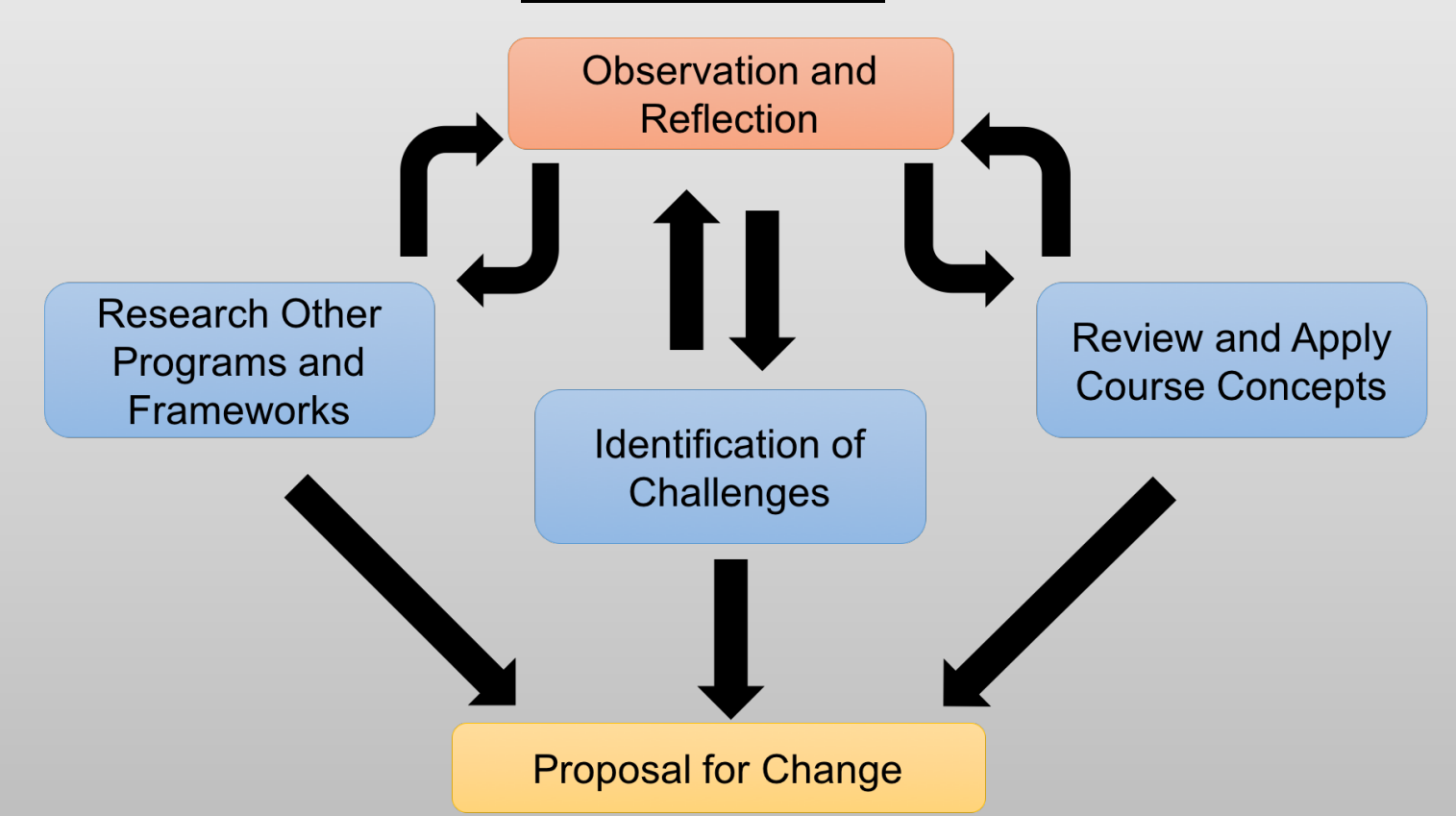


## Introduction

The goal of my project is to promote parental engagement as a means to improving kindergarten readiness in a low-income, predominantly Spanish-speaking, community. This inspiration for the project came from reflections and observations while volunteering at Caterpillar Ministries this past semester. Caterpillar currently uses a site-visit based approach to engage the preschool children and parents in the community, but continual parental engagement is a struggle. Parental engagement is vital to a child's engagement and future success, and we have worked to conceptualize a framework for enabling and encouraging parents to become more active in their child's readiness and early education (Arias, 2008; Parker et al., 1999). Readiness goals for Caterpillar include independence, reading, writing, and creativity.

## Method



Parents of English Language Learners (ELLs) face unique challenges to becoming and remaining involved in their child's education and school.

The literature suggests that Latino parents' inability to understand English may result in (Hyslop, 2000):

- Low Self-Esteem
- Culture Shock
- Misconceptions

These challenges restrict parental engagement in their child's education, whether that is communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, or even general awareness (e.g. reading a report card) (Arias, 2008).

## Background



Parental involvement is hugely impactful in determining a child's success in school, regardless of socioeconomic background or ethnicity.

Studies suggest that increased parental involvement improves (Arias, 2008; Parker et al., 1999):

- Achievement
- Behavior
- Adaptiveness
- Attendance
- Dropout Rates

Finally, the particular population we are working with is mainly comprised of low-income families. Our proposed framework will seek to address these challenges in an economic and sustainable fashion.

## Additional Research

A broad view on models for parental involvement is provided by Swap (1993). The relationship models between the institution and the families are:

- **Independent** – assume that parents have delegated all responsibility for education to the institution.
- **Mission-Driven** – enlists the parents' support in enabling with little input from the parents.
- **Cooperative** – assumes expertise in both parties and view interactions as helpful.
- **Collaborative** – the institution and families work hand in hand towards success.

