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A complexity perspective on parent-teacher collaboration in special education institutions: Narratives from the field in Lebanon.

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Abstract

In general, special education (SE) organizations in Lebanon are immersed in the complexities of the political, economic and social situation. Out of the many challenges facing special education, there is no known law supporting family-centered approaches and parental partnerships in SE organizations. Although some of these organizations have shown autonomous efforts of enhancing collaborative relationships with families, there still lies a gap between the desire to achieve collaboration and its actual implementation. Moreover, little research in the field is found tackling that area. This study intends to get a better understanding of parent-teacher collaboration (PTC) in one SE institution located in Lebanon from the perspectives of the teachers working there. Using the narrative approach, I interview six teachers. From the analysis of their narratives and the conducted literature review, I answer the research question which consists of three main parts including the processes involved in PTC at the organization, the organizational support taking place throughout the process, and the organizational learning processes resulting from PTC.

I approach the study from a complexity perspective which looks at the SE institution as a developing organism embedded, highly interactive and responsive to its complex environment. The complex adaptive system (CAS) framework in schools supports collaboration internally and across the boundaries for adaptation and self-organizing purposes. Findings from this study reveal that organizational policies, bureaucracy, and imbalanced power dynamics impede teachers from the development of the collaborative relationship with the parents. Moreover, while the teachers face adaptive challenges, they claim that the management approaches taken towards these adaptive challenges are not helpful. Finally, although teachers confess to learning on an individual level, they claim that not much of their knowledge is shared, selected or discussed on an organizational level.

Influenced by the CAS framework, this study recommends facilitating adaptive processes through PTC by favoring free and dynamic interaction between teachers and their environment, allowing for behavioral variability, implementing complexity leadership behaviors, and sharing knowledge throughout the organization.
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1. Problem Statement

Today, there is a global acknowledgment on the positive impact of parent-school collaboration in special education (SE). It has many benefits on the development and education of the special needs (SN) individual. Research has shown that interprofessional collaboration including close collaboration with the parents of the SN student is the key to reaching maximized student learning potential efficiently and cost-effectively (Griffin, 2014). It also enhances parent satisfaction and school development (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Generally, in SE, there are several professionals from different disciplines involved in the student’s development. They include therapists from different specialties, teachers, medical staff, and other professionals working together closely along with the parents. They recognize the parents as primary partners in decision-making processes regarding the student’s life. Over time, educational reformers have tried to move parent-school relationships from autonomous entities working on separate accounts towards a more collaborative relationship where shared responsibilities and teamwork are emphasized (Price-Mitchel, 2009). It has become part of legal policies and mandates in many countries (Griffin, 2014). Unfortunately, these countries exclude most of the Middle East including Lebanon despite its much-needed attention.

Ever since the 1980s, in the USA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) has provided rights for parents to be equal partners in the education of their child (Griffin, 2014). The federal law allows for parents to be active members in the decisions and responsibilities of the educational process. They achieve this through their participation in the design and implementation of the individual educational program (IEP) of their child. The routinely updated law requires that parents, special educators, therapists and other concerned professionals work together on designing and implementing an individualized plan for each of the students (Wellner, 2012). Parents are allowed to join all decision-making meetings, evaluate and plan within a team known as the IEP team for the proper execution of holistic education for the student with special needs (Wellner, 2012).
As schools in Europe and America started shifting to more family-centered and community-centered approaches to special education, Lebanon has remained far behind. The complex and dynamic nature of the political, social, cultural, and economic situation in the country has impeded the development of special education services (Lakkis, Nash, El-Sibai, & Thomas, 2015). Global special education trends such as inclusion are still in their primitive stages in Lebanon and face many challenges in development amidst the reality of this complex environment (Andary, 2013). Instead of inclusive settings, SE organizations cater to the education of special needs students. In most cases, the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs (MOA) covers the tuition fees of most enrolled students.

Nevertheless, due to the complicated political and economic situation, payments from MOA are not consistent and not always sufficient rendering it more challenging for SE institutions to provide proper quality services and education. The reality is that institutions catering to special education services are overcrowded with students who have diverse needs. The latter include medical, social, economic, physical, and other needs. SE institutions strive to adapt to ongoing environmental changes and challenges. This year, several SE organizations went on strikes asking for governmental and community support for survival and sustainability in the complex attitudinal, environmental, political and economic situation. Unfortunately, a couple of these organizations closed leaving SN pupils in their houses. The interconnectedness and interdependence that exists between the SN organizations and the political/economic/social sectors have left the organizations striving for survival and adaptability.

This unfortunate reality has left little room for the development and advancement of special education to fit the global standards. Up till today, there is no known law supporting parental partnerships in SE organizations, and little research is available on such collaborative and engagement practices. Fortunately, due to autonomous aspirations for professionalism, several SE organizations have been inspired by the IDEA federal law and have established systems similar to the IEP systems in which the parents, teachers, and therapists of the child meet together to plan annual goals for the student to achieve. Parents are given a copy of the IEP report to evaluate and transition between school and home. Unfortunately, despite these efforts there still lies a gap between the desire of these organizations to achieve collaboration and its actual implementation.
1.1 Research question and personal motives

In this thesis, I look at the SE institutions as systems that interact and respond to their complex environment as they strive to adapt. From this perspective, I examine the role and processes of collaboration in these institutions precisely that of parent-teacher collaboration. I look at teachers as internal agents exchanging information with parents acting as external agents in the environment. I aim at investigating the processes of parent-teacher collaboration and the ways that could ameliorate such collaborative relationships given their benefit on the student as well as the organization.

I base my study on the following research question (s):

How do teachers describe and reflect on the processes of collaborative relationships they build with the parents of their students? How do the teachers as employees perceive the role of their organization in supporting them with their collaborative efforts? How does the information they get out of their collaborative relationships affect their practice on an individual level and organizational level?

As a professional in the field of special education and an academic researcher, I have come to realize that most of the regional studies in the field of special education focus on the social and educational inclusion more than any other issue. I agree with its necessity and importance. However; I believe that there are issues within the current reality of SE organizations like the parent-teacher collaboration that we should tackle. The hardships and challenges faced by my colleagues, the parents as well as my own have driven me to use my skillset and venture into the issue.

1.2 Conceptual perspectives and methods

The way I look into, arrange and develop the theoretical framework to approaching collaboration has resulted from the apparent limitations of managing the organization as closed entities. As shown in the next chapter, I approached the study from a complexity perspective which looks at SE organizations as complex adaptive systems which are continually changing, adapting, growing and developing through the interaction, dependence, and interconnectedness to their complex environment. The complex adaptive system framework in schools supports
collaboration and networking internally and across the boundaries for adaptation and self-organizing purposes.

As for the methods, I interview six teachers working in a SE organization in Lebanon. Through their stories of successful and unsuccessful collaborative relationships, I look into how the teachers as employees perceive the role of their organization in supporting them with their collaborative endeavors. I also investigate whether or not the information they get out of their collaborative relationships results in changes in their practice.

1.3 Contribution of the study

The results and insights from this study contribute to the enhancement of PTC in SE institutions in Lebanon. The study recommends the acquisition and implementation of new organizational strategies that fit the complex Lebanese political, social and economic environment which could benefit several recipients including the students, the parents, the teachers, and the organizational management. As stated earlier, PTC plays a vital role in the maximization of S.N student progress and performance. Setting grounds for prosperous collaborative relationships between the teachers and parents would ultimately lead to parent satisfaction, teacher role fulfillment, and overall school development.
2. Literature Review

In the previous section, I have provided background information on parent-school collaboration in SE organizations in Lebanon. In this chapter, I aim to present the conceptual framework of this study. In reference to the literature, in this section, I define collaboration, its characteristics, and the different factors influencing its occurrence between families and schools. I discuss various models of parent-school collaboration that are inspired by the ecological systems perspective. Then, I introduce a different approach to looking at PTC within a SE organization. In this sense, I analyze the organization as a complex adaptive system, and I highlight the vital role PTC plays in the adaptation of the organization to its changing environment. Finally, I introduce concepts from organizational studies related to CAS which could help in the development of PTC and growth of the organization.

