

# Oklahoma LEND Learning Experience Explored and Emerging Theory Explained

## Study Design

## Findings

### Background

Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) programs provide interdisciplinary leadership education to health professionals with the aim of improving the health of children with disabilities and their families (Dodds et al, 2010). Oklahoma LEND (OK LEND) brings together a small group of students from several disciplines for intense study, practicum experiences, and individual and group leadership projects for a total of 300 hours over two semesters. Individuals with disabilities and family members are included in the OK LEND learning experience as equal participants, representing the disciplines of self-advocate and family perspectives, alongside representatives of medical/health professional disciplines.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the Oklahoma LEND learning experience through the perspectives of program graduates and develop a model explaining our emerging theory about how program graduates are influenced by the Oklahoma LEND learning experience.

### Participants

- Recruited by email from the list of program graduates in the OK LEND database with local addresses to facilitate in-person interviews.
- Participants completed the OK LEND training program in the years ranging from 1997 to 2013

Participant disciplines while in LEND

Family Perspective	2
Health Administration	1
Nursing	1
Nutrition	2
Occupational Therapy	1
Physical Therapy	1
Psychology	1
Public Health	2
Social Work	2
Speech-Language Pathology	1

### Methodology

- Research method: Followed method for constructing grounded theory as described by Charmaz (2014)
- Data collected: Narrative from participants gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews
- Data analysis: Conducted by a team of five analysts

**STEP 1:** Initial coding - data segments were separated and named

**STEP 2:** focused coding - used the most frequent or significant codes to sort and integrate the data

**STEP 3:** categorizing - compared and synthesized the data

**STEP 4:** theory building - developed concepts through constant comparison, defining implicit meanings, and discovering emergent links, facilitated by notes, tables, and diagrams

**STEP 5:** theoretical sampling -cycled back through the data to test emerging theory and consider alternative explanations

- Scientific rigor: Maintained through a written audit trail and analyst triangulation with multiple analysts

#### Interview Question Guide

- Tell me about your experience in the OK LEND program.
- Describe the most important aspects of the LEND learning experience for you?
- How do you think the LEND learning experience influenced you in your profession and/or role.
- How do you think the LEND learning experience influenced the way you interact on an interdisciplinary team?
- Is there anything else that you think I should know to better understand your learning experience with OK LEND?

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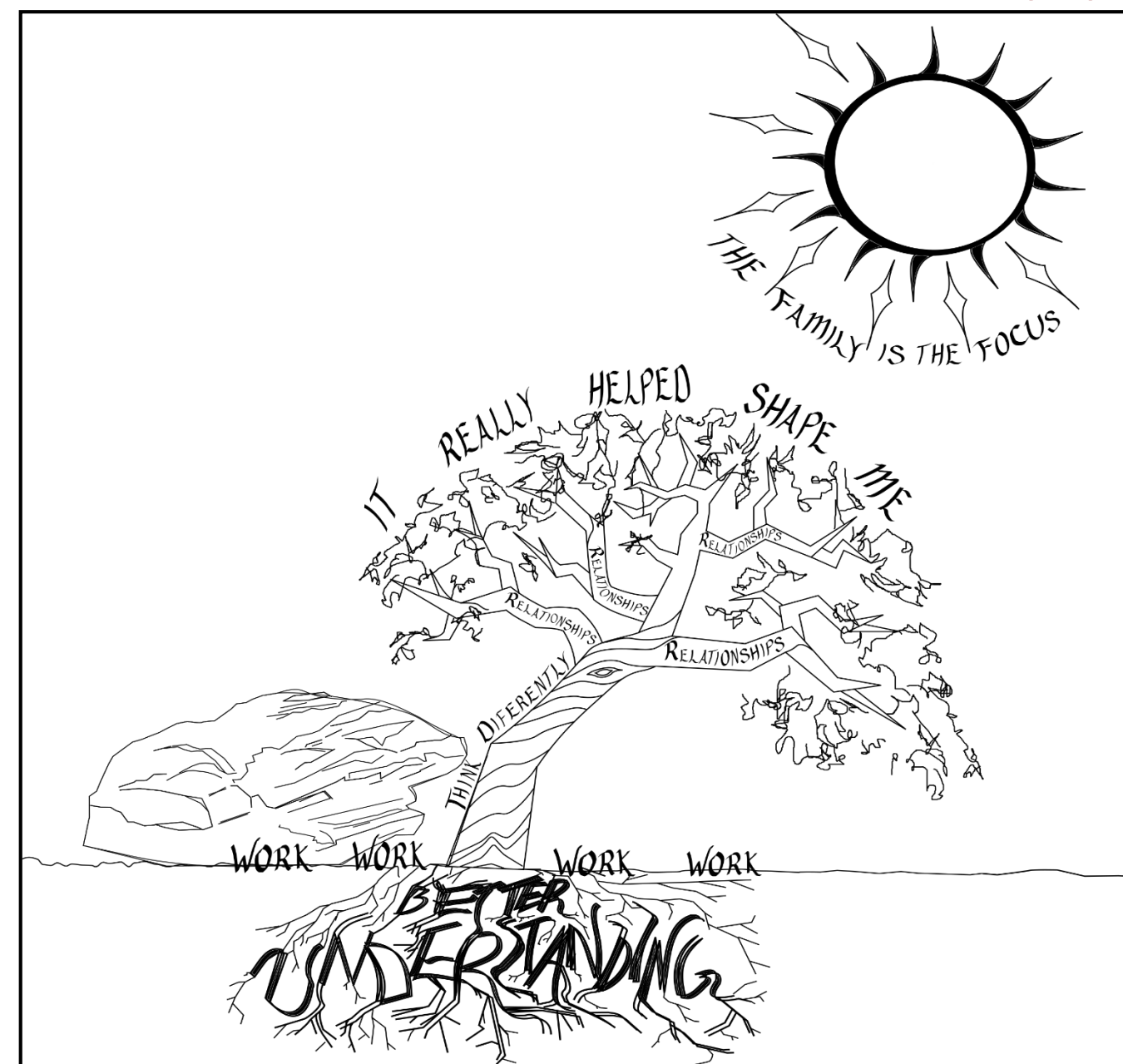
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### Our Emerging Theory

