and the legislative framework of the 1981 Education Act, she contended that British parents were viewed as "clients" (Wolfendale, 1982, p. 47) and not as partners. Thus, there was need for Britain to shift towards "radical alternatives" (p. 49) that entail the recognition of parents as "participant members of an integrated child service and ... equal agents of change" (p. 49). Such a shift could be accomplished when educational psychologists and teachers observed the "cardinal principle of reciprocity—mutual involvement, mutual accountability, [and] mutual gain" (p. 49). That same year, Wolf (1982) published "Parents as Partners in Exceptional Education" wherein she argued for the need to examine a new relationship between the American school and parents because "societal and legal factors" (Wolf, 1982, p. 80) had resulted in a shift in parental roles. To be able to "provide the best possible educational experiences for all exceptional children and fulfill the promise of true partnership" (p. 80), Wolf highlighted the need for parents and schools to exercise their rights and responsibilities in a responsible manner. Wolf's call for the development of true partnership that involved parents in decision making, was echoed later in Osher and Osher's (2002) study.

Looking at a different perspective in partnership in special education in the United States was Royster and McLaughlin's (1996) study. Undertaking a literature review of partnership in special education, the researchers examined the purposes of partnership, models of parental involvement, and barriers in participation. Their study established two main goals of parent-professional partnership—to empower parents and enhance communication. To empower parents, they suggested using a team approach that would allow parents to take on "leadership and case management roles" (p. 26) so that they could, together with the professionals, make
decisions for students that were transitioning from school to vocational setting. To enhance communication, Royster and McLaughlin (1996) suggested the cultivation of active listening in order to build trust which was essential in creating partnership. They also identified the need for professionals to receive training in collaboration and communication as their previous training had taught them to "work from an authoritative standpoint" (p. 28) rather than in a collaborative manner with the parents. They suggested the adoption of a collaborative consultative model to help facilitate successful parent-teacher conferences. Their study also identified barriers to partnership that included the following: psychological, attitudinal, cultural, and parent and professional identified barriers. Their study asserted that parent-professional partnership was dependent on "greater parental participation" (p. 24). In light of this, the "professionals [were urged to] examine their biases and values and search for a more inclusive method of working with families" (p. 31).

The literature concerning parent involvement also looks at varied perceptions of parents with children of disabilities (An & Hodge, 2013; Lindsay & Dockrell, 2004; Stoner et al., 2005). Generally, this literature examined the perceptions of parents who had children with a specific type of disability. For example, Stoner et al. (2005) studied the perspectives of American parents of young children with ASD concerning their experiences and relationships with education professionals. Involving four parents in their collective case study, their findings revealed how common experiences, such as the need to confront professionals, "being rebuffed or dismissed by professionals" (p. 47), requesting repeated referrals, and fighting for services had reduced their level of trust in the professionals. The findings also revealed the need to establish "frequent, honest, and open" (p. 45) communication between the home and school. Based on the findings, the researchers asserted that the interaction between parents and the professionals was a
"dynamic and complex process" (p. 40). They recommended that professionals listened to parents' concerns and developed communication by "recognizing and valuing parental expertise" (p. 49).

In a similar vein, Lindsay and Dockrell (2004) explored the perspectives of 66 British parents concerning provision to meet the educational needs of their children with specific speech and language difficulties. Using a mixed method approach, the findings showed that the parents felt that their views had been dismissed by the professionals. Hence, they "had to fight hard for appropriate support services or entry to an appropriate school for their children" (p. 232). They also reported being "ill-informed" (p. 233) about the ways the school went about to meet their children's needs. These findings led the researchers to conclude that these conditions contributed to a strained partnership between the parents and professionals.

Other researchers, such as Leyser and Cole (1984), examined the perceptions of American parents with handicapped children concerning their child's problem and educational services provided. Involving 325 parents from the lower socioeconomic strata, their findings showed that parents were generally satisfied with the education their child had received and had "an accurate perception of both their child's problems and the services provided" (p. 193). However, they viewed themselves as having "low" (p. 193) involvement in school, especially in an IEP meeting due to their lack of knowledge about what IEP constituted and timing of school meeting. As an IEP serves as "a road map to special education services ... [and] is essential in planning appropriate instruction for students with disabilities and should guide the integration of general and special education curriculum" (Diliberto & Brewer, 2014, p. 128), the low parental involvement troubled the researchers. This led them to conclude that "there is still a long way to go before the role expected by P.L. 94-142, including active participation and decision making in
planning programs for their children, is fully implemented" (p. 199). They thus advocated for training programs for both parents and teachers in order to alleviate the stress and tension that parents experienced during IEP meetings.

Researchers, such as Hsiao (2016), explored the perspectives of CLD parents of children with ASD concerning their relationship with their child's teachers. Hsiao's (2016) study showed that all 230 of his American participants were "close to" (p. 64) satisfied with their partnership with the teachers. This implied that the teachers had to understand what parents' needs were first before they could assist to meet those needs. Also, while parents were satisfied with the teachers' effort to communicate with them, they were however dissatisfied with the school for not meeting "the most pressing needs of their child" (p. 71). To improve this "child-focused relationship" (p. 71), Hsiao (2016) suggested that teachers sought to understand parents' immediate concerns about their children, and enquired what skills parents felt that their child needed the most help with. Additionally, Hsiao (2016) found that parents' satisfaction with family-professional partnership was tied to the age of the child with ASD. This meant that as the child got older, parental satisfaction with the family-professional partnership decreased. This finding is consistent with the findings of Summers, Hoffman, Marquis, Turnbull, and Poston, (2005a). Other than the child's age, Hsiao's (2016) study indicated that the amount of services that the family received from the school was also a predictor of parental satisfaction with family-professional relationship.

Clearly, the above studies on parental involvement in special education have indicated that each situation is not only different, but the perceptions of parents concerning the education of their children with disabilities are mixed as they have expressed satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Generally, satisfaction is tied to the child's age (Hsiao, 2016). It is also associated
with parents' having knowledge about their child's problem and the services that their child is receiving (Hsiao, 2016), teachers' efforts to communicate to parents (Hsiao, 2016), and how many services are received by the parents (Hsiao, 2016). On the other hand, dissatisfaction is associated to the need for parents to fight for services (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2004; Stoner et al., 2005), not being listened to by professionals (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2004; Stoner et al., 2005), lack of understanding about IEP process (Leyser & Cole, 1984), meeting schedule (Leyser & Cole, 1984), lack of frequent, honest, and open communication from the professionals (Stoner et al. 2005), and failure of professionals to meet the child's needs (Hsiao, 2016).

Other studies in parental involvement in special education have looked at factors connected with IEP meetings (Cawthon & Caemmerer, 2014; Fish, 2006, 2008). In a case study that involved seven Texan families with children with ASD, Fish (2006) found three factors that had contributed to parents' negative experiences with IEP meetings. First, the parents' inputs were neither "valued [nor] welcomed" (p. 66) by "most" (p. 66) educators. Second, the educators had not treated them as equal partners. Third, the educators had failed to implement the IEP goals that had been agreed on as they had perceived the entire IEP process to be a "formality" (p. 66). These factors had resulted in "adversarial relationships" (p. 67) between the parents and educators that could impact the students. Therefore, further research was warranted in this area. Interestingly, in another study that Fish conducted in 2008 with 51 American parents of children with disabilities, the parents indicated that they had very positive experiences during their IEP meetings. Unlike his previous study (2006), the educators in this study (2008) had accorded respect to the parents, "valued" (p. 8) parental input, and treated parents as equal partners in the decision-making process. Additional factors that contributed to the positive experience included parents' "clear understanding of the IEP process and special education law" (p. 8). The positive
experiences of the parents in this study is also supported by Cawthon and Caemmerer's (2014) study.

There are also studies on parental involvement in special education that have examined the issue of empowerment (Ditrano & Silverstein, 2006; Rizvi, 2017). For example, Rizvi's (2017) study explored how the perceptions of British Pakistani mothers with children of disabilities had impacted their relationships with schools. Rizvi (2017) found that the five mothers' disengagement from parental involvement was linked to their perception of disability that had "evolved from a medicalised lens" (p. 87). As the mothers had "recognized [that] disability placed professionals in a higher social category than them" (p. 95), they thus depended on the teachers for educational outcomes and accepted all placement decisions. This finding led Rizvi (2017) to assert that there was a need for parents with children of disabilities to be empowered and more studies in "maternal advocacy and empowerment within [United Kingdom] special education" (p. 87) to be undertaken. Rizvi's study affirms Ditrano and Silverstein's (2006) view concerning the need to empower parents with children of disabilities. Findings of Ditrano and Silverstein's (2006) participatory action research (PAR) involving nine American parents who had children with emotional disabilities showed how the parents involvement in PAR had developed their level of "critical consciousness" (p. 359), raised their optimism, and changed the way they worked with school personnel. From being "passive recipients of the policy and direction of the school, [they became] involved parents and advocates for change in the school community" (p. 366). Ditrano and Silverstein's (2006) study suggested that there were not only benefits in empowering parents, but there was a link between empowerment and effective home-school partnership.
Other studies in parental involvement in special education have examined conflicts and tensions (Iadarola et al., 2015; Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; Ryndak, Orlando, Storch, Denney, & Huffman, 2011). For example, Ryndak et al. (2011) showed how a mother's perception of "goodness of fit (i.e., congruence) between her views of her son and the views of his service providers" (p. 87) had contributed to the ongoing conflict that the mother had experienced during the 12 years of her advocacy for her son with significant disabilities. In her attempt to resolve her conflict with the school personnel, the mother had used multiple strategies to improve the services. The researchers concluded that service providers needed to "understand and respect parents' perceptions of their family needs and their views about their child's short-and long-term educational services" (p. 87). They asserted that a "poor collaborative relationship" (p. 88) between the parents and educational team would result in "less than positive outcomes" (p. 88) for a student with significant disabilities.

In summary, the above studies in this sub-section of section one highlight a couple of things about parent involvement. First, it is evident that there are a variety of studies done in different contexts along with various findings concerning parental involvement in special education. This therefore makes it difficult to generalize the nature of parent involvement or parent-professional partnership. Second, the mixed findings concerning parental involvement suggest that home-school partnership is still a work in progress. There are still apparent gaps that need to be addressed, such as the gap between the parents and educators' perceptions concerning their roles and what collaboration or partnership entails. The gaps can perhaps be attributed to the lack of definitional clarity concerning the term partnership. Without a clear definition of this term, no definite roles can be established for either the parents or professionals. As a result, the
professionals' expertise, as literature has shown, may continue to take precedence over that of the parents' (Fish, 2006; Rizvi, 2017; Stoner et al., 2005).

**Barriers and Enablers in Home-School Partnership**

The literature on parent involvement in special education has identified a "range of variables" (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012, p. 158), such as culture, beliefs, values, linguistics, and individual life experiences that can impact home-school partnerships. Studies have shown that these factors can serve as barriers or enablers for home-school partnership. In some instances, they can act as both barriers and enablers (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Soodak & Erwin, 2000). This section will examine the factors that operate at three different levels—the home, school, and external environment.

**The Home**

**Parents' beliefs, cultures, and values.** A review of the literature on special education has shown that parental beliefs and values can impact home-school partnerships. The most "consistent theme in parents' narratives" (Lalvani, 2015, p. 383) pertains to how they have viewed the meaning of disability. In Lake and Billingsley's (2000) American study that explored the factors that escalated conflict, the findings identified the differences in views held by the parents and professionals concerning disability as a factor that could escalate conflict, and that presents a barrier to home-school partnership. In this study, the parents held the belief that their child with disabilities was "an individual with unique strengths and abilities" (p. 244). The professionals, however, viewed their child from a "deficit model perspective" (p. 244) based on a "medicalized model [that] is derived from the positivistic paradigm" (Harry & Kalyanpur, 1994, p, 150). Embraced by Western technological societies, this paradigm advocates "scientific explanations ... because they are believed to provide a level of objectivity" (p. 150). Trained to
embrace such a view, the professionals thus had great difficulty in relating to "differing interpretations held by parents" (p. 150). This impacted collaboration as the parents' decision to work with the professionals was usually dependent on the latter holding similar beliefs as them.

Similar findings have been established by researchers who have studied home-school partnerships between CLD families of children with disabilities and professionals (Jegatheesan, 2009; Jegatheesan et al., 2010; Lo, 2009; Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010). Similar to the participants in Lake and Billingsley's (2000) study, many CLD families had also held different views of disability that were not congruent with those held by the professionals. For instance, Lo (2010) posited that, in many Asian immigrant families, "matters involving their children with disabilities [were] considered private matters" (p. 406). Hence, they would not "openly [discuss] with people other than their family members" (p. 406) because they had not "[defined or addressed] disability in the same open manner" (p. 406) as their American counterparts. For example, amongst the traditional Koreans, disabilities were linked to "poor maternal care" (Choi & Ostendorf, 2015, p. 39). For the Chinese, disability was linked to traditional health beliefs. As a result of such beliefs, Asian families experienced feelings of "embarrassment, shame, and [stigmatization]" (Chan, 1992, p. 231). Their feelings also prevented them from receiving information and assistance from professionals (Chan, 1992; Jegatheesan, 2009) and being "candid with [the] professionals" (Jegatheesan, 2009, p. 124). Contrary to the negative beliefs, there were also positive beliefs held by Asian families concerning disability. For example, disability has been viewed as part of a "divine plan" (Choi & Ostendorf, 2015, p. 40) or a gift from the gods (Chan, 1986, p. 40; Jegatheesan et al., 2010). Muslims specifically embraced the belief that "God had chosen them to be special parents" (Jegatheesan et al., 2010, p. 105). As a
result, Asian families resented professionals who had "discrepant views of their children with disabilities" (Jegatheesan, 2009, p. 124).

Studies have also shown that cultural values may impact home-school partnerships. For example, Manzon (2004) cited how the Confucian values embraced by Hong Kong and Singaporean families shaped how they viewed "the role of the school and home and the value of education" (p. 9). For them, schools were "holistic entities" (p. 9) and school improvement [was] dependent on the schools rather than parental involvement. As a result, these parents had adopted "non-interventionist attitudes towards schools, whether in political terms ... or practical terms. [They had also viewed] their role as being complementary to school, by providing support to children's study at home" (p. 9-10). Wong et al. (2015) also reported Singaporean parents as not wanting to "step into the boundaries of the school" (p. 5) unless they were called for by the school. Their study, together with Manzon's (2004), affirms that Asian parents generally prefer to remain as passive partners in schools. Manzon argued, however, that this phenomenon was not uniquely Asian. In some European Union countries and in Uganda, "culture had also reinforced the professional authority of school personnel" (p. 15). Manzon's findings are not only supported by other researchers (Chan, 1992, Khong, 2004; Khong & Ng, 2005; Sy, Rowley, & Schulenberg, 2007), but are consistent with Ho's (2009) perspective concerning separate responsibilities between the home and school. They also serve as a stark contrast to findings about European American culture where "parents' participation in school activities and school governance is not only typically accepted, but often promoted by teachers and schools" (Manson, 2004, p. 3).

From the studies above, it is evident that beliefs, culture, and values impact home-school partnerships. These factors do not just shape how parents view partnerships, but they can act as
barriers that prevent positive partnerships from taking place. In view of these barriers, researchers have made recommendations that might serve as enablers for home-school partnerships. For example, Lake and Billingsley (2000) suggested the need for schools to "examine where the discrepant views [of the child originated] and learn how to narrow the gap" (p. 249) between the parent's view and the school's view in order to facilitate collaboration. In a similar vein, CLD researchers had advocated for professionals to examine their "own cultural assumptions and actively seek information regarding families' interpretations of disability, and the values that underly their practices and preferences" (Harry & Kalyanpur, 1994, p. 161) so that they could demonstrate "cultural reciprocity" (p. 161). This same recommendation was forwarded by Kalyanpur and Harry in 2012, and this emphasized the need for cultural reciprocity in building family-professional relationships in special education. According to Haines, Gross, Blue-Banning, Francis, and Turnbull (2015), reciprocity kept "partnership active and strengthened trust and engagement in the relationship" (p. 235). Meanwhile, Turnbull et al. (2015) had advocated for professionals to honor "each family's cultural beliefs as a way of demonstrating ... respect for them. Honoring cultural diversity begins with understanding the family's cultures" (p. 168). They had also suggested that professionals focus on affirming the child's and family's strengths rather than on their weaknesses.

Parents' language and communication. Both language and communication are common themes that have emerged in studies concerning parent involvement in special education (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Chan, 1992; Choi & Ostendorf; 2015; Chu, 2014; Chu & Wu, 2012; Jegatheesan, 2009; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Lo, 2009; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Rossetti, Sauer, Bui, & Ou, 2017; Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Turnbull et al., 2015; Wolf, 1982). Lo (2009) stated that language was one of the "crucial factors" (p. 100) in
home-school partnerships. Specifically for CLD families, language was recognized as the "greatest barrier in cross-cultural communication" (Park & Turnbull, 2001, p. 133). Studies had shown that the CLD families' limited English proficiency could deter them from communicating with professionals (Lo, 2009) or becoming involved in the school (Lai & Ishiyama, 2004). According to Lai and Ishiyama (2004), the limited involvement of Chinese Canadian parents in their study served as a "stark contrast to [the parents'] desire to help their children learn and develop, to their involvement in home teaching, and to the high value they placed on education" (p. 105). They asserted that the limited English proficiency, along with the cultural values and practices of these parents rendered them "vulnerable in the educational context" (p. 105). It was therefore the responsibility of the educators to involve these group of "vulnerable parents" (p. 105).

Communication style has also been identified as a barrier to effective collaboration for CLD parents. Specifically for Asian families, traditional values influence the way parents communicate with the professionals. For example, in Park and Turnbull's (2001) study, many Korean-American parents confessed being influenced by their "traditional values which placed emphasis on respect for authority" (p. 140). Hence, "asking questions or proposing an opposite opinion [was] against this value, which the parents [had] been very familiar with for a long time" (p. 140). Park, Turnbull, and Park (2001) cited that "regardless of their level of acculturation, [many parents] said that they usually tried to listen and follow professionals' opinions without disagreeing or posing questions" (p. 163). Taught to also "say 'yes' to teachers" (p. 163), they contrasted their American counterparts who were more assertive. Consequently, Park et al. (2001) argued that language and "different discussion styles between two cultures could be a barrier to vigorous communication between parents and professionals" (p. 163).
Additionally, a barrier could also exist when CLD families and professionals "differ in the level of context that they use in communication" (Park & Turnbull, 2001, p. 134). For example, the Eurocentric (Chan, 1992) and Anglo-American (Park & Turnbull, 2001) cultures had been identified as low context cultures. Hence, these cultures focused on a "more precise, explicit, and straightforward" (Chan, 1992, p. 232) style of communication and value both "direction and speed" (Park & Turnbull, 2001, p. 134) to accomplish a given task. Their style of communication dramatically contrasted with the high-context cultures, such as the "Asian, Native American, Arab, and Latino" (p. 134). Unlike the low-context cultures, the high-context cultures were dependent on "situational cues, established hierarchies, and non-confrontational responses in their communication with others" (p. 134). In a parent-professional relationship, misunderstanding may occur when both parties communicate using different context level.

From the above, it is evident that beliefs, values, language, communication, and culture intersect with one another. These intersections therefore make it very challenging to establish a "satisfying, meaningful, and productive partnerships between parents and professionals" (Soodak & Erwin, 2000, p. 38). Despite this, recommendations had been made by various studies that may serve as enablers to home-school partnerships. These included making accommodations to meet family needs by being "attentive, patient, speaking slowly, repeating and rephrasing important points" (Cho & Gannotti, 2005, p. 8) for the parents. To facilitate communication between two parties that come from different cultures, Kalyanpur and Harry (2012) advocated for professionals to practice cultural reciprocity. This approach required professionals to have "explicit discussions with families regarding differences in cultural values and practices ... [and show] respect for the new body of knowledge that emerges from these discussions and make
allowances for differences in perspectives when responding to the family needs" (p. 19). A benefit of using this approach is the empowerment of both parties.

**Parents' lack of knowledge.** The literature on special education has cited parents' lack of knowledge as a barrier to parent involvement in schools (Chu, 2014; Chu & Wu, 2012; Jegatheeasan, 2009; Johnson et al., 2004; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Lo, 2009). For instance, Johnson et al. (2004) had cited how the lack of understanding of schools impacted school-family collaboration. They argued that schools were "complex organizations that had both overt and covert rules of operation" (p. 7). Hence, families who lacked knowledge and understanding of how these rules worked, were not only unable to use "the system" (p. 7) to meet both their and their child's needs, but they experienced a "diminished sense of control in decision making" (p. 7). The latter was a phenomenon often associated with families from the lower economic strata and those who had been labelled as coloured. The researchers contended that schools needed to be "family-focused" (p. 7) and to make "public their rules" (p. 7). To be family-focused, schools needed to examine how their way of "doing business" (p. 7) had hindered families from becoming equal partners in the educational process. In the researchers' view, families should be an "integral part of what was happening within the school" (p. 7). Seen in this light, the schools had a responsibility of instructing families how to access the school's resources. They also needed to view the families as educational resources that could be tapped to enrich the children's learning experiences. Additionally, they needed to "create an environment and structures that empowered families" (p. 7).

In addition to needing more knowledge about schools, Lake and Billingsley (2000) identified other types of knowledge that parents with children of disabilities needed, including "organizational knowledge, disability knowledge, judgmental knowledge, legal knowledge, and
conflict and management knowledge" (p. 249). In their study, the parents indicated that their inability to advocate for their children with learning disabilities was linked to having inadequate knowledge of all types. Hence, the parents sought knowledge to guide "the practical actions that [constituted] advocacy for their own children" (p. 244).

In an article entitled "A Parent's Perspective," Greene (1999) identified another kind of knowledge that parents like herself needed. It was knowledge about collaboration. Hence, she suggested that the school should help parents understand what collaboration entailed, how it worked, and what the role of a collaborator involved. This was because for most families their only "frame of reference about how families and professionals should interact [was] what they [remembered] about their own parents. Often, this [meant] that teachers [were] experts and teachers always [knew] best" (p. 150).

Interestingly, CLD parents with children of disabilities, seek a different kind of knowledge. Lo (2009) found that the CLD mothers with children with hearing impairments needed knowledge concerning the special education process in American schools. Specifically, they needed to understand "the purpose of IEPs, ... the timeline of the entire process, their roles in the special education process, and their parental rights" (Lo, 2009, p. 101). Their lack of knowledge had resulted in misunderstandings that could have been averted had the schools "provided more frequent and effective communication with the parents and educated the parents throughout the complicated special education process" (p. 101). In light of the parents' experiences, Lo (2009) argued that parent education was crucial. Without educating the parents concerning the special education process, schools could not possibly collaborate with CLD parents. Lo's (2009) finding is also consistent with that of other researchers (Chu, 2014; Jegatheesan, 2009; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012) and is further affirmed in her recent study (2014).
The above studies concerning lack of knowledge highlights a few salient points. First, it shows that parents' lack of knowledge can impact home-school partnerships. Second, factors such as family socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture, and past experiences intersect with a lack of knowledge. This further affirms the complexity of home-school partnerships. Finally, there are various types of knowledge that parents need in order to be effectively involved in home-school partnerships. This, therefore, makes it challenging for non-CLD and CLD parents to be involved in collaboration. At the same time, this implies the need for schools to provide parents the necessary knowledge to be involved in collaboration. Parent education had been suggested (Johnson et al., 2004; Lo, 2009) as an enabler to help promote positive home-school partnerships.

**Parents' past experiences and memories.** The literature on special education has shown that parents' past experiences and memories can affect their relationship with professionals (Beveridge, 2005; Dobbins & Abbott, 2010; Greene, 1999; Johnson et al., 2004; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004; Miller, 2015; Pinkus, 2006; Stoner et al., 2005). For example, Johnson et al. (2004) found that the lack of parental involvement was not attributed to parents' indifference or apathy as deemed by school personnel. Rather, it was the parents' past experiences that had caused them to avoid interactions with the school personnel. Their findings revealed that parents' previous negative experiences had led them to perceive all other interactions to be equally negative as well.

Lai and Ishiyama (2004) found similar patterns with Chinese Canadian families. In their study, they contended that the mothers' past experience with the "formal structure of Chinese schools [had] partly limited their participation at school in Canada" (p. 104). Coming from Asian countries, these participants recounted the "informal relationships" (p. 104) they had with
their children's teachers and their total non-involvement in school. Interestingly, Pinkus (2006) found that her British CLD participants cited present experiences, as well as past ones, as influencing the "way in which they interacted with the professionals ... [and] interpreted their behaviours" (p. 159). She also cited how past experiences had caused parents to view their relationship with professionals in a suspicious manner. In view of these findings, she argued that parents' "personal characteristics and histories" (p. 159) impacted parent-professional relationships. Similarly, Stoner et al. (2005) found how the previous experiences of American parents of young children with ASD had affected their trust level. Although the individual participant's situation with the educational professionals had improved, they continued to mistrust the professional due to past negative experiences. However, the participants did cite that their "repeated interactions with the teachers had the potential to enhance trust between [them] and [the] educational professionals" (Stoner et al., 2005, p. 46). Contrasting all four studies is Miller's (2015) American study. Unlike the previous three studies, Miller's participants, eight mothers and six fathers, had themselves received special education services in school. Based on their past memories of school, some of the participants reported having doubt about their "capacity to adequately support all their [children's] learning-related and social demands associated with special education labels and services" (Miller, 2015, p.165). Miller's findings lend further support to past experiences or memories serving as barriers to home-school partnerships.

Several recommendations have been made to enable the parents who have negative memories or experiences to become actively engaged in school. Johnson et al. (2004) suggested that schools organize "family-centred" activities to "generate positive feeling with positive outcomes" (p. 8). In their view, parents would likely become active participants if they perceived
schools as "positive places where positive thing happen" (p. 8). Additionally, schools should empower parents by creating opportunities for them to become "real decision makers within the schools" (p. 8). Specifically for CLD parents, Lai and Ishiyama (2004) suggested that schools invite parents into the schools and to put up "welcoming signs in ethnic languages [and display] pictures and objects of the cultures in the community" (p. 106). At the same time, schools were encouraged to provide new immigrants with information about the "adoptive land's school system and expectations for students and parents" (p. 107). On the other hand, Miller (2015) suggested that schools acknowledge "parental histories as an important factor contributing to parent-child journey through schooling process" (p. 167). They should also capitalize on using parents' personal histories to shed light on "home school environment and their relationships with families" (p. 167) and to aid parents to "revisit their school memories" (p. 167) so as to raise parents' awareness of the "motivation behind their own thoughts and actions" (p. 168). Stoner et al. (2005) suggested that professionals should have an understanding of how past experiences could impact trust so that they could "adjust other factors or interactions to develop greater trust" (p. 173).

The studies in this sub-section on experiences and past memories highlight a couple of things. As past memories do surface and interfere with home-school partnerships, this raises the need for professionals to be cognizant of this hidden factor in order to develop collaboration with parents of children with disabilities. Having a dialogue may perhaps bring this factor to the front burner. Moreover, it appears that past memories and experiences intersect with other factors, such as trust and personal histories, to impact home-school partnerships. Again, this affirms the complexity of home-school partnerships.
In sum, the findings in this sub-section on the home highlight a few key points. First, there many home factors that can impact home-school partnerships. Thus, this becomes challenging for professionals to try and engage parents productively. Second, the above studies highlight different gaps like the perception gap between the parents and professionals, knowledge gap among the parents as well as communication and language gaps. Discerning these gaps is important if positive home-school partnerships are to be developed. Third, the various CLD studies provide a deeper insight of the challenges faced by the CLD families. Collectively, these studies show that CLD families may not just have communication problem alone. Rather, their communication problem is compounded by their cultural values and beliefs, lack of knowledge, past experiences, and different communication style. All these issues put them in a vulnerable position when they have to collaborate with the professionals. In dealing with CLD families, Western professionals may need to be cognizant of these intersecting factors so that they can find ways to engage in a productive relationship with the parents. Similarly, as Singapore is a multi-racial society, Western-educated Singaporean professionals may need to be cognizant of this too.

The School

Leadership approach. Research has shown that educational leadership is linked to parent involvement in school (Auerbach, 2010, 2012; Gordon & Louis, 2012; Ho, 2009) and that it shapes the nature of home-school collaboration in schools (Auerbach, 2010, 2012; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Ho, 2009). Studies done in this area generally tried to establish which type of leadership practice or approach fosters home-school partnerships. The results pointed to several. For example, a study undertaken by Ho (2009) in an Asian context showed three main types of leadership approaches that were used amongst Hong Kong school leaders: bureaucratic,
utilitarian, and communitarian. School leaders who adopted the bureaucratic approach held the belief that both the schools and parents had separate responsibilities. Interestingly, their belief was linked to how they had viewed parents. In this case, they saw parents as troublemakers. As a result, an "alienated relationship [emerged] and parents and teachers [were] disconnected from each other" (p. 117). School leaders who chose the utilitarian approach believed that parents served as "extra human resources" (p. 118) and were at their disposal to use to run their various activities. Parents were thus viewed as "tools for promoting the school’s reputation and for fulfilling the home-school policy mandates of the central government" (p. 116), and the relationship between the parents and school was at best an instrumental one. Contrary to the other two leadership approaches, school leaders who adopted the communitarian approach believed in parents being "co-owners of the school" (p. 118) and in parental involvement as impacting the "quality and holistic education" (p. 118) of the children in the school. Under such leadership, the parents were viewed as "capable" (p. 118) volunteers who could effectively assist the school. The school thus made the parents feel welcome and the teachers viewed them as partners. This positive view promoted an "enduring and trusted relationships between the home and school" (p. 118).

The above findings of Ho's (2009) study are noteworthy. First, the study clearly indicates which leadership approach enables or serves as a barrier to home-school partnerships. It is evident that the bureaucratic leadership approach is a barrier. While the utilitarian approach allows for parent involvement, the partnership is one-way as there is a "unidirectional agenda at play" (Pushor, 2010, p. 6). Parents, in this instance, are managed and moulded to serve the school's agenda. Only the communitarian leadership lends itself to home-school partnerships. Second, the findings affirm Pushor's (2010) description of the narrowly scripted roles of the
family in home-school partnerships. Third, they illustrate how school leaders’ beliefs and leadership practices can impact the construction of parent involvement in the school.

Both beliefs and leadership approaches are also emphasized in Auerbach's (2010, 2012) discussion on leadership for authentic partnership. Auerbach (2010) defined authentic partnerships as "mutually respectful alliances among educators, families, and community groups that value relationship building, dialogue, and power sharing as part of socially just, democratic schools" (p. 734). She highlighted a leadership continuum for school-family partnerships. She also illustrated how a school leader's belief about the "goal and nature of partnerships" (p. 748), view of parents, and leadership approach could either prevent partnership or promote an authentic partnership that was more "empowerment oriented and two-way in terms of communication and potential power sharing" (p. 750). As this leadership approach paid "attention to families" (Riehl, 2012, p. 13), Auerbach (2010) argued that leaders should make a shift towards this leadership form as it was the "most collaborative and proactive in terms of seeking parents voice and equal partnership" (p. 750). This in turn implies that school leaders must take the lead in fostering parental involvement in school.

Looking along a similar line, Mleczko and Kington (2013) examined how school leaders "enhanced" (p. 129) parental involvement. Situating their longitudinal case study in two schools in Britain that had a large number of students who came from the lower economic strata and had learning disabilities, the researchers found that distributive leadership was key in increasing parental engagement. In their study, they noted that school leaders who practiced distributive leadership were able to establish with their staff a school culture that promoted parental engagement. As a result, the staff was able to respond positively to the parents. They viewed parents as partners in their children's education and community members that should be
empowered with certain skills. Based on these findings, the researchers argued that parental involvement should be "embedded in the general vision of the school" (p. 133) and that the principal should drive this vision through distributed leadership. While the leadership style advocated by Mleczko and Kington (2013) may differ from that of Auerbach (2010), they do embrace a common notion that leadership, as also argued by Riehl (2012), must make parental involvement a priority in school. Riehl's (2012) stand has also been supported by Haines et al. (2015) who found that the proactive leadership approach of the school leader had "facilitated a school culture in which partnerships flourished" (p. 233).

Meanwhile, other researchers have argued that other than leadership approach, parent involvement is linked to the school leader's attitudes (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Povey et al., 2016). For example, Povey et al. (2016) found that the principals' collaborative leadership approach, along with their positive attitudes and high expectations for parental involvement enabled them to develop a positive school climate that facilitated parent engagement in school. Barr and Saltmarsh's (2014) findings concurred with Povey et al.'s (2016) as they too found that the principals' attitudes, together with communication, and collaborative leadership practices, were key in fostering and maintaining parent engagement in school. Hence, Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) concluded that parents were more likely to be engaged with schools that had school leaders who were welcoming and supportive of parent involvement. Conversely, parents were unlikely to be involved in schools if they perceived the principals to be "inaccessible, dismissive or disinterested" (p. 491). Their findings align with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) and Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (2010) theory and model of family involvement and the findings of researchers like Soodak and Erwin (2000).
Two things are evident from the above studies on school leadership. First, there is no one specific leadership approach that fosters partnerships. There are many: communitarian leadership (Ho, 2009), leadership for authentic partnerships (Auerbach, 2010, 2012), distributed leadership (Mleczko & Kington, 2013), and collaborative leadership (Povey et al., 2016). Second, the studies suggest that leadership plays a pivotal role in promoting a successful home-school partnerships. Leadership therefore matters as everything in home-school partnership "comes down to leadership" (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014, p. 491).

**Trust.** According to Angell, Stoner, and Shelden (2009), although there is a "growing recognition of the importance of trust in home-school partnerships and school effectiveness, an understanding of what constitutes trust is still emerging" (p. 160). While literature has shown that there are many definitions of trust (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Borum, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000), there are also some common elements of trust. Amongst them are integrity (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Robinson, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000), respect (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Shelden, Angell, Stoner, & Roseland, 2010), openness (Dobbins & Abbott, 2010; Hargreaves, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000), reliability (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Hargreaves, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000) and competence (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Robinson 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Trust is vital to home-school partnerships. This is because trust among the school leaders, teachers, and parents impacts teaching and learning (Robinson, 2011) and student outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012). Trust may also be required for collaboration between families and school (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2013) as well as among professionals (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). It is also a determinant of effective home-school partnerships (Adams & Christenson, 2000) and is deemed necessary for "establishing and
maintaining effective communication" (Patrikakou, 2011, p. 131) between school and families. Additionally, trust is "important in the establishment and maintenance of healthy parent-professional relationships as well as in overall school climate and success" (Angell et al., 2009). At the same time, trust may influence parents' views concerning school professionals and determine their involvement in their children's education (Soodak & Erwin, 2000). Parents value trust, and cultivating trust may promote "satisfying, meaningful, and productive partnerships between parents and professionals" (Soodak & Erwin, 2000, p. 38). While it is a challenge to develop trust, "once established, it often leads to greater collaboration, which in turn facilitates greater capacity to trust" (Scorgie & Sobsey, 2017, p. 257). In a study done by Lake and Billingsley (2000) in relation to special education system, trust was found to mitigate conflict between parents and school in special education. Conversely, broken trust can prevent parents from continuing their partnership with the school (Borum, 2010; Lake & Billingsley, 2000). "Without trust, communication becomes constrained and distorted, making problems more difficult to resolve" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 252). A lack of trust will also impact "parent-professional trust relationships" (Scorgie & Sobsey, 2017, p. 257), the quality of school services that include all forms of therapy (Angell et al., 2009), and home-school partnerships.

In the special education literature, school leader and teachers have been identified as factors that can hinder or facilitate trust in home-school partnerships (Angell et al., 2009; Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Rossetti et al., 2017; Scorgie & Sobsey, 2017; Shelden et al., 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). For example, in Shelden et al.'s (2010) American case study that involved 16 mothers who represented eight school districts, they found that relationships with the school leaders "had a strong effect on the trust of the mothers of children with disabilities" (p. 164). In particular, two categories impacted the mothers' views of the
principals—the principal's attributes and actions. Attributes were essentially "individual characteristics" (p. 164) that the mothers of children with disabilities had highlighted to have affected their trust level and they were further sub-categorized to personal and professional. In terms of personal attributes, "approachability was identified as a positive influence on the trust of the participants in principals" (p. 165). This attribute was also highlighted in Francis, Blue-Banning, Haines, Turnbull, and Gross's (2016a) study. According to the participants, approachability was shown by attentive listening and an "accepting attitude" (Shelden et al. 2010, p. 165). In this study, some school leaders were unapproachable. Hence, some parents did not approach and talk to the school leader.

Authentic caring was also another personal attribute that influenced the participants' trust. Parents viewed authentic caring as "genuine, voluntary, child-focused, and benefitting children or the parents themselves" (Shelden et al. 2010, p. 165). Generally, parents who trusted school leaders described them as "warm, respectful, and exhibiting caring for children" (p. 165). Similar to the above points about approachability, the display or absence of authentic caring can be a barrier as well as an enabler to home-school partnership respectively.

In terms of professional attributes, the principals needed to be accessible and knowledgeable about disabilities. In this study, all participants fully agreed that accessibility was a "necessary prerequisite for the establishment of trust" (Shelden et al., 2010, p. 165). Interestingly, they did not view the school leaders' lack of knowledge of the disability as a barrier to trust. This only became a barrier when the lack of knowledge was accompanied by a "lack of desire to learn" (p. 165). However, as revealed in Tucker and Schwartz's (2013) study, parents "developed a lack of trust" (p. 12) when they perceived the school leader to be lacking in knowledge of disability.
As for the principal’s actions, the parents identified three actions that impacted their trust level in the school leaders. They were the school leaders' ability to encourage their staff to connect with parents, attendance at IEP meetings, and personal involvement with the students.

Teachers too can either facilitate or inhibit the development of a "parent-professional trust relationships" (Scorgie & Sobsey, 2017, p. 257). In a study that involved 16 American mothers with children of disabilities, Angell et al.'s (2009) found that teacher characteristics of "authentic caring, communication, and knowledge of the child's disability" (p. 166) had the most impact on trust. To some extent, their findings paralleled the findings of Shelden et al. (2010) concerning school leaders' authentic caring. Authentic caring on the part of teachers "encompassed actions and behaviour that parents identified as genuine, voluntary, child-focused, and benefitting children or parents" (p. 166). Parents perceived teachers to show authentic care when they viewed the teachers treating the children as "individuals first and their disabilities as part of, but not the prime components of, their personalities" (p. 166). This is consistent with Lake and Billingsley's (2000) findings about how parents viewed their children and how they wanted professionals to view their children. Additionally, teachers who went the extra mile and focused on the child's holistic needs were considered by the parents to be child-focused in their actions. With regards to knowledge about children's disabilities, the parents in this study reported that a lack of knowledge in this area inhibited trust. The lack of knowledge was also linked to inflexibility. For example, a teacher who was unable to adjust their teaching pedagogy to meet the children's need inhibited trust. In the absence of both knowledge and flexibility, the findings showed that participants' trust "was negatively affected" (p. 169). Lack of communication by the teachers was also an inhibitor of trust. The parents wanted "frequent, honest, and immediate" (p.
communication when problem arose concerning their children. Trust was "facilitated" when
teachers contacted the parents immediately.