2.1 Defining collaboration

Despite its widespread realization, there is still no consensus on the definition of collaboration. Researchers claim that it is a complex concept with diverse characteristics. These characteristics differ from one collaborative situation to another depending on the types of relationships and the different agents involved (Staler, 2004). In his research on parent-teacher collaboration in the IEP process, Griffin (2014) provides a definition of collaboration that encompasses many agreed upon characteristics. Griffin (2014) believes that:

> Collaboration is a trusting, working relationship between two or more individuals who give up some degree of independence to engage in interaction with others within a single episode or series of episodes working towards a common mission to realize a shared goal not otherwise attainable as entities working independently. (p.7)

The author defines collaboration as a working relationship between two or more collaborators who have a joint mission to attain. The collaborators acknowledge the importance of each other’s roles and trust each other. Collaboration is contextual and dependent on the backgrounds of the collaborators. There is no one-size fits all for parent-teacher collaboration models neither is there any linear, simplistic model. Every context can adapt collaborative models to fit the specific topic, population, and environment.
2.1.1 Characteristics of parent-teacher collaboration

In her study on collaboration in schools, Staler (2004) states that collaboration has a central role in school improvement. In her work, she assimilates the different characteristics provided by diverse researchers in the field of education and offers foundational components for collaboration in schools.

For parties to collaborate, they should negotiate and share common goals. They work together interdependently with recognition of the importance of their different roles in the attainment of the goals. Staler (2004) highlights the necessity of equality between the collaborators. When teachers, parents, and other school members come together to collaborate, there is a diversity between them in terms of backgrounds and social status. An essential element of collaboration is for them to establish shared power and equality despite the differences through the recognition of one another’s roles and contributions. Another characteristic of collaboration is the fact that it is a voluntary process. Usually, teachers and parents are assigned to one another by coincidence and not by choice. When parents, teachers and other involved personnel value collaboration, they embark on the journey regardless of whether or not there are mandates for such practices.

2.1.2 The collaborative journey

The collaboration’s success lies in the awareness of the participants to the issues of the process (Griffin, 2014). An article on multiparty problems describes the importance of process in collaboration and this description applies to parent-teacher collaborative efforts.

The importance of process cannot be overemphasized in planning and conducting successful collaborations. Good faith efforts to undertake collaboration are often derailed because the parties are not skilled in the process and because insufficient attention is given to designing and managing a constructive process. Good intentions are insufficient to counteract the typical dysfunctional dynamics (Gray 1989, p. 93).

Collaboration between teachers and parents usually starts with formal and informal encounters which then develop into a process of dual work. Many teachers and parents might start with good intentions to collaborate but then fail due to structural or personal factors hindering the process of collaboration and their lack of skill set. In other words, many encounters on the road can alter...
the journey. Gajda (2004), as mentioned in Griffin (2014), describes collaboration as a journey that is a continual learning process. It is not a destination one aspires for but a journey that one embarks on. The journey is not easy nor direct. The collaborative process is complex and contextual. Staler (2004) describes different dynamics that interplay throughout the collaborative process like diversity, conflict, time and hard work. Other necessary elements for a successful journey include openness towards the act of collaboration and viewing it as a learning experience, work on relationship building, open two-way communication and environmental support (Griffin, 2014).

Moreover, Park and Turnbull (2003) collected and identified different factors that enhance or impede parent-teacher collaboration. They categorized them into two categories. The first category included personal factors such as professional level, competence, personal characteristic, ethnicity, communication skills and so on. The second category included structural factors like the culture of the organization, type of collaboration, the communication system, mutual interest, time, resources and support, service offerings, and others. In their review, Park and Turnbull identify over sixty factors influencing collaborative efforts between parents, teachers and other professionals. They noted that these factors were situational and highly dependent on the setting in which the relationships took place.

As a conclusion, collaboration does not have a unified definition since it is multifaceted and contextual. Parent-teacher collaboration is a process that involves diversity, conflict, hard work and time. For it to be successful, it needs openness, relationship building efforts, communication systems, and environmental support. Parents and teachers who successfully collaborate have common goals and interests, and they acknowledge the fact that they cannot attain these goals without one another. They also trust and respect one another. However, many structural and personal factors could stand in the way of such successful collaborative relationships including the ones mentioned earlier.
2.2 The Ecological Systems perspective and PTC

A widely used theoretical perspective underlying the concept of parent-school collaboration is the ecological systems perspective developed by Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979) who mentions that:

> The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 21)

For the ecological approach, schools and families are embedded in communities and all together influence one another and the development of the child. Bronfenbrenner’s theory inspects the ecological environment of a developing child and establishes the fact that several ecological systems that interact together impact the child's life. According to Bronfenbrenner, the child’s environmental context is made up of several nested layers that connected through interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The older the individual grows, the more interactive the layers become. The first of the layers is the ‘Microsystem’ which is the setting that directly surrounds the individual such as the home, school, and work. The second layer, ‘Mesosystem,’ contains the interactions that take place between the different ‘Microsystems,’ for example, home-school interactions. Collaboration usually takes place in the second layer. Also, the ‘Mesosystem’ is nested within the ‘Exosystem’ which contains the situations in which the individual can be influenced by but not directly involved with like the church for example. The outer layer is the ‘Macrosystem’ where societal norms and cultural beliefs reside.

As evident in the literature, the ecological systems perspective has been used as a guiding framework in most of the models on parent-school collaboration given. It acknowledges the impact of relationships between different nested settings on the holistic development of the child. In this section, I present some of these models. Although not all of them target teachers and parents of students with special needs; they do cater to collaborative relationships in both general and special education settings. From this presentation, I show the limitations of applying such models in organizations embedded in a complex dynamic environment such as Lebanon.
2.2.1 Epstein’s Parent-School Partnership Model

From her extensive research on parent-school-community partnerships, Epstein and her colleagues developed a framework for successful parental involvement inspired by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system’s perspective. It is one of the most heavily cited in the literature.

**Spheres of overlapping influences**

The first part of Epstein’s model as indicated in figure 1, is represented in a Venn diagram that is made up of three spheres (home, school, and community). These spheres make up the context in which the child develops and learns. The overlapping of these three spheres represents the social relationships and interactions between parents, teachers and the community and their mutual interest in the child who is situated in the center of the diagram. The model is made up of two components containing the spheres of influence. In the external component, Epstein (2001) claims that the more the interactions between members of the family, school, and community occur, the closer the spheres become. Various factors impact the closeness of the spheres. First, is the force of time during which the child spends in school across his/her chronological age. The other forces are related to the experiences of the child that takes place with the family, school or community. These forces can impact the extent to which the school, family, and communities carry mutual interests and influence the life of the child. The internal component of the partnership model involves the communication and interpersonal relationships that take place between the different members across the different spheres. Her internal model demonstrates the complex and vital interpersonal relationships that take place at home, school and the community. These relationships take place on various levels. At the institutional level, there is an interaction between the schools and the families through newsletters, performances, and other means of communication. At the personal level, interactions occur between parents and teachers through formal and informal meetings.
Figure 1. Spheres of overlapping spheres of influence of family, school, and community on children’s learning (Epstein, J., 2009, p.154)

**Typology of the six types of parental involvement**

Based on her partnership model, Epstein (2001) developed a typology of six parental involvement types that she claims should be a part of all programs at schools that want to foster parental participation in the education of the child. These activities are of different types and include helping parents nourish their parenting techniques, helping them teach their children at home, giving them a chance to participate in decision-making processes, encouraging them to participate in community events and to enroll in school volunteering programs. In her typology, Epstein encourages schools to promote policies, programs, activities, attitudes, and values that would encourage parental involvement at schools through these six types of parental involvement activities.