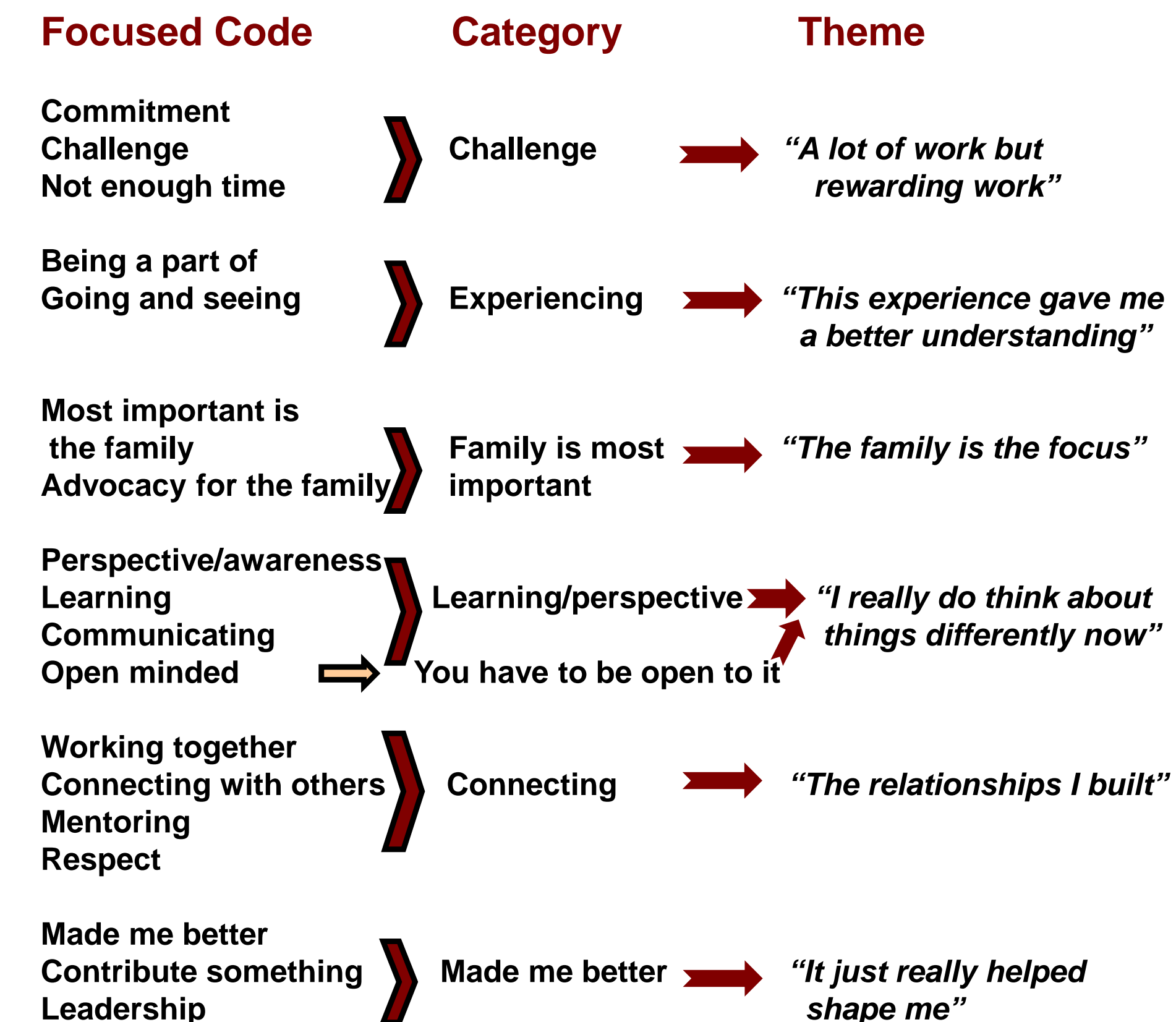
Model of the OK LEND Learning Experience: a visual representation of the themes as they relate to our emerging theory