It is evident from the above two studies that there are many factors that intersect with
trust. These include leadership, individual's qualities, knowledge, and communication patterns.
As a result, it becomes very challenging for the schools to establish and develop trusting
relationships with parents due to the complex nature of partnership.

**School professionals' personal qualities, behaviour, and perceptions.** According to
Kasahara and Turnbull (2005), professionals, in special education, were "those using their
expertise ... [to interact] with [parents or families] and/or their children with disabilities" (p.
251). The literature on special education has consistently cited professionals as one of the many
factors that can either hinder or facilitate home-school partnerships (Blue-Banning et al., 2004;
Chu & Wu, 2012; Dobbins & Abbott, 2010; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Lake & Billingsley,
2000; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Often, the obstacles or enablers are
related to their personal qualities, behaviours, and beliefs. In Dobbins and Abbott's (2010) study,
the Irish parents of children with disabilities identified nine professional characteristics:
"motivation, empathy, informality, openness, flexibility, collaborativeness, friendliness, and
accessibility" (p. 27). While the list was not exhaustive, the findings showed that parents who
consistently had "positive ... perceptions of individuals across these characteristics " (p. 27) had a
"productive home-school relations" (p. 27). Conversely, parents' negative perceptions of
professionals lacking in these characteristics resulted in "poor relationships" (p. 27).

Similarly, the school professionals' behaviour can either facilitate or hinder collaborative
partnerships. Blue-Banning et al. (2004) identified 39 indicators of professional behaviour and
classified them into six broad themes or categories: communication, commitment, equality,
skills, trust, and respect. According to these American researchers, there was a remarkable "agreement between parents and professionals about what [constituted] positive behaviour on the part of the professionals" (p. 180) even though they were placed in separate focus groups. There were also differences, but these were "often a matter of the degree of emphasis rather than a conflict in basic values" (p. 180). Also, the categories were "highly interrelated" (p. 173). For example, "communication was seen as a vehicle for establishing trust, expressing respect, and conferring equality for all families" (p. 173). Finally, there were examples of successful and unsuccessful partnerships provided by the participants for all indicators. This suggests that the indicators could be a barrier as well as an enabler of productive home-school partnerships.

Additionally, the professionals' perceptions of parents can either hinder or facilitate collaboration. For example, Fylling and Sandvin (1999) found that the Norwegian teachers viewed the parents as implementer and client. Teachers who viewed parents as implementers saw the latter as "crucial to the process of special education, but only as an extension of what [was] going on in school" (p. 149), while teachers who viewed parents as clients saw the parents "as part of their child's problem" (p. 144). Whether parents were viewed as implementers or clients, both roles placed the parents "in a subordinate and powerless relationship" (p. 144) with the teachers who had viewed themselves as "experts" (p. 155). This view of teachers or professionals seeing themselves as experts was also mentioned by Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008). In their British study, they found the professionals viewing themselves as experts in their field. As result, the parents felt "disempowered" (p. 639) in their relationships with them because professional knowledge was deemed as more important than the parents' intimate knowledge of their child. However, this relationship could be reversed and made positive. Hodge and Runswick-Cole contended that professionals need to be open-minded, "free-thinking and [be willing] to take on
broad perspectives" (p. 645). Instead of dismissing parents' views, they should view parents as "guides" ... [and as] experts on their children who [could] identify the skills as well as the deficits" (p. 645). Only then, will it be possible to strike up an effective and equal partnership between the parents and professionals.

Studies have also shown that the school professionals' discrepant view of the child could hinder collaboration between the home and school (Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Jegatheesan, 2009; Park, Turnbull, & Park, 2001). In both Lake and Billingsley (2000) and Park, Turnbull, and Park's (2001) studies, parents were found to be unhappy when their child was viewed by the school professionals from a deficit perspective. They wanted the school professionals to view their child as a whole person (Lake & Billingsley) or from a strength-based perspective (Park et al., 2001).

In similar vein, Tatto et al.'s (2001) American study found that the teachers' perception of parents and their work relationship with parents had shaped parent-teacher partnerships. They noted that the teachers' perceptions tended to "stereotype students and their parents, casting them into an 'image' or 'role' that proved difficult to change—some teachers manifested the consequences of this stereotyping by pre-judging families as difficult even before agreeing to visit/or talk with them" (p. 326). In light of this, Tattoo et al. asserted that active parental involvement was hindered from the very start, and they suggested changing teachers' beliefs of the parents in order to establish effective parental involvement.

Literature has also shown that professionals have perceived CLD parents differently than non-CLD parents. In Kasahara and Turnbull's (2005) study, for instance, many Japanese parents perceived a "common tendency for professionals to consider themselves as people of higher status than families seeking their help" (p. 258). This perception led the Japanese parents to
"express a desire to equalize family-professional relationships. Equal relationships meant being respected as a collaborator with valuable perspectives" (p. 258).

Once again, the studies concerning the qualities, behaviour, and perceptions of professionals highlight the complexity of partnership because, as Robinson (2011) notes often, it is through our actions or behaviour that our character is revealed: "Our prior experience and belief systems shape what we notice, how we interpret what we have noticed, and how those interpretations then determine how we act" (p. 99). Hence, there is a need for professionals to check their assumptions and biases in order to facilitate effective partnerships.

**School professionals' communication.** Communication is a common theme that emerges in special education literature (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Chu, 2014; Chu & Wu, 2012; Francis et al., 2016a; Jegatheesan, 2009; Johnson et al., 2004; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Patriakakou, 2011; Rossetti et al., 2017; Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Swain & Walker, 2003; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). It shapes parent involvement in schools (Soodak & Erwin, 2000) and is key to the development of relationships, especially a trusting one (Francis et al., 2016a). A "highly valued method of collaboration" (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013, p. 8), communication has been identified as both a facilitator of collaboration and a source of conflict (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Lake & Billingsley, 2000).

The literature on special education has looked into varied aspects of communication. For instance, Tucker and Schwartz's (2013) American study probed the "importance, frequency, and type" (p. 8) of communication that parents of children with ASD preferred. Their findings indicated that 91% of the parents rated frequent communication as "Very Important" (p. 8), while 33% had rated the "desired frequency of communication" with (p. 8) school staff as "As Needed" (p. 8). The latter finding was not only an "interesting" (p. 8) one, but also a conflicting one when
compared to the first finding. In light of this, Tucker and Schwartz (2013) suggested further research. As for types of communication received from school, there were several. The most preferred one was "In-Person Discussions (32%) [followed by] Phone Calls (31%) and Daily Written Reports (22%)" (p. 8).

Other studies done in relation to frequency and type of communication have to some extent concurred with Tucker and Schwartz's (2013) findings. In terms of frequency of communication, Tucker and Schwartz's (2013) finding align with those of Lake and Billingsley (2000), Soodak and Erwin (2000), and Chu (2014). In terms of types of communication, Tucker and Schwartz's (2013) finding concerning in-person communication is consistent with those of Francis et al. (2016a), Jegatheesan, 2009, Park and Turnbull (2001), and Soodak and Erwin (2000). The participants in Francis et al.'s (2016a) and Soodak and Erwin's (2000) studies also wanted the communication to be informal. For Francis et al.'s (2016a) American participants, both informal and in-person communication was critical for "building a trusting family-professional partnerships" (p. 331). Also, Francis et al.'s (2016a) participants appreciated newsletters done in a "casual, friendly style" (p. 331), with daily notes, brag notes, positive postcards and home-school notebooks as means to facilitate daily communication. Despite their limited English proficiency, the Korean-American parents of Park and Turnbull's (2001) study also indicated an eagerness to receive notes from the teachers.

Other studies have surfaced the issue of communication styles adopted by school professionals. Generally, there is a consensus that verbal and written communication should be free from jargon (Chu, 2014; Johnson et al., 2004; Kayama, 2010; Lo, 2014; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Rossetti et al., 2017; Wolf, 1982). Wolf (1982) highlighted that the educational language used during IEP meetings was so "complex ... and obtuse that parents [felt] intimidated by the
complicated terms” (p. 78). This sentiment is also expressed by CLD families. Jegatheesan (2009) suggested that professionals “use layman's explanation of the disability" (p. 134) to make it easy for CLD parents to understand the discussion. Both Johnson et al. (2004) and Park and Turnbull (2001) added that there should also not be any abbreviations used during the discussion. To further facilitate communication and collaboration with CLD parents, researchers suggested that professionals be culturally sensitive (Chu, 2014; Chu & Wu, 2012; Jegatheesan, 2009; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012) and adopt a high-context communication style (Chan, 1992; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012) to promote a "reciprocal dialogue" (Chu, 2014, p. 26) with CLD families. However, using such a communication style required specific skills to be acquired, and Chu's (2014) study showed the lack of these skills amongst the professionals.

From the above research, three things are evident. First, the studies show that there are three facets to communication: type, frequency, and style. While there appears to be some agreement in these facets, there are also some differences in what parents expect in terms of effective communication. The differences suggest the need for professionals to explore with different families the best possible form of communication so as to foster collaboration between the home and school. Second, the above studies show that communication intersects with factors of trust and culture. Once again, the complex nature of partnership is underscored. Third, for non-Asian professionals, collaboration becomes very challenging as they have to contend with the CLD families' communication style, limited English proficiency, as well as cultural beliefs and values.

**School professionals' knowledge and skills.** Research has shown that both knowledge and skills of the professionals can impact collaboration (Francis et al., 2016a; Johnson et al., 2004; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; McCabe, 2007; Rossetti et al.,
2017; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013; Yan, Kim, Kang, & Wilkinson, 2017). For example, a lack of knowledge can lead to mistrust (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013) while a lack of skills, especially communication skills, can lead to breakdown in communication (Jegattheesan, 2009) between the parents and professionals. Parents of children with disabilities have identified several types of knowledge that professionals should ideally have. One of them is knowledge of the child's disability (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; McCabe, 2007; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Another is knowledge of instructional strategies (Francis et al., 2016a; Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2013; Rossetti et al., 2017; Yan et al., 2017). According to Rossetti et al. (2017), parents with children of disabilities expect teachers to keep abreast with "research-based practices and technology in the field" (p. 336) so as to assist their children in learning. Parents also expect professionals to have the knowledge of developing IEP goals and objectives (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). Along with knowledge, professionals need skills in problem-solving (Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013) to help them confidently handle problems related to the child's disability (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). They also require skills in collaboration (Tucker & Schwartz, 2013), active listening (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Johnson et al., 2004; Swain & Walker, 2003), communication (Blue-Banning et al., 2004, Johnson et al., 2004, Rossetti et al., 2017), and cross-cultural (Chu, 2014) skills. In view of these, there have been calls for professional development in the knowledge and skills areas (Francis et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2004; Yan et al., 2017).

In Singapore, all SPED teachers complete a one-year full time Diploma in Special Education program offered at the National Institute of Education, a teacher training institute in Singapore. The program does not only equip them with a "basic knowledge of the key areas of child development, educational theory, and the etiology of the major types of disabilities" (Poon et al., 2013, p. 63), but allows them to acquire skills. These skills include the "identification of
specific disabilities, the diagnosis and assessment of individual strengths and weaknesses, and planning and evaluating individualized intervention programs" (p. 63). According to Poon et al. (2013), there was still a need for SPED teachers to "receive training equal, if not greater, in intensity to which their counterparts―[the Allied Educators for Learning and Behavioral Support] in mainstream education receive" (p. 63). Their assertion aligns with the researchers cited above who call for professionals to be equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to foster home-school partnerships.

In summary, this whole sub-section on the school must be seen in relation to the sub-section on the home because the factors in both the home and school sections intersect and interact with each other. Seen in this light, the complexity and multi-dimensionality in home-school partnerships become even more apparent.

**The External Environment**

**Policy.** Partnership and collaborative working are regarded as a "good thing" (Swain & Walker, 2003, p. 549) at the policy level. In practice, however, partnerships continue "to be experienced as problematic by both parents and professionals" (Hodge & Runwick-Cole, 2008, p. 637). This is because, within the special education policy itself, there has often been a lack of clarity about the nature of parent-professionals partnership and about the roles of parents and professionals in the partnership arrangement (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Hodge & Runwick-Cole, 2008; Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2013; Swain & Walker, 2003). In their critique, Hodge and Runwick-Cole (2008) asserted that policy itself was a "source of potential conflict and tension" (p. 639). As policy was often "negotiated and enacted at the level of the individual interactions" (p. 639), the lack of clarity in a policy document about what constituted partnership, collaboration, and parental involvement can act as barriers to effective home-school partnerships,
which in turn may have "profound influence on the student's learning programs and progress" (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012, p. 158). Acknowledged in literature as a disconnect or gap between the rhetoric of partnership and the actual practice of partnership (Epstein, 1992), Blue-Banning et al. (2004) suggested that addressing this problem with a "series of dialogues between parents and professionals, using [a set of collaborative guidelines] might ... result in greater understanding and progress toward more satisfying [parent-professional] relationships" (p. 181). This need for dialogue between parents and educators is also supported by Lai and Vadeboncoeur's (2013) study. In addition to dialogue, parents and educators should be brought together for "collective reflection and joint contributions" (p. 895) to policy making.

While the above literature highlights the difficulty inherent in aligning policy with practice, it also raises a series of questions about countries that lack a special education legislation or policy. My own nation Singapore is a good example (Lim & Sang, 2000). In the absence of such a policy, how is partnership defined? Who defines it? How might it be carried out in practice? How might professionals and parents view their roles? How might student outcomes be affected? To date, there is little literature in this area.

**State ideologies.** In Singapore, state ideologies are deeply embedded in society. According to Mauzy and Milne (2002), most Singaporean analysts have discerned the Singapore's government's ideology to comprise the following: pragmatism, elitism, meritocracy, multiracialism, Asian values or communitarianism, and elitism (Mauzy & Milne, 2002). To add to these, Singapore has also identified Five Shared Values as her national ideology for Singaporeans of all ethnic groups to embrace as the nation progressed into the 21st century.

The term ideology implies
a coherent and interlinked sets of ideas, beliefs and values leading to a plan of action. It is the systemic use of ideas and values to mobilize people, or to gain their support, for some goals or end. Ideologies reflect the beliefs, values and interests of those elites—usually state leaders—who produce or adopt them. (Mauzy & Milne, 2002, p. 52)

In Singapore, state ideologies are deeply embedded in society because the state leaders use ideologies as a "powerful political tool ... to legitimize the political system and leaders" (p. 52).

Defined as "practical or useful and concerned with actual application rather than theory or speculation ... [and] equated with rationality" (Mauzy & Milne, 2002, p. 55), pragmatism has been the Singapore government's modus operandi. Following Singapore's independence, the nation's survival as a fledgling nation with no natural resources led the governing People's Action Party (PAP) to formulate a pragmatic ideology to govern Singapore (Chua, 1995). According to Mauzy and Milne, "there are two aspects to PAP pragmatism. One is a commitment to rationality and practical results, the litmus test being 'Does it work?', and the other is tactical" (p. 55). In embracing this ideology, the PAP government has been able to articulate rational policies based on the "principle that persons affected by it will respond in a calculated and predictable manner" (p. 55). At the same time, this pragmatic principle has allowed the government to drop any policies that are not producing the desired results. Tactical pragmatism, on the other hand, allows the PAP to politically manage the "means, directions, timing, wordings, and public presentation of policies, especially sensitive policies involving language, religion, and culture" (p. 53) and garner their support from the populace at the same time.

In Singapore, elitism is the belief that decision making concerning the society lies in the hands of a small group of people who are deemed as the "best and brightest" (p. 53). The
government exemplifies this. To begin with, the leaders "admire the power of the intellect" (p. 53) and hold the belief that only the best and brightest should govern the nation. They also believe in "logical calculation, rationality, and the general superiority of science and technology" (p. 53) in solving the nation's problems. Leaders deliver speeches that reflect this elitism. Elitism is also reflected in many of Singapore's policies. An example of this is the "commitment to a meritocratic system, based on ascriptive achievement criteria applied to students and government employees" (p. 54). Other than speeches and policies, even the PAP's approach to leadership and lifestyles are viewed as elitist (Mauzy & Milne, 2002).

According to Mauzy and Milne (2002), elitism is sometimes classified under the "rubric of meritocracy" (p. 55). Seen closely related to elitism, meritocracy is the "idea that each person's social and occupational position is determined by individual achievement, not political or economic influence; not race, class or parentage" (p. 55). Premised on the belief that "merit is determined objectively, or even scientifically" (p. 55), this principle or idea has resulted in streaming students at the various levels and placing them into the various tracks based on their scholastic achievements. In general, the top students are not only admitted to the best schools that are well equipped with resources and the "best" (p. 56) teachers to teach them, they are also awarded scholarships for their tertiary education. Those who have been diagnosed as having learning disabilities and are unable to cope with mainstream school are channeled to SPED schools. Meritocracy is the principle that has also been applied to the appointment and promotions of officers in the civil service, and in determining the salaries of the civil servants. In applying this principle to the education and civil service sectors respectively, the government believes that the best students will rise to the top and establish a "corrupt-free and efficient civil service" (p. 56).
Multiculturalism is another ideology that the government embraces because Singapore is a multiracial nation that comprises Chinese, Malays, Indians, and Eurasians. Since coming into power, the PAP leaders have made multiracialism one of its party's key principle. Synonymous with multiculturalism, the term means "respect for and tolerance for all ethnic groups and cultures represented in the society, and equality under the law" (Mauzy & Milne, 2002, p. 56).

The Singapore government has always been concerned about the cultural roots of Singapore's multiracial communities. Specifically, in the early 1980s, they were concerned about the Chinese immigrant communities who were losing their cultures and values through the use of their English Language. As the Chinese cultural values have been linked to Singapore's economic success, the Singapore leaders decided to promote Confucian ethics through the new moral education program that schools had to implement in 1982. Embedded in Confucianism are a number of social and political ideas. Essentially, Confucianists believe that each individual is endowed with different abilities. Hence, only the "most able and virtuous" (Mauzy & Milne, 2002, p. 58) are worthy of ruling the masses. They also believe that the aim of society is to maintain order and stability. Hence, Confucianism stresses "obedience to benevolent and paternalistic hierarchical authority, and emphasizes societal duty and obligations" (p. 58). Additionally, Confucianism advocates the "spirit of community, or communitarianism" (p. 58), which became a core value in the late 1980s for Singapore. "Socially, Confucianism advocates strong patriarchal families and filial piety, self-reliance, the merit principle, respect for learning, and good moral behaviour" (p. 58). With some modifications, Confucianism, in the eyes of the political leaders, could provide an answer as to how Singapore could be a modern nation, and yet, be distinctly different from the West because of Eastern values (Mauzy & Milne, 2002). Such values were best inculcated through policies. Mauzy and Milne (2002) have observed that a
number of PAP policies have been designed to "inculcate particular values and / or to channel social change and patterns of behavior amongst the populace" (p. 58-59). Known as political socialization or "social engineering" (p. 59), this has been directed at the Chinese as they have been brought up in the Chinese tradition and are the dominant community in Singapore's multiracial society.

Confucianism was later "caught up in issues of ethnicity and a Singaporean identity" (Mauzy & Milne, 2002, p. 62). In 1988, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong suggested that a "National Ideology" (p. 62) be developed to address the values of Singaporeans who were noticeably "shifting from communitarianism to individualism" (Lim, n.d., para. 2) due to their exposure to Western values. This need for Singapore to adopt a set of shared national values was reiterated by the then President Wee Kin Wee the following year, and this resulted in the Five Shared Values being identified and subsequently passed by parliament in 1991. The Five Shared Values are: "(1) Nation before community and society before self; (2) Family as the basic unit of society; (3) Community support and respect for individual; (4) Consensus, not conflict; and (5) Racial and religious harmony" (Government of Singapore, 1991, p. 9). To be inculcated in schools through the civics and moral education lessons, the Five Shared Values represent "the state's attempt to unite its people through the vision of a 'shared fate'" (Tan, 2012, p. 2) and the "state's vision of shared citizenship" (p. 2). A close scrutiny of the Shared Values shows a heavy emphasis on group interests, and a little regard for individual interests, such as "one's moral interest to attain certain ethical ideals, or civic interest to participate in public policy-making. It appears that ... all citizens should set aside their 'selfish' individual interests for the 'common good'" (p. 5). On the whole, both individual rights and interest are viewed as "antithetical to national interests" (p. 5). In view of this, parents in Singapore may not assert their individual
rights and interests in the same way that their counterparts in the West do because Singapore's Five Shared Values shape the way parents ought to behave.

Understanding the emphasis of Singapore's Five Shared Values reveals how state ideologies may act as a barrier to positive home-school partnerships in Singapore's schools. A good example of this is seen in the "Parent Support Groups" guidelines document that was developed by the MOE in close collaboration with current and former mainstream school PSG group leaders and representatives from the COMmunity and Parent in Support of Schools (COMPASS), a National Council set up in 1998 to "advise the [MOE] on ways in which home-school-community collaboration could be strengthened and promoted" (Ministry of Education, 2018c, para. 1). In this document, parent support groups are given a set of guidelines concerning how to "balance [their] own needs and ideas with the needs of the school, other parents and all the students in the school" (Ministry of Education, 2017c, p. 9). It must be noted that the SSOs receive both funding and guidance from the MOE to assist them in the operation of their SPED schools. To enable their schools to provide quality education to the SPED children, SPED schools draw on the "Quality Assurance Framework for Special Schools," a document produced by the MOE and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS), to help them manage their systems and processes and evaluate their school's performance. Included in this document is partnerships. As this document may reflect state ideologies, the unequal partnership between the SPED parents and SSO schools, as observed by Poon et al. (2013), may continue to prevail in Singapore's SPED schools.

**Parental workplace.** Work can present itself as a barrier to parent involvement in school. American researchers Murray et al. (2014) found that this was because parents may have inflexible work hours, demanding work schedule or "positions without paid leave" (p. 6). As a
result, these parents were unable to attend school meetings, serve as volunteers, or partake in parent involvement activities. Murray et al. (2014) argued that meetings and varied events should be rescheduled at "varied or multiple times" (p. 9) and parents' ideas on ways to overcome work and scheduling barriers should be sought.

In summary, this entire section—the home, school, and external environment depicts the interplay between and amongst the various factors identified in the different sub-sections. For instance, the factors in the external environment can influence how the home and school engage in partnerships. Likewise, the interaction between the factors in the home and school sub-sections can impact the quality of home-school partnerships. Due to the interplay between and among the factors, the notion of partnership becomes difficult to define and even more challenging to put into practice. Moreover, as the studies done in this section are contextualized, the findings may not be generalizable. However, they do help school professionals to be cognizant of the multi-dimensionality and complexity of home-school partnerships. They also suggest that the home-school partnership is still a work in progress that requires much needed effort, knowledge, and skills.

**Improving Home-School Partnerships**

The literature I have reviewed shows that parents of children with disabilities are generally keen in being partners with professionals (Chu, 2014; Chu & Wu, 2012; Dobbins & Abbott, 2010; Jegatheesan, 2009; Johnson et al., 2004). Hence, they have made suggestions about how to improve home-school partnership. For example, in Dobbins and Abbott's (2010) study, the parents gave several suggestions for improving parent-teacher interaction. Their suggestions implied that they "clearly [wanted] to know much more about, and work closer with their child's school, and those professionally involved" (p. 27). Additionally, the suggestions
made were related to "further information, increased contact and involvement, and better collaborative planning" (p. 27). Dobbins and Abbott asserted that all three areas were interrelated, and "mutually constitutive, since improvement in communication and parental involvement [were] key elements in developing effective partnership. Similarly, developing effective partnerships [would] necessarily involve effective practice in relation to communication and parental involvement" (p. 30). Interestingly, CLD parents gave a similar suggestion. In their view, developing a collaborative partnership with professionals hinged on improving intercultural communication, which could in turn enhance student outcomes (Chu, 2014; Chu & Wu, 2012; Jegatheesan, 2009; Rossetti et al., 2017).

The above studies share a common theme—communication. It is key to developing effective partnerships. Hence, communication is an area that beckons much attention if schools want to effectively engage in partnership with parents.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework [see Figure 1] that I present below is based on my research problem, questions, concepts associated with my topic—home-school partnerships in Singapore's special education, and key themes drawn from my literature review.

![Conceptual Framework](image)

*Figure 1. Conceptual framework on home-school partnership*
It is evident from literature that the child is at the heart of special education. Establishing a home-school partnership is considered to be "important" (Patrikakou, 2011, p. 131) for students with disabilities as this contributes to their development and success in school and life. Literature has indicated that there are many factors involved in home-school partnerships, which can be both barriers and enablers (Blue-Banning et al., 2004) and can impact a positive home-school relationship (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012). Influenced by Bronfenbrenner's (1977) socio-ecological model, I have grouped the factors into three broad dimensions: the home, school, and external environment. In my conceptual framework, I have represented each dimension with a concentric circle. Together, they reflect the "multidimensional" (Patrikakou et al., 2005, p. 182) nature of home-school partnership. As partnership involves an interaction between the home and school, this interaction is illustrated by a two-way arrow. It must be noted that interaction does not just occur between two dimensions, but it can occur between and amongst the factors within a single dimension as well. For example, within the school dimension, communication can intersect and interact with trust and professionals' behaviour. This intersection highlights yet another facet to home-school partnership—it's complexity. When the dimensions interact with one another, they can, as seen in literature, influence the outcomes of home-school partnerships. These outcomes can be either positive or negative, effective or ineffective, or healthy or unhealthy. Depending on the degree of influence, the home-school partnership can be an equal or an unequal one. Also, from these outcomes, areas for improvement can be identified to further develop and strengthen home-school partnerships. Based on this conceptual framework, it becomes clear that partnership is not a simple term to define nor easy to put into practice because of the multi-dimensional and complex nature of partnership itself. This perhaps accounts for why
there is a disconnect between the rhetoric of partnership and the actual practice of partnership, and why this disconnect continues to be a problem that is yet to be resolved.

Summary

This chapter focused on a review of literature pertaining to home-school partnerships in special education. Specifically, the review is done to gain a deeper understanding of how parents perceive and experience home-school partnerships. To understand this, I have examined the definition of partnership and illustrated its lack of clear definition because partnership is a context-specific construct. I have also discussed the roles of parents in special education, and illustrated their mixed perceptions concerning their involvement in special education.

Additionally, I have discussed three theoretical perspectives and models concerning home-school partnerships and highlighted their strengths and weaknesses. In particular, I have drawn on the strengths of Bronfrenbrenner's (1977) model to help me develop my conceptual framework for this chapter. Specifically, Bronfrenbrenner's (1977) model provides a clear explanation of why the home, school, and relationship are important for children's development. Unlike Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model, that takes a narrow view of parental involvement, Bronfrenbrenner's (1977) model examines multiple contexts that can affect child development and home-school partnerships. Also, I have identified the home, school, and external factors, and elucidated how their dynamic interaction could potentially act as both barriers and enablers to successful home-school partnerships. At the same time, I have shown how the factors intersect, and how this intersection depicts the multidimensionality and complexity of home-school partnerships. Finally, I have reviewed the areas in home-school partnerships that warrant improvement.
Also, in my literature review, I have identified gaps. To begin with, there is a gap in the definition concerning partnership, as differing views reflect differing contexts. This lack of definition has in turn resulted in a perception gap between the professionals and parents concerning their roles and what partnership or collaboration entails. From the literature review, I have also identified gaps in the knowledge of both parents and professionals about home-school partnerships, as well as communication and language gaps between the parents and professionals. Additionally, there is a disconnect between the rhetoric of partnership and the actual practice of partnership. Specifically for Singapore, the lack of special education legislation or policy raises many unanswered questions concerning home-school partnerships. To add to this, my literature review has come mainly from the Western context. While I have included literature taken from Asian context, this pales significantly against the plethora of literature that comes from the West. This is indicative of literature gap that exists in both the Asian and Singaporean contexts. As the purpose of my study is to explore and understand the parents' perceptions and experiences regarding present home-school partnerships in Singapore's special education (SPED), I hope the findings of my study contribute to the body of literature in Asian and Singaporean contexts.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

The chapter outlines the methodology and methods that were used in this inquiry. In this chapter, I discuss the rationale for using a qualitative research approach, the rationale for selecting a case study methodology, the research setting, how my study participants were selected, and how the data are collected and analyzed. This is followed by the measures taken to establish trustworthiness and the study's limitations and delimitations. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Approach

This research inquiry took a qualitative approach for several reasons. First, the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative or interpretive research is based on the view that "reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event. Researchers do not find knowledge, they construct it" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). Termed as constructivism, this concept is linked to interpretivism (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016). As an emerging researcher having situated myself in my inquiry, I realize that, ontologically, I do not subscribe to a single reality. Rather, my life experience has shown me that there are multiple realities (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011) as there are many individual perspectives in life. These multiple realities are constructed through our own personal experiences and interactions with others in our community or environment (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011, Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Realities of this nature are thus "specific" (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 100), context dependent, and exist "largely within people's mind" (Yazan, 2015, p. 138). Epistemologically, I believe that knowledge is socially constructed and emerges from "people's social practices" (p. 138). Similar to Yazan (2015), I agree with
Crotty (1998) that research must make an attempt to seek for "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (p. 67). In light of this, undertaking a qualitative approach was congruent with my constructivist stance.

Second, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a "central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds. Constructivism thus underlies ... qualitative study. Here, the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved" (p. 24). Crotty (1998) asserts that meaning "is not discovered but constructed. Meaning does not inhere in the object, merely waiting for someone to come upon it. [Rather, meanings] are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (pp. 42-43). As a result, qualitative researchers focus on the following: "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). In relation to my inquiry, I endeavoured to learn about how SPED parents understood and constructed meaning of their experiences of home-school partnerships. Taking this "naturalistic" (Patton, 2002, p. 39) approach gave me the opportunity to gather data from the participants and form categories or themes to gain a deeper understanding of how SPED parents perceived, constructed, and experienced home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools.

Third, Patton (2015) states that qualitative methods "facilitate study of issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth ... and details of qualitative inquiry" (p. 22). In light of my research focus—to develop a deeper understanding of SPED parents' views about and experiences of home-school partnerships in Singapore—taking a qualitative approach allowed
me to achieve the depth and details that this inquiry demanded. As the participants were encouraged to share their perceptions and experiences, I was able to draw on their direct quotations, including references to artifacts. In addition, I drew on citations from documents, as well as my own reflections recorded in my researcher journal, to present findings that were thick or "richly descriptive" (Merriam, 2009, p. 16). As my literature review had established how complex home-school partnership was, this approach also provided me with a "complex, detailed understanding of [this] issue" (Creswell, 2013, p. 48).

Fourth, in a qualitative approach, participants' perspectives are seen as key to understanding a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). From an "emic" or insider's perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16), I was able to uncover and understand the SPED parents' perspectives about home-school partnerships (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This, in turn, has offered me the opportunity to contribute to the body of local literature and practice of education in the Singapore special education context.

In summary, the qualitative approach was the best fit for my research inquiry. This was because the approach supported the purpose of my inquiry. Above all, the underlying philosophical assumptions of qualitative research aligned with my own ontological and epistemological stances.

**Rationale for Case Study Methodology**

Case study is "one of the most frequently used qualitative research methodologies" (Yazan, 2015, p. 134), and the seminal work of three authors, namely Robert K. Yin, Sharan Merriam, and Robert E. Stake, is often drawn upon to assist educational researchers to conduct a case study. As researchers and research methodologists, all three authors have their individual "epistemic commitments that impact their perspectives on case study methodology" (p. 136). Yin
shows positivist inclinations in his perspective on case study in contrast to Stake, who aligns "closely with a constructivist and interpretivist orientation" (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017, p. 11). Merriam appears to be "much closer" (Yazan, 2015, p. 137) to Stake's epistemological stance than Yin's, as she maintains a constructivist approach to case study research (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017; Yazan, 2015). As a nascent researcher who subscribes to the constructivist paradigm, I am more comfortable aligning with Merriam and Stake's perspective of a case study than with Yin's (2014).

I selected the case study research approach for the following reasons. First, several researchers (Creswell, 2013, 2015; Flyvberg, 2011; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Yin, 2014) have noted that the case study methodology allows for a holistic, and in-depth investigation of a "contemporary phenomenon ... within its real-world context" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). Specifically for Merriam (2009), the "single most defining characteristic of a case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case" (p. 40). As the case (unit of analysis or object of study) is bounded, a researcher can "fence in" (p. 40) what he or she is going to study. The case, then, could focus on a person, a program or event, a group, an institution, a specific policy issue, or even a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). In light of this, a case study entails a detailed investigation of a bounded system. In my case study, the phenomenon being investigated was SPED parents' perceptions about home-school partnership in Singapore's SPED schools. What bounded my case and constituted this case study's unit of analysis was that all my participants were parents who had children with mild intellectual disability who were or had been enrolled in a SPED school in Singapore. In delimiting my study, I was able to explore my case (bounded system) "through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information [e.g. interviews, artifacts, documents, [and] researcher's field notes, and [report] a case description and case
themes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). According to Merriam (2009), the qualitative case study design is most suitable for those researchers who are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation" (p. 42) and, thus, aligned well with the purpose of my inquiry, overarching research question, and my constructivist stance.

Second, doing a case study allowed me to get close to my participants, and obtain "multiple" (Flyvberg, 2011, p. 303) details from them (Flyvberg, 2011, Merriam, 1998; 2009). These were beneficial. First, it was "important for the development of nuanced view of reality" (p. 303) as human behaviours could not be comprehended in a simplistic way. Hence, doing a case study gave me the opportunity to obtain participants' insights and understanding of the complex nature of home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools. Second, a case study provides a process to support the researcher's own learning in "developing the skills needed to do a good research" (Flyvberg, 2011, p. 303). For me, having a set of skills to do a good research was indeed important because I was interested in doing an ethical study that demonstrates rigour in terms of "design, conduct, analysis, and reporting" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011a, p. 88).

Furthermore, utilizing the case study methodology allowed me to draw on its strengths. "Anchored in real-life situations" (Merriam, 2009, p. 51), a case study provides "insights" (p. 50) and understanding concerning the phenomenon. In terms of my own study, these insights or understandings can "in turn affect and perhaps improve" (p. 51) home-school partnerships in Singapore's special education schools. According to Merriam (1998; 2009), case study has proven especially useful for informing policy. As established in my literature review, there is no home-school partnership policy in Singapore at present (Lim & Sang, 2000; M. Ang, personal communication, October 25, 2017). Hence, the insights and understanding obtained from my
case study may prompt policy makers to develop a policy that is relevant for Singapore and, in turn encourage school leaders and school professionals to review and improve current home-school partnership practice in Singapore's SPED schools.

In summary, the case-study methodology utilized in this study helped in the exploration of the real-life context and practices of home-school partnership in Singapore's SPED schools. By using Merriam's (1998, 2009) methodological approach for rendering insight and understanding, I believe that my study will contribute to the field of home-school partnership.

**Research Setting**

The case study was conducted in Singapore, a multi-racial city state. Demographically, Singapore's population consists of ethnic Chinese, Malays, Indians, and Eurasians. Based on the 2018 population census, the ethnic Chinese make up 74.3% of the ethnic composition of Singapore. This is followed by the Malays, Indians, and Others (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2017). Reflecting this, the participants in this case study were predominantly ethnic Chinese (see Appendix C). Moreover, the majority of Singapore's population lives in Housing and Development Board (HDB) flats or apartments. All HDB flats are publicly governed and developed and are located in 23 self-contained satellite towns that are found in the north, south, east, and west of Singapore. In this study, several of the participants lived in HDB apartments that were situated in the north side of Singapore. Based on the demographic data (see Appendix C), many of them belonged to the middle-income group. None lived close to their child's special school as the SPED schools are all located in different parts of the island.

In this study, all the participants came from one SSO. The SSO has several schools under its charge. The different schools in this SSO cater to different age groups. As a result, the children of the participants had attended a minimum of two schools—primary and secondary, or
a maximum of three schools—primary, secondary, and vocational that are under this SSO. This therefore provided the parent participants with good insight into how the concept of home-school partnership was operationalized by this SSO.

**Research Participants**

For this study, I chose to purposefully select participants. This approach is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to unearth, comprehend, and obtain insight (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, Patton, 2015). I was, therefore, "strategic" (Patton, 2015, p. 263) in selecting a small group of participants "from which the most [could] be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96) about the phenomenon under study (p. 77). Specifically, I wanted a purposeful sample of SPED parents who had a sufficient amount of experience working closely with the SPED schools that were run by the SSO in Singapore.

As for sample size, Patton (2002, 2015) argues that there are no rules. In his view, the size is dependent on what the researcher wants to find out, what will be useful and doable based on the set time and resources allocated to the study. Taking this into consideration, I interviewed ten participants, as this size allowed me to obtain multiple perspectives pertaining to the complex phenomenon that I was investigating. The size was also a manageable number in terms of the time constraints that I had for conducting interviews, which took place between late August 2018 and late September 2018.

According to Merriam (2009), a selection criteria needs to be established within the case before data collection begins. The following, therefore, were my criteria for a purposeful selection of participants:
1. Be a Singaporean

2. Have been engaged in home-school partnerships in a SPED school in Singapore for more than seven years.

In this study, all my selected participants met the criteria except for one who was a permanent resident who had lived in Singapore for more than 30 years. Following a consultation with my supervisor, I decided to include the participant as I deemed him to be an information rich resource; his length of residency made him familiar with the special education context in Singapore. As all my participants had substantial years of involvement in home-school partnership, I was able to understand what a positive home-school partnership was, identify barriers and facilitators of positive home-school partnership, and what improvements were needed to enhance positive home-school partnership in the SPED schools in Singapore.

**Planning and Conducting the Case Study**

After receiving approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) of the University of Calgary on 16 August 2018, I contacted eight individual and one couple who were potential parent participants to invite them to be a part of my study. Eight were from my previous school. Amongst the eight, several of them had occasionally kept in touch with me since I left Singapore in 2010. While I had a pre-existing relationship with them, this relationship was strictly "arms-length"—based on courteous professionalism. From amongst this pool of potential parent participants, one was unknown to me, but had expressed interest in the study to one of the potential parent participant that I knew. Unlike the other potential parent participants, 

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4 Although I have had a pre-existing relationship with them, I do not know the parents' nationalities. This therefore necessitates this criteria as this is a Singapore case study.

5 I have been away from Singapore for more than 10 years. Thus, I am unsure whether the parents have been actively involved in home-school partnerships since I left in 2010. As a result, this criteria also needs to be set.
this potential parent participant's child attended another school run by the SSO. In this initial contact, I informed them of the purpose and rationale of the study. I also informed them of my selection criteria so that those who did not meet the criteria need not continue their correspondence with me. Most importantly, I stressed that their participation was voluntary, and that they were not obligated in any way to participate due to our pre-existing relationship. They could, if they wanted to, withdraw from the study at any point until November 15, 2018.