**Limitations of the model**

Epstein’s model emphasizes how schools can help parents become more involved in their child’s education. It highlights specific ways through which schools can help parents be a part of their children’s learning and development. However, not much recognition is given to the multifaceted nature of the relationships present and diversity of parents or teachers when it comes to sociocultural, socioeconomic, race, and so on (Price-Mitchell, 2009). This multidimensional and
complex nature of the relationship is presented in the next section with Carol Keyes who also basis part of her model on the ecological systems perspective.

2.2.2 Carol Keye’s parent-teacher partnership model

In part of her theoretical model, Carol Keyes incorporates the ecological systems perspective to portray the complexity and dynamic nature of parent-teacher collaboration. She places particular emphasis on the ‘Mesosystem’ in which the interaction of the teacher ‘Microsystem’ and the parent ‘Microsystem’ occurs (Keyes, 2000). Although Bronfenbrenner’s theory addresses the developing child and emphasizes the importance of parent-school partnerships found in the ‘Mesosystem,’ Keyes adapts Bronfenbrenner’s model to parents and teachers working together. She shows how each of them carries attributes from their own ecological systems which might influence their work together. Keyes shows the complexity of the parent as an individual and the teacher as an individual by identifying the qualities that they hold in their own ecological systems which might influence their collaborative relationship. These qualities are demonstrated in figure 2.

![Ecology of teacher and parent](image)

*Figure 2. Ecology of teacher and parent as they work together for the child. (Keyes C., 2000, p.116).*
2.2.3 Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) model in special education

As complex as it may be, the relationship between teachers and parents is crucial in special education. Most students with special needs have social and behavioral impairments accompanied by other challenges. For example, an autistic student can manifest social and communication challenges in specific behavioral patterns that intervene with his learning and coping abilities (Masi A., DeMayo M., Glozier N., Guastella A., 2017). Hence, in SE, behavioral intervention and management plans are necessary parts of the education and containment of the SN students. A few decades ago, teachers would consult psychologists on behavioral management strategies. They would both work on identifying the problem behavior, analyzing it, treating it and evaluating its effect (Wilkinson, 2006).

Nevertheless, as the ecological-systems perspective started becoming more famous, the consultation model extended to incorporate the parents and the home acknowledging the fact that the behavior spreads across the school and home, considering the broader context. This extension resulted in the Conjoint Behavioral Consultation Model (CBC) which defined by Sheridan and Kratochwill (2007) as:

> Strength-based, cross-system problem-solving and decision-making model wherein parents, teachers, and other caregivers or service providers work as partners and share responsibility for promoting positive and consistent outcomes related to the child’s academic, behavioral, and social-emotional development. (p.25)

Following the CBC model, parents and teachers along with the supervision of a consultant (usually a therapist) collaborate and go through the problem-solving stages of defining and analyzing a problem than setting a plan and implementing it across the school and home. They start by meeting together and identifying the problems present in the current situation. Then they jointly determine procedures and goals to work on taking into consideration the environmental conditions across the school and home. Eventually, they select the measurement tools and the data collection system which they will use throughout the collaboration. After plan implementation, evaluation of the team and its members takes place. Evaluation is an essential part of the process and involves the development of feedback by the members of the team on how they are performing individually and cohesively.
Limitations of the model
The CBC is an emerging and promising model for PTC in SE. In its framework, the reader may notice how structured it is and the importance of the evaluation process that occurs on both the individual level and team level. The CBC, however, requires a third-party consultant to guide the structured process. In turn, generalizing this process to all parents and teachers might require a large number of human and financial resources to compensate for the number of students needing such consultation in the organization (Wilkinson, 2006). Also, CBC is based on a systematic structure which cannot be completely applied in a complex setting such as the SE organizations were myriad forms of interactions resulting in different outcomes. In the next section, I present a different perspective of dealing with complex systems. As will be described later, complex systems have self-organizing properties in which external forces controlling the system cannot explain the series of the emergent outcomes occurring.

2.3 A shift towards the complexity sciences
As shown earlier, the ecological systems perspective has tremendously contributed to recognizing the importance of the environment on the development of the child. Influenced by the ecological perspective, many researchers in the field highlight the importance of parent-school collaborative practices on the child’s wellbeing and education (Keyes, 2000; Epstein, 2001; Wilkinson, 2006). Many programs for parent-school collaboration have been developed based on the notion of the ecological perspective which deals with the study of organisms and how they interact with their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Epstein, 2001; Wilkinson, 2006).

In this study, I present a different way of examining PTC. Just like the organism who is growing and developing through his interaction with the environment, I look at the SE institution as an organism that is embedded, dependent and highly interconnected to a continually changing environment. This comparison is made possible using the complexity theory perspective which views the organization as a complex adaptive system or a natural system that is constantly changing, adapting, growing and developing through the interaction and the interconnectedness of its different components (Lavian, 2015). PTC, as well as other collaborative relationships, play a vital role in the adaptation of such complex organizations. As demonstrated in the next
section, a shift to complexity theory perspective gives a good insight on PTC and the conditions needed for organizations to grow and adapt.

2.3.1 Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS)

Complexity science has evolved from the systems perspective which offers a micro as well as macro examination to interactions and changes in systems including the environment with which these systems exchange energy (Price-Mitchell, 2009; Yuan et al., 2018; Lavian 2015; Sandaker 2009). Complexity science is concerned with the study of such systems. The term complexity implies intertwining whereby reciprocal and dynamic interactions takes place among agents of systems with their environment (Lavian, 2015).

CAS is one of the frameworks in complexity science that is used to study the interactions that take place within and across the system. It is also used to study how these interactions influence the general behavior of the system. We classify a system as a CAS according to several characteristics. First, CAS are nested systems contained within larger systems and constituted from smaller systems which relate to each other. Second, a foundational characteristic of a CAS is its response and adaptation to changes in its environment of which it is a part of (Sandaker, 2009). They are open systems with permeable borders made up of a network of diverse agents. These agents behave and interact in a dynamic, nonlinear and sometimes unpredictable ways according to exchange and feedback from and to the environment. In other words, in CAS there is dynamic, nonlinear interactions between varieties of agents functioning towards adaptation in an unpredictable and changing environment. The agents use action patterns with other agents or resources. These actions are evaluated according to performance measures. According to this evaluation, types of agents or strategies are selected and reinforced or eliminated from and within the system. In the book “Harnessing Complexity,” the authors Axelrod and Cohen (2000) combine in one definition central concepts related to CAS.

Agents, of a variety of types, use their strategies, in patterned interaction, with each other and with artifacts. Performance measures on the resulting events drive the selection of agents and/or strategies through processes of error-prone copying and recombination, thus changing the frequencies of the types within the system.

(p. 154)
As a framework, CAS was inspired by looking at natural systems and biological systems like the immune system. CAS can be applied in multiple disciplines like artificial systems having to do with computer programs and algorithms and social systems constituted of people and institutions (Keshavalz, N., Nutbeam, D., Rowling, L., & Khawarpour, F., 2010). For the sake of this study, I analyze the SE institutions as a social CAS whereby I examine the interactions that take place among the people involved in the education of the SN child (specifically the parents and the teachers).

2.3.2 The paradigm shift of organizations towards the CAS approach

Today, the advancement of globalization, digital technology, and access to information through the internet has changed society to drastic measures. These advancements have led to complexity and have promoted a new way of thinking about social systems. With faster and easier communication and access to knowledge, the surrounding environment has become more complex and more dynamic than ever before (Axelrod and Cohen, 2000). In order to fit the complexity of the surrounding environment, organizations had to become complex as well by applying changes in organizational behavior and management (Sandaker, 2009; Turner, Baker & Morris, 2018).