Epstein's Framework on Involvement from the National Education Association suggests 6 avenues to promote parental involvement (1992, 1995, 2000). This framework was designed for schools, but can be integrated into our model. The avenues are:

- **Parenting** – provide families with support and assist with parenting skills
- **Communicating** – clearly communicate about programs and progress
- **Volunteering** – involve families as volunteers
- **Learning at Home** – promote families in academic learning at home including: homework, goal setting, and other activities
- **Decision Making** – include families as participants in program decisions
- **Collaborating with the Community** – coordinate communal resources and services for families

## Challenges

Based on interviews with Maria Gandy, Administrative Assistant at Caterpillar Ministries.

- The main difficulty with promoting parental engagement in the past, is remaining sensitive while presenting these ideas to parents. If parents sense that you are questioning their abilities as a parent, typically they will refrain from any further engagement.
- Another challenge, in general, as been promoting continual engagement. Caterpillar offers a variety of programs and services, but continually struggles with commitment from some parents and cancellations in general.
- Caterpillar hopes to find a way to create a program that promotes parental engagement to better school preparedness in a sustainable way such that it becomes habitual for the families involved. This involves promoting parental self-esteem and child-investment to create an engaging at-home environment for preschoolers in a low-income community.

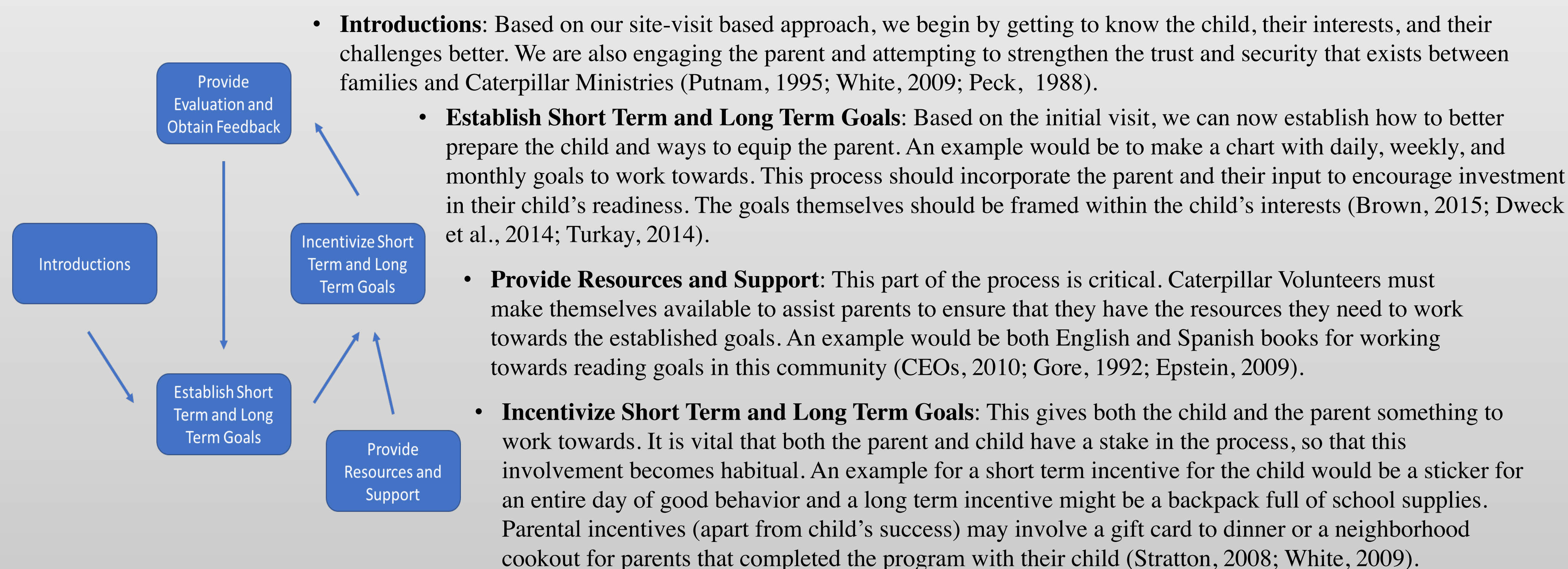
## Relevant Course Concepts

Based on observations during site visits and also integrated into proposal methods (see Proposal for Change section).

- During my observations with Caterpillar, I noticed how relevant Putnam's 'social capital' became when interacting with the families. The "flow from trust, reciprocity, information, and cooperation" is vital when creating change (1995).
- The methods presented by Dewey was useful during each of the site visits and throughout the process of creating and implementing an involvement framework. The continuous process of discovering specific connections and the consequences of action (1916).
- Wildman's exposition of privilege combined with Bell's definition of oppression was influential in the creation of the framework. The population for which the framework is designed does not have the privilege to be "understood in individual terms ... [because people] are oppressed on the basis of social group status" (1996).
- The role that institution's play in creating change and the dynamics of that relationship have been vital when considering the ways to promote parental involvement. White's promotes partnerships while enabling internal leadership, but maintaining the institutional obligations to create communal power (2009).

## Proposal for Change

Here we are proposing a framework for promoting parental involvement as a means of improving kindergarten readiness.



After feedback has been obtained, the process can restart at the goal establishment phase and continuously cycle. The framework can be adapted to individual organizational and communal needs, but the examples provided were based on discussions with Maria Gandy from Caterpillar Ministries to promote the long-term readiness as a means to success in our community.



## References

These references are available upon request.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to Maria Gandy from Caterpillar ministries and Dr. Stacey Reimer for their continual guidance and direction throughout the duration of this project.