Out of the nine potential participants whom I contacted, three did not meet the criteria and two declined to participate in the study. Among the four willing potential participants, I agreed to allow one of them to be interviewed with her spouse who had expressed an interest as I thought that they would offer me with a different perspective from the other participants because they had worked with three schools run by the SSO. As I was in need of six participants, I therefore employed a snowball approach to recruitment (Patton, 2002, 2015) and asked one of the willing participants if she could refer me to other potential participants. I also realized that I lacked participants from one of the SSO schools (school C), so I also requested potential participants from this school, as it was important for me to gain insights from different school contexts. The parent did furnish me with the names and contact numbers of four potential parents with whom I did not have a pre-existing relationship. When contacted, all of them expressed immediate interest. Out of the four, three met the criteria, and one parent did not. As aforementioned, I had selected him as I deemed him to be an information rich case. Moreover, he, Jay, and Ling, his wife (who met the selection criteria) were parents of a child with down syndrome, so I included them as a couple in hopes that they would provide me with a perspective different from other participants. Additionally, because Jay is a Caucasian, I thought he might bring a unique perspective.
As for the other three participants, they were included for the following reasons. Two of them had children who attended school C, and the other would be able to provide a perspective of a parent of a child with ASD and ADHD disorder. I sent all participants an email (one email was sent to each couple) informing them that they had been selected for the study. Attached to this email was a Participant Information Letter (see Appendix D) and Biographic Information Questionnaire (see Appendix E). The former reminded them that their participation was voluntary, and that they were not obligated in any way to participate, while the latter contained four sets of questions pertaining to parent's demographic information and to their child's disability type. This demographic information of the participants was needed for the following reasons. Studies done with culturally and linguistically diverse participants have shown a link between demographic background and their perceptions of home-school partnerships (Harry & Kalyanpur, 1994; Jegatheesan, 2009; Jegatheesan et al., 2010; Lo, 2009). As Singapore is a highly heterogeneous, multi-racial society, and as the selected participants came from different demographic groups, I thought that this may help "explain what may be underlying an individual's perceptions, as well as the similarities and differences in perceptions among participants" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 149). As it turned out, in this study, the parent's ethnicity or cultural background, helped to explain why they were keen to partner with the school. Upon receiving their completed Biographic Information Questionnaire, I entered the information provided in a Participant's Demographic Matrix form that I created (see Appendix C). At the same time, I phoned the participants to arrange a mutually agreed upon interview date, time, and venue. An email was then sent to reconfirm the interview date, time, and venue. Attached to this email was a set of interview questions and a list of suggested documents (see Appendix F) that they may wish to bring to the interview as artifacts to potentially facilitate their
responses. The purpose of sending the participants the interview questions and the list of suggested documents early was twofold: to give my participants time to reflect on the interview questions, and to allow them time to gather the documents to share with me during the interview session. On the interview day, I brought two sets of the Informed Consent forms (see Appendix G) to the meeting so that I could review the contents of the form with my participant. When both copies were signed, a copy was given to the participant, and the other was kept by me.

Before the interviews began, I showed and piloted the interview questions with two SPED parents who were not selected due to not meeting my criteria. Their invaluable feedback led me to simplify the questions so as to make them more comprehensible and to ensure a productive interview (see Appendix F). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the interview questions needed to be "couched in familiar language ... that [reflected the respondent's worldview" (p. 117).

**Data Collection Methods**

This case study drew on methods described by Merriam (1998, 2009), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), Patton (2015), and Brinkman and Kvale (2015): a brief questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, consideration of artifacts, review of documents, field notes, and a reflective journal. Collectively, these different methods of data collection helped me to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being investigated and to achieve trustworthiness. The subsequent sub-sections describe the methods in more detail.

**Questionnaires.** Before the interviews, participants were given a brief form where they were asked to answer a set of four short "biographic" questions pertaining to demographic information and to their child's disability type (see Appendix E). As aforementioned, the information provided helped to "explain what may be underlying an individual's perceptions, as
well as the similarities and differences in perceptions among participants" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 149).

**Interviews.** The first data collection began on August 29, 2018. I used interviews to help me generate data for four reasons. First, this method allowed for an in-depth exploration and understanding of the case (Simons, 2009). Second, it allowed me to uncover the participants' point of view, as they had knowledge of and personal experiences concerning the problem of concern (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Third, it enabled me to gain an inner perspective of the participants' behaviours, feelings, and how they interpret the world around them, as these were not directly observable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Merriam and Tisdale (2016) added that interviews "are necessary ... when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 108). Fourthly, interviews provided me with the opportunity to probe during the interview. The ability to probe permitted me to obtain more information where necessary and to clarify what my participants had said to me to ensure understanding. At the same time, probing helped me to respond to the interviewees as well as establish a rapport with them in an interactive manner (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Specifically, I used semi-structured interviews. In total, there were 11 semi-structured interview questions. As aforementioned, the interview questions were simplified to ensure a productive interview. For example, the questions in question seven were as follows: "In your view, what would you say are some home or personal factors that have made home-school partnership challenging for you? Can you give specific examples and describe them?" They were rephrased in the following manner: "Could you share three personal difficulties or struggles you have had whenever you worked with your child's SPED school? Tell me more about these experiences." These were then shown to my supervisor for inputs and approval. As the intent of
the questions was not changed, the rephrased questions were not resubmitted to the CFREB as a modification for approval. These questions were then reflected in my interview protocol (see Appendix H).

I conducted the interviews in a location that ensured confidentiality and participant anonymity. For interviews that involved couples, both spouses attended the interview together. All interviews were audiotaped. Before the recording began, I reminded all participants not to share recent examples. This was to ensure that no harm would come to them or their family members when the study was published. On an average, each interview was approximately 120 minutes long instead of 75 minutes as the majority of the participants did not come prepared for the interview even though the interview questions were sent one week ahead of time. I assumed they all led a busy life. They did, however, apologize for their lack of preparation. While I tried to respect their time, I noted that they were very willing to share and give of their time when it came to the interview. During the interviews, I took down some brief notes. While I had predetermined questions to ensure a productive interview, I remained "open to the unexpected" (Simons, 2009, p. 57) and was flexible when a participant did not respond in a way to follow the line of questioning. Also, to help me gain clarity and to encourage my participants to provide more details, I utilized probing questions. In a couple of cases, to encourage the participants to respond to question 1b, concerning the notion of partnership and question 10 concerning the absence of a national guideline, I utilized a picture prompt and a document entitled "Parent Support Groups" drawn up by COMPASS for mainstream school parents. Before closing each interview, the participants were invited to add anything that they may not have shared during the interview.
Following each interview, I transcribed the entire the audiooptaped recordings into text data using Microsoft Word. I did the transcribing personally as I wanted to stay as close to the data as possible. In this way, I was able to note possible themes that emerged during the transcription. Before transcribing, I assigned a colour code for each participant's transcript for ease of identification. When transcribing the recordings verbatim, I followed Creswell's (2015) guidelines, which required the creation of a large margin on each side of the text. Upon completion of each transcript, I sent it to the participant for member checking. Through this process, the participants had the opportunity to review the interview transcripts, make additions, corrections, or deletions to the transcripts, or clarify meanings. Each participant was asked to return the revisions to me through email within two weeks of receiving the transcripts. Alternatively, they could call me to arrange for a convenient date for the verified transcripts to be collected at a mutually agreed location. All participants made revisions to their transcripts. For two participants who did not own a personal computer, special accommodations were made. In one case, the participant requested that I make a second visit to her home to help her make the edits on my personal laptop. In another case, the participant requested permission to come to my home to make the edits on my laptop. In both instances, in addition to assisting the participants to edit, I also had the opportunity to seek for further clarification. Those who self-edited their transcript took a longer time to return it. Only one participant chose to withdraw as she realized that she had cited recent examples, even though I had asked participants not to do so. After I explained the possible consequences of including the data of her transcript, the participant emailed to inform me of her decision to withdraw. Upon receiving her email, the participant's contributed data were removed from the study and destroyed. As sufficient data had been gathered, no replacement participant was needed.
**Documents and artifacts collection.** According to some researchers, the use of artifacts and documents can be a valuable source of information in qualitative research (Creswell, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I invited the participants to share relevant artifacts during the interview. Examples of potential artifacts that could be shared were listed below the list of interview questions that were sent to the participants (see Appendix F). During the interview, the artifacts brought by the participants were used to help them recall and articulate their experiences and views of home-school partnerships. In this way, I was be able to obtain an in-depth account of how home-school partnerships was conducted in the Singapore SPED school context. Amongst the artifacts shared were a numeracy assessment paper; a communication booklet that contained the school's vision, mission, strategic goals; occasional communication messages from the teacher to the parent; and some PowerPoint slides that presented a school's strategic goals for a parent workshop. I recorded receipt of each artifact in a Document Summary Form (see Appendix I).

In addition to artifacts, following the interviews, I also accessed and reviewed online public documents. These documents included the MOE's 5-day work week policy, the MOE's SPED curriculum framework, the SSO's school curriculum framework, the National Institute of Education (NIE) course outline for SPED trainee teachers, and both the SSO and NCSS hiring criteria. I also wrote down my thoughts about each document in the Document Summary Form. While both artifacts and documents may have their limitations related to its authenticity and fragmentary nature as it was not produced for research (Merriam, 2009), I did not find these observations to hold true for my study as all the artifacts collected and documents reviewed were authentic as they were either official documents generated by the schools or obtained from
Field notes. I took field notes during the interviews and recorded them in the right margin of the interview protocol. According to Merriam (1998, 2009), these have a "reflective component" (Merriam, 2009, p. 131) and, in my study, the field notes were descriptive in nature. They included my personal observations about the physical setting, participants' non-verbal behaviours, such as silence, flipping through blank pages of a communication book, and shrugging of shoulders; the participants' tone of voice; the language used, such as expletives; key words that stood out for me, hunches, and recurring themes and initial interpretations. These brief notes later enabled me to write my reflective journal. As a source of data, my field notes, along with the documents, artifacts, and interviews, allowed me to bring "together multiple perspectives" (Patton, 2002, p. 306), which in turn helped me to provide a comprehensive perspective of the phenomenon that I investigated.

Reflective journal. I kept a reflective journal to keep track of the details of the research process. Unlike my field notes, the reflective journal was where I recorded my perceptions, insights, assumptions, and biases throughout the whole study. Specifically, I noted my thoughts, feelings significant moments, and connections made between what a participant had stated and the literature that I had reviewed.

Data Management.

For each of my participants, I created eight separate computer files including sub-files for audio recording, transcribed interview, shared artifacts and document summary form, if any, member checked transcripts, and reflective journal of each interview. Having these files enabled me to store, organize, and retrieve data easily.
Analyzing Case Study Evidence.

According to Patton (2002), qualitative analysis transforms data into findings, and this involves "reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal" (p. 432). Data analysis is therefore complex, ongoing, recursive, and iterative process (Merriam, 1998, 2009). For me, this process entailed returning consistently to the original data and considering the themes that I found emerging in terms of my research question (Merriam, 2009).

The initial step for analysis began by preparing and organizing the data. As aforementioned, I had transcribed the interviews and created a folder for each participant on my computer. After transcribing each interview, I printed a hard copy of each transcript and reviewed it by listening to the audio recording again. Then, I read the transcript in order to "get a sense" (Creswell, 2015, p. 243) of it. I then reread the transcript and did in vivo coding. This entailed picking out words or short phrases from the participant's responses (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), which I manually wrote in the right margin of the transcript. I again reread each transcript and employed descriptive coding. This entailed writing a word or short phrase that best described the meaning of each segment of the text used (Miles et al., 2014) in the left margin of the transcript (see Appendix J). Through this manner, I was engaging in my preliminary cycle of my coding process.

The coding process on NVivo began only after I uploaded all the member checked transcripts along with the artifacts and documents into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software tool. I then followed Miles et al.'s (2014) two cycles of coding. Before the first cycle of coding began, I identified three broad categories that I felt best exemplified my
three research questions: positive experiences, barriers, and suggestions. Following this, I carefully read each transcript and did in vivo coding first as I wanted to "[honour] the participant's voice" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74). This was subsequently followed by descriptive coding. In this way, codes were allowed to emerge and unfold in an inductive manner.

In the second cycle of coding, I again reread the transcripts and codes and made additions and deletions. At the same time, I also renamed and merged some codes. For example, after reflection, the code "Willing to Make an Effort" was renamed to "Going the Extra Mile" while the codes "Unapproachable" and "Inaccessible" were merged to become "Unapproachable" in order to "more precisely reflect what [was] in the data" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 209). During this cycle, codes were grouped and regrouped as patterns emerged. These patterns of codes formed categories (Miles et al., 2014) or themes or findings that answered the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The themes were layered through. This was done by creating smaller categories called subcodes (Miles et al., 2014) or subthemes that helped to organize the data into more specific groups (Saldaña, 2016). In a hierarchical coding or layering process, a subcode is an extension of a parent code. For example, a parent code that I used in my study was "Perceptions" and the subcodes included "Perception of Child's Disability" and "Perception of Parents." An example of how some codes appeared in NVivo and how they relate to each other can be found in Appendix J.

As I wanted to reconfirm my themes and sub-themes, I repeated Miles et al. (2014) coding processes as described in the above paragraphs. By engaging in this repeat cycle, I was able to reduce the number of codes further (Saldaña, 2016) and sharpen the categories or themes by renaming them and their subcodes that were subsumed under the themes or regrouping the sub-codes as patterns emerged so that they best explained my participants' perspectives and
answered my research questions. At the same time, repeating this coding process enabled me to reconfirm my themes and sub-themes. An example of a theme and sub-theme that consistently emerged from all three cycles of the coding process was communications and home visit respectively (see Appendix K).

**Develop conclusions, recommendations, and implications.** The process of analysis continued as I wrote my findings chapter. I often revisited the transcripts and continued to make changes on NVivo following discussions with my supervisor. For example, I would move data between themes, make deletions, rename categories, or subsume a code under a major category. This process enabled greater clarity.

According to Merriam (1998, 2009), data analysis must move beyond basic description that entails a systematic classifying of data and construction of categories or themes. That is, the categories or themes that are created as part of data analysis do not just describe the data collected, but they reflect the researcher's deep reflection and interpretation of the data that will assist in developing conclusions and recommendations (Merriam, 1998, 2009). In the analysis of my case study data, both the themes and recurring patterns, were considered along with the artifacts, documents, my study's purpose, my experience and knowledge of the context, my deep reflection, the meaning made explicit by my participants, the comparisons made between my findings and the literature in my conceptual framework, helped me build or construct an in depth understanding of the phenomenon, as well as conclusions for my case and suggestions for future research.

**Ethical Consideration**

According to Cohen et al. (2011a), ethical issues may arise from the kind of problems being investigated and the methods used by the researcher to obtain accurate data. Hence, this
implies that ethical issues may arise at each stage of the research process (Cohen et al., 2011a). As a researcher, it was thus my responsibility to prevent or mitigate any negative consequences to my research participants and carry out an "ethically responsible research" (Sieber, 2009, p. 106). According to Sieber (2009), "the ethics of social and behavioral research is about creating a mutually respectful, win-win relationship in which important and useful knowledge is sought, participants are pleased to respond candidly, valid results are obtained, and the community considers the conclusion constructive" (p. 106).

To help me conduct an ethically responsible inquiry, I undertook the following actions. First, I applied and received approval from the CFREB and adhered to the requirements of the ethics board. This was done by providing potential participants with a Participant Information Letter (see Appendix D) and selected participants with informed consent information. This information was also reviewed with the participants at the beginning of the interview to ensure that they had a full understanding of their participation before we signed the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix G).

Second, to minimize hardship to the participants, I built and maintained a trusting relationship with my participants. According to Simons (2009), trust is "essential to good field relations" (p. 100). Hence, I did this by sharing "fully [my] identity and background" (Cohen et al., 2011a, p. 103), and being both "open" (Simons, 2009, p. 47) and transparent with my participants about the purpose of my study and the research procedures. I also conducted my interview in a conversational manner (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Simons, 2009), respected participants' ideas (Simons, 2009), and treated them as equal partners. Additionally, I assured them that, at no time, would their participation or responses be judged or evaluated by me. At the
same time, I also reminded them of their right to withdraw up to a stipulated date, which was November 15, 2018.

Third, to ensure that no harm befell my participants, I reminded them not to share current examples before the interview began. For one participant who realized that she had shared current examples, advice was given concerning the consequences of using the transcript. As the participant decided to withdraw from the study, the participant's contributed data were subsequently removed from the study and destroyed.

Fourth, I attended privacy and confidentiality throughout the research process by using the pseudonyms chosen by participants to protect their identity. I likewise assigned pseudonyms to replace the names of schools mentioned by the participants. All my transcripts included the pseudonyms. Moreover, I ensured that the list of connecting pseudonyms with actual names was stored and locked in a filing cabinet only accessible by me. All paper copies of and file folders for recording data were also stored in a locked cabinet. All electronic data continues to be stored on a password-protected computer. The data will be kept for five years, after which time they would be permanently destroyed.

Finally, my study posed minimal or no risk to my participants. This was because I was no longer a vice-principal of a SPED school. As I was no longer a person in authority, my participants did not have to guard their responses for fear of repercussions on their children. Neither did they experience undue stress or discomfort as I had no power over them. Finally, I did not have the ability to compel my participants to participate in this inquiry. Their participation was voluntary.
Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is concerned about how a researcher is able to convince his or her audience that the findings made are worthy of attention and consideration. As a researcher, I therefore had a responsibility to ensure that trustworthiness and accuracy were achieved and apparent in my study so that my claims were valid. Associated with trustworthiness are four terms—credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). How these were operationalized in my study are discussed below.

Credibility. This criterion refers "to whether the participants' perceptions match up with the researcher's portrayal of them" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 162). To enhance credibility, I gathered multiple sources of data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Patton, 2002). These included interviews, artifacts, documents, field notes, reflective journal, biographic information questionnaire, and literature related to home-school partnerships that had been reviewed for my literature review. Collectively, these data enabled me to complete a comprehensive study. Also, the collection of these multiple sources of data via multiple methods also allowed me to check for convergence between what my participants had reported and what were collected as artifacts or obtained on public websites. This, therefore, added credibility to the work (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Moreover, I utilized member checking of the interview transcripts to ensure accuracy. This strategy ensured that the record of the participants' experiences was correct. Additionally, by interviewing the SPED parents who had been involved in home-school partnership, I was able to get "closer" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 243) to the participants' reality and, hence, "uncover the complexity of human [behaviour] ... and to present a holistic interpretation of what [was] happening" (p. 243-244).
Also, my Skype meetings with my supervisor allowed me to share and discuss my data and analysis with her. Finally, my own integrity was another strategy that I used to ensure credibility (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). This was demonstrated by being upfront concerning my biases and assumptions before the research took place (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

**Dependability.** In qualitative research, dependability involves whether the findings or results are consistent with the data collected (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). To ensure dependability, I created protocols for data collection. For example, I used an interview protocol for each interview and utilized a document summary form to record the artifact I received as well as to write my short reflection on it. At the same time, I analyzed all data in a consistent manner to ensure that the findings reflected the data collected.

**Confirmability.** The concept of confirmability is similar to the concept of objectivity in quantitative study. It ensures that the findings are derived from the result of the research and not from the researcher's biases and subjectivity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). To manage my subjectivity, I was cognizant of my own personal beliefs, biases, and assumptions at all times, and I made a point of recording related insights, questions, and ideas in my reflective journal. By recording field notes, I also maintained an audit trail that allowed me to track my analysis through the coding processed.

**Transferability.** In qualitative study, transferability refers to "the fit or match between the research context and other contexts as judged by the reader" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 164). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is not the researcher's responsibility to "provide an index of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the database that makes transferability judgments possible on the part of the appliers" (p. 316). In light of this, I provided detailed and in-depth descriptions of my SPED participants' perceptions and experiences of
home-school partnership in Singapore in the hope that readers of this dissertation will be able to decide whether the findings are applicable to own situation (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Delimitations**

There were several delimitations placed on this study. In the first instance, my choice of case study methodology delimited the object and parameters of the study. As a result, my study focused on participants of children with mild intellectual disability and not all disability types. Also, the participants had to either be a Singaporean or be a permanent resident of Singapore of seven years or more. In addition, the participants had to be engaged in home-school partnership for more than seven years. Finally, my study examined the parents' perspectives and experiences of home-school partnership and not those of the school administrators, teachers, and professionals from the SPED schools who were also engaged in home-school partnerships.

**Limitations**

This study contains several limiting conditions. First, was my limited experience with research. Being the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, the research may have been limited by my abilities and sensitivities in analyzing data and coming to conclusions (Merriam, 1998). In an effort to address this limitation, I utilized member checking before data analysis began. I also used peer reviews throughout my analysis process which entailed sharing and discussing my codes and findings with my supervisor.

Second, the sample size was small. Only nine participants were involved. Hence, it could not be generalized to a larger population as the findings were only a snapshot of home-school partnership in the SPED schools in Singapore. However, according to Flyvberg (2011), generalizability is "only one of the many ways by which people gain and accumulate knowledge"
This is because knowledge "may be transferable" (p. 305) although it is not formally generalizable. Both Merriam (1998, 2009) and Stake (2005) hold the belief that readers can learn much from a particular case as they can vicariously learn from the researcher's thick description. Specific to my study, by addressing a gap in local literature, I believe that the findings and the research as a whole will prove invaluable in Singapore's context.

Finally, my participants were purposefully selected because I saw them as being information rich. Nevertheless, some of my participants and I had a pre-existing relationship; hence, they could have tried overly hard to cooperate with or please me by offering me responses they thought I might be seeking. To mitigate this, I collected multiple sources of data. This enabled me to examine for convergence between what my participants had said and what was reflected in the artifacts and public documents. This thus helped to strengthen and confirm what participants' shared during the interview.

**Chapter Summary**

In summary, I have provided a detailed description and explanation of this study's research methodology in this chapter. I have also included a discussion of the research context, the rationale for the approach, and an explanation of my participant selection and recruitment. Additionally, I have described my methods and offered an explanation and justification for them, and I have provided a detailed account of how the data were coded and analyzed. I have also presented the ethical considerations for this inquiry, and discussed how trustworthiness was achieved through the four constructs—credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Finally, I concluded with delimitations and limitations of this study. The next chapter presents the research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how SPED parents perceived and experienced home-school partnerships in Singapore. In search of this deeper understanding, I interviewed nine SPED parents who had been engaged in home-school partnerships for more than seven years. A semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. The rationale for examining this topic was to better understand SPED parents' perceptions and experiences of home-school partnerships so as to assist SPED schools to better align their current practices of home-school partnerships with stakeholders' needs. Such an alignment will help to foster a positive home-school partnership which in turn will lead to better student outcomes. At the same time, this deeper understanding of SPED parents' perceptions and experiences of home-school partnerships will contribute to a body of knowledge about home-school partnership in the Singapore context. As mentioned in Chapter One, there is presently a lack of local literature in this area.

In seeking to understand the research problem, this study was framed by one primary research question: What are special education parents' perceptions about home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools? Three sub-questions helped to answer the primary research question:

a. What are the special education parents' views about what contributes to a positive home-school partnership?

b. What do special education parents identify as barriers to or inhibitors of a positive home-school partnership?

c. What do special education parents suggest to improve home-school partnerships?
The results are organized using the three secondary research questions that, when answered by participants, contributed to addressing the primary research question.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section contains a brief description of the research setting. The second section contains brief profiles of each participant. The third section contains the findings organized in relation to my research questions.

**Research Setting**

There are 19 SPED schools that are managed by the different SSOs in Singapore. In this study, the schools are run by one SSO. As the number of SPED schools is relatively few in Singapore, only a general description of the setting is given to maintain the anonymity of the SSO and the schools under its charge.

The schools under this SSO provide special education to students with mild intellectual disability (MID) and mild ASD. Depending on their age group, the students are placed in the primary, secondary, or post-secondary school. As aforementioned in Chapter One, the class size is small and each school has a team of allied professionals to provide support services to the students and their families. Moreover, like all SPED schools in Singapore, each school under the SSO customizes its curriculum and programs to deliver "quality and holistic education" (MOE, 2018b, para. 5) to its students. The customized curriculum is based on the MOE's SPED Curriculum Framework: "Living, Learning and Working in the 21st Century" [see Figure 2]. Introduced in 2012, this framework "sets a common direction for excellence in teaching and learning" (para. 1). The framework also articulates "the vision for SPED, a set of core principles, and Living, Learning and Working (LLW) outcomes for students at the end of their education" (para. 2). Also, the framework specifies a set of desired living, learning, and working outcomes in six core learning domains: "academic, social-emotional, daily living, vocational, the arts,
physical education, and sports" (para. 2). Finally, the framework "affirms the importance of Character and Citizenship Education ... as the foundation for a values-based SPED, and Information Communication Technology ... as an enabler for teaching and learning in SPED" (para. 3).

![SPED curriculum framework](image)

*Figure 2. SPED curriculum framework. Copyright 2012 by Ministry of Education. Reprinted with permission.*

**Participant Profiles**

There were a total of nine participants, of whom two were couples. Many of them are from the working class, and they live in HDB flats located in the north east region of Singapore. They also lead a busy life. Other than work, looking after their child with special needs takes up much of their time. Below are their profiles.

**John and Sally.** My first set of participants is a married couple. They have a son with special needs who has completed his primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. As they both work full time, they have a domestic helper to help them look after their son when they are not at home.
Their interview was held in the evening. The couple came immediately after work to meet up with me at their chosen venue—a restaurant that was located in the eastern part of Singapore. As the interview was held in the evening, the restaurant was fairly quiet. However, for privacy purposes, the interview was conducted at an inconspicuous corner of the restaurant that had been cordoned off for customers' use that evening. Once we were comfortably seated, the interview began.

While the couple was eager to meet up with me, they had not come prepared although the interview questions had been sent to them ahead of time. During the interview, John spoke most of the time while Sally, his wife, sat quietly to listen. When she did speak, she either agreed or substantiated on what her husband was saying. She would also include her personal thoughts about her experiences of home-school partnership.

Mary. My second participant is a single mom with two children. She has deliberately chosen to do a part-time job so that she can look after her son with special needs. Like the first couple, Mary's son has attended three different SPED schools run by the SSO. He has completed his primary and secondary education, but not his post-secondary education.

Like the previous couple, Mary did not find the time to look at the interview questions due to time constraints and "chaos." When I met her for the interview, her flat was indeed in a chaotic state; her living room and kitchen were cluttered with her paraphernalia. There was only a little, square coffee table available for me to place my voice recorders on, and two stools where we sat on throughout the interview. As Mary had not perused the interview questions, she had to pause occasionally to think and recall some of her experiences concerning her partnerships with the schools. On the whole, she was eager to share her experiences and perceptions. At the end of the interview, she shared three artifacts with me. Two were related to her son's progress report.
and they were both easy to read and understand, and one was her email correspondence with the school leader.

**Snowyz.** My third participant is a widow with two sons. Like my second participant, she too works part-time so that she could look after her younger son with special needs. Her son has completed his primary and secondary education and should graduate from the post-secondary school by the time this work is published. As requested by Snowyz, the interview was held at my home. Unlike the previous participants, she came fully prepared for the interview. She had also brought along some artifacts to share with me and was very at ease during the interview.

**Helen.** My fourth participant is married with three children. Unlike most participants, she is a homemaker who devotes much of her time to looking after her youngest daughter who has completed her primary, secondary, and post-secondary SPED education. Her interview took place at her home. Before the interview began, she informed me that she had only taken a quick look at the interview questions as she had no domestic helper then to assist her with her housework. Although she was not fully prepared, she had much to share during the interview.

**Lynn.** My sixth participant is a homemaker. Prior to being a homemaker, Lynn worked for a shipping company. She left her job to take care of her son when he was diagnosed with ADHD and ASD. At the time of the interview, her son has attended two of the schools run by the SSO. Like Snowyz, she requested for the interview to be held at my home when she realized that her home would not be conducive to the interview as she had visitors that day. She also came fully prepared for the interview and was very forthcoming in sharing her perceptions and experiences of home-school partnerships.

**Coco.** My fifth participant is married with three wonderful daughters. Two of her older daughters are working while her youngest daughter has just completed her secondary school
SPED education. Coco currently works as a student care officer, and at the time of the interview, she was pursuing a short course that was related to her work. Like Lynn and Snowyz, Coco was also very prepared for the interview. What perhaps distinguished her from the other participants was the cheerfulness that she demonstrated from the beginning to the end of the interview. I realized that this was because she had had very positive experiences working with her daughter's SPED school. Like Snowyz, she shared a couple of artifacts with me. Her interview was held at her home.

**Ling and Jay.** My last participants are a self-employed couple who owns a visual arts company. Unlike Ling who is a Singaporean, Jay is an expatriate who has lived in Singapore for more than 30 years. At the time of the interview, Jay has been a Singapore permanent for more than seven years. They work in the same field, and their work requires them to travel extensively abroad together. Together, they have four children, of whom one is a special needs child.

The interview was held at the couple's home. Interestingly, their home was also their office. When I arrived for the interview, I noted that the couple was having their late morning breakfast as well as perusing the given interview questions, which was on the breakfast table. During the interview Ling graciously allowed Jay to speak first before giving her insights. Between the two, Ling was very articulate and was able to provide rich insights, as she has not only been involved in her step daughter's special education schools, but she had also been a mainstream schoolteacher in Singapore. She contrasted Jay, who was more reflective. Like the first couple, both Ling and Jay were totally in sync in their views about home-school partnership in the SPED schools their daughter has attended. At the time of the interview, their daughter was in her final year at the post-secondary school.
Presentation of Findings

The following is a discussion of the findings. The findings are framed by the study's research problem and questions, and are drawn from the participant contributions as well as my own researcher journal and field notes. The findings are presented in a narrative form. Where applicable, exact quotations from the interview transcripts have been included. The purpose of this is to allow the participants to speak for themselves and convey their own perspectives. This in turn will allow the readers to understand the reality of each participant's perspectives and capture some of the complexity of the phenomenon and themes explored. According to Merriam (1998), by providing the readers with "rich thick description" (p. 211), the readers "will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether the findings can be transferred" (p. 211).

Research Question 1. What are the special education parents' views about what contributes to a positive home-school partnership?

I identified a number of factors that contributed to a positive home-school partnership. Once analyzed, four themes emerged from Research Question 1: parent's beliefs, values, and culture, parental involvement in school activities, the school leader, and school professionals. It must be noted that all four themes overlapped. Also, within each theme, sub-themes emerged.

Findings 1.1 Parents' beliefs, values, and culture. The first theme that emerged from the data was parental beliefs, values, and culture. In examining this theme, I uncovered three sub-themes. They were factors that impacted positive home-school partnership, and they included the following: parents' beliefs about their role in home-school partnerships, parents' beliefs in their ability to help their child succeed in school, and parents' cultural values.

Parents' beliefs about their roles in home-school partnership. All the participants
believed that one of their roles in home-school partnership was to support their child's learning at home and in school. This was because they believed that such a partnership would lead to student outcomes. However, they differed in terms of what the outcomes were. For example, for Coco and John, it was improved behaviour in their child. However, for Snowyz, it was more than just improved behaviour. Snowyz believed that a "strong relationship" between the school and home would also impact her son's attendance and academic achievement other than his behaviour. A similar sentiment was also echoed by Ling. Despite the differences, the participants believed that to achieve their child's educational outcomes, they needed to reinforce what was taught at school. An example of this was best exemplified when Lynn said: "[I] tried to use the same learning strategies and structures the teacher used in school ... at home." By replicating the school's strategies, Lynn, Helen, Ling, and Jay stated that they were able to give their child additional practice exercises to supplement those given at school. In this way, their child was able to achieve his or her IEP goals. Interestingly, the support given to the children was irrespective of age or grade level. In fact, all the participants had supported their child in their schoolwork since primary school.

Other than supporting their child at home, a couple of participants believed that they needed to support the schools. One way was to update the school about what was happening at home. For example, Snowyz shared that she would inform the school whenever her son threw his "trantrums" and decided not to go to school. Unlike Snowyz, Mary stated that she would inform the school whenever her son was unable to complete his schoolwork at home due to time constraints and his inability to "understand [certain] concepts." Another way was by becoming involved in school activities. Snowyz explained that such an involvement would help motivate
her child to attend school. Her explanation made it clear that a parent's role was to be a school volunteer.

*Parents' beliefs in their ability to help their child succeed in school.* The data also indicated that all the participants believed in their ability to help their child succeed in school irrespective of their educational background or their child's grade level. Interestingly, several participants spoke of the need to help their child succeed in numeracy or math, as it was called in some schools. They did this in different ways. For example, Helen shared that she gave her daughter "practical activities" to do at home in order to help her understand measurement, while Ling and Jay said that to help their daughter with her counting skills, they gave her some money so that she could pay for the bill whenever they went out together. Unlike other participants, Sally said that would first "check with the teacher about [the] teaching method [used] so as not to confuse [her] son [with] her own method" which she had picked up from her mainstream education. This then enabled her to coach her son in his multiplication tables at home. Mary reported likewise too.

*Parents' values and culture.* The high value that a parent placed on their child's education helped to facilitate positive home-school partnership. While this was not made explicit during the interview, this was clearly exemplified when Coco shared about her frequent enquiry about the grades needed to qualify for the Institute of Technical Education (ITE)\(^6\) and the number of times her daughter could take the Workplace Literacy and Numeracy (WPLN)\(^7\)

\(^6\) The Institute of Technical Education (ITE) in Singapore was established on April 1, 1992 as a post-secondary institution. An education from ITE provides graduates with good job and career advancement opportunities, as well as opportunities to go for further education and training.

\(^7\) The WPLN assessments are computer assisted and are designed to assess student's literacy and numeracy proficiency in functional or work related contexts.
examination. She explained her rationale for such enquiries: "As parents, we wanted to know if she could go to ITE. Why not? We wanted her to go for it you see." Being an Asian, Coco's desire for her child to receive mainstream education did not come as a surprise.

Two things were evident from the above responses in this section. First, all the participants had very positive beliefs about the notion of partnership, their role in home-school partnerships, and their ability to help their child to succeed in school. Second, their beliefs about their role in home-school partnership and in their ability to help their child succeed in school, cum the Asian value concerning education, were motivational in nature. Collectively, they helped to foster positive home-school partnerships.

**Finding 1.2 Parental involvement in school activities.** Parental involvement in school activities emerged as a second theme from the data. In responding to the interview questions that pertained to their involvement in partnership activities in the schools, the participants identified three factors that made their involvement in school activities positive. They were: a welcoming environment, varied opportunities to benefit parent involvement, and acknowledgements. As sub-themes for this section, they provide insights into why parental involvement in school activities was seen to foster a positive home home-school partnership.

*Welcoming environment.* Most schools were found to have an inviting and welcoming environment. Several factors contributed to this. One factor that all participants spoke about was greetings they received be it from the school leader, school professionals, school security guard, or students when they entered the school grounds to attend a school event or do volunteer work. Another factor which Mary and Coco highlighted was the smiles they received. Coco also shared other factors that she saw in one school, and they included the following: the cheerful disposition of the teachers, the teachers' willingness to offer her help whenever she came to do volunteer
work, and their constant invitation to parents to "join" them in school activities and outings. As a result, Coco shared: "I could feel the warmth in the school .... The welcome was there .... The warmth just made you want to stay on than leave the school." Unlike Coco, both Ling and Jay spoke about the friendly disposition of the teachers in another school and being treated like a "guest" when they attended a school event. In yet another school, Lynn cited another factor—the appreciation expressed by the school leader, co-curricular activity (CCA) teacher, and CCA students. She explained that these appreciations encouraged her to do volunteer work in that school. Mary also echoed Lynn's sentiments. It was evident that the invitation extended to the parents and the positive gestures demonstrated by some schools did not only help to create a welcoming environment for parent involvement in school activities, but it also made parents involvement experience in these school a positive one for them.

**Varied opportunities to benefit parent involvement.** Other than a welcoming environment, all the participants spoke about how the varied parental involvement opportunities had allowed them to partner and support the schools. From the data, it appeared that the schools had created a PSG platform to facilitate parental involvement in school activities. With the exception of one school that had the school leader heading the PSG, the other schools had appointed a "teacher coordinator" to oversee the PSG. During my analysis, it became very clear what areas the schools had identified for parents to be involved in. There were essentially four main areas [see Figure 3]. With the exception of one school in the SSO that created parental involvement opportunities in four areas, all other schools had three areas.
**Figure 3.** Four main activity areas

Other than the provision of varied parental involvement opportunities, some schools also provided their PSG volunteers with guidance on how the latter could support the different school programs and activities like the "learning journeys" or fieldtrips, weekly "reading" programs, and Chinese New Year activity. An example of such support given was best exemplified by Mary. She shared that "[before] the parents could coach the students [who needed extra help for their WPLN examinations], the teachers trained the parents first." From the coaching she received, Mary proudly said that she was able to help the students to effectively
learn the key points and memorize technical terms. The guidance she received therefore made her involvement in school activities a positive one for her.

Moreover, two schools made an effort to invite parents' participation in the school-based activities. For example, in school B, Jay indicated that he was personally invited to sit in on a couple of his daughter's dance CCA sessions in order to help her overcome her shyness and be more participatory. He described his involvement to be a "good" and "effective" one because his participation "helped [his] daughter [to] feel relaxed and ... participate better." Being specially invited to assist his daughter in her school CCA thus made his involvement with the school a positive one. In school C, Coco said that parents were invited to go on school fieldtrips.

What perhaps drew many of the participants to become involved in school-based activities and made their involvement a pleasant experience was the manifold benefits that resulted from their involvement. In total, there were five benefits that were cited. The first benefit was learning more about the staff. For example, Coco and Snowyz shared that their voluntary work had allowed them to become better acquainted with the school leader and her staff members. Mary added that doing voluntary work enabled her to gauge the quality of the teachers in the schools and their engagement with their students. She stated that knowing these helped her "to build trust in the teachers" so that she could work "closer with them" to help her son with the difficulties he had in his schoolwork. Her comment indicated that trust was not only important, but it was also a contributory factor to a positive home-school partnership. Unlike Mary, Jay offered a different perspective. He shared that attending school events did not only help him and Ling to become acquainted with her daughter's teachers, principal, and friends, but it also made him feel "more connected to the school, to what they were doing, and what [his daughter] was doing."
The second benefit was being more able to offer support to their child's learning at home and in school. Several participants expressed this viewpoint. For several participants like Helen, Lynn, and Coco, doing voluntary work gave them the opportunity to observe how the school professionals taught their child at school and how their child was doing in school. This, in turn, not only helped them to reinforce what was taught to their child at school, but also, in Helen's case, to provide feedback to her child's teacher. Aside from this, both Helen and Ling shared how their presence in school was perceived as a form of emotional support for their children at school. According to Ling, it was "comforting" for the child to see the parents in school. Helen also shared Ling's sentiment.