Sandaker (2009) describes this paradigm shift by referring to Burns and Stalker (1961) article. The latter classifies change in behavior and management in organizations as a form of transition from ‘mechanistic’ to ‘organic’ organizations. During the industrialization era, organizations functioned at a low complexity scale. Standardization in processes and procedures were vital for organizational success since the purpose of the organization was solely based on production. There was no room for deviation and employees had to follow operating procedures strictly. Formal lines of communication took over, and little interaction was favored. However, the management of organizations had to change to fit the complexity of social life and work life.

Rather than depending on production, knowledge and information had become central commodities in the organizations. The once controlling and constricting management had to become more open towards differences in organizational practices. Organizations were no longer viewed as static entities independent of the environment. On the contrary, they were viewed as
dynamic functions that progress as the system exchanges energy with its changing surrounding (Turner, Baker & Morris, 2018). Sandaker (2009) puts it this way:

Contingencies favoring behavioral variation are arranged in a way that differs fundamentally from the contingencies controlling production behavior in early industrialized society. The new paradigms can be discussed in terms of variation, selection, and interaction. Modern, knowledge-based businesses encourage behavioral variation when meeting continuously changing demands in order to increase the probability that appropriate behavior comes about.

(p. 278)

In other words, to fit the complexity of its environment, new patterns of behavior had to be taken by organizations for adaptations. These new patterns can be explained in terms of variation, interaction, and selection which are hallmarks of CAS and will be explained further in the next section.

2.3.3 Analyzing the organization using the CAS approach: variation, interaction, and selection

The main function of a CAS is to fit the complexity of its surrounding environment or in other words: to adapt. This functionality is identified through the organization’s relationship with the external environment. In this case, variation is a necessary component of the system whereby possibilities for new successful strategies for adaptation is present. In other words, variation is “the raw material for adaptation” (Axelrod and Cohen, 2000, p. 32). The latter state that “variety turns up repeatedly in complex systems as a crucial factor in their development. When the world is changing, and the current agents are far from best possible, variety can have value and homogeneity may be a hindrance” (Axelrod and Cohen, 2000, p. 34). However, extreme variation can also be a hindrance. In order for the organization to benefit from what it has already acquired, constraints have to be placed on the extent of variation within the system. When approaching variation in CAS, there is the challenge of finding the balance between variety and uniformity. There should be a balance between the constraint of variation to maximize standardization of processes, and the permission of variation to find new solutions in a continually changing environment (Sandaker, 2009).
Interaction is another hallmark in the CAS framework. All unfolding changes and events taking place within the system are a result of the non-linear interactions among different agents or artifacts (Axelrod and Cohen, 2000). Looking at the structure of a CAS, one can realize that it is not a regular organization chart where lines of command and role distribution is linear. On the contrary, the structure of CAS is more like a web or network of interactions that forms the living pulse of the CAS (Sandaker, 2009). Usually, in CAS, the interactions of the different agents give rise to regularities forming different patterns of interactions (Lavian, 2015). In the structure of CAS, the web or network is a representation of these occurring interaction patterns. These interaction patterns are “neither random nor completely structured” (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; p. 63). In other words, beyond formal structures, the organization has its own structures of interactions that have emergent patterns. According to Keshavarz et al. (2010), “at the scale of the system, the interplay of agents shape a hidden but recognizable regularity in the behavior of the whole system” (p. 1469). There is a complex relationship between the formal “official” structure and the everyday emergent web of dynamic and non-linear interactions. For Sandaker (2009), CAS “allows a ‘web of influence, i.e., facilitating variation in interaction independently of divisions, departments or levels of administration” (p.277). Interactions between agents vary in intensity, and daily information is exchanged amongst them in many directions. In CAS independent agents interact in a nonlinear manner, and the whole is not the sum of its parts meaning that there are no straightforward cause and effect relationships. Minor changes can produce unequal effects (Keshavarz et al., 2010). Instead of being controlled, agents function in response to the exchange of information and feedback loops within and across the system. This is mainly achieved through self-organization in which the agents autonomously decide and take action in different situations (Keshavarz et al., 2010).

As stated earlier, in CAS, agents and strategies are selected and recopied according to performance measures, as a means of exploitation. A balance exists between being able to explore new possibilities and exploit already existing ones. In their evolutionary perspective, the authors Axelrod & Cohen (2000) suggest targeting selection in CAS by looking at how natural selection and evolutionary biology works. They suggest a design for selection that includes: identifying the standards for achievement in the system; being aware at which level selection
takes place (level of agents or level of strategies); ascribing recognition for success and failure, and destroying or creating these agents or strategies accordingly.

2.3.4 SE organizations holding characteristics of CAS and the role of PTC

In his book on school leadership and complexity theory, Morrison (2007) claims that schools hold many characteristics of complex adaptive systems. Morrison (2007) states that:

Schools exhibit many features of CAS, being dynamical and unpredictable, nonlinear organizations operating in unpredictable and changing external environments. Indeed schools both shape and adapt to macro- and micro-societal change, organizing themselves, responding to and shaping their communities and society (i.e., all parties co-evolve). (p. 19)

This is also true for institutions that provide special education services. The SE institution is nested within larger systems constituting of the ministry of social affairs, the community, and the government. It also includes smaller systems within itself constituting of families, classes, departments, and agents. Theses nested environments are continually changing requiring the institution to respond to these changes while trying to maintain its core structure. This adaptation occurs through the nonlinear interactions of the different agents involved including the staff such as teachers, administrators, therapists, and the parents. These agents come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and have different values and perspectives. Many external and internal nonlinear interactions take place within and between the different nested systems in the institution.

Parents, teachers, administrators, and therapists exchange feedback loops in formal and informal ways through their interactions. Relationships between agents vary in intensity, and daily information is exchanged amongst them in many directions. In his book on leadership and complexity theory in schools, Morrison (2007) describes that:

The school is highly sensitive to its internal and external environment and goes to exceptional lengths to cultivate links relationships and feedback between these two environments: the internal environment is affected by and affects the external environment and the internal environment changes and recognizes itself in response to the school’s changing situation. (p.117)

This dependency is manifested by the presence of permeable boundaries between the organization and its environment. The exchange of information between the internal and external
environment of the school plays a vital role in the adaptation and progress of the organization. Moreover, teachers collaborating with parents serve as excellent portals for such an exchange to occur. Among all the diverse internal staff members and roles in the organization, teachers form the most significant number of interactions with the environment through their relationship with parents. Teachers as internal agents act as sensors interacting with parents who are considered as external agents, allowing the organization to exchange energy and information with its environment.

2.3.5 Communication and information exchange

In the perfect case scenario, as demonstrated in figure 3, school organizations would have the internal agents or “sensors” transmitting the message from the external environment and spreading it internally through systems of communication. This leads to internal changes that act on the information received. At the same time, you have internal agents deciding to convey messages externally through communication systems. These messages are then received by external sensors who spread the messages externally. Open lines of communications emerge and spread the messages coming from the external environment to the internal environment and vice versa. In schools, these open lines and occasions for communication exchange can take many forms including written communication, visits to homes, visits to schools, formal meeting and associations, school events, informal meetings, and others.

This is also true for internal lines of communication and coordination within the organization. To secure the dissemination of information to the right people at the right time, internal communication among the different staff members emerges. Also, internal processes and structures within the system are developed and made flexible to be able to adapt to the information and messages received correctly. This means that changes in processes and procedures in the institutions occur regularly as a response to the messages received from the environment.

Hence, constituting a large percentage of the internal and external environment, collaborative relationships between the teachers and the parents could not only serve well for the student with special needs but also allow the organization to respond and adapt accordingly. It is a given that
teachers and parents form most of the portals through which information is exchanged back and forth. In fact, “Individual teachers and groups of teachers have expert knowledge of the most appropriate links with those aspects of the external environment with which they are involved” (Morrison, 2007; p.123). Teachers act as the sensors of the system that receive and give away the information from and to the organization. Even though the teachers receive and give out data from and to the environment, certain factors play a role for the sensing to be effective and targeted towards self-organization and change which will be discussed in the next section.