- Better understanding* is represented in the root system of the tree. This theme embodies aspects of learning that occur through first-hand experiences with individuals, families, and community services, forming a foundation for understanding and developing new perspectives.
- Work* at the ground level of the model signifies what the OK LEND interns put into the program in terms of time, energy and effort, providing necessary nutrients for strengthening relationships and building the skills for working collaboratively.
- Thinking differently* is depicted in the model by the shift in the trunk of the tree, representing new ways of thinking that begin during the learning experience and become integrated into program graduates' new paradigms.
- Relationships are shown by the branches of the tree*, encompassing the collaborative relationships, connections, and friendships that develop through the OK LEND learning experience. These branches continue to grow, extending beyond the program and preparing graduates for interdisciplinary, collaborative practices.
- Shaping* is the form the tree takes, demonstrating long-term changes and influences on program graduates that result from the OK LEND learning experience.
- Family* is portrayed as the sunlight in the model and represents the continued presence of family throughout the OK LEND learning experience. Full and equal involvement of family in the OK LEND learning experience plays a crucial role in shaping the family-centered attitudes and behaviors of program graduates.

### Results

From twenty-six initial codes we synthesized the data into six themes. The six themes (see chart below) represented the participants' perceptions of the OK LEND learning experience and described influences of the experience on these program graduates. When considering the relationships of these themes to one another and to our emerging theory, phrases such as "grew me" and "helped shape me" contributed to our conceptualization of the experience as formative and dynamic. We envisioned these thematic concepts as interdependent components, influencing the foundational development and future growth of the program graduates, similar to the influences of an ecosystem on a growing tree, defining its current and future shape.



### Quotes

"Definitely an experience that grew me educationally, emotionally, culturally, ethically."

"The idea that the family is the focus... having that be such a major focus of the program that they were included in on everything."

"I believe because the LEND experience gave me the opportunity to know how some of the families felt... the process is totally different because of my LEND experience."

"It really is just part of my new paradigm, and I really do think about things differently now."

"It just really helped shape me to the clinician I am, to the wife I am, to the mother I am, to the family member I am."

### Conclusion

Our exploration of the OK LEND learning experience provided a picture of how program graduates are influenced, and how, like living trees, they continue to grow beyond their program year. Key components that contributed to these influences were the small group, personalized interactions, experiences with families and in the community, and the equal roles of individuals with disabilities and families in the OK LEND learning experience. The learning experience developed a foundation of understanding, established ongoing interdisciplinary relationships, and shaped how program graduates understand, think about, and interact with health/medical professionals, individuals with disabilities and family members. The concept that the family is the focus was central to the OK LEND learning experience. It is therefore imperative that future research explore the integral role of families on health care teams. We further suggest research to study the impact of including family in equal roles in health/medical educational experiences.

### References

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory: 2nd edition*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.

Dodds, J., Vann, W., Lee, J., Rosenberg, A., Rounds, K., Roth M., Wells, M., Evens, E., & Margolis, L. (2010). The UNC-CH MCH Leadership Training Consortium: Building the capacity to develop interdisciplinary MCH leaders. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 14 (4), 642-648.