The third benefit was the opportunity to interact with members of the school community that included the school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. Multiple perspectives were given concerning the value of interacting with the school community. For John, his interactions with the school leader and school professionals at school events allowed him to gain insights about why the school could not address "certain issues" that he had brought up. For Coco, her attendance at school workshops with the teachers allowed her to discuss with the latter "how interesting the course was, and how [they] should help the kids in the school." For Mary, participating in school events gave her the opportunity to enquire from her son's teacher why her son was not selected to participate in a school event. For Jay, he saw his involvement in school events as "opportunities for partnership [with the] teachers and parents." Jay's wife, Ling, added that they were always looking for ways they "could value add" to the school and for new opportunities for their daughter to hone her talents. Jay added that being able to "talk to the teachers and other parents ... was a good way to support the community informally." As for Snowyz, she stated that the opportunity to interact with the teachers enabled her child's teachers
to know who she was. She explained that this helped to facilitate a closer working relationship between them, which, in turn, enabled them to successfully help her son to overcome his shyness. She shared that this made her feel "good" as the teacher had worked together with her. Based on this experience, she concluded that "participating in school activities helped to improve parent-teacher relationships." Unlike the other participants, I found Lynn's sharing to be uniquely interesting as she shared how her interaction with the SPED students helped raised her awareness of her son's inability to greet people. This awareness made her teach her son greetings so that he could greet the school leader.

The fourth benefit was empowerment. The participants cited different ways they were empowered. One way was by attending school organized workshops. Mary mentioned that the PSG workshops empowered her to find courage to ask her son's teacher for help and cope with her son's sexuality problem. Unlike Mary, Coco shared that her attendance at these workshops empowered her to help the students with disabilities at the student care centre where she worked. Hence, she cheerfully said: "That was why I really liked to go for all these courses that the school organized." Another way was by being involved in the school's programs. Snowyz explained how the knowledge she had gained from her involvement in a school program empowered her to later customize effective activities to help the other SPED students in the school. For Snowyz, being able to help the school in this manner was called a "partnership." The third way of being empowered was by mingling with other parents. Participants such as Sally, Lynn, Mary, and Snowyz spoke about how the mingling among the parents during school-based activities and volunteer work allowed them to share tips and strategies on how they could solve their personal problems such as stress as well as manage their children with disabilities. The final way was when the school gave the PSG members the freedom to plan school events like Racial
Harmony Day, Children's Day, and Teacher's Day. When I asked Snowyz how she felt when the school empowered the PSG members, she said: "I felt positive and encouraged. I felt that the school trusted us with organizing the activity and valued our support and help."

The fifth benefit of parental involvement in school activities was the personal satisfaction gained from doing voluntary work. For Snowyz, Helen, Coco, and Lynn, seeing the students that they had worked with made improvements in their work brought much joy to each one of them. Coco and Lynn also shared that being remembered by the students who they had once helped also made them feel much appreciated. Specially for Lynn, she articulated: "You can really say that money can't buy this kind of experience."

**Acknowledgements.** Other than benefits, receiving acknowledgements facilitated positive home-school partnership. Seen as appreciations, these came in varied ways and from different people in different schools. In several schools, the acknowledgement was done verbally. For example, in one school, Coco said that she received them from the teachers. Other than verbal acknowledgments, she also received certificates and tokens of appreciation as well as a lunch treat from the school leader. In another school, Lynn mentioned about receiving verbal acknowledgement from the teachers and students. She also cited receiving personal acknowledgement from the school leader. When I probed Lynn on how she felt about receiving such an appreciation, she replied: "Aah ... I felt very appreciated, and she really recognized the work that I had done for the school." Unlike Lynn, Mary spoke about receiving a public applause during one end of year school activity in another school. That, she recalled, made her feel "great ... [and] want to work with the school because the staff and students appreciated the parents' presence and work effort."
Conversely, the participants shared how they acknowledged the school professionals for the work they did with their child. A couple of participants shared how the parent volunteers came together to show their appreciation by either putting up a concert or hosting the school professionals to a luncheon on Teacher's Day. Specifically for Jay, he would remind his daughter to "do something" for her teacher. Often, his daughter would make a card or gift for her teacher.

From the above narratives, it was clear that parental involvement in school activities fostered a positive home-school partnership. It had also allowed trust to be built between the participants and the schools. More importantly, this involvement benefitted the participants' child, the school community, and the participants themselves.

**Finding 1.3 The school leader.** The participants also identified the school leader as another factor that contributed to a positive home-school partnership. Three sub-themes emerged in this category, and they were school leader's attributes, communication practice, and perception of parents.

**School leaders' attributes.** Three leadership attributes were highlighted as important for facilitating a positive partnership. The first attribute was welcoming. Several school leaders were found to be welcoming of the parents. As aforementioned, two common actions cited by several participants were greetings and thanking the participants for participating in school activities.

The second attribute was approachable. I noted that the word "approachable," was synonymously used with "accessible," "available," being easily "reached," "being present," and being visible. Defined in terms of the school leader's behaviour and actions, the participants cited how some school leaders had demonstrated this attribute. In school C, Coco stated that the school leader made herself accessible and visible to the parents via the following ways: by going on school "outings" with the parents, students, and staff, attending family bonding activities,
dropping in to attend the PSG meeting, and mingling with the parents during a school luncheon. She also shared that the school leader maintained an open-door policy. For her, this policy signified the school leader's welcoming attitude towards the parents and her willingness to "always" make time for them. Additionally, she also said that the vice-principal made herself approachable by working together with the parents on projects such as the Purple Parade. Mary added that the same school leader made herself available and accessible via email. Hence, this allowed her to raise her concerns about her son with the latter. In school B, Helen noted that the school leader made herself visible at school dismissal time and by participating with the children in school events such as Racial Harmony Day. When I asked Helen how she felt when the school leader participated in school events, she replied: "Of course, I felt good. Otherwise, I would not tell you (laughs)." As Helen maintained a serious disposition throughout the interview, this sudden burst of laughter signified her approval of the principal's behaviour. In school D, Mary said that the school leader made an effort to reach out to her by approaching her and talking to her. What impressed Mary about this encounter was the school leader's willingness to "spend some time with [her]" to talk about her son and answer her queries.

Caring was the third attribute that several participants highlighted. Like approachable, caring was demonstrated in different ways in different schools. For example, in school C, Coco shared two ways how the school leader showed care. The first way was via her "motherly" behaviour and actions. While she did not say how this motherly care was shown, she articulated that such care was shown to the children and extended to the parents whenever she went on a

8 The Purple Parade is “a unifying national platform to promote awareness and celebrate abilities of persons with special needs. The core of The Purple Parade movement is to ensure that people with special needs are included in the main chapter of Singapore’s growth and have equal access to education, employment, transport and social networks” (The Purple Parade Limited, 2013, para. 1).
school outing with them. Additionally, Coco noted that the school leader was able to show that she had an intimate knowledge about her child's personal accomplishments. The school leader's ability to cite Coco daughter's accomplishment, along with her ability to commend Coco for her good work, helped to boost both Coco and her daughter's morale. In school D, Jay shared that the school leader knew the names of her students. For Jay, this action did not show him that the school leader was caring, but she was also interested "in building a personal relationship. So it made [him] want to participate more with the school."

**Communication practices.** The practice of active listening also facilitated home-school partnership. It was evident that some school leaders practiced active listening. They not only listened, but acted on the participants' feedback or request simultaneously. For Mary, the school leader's active listening had resulted in the school leader making an apology on behalf of her teacher who had written inappropriate remarks in her son's report card and a change of teacher for her son's class. This led Mary to perceive the school leader to be a "very concerned" person as the latter cared enough to act on the situation. As for Lynn, the school leader's active listening had resulted in her son being placed in a class where he could learn at a slower pace. This showed her that the school leader had not only listened, but had also "respected [her] wish."

**Perception of parents.** The positive perception that the school leader had of the parents was another contributory factor to a positive home-school partnership. In my analysis of data, I found it interesting to see how the views of two participants converged when they spoke of how a school leader in school C had perceived them. In both their views, the school leader perceived them as partners. Coco explained that this was because the school leader "really believed in the parents." Hence, she treated the parents as "partners." This, in turn, motivated Coco "to be more
involved in the school." As for Mary, the school leader's willingness to listen and act on all her feedback about school improvement" made her to feel like a school partner.

From the above narratives, it is evident that the positive attributes of the school leaders, their practice of active listening and their perceptions of parents as partners contributed to a positive home-school partnership. These factors did not just impact the child's progress in school, but it also encouraged parental involvement in the schools. As a result, there is a clear overlap between this theme and the previous theme on parental involvement in school activities.

**Findings 1.4 School professionals.** This theme arose from the participants' responses to this semi-structured interview questions: Could you share three good (positive) experiences you have had when you worked together with the school. What have made these experiences positive for you? Within this theme, three sub-themes emerged, and they were school professionals' attributes, communication practices, and perceptions of parents and the child.

**School professionals' attributes.** Three attributes were highlighted as factors that contributed to a productive home-school partnership. The first attribute identified was approachability. Similar to the school leader's, this attribute was defined in terms of the school professional's behaviour or actions. For example, Coco, Snowyz, and Mary cited being "friendly" allowed them to comfortably approach and interact with the school professionals. Specifically for Mary, this helped to forge trust in her relationship with the teachers. Snowyz also highlighted the importance of behaving in a "down to earth" manner. When I asked Snowyz to explain what she meant by being "down to earth," she told me that school professionals should not behave in a "proud [manner] even though they had high qualifications" as this would allow them to "accept [parents] as equals." Being down to earth thus made the teachers approachable to the parents. As for Coco, the school professionals made themselves available and visible to the parents by
attending school workshops and going on school outings with them. Such occasions allowed
them to interact and get to know each other better.

The second attribute was caring. This attribute was demonstrated via three ways. The first
way was by showing care and concern for a child's well-being. All the participants agreed that
some school professionals cared for their children well-being. From amongst the different types
of well-being rendered, it was very evident that the safety and well-being of the child was greatly
emphasized by all participants. Specifically, they were concerned about their child's safety and
well-being in and outside the school. Following is an example of how this viewpoint is
conveyed: "At the end of the day, it was safety that we were looking at. We needed to know
whether our kid was good and safe in the hands of the person who was watching them for eight
... hours." (Ling).

Besides safety, several participants also spoke about some school professionals caring for
the socio-emotional well-being of the child. In school C, Coco said this care was shown when
her daughter's teacher shared some anger management strategies with her to help her manage her
daughter's anger at home. As for Ling, she witnessed "genuine" care being shown in school D
when the teacher worked together with her to regulate her daughter's inappropriate behaviour
while taking time to counsel her daughter simultaneously. Affirming this care, Jay, her husband,
added that such care helped him to trust the school professional more. As for Lynn, this care was
shown when her son's teacher in school B took it upon herself to help her autistic son not to use
hurtful words when he communicated to his peers. In return for the care shown, Lynn disclosed
that she reciprocated in like manner by caring for the teacher's students as the teacher had cared
for her son as she was comfortable with the teacher.
Unlike Lynn, Helen spoke about her daughter's teacher in another school caring for her child's physical and mental well-being. Advising Helen to let her daughter sleep early or take her out for a walk as her daughter was not focusing and doing well in class, Helen shared that the teacher's advice did not only show that the latter was concerned and caring, but the advice was seen as an "attempt to [forge] a better relationship" with her, for which, she was grateful.

Unlike most participants, Mary offered a different perspective of care. She shared how the teachers had shown genuine care for her son's intellectual well-being. They did this by messaging her to ask for her assistance in supervising her son's assignments. Interestingly, she added that this care was also extended to her in two schools. In both schools, an effort was made by the school professionals to personally coach her how to teach her son math. Both gestures made her feel "great" and they signified that the schools "cared for their student and his family."

Another way care was demonstrated was when some school professionals went the extra mile for their students. A few participants spoke at length about how some school professionals made an extra effort for their students. John, for instance, described how appreciative he was when his son's class teacher from school D made her way to Hougang bus interchange to personally look for his missing son. Similarly, Lynn spoke appreciatively of one teacher in school A sacrificing her weekend to conduct extra class outings so that her students with autism and their families could attend a family "bonding" activity together. Likewise, Helen spoke of how touched she was when a teacher from school D made an effort to leave her home early everyday so that she could teach her daughter how to use the mass rapid transit system to get to school.

From the above examples, two things are evident. First, the willingness of the school professionals to go the extra mile to meet the well-being needs of the child, and in some cases,
the participant’s needs, made home-school partnership a positive experience for all the participants. Second, by taking on responsibilities that was outside of the school context, the teachers showed that they were willing to step outside their professional boundaries. In doing so, they had won the admiration of several participants as well as instilled a positive memory in them about home-school partnership.

The third way care was shown was by showing an understanding of the child's needs. John explained that this was important because if "the teachers didn't understand the children's ability, it would be difficult for them to tell the parents what to do." Unlike John, both Snowyz and Lynn shared some ways on how some school professionals demonstrated their understanding of their child's needs. For Snowyz, it was the willingness of the teacher to accommodate to her son's disabilities by giving him extra time to complete the given task. As for Lynn, she highlighted one teacher's effort in customizing her teaching pedagogy to meet her son's learning needs. Lynn recounted how the teacher had ingeniously used the yoga mat to teach her son addition and subtraction in school and shared it with her through a video. Watching the video allowed Lynn to replicate the method at home. In doing likewise, her son was able to learn quickly and "excel" in his math.

From the above narratives, it is also apparent that there were overlaps again. Clearly, there were overlaps between understanding the child's needs and caring for the child's well-being. There was also an overlap between the sub-themes in this section and the previous theme on parental involvement in school activities, and parental beliefs about their role in their child's education.

*Communication practices.* It was clear that four communication practices facilitated
positive home-school partnership. The first was the use of multiple platforms of communication. All the participants agreed that the use of multiple communication modes by the various schools in the SSO facilitated an effective one or two-way communication between the home and school [see Figure 4].

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*Figure 4. Varied communication platforms*

Amongst the two-way communication modes, all the participants favoured the cell phone most as they participants could call, text messages, or use the WhatsApp, a popular messaging system used on mobile phone devices to communicate with the school professionals in a "fast" manner.
They also spoke favourably about other two-way communication platforms such as the home visit. Impressed by the allied professional's visit to her home, she articulated: "I really appreciated [the visit]. I found [the] visit to be very effective because I could help my child at home too. I never knew that there was such a process that my child needed to know."

Like the two-way communication platform, the one-way communication platform was equally effective. This was best exemplified when John described how pleased he was when his son's instructor sent him a video to show him and his wife their son's ability to tie an apron by himself. He was pleased because the instructor had made an effort to involve both of them in their son's education via the video. He was also pleased as the video provided them with an update on their son's progress and allowed them to reinforce what the instructor was teaching his son at school.

In another school, Helen described how the school had set up a "good" communication system where the teacher mentor served as a one-point contact between the parents and the different subject teachers in the school. As a result, Helen found this system of communication to be effective as parents could keep in "close contact" with the school.

The second practice was the provision of immediate, frequent, and timely updates to the participants. The participants appreciated such types of updates given to them about their child. In terms of immediate updates, two types were mentioned by the participants. The first was context dependent. Coco illustrated this by stating that she would receive an immediate phone call from her daughter's teacher if her daughter sustained a physical injury in school. Hence, she knew what was happening to her child at school. Ling, on the other hand, spoke of teacher dependent context. She highlighted one school professional who impressed her by giving her
immediate feedback to all her queries about her daughter. It also made her grateful to this school professional.

As for frequency, it was clear that several participants also appreciated the practice of frequent communication for various reasons. It was also clear that this practice varied amongst the schools. For example, John stated that he received "monthly" and "quarterly" updates from his son's teachers in school A. These updates allowed him to feel more involved. They also encouraged him to work with the teachers as they informed him what the latter had planned for his son. Lynn, on the other hand, said that she received "weekly" updates from her son's teacher in school B, and this kept her informed of her son's progress and enabled her to take follow up actions at home. As for Mary, she recalled receiving weekly and quarterly updates from her son's teachers in school C. Hence, she reported receiving no unexpected reports from them. As for Ling, she shared receiving "consistent" updates from her child's teacher in school D. She explained that this helped to create a "very good bond" between them. Unlike the others, Helen shared receiving quarterly updates concerning what programs school D had for her child. However, she did not elaborate what these programs were.

While Snowyz agreed on the need to receive frequent updates about her child, she also stressed on the importance of receiving "timely" updates. She explained that receiving frequent and timely updates from her son's therapist had enabled her to take follow up actions at home. As a result, she could see son's improvements in his gross motor skills and emotional health. Seeing these improvements, gave her a sense of "peace" as she knew that her child was in the good hands of the therapist.

The third practice cited was "open" communication. The data showed that the word "open" had different shades of meaning. One meaning was being transparent. For example, Coco
and Jay shared that their child's teacher was "open" or transparent with them about how their child was doing and what they needed to do to help them improve. The other meaning was about being honest about what was being communicated. This is best illustrated when John said: "[The allied professionals were] honest in a way as they told us what was wrong and what was right .... You just tell me what was wrong with my son. At least I know." Contrary to John, Coco, and Jay, Mary gave another perspective. During the interview, Mary spoke about "frequent and open" communication lines. For Mary, an open communication line allowed her to communicate with the school professionals during and after school hours.

The fourth communication practice was active listening. Several participants shared that active listening fostered a positive home-school partnership as their requests or suggestions were followed up by the school professionals. Following is the best example of how this view was conveyed.

I [highlighted] to the teacher that ... she needed to be very firm with my child because my child tended to give all sort of excuses to avoid doing any tasks .... And the teacher listened .... This therefore helped my child to increase his will power ... [and] stay on task for an extended amount of time. (Snowyz)

During the interview, Snowyz made it a point to emphasize the word "listened" to clearly indicate that she valued active listening as this practice helped to foster a positive working relationship as well as facilitated problem-solving between the home and school. In her case, it was her son's avoidance of doing an assigned task.

Besides problem-solving, active listening facilitated decision making during IEP meetings. Amongst the participants, I found Ling's narrative in this area to be interesting as it was an uncommon practice for a child to be involved in setting the IEP goals. According to Ling,
the IEP goals had been agreed upon between her daughter and school professional before the IEP meeting. When Ling and Jay came to the meeting, they were able to give further inputs to the IEP goals in the presence of their daughter. For Ling, to have their inputs included in her daughter's IEP goals, signified a two-way communication. She also liked this process as it allowed her daughter to know that both parties were supporting her IEP goals. At the same time, her narrative sharply contrasted the usual way some participants related about how IEP goals were set. According to Ling, the IEP goals were set through collaboration between the school professional and the parent. Like Ling, Lynn also found her experience with the school professional a positive one.

It was evident from the above that communication was key in fostering a positive home-school partnership. This was because there was an exchange and sharing of information between the home and school on a regular basis, using different communication platforms. There was also problem solving and joint decision making because there was active listening. In some cases, there was also transparency and honest reporting of information. Together, these varied communication practices made home-school partnership a positive experience for the participants. It was noted that there was an overlap between this sub-theme and the previous one on attributes. This again highlighted the complexity of home-school partnership.

**Perception of parents and child.** It was clear that positive perceptions of the parents and their child impacted home-school partnership. Once again, different perspectives were given. For example, Coco noted that the school professionals in school C had viewed her as a "partner" and "teacher." As she was "treated," accepted, and "appreciated" as a partner and teacher, Coco articulated that she was encouraged to be more involved with the school. Lynn also expressed a similar sentiment. Being viewed as an "important" partner encouraged her to strive for an
"ongoing partnership" with the school's occupational therapist (OT). Unlike Coco and Lynn, Mary, said that she was being viewed as a "friend." As a result, there was "no barrier" between the teachers and parents. Seen as a friend, this allowed her to communicate and provide feedback to the teacher easily as well as fostered trust. From Mary's sharing, it was evident that being treated on equal footing facilitated communication and the building of trust between her and the teacher. From the examples, it was clear that having a positive perception of parents built trust and facilitated collaboration.

It was also very clear that the school professional's positive perception of the child impacted collaboration between the home and school. Specifically for John, "how the teacher perceived the child" was important as this determined how he interacted with the teacher. For participants like John, Sally, Coco, and Lynn, they were delighted when the school professionals viewed their child from a strength-based perspective. This delight was clearly reflected in Lynn's narrative.

[At] least, one teacher recognized my boy's strength .... Not totally because he is autistic, you lock him up in a cage. He can do a little bit of speech and drama, sing, and dance .... This teacher ... took time to observe him. When she saw him singing, she decided to put him in the school choir .... [and] in her speech and drama class .... I appreciated this teacher. At least, this teacher gave my boy a chance to perform on the stage.

Lynn's emphasis on "at least" indicated that not many teachers were able to view her son as from a strength-based perspective. In her view, to do this required a "mindset" change. As the teacher had a positive mindset, this helped to foster a positive working relationship between them. In turn, Lynn was grateful to the teacher for exercising her faith in her son's abilities.
Clearly, the parents' perception of how the school professionals perceived them and their child impacted home-school partnership. From the above narratives, the positive working relationship was linked to the participants' positive perceptions of the school professionals. It must be noted that there is also an overlap between this sub-theme and the parental involvement in school activities theme.

**Research Question 2. What do special education parents identify as barriers to or inhibitors of a positive home-school partnership?**

I identified a number of barriers that the participants shared in relation to this research question. The following themes emerged: parent-related inhibitors, the school leader, school professionals, location and scheduling of IEP meetings, lack of opportunities for parental involvement, different pathways, different goals, no national policy on home-school partnership, and parental workplace.

**Finding 2.1 Parent-related inhibitors.** The first major theme that emerged was parent-related inhibitors. In examining this theme, I uncovered four sub-themes that helped to show how parent-related inhibitors were obstacles to a positive home-school partnership. They were parents' belief and understanding of home-school partnership, parents' beliefs, values, and culture, lack of knowledge and skills, and work demand and time constraint. These will now be discussed in the next section.

**Parents' belief and understanding of home-school partnership.** This sub-theme emerged from the semi-structured interview questions posed to all participants. The first question was: What are the first things that come to your mind when you hear about the word partnership? The second question was: What does home-school partnership mean to you? The final question was: From where do you get your ideas about home-school partnership?
There were some similarities as well differences given by the participants to question one. While many of the participants concurred that partnership was about "working together," they also gave other variations of this definition. They included "a communication link" (John), "communicating with each other" (Mary), and needing "two hands to clap" (Helen). Besides these, Jay added the following: "collaboration, co-creation, sharing, [and] bridging between two different places."

While many of the participants agreed that partnership meant working "closely" together or "hand in hand," they also differed in terms of who the parents should work closely with. Both Coco and Mary felt that partnership should be between the parents and teachers. John and Sally insisted that partnership must also include the child. Lynn, however, felt that the parents needed to work together with teachers and allied professionals as partnership was about teamwork. Snowyz agreed with Lynn, but she asserted that partnership must include the school leader too.

Like question one, the responses given for question two had some similarities and differences. Specifically for Snowyz, partnership meant many things to her. One of them was communication. For her, communication between the home and school needed to be "transparent" and "frequent" and focused on her child's work progress. For John, communication meant having "open discussions" with the teachers. That meant that the teachers should provide him and his wife truthful reports about their son's progress in school. Snowyz added that partnership entailed a two-way communication, a notion that was also embraced by John and Mary. Other than communication, Snowyz asserted that partnership implied "mutual trust," "mutual respect," "responsiveness," "cooperation," "coordination," and the "sharing of responsibility" between the home and school. The notion of mutual trust was also highlighted by
Helen. Above all, Snowyz articulated that for students to benefit, partnership "must be goal oriented and [be] focused on learning." This too, was echoed by John.

John too had his own notion about partnership. For him, partnership meant reciprocity. He explained that parents needed to reciprocate when a teacher provided feedback. Like John, Helen also embraced this notion and agreed that a reciprocal relationship between the home and school would impact the child's progress at school. Additionally, for John, partnership also meant the "giving of one's time" when working with the school. Sally, his wife, said that doing voluntary work for the school required time. Both Ling and Snowyz, embraced Sally's perspective. However, Ling, stated that partnership must have a focus, and that this focus should be based on those areas identified by the parents. In her view, parents should be "given a chance to play a significant role in this partnership so that [they] could create an impact" on their child's educational outcomes. Hence, she welcomed "an equal partnership," a notion that was supported by both Lynn and Snowyz. Particularly for Lynn, equal partnership would facilitate the attainment of the IEP goal that was set by the parents and teachers. Other than equal partnership, Ling also perceived partnership to be "flexible" in nature. She explained that flexibility was needed to allow working parents like herself the opportunity to contribute to her child's school whenever they were available.

With regards to question three which sought to understand where the participants' idea about partnership originated, the participants cited varied sources. For example, Ling declared that her idea about partnership came from watching how an American school partnered with the home to nurture a child with special needs on YouTube. Snowyz, on the other hand, mentioned that she got her idea from "the internet and through work experience." Unlike Snowyz, Lynn shared that her idea of partnership came from listening to "MOE's announcement [about
partnership] for the mainstream schools." Mary said that she had her "own idea" about partnership. She asserted that it was "something ideal." Mary, believed that partnership must extend beyond the schools to include external agencies that conducted enrichment classes as these classes gave her some personal space and helped her son to improve his attention span and his social interaction skills.

When I probed the participants about whether the schools had shared about home-school partnership with them, I received mixed responses. Some participants like Snowyz, John, and Coco offered a clear "no," and provided no explanation. Lynn, on the other hand, recalled hearing the vice-principals in two schools speak about home-school partnership to the parents while, both Mary and Helen reported hearing it from their child's class teacher. Based on Lynn, Mary, and Helen's sharing, it became evident that the sharing did not only come mainly from the school, but that their narratives provided an insight into the schools' view of partnership. It was clearly not about working closely, but more about what the schools wanted the participants to do.

From the above responses, a few things became very apparent. First, there were multiple definitions about partnership. Second, there were also varied understanding concerning the notion of partnership. Third, the participants' ideas of partnership came from different sources, and finally, only some schools were explicit about what home-school partnership entailed. Collectively, they made it difficult for a positive home-school partnership to flourish.

Parents' beliefs, values, and culture. It was also evident that the parents' beliefs, values, and culture inhibited a positive home-school partnership. Both Helen and Coco's narratives indicated that they strongly believed in according respect to the school leaders. While Helen shared that she, along with the PSG volunteers, unquestionably accepted all volunteer work tasks "assigned" to them by the school leader in school D to show their respect to the school leader,
Coco shared that she deliberately chose to "say nothing" to the school leader in school C even though she had received much complaints from her daughter and her classmates about a teacher's inability to teach math. Other than the school leader, Helen also shared that she also "respected" the teachers even though there were "hiccups" in their relationship. She even shared how everyone in school D tried "to keep harmony" and "bear with each other" during difficult moments. It did not come as surprise to me to hear the words "respect" and "harmony" articulated by Helen, who is of Chinese ethnicity, as these words reflected her Asian cultural heritage, beliefs, and values.

**Lack of knowledge and skills.** For a couple of participants, the lack of knowledge and skills were identified as factors that prevented them from having a positive home-school partnership. The participants shared two areas where they were lacking in knowledge and skills. The first was in the setting of IEP goals. Both John and Snowyz mentioned that they were unclear on how to set the IEP goals because they were unaware of the criteria for setting these goals. In light of this, John left the setting of the IEP goals in the hands of his son's teacher. Snowyz too felt likewise. In her case, she did so as she perceived herself to lack "professional" knowledge in setting the IEP goals.

Another area where a few participants identified to lack both knowledge and skills was in the teaching of math. While these participants perceived themselves to be able to coach their child in math, they were hesitant to do so. As Sally, Mary, and Snowyz came from a mainstream educational background, they therefore acknowledged not having the knowledge and skills that the SPED teachers had to teach their child math at home. This therefore made it a challenge for them to support the school.

**Time and work constraints.** The participants' work demand and time constraint
were identified as factors that inhibited positive home-school participants. John specifically spoke about how both his and his wife's full time job cum the need to attend to their child's socio-emotional needs and school work at home made it difficult for both him and his wife, Sally, to find the time to be involved in school-based activities. As for Ling and Jay, they shared that their overseas work made it a challenge for them to be involved with their daughter's school activities. Jay also confessed: "[When] I got so busy, I might not remember certain things or not follow through [with what the teacher requested] as I had hoped to, even with the best intention and idea of the teacher."

**Finding 2.2 The school leader.** The second major theme that arose from the data was the school leader. In examining this theme, I found three sub-themes that accounted for how the school leader hindered a close working relationship between the home and school. They were the school leader's attributes, communication practices, and perceptions. It must be noted that each sub-theme overlapped with each other.

**School leaders' attributes.** The participants identified four negative leadership attributes that served as barriers to home-school partnership. The first negative attribute was unwelcoming. This attribute was demonstrated in different ways in different schools. For example, in one school, Lynn recalled the school leader chasing her and some parent volunteers away when they came to "support a school event" as well as telling them that they could not be involved as this was not their project. When I asked Lynn how she felt, she emphatically replied: "We were very upset" as well shocked by the school leader's "rude" and "unprofessional" behaviour. This, along with her actions, showed Lynn that the school leader was unwelcoming of PSG volunteers. In another school, Helen shared that the school leader did not make an effort to welcome or interact with the PSG members when the latter came to do voluntary work at the school. She explained
that the school leader was probably "very busy." As a result, she felt that the school environment lacked warmth for parent involvement activities. Contrary to Helen, John shared that while another school leader welcomed him to the school, he felt that the welcome given lacked sincerity. When I probed John about what made him feel that way, John said that it was the school leader's "body language." Just "observing the body movements" allowed him to determine if a person was sincere. As to what these movements were, John did not provide any examples.

The second negative attribute was unapproachability. In examining the data, it became evident that this attribute was linked to the school leader's visibility in school. Participants like Helen and Snowyz used the phrase "hardly seen" while Coco used the phrase "seldom met" to reflect this lack of visibility. As the school leader was not visible, this had impacted the participants' partnership with the school leader. Articulating this view was Helen, who emphatically said: "We hardly saw the principal ... [except at] a big event like graduation day." In her view, the school leader "should not only be seen at events that needed her to give a speech." Such behaviour only "puts [her] off" from developing a relationship with the school leader. Like Helen, Snowyz noted a similar behaviour in two other school principals. As result, she asserted: "There was not much interaction and communication with the principal in both schools." Similarly, Coco commented that unlike the previous principal, she "seldom met" the new principal whenever she was in school doing volunteer work. As the new school leader was "rarely" visible, she found it difficult for her to approach the new leader to tell her things. She added that if she had a problem, she rather chose to wait to see how things turned out than to say anything to the new school leader. From these narratives, it was clear that the lack of visibility caused these participants to perceive the school leader as unapproachable.
In addition to lack of visibility, this unapproachability was also linked to the school leader's inaccessibility. Two factors contributed to this. The first factor was attributed to the school leader's busyness. This busyness was demonstrated in several ways. In one school, Coco said that the new school leader's busyness was attributed to the many "meetings" that the latter had to attend. Mary affirmed that the new principal was indeed busy. She shared:

[The new principal] was always cordial, but not approachable. She did not stop to talk to me. She was always rushing off because she was busy. If we did have a conversation, it was a short one. It was a line or two. It was: "Hi! How are you?"

Unlike Coco and Mary, Lynn offered an unexpected perspective. She asserted that the school leader in another school "pretended to be very busy" so as to avoid talking to parents. Snowyz affirmed Lynn's observation. During the interview, she also described the frustration of one parent when the same principal never returned the parent's numerous calls. As a result, the parent could not seek answers concerning her child's learning pathways. This led Snowyz to sarcastically remark: "Not a partnership, right?"

The second factor was attributed to school leader's proud behaviour. This notion of pride was expressed in the following manner. Lynn said that one school leader thought "too highly of [herself]" in terms of her knowledge. Demonstrated by always stressing on her professional knowledge when she spoke to Lynn, this deterred her from partnering with the school. Likewise, Snowyz shared that some school leaders "always had their noses in the air" due to their SPED expertise. When I asked her to clarify what she meant by "noses in the air," she laughed before uttering the phrase, "very proud." She explained that this behaviour of the school leaders made her "afraid of them." Hence, she would not open up and share her ideas with the school.
The third attribute was uncaring. According to a couple of participants, some school leaders did not show care for the PSG volunteers who came to do volunteer work for the school. This was demonstrated by the school leader's absence of interaction with them. Amongst the participants, Helen explained emphatically why it was important for the school leader to interact with them:

You felt that the principal was around to care. To care. *Ya lah.* (Pause). And was concerned. That was important .... [The] school leader should make an effort like the church pastor. After the service, the pastor would come up to greet his congregation. If the principal did ... [likewise], you would feel that the principal was concerned. That was what I wanted to see.

Other than the PSG volunteers, a couple participants stated that some school leaders did not care for their students' well-being. Following is the best example of how this view was conveyed by Snowyz concerning the safety and well-being of the students:

For the safety of the child, the school should allow us to come into the school grounds to fetch our children. In the end, we parents ... [signed] a petition in order to get the school to allow us to come into the school grounds to fetch our child home from school.

The final attribute was the lack of understanding of the child and parent's needs. For example, Lynn spoke of one school leader's failure to understand her concerns and her son's needs. She recalled disagreeing with the school leader when her son first went to a secondary school. She explained that this was because she felt that the school leader "had little understanding of ASD children and about [her] concern about letting [her] son be independent so fast." In her view, she felt that the school leader should have encouraged her to work closely with the teacher in order teach her son how to be independent. Snowyz agreed that it was not only
important for the school leader to just know the parents and the students, but they also needed to understand the struggles that they were facing. She also explained that some school leaders failed to understand the child because their busy schedule had prevented them from seeing the child everyday and from being involved in the daily school activities and events. As a result, this had hindered the school leader's ability to communicate with the parents about their child's needs. Specifically for Snowyz, for a school leader to simply say "nothing" about her child or what type of resources she could use to help the child when the former encountered her in school was unacceptable. In fact, it only disappointed her.

**Communication practices.** Communication practices had also served as barriers to a healthy home-school partnership. Two negative practices were identified. The first was the lack of active listening. Several participants articulated their frustration when some school leaders failed to listen and follow through with their "opinions and ideas." This frustration is best illustrated when Helen emphatically remarked: "[We] had given feedback .... But, there was no reply to your feedback you know from the principal. At least, the school could say, "Oh, we will consider it .... Nothing. This happened so many times." Helen explained that as "school D had all the projects and goals planned out for the year, .... [the school] only needed the parents to support their projects [and not] new ideas from the parents." As a parent, Helen expressed that she felt obligated to give feedback as this would allow her to help the school improve.

Interestingly, John remarked that the above mentioned school leader did make an attempt to respond to parents' feedback. However, the responses given were in the form of stock replies such as "Oh, we will do something about it," "I will look into it," and "Wait, let us check, and we will see what we can do about it." Wanting to know how John felt, I probed by asking him this question: "How did you feel whenever you give feedback to the school?" John gave an
exasperated reply by saying: "How do I feel? I didn't expect them to do anything." It was likewise for his wife, Sally, who said, "I felt that it was useless to give feedback." Sally's sense of helplessness was also echoed by Helen when the latter said: "Nothing more I could do, you see. I was like a small fry you see. I couldn't do anything."

Unlike John, Ling and Jay affirmed Helen's comments about the school leader. He too felt frustrated when the school leader did not respond to both his and his wife's suggestion of running a visual arts class for the students in the school. As a result, Jay was neither encouraged to offer further suggestions nor work with the school.

Besides the failure to practice active listening, the school leader's unilateral communication practice hindered a positive home-school partnership. In Ling's view, the "mass meeting" structure that the school leader in one school used to "expedite communication" had limitations. Expressing her dislike for such an approach, she stated this form of practice was not only unidirectional, but it was non-interactive too. Ling added: "She was just telling us what was in her head. She was not picking from the parents what was in the parents' heads."

From the above narratives of this section, two things were evident. First, it was clear that some school leader's negative attributes affected positive home-school partnership as they clearly undermined the opportunity to promote a healthy working relationship between the home and school. Second, it was also clear that the school leader's lack of communication skills and communication practices made it difficult for the participants to work closely with the schools.

**Perceptions.** The participants surfaced two different perceptions that acted as barriers to positive home-school partnership. The first was the school leaders' negative perception of parents. Two different perspectives were articulated. A few participants shared that some school leaders had viewed them as resources to be used "to support their [school] projects." As a result,
participants like Snowyz felt being used by the schools. Others, like John and Lynn, shared that some school leaders viewed them as "troublemakers." While John was openly told by the school leader not to ask the board members too many questions during a meeting as that would spell trouble for the school leader, Lynn stated that both she and the other parents chose to communicate less with school leader lest they be viewed as troublemakers for the school.

In terms of the perception that the participants held about how some school leaders had viewed their roles and responsibilities, multiple perspectives were given. For example, Jay viewed one school leader to have perceived herself as an instructional leader. She demonstrated this by helping the parents to understand the "school initiatives." As she was so focused on achieving the school's initiatives, Jay found it a struggle whenever he had to speak to her concerning issues that was not within the school's goals or context. Contrary to Jay, Snowyz offered a different perspective. She stated some school leaders viewed themselves to be an expert "in special education." In doing so, these principals did not "set [themselves] high above the parents in terms of [their] expertise in special education," but they also deterred parents from wanting to talk to them. Having also encountered such a principal, Lynn asserted that it "was not right" for a school leader to behave in this manner as such a behaviour was perceived by Lynn to be condescending. Additionally, Snowyz shared that some school leaders viewed themselves as an operations manager of the school. She conveyed this view when she said: "I felt that my child's school principals in both schools were there to oversee the school facilities and the day to day operation and business of the school only."

During the interview, two participants, on separate occasions, shared with me the strategic thrusts or goals of the school that their child had been in. An examination of both artifacts revealed that partnership was reflected as one of the strategic thrusts. This therefore
showed a marked divergence between what was reflected in both schools' strategic thrust on partnership and the findings in this section.

**Finding 2.3 School professionals.** The third major theme that arose from the data was school professionals. Three sub-themes emerged from the analysis and they were as follows: attributes, communication practices, and perceptions. Collectively, they account for why the school professionals was also another factor that hindered a positive home-school partnership. It must be noted that each sub-theme in this section overlapped with each other.

*School professionals' attributes.* Three negative attributes were identified. Demonstrated in terms of the school professional's attitudes, behaviour, or actions, the first negative attribute was unapproachability. According to the participants two behaviours contributed to this negative attribute. The first was the busyness of the school professionals with the "paperwork" (Snowyz) they had to do after school. As a result, this affected the participants in different ways. For several participants, the school professionals' busyness made it difficult for them to get updates about their child. Snowyz shared that to get an update from the teachers, she needed to catch them when she picked up or dropped off her child at school. Such a face to face encounter with the teachers was described by Snowyz as a "touch and go" affair. In her view, this affected partnership greatly as she could neither support her son at home nor in school. On the other hand, Helen spoke of how the busy schedule of her daughter's teacher made the latter inaccessible to her. This, in turn, caused her to become "kan cheong" or "anxious" as she could not resolve an issue with the school professional concerning her child. She commented emphatically that she needed to be "persistent" in order to finally gain access to the teacher. Ling asserted that such a behaviour discouraged both her and her husband from working with such a school professional.
Clearly the unapproachability of the school professionals did not facilitate a pleasant partnership experience for these participants.