![Diagram of information flows in schools](image)

*Figure 3. Schools sensing and responding to their environment (Morrison, 2007, p.121)*
2.3.6 Learning in SE Organizations

As stated in the previous section, Morrison (2007) expresses the essential duty of schools in examining, prioritizing, planning and responding to changes in the environment so that change in organization structure occurs and self-organization is achieved. In other words,

Schools affect students, who affect families, who affect communities; communities affect families, who affect students, who affect schools...There must be mutual learning from each other…Schools must be constantly scanning and sensing their environments and responding to them through their organizational structure (Morrison, 2007, p. 188).

Morrison implies that a mutual learning process should take place between the school organization and its environment. Cohen and Levinthal (1990), as cited in Morrison (2007), talk about the enhancement of the organization’s “absorptive capacity” meaning the organizations “capability for searching, encoding, decoding, selecting, synthesizing, interpreting and acting on external information” (p.122). To reach this learning capacity, school leaders should take into consideration the importance of the data exchange that takes place between teachers and parents by providing open lines of communication, proper internal communication for dissemination of information and flexibility towards change in structural processes in response to the messages received. School leaders should try to deal with information keenly knowing how what, to whom and where to share the information they receive from such exchange of information (Morrison, 2007). Nonetheless, how can the quality of learning processes inside an organization be evaluated?

In the article “Learning as an activity of interdependent people,” Stacey (2003), distinguishes between organizational learning and learning organization. Organizational learning is concerned with studying the processes of learning that occurs on an individual and collective manner apart from the organization itself while learning organization relates to the methods used to help in the enhancement and evaluation of the quality of learning inside an organization as a whole. Following complexity theory, Stacey uses leaning organization to give insights on learning and change in an organization. Stacey (2003) defines organizations as “patterns of power relations sustained by ideological themes of communicative interaction and patterns of inclusion and exclusion in which human identities emerge” (p.330). The organization, groups, and individuals are all facets of similar processes of interaction amongst people. For Stacey, organizations
cannot learn. Learning, on the other hand, emerges from the interaction of individuals together. It is not the organizations that learn, but the individuals interacting together within that organization that do so. Stacey (2003) mentions that in CAS when individuals interact together, knowledge and behavioral patterns emerge in the form of themes. These themes make up the individuals’ experiences of working together. Although they take the form of habits, these themes can transform the individual and the system. For Stacey, when individuals interact together, knowledge is constantly repeated, and patterns emerge with a capacity to transform.

When viewing organizations from a complexity perspective, the process of learning itself is also viewed differently. The learning process is looked at as an emerging shift in the patterns of interactions or as Stacey (2003) calls ‘thematic patterns’ that occur between individual people. In other words, “Learning is the activity of interdependent people and can only be understood in terms of self-organizing communicative interaction and power relating in which identities are potentially transformed” (Stacey 2003, p.331).

From this viewpoint on learning in CAS, I move to another main focus of this study which is partly concerned with the processes of learning that occur as a result of the collaboration that takes place among the individuals involved in the education of the SN child (mainly the teacher and the parents).

2.3.7 Complexity Leadership- Adaptive Leadership

In summary, educational institutions such as school and SE institutions have some characteristics of complex adaptive systems (Morrison, 2007). As stated earlier, such institutions change and adapt so that they match the complexity and changes of their environment (Stacey, 2000). Characteristics of CAS include dynamic interactions between agents, non-linearity, self-organization, and decentralized control during interactions of agents, unpredictable and changing environments (Keshavarz et al., 2010). Organizations considered CAS depend on knowledge and data as central elements of success and survival (Sandaker, 2003). In educational institutions, specifically in SE organizations, collaboration within and across the organization is necessary for such knowledge and data to be exchanged. Collaboration between parents and teachers constitutes the most significant amount of collaborative relationships in schools. Teachers acting
as sensors exchange information between the organization and its environment through parents. Through these interactions, both parents and teachers undergo a process of learning which is fundamental for self-organization and adaptation.

This complexity perspective on organizations has been recently followed by studying leadership styles in such organizations (Northouse, 2016). The complex system does not mean the absence of leadership; however, leadership exists on all levels. In CASs, the notion that change and emergence can occur anywhere and sometimes unpredictably in the organization is highly acknowledged. Leadership in such systems is thus decentralized and can exist from the bottom up (Morrison, 2007). Although the leaders in such systems are more visible and appear to have more power, they are agents operating in a context of uncertainty just like everyone else. In the classroom and when interacting with the parents, the teachers have a leadership role. Nickse (1977), as cited in Morrison (2007), says that

> Teachers are in ideal positions to be leaders in schools because not only do they have a vested interest in what takes place but also they have a sense of history of the organization, and of their colleagues, they know the community and are in a position to implement change. (p.72)

Leaders could be present anywhere in the organization and leadership could be present in more than one person disregarding his/her position. School leaders should give the right for teachers to lead.

Currently, there are six distinguished frameworks related to “complexity leadership” which I will not fully discuss in this study. In relevance to this study, I will be discussing a type of leadership strategy known as adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership is one of the six frameworks of complexity leadership which allows ways for organizations to respond efficiently to the changing environment. In other words, it “focuses on the strategies and behaviors that encourage learning, creativity, and adaptation in complex adaptive systems” (Northouse, 2016). Adaptive leadership tackles the activity of school leaders in relation to the employees like the teachers in different challenging situations. In the leadership model, you have a complex process taking place whereby the leader identifies a situational challenge. If the challenge is adaptive, the leader behaves in specific ways to help in the progress of the adaptive process. This will be explained thoroughly.
Situational challenges
There are two kinds of challenges technical and adaptive. Usually, technical challenges are those that involve solving to reach identifiable solutions. This requires a certain level of technical know-how to solve. However, especially in SE most of the challenges faced between parents and teachers are adaptive. Adaptive challenges are usually difficult to identify along with a clear cut solution (Northouse, 2016). They require changes on several levels such as the relationship between parents and teachers, their roles, their teaching approaches, and other changes (Northouse, 2016). Moreover, only the people involved can work towards the solution which requires cross-organizational boundary change and time to be implemented. In the adaptive situational challenges, there is a need for adaptive leadership.

Leader Behaviors
When approaching adaptive leadership, we have six leader behaviors that I will discuss in this section with no sequential order (Northouse, 2016). First, ‘Getting on the balcony’ which means that school leaders should acquire a holistic view of the situation with everyone involved. By moving back and forth between the different people involve in the situation, leaders would get a broader objective perspective on the situation. Second, school leaders should differentiate technical challenges from adaptive ones in different situations and act accordingly. Third, school leaders should create an environment that promotes stress regulation. This is made possible by allowing occasions for teachers and other employees to share and discuss difficulties with a blame-free approach, and by empowering, motivating, orienting and protecting them. Fourth, school leaders should encourage teachers that are going through a hard time to focus on the current job that needs to be done no matter how hard it could be. The fifth school leader behavior is to give work back to the people (i.e., teachers or any other employee). This means that adaptive school leaders must enable teachers to take possession of their own job and duties whereby they are allowed to solve their own problems and be accountable for outcomes. Last but certainly not least, school leaders should protect leadership voices from below meaning they should listen and consider the ideas of teachers and accept them as leaders from below.

From a complexity perspective, variation and selection are necessary components for organizational leadership. Axelrod & Cohen (2000) suggest that organizations create opportunities where there could be a massive increase in the variety of suggested, proposed and implemented practices. Hence, complexity leadership that is present in schools that are
considered self-organizing bring about and cultivate relationships through the acknowledgment of diversity in people and cultures working towards collaboration and conflict resolution. With the process of selection, leadership potentials of the different participants are identified and rewarded (Morrison, 2007). For the promotion of selection, Axelrod and Cohen (2000) suggest creating social activities like prizes in order to encourage the development of the organization’s valued criteria. “The result of such an activity is to increase the use of criteria embedded in the prize, which can sometimes be far more effective than direct advocacy of criteria” (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000; p.158). Moreover, since adaptive leadership is shared leadership, the creativity of all participants needs to be shared collectively making the schools learning capacity synergistic where members learn from each other. Lastly, for Harris (2003), with leadership schools become more of ‘professional learning communities which are “one where teachers participate in decision making, have a shared sense of purpose, engage in collaborative work and accept joint responsibility for the outcomes of their work” (p. 321). This leadership is best achieved through changes in school towards a more collaborative environment whereby more opportunities are given for teachers and other school personnel to communicate openly, share ideas and work together.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This master thesis investigates the processes of parent-teacher collaboration in one SE institution in Lebanon. The conceptual framework of this study starts with concepts on collaboration from the ecological systems perspective leading to concepts of adaptation and self-organization from the complexity theory perspective. According to the ecological system’s perspective, the developing organism is hugely influenced by the interactions that occur with and between his surrounding environments. Many studies, based on this perspective, encourage the development of collaboration between the school and the family given its crucial role in the healthy development of the child. These studies have led to the establishment of programs and models that encourage the development of PTC like Joyce Epstein’s famous Family Partnership Model discussed earlier. Nonetheless, there is a general agreement that the collaborative process is complex and rarely can any model cater for the diversity of factors and situations that might
affect parent-school collaboration especially in the changes and complexity of our world today. In other words, there is no one-size fits all model for PTC in schools and educational systems given the diversity and complexity of parents, teachers and their environment as shown in Carol Keyes’s theoretical model.

From this notion, I look at the S.N institution as a developing organism embedded and highly influenced by its environment that is continuously changing. Just like the child (in the ecological system’s perspective), the organization is highly dependent on, permeable to and affected by its environment for growth and adaptation. These concepts are the cornerstones of the complexity sciences that look at organizations as complex adaptive systems which are constantly changing, adapting, growing and developing through the interaction, dependence, and interconnectedness to their environment. As mentioned earlier, when considering an organization as a complex adaptive system, we regard it as emergent, self-organizing and nonlinear. CASs can self-organize which in turn allows them to adapt, progress, and change their internal structure in response to influences in their environment. The complex adaptive system framework in schools supports collaboration and networking internally and across the boundaries. This calls for a change in the managerial approach of the organization whereby leaders and managers should allow room and make fertile grounds for collaborative relationships to prosper and self-organization to occur. This is established by focusing on ways to harness complexity through variation, interaction, and selection.

When it comes to the S.E institutions, parents collaborating with teachers form the highest percentage of cross-boundary networking and interactions between the internal and external environment of the organization. Just as much as it is considered essential to collaborate with respect to the ecological systems perspective, parent-teacher collaboration is immensely crucial in schools when considered as complex adaptive systems. As referred to in the literature on CAS, in order to harness emergence and self-organization in CAS, reconsiderations must occur on the structural and interpersonal level of the organization. Open lines of communication and proper scanning of the environment should take place via collaboration as well as flexibility and adaptation of internal strategies that fit the changes. Moreover, attentiveness to aspects of leadership styles such as adaptive leadership should be considered. Another important aspect is the spread and sharing of knowledge across the organization.
As will be explained extensively in the next chapter, I conduct my study using the qualitative approach which allows me to interpret how teachers make sense of the process of PTC. I use semi-structured interviews with six teachers working in the same SE institution in Lebanon. I analyze and interpret their narratives of successful and unsuccessful collaborative relationships. The analyses, findings, and discussions held in this study are all guided by this conceptual framework.
3. Methods

Venturing from the complexity perspective, in this study, I aim to get a better understanding of parent-teacher collaboration (PTC) in one special education institution located in Lebanon from the perspectives of the teachers working there. Through their stories of successful and unsuccessful collaborative relationships, I aim to get better insights into the processes of collaborative relationships they build with the parents. I am interested in investigating how the teachers as employees perceive the role of their organization in supporting them with their collaborative efforts and how the information they get out of their collaborative relationships influences their practice on an individual level and organizational level. This chapter begins with a description of the research paradigm, which includes the philosophical stance and the research approach, research design, data collection tools, ethical considerations, and analyses.

3.1 Ontological and Epistemological implications

Austin (2000) describes collaboration as a “continual learning experience” (p.121). Throughout their interactions, both parents and teacher learn and continue learning about collaborative relationships. The person learning form collaborative experiences constructs his/her own meaning of the concept and behaves accordingly. Hence, collaboration is socially constructed and thus requires qualitative research for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon which directly relates to experiences and meaning-making of the different participants in the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). From a relativist ontological perspective, PTC is socially constructed, and multiple versions of this truth exist depending on the context and the interpretations of the experiences of the different people involved (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2015). Both parents and teachers develop and construct subjective meanings of their own collaborative experiences. Such construction of meaning leads to certain behaviors in how they go about collaborating. The literature shows that parents and teachers have different views on collaboration concerning how they perceive their role, their past experiences, and their social environment (Keyes, 2000). In turn, they have their own perceptions of certain structural factors that tend to make collaboration happen based on their experiences. As stated earlier in the
literature, general factors like openness and willingness to collaborate, and two-way communication are needed in all situations for successful collaborations to occur (Griffin, 2012) however there are many other structural or behavioral factors that might influence the collaborative process. The knowledge about this lies in the perspectives and experiences of the collaborators; in this case, the parents and teachers.

For this reason, I choose a subjective approach in my study in which I talk to teachers in a specific setting to get an in-depth understanding of what they know about PTC, how they know it and how they practice it. In other words, looking into what the teachers know about collaboration and how they practice it is a proper way of acquiring a better understanding of it. The reason I choose to interview teachers and not parents in this study is that I look at collaboration in the organization from a complexity theory perspective in which teachers act as agents who exchange information with the outside environment leading the organization towards adaptability and sustainability. Thus, I am interested in investigating how the teachers as employees perceive the role of their organization in supporting them with their collaborative efforts, whether or not the information they get out of their collaborative efforts influence their practice and if so, how and on which levels.

3.2 Qualitative Research and complexity perspective

As mentioned earlier, collaboration is too context specific and dependent on the complexities of human interactions (Griffin, 2014). Hence, when studying collaboration, I give attention to the setting in which it takes place and the different people involved. In other words, I investigate the context in which such relationships are embedded and the behaviors and interactions of the different people involved. As indicated in this study, I consider the context in which collaboration takes place as a complex adaptive system. I have provided and assigned specific characteristics that define the organization as complex. From this complexity perspective on the organization, I will be using the qualitative approach to investigate collaboration through the stories of teachers in that organization. In their article, Tsoukas and Hatch (2001), refer to Bruner’s model of the two modes of thought to show how qualitative approach specifically narrative design is eligible for studying complex systems. Opposing the logico-scientific mode of
thought to theorizing complexity, Tsoukas and Hatch (2001) encourage the use of the qualitative research and narrative mode of thinking. For Tsoukas and Hatch (2001), “complexity is not only a feature of the systems we study, It is also a matter of the way in which we organize our thinking about those systems” (p. 979). They describe the concept of ‘second-order complexity’ whereby consideration is given to the complex thinking of the thinker who thinks of organizations as a complex system. In other words, “the complexity of a system is not an intrinsic property of that system; it is observer-dependent, that is, it depends upon how the system is described and interpreted” (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001, p. 986). Moving away from the system itself, all the features and characteristics that make a system complex such as non-linearity of interactions, and emergence are actually terms that are described by the observer as part of his interpretation and vocabulary. Hence, the qualitative approach specifically narrative approach to complexity proposes that our knowledge of CAS and their characteristics remain rooted in the stories we tell about them.