The second behaviour was the display of pride. An example of this was best conveyed by Lynn when she asserted: "[Teachers] cannot understand everything about the child. They need to learn from the parents about the child because the parents know better than the teachers." She added that being humble would encourage her to share and partner with them. Lynn's sentiments were shared by Snowyz.

Several participants also spoke of the uncaring attitudes of some school professionals. It was apparent that these attitudes affected their child's well-being. For Helen, the "never mind" attitude that her daughter's school professional in school D adopted impacted her daughter's safety and well-being in the school, as it allowed her daughter to be bullied until Helen raised the issue with the teacher. This episode caused her to say that a teacher should not just do a job for the sake of living. As for John, the "could not be bothered" and "didn't care" attitudes of some school professionals impacted his son's intellectual well-being. Like Helen, he attributed this to how he perceived these school professionals viewed their job—it was just a job to be done. Hence, he surprised me by using expletives to express his disapproval of the negative attitudes some school professionals had adopted. He uttered:

And it XXX. It really XXX ... There was a need. Even if my son was weak in math, the teacher should have given him remedial lessons .... But, the teacher just gave him a pile of work to do at home .... [Like] I say, could not be bothered .... So, I didn't think that I could depend on the teacher at that point.

Like John, Mary also witnessed a similar attitude in another school where the school professional did not exercise care in marking her son's work.
From the accounts, two things were evident. First, the uncaring attitude undermined the close working relationships between the home and schools. Second, the same attitude also caused a rift to occur in both John and Helen's case, thus making their partnership with the school professionals an unpleasant one.

The third attribute was the teachers' failure to show an understanding of the child's need. The data revealed that the participants differed in how they defined the child's needs. For Helen, it was an understanding her child's emotional needs. Helen recounted how the failure of the school professional to understand the differences between the emotional needs of the male and female gender made it difficult for the latter to customize the very intense library internship program for her daughter. As a result, Helen asserted that her child "suffered a lot." What this "a lot" alluded to, she did not elaborate. Unlike Helen, John shared how the repeated failure of the different school professionals to understand his son's intellectual and emotional needs caused him to not only "[lose] confidence in them," but to adopt a passive stance during the IEP meetings. He said: "Unfortunately, after two years in school D (long pause) ... whatever the teacher told us to do, we just did it." As for Lynn, the school professional's failure to understand her son's learning needs resulted in the latter using the "same teaching method" to teach her students. As her son had ASD, Lynn reported not seeing progress in her son's academic work.

From the above narratives, it was clear that the negative attitudes, actions, and behaviours of some school professionals impacted home-school partnership. They did not just undermine the working relationship between the school and home, but they also gave each participant a negative experience of home-school partnership.

*Communication practices.* The findings indicated that there were five communication
practices deployed by some school professionals that inhibited positive home-school partnership. The first was the lack of feedback or update given by some school professionals. Several participants articulated this view. They spoke of how some school professionals shared minimally with them about their child. This view is best illustrated when Snowyz said: "Ninety-nine percent of the pages [in the communication book] was blank. Once in a while, the teacher would write to say that my child had forgotten to bring this and that to school." Shrugging her shoulders to indicate that she had no idea why the communication book was underutilized, she added that she felt "no sense of connectedness or a working relationship with [the] school." This made her feel "helpless" and "frustrated" as she was unable to assist her son with his work at home. Her sentiments were shared by several participants. John added that infrequent communication also showed that the teachers "didn't care" about the child.

The second negative issue with communication was the lack of clarity in the communication of some of the school professionals. Both Snowyz and Lynn said that this was caused by the "incomplete information" provided by the school professionals. Lynn also shared that when she tried to ask for clarification, the teacher became "annoyed" with her. In light of this, Lynn asserted: "Having the skills to communicate was important as this would help us work better together."

The third negative communication practice concerned the lack of integrity. A complete surprise to me, several participants like John, Helen, and Lynn expressed their frustration with some school professionals' failure to communicate truthfully about their child be it in terms of the child's academic progress (John), behaviour (Lynn), or injury sustained in school (Helen).

The fourth negative communication practice was the lack of active listening. The participants provided different perspectives on how this was illustrated. For example, John stated
that he observed a lack of empathetic listening being demonstrated by a school professional towards his wife when she sought the school professional's help to search for her missing son. This angered him. Lynn, on the other hand, noted that the school professional did not accept her suggestion on how to manage her autistic son in class. This also angered her as her son continued to struggle in class as he was uncomfortable with the teacher. Unlike John and Lynn, a few other participants also spoke about the lack of follow through by some school professionals. An example of this was illustrated when John said: "We had to ask for therapy sessions. The psychologist said that he would try to do some therapy sessions with him, but nothing happened."

Finally, the unidirectional communication of some school professionals also hindered a collaboration between the home and school. The data indicated that this practice was more pronounced during the IEP meetings. This thus prevented participants such as Coco, Ling, Jay, Snowyz, and Mary from being involved in decision making process for their child. Snowyz explained why she perceived this to be so. She articulated: "I guessed that the school felt that parents couldn't contribute much as we were not professionals and a school partner." Hence, it came as no surprise when Mary said that the IEP goal set for her son was that of the teacher's. She also added: "That was what the teacher wanted him to achieve so that he could be placed on the certification program when he moved over to the next school."

The above narratives highlighted the importance of communication in home-school partnership. Specifically, they indicated which communication practices had hindered a close collaboration between the home and school.

**Perceptions.** Three different types of perceptions were identified as barriers to positive
home-school partnership. The first was the school professionals' perception of parents. Multiple perspectives were put forward. Both Coco and Ling said that some school professionals viewed them as parents rather than partners while John said that he was perceived as a total stranger. He cited the failure of a school professional to acknowledge both him and his family when he greeted the teacher at a shopping centre as an evidence to support his perception. Snowyz shared that she was viewed as a "nobody" and "non-professional." She stated that these perceptions were shaped by the school professionals' attitude that the latter had of parents—that parents knew less than teachers. This perception thus deterred her from interacting with the teachers and helping out in school events.

The second was the school professionals' perception of their child. Lynn shared how a new SPED teacher graduate from NIE had viewed her SPED students. She said: "The teacher felt there was no .... cure .... [or] recovery for the students. [As for] the students with autism, there was no medication to help them with their disabilities." Hence, the teacher concluded that there was no need for her to work hard. As a result, Lynn said: "I felt [that] it was a waste of time to talk to [the] teacher." This was because such a negative attitude and deficit view of her child had affected their working relationship.

The final perception of participants was related to how the school professionals saw themselves in terms of roles and responsibilities. Snowyz related that some school professionals viewed themselves to be experts in their respective fields because of their "certification and credentials." On the other hand, Jay remarked that they saw their role as supporting the school's goals and achieving the school's objectives. Hence, this made it a challenge for him to talk to them about things that did not pertain to the school goals. Clearly, both Jay and Snowyz's
narratives indicated that how the school professionals viewed themselves in accordance with a narrow set of roles and responsibilities was a deterrent to a positive home-school partnership.

**Finding 2.4 Location and timing of IEP meetings.** The location and scheduling of the IEP meetings were also highlighted as barriers to positive home-school partnership. Specifically for Snowyz and Coco, the location of the IEP meetings played an important role in facilitating their partnership with the school professional. In their view, neither the school canteen nor the classroom was a good choice as it did not give them the privacy to share sensitive issues related to their child or family with the school professionals. Coco's remark about the classroom came as a surprise to me, as all IEP meetings were held in the classroom. Coco's explanation was that as all the classroom doors were open, her conversation could be overheard by other parents who were seated outside of the classroom waiting for their turn to see the school professional. For me, this was an eye opener.

Other than location, the scheduling of the IEP meeting also proved to be an added barrier that prevented a productive collaboration. Lynn highlighted that holding the meeting on a weekday affected working parents as had difficulty taking leave from their work to attend the IEP meeting. While the parents' preference was for the meeting to be held on a Saturday, Lynn shared that the teachers in this school were not allowed to conduct the IEP meeting on a Saturday. Her comment caused me to search the MOE's public archives concerning a five-day work week policy. Enacted in 2005, this policy was only meant for the mainstream schools. However, as SPED schools in Singapore come under the partial charge of the MOE, it was therefore not surprising to see this policy being adopted by this school. Hence, this document corroborated with Lynn's narrative. It must be noted that this finding overlapped with the earlier finding on work demands and time constraint.
Finding 2.5 Lack of parental involvement opportunities. The lack of parental involvement opportunities in school activities was another barrier. While many of the participants concurred that this lack hindered the opportunity to foster a closer working relationship between the home and school, they differed in the area where the opportunities were seen to be lacking in. Interestingly, the data also indicated that this phenomenon was more pronounced in one school more than the others.

An area where some participants found a lack of parental opportunities in was in the school's CCAs. Two reasons were cited for this. Jay stated that the secondary school (school B) had its "own agenda worked out." Hence, when his offered to help to his daughter's CCA teacher to run a graffiti art session for the students, his received no response from the teacher. This disappointed him as he felt he had much to offer to the CCA teacher and the students. Ling, his wife, said that the school was not tapping on the work that they did. In another secondary school, Coco stated that she was not allowed to participate in school C's organized activities like the "learning journeys." While no explanation was given to her, she gave her own reason for this. She shared that she believed it was because the school wanted the students to learn how to be independent so as to prepare them to do their "work internship" in the latter part of their secondary education. This work internship required them to be attached to a workplace where the parents were not allowed to be with their children.

For some participants who were PSG members, they found that some schools did not give them enough opportunity to participate at PSG meetings and school events. Two factors were cited for this. The first was the school leader factor. According to Lynn, the school leader's busy schedule had hindered the PSG involvement in school B. Despite repeated reminders being sent to her by the PSG members to call for a PSG meeting, no meeting took place for three years.
This led Lynn to conclude that the school leader "didn't see the importance of the PSG in her school." Besides the busy work schedule, Lynn also commented on the school leader's negative attitude towards the PSG members demonstrated by the school leader's failure to listen to PSG members' ideas for parental involvement in the school and her preference to depend on her staff and external help to assist in school activities. The teacher factor was cited as the next factor. Jay shared that the teachers in charge of the PSG in school A "didn't have time or make an effort to conduct an engaging [meeting]" with the PSG members. Jay explained that the teachers probably saw their involvement with the PSG as an "extra" or "add on" thing for them. Hence, he did not see the benefit of attending the meeting. In his view, the teacher factor revealed to him that this school had not given "much attention to home-school partnership." Jay articulated his disappointment as he felt that "[there] was an opportunity that was lost there."

Besides the above, there was also a lack of opportunities to participate in school organized workshops or courses in some schools. Both Snowyz and Lynn commented on this lack in school B. Unlike Snowyz, Lynn explained that this was due to the school's failure to provide parents with information about relevant courses that were organized externally for SPED parents. Hence, she took her own initiative to attend external courses. Unlike Lynn, Coco highlighted that in school C, the course or workshop scheduling for parents prevented her from attending them. According to Coco, they were only held on "Thursdays" during work hours. This then made it difficult for working parents like Coco to attend them. In yet another school, Mary added that that there was also a "limited number of workshops and spaces" offered to the parents in this school.

Drawing from what I saw in the two artifacts that were shared with me by two participants earlier, the finding in this section also showed a divergence from what the schools
reflected in their strategic thrusts on partnership. Moreover, there is a clear overlap between the findings in this section and the findings on the school leader's attributes.

**Finding 2.6 Different pathways, different goals.** The theme—"different pathways, different goals" emerged from the analysis of data. It was clear the conflict in goals between the home and school served as a barrier to positive home-school partnership. For several participants, some schools were too academically inclined as they had emphasized more on the academic domain of their curriculum framework than other domains. What gave them this impression were the following school practices. For John and Helen, they cited the practice of drilling in order to pass the school's assessments or WPLN tests. John also cited the practice of "streaming" and "pushing" the students to the next level when they were not ready to illustrate the academic drive that some schools had to achieve their academic "quota" or pass rate that each school had set as its yearly targets. In light of all these, Ling's articulated that she "was not too sure if [the academic curriculum] was applicable to special needs kids."

While some schools were perceived to be academically inclined, most of the participants shared that they did not place an emphasis on their child's academic performance. Following is an example of a reason given by a participant to explain why the academic performance was least important to her:

I wanted to see that my son could take care of himself, know his daily routines, and help out in house chores. These are important for me because he has no siblings to take care of him when I can no longer be with [him]. (Lynn)

Hence, Lynn repeatedly told the teacher: "His life skills are more important than [his] school grades."
Moreover, several participants shared that their child had dreams and aspirations that the schools could not cater to because of the "limited pathways" that were offered to the students. This view is best illustrated by the comment of one participant who emphatically said:

[There] are ... limited pathways and so the kids have to choose one of the pathways whether they liked it or not .... To be honest, which parent would want their ... special needs kid to grow up to make beds, [or] clean toilets .... Everyone wants their kids to have something they want to do in future. They dream of something like that. Our daughter has a dream. She has a talent. Her dream and her talent match. But there isn't an environment to grow that. So maybe the home and school could work together and help to move this area forward .... Although the school offered programs to specially train her, it was not able to give her that kind support that we wanted. (Ling)

As several participants perceived the inability of some schools to meet their goals and their child's dream, they decided to look for an "alternative pathway." For Mary, she created this pathway by pulling him out of school so that he could pursue his passion for the "fine arts." She shared that prior to withdrawing her son from the school, "the teachers were not communicating with [her]" even when her son did not complete his homework as they knew that "he was moving towards his dream—to be a dancer." As for Snowyz and Helen, they found an alternative pathway for their child. It was at a "music centre." The centre did not just hone their child's musical talent, but it also gave Helen specifically what she wanted—"to take part in the centre's activities with her [daughter] and help her to integrate into the society." Helen's sentiments were also shared by Snowyz. For Jay and Ling, it was the church youth group that helped their daughter to hone her talents and integrate with the mainstream youths.
I reviewed some public documents that were available on the Singapore MOE and SSO's websites and found a divergence and convergence. In examining the public documents, I noted an alignment between the schools' and MOE's curriculum framework and student outcomes. While both the MOE and schools' curriculum framework was "holistic" (MOE, 2018b, para. 3) in design, the findings in this section showed a divergence between what the documents showed and what the participants reported during their interview. As for the "limited" vocational training areas offered by the schools, there was a convergence between what the findings and what was seen in the SSO's public document.

**Finding 2.7 No national policy on home-school partnership.** Generally, most participants agreed on the need for a national guideline to be drawn up for home-school partnership. Following were some reasons given by some of the participants. Several participants like Coco, Lynn, and Sally agreed that a national policy would enable a closer bond to be established between the home and school. Sally also added that such a policy would help parents to better "understand their role" in partnership. To this, Lynn added that a national policy would help the "principal to work closer with the parents and teachers." Interestingly, Ling gave a different viewpoint. As she had a good working relationship with her child's class teacher, she saw no necessity for such a policy. A policy, in her view, was only needed if parents met an unresponsive teacher. In her view, "when a policy is in place, it complicates things because the parents and schools will be made to just follow. I mean they would have to follow a certain process." With a process in place, Ling expressed that home-school partnership might not be "genuine or authentic."

Several participants also articulated their feelings concerning the current lack of a national policy. For example, John uttered that he felt "lost." His wife, Sally, added "helpless" as
there was "no direction" for her to follow in home-school partnership. Lynn echoed Sally's sentiment too. Not only did she feel "sad and helpless," but she wondered where she would go and seek help.

As I probed the participants concerning who should draw up the guidelines for home-school partnership, I received some similar and different responses. For example, Coco explicitly said that it should be the MOE because "it is the MOE mah! .... Unless MOE makes the policy, the policy will not work. Parents will ... follow MOE's policy rather than the school's." For Coco, the MOE represented "authority." Similarly, Lynn viewed the MOE to be a "powerful" establishment. In her view, when MOE drew up such a policy, it showed that "MOE [cared] about home-school partnership." Unlike Lynn and Coco, Snowyz offered a different perspective. She believed that the SSO "should [first draw up] the guidelines for all the schools." Once that was done, the SSO should seek for MOE's approval. She explained why she preferred the SSO to draw up the guidelines: "If a policy was to be set by the individual school under the same organization, then things would become complicated for the parents because each school under the same SSO may have different policies on home-school partnership." From the various views given, it was apparent that they all welcomed a national policy on home-school partnership.

**Finding 2.8 Parental workplace.** A couple of participants cited parental workplace as a barrier to collaboration with the schools. For example, Lynn expressed the difficulty that some parents had in attending the parent teacher conference that was held twice year by all schools in the SSO as they "could not apply for leave" to attend the conference that was usually held on a weekday. Coco fully concurred with Lynn.
Research Question 3. What do special education parents suggest to improve home-school partnerships?

Six themes emerged from my semi-structured interview question that I posed to all participants: What are three suggestions you can give to help your child's school to improve or strengthen home-school partnerships? The six themes are as follows: building parents' capacity, increasing parent involvement in school activities, the school leader, the school professionals, addressing a gap in the school curriculum, and IEP meetings.

Finding 3.1 Building parents' capacity. Building parents' capacity was a theme that emerged from the analysis of data. Within this theme, three sub-themes surfaced. They were organizing more courses and conferences, making resources accessible, and engaging parents in decision making and planning of school events. In the participants' view, improving each of these areas would in turn improve home-school partnership.

Organizing more courses and conferences. A suggestion given to improve home-school partnership was for schools to organize courses for the parents to attend. The purpose of this was to equip them with the "strategies" and "skills" to help their child at home with their schoolwork. For example, Snowyz suggested courses such as "techniques and methods of teaching ... children literacy and numeracy" as they would enable parents to use "the same methods [used by the school] at home." In her view, this would help lessen the child's confusion as there would be a consistency in how the child learned at school and at home. She also requested for other courses such as those related to "emotional and vocational support," behaviour management, "physiotherapy [and] occupational therapy" to help empower parents. These could be conducted by an "external professional or the HOD (Head of Department) of the school." More importantly,
she suggested that schools equipped parents with the knowledge of how they "could partner with the schools effectively to fulfill the potential of their child."

**Making resources available.** Several participants also emphasized the need for "resources" to be made available to them. For example, both Helen and Ling requested for resources pertaining to external events or activities as these would help them to meet their child's "interest." Ling also suggested that these resources be shared informally by the respective teachers via the WhatsApp platform. On the other hand, both Lynn and Snowyz requested for online resources to be made available via the respective school's websites. These included resources such as the school curriculum as well as materials related to teaching and learning, and "parenting." Snowyz expressed that when such resources were made available, the schools would be fostering "a strong partnership" as they were helping the parents to assist with their child's learning at home.

**Engaging parents in decision making and planning of school events.** Another suggestion given was to empower parents with the ability to plan and decide in the planning of school events. Articulating this view was Snowyz who suggested areas where schools could engage the parents in. They included "school development plan," school policies that pertained to "student well-being, ... safety, [and] anti-bullying," school activities and events, and curriculum planning. In her view, parents should be involved in decision making as they had a "stake" in their child's education.

**Finding 3.2 Increasing parent involvement in school activities.** Several participants also expressed their desire for an increase in parent involvement in school activities to improve partnership. They suggested three ways on how they this could be done.

**Inviting parents to become involved.** Two ways were suggested on how to invite parent
involvement. A few participants suggested that the schools explored a different way to invite parents to become involved in school activities. Strongly advocating this view were both Ling and Jay. Specifically for Ling, she suggested that schools explored "what parents had to offer" during orientation or meet the parent sessions. Jay added that this would allow parents like himself to use their professional expertise to "help create exposure to different types of learning ... that would help support the school's academic work or ... the school's CCA." He also suggested that schools could consider creating a platform for parents to come and "wow [their] child's school or class." In his view, these sorts of platforms would encourage more participation and partnerships. Lynn agreed. She felt that as some parents were professionals like lawyers and doctors by profession, they could engage students in activities that were related to art and craft or vocational skills.

*Improving the quality of PSG meetings.* Improving the quality of the PSG meeting was another suggestion given to encourage parent involvement in these meetings. Jay offered two suggestions on how this could be done. In terms of the conduct of the meeting, Jay wanted to see more "motivation" reflected in the planning of the meeting, as well as "follow ups" and "accountability" measures being put in place. He articulated: "[If] the meetings had more of these elements, more was going to get done, and I might have been more wanting to participate [in these meetings]." Moreover, he suggested that the teacher in charge of the PSG be "trained in facilitation skills" as this would help the teacher to run an effective meeting where parents would be engaged and "some tangible outcomes" could be seen.

*Early notification and rescheduling of school activities.* Finally, to increase parental involvement in school activities, some participants spoke about the need for schools to provide early notice as well as reschedule the timing of parental involvement activities to enable working
or busy parents to participate in school activities. Ling suggested that schools make known the 
dates of their school activities early as this would allow both of her and Jay, who had to travel 
overseas for work, to arrange their calendar in a way that allowed them to participate in the 
school's activities. Jay agreed fully. However, Coco, who worked locally, suggested that schools 
held their activities on a Saturday as it is a non-working day for most parents. When I looked at 
one school's website, I found that the school still holds talks for parents on a weekday. This data 
gathered from the school website thus corroborated with what Coco had shared.

**Finding 3.3 The school leader.** Several participants also spoke about several positive 
leadership attributes and communication practices they desired to see being demonstrated by 
school leaders. The first was "welcoming." The participants mentioned several ways this could 
be demonstrated. For example, both Lynn and Snowyz mentioned more interaction with the 
parents when they came to the school as she believed that this would help develop a closer 
relationship between the principal and parents. This, in turn, would cause parents to "open up 
and share more with the school." Additionally, Snowyz mentioned that saying "hello" would also 
show that the school leader was both friendly and welcoming of parents too.

The second attribute was approachability. There were two ways of demonstrating this. 
The first way was by demonstrating humility. In Lynn view, the unassuming ways of the 
principal would encourage the parents to partner with the school more. The second way was by 
being "visible" (Snowyz) or "present" (Helen). Both Helen and Snowyz gave examples of how 
the school leaders could make their presence felt so as to make themselves approachable. Helen, 
for instance, suggested that the school leader be present when the school assembled together at 
the start of the school day and during school dismissal time as well as at school events. She also 
suggested that the school leader "come and see what the parent volunteers were doing" in the
school even if it was "for a short period of time." She explained that the school leader's presence would not only make her "approachable" to the parents, but it would also make parent volunteers like herself feel "welcomed." Snowyz, on the other hand, said that the school leaders could be around "when parents dropped off and picked up their child from school" as this would give them an opportunity to approach the parents and engage them in "a short chat" with them about their child's progress in school.

The third attribute was openness. Lynn suggested for some school leaders to have an open mind towards parental involvement in school. This could be demonstrated by allowing parents, who had the desire to help the students, to volunteer in the schools. Snowyz agreed with Lynn as she felt that parents' involvement would "enrich the school's activities." She also suggested for the school leaders to be open to having parents being involved in decision making on issues that affected them.

In terms of communication practices, Ling suggested that some school leaders adopt a more interactive communication approach when they held meetings with the parents. Such an approach or practice would help to improve home-school partnership. To facilitate a more engaging discussion with parents, Ling suggested that the school leaders "identified" and invited interested parents or those who had some concerns to "coffee sessions." She envisaged such sessions to be different from having mass meetings. Not only was the number of participants smaller, but the participants would be made to sit in "a circle." Such a setting would make the session "more casual and relaxing." It would also make parents feel "more comfortable ... to voice out." Ling was confident that such sessions would "yield better results."

**Finding 3.4 School professionals.** Several participants suggested three ways that school professionals could work on to help improve home-school partnership. They were building
capacity, demonstrating positive attributes and communication practices, and adopting a positive perception of parents.

**Building capacity.** Building the capacity of the teachers was suggested by a couple of participants as a way to improve home-school partnership. The data indicated a divergence in terms of the area that the teachers needed to work on. For example, Lynn requested for some teachers to attend courses in pedagogy. Specifically, she would like them to attend training or courses related to ASD as she felt that the "NIE SPED course was not enough" to equip them to teach ASD children like her son. To build their capacity further in this area, she suggested that teachers went on an "attachment to other autism schools so that [they] could better understand and have more experience in teaching students with autism."

To help me understand why Ling commented on the inadequacy of the NIE SPED course in preparing trainee teachers to teach students with ASD, I went to the NIE website to gather information about the course outline for this group of teachers. The outline indicated that SPED trainee teachers were required to do a mandatory course entitled "Introduction to Disabilities and Disorders." In this 26-week course (NIE, 2018), the trainee teachers were exposed to "13 disabilities categories in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004 classification system" (p. 248). In this classification system, autism is among one of the 13 disabilities that have been listed. Based on this information and on the duration of time given for this course, I could only assume that ASD could not have been covered in great detail. Hence, this evidence converged with Lynn's viewpoints on the need for the teachers to complete courses or professional development on ASD.

Other than building pedagogical skills and knowledge, John suggested that some teachers be trained in communication skills so that they could demonstrate "empathy" when they
communicated with the parents. To better understand why John made this suggestion, I also looked at the above mentioned NIE course outline. I found that the NIE SPED trainee teachers were also required to do a 13-week course entitled "Communication and Collaboration for Special School Teachers." Looking at the brief descriptor and the time duration allocated to this course, I assumed again that the course provided the participants with only basic communication skills to "collaborate with relevant stakeholders" (p. 251). In light of this, I was not able to conclude that the teachers lacked communication skills.

Additionally, John suggested for the school professionals to be trained in "special education." However, he did not specify which group of school professionals. Nevertheless, I decided to examine the SSO's hiring criteria as well as the NCSS educational requirements for becoming a SPED teacher to help me better understand why John made this suggestion. I noted that the SSO's hiring criteria aligned with NCSS's. I also found that the only school professional that was not required to be trained in special education was the job coach. As some of the experiences that John shared with me came from a school that had job coaches, John's suggestion for this group of school professionals to be trained in special education was therefore a justifiable one in light of the information that was gathered from the NCSS and SSO websites.

*Demonstrating positive attributes and communication practices.* The participants stated several positive attributes that school professionals should have or demonstrate to improve home-school collaboration. Helen, for example, suggested for some teachers to be "respectful" and caring as these attributes would encourage her work and share with the teacher on how the latter could work with her child. She said that she would also talk to her child and get the latter to work with the teacher. John, on the hand, would like them to demonstrate empathy, patience, and the ability to understand the child's capability. Both he and Sally, also stressed the importance of
being passionate about the job. Helen agreed as well. Lynn added about the need to show humility as this would facilitate partnership between the home and school. Like John, she also stressed the importance of being "truthful" to the parents about their child. In addition to all these, Snowyz added that the teachers should be friendly, an attribute that was also highlighted by Helen. Snowyz explained that demonstrating this attribute would put parents at ease with the teachers. This, in turn, would encourage the parents to be more forthcoming in sharing information about their child and making suggestions for school improvement. Moreover, she suggested the need to demonstrate two other attributes—flexibility in handling a special needs child and showing professional knowledge concerning the different ways of dealing with each child. These attributes were highlighted by Lynn too. Specifically for Snowyz, demonstrating both attributes would help the parents to "trust" the teachers more.

In terms of communication practices, the participants suggested adopting two practices that would help to enhance home-school partnership. The first was frequent communication. The data indicated a divergence in terms of how the participants defined frequency. John would have liked "monthly" updates about his son. His wife Sally, on the other hand, said that updates could be given at any time of the day. Mary would have liked to receive updates on "alternate days" while Snowyz suggested "twice a month" as she knew how busy the teachers were with their paperwork. Like Snowyz, Jay acknowledged the "demands of a teacher." To meet the needs of the teachers and parents as well as to facilitate a "more continuous communication," he suggested putting a support structure in place. This involved getting a "third party" to simultaneously help the teachers with any follow up they needed to do with parents and to lighten their workload. The second was to practice active listening. Participants like Helen,
Coco, and Sally wanted the schools to listen and response to their feedback as this showed them that the school "valued" their inputs. Seeing this would prompt them to give future suggestions.

*Adopting a positive perception of parents.* Perceiving the parents in a positive way would also help to improve home-school partnership. Snowyz suggested that the teachers viewed parents as partners.

**Finding 3.5 Addressing a gap in the school curriculum.** Two participants gave suggestions on how to address a gap in the current school curriculum so as to facilitate partnership between the home and school. Specifically for Mary, she suggested that the school considered the inclusion of creative arts in the current school curriculum as this "would cater to students who might want to pursue the creative arts field and make it their career." Ling suggested the inclusion of an overseas "exchange program" as such a program would "wow" the students, "help [them] fulfill [their] dream," and even get her and Jay to be more engaged with the school. On the other hand, Jay suggested using the social media platform such as Facebook to hold a "greater conversation" amongst the school, parents, and students to discuss what the kids could do.

**Finding 3.6 IEP meetings.** The final suggestion concerned IEP meetings. Two suggestions were given on how the IEP meetings. The first was to review the way IEP meetings were conducted. Both Coco and Snowyz spoke about the need for "privacy" which could be achieved by holding the IEP meeting behind "closed doors." The second was to reschedule the IEP meeting. Lynn suggested holding the meeting on a Saturday as "some parents could only turn up on Saturday" as they worked on a weekday.

From the above participants' comments, it was evident that conducting the IEP meeting behind closed doors and rescheduling the IEP meeting would not only encourage parents to share
more or participate actively in the IEP meeting, but it would also facilitate a two-way communication.

**Summary**

This chapter began with the profiles of the participants. In order to gain an insight on how the participants perceived and experienced home-school partnerships in Singapore, I coded data from the seven transcribed semi-structured interviews. The findings were built from the problem, research questions, research design, and from the themes that surfaced throughout the coding process. The data were connected and synthesized through explanatory text. Where appropriate, the findings were presented in clear narrative form using verbatim quotations. The intention was to allow the parents to speak for themselves to portray their reality and the complexities of the phenomenon. A summary of the findings could be found in the appendix (see Appendix L).

The research findings were organized following the study's research questions and contributed to the primary research question: "What are special education parents' perceptions about home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools."

The first sub-section contained findings related to the secondary research question: "What are special education parents' views about what contributes to a positive home-school partnership?" By utilizing the interview data, my research journal, documents, artifacts, and field notes, I uncovered four themes or factors that contributed to a positive home-school partnership. These included parents' beliefs, values, and culture, parental involvement in school activities, the school leader, and school professionals. Within each theme, were sub-themes. For example, under the parents' beliefs, values, and culture theme, the following sub-themes were identified: parents' beliefs about their roles in home-school partnership, parents' beliefs in their ability to help their child succeed in school, and parents' values and culture. Together, they accounted for
why or how beliefs, values, and culture made home-school partnership a positive experience in Singapore. The findings in this sub-section also showed that there were overlaps between the themes and sub-themes.

The second sub-section contained findings related to the secondary research question: "What do special education parents identify as barriers or inhibitors of a positive home-school partnership?" There were eight factors that served as barriers to a productive home-school partnership: parent-related inhibitors, the school leader, school professionals, location and scheduling of IEP meetings, lack of parental involvement opportunities, different pathway, different goals, no national policy on home-school partnership, and parental workplace. Amongst these themes, the first three themes contained sub-themes. These sub-themes within a theme showed why or how the theme served as a barrier to positive home-school partnership. Similar to the first sub-section, there were also overlaps between themes and sub-themes within this sub-section. Additionally, there were overlaps between themes and sub-themes in this sub-section and those in the first sub-section. These overlaps clearly revealed the complexity and multi-dimensionality of home-school partnership in the Singapore SPED schools. Besides these, this section also revealed convergence and divergence between what was reported by the participants and what was documented in the school artifacts or public documents.

Noteworthy was the findings related to the school leader and school professionals as there were some similar concepts being identified in sub-section one and two such as approachability and caring. This could be attributed to the interview protocol where participants were asked to provide positive and negative examples of home-school partnership.

The third sub-section contained findings related to the secondary research question: "What do special education parents suggest to improve home-school partnership?" Six
suggestions were provided. They were building parents' capacity, increasing parent involvement in school activities, the school leader, school professionals, addressing a gap in the school curriculum, and IEP meetings. Like sub-section two, this section also revealed some convergence between what was reported by the participants and what was documented in public documents. More importantly, the suggestions given represented the participants' desire to see improvements in home-school partnership in the Singapore SPED schools.

In Chapter Five, I provide interpretive insights into the findings of this chapter. I also analyze, discuss, and synthesize the findings in an attempt to provide a more holistic understanding of home-school partnership in Singapore SPED schools as seen from the perspectives of SPED parents.
Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to gain a deeper understanding of how SPED parents perceived and experienced home-school partnerships in Singapore. The rationale for the study was to assist SPED schools to better align their current practices of home-school partnerships with stakeholder's needs. Such an alignment will help foster a positive home-school partnership which, in turn, may lead to better student outcomes.

In Chapter Four, I presented the findings by organizing the data from various sources into categories to construct an understandable narrative. The purpose of this chapter is to provide interpretive insights into these findings. Whereas the previous chapter separated out the data to tell the "story of the research" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 253), this chapter reconstructs, analyzes, synthesizes, and builds a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon of home-school partnerships from the perspective of the Singapore SPED parents. This chapter is the result of interpreting and re-examining the patterns and themes of the findings and comparing and contrasting the findings with issues raised by other researchers and presented in my literature review.

This chapter is organized by synthesizing the main and sub-themes that emerged and placing them in Bronfenbrenner's (1977) socio-ecological model that I adapted for my original conceptual framework that was presented in Chapter Two (see Figure 1). However, in light of the findings that actually emerged through the study, I have now made changes to this original conceptual framework, which, for the purposes of this chapter, I now refer to as my "revised conceptual framework for Chapter Five discussion" (see Figure 5 below).
Figure 5. Revised conceptual framework for Chapter Five discussion.

The themes and sub-themes continue to appear within three broad dimensions—the home, school, and external environment but, where "positive partnership" appeared at the centre, "the child" now appears in this position to reflect the key concern of participants. This change and others are explained throughout my discussion below.

In presenting the themes of my revised conceptual framework, I have chosen to introduce the positive factor within each theme before presenting the negative one. Where applicable, suggestions from the participants and literature are incorporated to show how the barriers could be overcome. Consistent with literature, some factors served as both enablers and barriers (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Murray, Finnigan-Carr et al., 2014).

The Home

Under the home dimension, three themes emerged. They were parents' beliefs, values, and culture; lack of knowledge and skills; and time and work constraints.

**Beliefs, values, and culture.** Within literature, it is evident that parental beliefs can impact home-school partnership (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Murray et al., 2014). This was very evident in my study. It was clear that all participants held strong beliefs that shaped their partnership with the schools. Believing that their role in home-school partnership was to
support their child's learning at home, they conscientiously helped their child with homework, confident that this would lead to positive outcomes and, consistent with the literature, results in improved "behaviour," "attendance," and academic "achievement" (Cox-Petersen, 2011; Gordon & Louis, 2012; Kinkead-Clark, 2017). Their ability to help their child at home was key to how parents experienced home-school partnership as being positive. At the same time, this underscored parents' strong beliefs about their abilities to positively affect their child's educational achievement and future success. Referred to as self-efficacy in the home-school partnership literature (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sander, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010), such beliefs are important motivational factors in parents' decisions to be involved in their children's schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010).

The findings of my study corroborate research that found that parents with high levels of self-efficacy were inclined to "make positive decisions about active engagement in the child's education; further they [were] likely to persist in the face of challenges or obstacles and work their way through difficulties to successful outcomes" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 109). However, Eccles and Harold (1993) reported a "decrease in parents' feeling of efficacy as their children [grew] older" (p. 573). This was attributed to parents' lack of knowledge of math or to misgivings about how their approaches to assisting with homework might differ from the teaching methods of the school. Consequently, as children moved into higher grades, parents refrained from helping because they did not want to "mislead or confuse their children" (p. 574).

That I did not find this decrease in parent's sense of self-efficacy in my study is noteworthy. While the participants experienced similar challenges, they were not similarly discouraged. On the contrary, their perceived need to contribute to their child's achievement
seems to have outweighed any lack of confidence. For example, while several participants talked about how they found it difficult to help their child in math, they also talked about their persistence. One participant, for instance, explained that by approaching a teacher to ask to be shown the "teaching method" used in school, they learned how to better coach their child. As a result, parents were involved in their child's education irrespective of the child's grade level. This meant that a level of seamlessness between the school and the home could be sustained when the children went to secondary school and beyond. Furthermore, this enhanced sense of self-efficacy was related to how parents saw the home-school partnership as a positive experience.

Interestingly, my findings concerning the relationships between my participants' self-efficacy and the role they played in their child's education both converge and diverge with Wong et al.'s (2015b) findings about Singaporean parents with children with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools. Reflecting and, indeed, motivated by Singapore's emphasis on academic excellence, participants in both studies recognized that they play a "crucial role in learning and development of children with disabilities" (p. 9) at home. Participants of Wong et al.'s study "actively sought alternative sources of support to help their children succeed in school" (p. 9) such the hiring of private tutors. This is perhaps not surprising; Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation's (HSBC) (2017) *The Value of Education* study, "which looks at parents' ambitions for their children, the views on the costs and benefits of education, and the sacrifices they are prepared to make to ensure their children can fulfill their potential" (p. 3), indicates that Singaporean parents are ranked third globally for their willingness to invest early and heavily, spending an average of US$70, 939 on a child's primary, secondary, and undergraduate education (p. 9).
While Wong et al. (2015b) suggest that parents' sense of self-efficacy is related to their ability to access and pay for additional educational supports, I argue that self-efficacy comes from parents' determination and persistence in finding ways to work with the school to assist their own children. Specifically, the cost of hiring a tutor was beyond the financial means of most participants of my study. Even had they been able to afford this, most private tutors in Singapore offer services that focus on the mainstream school curriculum (Tan, 2015); tutors are rarely prepared to deliver the SPED curriculum and to meet the needs of SPED parents. Thus, parents of my study were best able to support their own children by working closely with the SPED teachers.

While not related to a monetary investment in education, I suggest that the self-efficacy that resulted from parents' persistence and ultimate confidence in this kind of home-school partnership nevertheless reflected how much value Singaporean parents place on education. Albeit not always without challenges (e.g., helping children in higher grades with math homework), parents' ultimate desire to see their children achieve in school was a key motivator. In Singapore, academic excellence is emphasized as the path, not only to personal but, moreover, to national success (Ong, 2018; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2010). In this sense, I can see how parental beliefs in self that are shaped by cultural values and, indeed, ideology are also strongly linked to successful home-school partnerships.

Parental beliefs and cultural values were also evident in my study in the ways in which parents were directly and actively involved in their children's schools. One way was by working with school professionals by furnishing them with information about the home and their child, another way was by becoming a school volunteer. In this regard, my findings were somewhat unique. Specifically, Jones (2019) found that, while Singaporean parents of children in
mainstream schools were similarly motivated by the value they placed on education, they did not see the need to be directly involved in the work of the school. They "operated almost independently of the school, offering support to their children in the form of encouragement ... and home teaching" (p. 45). Reporting on their study of education in mainstream schools, Wong et al. (2015b) asserted that Singaporean parents of children with disabilities did not see the "need to step into the boundaries of the school" (Wong et al., 2015b, p. 5) unless they were called, nor did they see the need to be involved in "volunteer activities" (p. 9). While confirming Jones and Wong et al.'s findings that education and, specifically, parental involvement in education are highly valued in Singapore, my study distinguishes the parents of children in SPED schools from the parents of children in mainstream schools of Jones' study in terms of what involvement entails; parents of SPED school children seem to be more willing to be directly involved by working in partnership, interdependently. And, in sharp contrast to Wong et al.'s (2015b) findings, the parents of my study were very willing to be present for and to volunteer to help with in-school activities. In these ways, they saw themselves as equal contributors in a positive and worthwhile home-school partnership.