3.3 Narrative approach

As stated earlier, I look at collaboration in and across the organization from a complexity perspective. Currently, in the field of organizational research, there is more recognition of stories as necessary resources of communication and knowledge in the organization. Snowden (2005) claims that:

> Stories in organizations reveal patterns of culture, behavior, and understanding in a different and frequently more effective way than interviews and questionnaire-based approaches…narrative techniques both reveal the patterns of an organization and are in turn the means by which it can be patterned. (p.2)

When looking at organizations as complex adaptive systems, I use the narrative approach to investigate collaboration through the temporally and spatially structured stories of the employees or teachers. I look for certain patterns of behavior and events among the different stories told by the different agents in the same organization regarding the same topic. Moreover, agent perspectives on how they experienced their collaborative process with the parents are more important than the mere listing of the events that happen. Through the use of the narrative mode of thinking, the emphasis is put on the context and the reflexivity of the participants (Tsoukas &
Rather than providing implicit justifications, the focus is put on the statement of purposes and motives set forth by the participants. Moreover, special recognition is given to temporal sensitivity (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). The narrative approach has gained the interest of researchers from multiple disciplines, and there are different views on the definition of a narrative approach found in the literature (McCance, McKenna, & Boore, 1999). For Riesman, (2005):

Narratives do not mirror; they refract the past. Imagination and strategic interests influence how storytellers choose to connect events and make them meaningful for others. Narratives are useful in research precisely because storytellers interpret the past rather than reproduce it as it was. (p.6)

As stated earlier, I thrive on looking at the participants’ interpretation and sense-making of events serving as turning points in their collaborative processes with the parents. Analyzing participant interpretations in single stories and across the different stories might lead to the emergence of certain patterns and themes that could be useful for the study. An important way to understand human experiences and meaning-making is by listening to their stories (McCance, McKenna, & Boore, 1999). Usually, participants have an intrinsic capacity for storytelling and can best understand and reflect on their experiences through the stories (McCance, McKenna, & Boore, 1999). Also, narrators usually narrate experiences that are exceptional or deviating from the normal. (McCance, McKenna, & Boore, 1999). Whenever participants are asked to tell stories about their collaborative practices, they are usually driven by memories of either exceptionally successful or unsuccessful collaborative relationships. Hence, narrative analyzes of detailed stories including interactions, structural factors, context, characters, and turning points that have been constructed by the narrators can result in a better understanding of the parent-teacher collaboration.

### 3.4 Context and Sampling

In this study, I interviewed six teachers working in the same institution. In the next section, I describe the setting in which the study is conducted as well as the different narrators involved. For the sake of anonymity, I provide pseudo names for both the institution and the teachers interviewed.
3.4.1 Organizational Profile

SNI is an NGO specialized in the education and therapy of around 300 pupils with diverse special needs including autism, Down syndrome, and cognitive delay. SNI is a center that provides preschool programs, academic programs, pre-vocational and vocational programs with over 13 workshops, and residential services for pupils with special needs between 3 to 60 years of age. It also includes a therapy program with more than eight kinds of therapies including counseling and psychotherapy for students and their families. They also have a social action and parental support program led by social workers. The NGO has around 80 teachers and 20 administrators. Every department is managed by a coordinator who coordinates with teachers, parents, administrators, and therapists on behalf of the section.

3.4.2 PTC meetings in SNI

In SNI, there are several programs and parent-school meetings to ensure parental involvement. Every year, a multidisciplinary team meeting is conducted, so the parents get to know the staff members. The headmaster usually gives a presentation on policies and procedures and distributes the parent handbook that contains all details related to the school. An annual class meeting and an open house are conducted once every year as well where the parents get to meet other parents, experience the classroom setting and discuss feedback in the meeting. Another annual meeting is the adapted individualized educational program (IEP) meeting explained in the previous chapter. In the IEP meeting, the parents meet together with the teachers and therapists and discuss annual goals to be incorporated into the child’s annual individual educational and therapeutic plan. On several occasions, the institution opens its doors for parents and staff to celebrate festivals with the students. Throughout the year parental training sessions are offered to parents, and parental guidance meetings are provided from the institution's psychologists and social workers whenever there is a need.
3.4.3 Sampling procedure and the study participants

The participants interviewed are all teachers in SNI with varying years of experience teaching students of diverse ages and needs. For the scope of this study, only teachers working with children and adolescents with diverse special needs were selected. Surprisingly, most of the narratives throughout the interviews involved autistic students. An email and flyers about the study were sent to all the teachers at the school. Thirteen female teachers showed interest in participating. Since I chose the narrative approach for the study only 8 out of the 12 were selected. Selection criteria were based on diversity in years of experience, departments, and educational background. All selected participants were female special educators holding a degree in special education and curative education since no male teachers signed up for the study. Details about the participants of the study are found in table 1. All participants signed informed consents that explained the purpose of the study and their right to retrieve from the study at any given moment (refer to Appendix A).

Table 1

Details about participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher’s name</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Ages of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>3 till 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>3 till 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>8 till 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rana</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>14 till 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Prevocational</td>
<td>8 till 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>21 till 25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4.4 Ethical Considerations related to context and participants

There are several ethical issues to consider in this study. The first is related to the anonymity of the setting in which the study is conducted. SNI is one among a few other institutions in Lebanon. However, there are a few facts about the institution related to the philosophy by which it is inspired from that I cannot identify for the sake of keeping it anonymous. However, parent-teacher collaboration is highly valued by that philosophy and is among its basic principles when working with pupils who have special needs. Other ethical considerations are related to the
participants of the study. First, I collect one side stories about the collaborations between parents and teachers from the latter. This might lead to teachers idealizing their practice based on how they interpret the events. However, since this study regards the institution as a complex system, I focus on the perspective of the teacher as an internal agent in the system. Second, as stated earlier all the teachers are females, so there is a gender imbalance.

3.5 The interviews

When constructing narratives both the researcher and the participants are co-creating stories where there is a process of give-and-take amongst them for the recollection of details and events, emotions, turning points and more (Bento, 2015). The most prominent ways to collect stories and data in narrative approaches is through interviews (McCance, McKenna, & Boore, 1999). In narratives, unstructured interviews are regularly used more than semi-structured interviews whereby the researcher allows for freedom and loss of control toward the structure of the interviews (Bento, 2015). For this study, I use a semi-structured interview rather than structured mainly due to restriction in time I was given for each interview. Most interviews lasted for approximately an hour except for one interview which had been interrupted then resumed. The teachers had limited time after the school day. The interviews were conducted in the realm of the institutions outside of schools hours. All interviews were expressed in Arabic given that the participants felt more comfortable expressing themselves using their native language. Inspired by my literature review and personal experience, I held some concepts in mind while engaging in the interview and analyzed the process. The questions in the interview roamed around the value of collaboration, with respect to the teachers, how it was like to collaborate in SNI and whether or not the information they get from their experiences change their practices. I also ask them to tell stories about either successful or unsuccessful collaborative relationships they have encountered throughout their practice. In case I wanted to know more, I would use ‘probe questions’ to help the participants further explain themselves. In general, these questions helped me in my search for concepts related to the conceptual framework of my study. I looked at concepts such as the value of collaboration and factors impeding or facilitating it. I also paid attention to the processes of exchange between the organization and the environment (internal/
external communication, scanning changes in the environment, and adaptation to changes), managerial approaches to harnessing complexity, leadership styles dominant in the organization, and the processes of learning in the organization. Some interesting themes emerged from the stories of the participants including the recognition and appreciation of the role of the teacher, the type of dominant environment in the organization and its impact on collaborative practices, teacher intrinsic motivation and willingness to collaborate.