As can be seen above, commonly held beliefs about educational achievement and the cultural value placed on academic excellence motivated parents and influenced positive home-school partnerships. However, my findings also indicate that beliefs and values can also hinder home-school partnerships. This happens when, rather than in a broad, national sense, beliefs or values that are held at the individual level of the parent or the local level of the school are about the nature of partnership. Literature has shown that there are not only multiple definitions for the term partnership (Armstrong, 2002; Bastiani, 1993; Broomhead, 2018; Deslandes, 2001; Dobbins & Abbot, 2010; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Summers et. al., 2005b), but that
partnership can mean "different things to different people" (Swain & Walker, 2003, p. 549). Consistent with this literature were my own findings. There were multiple definitions provided by the participants for the term "partnership" and, furthermore, what, specifically, partnership should entail was related to different beliefs and values. This resulted in some challenges for parents and schools. As some schools did not explicitly share with parents what partnership was to involve, participants had to operationalize partnership based on their own personal views and definitions, which, interestingly, had been shaped by a variety of sources, such as YouTube videos, internet news and information, and personal work experiences. Thus, it is not surprising that parents highlighted differing conceptions about partnership as barriers to their interactions with professionals in some schools. Ludicke and Kortman’s (2012) findings concur. Such tensions between the home and the school can distract from successful collaboration and make it difficult to work productively. Given that home-school partnership is a shared responsibility (Epstein, 2010; Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005; Reschly & Christenson, 2012), a first step for all involved is to have a clear understanding about what the home-school partnership is and what it entails. This reflects Hands' (2013) recommendations in the Canadian context: "Educators at all levels and families working together at the school level to first define what family engagement entails in each particular environment or context would be a helpful start to developing any parent engagement program" (p. 146).

Participants of my study revealed that differing conceptions about home-school partnership can be especially problematic when parents perceive a "gap between the 'rhetoric' of partnership, as espoused by schools ... and actual practice" (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012, p. 156). Schools should be prepared to take the lead in avoiding this (Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Participant Snowyz, for example, suggested that the onus should be on schools to equip parents
with the knowledge about how to be an effective partner, echoing Green's (1999) call for schools to be specific about what collaboration means, how it works, and what parents should know about their role as a collaborator.

Ironically, some participants also experienced tension even in schools where expectations for home-school partnership had actually been shared with parents. Again, this was attributed to differences between individual school professionals and individual participants' beliefs and values about partnership. For example, both Mary and Helen argued that the school professionals' unidirectional communication with families about home-school partnership was more about "doing to" (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 12) than "doing with" (p. 12). Ferlazzo stated that enacting home-school partnership by "doing to" (p. 12) involved leading by "mouth—identifying projects, needs and goals and then telling parents how they can contribute" (p. 12). The findings of my study affirm the claim in literature that school professionals, as individuals, can have beliefs and attitudes that may inhibit parental involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 2010a; Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; Šukys, Dumčienė, & Lapėnienė, 2015).

As literature has acknowledged that the parents and school professionals often hold different beliefs about the notion of partnership, several researchers have suggested that building a common vision and a shared set goals for the home-school partnership is key (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Reschly & Christenson, 2012). I concur with this. I recall what Snowyz shared about how parents have "a stake" in their child's education and, so, should also have a say in SPED schools. As Ludicke and Kortman (2012) suggest, consideration should be given to the beliefs about partnership that each participant brings. However, in order for this to be fully realized in Singapore’s SPED schools, there may need to be a cultural shift in relation to beliefs about partnership that families and schools hold. For example, instead of relying on the
traditional, and perhaps, the most convenient and efficient way of telling parents what partnership entails, school leaders may have to engage parents in a conversation, and they may have to approach this collaborative work by using different platforms, such as sharing sessions or online feedback. According to Ferlazzo (2011), this kind of family engagement would better align views and goals, allowing the school to "gain 'partners" (p. 12) through the development of a shared vision of home-school partnership. This would help to foster a positive home-school partnership.

In this section about beliefs, values, and culture, I think it is important to pick up on a point made earlier about how, in Singapore, the cultural and ideological value placed on academic excellence can be seen to be related to home-school partnerships; specifically, the desire parents have to be involved in the education of their children with disabilities, and the positive effects of this for both the home and the school. Again, as a Singaporean, I do not find this to be surprising, and studies confirm the high value that Asian parents place on education (Chan, 1992; Khong, 2004; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004; Liu & Xie, 2014; Nguyen & Hughes, 2013). In Singapore's context, similar to the HBSC (2017) study cited earlier, Khong (2004) reported that "a substantial sector of the parent population fully recognizes the importance of schooling and is willing to invest heavily to ensure the children's success" (p. 9). While most of the participants of my study did not explicitly state how they valued education for their children, this was very obvious. From amongst participants whose stories revealed this, Coco's account represented the clearest case. She was particularly keen to "push" her daughter to go to ITE, a mainstream institution. Moreover, it was very evident that Coco, as a Singaporean, had been strongly influenced by a prevailing national ideology—meritocracy. As one of the main principles of governance (Chua, 2017; Mauzy & Milne, 2002) guiding education in Singapore
(Wong et al., 2015a), meritocracy was well understood by Coco in terms of the rewards of Singapore's highly competitive education system—social mobility and economic prosperity. Parents are reminded of this often, and statements, such as asserted by the current Minister of Education in a recent speech for Equal Ark Charity, resound: "Education has been, and will continue to be, the key tool to ensure social mobility" (Ong, 2018, para. 4). It was only natural, therefore, that like any other Singaporean parent, Coco was so willing to work with the SPED teacher to ensure that her daughter would get the educational boost afforded by the opportunity to attend a mainstream school where she could maximize her academic potential and ultimately improve her social mobility. As Coco was able to see an improvement in her daughter's grades as a result of her "push," coupled with her willingness to partner with the teacher, she gained hope that her daughter would be able to attend ITE in the near future. This sense of hope, therefore, made home-school partnership a positive experience for Coco. In Singapore’s context, it appears that both the Asian cultural value placed on education and the related national ideology of meritocracy for social mobility played a role in facilitating a positive home-school partnership.

Conversely, some literature suggests that cultural values held by Asian parents can also be a barrier to positive home-school partnership. Manzon (2004) cited the Confucian values embraced by Hong Kong and Singaporean families as shaping perceptions of "the role of the school and home and the value of education" (p. 9). Specifically, schools are viewed as "holistic entities" (p. 9), and school improvement is seen to depend on the individual school rather than on parental involvement. Hence, families tend to take a "non-interventionist attitudes towards schools" (p. 9). The findings of my study do not entirely support Manzon's (2004) claim. For example, most participants reported that they were very forthcoming with their input concerning school improvement. However, it was interesting to note that there were a couple of participants
who withheld feedback. To me, this was puzzling. However, I recalled that the literature often refers to how Asian families accord extreme respect or reverence to teachers and school authorities (Chan, 1992; Choi & Ostendorf, 2015; Park & Turnbull, 2001). My findings support this. Both Coco and Helen were clearly willing to defer to the authority of school leader, explaining why they had chosen to remain silent instead of raising certain concerns with the school leaders. It must be noted, however, that keeping silent may not always be a sign of deference and respect. In Asian culture, it may mean unspoken disagreement (Jegatheesan, 2009). Regardless of meaning behind silence, the intersecting values of education and deference to authority can pose a barrier to parents being active and equal partners with the school and, in turn, can prevent a productive home-school partnerships.

Importantly, other Confucian values, respect and harmony, are also embedded in the Government of Singapore's (1991) Shared Values, and are notable in the declarations of "nation before community and society before self" and "consensus, not conflict" (p. 9). I suggest that these, together with the Asian value of showing respect to authority, may impact positive home-school partnership in the Singapore SPED schools. This was evident in how Helen chose to maintain harmony by 'bearing with' the teachers whenever there were tense moments in the relationship. In view of this, working collaboratively in SPED might require cognizance of how these shared cultural values can influence parents' attitudes and behaviour towards home-school partnership.

The above discussion leads me to two significant points about the beliefs and values of parents of children in SPED schools: First, parents' personal beliefs, along with their shared cultural values, are powerful motivators of parental involvement that contribute to successful partnerships. Second, parents' beliefs about their roles in the home-school partnership are not
necessarily the same as those held by school professionals, and these differences are barriers to positive home-school partnerships. With these points in mind, I argue that the potential that can be identified in what motivates parents to work with schools on behalf of their children can be diminished when what parents believe and value is not recognized or is ignored by school professionals. This should be taken into consideration in the development and implementation of a home-school partnership for a SPED school. Specifically, alignment of vision and goals of all involved can be achieved through consideration of parents as equal partners in all stages of development and through strong collaboration in all processes of the home-school partnership. This asserts the need for SPED schools to engage the beliefs and values that are behind parents' strong desires to support their children’s education, and to harness this positive parental force to build and sustain strong home-school partnerships. It reflects Ferlazzo’s (2011) call for truly engaging rather than merely involving parents.

**Lack of knowledge and skills.** It was clear that some participants' lack of knowledge hindered positive home-school partnership. This is a common issue that is reported in special education literature (Chu, 2014; Chu & Wu, 2012; Jegatheesan, 2009; Johnson et al., 2004; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Lo, 2009). Specifically, several participants were concerned about their lack of knowledge about the IEP process (Lo, 2009, 2012) and how to set the IEP goals. Lo (2009) sees parent education about special education processes as crucial to effective collaboration between the home and schools. When such education is provided, parents are able to work together with the school professionals, and be "decision makers and advocates" (p. 101) for their children.

As was mentioned in the previous section, some participants were also particularly concerned about their lack of knowledge about how math was taught in a SPED school. They
attributed this to having been educated in mainstream schools. That most participants believed they had the ability to teach their children suggested that schools could build the capacity of parents to support their children's learning at home. This reflects recommendations of other studies (Bryne, 2000; Epstein, 2010b; Hands, 2013; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Lo, 2009). Lo (2009) argued, for example, that teaching strategy demonstrations for parents were beneficial to children with hearing impairments; thus, pedagogy and skill development can be reinforced both at school and at home.

Interestingly, the literature I reviewed identified the lack of knowledge of CLD parents about the IEP process as the only hindrance to home-school partnership. While this was reflected in my study, participants also spoke specifically about their lack of knowledge and skills in teaching math to their children as a key barrier to positive home-school partnership. This slight difference could possibly be attributed to context. Lo's (2009) Asian participants had immigrated to the United States and had to contend with limited language proficiency and America's education system and curricula. The Singaporean participants of my study were long accustomed to the educational system and the nation's strong emphasis on academic excellence (Ong, 2018). Specifically, since the PAP came into leadership in 1959, education has been seen as key in Singapore's survival by "facilitating the nation's economic transformation and building … a socially-disciplined cohesive Singaporean society (Kaur, 2014, p. 3). In facilitating Singapore's economic development and progress, mathematics is especially valued (Kaur, 2014). This perhaps accounts for why the SPED parents desired the math knowledge and skills to effectively assist their child at home, ultimately ensuring their child’s success and social mobility.
**Time and work constraints.** Consistent with literature, some participants acknowledged that the lack of time and constraints of work hindered them from engaging in home-school partnership (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 2005; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Murray et al., 2014). In my case study, it was evident that other than work, SPED parents such as John and his wife, Sally, had other responsibilities that consumed much of their time—managing their son's academic work and his social-emotional needs at home. As time, energy and emotion seemed to be involved, it was difficult for John and his wife to be fully engaged with the school. As John indicated, engaging in partnership also involved time. This reinforces that a commitment of time is important in facilitating positive home-school partnership, and literature has made it clear that time constraints are indeed a barrier to parental involvement with the school (Baker et al., 2016). While John did not give any suggestions about how this could be addressed, literature provides recommendations. For example, Wong et al. (2015b) suggested that schools need to "understand the stresses and vulnerabilities of parents of children with disabilities [so that they can] design strategies for more effective parental involvement" (p. 9). Baker et al. (2016) suggested that both the parents and staff engaged in a conversation about how the time barrier could be resolved. Incorporating both suggestions may result in SPED schools being seen as serious about collaborative and equal partnerships.

In addition to John, both Ling and Jay also shared that many school-based activities that were open to parents were held during the school day. Thus, lack of consideration of parent's work schedule was also a barrier to parents being involved as partners in their child's education. Again, a gap between the rhetoric and the actual practice of home-school partnership was revealed. This explains why a couple of participants gave suggestions for holding courses for parents on a Saturday and providing early notification of school events so that parents could
adjust their work schedules to be able to attend. Literature has also put forward a good
suggestion that SPED schools might want to adopt: Ask parents on how to "overcome work and
scheduling-related barriers" (Murray et al., 2014, p. 9-10). Such an initiative would show that
parents' involvement is valued, better align objectives of home-school partnership and, further,
build trust in the schools by bridging the gap between rhetoric and practice.

**Reflecting on the Home Dimension**

When comparing the finding with my original conceptual framework of Chapter Two,
two factors in the home dimension were not surfaced by participants of my study. This first was
language and communication. This could be attributed to English being the lingua franca for
communication within and beyond Singapore (Jones, 2019; Shanmugaratnam, 2002). Hence,
compared to other studies that identified the limited proficiency in English of CLD parents to be
a challenge to communication (Lo, 2009; Park & Turnbull, 2001), my study revealed no such
barrier. The second conceptual factor that was not reflected in my participants' contribution was
past experiences and memories (Johnson et al, 2004; Pinkus, 2006; Miller, 2015). While the
participants did share some negative past experiences and memories, these were not related in
being roadblocks to partnership. This could perhaps be attributed to participants' beliefs about
the importance of home-school partnerships, the cultural values that emphasize the importance
on education and academic excellence, and a dominant Singaporean ideology, namely
meritocracy. Collectively, these beliefs, cultural values, and ideology could have had participants
looking past their previous experiences or memories to be able to see the benefit of a positive
and sustained home-school partnership, which would ultimately lead to the educational success
of their children.
The School

Related to the school, the following themes emerged from the findings: school leaders and school professionals' attributes, differences between parents and the school about educational pathways and goals for students, and parents' involvement in school activities and IEP meetings. These will be discussed below.

School leader. Under this theme, three sub-themes emerged. They were attributes, communication practices, and perceptions.

School leaders' attributes. The results of my study confirm the literature about the importance of school leaders demonstrating positive attributes so to facilitate constructive home-school partnership (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Broomhead, 2018; Francis et al., 2016a, 2016b; Shelden et al., 2010; Siegal et al., 2019). The participants of my study identified three positive attributes that they considered important for a school leader to possess. The first was being welcoming. It was clear the participants appreciated the school leader's welcoming gestures. Whether it was greeting them, thanking them for help rendered to the school, or taking the time to interact with them, these gestures made parents feel genuinely welcomed into the school community. According to Coco, they also contributed to the warm, inviting climate for parental involvement. This finding supports the assertion of several researchers concerning the crucial role of the school leader in developing, supporting, and maintaining a welcoming and inviting school climate, conducive to parent involvement (Angell et al., 2009; Broomhead, 2018; Francis et al., 2016b; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Povey et al., 2016; Siegal et al., 2019).

In addition to being welcoming, the participants also spoke about the importance of school leaders' approachability, which is an attribute also identified in the literature in terms of availability, accessibility, visibility, or presence (Broomhead, 2018; Francis et al., 2016a, 2016b;
Shelden et al., 2010; Siegal et al., 2019). In practice, for participants of my study, school leaders' approachability involved maintaining an open door policy, going on school outings with the parents, students, and staff, dropping in to attend PSG meetings, being available via email, being present during school dismissal time, and making time to talk to parents and respond to their questions. This finding reinforces the assertion concerning the crucial role that the school leader plays in creating and sustaining a positive, welcoming climate for parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, Siegal et al., 2019). Additionally, approachability also enabled participants like Coco to develop a very close working relationship with the school leader. As Auerbach (2012) states, "partnerships are essentially about relationships" (pp. 35-36).

To build a successful home-school partnership, Bull et al. (2008) found that both time and commitment are needed. Clearly, some school leaders made time for the participants of my study. This engendered parents' trust in them and perhaps explains why Mary could comfortably approach the school leader even via email; she knew her concerns about her son would be heard and attended to. This finding is also supported by Shelden et al. (2010), who found that approachable school leaders not only listened to parents, but also "conveyed an accepting attitude that resulted in parents comfortably approaching them with their concerns" (p. 165). They concluded that the school leader's approachability was the "key to a mother's connecting and developing trust in the principal" (p. 165). As for Helen, the school leader's approachability was very assuring, as parents want to feel confident that the school "[cares] about their children's well-being and genuinely want to see them be successful in school and life beyond school" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 190).

Reflecting Shelden et al.'s (2010) study, caring was the next and perhaps the most important leadership attribute that was appreciated by participants. Similar to approachability,
care was demonstrated in different ways. For example, Coco observed the leader of school C showing care by being "motherly" towards her students, and noted that "all the children were happy" to be with her. That the care was perceived to be genuine had a positive influence on Coco. It not only increased her trust in the school leader, but also encouraged Coco to actively participate in many of school-based activities. This supports Park et al.'s (2001) finding about parents wanting to work with educators who consider their child with disabilities "as their own children and ... treat them accordingly" (p. 165). Besides being motherly, the leader of school C showed care by knowing the students as individuals. This was illustrated when she was able to point out students' strengths to parents. This clearly contrasted the outpouring of the usual "litany of problems" (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 169) that most parents expected when encountering the school leader. Coco, for example, saw this strength-based approach (Francis et al., 2016b; Park et al., 2001; Turnbull et al., 2015) as not only boosting her and her daughter's morale, but also showing that the school leader respected her role as an equal partner in her daughter's education and achievements. For parents, a strength-based approach to communication is seen as important in encouraging the child's potential (Park et al., 2001) and, moreover, in affirming both the child's and family's strengths (Turnbull et al., 2015).

In another school, the leader demonstrated her knowledge of her students by knowing all of their names. This meant a lot to Jay, as it showed that the school leader did not just care for his child, but also respected and valued each student as an individual with an identity. She saw "the child as person rather than as a ... disability label" (Blue-Banning et al., 2004, p. 179). As the school leader was concerned with building a personal relationship with her students, Jay was motivated to participate in more school activities. Care and respect help to increase "families' investment in the life of the school and their desire to participate in events and activities"
(Francis et al., 2015, p. 332) and are leadership attributes that are core to positive home-school partnerships.

The findings of my study support Shelden et al.'s (2010) definition of authentic caring: a school leader's praises and encouraging words are "genuine, voluntary, child-focused, and benefitting [the child] or the participants themselves" (p. 165). The findings also affirm what the literature says about the significance of respect in positive home-school partnerships (Blue-Banning et al., 2004, Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Kayama, 2010; Park et al., 2001; Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Turnbull et al., 2015). Coco, for example, shared that the school leader, in extending care to the parents as well as to the children, showed respect. In this sense, I would add to Shelden et al.'s (2010) definition of authentic caring to also include a focus on parents.

From the above discussion, we can see that four things became very apparent in this study. First, the study revealed that positive attributes such as welcoming, approachability, and caring were appreciated by the participants. They not only drew them to collaborate with the school, they also helped to make home-school partnership a positive experience for them. Second, the discussion also surfaced the importance of respect as a determinant in building a positive and trusting home-school partnership. According respect to both the parents and the children was greatly appreciated by the participants. Third, the discussion underscored how important it is for leaders to build trusting relationships between the home and school. Trust is key to effective leadership (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Tschannen-Moran, 2014) and, in my study, it was evident that some school leaders understood what was needed to build a trusting and productive relationship with parents: time, commitment, care, and respect. Fourth, it was clear that there was no one definitive attribute that contributed to a positive home-school partnership. Rather, a combination of attributes is needed. And, as attributes intersect with one another, such
as was seen with approachability and care, they help to further facilitate a positive and inviting school climate, which in turn, enhances the home-school partnership experience for parents. Such intersections also affirm the complex nature of the home-school partnership.

Conversely, the negative attributes of some school leaders impacted home-school partnership. In one school, for example, the school leader was perceived to neither welcome nor interact with parent volunteers when they came to do their work in the school. Presumably, this was because the leader was busy with administrative tasks. It was therefore not surprising that, when reflecting on leadership, Helen commented that the school lacked warmth and was unwelcoming of home-school partnership. This finding is supported by Ferrara (2009), who observed that the physical absence of the school leader in the daily life of the school has a negative impact on parents' perceptions and feelings about the school. In another example in my study, it was the "rude" and disrespectful behaviour that caused Lynn to conclude that the school leader was unwelcoming of parent volunteers. It was apparent that the home-school partnerships in Helen and Lynn’s accounts were more rhetoric than practice. This raises a question about whether the home-partnership in these schools was implemented merely for the sake of "meeting the basic requirements of evaluation" (Khong & Ng, 2005, p. 6) by the MOE and the NCSS's "Quality Assurance Framework for Special Education Schools" (2011).

In addition to being unwelcoming, several participants found some school leaders to be unapproachable. This trait was attributed to two factors. The first was the school leaders' busy work schedule, which clearly denied several participants the time they felt would allow them to share their concerns about their child and forge a relationship with the school leader. This affirms Bull et al.'s (2008) argument that both time and commitment were needed to build a successful home-school partnership. This also meant that relational trust, which is key to "[advancing] the
education and welfare of students" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 6) could not be established due to a lack of time required to connect and communicate. To help improve the situation, the participants agreed with the literature that suggests that school leaders need to be welcoming, approachable, and accessible (Shelden et al., 2010; Siegal et al., 2019). For Helen, an effort on behalf of the school leader to check on what the parent volunteers are doing, even if only briefly, would suffice. Her other suggestions for a leader included being present when the school assembled together at the start of the day, during school dismissal time, and at school events. Snowyz added that being present when parents dropped off and picked up their child from school would give the school leader an opportunity to approach the parents and engage them in a short chat about their child's progress. Snowyz's suggestion is also reflected in the literature (Siegal et al., 2019). All these suggestions clearly call for the school leader to make time to develop partnerships with parents.

Besides the busy work schedule, participants' perceptions about how a school leader's pride is linked to professional knowledge was also seen to make the leader unapproachable. This perhaps explains why Lynn felt intimidated, disempowered, and resentful, and was deterred from partnering with the school. This corroborates Hodge and Runswick-Cole’s (2008) assertion that professional knowledge is "privileged" (p. 639) in contrast to the intimate knowledge that a parent has of their child. As professional knowledge has been "valued above others" (p. 640), the working relationship between the home and school can be negatively affected (Todd & Jones, 2003). For Snowyz, the school leaders' expertise in special needs education not only made her view some school leaders as "higher than" the parents, but it also made her "afraid" of approaching and sharing her ideas about the school with them. Her fear suggested that leaders hold a power position in a hierarchical relationship, which can result in parents' discomfort. This
diverges somewhat from Turnbull et al.'s (2015) finding that a power-over relationship results in a "conflict" (p. 175) within home-school partnerships. No explicit or overt conflict was related by participants of my study. As some literature suggests, this difference could be attributed to how some Asian parents show respect and deference to authority (Chan, 1992; Choi & Ostendorf, 2015; Park & Turnbull, 2001). It could also be attributed to Singapore's Shared Values, notably, "nation before community and society before self" and "consensus, not conflict" (Government of Singapore, 1999, p. 9). Regardless of the reason, from Lynn and Snowzy's perspective, the school leaders' prideful behaviour was a barrier to building a positive and trusting partnership. To help remove this barrier, both participants recommended that school leaders be humble and friendly, as the literature suggests is necessary to promoting positive relationships between the home and school (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018). Literature also advocates for "power shared" partnerships that are "horizontal, not vertical" (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 175).

A primary concern amongst several participants was that some school leaders do not care about the safety and well-being of the students. As a result, parents were not only anxious about their children, but also particularly vexed. In one school, this anger was expressed via a petition, while in another school, it was expressed by labeling the school leader as unconcerned. As safety is linked to trust (Blue-Banning et al., 2004), it is clear that these school leaders' lack of care undermined the participants' confidence the school. The findings affirm that parents of children with disabilities want to "trust that their child could safely be left with a service provider without fear of physical or emotional harm" (p. 179). SPED school leaders who demonstrate authentic care are able to build trust. This is a "[prerequisite] for developing positive partnerships" (Francis et al., 2016b, p. 168).
A lack of understanding of the child and participants' needs also proved to be a barrier to positive home-school partnerships. For example, one school leader's lack of knowledge about ASD sowed in Lynn doubt about the leader's professional competence. Literature is clear that competence is one facet of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). However, Shelden et al. (2010) found that "the lack of knowledge of the disability was not viewed as an inhibitor to [a trusting relationship] unless it was accompanied by a lack of desire to learn" (p. 165). This divergence from Lynn's position could be attributed to context. Shelden et al.'s (2010) study was conducted in an inclusive setting. Hence, the school leader had "no knowledge" (p. 165) of disability, but was ready to learn when a parent offered to run an in-service course for the school. My study, on the other hand, was specific to the special education setting. Based on my past experience, most SPED school leaders, with the exception of those who come from the mainstream schools, will have knowledge of mild intellectual disabilities because they hold special education qualifications. Those who do not have SPED qualifications, will have taken courses on disabilities just as I did when I was a school leader of a SPED school. Thus, it is not surprising that Lynn perceived the leader's lack knowledge about ASD to be reflective of incompetence, and this may simply point to a need for leadership professional development as a way to build parental confidence and trust.

A school leader's "busy" work schedule and not being involved in daily school events and activities was also seen to be the cause of a lack of knowledge about students. Snowyz longed to be able to communicate with the school leader about her child's progress, and she was especially disappointed in the leader's inability to recommend helpful resources. Literature is clear that parents desire to hear about their child's strengths (Turnbull et al., 2015), and Snowzy's experience reflects this and further suggests that her trust in the school leader was affected by a
lack of knowledge about students and parents' needs. While no suggestion for improvement was made by the participant, literature emphasizes the importance of leaders using a strength-based approach to better connect with parents about their child (Park et al., 2001; Turnbull et al., 2015). This approach implies that the school leader would need to make time to become better acquainted with the students' strengths. Time, however, is a luxurious commodity that most school leaders do not have, including those in SPED schools, due to their increasingly complex and multifaceted role (Canadian Association of Principals, 2014; Wong et al., 2015b). Being a former SPED school leader, I can attest to this. Perhaps this is another reason why partnership in some SPED schools was more rhetoric than practice.

*Communication practices.* Research has shown that parents stress the importance of leaders being willing to listen and act upon what they have said (Francis et al., 2016b). This was the view of two of the participants of my study, Mary and Lynn, who related that leaders' strong communication skills had not only benefitted their children, but also indicated to them that they were respected as equal partners in their child's education. At the same time, it was also evident that some school leaders did not practice active listening. Snowyz, for example, reported that the "voices of parents" went unheard as no follow-up actions were taken after "opinions and ideas" about school improvements were given. That this occurred "many times" exasperated participants such as Helen. This finding is congruent with literature that highlights the importance of listening as a leadership practice for positive partnerships (Blue-Banning et al., 2004, Francis et al., 2016b, Lake & Billingsley, 2004). The finding also underscores the importance of follow-up action as an influence on trust (Shelden et al.'s, 2010). To help improve the relationship between the home and school, a couple of participants suggested that the school leaders could "be more supportive and listen to the parent's voices and suggestions" for working
better with parents. Snowyz also suggested that the school leader allow the parents to be involved in decision making about issues that affected their children. This is consistent with literature that promotes the empowerment of families to voice their opinions and participate in decision making (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

Interestingly, the communication approach used by one school leader also came under heavy criticism. Used to expedite communication, Ling found the deployment of the "mass meeting" structure to have serious limitations. Not only did this approach result in unidirectional communication, but it was equally noninteractive. Her criticism of this approach clearly revealed a desire for a two-way communication, which has been emphasized as important by the home-school partnership literature (Blue-Banning et al. 2004; Francis et al., 2016b, Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Ling's critique is echoed in the leadership literature. Auerbach (2010), for example, describes leadership for nominal partnerships, wherein the "implicit goal is compliance with partnership mandates; partnerships are nominal, one-way, and service oriented" (p. 748). Parents are seen as receivers of information rather than "knowledgeable subjects in a mutually beneficial relationship" (p. 738). Such a leadership approach is authoritarian, giving the school leader most of the control. As participants of my study clearly believed that partnership entailed two-way communication, this has implications for some SPED school leaders, especially since some schools actually espouse partnership as one of their school's strategic goals. Ling suggested that school leaders adopt more interactive communication practices to engage parents in discussions. She proposed having a small "targeted coffee sessions" with interested parents, as this would "yield better results." In this sense, Auerbach (2010) argues for leadership for authentic partnerships that is "empowerment oriented and two-way in terms of communication and potential power sharing .... [Families] are viewed ... [as] allies .... Leadership is the most
collaborative and proactive in terms of seeking parent voice and equal partnership" (p. 750). While this is the preferred leadership approach for positive home-school partnerships, I do question its applicability in Singapore's context given that parental involvement is still generally perceived as something that does not interfere with school governance and policy matters (Khong & Ng, 2005). My previous experience as a vice-principal of a SPED school tells me that this phenomenon is likely still a factor in SPED schools. However, as my study strongly indicates, SPED parents do have "expectations" (Khong & Ng, 2005, p. 8), and school leaders may need to address these by adopting an open stance towards parental input (Khong & Ng, 2005).

From the above discussions concerning school leaders' attributes and communication practices, four things are evident. First, the findings highlighted the need for some school leaders to recognize that their direct or indirect behaviours and practices can significantly impact the school climate and, in turn, influence the effectiveness of family involvement (Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018). Second, as trust appears to intersect with all the school leader's attributes and communication approaches, this underscores the need for school leaders to build relational trust as a prerequisite for developing a close working partnership between the home and school (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Third, my study suggests that partnership in some of the SPED schools was rhetoric rather than practice, as the negative attributes and deficient communication practices of some school leaders hindered the development of positive relationships between the home and school, even when these schools identified partnership as a strategic goal. Fourth, there were clear overlaps among leadership attributes, as well as between factors in the home and school dimensions. For instance, the attribute "unapproachability" intersected with other attributes such as being unwelcoming and uncaring in the school dimension, while the parents'
beliefs in the home dimension intersected with the communication practices in the school dimension. This affirms the literature discussed in Chapter Two—that home-school partnership is clearly and indisputably a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon.

**Perception of parents.** Literature has shown that when a school leader believes that parents are partners or allies, collaboration is invited (Auerbach, 2010, 2012). This is evident in my study. Both Coco and Mary, whose children were in the same school, attributed being perceived as a "partner" to the school leader's confidence and trust in parents. This encouraged both Coco and Mary to be engaged with the school. This finding is supported by literature that recognizes how a school leader's positive beliefs about parents can impact partnership between the school and home (Auerbach, 2010, 2012; Ho, 2008).

Also evident was the failure of some school leaders to view the participants in a positive light. Both John and Lynn noted that they had been perceived as "troublemakers." Hence, their desire to partner with the schools posed challenges, and their feedback was not valued by the school leaders. Others, such as Helen and Snowyz, stated that they had been perceived as resources to be used by the schools to "support" school-based activities. This perception, too, was not appreciated, as it strongly suggested that the sole role of the parents in the home-school partnership was to help further school goals (Pushor, 2010). Hence, the benefits were not mutual. The findings corroborate both Auerbach (2012) and Ho's (2009) conclusions that, whether perceived as troublemakers or resources, parents were not equal partners in the collaborative relationship. Interestingly, both of these studies also link school leaders' perceptions of parents to their approach to leadership. In this vein, the responses of participants of my study indicate that some SPED school leaders may subscribe to leadership theories and practices that exclude families (Riehl, 2012).
It must be noted that several of the current school leaders of Singapore’s SPED schools come from the mainstream schools. Since 1997, it has been the practice of MOE to second or attach mainstream school leaders to the SPED schools in order to enhance the quality of SPED school leadership (Gan, 1997). Ng, Nguyen, Wong, and Choy (2015) identified two leadership approaches that prevail in mainstream schools, instructional and transformational leadership. The instructional leadership seemed to be most evident, probably because it "is greatly aligned to contextual factors, in particular, the MOE policies and initiatives. The alignment is most noticeable in the dimensions of the school vision and managing the instructional [program]" (p. 402). While both the instructional and transformational leadership approaches are important as they are linked to student outcomes (Wahlstrom, 2013) and school improvement (Lynch, 2014) respectively, literature has shown that some leadership theories "may leave families and communities out of their model" (Riehl, 2012, p. 13). According to Riehl (2012), school leaders who focused on leadership practices that excluded families were best known as strong "heads of school, not heads of relationships among schools, families, and communities" (p. 13). According to Barr and Saltmarsh (2014), parents perceive school leaders to play a crucial role in "shaping parents' relationships with schools" (p. 501). When it comes to fostering parent engagement, "it all comes down to leadership" (p. 491).

**School Professionals.** In my study, school professionals included teachers, teacher aides, instructors or job coaches, and allied professionals that include psychologists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, speech therapists, art therapists, and social workers. Participants rarely differentiate among professional; rather professionals were referred to as teachers, regardless of their title or role. Under this theme, three sub-themes emerged. They were attributes, communication practices, and perceptions of parents and child.
School professionals' attributes. Within the literature, attributes of the school professionals have been identified as a factor that both facilitates and inhibits positive home-school partnership (Angell et al., 2009; Blue-Banning et al., 2005; Dobbins & Abbott, 2010; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Park & Turnbull, 2013). Participants of my study identified two facilitating attributes—approachability and caring. Approachability was demonstrated by school professionals being "friendly," which facilitated interaction with parents and, in turn, fostered trust. According to Dobbins and Abbott (2010) friendliness is "critical to productive home-school relations" (p. 27). Approachability was also demonstrated by teachers in being "down to earth." A welcoming behaviour, this was especially appreciated by Snowyz. It allowed her to approach the teachers on equal terms, and this engendered "harmony and ease in the relationship" (Blue-Banning et al., 2004, p. 176). Another way approachability was being shown was by being visible and accessible. In one school, Coco shared that this was conveyed when the teachers attended school workshops with the parents and school outings with the families. Such practices simultaneously promote parental engagement and build trust (Broomhead, 2018).

Also evident in my study and consistent with the literature was the care that some teachers showed to their students (Angell et al., 2009; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Park et al., 2001; Povey et al., 2016). Participants reported that, just as a mother is attentive to her child's personal well-being, some teachers had likewise been attentive to their students' physical, socio-emotional, and intellectual needs. In this sense, care was seen to be genuine, "just like in family relationships" (Park et al., 2001, p. 165). Being especially appreciated, personalized care helps to build trust between the parents and the teachers (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Another way care was demonstrated was when some teachers went the extra mile for the students. Whether this involved locating a missing student at a bus interchange after school
hours, sacrificing a weekend to conduct extra class outings for the students with ASD and their families, or making a daily effort to leave for work early so as to teach a student how to use the mass rapid transit system, these acts clearly showed participants that these teachers had the students and their families' welfare and interests at heart, were willing to step out of their professional boundaries to meet the needs of the children and the parents, and were highly dedicated in their job. Collectively, these caring actions explained why these teachers won the admiration of the participants.

A third way care was demonstrated by teachers was by understanding an individual child's needs and making appropriate accommodations. Evidenced in my study was how some teachers provided extra time for a child to complete a given task and customized their teaching to the learning needs of a child. These acts showed not only care, but also flexibility and competence. Such qualities were especially appreciated by Snowyz and Lynn, who suggested that this kind of care facilitates trust in home-school partnership (Angell et al., 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Similar to some school leaders, some teachers also showed care for the parents by making an effort to empower parents with the relevant skills to coach their child at home. Mary’s experience, for example, reflected Angell et al.'s (2009) finding that such care did not just "enhance student learning, [but also] showed acceptance of parents, and empowered parents. These behaviours facilitated participants' perceived trust" (p. 167) in the teachers.

Angell et al. (2009) found that teachers who were perceived as "going above and beyond the call of duty" (p. 166) had the student as their main concern. However, my study indicated that some teachers go the extra mile for both the child and their family. This difference could be attributed to the SPED teachers' passion and high level of commitment to their job.
Conversely, the negative attributes of some school professionals also hindered positive home-school partnerships. It was clear that several participants were unhappy with teachers who were unapproachable. Similar to perceptions about some school leaders, participants felt that some teachers were too busy with their "paperwork" to provide updates about their child's progress or to assist the parent in supporting their child's learning at home. Participants suggested that, because of this lack of connection, a trusting partnership could neither be developed nor maintained.

Similar to my findings about SPED school teachers, Wong et al. (2015b) found Singaporean mainstream school teachers to be "continuously confronted by various demands and responsibilities" (p. 5) and, as a result, attempts at "constant communication" (p. 5) with parents posed a challenge. However, unlike Wong et al.'s participants, who perceived 'no news to be good news'—an indication "that their children [were] coping well in school or educators [were] managing the needs of their children" (p. 5), the parents of my study sincerely tried to develop and maintain close partnerships with the teachers. This difference could be attributed to how they were highly motivated by their personal belief that their close involvement and support were directly related to their child's success.

Broomhead (2018) argues that both trust and approachability "are essential foundations on which to build positive relationships, for which educational practitioners must strive" (p. 447) and, notwithstanding their various work demands and responsibilities, school professionals are responsible for the development and maintenance of partnerships with parents. The participants of my study would concur. Furthermore, some would suggest that perhaps a gentle nudge is needed to remind SPED professionals about the importance of making time for parents. Simple strategies, such as "meeting parents at the school gates to discuss issues, 'spending time' with
parents ... and [adopting] an 'open-door' policy" (Broomhead, 2018, p. 447) could go a long way in closing the gap between the rhetoric and the practice of partnership.

Similar to some perceptions about school leaders' attributes, participants believed that pridefulness made some teachers unapproachable. As pride was seen to be linked to professional knowledge, this inevitably placed a wedge in relationships between teachers and parents. For some parents, such as Snowyz and Lynn, this caused resentment because they did not view themselves as less knowledgeable—indeed, in some ways they saw themselves as more knowledgeable than the teachers. They wanted to be respected as a parent who had meaningful and important knowledge about their own child. This affirms Pushor's (2010) conclusion that parents need to be recognized as "constructors and holders of knowledge regarding their children, teaching and learning" (p. 7). While parents offer a different kind of expertise, "this knowledge can significantly inform their children's schooling experiences" (p. 8). Despite research that suggests that Asian parents believe educators to be "people of higher status than families" (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005, p. 258), participants of my study would like professionals to be more humble and less aloof. They see friendliness, familiarity, and mutual respect in sharing information as significant to the attribute of approachability. This view is supported by several researchers (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Dobbins & Abbott, 2010; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004).

Equally unacceptable to several participants was the various negative attitudes that some teachers had towards their children. Attitudes reflected in comments such as "could not be bothered" were met with strong disapproval, and indicated to participants, such as John and Helen, that teachers did not care. As Park and Turnbull (2001) reported, participants of my study also suggested that uncaring professionals were only "working for a paycheck" (p. 165), and John and Helen went as far as to say that, not only was some teachers’ indifference affecting
students’ learning, it was also a detriment to the safety and well-being of their children. They reminded me of the importance of teachers being aware of their role in loco parentis, and their words echoed Blue-Banning et al.’s (2004) finding: Parents want "to trust that their child could be safely left … [at school] without fear of physical or emotional harm" (p. 179).

Also not well received by some participants was professionals' lack of knowledge about children's disabilities and about how to accommodate and adapt to students' specific learning needs. Lynn, for example, was convinced that this kind of incompetence had affected her autistic son's academic progress. Perhaps this explains why both John and Lynn emphasized the need for some schools to develop the school professionals' professional capacity. This issue may be explained by a quick review of SSO and NCSS websites, which indicate that some SPED positions, such as a job coach, only require a minimum secondary school qualification. The NIE website reveals that pre-service SPED teachers may not receive adequate instruction on ASD. Lynn’s concern is supported by literature that asserts that teachers who teach students with ASD should not only have "a sound basic knowledge of ASD and the key characteristics of that condition that can impact a student's education" (Tobias, 2009, p. 156), but should also be flexible in their teaching approaches (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005; Reupert et al., 2015; Tobias, 2009). The issue that both John and Lynn raised is consistent with the Angell et al.'s (2009) finding regarding professional competence: When "this knowledge and flexibility was perceived as lacking, the [participants'] trust was negatively affected" (p. 169).

**Communication practices.** Within literature, effective communication is repeatedly identified as fundamental to partnership between the home and school (Angell et al., 2009; Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Broomhead, 2018; Epstein, 2010a; Graham-Clay, 2005; Hegarty, 1993; Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Hence, I was not surprised to learn that participants of my study were
appreciative when school professionals adopted positive communication practices that encouraged parental involvement, such as modes and strategies that support dialogue about the child as an individual (Graham-Clay, 2005; Hegarty, 1993; Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018; Rodriguez, Blatz, & Elbaum, 2014), frequent, immediate, and timely communication (Angell et al., 2009; Chu, 2014; Soodak & Erwin, 2009; Stoner & Angell, 2014; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013), open and transparent communication (Angell et al., 2009; Kasahara & Turnbull, 2005), and active listening (Turnbull et al., 2015).

Agreeing with Chen and Pakter (2012) and Graham-Clay (2005), it was clear that, amongst all possible modes of communication, the cellphone was perceived by participants to be the best for facilitating positive working relationships between the home and school. This finding diverges from research that points to parents' preference for informal, face-to-face communication with school professionals (Francis et al., 2016a; Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Tucker & Schwartz, 2013). It is, however, consistent with research that attributes cellphone use to wide availability and convenience (Soodak & Erwin, 2000). Participants of my study, however, reported that they prefer the cellphone because it allows them to communicate with the school in a "fast" manner. This did not surprise me. This is an effect of life in a particularly "face-paced society" (Goh, 2016, para.1). Indeed, "the virtues of speed are embedded in Singaporeans' national consciousness" (para. 11), reflecting the "narrative of Singapore's successful transformation from a sleepy fishing village to a modern metropolis" (para. 11).

Equally noteworthy was the accessibility and frequency of contact provided to parents through open lines of communication. Mary, for example, valued how school professionals were available and willing to keep her informed, not just "during school hours, but outside school hours." This aligns with what Soodak and Erwin (2000) found about the communication and
availability of teachers and therapists of their study: Open and frequent communication fosters a "satisfying, meaningful, and productive partnerships between parents and professionals" (p. 38). Interestingly, the home-school partnership guidelines that have recently been developed for Singapore's mainstream schools, encourage parents to contact their child's teacher only during school hours (MOE, 2019a). While there is currently no similar guideline for SPED schools, this nevertheless raises a question about how such a limit to communication and accessibility might be received by SPED parents, such as Mary, who enjoyed a productive and positive partnership with school professionals because of their availability.

Also important to note was one school professional's willingness to actively listen to and take into consideration input from both the child and the parents when setting the IEP goals. Doing so facilitated a tripartite collaboration. Based on my past experience, this is rare in Singapore's SPED context, as IEP goals are typically set by parents and professionals, thus making children the recipients of the decision-making process. This was perhaps possible in Ling's case because her daughter was considered to be very high functioning, but it nevertheless revealed that the school professional thought of the child as an important partner in the IEP process. This is supported by literature that advocates for home-school partnerships that support rather than constrain children's active involvement in their education: Children do better personally, socially, and academically when they contribute to decisions about their learning (Beveridge, 2004). As was the case with Ling’s daughter specifically, Potter and Bulach (2001) argued that the presence of the child during IEP meetings reinforces expectations via consistent messages from a united front. Clearly, the child's presence and involvement in IEP meetings is advantageous. However, for Ling personally, what especially pleased her was how the school professional respected her daughter, not only as an important educational partner but also as a
According respect to the child is key to SPED success (Blue-Banning et al., 204; Francis et al., 2016b; Park et al., 2001) and, hence, built Ling's trust and resulted in the home-school partnership being a positive experience for her.

The inverse also is true. Negative communication practices hinder the success of home-school partnerships. While the participants of my study offered a number of perspectives about this, they were most dissatisfied when not receiving regular communication from teachers about their child's progress. This caused them to feel "helpless" in assisting their child's learning at home. Snowyz specifically noted that the infrequent updates also caused her to feel "no sense of connectedness or a working relationship with [the] school." Her view aligns with Bryk and Schneider's (2003) assertion concerning the importance of relational trust as "the connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of children" (p. 6). My study adds to literature that points to how a lack of frequent communication inhibits the development of a trusting relationships between the home and school (Angell et al., 2009; Francis et al., 2016b).

More specifically, a lack of clarity in communication thoroughly annoyed participants of my study. Lynn’s concerns, for example, are supported by Hegarty's (1993) assertions that information should be conveyed with "maximum intelligibility" (p. 121) and should be written, allowing for repeated reference "to deepen understanding or clarify ambiguities. Because of its permanence, it also tends to be more public and thereby subject to scrutiny; this in turn puts premium on both accuracy and relevance" (p. 121).

Just as important was the need to exercise integrity. Disingenuous communication about a child's school progress and well-being only vexed the parents of my study. However, while Lake and Billingsley (2000) found that "untrue or deceitful communication was a factor that
escalated conflicts" (p. 248), no overt disputes with professionals were mentioned by participants. Participants did find a lack of integrity as particularly irritating, and as ultimately undermining trust, but they were willing to leave well enough alone. As discussed previously, I attribute this to either the cultural values of Confucianism, specifically, the emphasis on societal duty and pacifism, or the national ideology of Singapore’s Shared Values, specifically, the avowals of society before self, and consensus, not conflict that likely shaped participants’ preference to avoid causing trouble or fueling conflict.

A lack of active or empathetic listening on the part of teachers was also a source of irritation for participants. John related how his trust in the school was eroded by wife’s experience of not having her serious concerns heard by a professional, and Lynn shared how discouraged she was when her suggestions for how her son could be best supported went unheard. These findings are supported by literature that emphasizes how critical actively listening to parents is to the "healthy two-way communication" (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 193) that is necessary to building trust, increasing parental involvement, and ultimately benefitting the child (Chu, 2014).

To improve communication between the home and school, participants offered some good suggestions. John recommended that the teachers build their capacity in communication skills so that they could listen actively and demonstrate "empathy" when they communicated with the parents. Jay suggested getting a "third party" to help busy teachers to follow-up frequently and in a timely manner to achieve more continuity in communicating with parents about their children's progress and needs. Interestingly, the NIE website reveals that all pre-service SPED teachers are required to complete a 13-week course entitled "Communication and Collaboration for Special School Teachers." Yet, the lack of strong communication skills that
was highlighted by participants of my study may point to a need for more professional
development, especially since strong effective communication is essential to a successful home-
school partnership (Turnbull, et al., 2015).

**Perception of parents and child.** In addition to effective communication practices, the
participants reported that the positive perceptions that teachers had about both the parents and
students also mattered. Consistent with the literature, some participants reported that they were
perceived to be equal partners (Francis et al., 2016b; Park & Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull et al.,
2015). Coco, for example, related that she was actually considered to be a "teacher" because of
her expert knowledge drawn from "experience and/or training" (Osher & Osher, 2002, p. 54).
Mary said that she was perceived as a "friend" in that her relationship with teachers was based on
trust. Whether they were viewed as a partner, teacher, or friend, participants felt that positive
perceptions contributed to a close and productive working relationship between the home and the
school.

Similarly, the participants appreciated teachers who saw their children in a positive light.
Many of the participants' talked about their children's "strengths," so they especially appreciated
when the school professionals spoke about students from a strength-based perspective. Put aptly
by Lynn, operating from a strength-based position enables a "teacher [to] ... work very quickly
with the child, ... see the [child's] ... progress," and share timely information with the parent.
Teachers who embrace this perspective encourage a respectful and trusting relationship with the
participants (Francis et al., 2016b; Turnbull et al., 2015).

Conversely, teachers who held negative perceptions about the participants inhibited
positive home-school collaboration. I was surprised by the number of participants who talked
about this. Negative perceptions were referred to in terms of how they believed they were
thought of as merely "a parent," "stranger," "nobody," or "non-professional." While this baffled me initially, Snowyz's explanation of how some school professionals see themselves in relation to parents—namely as the experts with the professional qualifications—helped me to understand how, in assuming a "higher status than families" (Kasahara & Turnbull, 2015, p. 258), professionals were operating from a "hierarchical position of power" (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 175) that was contrary to building the home-school relationship Snowyz desired. This was reiterated by John, whose remarks echo the literature that emphasizes how important it is that parents and professionals have equal footing in the home-school partnership (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Francis et al., 2016b; Turnbull et al., 2015).

Perceiving a child's abilities in a negative light also inhibited positive collaboration between parents and teachers. Participants of my study resented what is referred to in home-school partnership literature as a deficit or "discrepant [view] of the child or child's needs" (Lake & Billingsley, 2000, p. 240). Lynn found it challenging to collaborate with a teacher who seemed unable to see her son beyond his disabilities. Turnbull et al. (2015) stress the importance of "treating the child as a person rather than a person with a diagnosis or a disability label" (p.171). This requires professionals to make an effort to appreciate a child's strengths from the perspective of the parent, and to understand the familial "contexts in which the child [demonstrated] such strengths" (Rao, 2000, p. 485).

The discussion of the above section on school professionals sheds further light on the home-school partnership in the SPED schools. First, it showed the mixed experiences of home-school partnership that participants had, which, according to John, varied "from teacher to teacher." It was evident from the study that some teachers were proficient in engaging the participants while others were not. The latter raises a question about whether or not these
teachers understood family engagement as a part of every teacher's professional work. As Epstein (2018) asserts, as a professional, a teacher "understands that education is a shared responsibility of home, school, and community … [and] knows how to work effectively with students, parents, ... and colleagues to promote student learning ... and other important outcomes" (p. 401). Second, the discussion also raises questions about requirements for and availability and relevance of current pre- and in-service courses related to parent engagement in SPED schools. Third, it is clear that a successful home-school partnership is dependent on positive and effective communication. Hence, it was crucial for school professionals to have good communication skills. Finally, with regard to my conceptual framework, my discussion reinforces the complexity of the home-school partnership. Interaction among factors within the school dimension as well as intersections between the home and school dimensions were apparent. For example, the attribute of care interacted with communication practices, and the parents' beliefs intersected with the school professionals' perceptions and communication practices.

**Parent involvement in school activities.** In my study, the participants highlighted three factors that have made their involvement in school-based activities a positive experience. The first was a welcoming environment. Literature is very clear that a positive school climate is a key determinant of meaningful parental involvement in schools (Baker et al., 2016; Collins, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, 2010; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This was evident in some schools talked about in my study. While it rested on the shoulders of the school leaders to develop and maintain a positive school climate conducive to parent involvement, participants also suggested that some teachers played a significant role in creating and reinforcing this through their positive attitudes and gestures, including personal invitations to parents to be involved in school activities and guidance for parents about how to
support school programs. The findings affirm Collins' (1995) research: Next to the school leader, teachers are most "instrumental in creating a welcoming atmosphere" (p. 2) for parental involvement. Findings also align with literature that has asserted the importance of a teacher's invitation in influencing parents' decisions to be involved with the school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, 2005a, 2005b; Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, & Ice, 2010).

According to the participants of my study, involvement in a variety of school-based activities further facilitated a positive partnership experience. They identified this kind of collaboration as particularly rewarding and advantageous not just for them, but also for their children and the school community at large. Literature confirms that many benefits accrue for the parents, their children, and the school when the school and home worked closely with each other (Collins, 1995; Cox-Petersen, 2011; Epstein, 2010a).

To add to the above, the participants also referred to recognition for their involvement as another factor that contributed to satisfying partnership experiences. This recognition came from all quarters—the school leaders, teachers, and students. Whether personal or public, acknowledgement and appreciation affirmed that parents were "welcomed," "recognized," "respected," and valued by the entire school community, and, reflecting Collins’ (1995) research, further encouraged involvement and collaboration. Collectively, these findings make it clear that the development and maintenance of a positive school climate for parental involvement requires a whole-school approach.

On the other hand, and seen by participants as having a negative effect on home-school partnerships, was a lack of parental involvement in some specific areas: fieldtrips, school workshops, CCAs, and PSG meetings. Not being included in some activities is not surprising; in Singapore, most schools "draw the line at active parental involvement in school governance"
Participants speculated about the reasons for their exclusion, but were nevertheless disappointed in not being able to contribute to or benefit from involvement in the full complement of school activities. Interestingly, while participants, for the most part, were also not involved directly in the classrooms of their children, this was not mentioned as a point of dissatisfaction. This diverges from Ratcliffe and Ponte's (2018) finding about how parents would have liked to do more "to contribute to the classroom itself" (p. 232). I suggest that the difference is related to context. While parents' participation in the classroom is more common and acceptable in western school settings (Baker et al., 2016; Ratcliffe & Ponte, 2018; Soodak & Erwin, 2000), this is not the case in Singapore. Specifically, Khong and Ng (2005) found that, in the mainstream schools in Singapore, parents did not see a "need to intrude into school space except for [school-based activities and events]" (p. 3). I would argue likewise; the parents of SPED schools did not express a desire to be involved directly in the classroom.

To improve home-school partnership, several suggestions were made. For example, Ling suggested that the schools "explored what the parents had to offer" during orientation or the "Meet the Parent" session. Ling's husband, Jay, added that the schools could create a platform for parents to come and "wow" their child's school or class. In his view, this type of involvement would encourage more parental participation and develop partnerships. Ling spoke of the need for schools to provide early notification as well as take into consideration parents' schedules to enable parents like Jay, who works overseas, the opportunity to participate in school-based activities. Coco, who works locally, voiced her preference for school activities to be held on Saturday, a day off for most parents. The call to schedule school activities at times more convenient for working parents is also supported by literature (Baker et al., 2016; Leithwood, 2009).
It appears that, in terms of practice, parental involvement was directed by the schools; professionals tended to tell parents "how they can contribute" (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 12). In this way, as was discussed earlier in this chapter, participants were involved rather than engaged in the work of specifically identified "projects, needs, and goals" (p. 12). According to Pushor (2010), schools do this "because they are seeking ways to address their central agenda of enhancing student achievement" (p. 9). In this sense, involvement is mostly "one way." While Ferlazzo (2011) argued that family involvement is not bad, engagement "produce[s] even better results" (p. 12) by "serv[ing the] family's purposes as well as the purposes of the school (Pushor, 2010, p. 9). While the participants of my study were pleased to be involved in whatever ways they could, their suggestions also revealed that they preferred to be engaged in a wide range of school matters by "doing with" (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 12) professionals. Such engagement, "both within and outside of the boundaries of the school agenda" (Pushor, 2010, pp. 9-10), "ensure[s] that there are reciprocal benefits for parents and families" (pp. 9-10).

Manzon et al. (2015) recommended a "context-sensitive framework of parent engagement ... to be developed based on a comprehensive and systemic understanding of Singapore's stakeholders' practices and beliefs" (p. 32). While this referred to the mainstream school context, in light of the findings of my study, I would advocate for SPED schools in the SSO to also be guided by such a framework. Increased engagement would shift "parents' positioning on the landscape of schools from the margins to the center" (Pushor, 2010, p. 9). Reflecting the views of some participants on this issue, were Snowyz's remarks about the school not listening to parents: "I felt disappointed … but there was nothing I could do." Helen's feeling of resignation was especially poignant: "Nothing more I could do, you see. I was like a small fry you see. I
couldn't do anything." Unless such a shift is made, the "voices" of the parents will remain sidelined.

The above discussion also raises a question: Is the PSG structure set up for the sake of meeting the MOE's "basic requirements of evaluation" (Khong & Ng, 2005, p. 6) or for enhancing student outcomes? Jay's comment that the school had not paid "much attention" to home-school partnership suggests that the PSG structure was in place for the sake of meeting the MOE's evaluation criteria. Careful consideration should be given to how home-school partnerships can better help promote student learning.

**Different pathways, different goals.** In my study, the theme—"different pathways, different goals" represented a barrier to positive home-school partnership. It was evident that several participants embraced a set of goals that differed from those of their children's schools. For example, participants related that SPED schools that focused on academic goals, and concentrated on practices such as streaming, drilling, assessments, and pushing the students to the next level, were clearly at odds not only with their own needs-based 'non-academic' goals for their children, but also with the dreams and aspirations that the children actually had for themselves. In this vein, stark differences between the home and school were barriers to productive partnerships especially when alternative pathways or other programs preferences that were identified by a parent or student were not offered by the SSO schools. For example, Helen and Snowyz’s engagement in the activities of the music centre seems to suggest less involvement in their child’s school. Mary's withdrawal of her son from the school clearly pointed to a failed partnership that resulted from differing goals. While I was unable to determine the extent to which these alternative pathways affected the participants' working relationship with the schools,
findings are supported by literature that identifies differences in goals between families and schools as obstacles to effective home-school collaboration (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

To improve home-school partnerships with regards to alternative pathways and goals, three suggestions were offered by the participants. As the current school curriculum prepares students for the vocational industries (National Institute of Education, 2017), Mary suggested that the school consider the inclusion of an additional, alternative program that would cater to students who might want to explore the creative arts and potentially pursue a career in this field. Ling suggested the inclusion of an overseas exchange program and Jay, her husband, went further to argue for a "greater conversation" to held amongst the school, parents, teachers, and students to discuss the issue of appropriate programming and to generate ideas for expanded course offerings. I am in favour of Jay’s recommendation, especially the inclusion of the SPED children as partners in home-school initiatives that will result in the fulfillment of their own hopes and aspirations. Only then can SPED schools fully prepare and enable students to "pursue a productive and meaningful life" (MOE, 2019b, para. 1).

My above discussion of differing pathways and goals highlights two significant findings: First, it appears that the home-school partnership in some schools is more rhetoric than practice. Specifically, it seems that some schools were mostly concerned with meeting the academic goals and objectives of the school, and perhaps the MOE. In view of this, some schools may want to reflect on the intent of their home-school partnership. Is the purpose of home-school partnership to help meet the goals of the school or the needs and goals of individual SPED students? Unless there is clarity in this, a positive home-school partnership may be difficult to forge with parents, who, similar to their children, may have desires and aspirations that do not reflect the goals of the school.
Second, the findings seem to suggest a need to review the present school curriculum in two areas. The first being implementation. While the schools aligned their curriculum to the SPED curriculum framework that was drawn up by the MOE in 2012, in practice, it appeared that some schools had placed a great emphasis on academic outcomes rather than on "holistic outcomes ... in six learning domains: academic, socio-emotional, daily living, vocational, the arts, physical education, and sports" (MOE, 2018b, para. 3). A review of curriculum implementation may result in programs being more aligned with the MOE’s conception of a more holistic curriculum that meets the needs and goals of more children. In addition to a review of implementation, a review of the SPED curriculum itself would be beneficial. The current curriculum is meant to prepare students for a career in one of four vocational industries (National Institute of Education, 2017). Perhaps an expanded curriculum is needed—one that possibly integrates academic with artistic or creative development to recognize a wider range of children's abilities and career possibilities. Reviews of implementation and relevance of the SPED curriculum could result in convergence between the goals of families and schools for, ideally, stronger home-school partnerships for student success at school and beyond. This recognizes that there is a positive correlation between parents' aspirations and student learning. As parents "need to hold high aspirations and expectations for their children, the schools need to work in partnership with parents so that the home and school can share in these expectations and support learning" (Hattie, 2009, p. 70).

**Location and scheduling of IEP meeting.** It was also evident that several participants viewed their involvement in their child's IEP meeting to be particularly important. Specifically, for Coco and Snowyz, the IEP meeting location lacked privacy and hindered the productive collaboration that can come from strong two-way communication (Chrispeels, 1996). Both
participants recommended that meetings be held behind "closed doors" to allow sensitive issues to be shared in the service of parents being better able to understand and support their child's behaviour and learning.

As for the scheduling, it was evident that one school's practice of holding the IEP meeting on a weekday impacted home-school partnership; the concern, according to participants, was that most parents work full time. To them, this exemplifies the school’s inflexibility, but it was likely a result of abiding by the MOE's policy of a 5-day work week that was enacted for schools in 2005 (Shanmugaratnam, 2005). To improve home-school partnership, Lynn suggested that schools allow the teachers to hold the IEP meeting on a Saturday for those working parents who could not attend on a weekday. This suggestion affirms assertions that schools should schedule meetings "during time of the day that are convenient for working parents" (Leithwood, 2009, p. 17). This would require the school to make some exceptions instead of working strictly to policy. It would demonstrate to parents that their presence matters and that the school takes home-school partnerships seriously.

Reflecting on the School Dimension

Looking at the school dimension as a whole, I noted some differences between what I found and what was presented in my original conceptual framework in Chapter Two. While my original conceptualization reflected "leadership approach" as a factor that impacted partnership, this was not mentioned by my participants. I realize that they may not have had enough knowledge about leadership approaches to be able to comment on this. However, they did talk about school leader's attributes, communication practices, and perceptions. Apparently, these factors influenced their decisions about working with the schools. Of the three factors, "perceptions," as discussed earlier, enabled me to infer that some leader's approaches were
focused more on student outcomes than on home-school partnerships. In my literature review, "attributes" and "perceptions" were reflected as aspects of the "leadership approach" and "trust" factors. In my revised conceptual framework, to better reflect what actually emerged in my study data, school leaders' attributes and perceptions are set apart, and sit alongside the factor of communication practices.

With regards to trust, while this factor was not explicitly referenced by participants with the actual word "trust," their narratives concerning the school leader and professionals were shot through with strong inferences to trust as an important element in fostering a productive collaboration between the home and the school.

As for the school professionals' knowledge and skills, my findings show this factor to be most discernable in the school professionals' attributes pertaining to understanding a child's needs, specifically, the inability to customize lessons for ASD students and in their inability to communicate effectively with the parents about matters related to their children.

The External Environment

No national policy on home-school partnership. The theme—"no national policy on home-school partnership" points to a barrier to positive home-school partnership. This came as no surprise to me. According to the literature, this is because even when policy exists, it can be a "source of potential conflict and tension" (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008, p. 639) and, thus, can hinder effective home-school partnerships (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012). In my study, the absence of a national policy led to an uneven practice of home-school partnership among the schools in the SSO. While SPED schools had a set of MOE and NCSS general guidelines about how they may "leverage ... parents ... to extend students' learning" (MOE & NCSS, 2011, p. 3), based on my past experience as a vice-principal in one of the SSO's schools, each school had to interpret
the guidelines for their own school context. This perhaps accounts for the varying home-school partnership practices among the schools of participants of my study and, in turn, could be the reason for the range of positive and negative experiences that the participants had with different schools. Perhaps this also explains why several participants were in favour of a national policy for the SPED sector as a means to improve home-school partnership. This finding is supported by the literature that suggests that, while partnership is "difficult to achieve in practice" (Bastiani, 1993, p. 113), it still is important to the success in school and the life of children with disabilities (Patrikakou, 2011). According to Bastiani (1993):

> Home-school partnership cannot be left to quietly evolve, unaided, in its own good time!
> Neither should it be left to individual schools, teachers and parents to foster on their own, without help. It is a major task that calls for imagination and commitment, initiative and direction; it also needs management, understanding and support. There is here, an important role for policy and legislation. (p. 114-115)

**Parental workplace.** Consistent with literature, for participants of my study, work presented a barrier to parental involvement in school (Murray et al., 2014). A couple of participants spoke about the difficulties working parents have in obtaining leave from their workplace to attend school-based activities. Their concern about being unable to participate in such activities once again highlighted the gap between the rhetoric and the actual practice of home-school partnership.

**Reflecting on the External Environment Dimension**

Compared to my original conceptual framework, the state ideologies factor in the external environment dimension was not explicitly referred to by participants, but it was strongly inferred in their narratives about how they interacted with the school. As mentioned in relation to
the home and school dimensions, state ideologies shaped the participants' shared values and, consequently, their beliefs and behaviours related to home-school partnership. As Singapore's state leaders deliberately embed the nations' ideologies in their speeches (Heng, 2015; Lee, 2019; Ong, 2019), and as Singapore's Shared Values are inculcated and transmitted via the Character and Citizenship curriculum (Heng, 2015; Sim, 2012; Tan, 2013), the participants of my study, most of whom were educated and have always lived in Singapore, have very likely internalized the state ideologies of academic excellence, meritocracy, survival, and competition for social mobility. This, perhaps, explains why they did not talk about state ideologies as barriers to home-school partnership. Nevertheless, cultural values and associated ideologies cannot be discounted, as my findings show that they do, at least to some extent, impact home-school partnership in Singapore. This explanation likewise applies to how I have suggested that the cultural values of Confucianism can potentially shape school practices and, specially, limit parental involvement as a result of how much value is often placed on the notion of deference to authority. Thus, state ideology is probably taken for granted, assumed in the discourses of the SSO and SPED school systems and the educational leaders and other professionals and, therefore, not even observed by participants of my study, let alone seen as a factor either helping or hindering home-school partnerships.

**Revisiting the conceptual framework**
Figure 6. Revised conceptual framework for Chapter Five discussion. My revised conceptual framework includes the following: (a) new factors; (b) one factor that was not explicit, but noteworthy; (c) unchanged factors; (d) one renamed factor; and (e) factors made prominent. The revised conceptual framework also replaces "positive partnership" with "the child".

Based on the evidence that emerged from this case study, which is specific to the Singapore context, I made some revisions (see Figure 6) to the original conceptual framework that I presented in Chapter Two (see Figure 1). First, in the external environment dimension, the revised conceptual framework identifies "parental workplace," state ideologies," and "policy" as constant factors influencing home-school partnerships. Specifically in Singapore's context, the absence of a national policy for home-school partnerships in SPED schools has led individual schools to decide on goals, objectives, and best practices for parents and school leaders. This, in turn, has resulted in various and uneven effects. As a factor of the external environment, "state ideologies" was not explicitly talked about by participants as they were likely internalized by the individuals. However, it was noteworthy because, as revealed in some parents' accounts, state ideologies do influence home-school partnership.

Second, in the school dimension, the revised conceptual framework reflects factors that were renamed. Specifically, "quality and behaviour" of the school professionals is now "attributes." The school leader's "attributes" and "perceptions" did not appear in the original conceptualization as they were mentioned, respectively, in terms of "trust" and "leadership approach" in the literature I reviewed. They are now made prominent in the new framework as the discussion of my findings makes it clear that they are the leadership factors that impact collaboration for home-school partnerships the most. Third, the new conceptual framework also highlights that the school dimension was perceived by the participants to have the greatest
impact on positive home-school partnership; this is reflected in how this dimension now includes additional factors: school professionals' "attributes" and "perceptions," which paralleled the findings related to school leaders; "communication practices" specific to school leaders; both "school leaders and professionals' knowledge and skills;" parental involvement in school activities;" "different pathways, different goals;" and "time and location of the IEP meeting." In the original framework, the factor of "trust" was accompanied by "respect." In my study, respect was definitely important to participants, but it was shown to be a contributor to trust; trust was seen to be the overarching factor in building strong relationships for effective home-school partnerships. Thus "respect" does not appear in the new framework.

Fourth, in the home dimension, the revised framework includes the new factors that were brought to light through my discussion: "parents' lack of knowledge and skills," and "parents' time and work constraints." Factors that appeared in the original but not do appear in the new conceptual framework are "parents' language and communication," and "parents' past experiences and memories." As discussed above, these were not evidenced in my study likely because it only involved parents whose perceptions and experiences are influenced by the language and educational systems of the Singaporean context.

Fifth, to reflect that it is very clear that the central concern of the participants of my study was their children, in the new framework, "positive partnership," which appeared at the centre of the original framework, is replaced with "the child". Finally, this revised conceptual framework serves to emphasize the elements that best represent the Singapore SPED parents' responses to the central question that guided this study: What are special education parents' perception about home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools?
Reflection on the Definition of Partnership

Within the Singapore context, Poon et al. (2013) stated that, while parents with children of disabilities were perceived as "crucial" (p. 63), they "still [remained] as unequal partners in the support process with special education [as the SPED schools were] largely child and school centric" (p. 63). When I began conceptualizing my research study, I found Poon et al.'s assessment of parents as unequal reflected my own observations of how home-school partnerships have been conducted in Singapore's SPED schools. I therefore assumed that the concept of partnership could be based on the notion of an equal, '50-50' kind of relationship between parents and the school. In light of this conception, an equal partnership between the SPED parents and the schools was, in my view, desirable. Thus, the definition of partnership upon which I initially based my study assumed equality.

Having now completed my research, I realized that the definition of partnership that I started with was quite limited in its reliance on the notion of equality. I am now able to see that a definition based on equity would have been more appropriate. Specifically, the data of my study indicated that participants believed that partnership should be characterized by mutually respectful relationships, wherein all involved worked together towards a common goal. Participants also shared that partnerships should be more about the school doing 'with' parents rather than doing 'to' parents. They also argued that partnership should involve shared responsibility in a relationship that is horizontal, not vertical. For example, parents' responses revealed that they strongly felt that, while perhaps different from the expertise of school professionals, their expertise about their child and about disabilities was certainly as worthwhile. Collectively, these findings convinced me that partnership ought to reflect the notion of equity rather than simply equality. Thus, when I reflect on how I began my study, I can now see how a
definition of partnership that is premised on equity would have been better than the definition I started with. Specifically, I think Epstein's (1992) definition would perhaps have been more appropriate. Indeed, it is more in keeping with the findings of my study: Partnership implies "a formal alliance and contracted agreement to work together towards a shared goal and to share the profits or benefits of mutual investments" (p. 1140).

Furthermore, I can now also see how, had Epstein's (1992) definition been the one I started with, my research questions may have been framed differently. Rather than focusing on what results in a positive home-school partnership and what are barriers to or inhibitors of a positive home-school partnership, I may have started with research questions that focused on what goes into a mutually beneficial partnership. As it was, because my interview questions were developed in direct relationship to my research questions, participant responses were often 'black and white' or dichotomous in nature (i.e., good or bad) and articulated, for example, in terms of "positive/negative," "effective/ineffective," "healthy/unhealthy," and "productive/unproductive" partnerships. Had my research and interview questions focused on equitable, respectful, and mutually beneficial partnerships, my inquiry may have generated more nuanced data that pointed towards and foregrounded what works well rather than, as was evident in some participants contributions, what was wrong or who was not doing what they ought to. Therefore, findings may have been more conducive to the spirit of partnerships that reflects mutual respect and mutual benefits, and what my participants and I would like to see promoted in the Singapore SPED schools—home-school partnerships that are not simply equal, but equitable.

While in hindsight I am able to reflect on the definition of partnership and consider what might have been if I had started off with a more appropriate definition, I nevertheless remain
very pleased with what, as a result of my research conceptualization and design, participants were able to contribute and what I have, therefore, been able to present as findings.

**Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a more in-depth, holistic understanding of the phenomenon of how special education parents perceived home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools. By using Bronfenbrenner's (1977) socio-ecological model and grouping the 13 themes and their sub-themes under three broad dimensions—the external environment, the school, and the home, my study has clearly established what factors facilitated or inhibited a positive home-school partnership in Singapore's SPED context. In the home dimension, the participants identified the following factors specific to parents—values, beliefs, and culture, lack of knowledge and skills, and time and work constraints. In the school dimension, the following factors were identified: the school leader and school professionals' attributes, communication practices, perceptions, knowledge and skills, leadership approach, parental involvement opportunities, different pathways, different goals, and timing and location of the IEP meeting to influence the collaboration between the home and school. Within this dimension, trust and respect also surfaced as factors that impacted home-school partnership. As for the external environment, factors discussed that inhibited an effective home-school partnership from being forged were the absence of a national policy for SPED home-school partnerships, parental workplace, and state ideologies. As the factors within and between each dimension both interact and intersect with one another, it is clear that home-school partnerships in the Singapore SPED schools are indeed multifaceted and complex in nature. As I also connected these factors to issues raised in the literature, it also became very clear that the barriers identified contributed strongly to the disconnect between the rhetoric and the practice of home-
school partnership among some SPED schools in the SSO. Despite this, the discussion also revealed that the disconnect could be bridged via the various suggestions offered by participants and further discussed by me in relation to the literature. However, bridging this gap may prove to be a challenging task as partnership requires time, energy, and commitment. For home-school partnerships to succeed and be sustained, school leaders and professionals must take into consideration the beliefs, cultural values, expectations, perceptions, and opinions of the SPED parents. Home-school partnership should be intentional, and it should engage rather than merely involve parents. It also requires a conscientious effort on the part of the school. As Ludicke and Kortman (2012) state, there is still work to be done "between teachers and parents, family and school, for collaborative partnerships to result in positive educational outcomes for the students with learning barriers" (p. 168). While the ideals of home-school partnership may never be fully realized, as they are continually subject to dynamics of the home, the school, and the broader external environment, SPED schools must, nevertheless, strive for the kind of positive and effective partnerships with families that stand to give the parents hope for the future of their children in a highly meritocratic society. Based on this chapter’s discussion, a revised conceptual framework was developed. In the next chapter, I offer recommendations as well as suggestions for further research.
Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this case study was to gain insight into how SPED parents perceived and experienced home-school partnerships in Singapore. My rationale for examining this topic was threefold—to answer three different calls. The first was the call made in literature for more research in home-school partnership in Singapore. The second was the national call made for more research that can potentially benefit persons with disabilities, and the third was a response to Mr. Chan Chun Sing's call for partners to come forward and develop local solutions for local problems. This inquiry has attended to all three calls. As my research has addressed a significant gap in the literature regarding home-school partnership in Singapore’s SPED schools and makes recommendations for improvement, it therefore contributes to the following areas—local literature, the disability sector, and social service sector.

This final chapter serves to draw this research study to a close by providing concluding remarks related specifically to my original research questions. I will begin by offering some general implications of the study for practice and follow by making specific recommendations for school leaders, school professionals, and for government officials, policy makers, and school board members. I then revisit the assumptions I outlined in Chapter One. I conclude this chapter with my final reflections on the study.

Implications for Practice

Given the paucity of local research, educators with an interest in home-school partnership in Singapore's SPED schools, have mainly North American, European, and Australian literature to draw upon. This study contributes to the literature by providing current, local research about how home-school partnership is perceived by parents of children with disabilities who attended Singapore's SPED schools. While the findings are not generalizable due to the small scale of my
qualitative case study, I suggest that the following key findings may be useful to policy makers of the MOE and the NCSS whose portfolios concern SPED, and to educators who work in Singapore’s SPED schools.

1. The Beliefs, Values, and Culture theme, reflected parents' clear beliefs about their responsibilities in their children's education, and about the purposes of, what should be entailed in, and their roles vis-à-vis the home-school partnership. Parents' self-efficacy was related to a sense of confidence in participating in matters of the SPED school. Participants also embraced Asian cultural values, one of which was the importance of education, the other was showing respect or deference for authority. They also seem to have held in common the Confucian values that are embedded in Singapore's Shared Values, specifically society before self, and consensus, not conflict. While most parents held similar values regarding their child's education in general, and home-school partnerships in particular, they held different beliefs about what partnership entails. To accommodate parents' cultural values and differing beliefs, SPED schools should engage parents in the creation and implementation of home-school partnerships to achieve a strong alignment between the expectations of the home and the school. This also suggests that each SPED school may need to contextualize their school's home-partnership to best fit the needs and desires of their parents.

2. Reflected in the Lack of Knowledge and Skills, Time and Work Constraints, and Parental Workplace themes, are "elements of the parents' life contexts" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005b, 2010). Whether related to knowledge, skills, energy, time, and their work, these factors suggest that SPED schools should take families'
circumstances into consideration when designing and implementing strategies for a productive collaboration between the home and school.

3. From the School Leader theme, it was evident that a school leader's attributes, communication approach, and perceptions of the parent or the child could either facilitate or hinder a positive and trusting home-school partnership. The discussions on this theme also raised another factor—the school leader's beliefs about home-school partnership. Taken together, these findings suggest that school leaders need to be aware that their direct or indirect behaviours and practices can impact the home-school partnership. As the issue of trust was also underscored in this theme, school leaders also need to make a conscious effort to build relational trust with the parents as it "is the connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of the students" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 6). This further implies that busy school leaders need to make time for SPED parents, as both time and commitment (Bull et al., 2008) are needed to build a trusting relationship. SPED school leaders may also need to review their leadership repertoire to see if their current leadership approach is inclusive of families. If they have come from a mainstream school, they should also be prepared to ensure that their professional knowledge of special education is relevant so that they are able to engage appropriately and effectively with SPED parents. To help build SPED school leaders' professional capacity, the MOE may have to work together with the NIE and the NCSS to provide more in-service courses. School leaders, on their part, ought to actively look for relevant courses to take. Additionally, the Academy of Principals (Singapore), a professional body that brings together senior mainstream school
educators in Singapore under one professional body, could provide targeted support and specific resources to build SPED school leadership capacity.

4. From the School Professionals theme, it was evident that the school professionals' attributes, communication approaches, and perceptions could either facilitate or hinder positive and trusting home-school partnership. Similar to school leaders, the school professionals also need to be cognizant that their direct or indirect behaviours, practices, attitudes, perceptions, and communication approaches can impact the development and maintenance of trusting relationships between themselves and the parents. As relational trust requires both time and commitment (Bull et al., 2008), busy school professionals should develop effective and efficient practices for communicating with SPED parents. School professionals may need more initial training and more in-service development specific to collaboration and communication skills. Specifically, this calls for a review of the current course that the NIE offers to pre-service SPED teachers—"Communication and Collaboration for Special School Teachers." It also suggests that the MOE may need to work with the NIE and the NCSS to provide courses for professionals to keep abreast of new developments in home-school partnerships. Finally, as this theme also revealed that some school professionals may not have special education qualifications, both the NCSS and the SSO may want to review their hiring criteria for SPED schools.

5. From the Parent Involvement in School Activities and Parental Workplace themes, it was clear that most parents wanted to be involved in school-based activities, as they had perceived this to result in immense benefits not only for their children but for the school as a whole. The value they placed on education made them highly motivated
partners. In relation to the School Leader, School Professionals, Lack of Knowledge and Skills, and Location and Scheduling of IEP Meeting themes, it was clear that parents wanted their opinions or "voices" to be heard. They also wanted to be involved in decision making during IEP meetings. This means that school professionals will need to practice active listening, and may have to educate parents on special education processes. Taking these points into consideration, I argue that it is no longer sufficient to merely involve parents in home-school partnership; instead, SPED schools ought to consider a paradigm shift to engage parents for "even better results" (Ferlazzo, 2011, p. 12).

6. The theme Different Pathways, Different Goals, revealed that several SPED parents had aspirations and goals for their children, and that their children also had dreams and aspirations of their own. However, these did not always mesh with the goals of the SPED schools or the curriculum and programming established by the MOE. This calls for the SPED schools to not only acknowledge the differences between the goals of the home and the school, but to make a concerted effort to work with the families to create more or alternative curriculum pathways or to find external resources that will support children's growth in ways that the school cannot. The MOE may wish to consider a curriculum review to assess the range of needs and aspirations of SPED school children and to develop programs accordingly so that all children can reach their full potential.

7. The theme on Location and Scheduling of the IEP Meeting revealed that inappropriate meeting locations and conflict in IEP scheduling impacted positive home-school partnership. Some SPED professionals can be reminded about the
sensitive nature of information shared and, therefore, parents' desire for private meetings. Some schools should consider being more flexible in scheduling IEP meetings for working parents. These considerations would help to demonstrate that school professionals value the SPED parents as important education partners.

8. In reference to No National Policy theme, I argue that SPED home-school partnerships practice vary and are uneven among schools in the SSO. This suggests that SPED schools may require more guidance from the MOE to unpack the definition of partnership for a clear understanding of what home-school partnership entails. Greater involvement by the MOE would also help Singapore to move towards an inclusive education system. At the SSO level, a definition of what home-school partnership looks like in practice may need to be developed. This would require that school leaders, staff, and parents work together with the SSO board members to come up with a definition of and goals for partnership that would result in clear expectations and consistent practices for all stakeholders.

**Recommendations**

I offer the following recommendations, based on the findings, discussions, and conclusions of this study. These recommendations may be of value to a variety of stakeholders, including current and aspiring school leaders and school professionals, MOE and NCSS officials who are jointly responsible for overseeing the SPED schools and SPED education policy, SSOs who run the different SPED schools in Singapore, and those in tertiary institutions and other social service agencies who develop and deliver leadership education and SPED programs and courses.
For school leaders.

1. Based on the School Leader theme, school leaders should be cognizant of their beliefs, leadership approaches, behaviours, practices, attitudes, perceptions, and communication approaches, as these can impact positive home-school partnership. I recommend that SPED school leaders be reflective practitioners (Sergiovanni, 2009). To become such a practitioner, a leader must take time from their busy work schedules to engage in self-reflection. This will allow them to challenge their "taken-for-granted assumptions" (Robinson, 2011, p. 99) that they may have about the role of parents, school leaders, and the school in home-school partnership.

2. Also, based on the School Leader theme, SPED school leaders need to expand their repertoire of leadership practices. Common practices such as instructional and transformational leadership may exclude parents from decision making. I recommend that SPED school leaders include leadership practices that are more inclusive. Examples of such leadership include collective leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2012), leadership for authentic partnership (Auerbach, 2010, 2012), and communitarian leadership (Ho, 2009). Reading books and articles, as well as attending courses on these leadership practices will help to widen the SPED school leaders' repertoire.

3. The School Leader theme also highlighted the importance of building relational trust to facilitate positive home-school partnerships. I recommend that school leaders intentionally make time to build relational trust by adopting any practices that demonstrate that they are approachable, accessible, visible, respectful, and caring. At the same time, they should also engage their staff in dialogues or form professional
learning communities that explore topics such as the values of partnering with parents and parents as learning partners. By doing this, together with their staff, they could collectively build trusting relationships with the SPED parents and strengthen home-school partnership. Additionally, I recommend that school leaders continuously build their capacity in the following areas: collaboration, communication skills, and understanding children with disabilities, in particular, with ASD, as knowledge and skills in these areas would greatly enhance parents' trust in the school and their willingness to participate in home-school partnerships.

4. Based on the themes of Parent Involvement in School Activities, Parents' Beliefs, Values, and Culture, School Leader and School Professionals' Lack of Knowledge and Skills, and Location and the Scheduling of IEP Meeting, my study reveals that it is insufficient to involve parents only in school-based activities. I therefore recommend that all SPED school leaders move towards parent engagement to create "a shared world" (Pushor, 2007, p. 3) wherein both the parents and teachers are involved in decision making, setting the agenda, and determining the "intended outcomes of their efforts for children, families ... and the school" (p. 3). To enable parents to be engaged, school leaders must empower them by, for example, building capacity through school-organized workshops or courses.

5. Based on the Different Pathways, Different Goals theme, school leaders should ensure that the school curriculum is implemented in a holistic manner. They should, together with their staff, explore the possibility of including a creative arts program, or partner with external agencies to deliver this program to meet the needs of students who have strong inclinations towards the creative arts.
For school professionals.

1. The themes for Parents' Beliefs, Values, and Culture highlighted that parents hold similar values, but have differing beliefs about what home-school partnerships entail. These beliefs may also differ from those of the school professionals. To raise school professionals' awareness of the differences, I recommend that all school professionals actively engage parents in a conversation about their views and beliefs about partnership at the beginning of the new school. This could be the start of the home and the school working in the same direction on behalf of children.

2. As for the themes on Parents' Lack of Knowledge and Skills, Time and Work Constraints, and Parental Workplace highlighted that the parents have differing life circumstances, it is also important that school leaders and professionals take this into consideration when engaging parents in home and school-based activities. I recommend that school professionals engage parents in conversations to find out about their needs and life challenges. Alternatively, school professionals could issue a needs assessment form to all parents at the beginning of the school year to determine how they can best support parents and children.

3. Based on theme specific to School Professionals, I suggest that school professionals, similar to school leaders, should be cognizant of their approach, behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, and communication practices, as these can impact positive home-school partnerships. I recommend that SPED school professionals take time out of their busy work schedules to engage in self-reflection for the same reasons and in the same ways that I suggest for school leaders.
4. As the School Professional themes also highlighted the importance of building relational trust to facilitate positive home-school partnership, I recommend that school professionals, like the school leaders, intentionally make time to build relational trust with the parents. This can be accomplished by adopting any practices to demonstrate that they are approachable, accessible, visible, respectful, and caring. Examples of such practices could include frequent, timely, and open communications with the parents via multiple communication modes, spending time with parents, meeting parents after school dismissal to discuss issues, adopting an open door policy, as well as customizing their teaching to meet their students' needs. Additionally, to strengthen relational trust, school professionals could continuously build their capacity in the following areas: collaboration, communication skills, and teaching pedagogy. The latter, specifically, would allow them to expand their teaching repertoire as well as customize their pedagogy to meet the learning needs of students with mild intellectual disabilities and ASD.

5. Based on the Location and Scheduling of IEP theme, SPED school professionals need to be sensitive to parents' need for privacy when conducting an IEP meeting. Conducting the IEP behind closed doors would help parents to feel safe and comfortable in sharing sensitive information about their child.

6. Based on the Different Pathways, Different Goals theme, school professionals should acknowledge parents and their children's aspirations, goals, and dreams. While they may differ from those of the school, school professionals still need to work together with these families. I, therefore, recommend that school professionals be familiar
with external resources and agencies that may be available to help parents to support their children in reaching their fullest potential.

**For government officials, policy makers, NIE, and SSO board members.**

1. Based on the No National Policy theme, the study highlighted the need for the MOE and the NCSS to offer SPED schools more assistance in engaging parents in home-school partnerships. Specifically, I recommend that, together, the MOE and the NCSS draw up a national policy on home-school partnership. In this policy, they should clearly explain what partnership means and entails. This, in turn, would allow the SSO board members to dialogue with school leaders, staff, and parents of SPED schools to define and clarify what a positive and productive partnership would look like for the SSO. What emerges from the discussions could then be reflected in each SSO school's vision, mission, goals, and strategic plans. Additionally, both the MOE and the NCSS may want to consider working with the NIE to provide more in-service courses for SPED school leaders and professionals in the following areas: school leadership, communication and collaboration skills, teaching pedagogy, and understanding disabilities.

2. The theme related to School Professionals' Knowledge and Skills underscored the need for school professionals to have special education qualifications. As the data revealed that some job coaches may not have a special education qualification, both the NCSS and the SSO should consider reviewing hiring criteria to ensure that all staff possess relevant SPED qualifications.

3. As the study revealed that participants had several negative experiences with some teachers, the NIE may consider reviewing their current pre-service SPED courses
related to collaboration, communication, understanding disabilities, and teaching 
pedagogy to see if further refinement is needed to better meet the needs of fresh 
SPED graduates. At the same time, the NIE could consider producing and issuing all 
pre-service SPED teachers with a "handbook" (Hands, 2013, p. 144) on home-school partnership. Also, both the NIE and the NCSS may want to consider offering in-
service courses to current SPED teachers to enable them to keep abreast of 
developments in collaboration, communication skills, learning disabilities, and 
teaching pedagogy.

4. As the theme of School Leaders' Knowledge and Skills showed that some school leaders came from the mainstream schools, the MOE may consider working with the NIE and the NCSS to help build these school leaders' professional capacity. Offering in-service courses on collaboration, communication, leadership for home-school partnerships, and understanding disabilities would help school leaders to better serve and meet the needs of the parents and children in their SPED schools.

It must be noted that even if a centralized SPED home-school partnership policy is developed by the MOE, SPED school leaders will still play a key role in translating the policy into practice within their own schools. The discussions and revised conceptual framework in Chapter Five clearly shows that school leaders can influence many areas in the school dimension. Reiterating what Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) have argued, when it comes to fostering parent engagement, "it all comes down to ... leadership" (p. 492).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Having now completed my study, I now see a number of topics that are worthy of future research:
1. My research focused only on the perceptions about positive home-school partnerships of SPED parents. Future research should investigate the perceptions of school leaders or school professionals. This would provide a greater understanding of the full view of successful school partnerships.

2. Based on my findings, further research that investigates the differences between the beliefs of and the leadership approaches to home-school partnerships of SPED school leaders who have come from mainstream schools and SPED school leaders who have had longstanding careers in non-mainstream schools would be valuable. This may uncover leadership practices that are particularly conducive to facilitating home-school partnership in Singapore's SPED schools.

3. Only one participant who had a child with ASD participated in my study. It seemed that this parent encountered more challenges in the home-school partnership when the child moved on to a secondary school. Doing a comparative study between the home-school partnerships conducted at primary SSO schools and SSO secondary schools may shed light on how the secondary schools could better serve the needs of this group of parents.

4. Based on the findings of my study, further research investigating current workloads of SPED school leaders and professionals may shed light on how to alleviate time- and stress-related pressures on effective and meaningful partnerships.

5. As the current study focuses on parents' perceptions of the schools in one SSO, doing a comparative study with parents from SPED schools in the different SSOs in Singapore could provide a more robust indication of what factors facilitate and inhibit positive home-school partnership in Singapore's SPED schools.
6. Based on the findings, I think it would be interesting to investigate further how SPED parents and teachers understand and construct their roles in collaborative partnerships. This could result in particularly helpful in-depth and focused findings about how identity might influence relationships, and what, specifically, fosters the kind of relational trust that is so crucial to home-school partnerships.

**Revisiting Assumptions from Chapter One**

Five assumptions were made at the beginning of this study. I now address these as part of the summary for my closing chapter. The first assumption was that there was a disconnect between the rhetoric and actual practice of partnership in Singapore SPED schools. This assumption held true throughout the inquiry. All the themes pertaining to the barriers that inhibited positive home-school partnership pointed to factors that SPED parents perceived to have caused this disconnect.

The second assumption was that SPED parents did not think they were considered to be equal partners in the home-school partnership. This assumption was also true. While some participants made this explicit, the experiences of being an unequal partner of the other participants could be inferred from what they shared about the factors that hindered positive home-school partnerships.

The third assumption was that participants who had seven years of experience in more than one home-school partnership would respond to questions in an open and honest manner. This impression also held true. I am confident that all participants shared freely their views and experiences of home-school partnership in at least two SPED schools that their children had attended.
My fourth assumption was that case study methodology and methods would be appropriate for this study. I believe this approach was indeed beneficial for exploring the phenomenon of parents' perceptions about home-school partnership in Singapore's SPED schools. Given their compelling insights, I can now see how using a quantitative research design would not have resulted in participants being able to share such rich insights about complex home-school partnerships. Hence, I agree that qualitative research helps us to understand how human behaviour cannot be meaningfully understood in a quantified manner. I also see how case study research was appropriate for an in-depth investigation of a specific phenomenon that could not be studied as separate from its context. Thus, my study generated a set of interesting findings that allow me to make recommendations about home-school partnerships that will be especially appropriate to the Singapore context and, hopefully, to improving Singapore’s SPED schools.

My constructivist approach to the research also allowed me to engage with the literature and with my participants' contributions to generate new understanding about home-school partnership in Singapore's SPED schools. While I set out to understand SPED parents' perceptions and experiences, I came away with a strong understanding that SPED parents earnestly desired to be respected and valued as critical allies and partners in the school. This was because they shared a deep sense of responsibility and a common journey in doing whatever they possibly could to ensure that their children could reach their fullest potential.

Finally, I assumed that the phenomenon of parents' perceptions of and experiences with home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools would be researchable. From the themes that emerged, it is evident that my inquiry generated copious amount of data. This was because the participants were willing to not merely respond, but to genuinely share in a way that required them to be vulnerable. I am grateful for this. It has made this study more meaningful for me than
I could have imagined. I hope that those who read this dissertation are also able to benefit from the generous contributions of the participants of my study.

**Researcher's Final Reflection**

When I first embarked on this doctoral journey in the summer of 2016, it was upon my heart that I should make the SPED sector in Singapore the subject of my research. In November 2016, three documents were brought to my attention by the SPED parents. Upon reading them, it dawned on me that special needs education was gaining currency in Singapore. Having learnt much about "voice" (Hall, 1992, p. 22) from my participatory action research course, I contemplated the possibility of giving parents a voice by inviting them to share their lived experiences of raising a child with special needs in Singapore. While searching for articles related to the lived experiences of SPED parents, I stumbled upon Dobbins and Abbott’s (2010) article on "Developing Partnership with Parents in Special Schools: Parental Perspective from Northern Ireland." What I read deeply resonated with me. I realized that this was because the study gave the Irish parents a voice concerning home-school partnership. Between the two topics—home-school partnership and the lived experiences of parents raising special needs children in Singapore, I realized that the former might have a greater impact on school policy and practice in Singapore. Hence, I embarked on this study hoping that the findings and recommendations would have relevance for SPED practitioners in SPED schools, government officials from the MOE and the NCSS who jointly develop SPED policies, the NIE curriculum developers and instructors who prepare pre-service SPED teachers, and board members who run the SSO schools.

As there was a significant gap Singapore's literature on home-school partnership in Singapore SPED schools, a national call for more research related to persons with disabilities, as
well as a call to develop local solutions for local problems, I embarked on this study to address all three concerns. As this study has shed light on the facilitators and barriers to positive home-school partnership, as well as providing suggestions to improve home-school partnership, it is my hope that school leaders will now be able to incorporate some evidence-informed practices into their work to promote productive partnerships for their schools. At the same time, it is also my hope that the insights from this study will move the hearts of policy makers to consider developing a relevant home-school partnership policy for SPED schools in Singapore.

Moreover, I do hope that in the days to come, this study will spark conversations with diverse audiences about the importance of home-school partnership in Singapore SPED schools. Ideally, these conversations will be a launching pad for more research related to the SPED sector to be undertaken by either local scholars or practitioners in the SPED schools.

In closing, I am grateful to all my participants. Specifically, I am appreciative of the time they have given and their willingness to open up their world to me. In doing so, they have allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding about home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools. This is invaluable learning for me as it will certainly help me to build an effective home-school partnership if I should ever return to head a SPED school in Singapore. While I am cognizant that partnership is difficult to achieve, I am, however, hopeful that both families and schools can strive towards achieving positive and meaningful partnerships. It only takes two willing and committed sculptors, as the poem below suggests, to be engaged in a partnership that could give a SPED child a future filled with hope.

**Two Sculptors**

I dreamed I stood in a studio

And watched two sculptors there,
The clay they used was a young child's mind
   And they fashioned it with care.
One was a teacher; the tools she used
   Were books, music and art.
One, a parent who worked with a guiding hand
   And a gentle, loving heart.
Day after day the teacher toiled
   With touch that was deft and sure,
While the parent labored by her side
   And polished and smoothed it o'er
And when at last their task was done,
They were proud of what they had wrought;
For the things they had moulded into the child
   Could neither be sold nor bought
And each agreed he would have failed
   If he worked alone,
The parent and the school,
The teacher and the home.

Author Unknown
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https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124517747682


Appendix A: Singapore's Dual Track Education System

Appendix B: Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Model of Parental Involvement Process

### Appendix C: Participant's Demographic Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Code</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Ethnicity / Cultural Background</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Child's Disability Type</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INT1</td>
<td>Sally &amp; John</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>GCE &quot;A&quot; Level / Diploma Holder</td>
<td>Executive Assistant / Sales</td>
<td>GDD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT2</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>B.A</td>
<td>Part time Accounts Assistant</td>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT3</td>
<td>Siti</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>GCE &quot;O&quot; Level</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>GDD</td>
<td>Withdrew 15 Sept 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT4</td>
<td>Snowyz</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Diploma Holder</td>
<td>Teacher Assistant</td>
<td>Oromotor Dysarthria</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT5</td>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Diploma Holder</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>ASD &amp; ADHD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT6</td>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Diploma Holder</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Brachmann De Lange Syndrome &amp; GDD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT7</td>
<td>Coco</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>GCE &quot;O&quot; Level</td>
<td>Student Care Officer</td>
<td>GDD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT8</td>
<td>Ling &amp; Jay</td>
<td>Chinese / Caucasian</td>
<td>B Sc / B.A.</td>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>Jay : PR - 7 years ago. Lived in Singapore for 30 yrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legend:**

- ASD : Autism spectrum disorder
- ADHD : Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- B.A. : Bachelor of Arts
- B Sc. : Bachelor of Science
- GDD : Global Developmental Delay
- PR : Permanent Resident
Dear Mx. Xxxx:

I am writing to you to request your participation in a university research project entitled *Home-School Partnerships in Singapore's SPED Schools: A Case Study*. I am conducting this project as part of the dissertation requirements for completion of an EdD Degree in the Department of Graduate Studies and the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary.

The purpose of this proposed case study is to investigate parents' perceptions about and experiences of home-school partnerships with special education (SPED) schools in Singapore. My rationale for examining this topic is to understand how parents view positive partnerships, determine inhibitors and enablers for home-school partnerships, and identify areas that may require improvement. Findings of the study may help SPED schools to review and subsequently improve collaboration between the home and school. They may also prompt policy makers to develop a special education policy for Singapore in the near future.

I am inviting you to assist me in this study by agreeing to be a participant. This study will involve an in-depth, face-to-face interview. The interview will last approximately 75 minutes, and will focus on your views about and experiences with home-school partnerships. I will take notes and use a digital audio recorder during the interview. The purpose for recording the interview is to ensure accuracy and preserve what is being said for analysis. As a participant, you will also have the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, make changes and add comments, and return it within two weeks from the time you receive the transcript. To return the transcript, you may email it to me or call to make arrangements for me to collect it. If you are interested in participating, I will send more detailed information about the study and, then, we can decide on an interview time and location.
Also, if you would like to, you may bring to the interview any documents pertinent to the home-school partnership of your child's SPED school, including, for example, school newsletters, general communiques, information from the school website (e.g., downloaded documents or screenshots). The purpose of these documents is for you to use them as artifacts during the interview, to help you talk about your views about and share your experiences of home-school partnerships. Should I wish to borrow any of these documents, I will require your permission, and they will be returned to you within a week. A complete list of the interview questions that will be asked, along with examples of the documents you will be asked to collect and share during the interview, will be emailed to you if you decide to participate in this study.

Please be assured that you are under no obligation to participate. If you do consent to participate, you are encouraged to ask questions about the research or your involvement in the study. At any time during the interview, you may refuse to respond to any question or questions, ask to take a break, or interrupt and discontinue the interview. You also have the right to withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw, any data contributed by you will be removed from the study and destroyed. Please note that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point until November 15, 2018, when all interviews are completed, all transcript reviews have been done, and the study data, in their entirety, have been collected. Please also be assured that you or your interview responses will not be judged or evaluated by me at any time during the study.

All data gathered in the study will be kept in strict confidence and only shared with my supervisor if necessary. All hard copy data and research materials will be stored in a secure location, to which only I have access. All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Also, all data will be kept only until my dissertation has been completed and approved, at which time it will be destroyed. A final copy of the dissertation will be made available to you upon request.

Your identity will be protected. You will be asked to provide a pseudonym, and this pseudonym will be used in the data analysis, dissertation, presentation, and any future publications about the research.

This study has been approved by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board of the University of Calgary. We do not foresee any harm or predictable risks for participants in this research. However, please feel free to contact me at [phone number] or email me at [email address] if you have any questions. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr. Brenda Spencer, at 403-220-6095 or spencerb@ucalgary.ca.

I have attached a brief “Biographic Information” questionnaire for you to respond to should you decide to participate in this study. Please return the questionnaire to me via email within a week.
at [email address]. If you prefer that I pick up the Biographic Information questionnaire from you, please email me to make arrangements for this. If I don’t receive the forms from you in a week’s time, I shall email a reminder to you. While I would like to invite all interested individuals to participate, please be informed that I will be selecting participant based on the study’s criteria—be a Singapore citizen and have been involved in home-school partnerships in a special education school in Singapore for more than seven years. You will be informed by email about whether or not you will be participating as soon as possible.

Thank you for considering this request, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Ang, EdD Candidate
Appendix E: Biographic Information Questionnaire

1. What is your ethnic and cultural background?
2. What is your highest educational level attained?
3. What is your present occupation?
4. What is your child's disability type?
Appendix F: Interview Questions and Documents to Potentially Share

1a. Could you please share with me what have been your general experiences working together with your child's school?

b. What are the first things that come to your mind when you hear about the word partnership?

c. What does home-school partnership mean to you?

d. From where do you get your ideas about home-school partnership?

2a. What should your part or role be when you work together with your child's school?

b. What should the school's part or role be when they work together with you?

c. In your opinion, has your child's school shown that it understands your needs and is willing to support you?

d. Give examples of how the school has supported you. How has the support given helped you as a caregiver?

3. In your opinion, what are important things that the school needs to do and have to build a good (positive) relationship with the parents?

4a. Based on your experience, how has your child's school encouraged you or parent involvement been in the school?

b. How involved are you as a parent in your child's SPED school(s)?

c. Give 3 examples of home-school partnership activities that you have been involved in. Could you please tell me more about them?

d. How has your involvement in these activities helped you as

   i. a caregiver

   ii. improve your relationship working with the school?

e. Do you think your involvement in these activities represent your idea of home-school
partnership that you have spoken about earlier (Question 1c)? Why or why not?

5a. How do you feel about giving feedback to the school and being involved in decision making?

b. What are some types of feedback you have given to the school and decision making you have been involved in with the school?

c. Based on your experience, how do the following people see your role (as a partner) and their role in home-school partnership:

i. P / VP

ii. Teachers

iii. Allied Professionals

d. How has the school's view(s) of your role in home-school partnership affected you as a caregiver at home

i. partner with the school

6. Could you share 3 good (positive) experiences you have had when you worked together with the school? What have made these experiences positive for you?

7. Could you share 3 personal difficulties or struggles you have had whenever you worked together with your child's SPED school? Tell me more about these experiences.

8. Could you share 3 experiences of how the school has made it difficult for you to work with them? Tell me more about these experiences.

9a. How often is parent teacher-conference held by your child's school?

b. Do you know what IEP stands for?

c. Could you tell me how parent teacher-conferences are conducted by your child's school(s)?

d. Could you share what are the things discussed during these conferences?

e. How have you contributed at these parent-teacher conferences?
f. How satisfied are you with the way parent-teacher conferences are conducted?

g. How could these meetings be improved?

h. If you have had IEP meetings with the allied professionals, describe what a typical meeting is like.

10. At present, there is no national guidelines drawn up on the role of SPED parents and schools. What are your views and feelings about this?

11. What are 3 suggestions you can give to help your child's school to improve or strengthen home-school partnerships?

**Possible Documents You May Wish to Share During the Interview**

1. School newsletters

2. General communiques sent to you by the school

3. Information from the school website (e.g., downloaded documents or screenshots)

4. Any other relevant document(s) that may help support your responses to any of the above questions.

Thank you.
Appendix G: Informed Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:
Marilyn Ang, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Werklund School of Education
Phone: [phone number] Email: [email address]

Supervisor: Dr. Brenda Spencer, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Werklund School of Education
Phone: 403-220-6095 Email: spencerb@ucalgary.ca

Title of Project: Home-School Partnerships in Singapore's SPED Schools: A Case Study

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study. Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study until November 1, 2018, when all interviews are completed, all member checks have been done, and the study data, in their entirety, have been collected.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this proposed case study is to explore SPED parents' perceptions about and experiences of home-school partnerships in Singapore. Specifically, I am interested in gaining a deeper understanding of how positive home-school partnership is understood by SPED parents, the barriers and enablers that SPED parents experience in home-school partnerships, and what SPED parents view to be areas of improvement for home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools. Hence, only participants that meet the criteria—be a Singapore citizen and have been involved in home-school partnerships in a special education school in Singapore for more than seven years will be selected for this study.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?
Each participant will be involved in one in-depth, face-to-face interview with me. The interview session will be approximately 75 minutes long and will be conducted at a time and location that we agree upon. During the interview, I will take notes and use a digital audio recorder to capture the interview. The purpose for recording the interview is to ensure accuracy and preserve what is being said for analysis. The interview will be transcribed by me or a hired transcriber. Should the latter be used, the transcriber will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement form. When the transcription is completed, you will be emailed a copy of the interview transcript to review, make changes, and add comments. You are kindly requested to return the transcript via email within two weeks from the date of receipt. Alternatively, you may email or call the researcher to suggest a date based on mutual consent, for the return of the transcript via email or collection by the researcher.

Please be assured that you are under no obligation to participate in this study. If you do consent to participate, you are encouraged to ask questions about the research or your involvement in the study. At any time during the interview, you may refuse to respond to any question or questions, ask to take a break, or interrupt and discontinue the interview. You also have the right to withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw, any data contributed by you will be removed from the study and destroyed. Please note that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any point until November 15, 2018, when all interviews are completed, all transcript reviews have been done, and the study data, in their entirety, have been collected. Please also be assured that you or your interview responses will not be judged or evaluated by me at any time during the study.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?
Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym, as well as your ethnic and cultural background, educational background, occupation, and your child's disability type. A complete list of the interview questions that will be asked, along with examples of the documents you will be asked to collect and share during the interview, are attached to this Informed Consent Form.

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?
There is no anticipated harm or predictable risk associated with participating in this research.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?
The information will only be accessed by me, the researcher, and my supervisor. The information gathered will be kept confidential. All electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Hard copies of data will be stored in a locked cabinet in a secure location to
which only I have access. The information you contribute will be kept until I finish my dissertation and it has been approved, at which time it will be permanently destroyed. A final copy of the dissertation will be made available to you upon request.

Signature

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant’s Name: (please print) __________________________________________

Participant’s Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________

Researcher’s Name: (please print) __________________________________________

Researcher’s Signature: ________________________________ Date: __________

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: __________________________________________

Please initial here if you would like a summary of the findings of the study upon its completion:

________

Please provide contact information for receipt of summary: ______________________________

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Ms. Marilyn Ang (Researcher),
[phone number]
[.email address]

Dr. Brenda Spencer (Supervisor)
Werklund School of Education
(403) 220-6097
spencerb@ucalgary.ca
If you have any concerns about the way you’ve been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-6289/220-4283; email cfreb@ucalgary.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

REB18-1002
Appendix H: Interview Protocol

Participant's Name: ____________________________
Gender: M / F

Date & Time of Interview: ___/___/ 201__ Start: _____ End: ______
Place of Interview: ______________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity and Cultural Background</td>
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<td>Highest Educational Level Attained</td>
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<td>Occupation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child's Disability Type</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Interview Procedure

Good _____, Mr. / Mrs./ Ms __________. Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. I am an EdD student at the University of Calgary and I am doing a research on home-school partnership in Singapore SPED schools. Six SPED parents with children with mild intellectual disability will be sought to participate in this research study. The purpose of my proposed case study is to explore SPED parents' perceptions about and experiences of home-school partnerships in Singapore. Specifically, I am interested in gaining a deeper understanding of how positive home-school partnership is understood by SPED parents, the barriers and enablers that SPED parents experience in home-school partnerships, and what SPED parents view to be areas of improvement for home-school partnerships in Singapore's SPED schools.

I will do a semi-structured interview with you, and it will be audio-recorded. I will also take notes during the interview. Other sources of data that I will collect include any relevant documents, field notes, and journal notes. Upon completion of this interview, I will transcribe the information collected. When the transcription is completed, you will receive a copy of the interview transcripts to review and edit where necessary. Please review the transcripts and return within two weeks from the date of receipt. Alternatively, you may call me to arrange for a convenient date for the verified transcripts to be collected at a mutually agreed location.
Before I begin the actual interview, I want to take you through the contents in the consent form that you signed and returned to me not long ago. It's important to me that you have a clear understanding of what your participation in the study involves, and the steps I will take to protect your anonymity and privacy. *Hand participant a photocopy of the signed consent form to the participant, and take the participant through the contents.* Do you have any questions for me about the consent document, or about your participation? *

Pause for questions.*

Before I turn on the audio-recorder, may I ask you to provide me with your ethnic and cultural background, highest educational qualification attained, occupation and your child's disability type. Thank you.

This interview should take approximately 75 minutes. *Turns on recording to test it.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Could you please share with me what have been your general experiences working together with your child's school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1b. What are the first things that come to your mind when you hear about the word partnership?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1c. What does home-school partnership mean to you?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1d. From where do you get your ideas about home-school partnership?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Probe: State ideologies, cultural beliefs]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a. What should your part or role be when you work together with your child's school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Answers</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. What should the school's part or role be when they work together with you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c. In your opinion, has your child's school shown that it understands your needs and is willing to support you?</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Give examples of how the school has supported you. How has the support given helped you as a caregiver?</td>
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</table>

**[Research Question 1]**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. In your opinion, what are important things that the school needs to do and have to build a good (positive) relationship with the parents?</td>
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</table>

**[Research Question 1]**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4a. Based on your experience, how has your child's school encouraged you or parent involvement been in the school?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. How involved are you as a parent in your child's SPED school(s)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Give 3 examples of home-school partnership activities that you have been involved in. Could you please tell me more about them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Answers</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. How has your involvement in these activities helped you as</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>i. a caregiver</td>
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<tr>
<td>ii. improve your relationship working with the school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Do you think your involvement in these activities represent your idea of home-school partnership that you have spoken about earlier (Question 1c)? Why or why not?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>[Research Question 1 &amp; 2]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5a. How do you feel about giving feedback to the school and being involved in decision making?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b. What are some types of feedback you have given to the school and decision making you have been involved in with the school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Based on your experience, how do the following people see your role (as a partner) and their role in home-school partnership:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. P / VP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ii. Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>iii. Allied Professionals</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. How has the school's</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Answers</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>view(s) of your role in home-school partnership affected you as a</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. caregiver at home</td>
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<tr>
<td>ii. partner with the school</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>[Research Question 1 and 2]</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Could you share 3 good (positive) experiences you have had when you</td>
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<tr>
<td>worked together with the school. What have made these experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>positive for you?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>[Research Question 1]</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Probe: school culture, school leader's personality,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>relationship with staff and allied professionals, staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>personal qualities, communication, language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>used during interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Could you share 3 personal difficulties or struggles you have had</td>
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<tr>
<td>whenever you worked together with your child's SPED school? Tell me</td>
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<tr>
<td>more about these experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>[Research Question 2]</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>[Probe: parental /staff's belief about disability, values held by</td>
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<tr>
<td>parents, lack of knowledge of disability, communication, and</td>
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<tr>
<td>collaboration, past memories/ experiences,</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>workplace</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Could you share 3 experiences of how the school has made it difficult for you to work with them? Tell me more about these experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>[Research Question 2]</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>[Probe: school leader's approach, trust, staff's professionalism, communication, knowledge and skills]</td>
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<tr>
<td>9a. How often is parent teacher-conference held by your child's school?</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Do you know what IEP stands for?</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Could you tell me how parent teacher-conferences are conducted by your child's school(s)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Could you share what are the things discussed during these conferences?</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. How have you contributed at these parent-teacher conferences?</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. How satisfied are you with the way parent-teacher conferences are conducted?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Answers</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[Research Question 1 and 2]</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. At present, there is no national guidelines drawn up on the role of</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPED parents and schools. What are your views and feelings about this?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[Research Question 1 and 2]</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. What are 3 suggestions you can give to help your child's school to</td>
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<tr>
<td>improve or strengthen home-school partnerships?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>[Research Question 3]</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Are there any additional comments that you would like to make</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>concerning your involvement in home-school partnerships?</td>
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</table>

Adapted from Creswell (2015)

Thank you for spending your time and sharing your views and experiences with me. I greatly appreciate it. You have given me a lot to think about. Please be ensured that your responses will be treated with confidentiality. Do you have any other questions for me? [Pause] Once, I have finished transcribing today's audio recording, I will send you a copy of the transcripts for review and edit. I hope this is fine with you. You may also contact me by phone or email at anytime if you have any follow-up information or further questions that you have about your participation. I am happy to answer them for you.
Appendix I: Document Summary Form Sample

Name of Type of Document: Numeracy Assessment Sample From School A

Document No: 2.1

Document Received: 31 August 2018

Date of Document: Nil

Event or Contact With Which Document Is Associated: School assessment, IEP meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page #</th>
<th>Keywords / Concepts</th>
<th>Comments: Relationship To Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 12 - 13| Parent's knowledge and skills, Parent self-efficacy | a. What are the special education parents' views about what contributes to a positive home-school partnership?  
The participant acknowledged the lack of knowledge and skill to help her child in math. However, she had approached the teacher for help. This enabled her to use the same teaching method to help her child to do his math homework in school. |

Brief Summary of Contents:
Participant's child struggling to do basic addition, subtraction and solve word problem.

Significance or Purpose of Document:
Highlights a factor that contributed to positive home-school partnership: parent's belief in her ability to assist her child succeed in math. This factor aligned with Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker & Ice (2010) findings concerning parent's self-efficacy.

Is There Anything Contradictory About Document? Yes ______ No __√__

Salient Questions / Issues To Consider: Nil

Additional Comments / Reflections / Issues:
This participant's comment aligned with another participant's comment made in interview one. The latter also acknowledged her lack of knowledge and skills in helping her child complete his math assignment. In interview one, the mother had sought the help of the teacher from school D. This showed that both participants were highly motivated and believed in their ability to help their child succeed in their schoolwork.
Appendix J: Example from NVivo Coding Process

Other parents had also experienced this same problem. They couldn’t approach and talk to the principal when they saw her. They had to email her to make an appointment. You could not go and talk to her anytime.

Then, the school changed another principal and there was a formal barrier. She was always cordial, but not approachable. She did not stop to talk to me. She was always rushing off because she was busy. If we did have a conversation, it was a short conversation. It was a line or two later, it was "Hi! How are you?"
Appendix K: Sample of a Recurring Theme and Sub-Themes From Coding Process

From Preliminary Coding

Screenshot After 1st Round of Coding on NVivo
Screenshot From 2nd Round of Coding on NVivo

62. Mary:
I remembered that the occupational therapist from school D actually came to my home to see if there were proper toilet facilities for my child and to see what was lacking. My child had problem cleaning up after he passed his motion. So the therapist wanted to know whether my house used a jet spray or toilet paper. He also got my child to demonstrate the procedure he used for himself cleaning up in the toilet. Then, the therapist demonstrated to me how to teach my child to use the toilet paper properly. This was to make him ready for work as the school had a standard work performance that he had to maintain. The therapist also had 1-2 weekly sessions with him to manage his shortfalls. I really appreciated that. I found this home visit very effective because I could help my child at home too. I even knew that there was such a process that my child needed to know.
### Appendix L: Chapter Four's Summary of Findings

#### Research Question 1: What are the special education parents' views about what contributes to a positive home-school partnership?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding 1.1: Parents' beliefs, values, and culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Parents' belief about their roles in home-school partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parents' belief about their ability to help their child succeed in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parents' values and culture</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding 1.2: Parental involvement in school activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Welcoming environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Varied opportunities to benefit parental involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Acknowledgements</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding 1.3: The school leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- School leaders' attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Communication practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Perception of parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding 1.4: School professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- School professionals' attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Communication practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Perception of parents and child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Research Question 2: What do special education parents identify as barriers or inhibitors to a positive home-school partnership?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding 2.1: Parent related inhibitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Parents' beliefs and understanding of partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parents' beliefs, values and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lack of knowledge and skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Time and work constraints</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding 2.2: The school leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- School leaders' attributes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Communication practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding 2.3: School professionals</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>: School professionals' attributes</td>
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<tr>
<td>: Communication practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>: Perceptions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Finding 2.4: Location and scheduling of IEP meetings |
| Finding 2.5: Lack of parental involvement opportunities |
| Finding 2.6: Different pathways, different goals |
| Finding 2.7: No national policy on home-school partnership |
| Finding 2.8: Parental workplace |

| Research Question 3: What do special education parents suggest to improve home-school partnership? |
| Finding 3.1: Building parent capacity |
| : Organizing more courses and conferences |
| : Making resources available |
| : Engaging parents in decision making and planning of school events |

| Finding 3.2: Increasing parental involvement in school activities |
| : Inviting parents to become involved |
| : Improving the quality of PSG meetings |
| : Early notification and rescheduling of school activities |

| Finding 3.3: The school leader |
| Finding 3.4: School professionals |
| : Building capacity |
| : Demonstrating positive attributes and communication practices |
| : Adopting a positive perception of parents |

| Finding 3.5: Addressing gap in the school curriculum |
| Finding 3.6: IEP meetings |
Appendix M: Copyright Permission

RE: SPED Curriculum Framework

Suet Ling CHONG (MOE)
West 2020-04-01 5:04 PM

To: Marilyn Ang

Thanks, sure please go ahead.

Dr Chong Suet Ling
Principal Educational Psychologist, Special Education
Special Educational Needs Division

Ministry of Education
Integrity the Foundation • People our Focus • Learning our Passion • Excellence our Pursuit