3.6 Data Handling, interpretation and Analysis

After the data collection with the use of the digital voice recorder, interviews were transcribed and then translated to English. Throughout the translation process, I paid extra attention to details and tried to keep the data as descriptive as possible conveying the same meaning. After translating the transcriptions, I started coding. In narratives, while the researcher analyzes data objectively, they interpret it subjectively. The balance between analyses and subjectivity is key to success in dealing with narrative data. For Riesman (2008), the narrative design is a “family of methods for interpreting texts” (p.11). In narratives, researchers acknowledge their position toward the subject. They do not merely present what the participants have declared. Throughout the interviews, I could not ignore my own perspective on PTC in the organization and my subjectivity. While listening to the stories, concepts that were extracted from the literature review resonated in my head whenever a related idea emerged. However, being consciousness in this manner, I dealt with my subjectivity throughout every step of the process. While analyzing the data I got from the interviews, I wrote interpretive comments as well and highlighted them. I also wrote the reasons for my interpretations, and I always kept room for alternative explanations. I was open-minded towards all that was said, and I was investigating different possible ideas in each situation.

Given that I used the narrative analysis, I not only categorize the data in codes using thematic analysis where “emphasis is on the content of a text, “what” is said more than “how” it is said” (Riesman, 2005, p. 2) but I also work with the temporal and sequential logic of the narratives themselves. In this study, I use thematic analysis where I find common thematic elements present across the events in the stories of the different narrators (Riesman, 2005). I found this type of
analysis to be more suitable for this study than a linguistic analysis which focuses on language and ‘how’ the participants use the language to communicate their construction of the stories. In the next chapter, the reader will encounter the presentation of findings from a time perspective. After collection of the different narrations, I found that the suitable way of presenting the data is in terms of three phases including the pre-collaborative phase, the intra-collaborative phase, and the post-collaborative phase which mainly involved reflection on the information the teachers got from their collaborative experience and how, if it did, led to change in practice. This temporal demonstration and analysis of data were made possible since the participants all told stories of collaborative relationships with parents that had happened in the past and no longer occur presently except for one participant.
4. Findings

In the previous chapter, I describe the narrative approach I choose for my study. I also explain how the research was designed and the ways the data was collected to serve best the purpose of the study which focuses on the teacher’s perspective of their collaborative relationships with parents in SNI, an institution for special needs in Lebanon. Through my interviews, I aim to get an in-depth understanding of how they experience PTC in SNI. The reason I choose to interview teachers and not parents is that I look at the institution as a complex adaptive system and I am interested in investigating how the teachers as internal agents perceive the processes of their collaborative relationship with the parents who are considered as external agents. During the interviews, teachers were asked how it is like to collaborate with parents in the institution nowadays and how valuable collaboration is for them. They were also asked to tell me stories of successful or unsuccessful collaborative relationships, its processes and the role of the organization in the process. In most of the narratives, I ask how the information they got out of their collaboration influenced their practice.

4.1 Data presentation

Throughout the different narratives, the narrators provide valuable insights about the processes and nature of their collaborative relationships. The teachers’ perspectives and stories are based on the subjective meanings they have constructed form their own collaborative experiences with parents of special needs students in SNI. For the presentation of the first part of data, I use recurrent themes presented by the different teachers as they reflected on how it was like to collaborate with parents at the institution. For the second part which focuses on the stories and sequence of events involved in the collaborative process, I present the data in a temporal dimension and sequential logic based on the conceptual framework of information exchange between the internal and external environment of a complex adaptive system via internal and external agents mentioned in figure 3. Based on the framework and on common patterns of events that emerged amongst the different collaborative stories, I present the processes and
trajectories of the different collaborative relationships in three phases which include the pre-collaborative phase, the collaborative phase, and the post collaborative phase. The phases are described thoroughly later in the different sections.

4.2 The Participants and their Perceptions on collaboration

As mentioned earlier, in the first part of this chapter, I use analysis of common themes mentioned by the teachers as they shared their perceptions on how it was like to collaborate with parents in their institution and how important collaboration was for them as teachers. I use this section to present the different participants and the way they view collaboration and its practice at SNI before going to the next section whereby I present their different stories.

Norma

Norma, a teacher who had been working at the institution for more than eight years, describes how collaboration between teachers and parents has become very challenging over the years. In her opinion, “new aged “parents have become more doubtful and less trusting towards the teacher. She believes that the teacher had much more appreciation back in the days while nowadays teachers fear blame and doubt from both the parents and the school. Within this environment, teachers are demotivated to take extra steps with all parents unless the latter portrays welcoming personalities. Norma thinks collaboration is a precious asset; however it has become very challenging in terms of its implementation given the number of students per class and the diverse needs of students and their parents. She claims that teachers need to be ‘socially skillful’ enough to understand the different situation of the parents, their actions, their behaviors, their worries and to find her way through all of that in the most subtle way possible. Throughout her talk, she puts particular emphasis on how quantity has overtaken quality in her work as a teacher and how much quantity of paperwork and internal duties stand in the way and take time off from the effort the teacher puts on her collaborative relationships with the parents. She claims that she has encountered many teachers who have lost the desire to collaborate given how hard it is to do so with some parents and how much overloaded the teacher tends to become in terms of her duties towards the organization. In her story, Norma talks about the processes of her challenging collaborative relationship with a mother of one of her autistic students who was having several incidences of obsessive-compulsive behavior.
Olivia

Olivia has been working at the institution for six years now. Reflecting on my question of how it was like to collaborate, I could also sense that she had experienced a change in the way she had been collaborating with the different parents across her years of practice. For her, nowadays most parents have become more “sophisticated.” For Olivia, the experience itself does not make the collaborative process easier. She sarcastically says that in special education, the teacher should also specialize in psychology to keep up with the diverse personalities and needs of the children and the parents. The only thing that differentiates a novice teacher from an experienced one is the element of surprise and self-regulation. Moreover, when she was a new teacher, she used to take things more personal than she does now; this includes pressure from the management team and that of the parents. Throughout her years as a special educator, she has become less anxious upon the encountering of new types of parents and new types of relationships and commands. For Olivia, to collaborate, a teacher has to have a certain level of flexibility to change herself and the way she establishes relationships with people according to the situation. Just like Norma, Olivia trusts that collaboration is very important, but the teacher cannot do it all alone. She adds

“Sometimes when you are too immersed in wanting to help your student, you tend to go over the limits to do so forgetting the limitations set by your role. This may backfire at you, especially when you already have too much on your plate.”

In addition, many factors could stand in the way of her collaborative efforts whether from parents or from the institution. This is demonstrated in her collaborative story with the family members of a depressed autistic student. For Olivia, even if the teachers wanted to go the extra mile with the students and their parents, they could not because their job as teachers is too limited and restricted in time.

Jen

Jen another teacher who was previously a special educator in the USA believes deeply in the value of parent-teacher collaboration, but she identifies an interesting observation regarding its recognition from the school management team. Throughout her five years in the institution, she believes that not much recognition is given to the important role of the teacher as a “case manager” whereby she is the connection point between the student, his parents, the school
administration, the social worker, the therapists, and all other involved personnel. Several incidences in her job have led her to believe that. For Jen, not being recognized, makes collaboration a very challenging process since the teachers are not given enough time and tools to go about collaborating. In fact, she claims that a lot of decisions and information about the student is shared between the coordinators, therapists, and parents without putting the teacher in the loop. Comparing her current job to her prior one, she believes that in this institution the teacher is less autonomous than the usual. She also mentions that many of her colleagues are satisfied with this reality since they find it less risky and they do not hold more responsibilities than they already have on a daily basis concerning paperwork and duties. Throughout the interview, I could sense that Jen had a rebellious attitude and wanted to talk about the current challenges. She gives an example of her collaborative relationship with parents of very low socioeconomic background.

**Sara**

Sara is also a teacher who has been working around the same time as Jen. For Sara, to collaborate, a teacher needs a certain amount of maturity and experience to become better at collaborating. When asked how it was like to collaborate with parents at the institution, she distinguished between two kinds of relationships a teacher has with the parents. One that is superficial and maintains a certain amount of cooperation and another which is collaborative and involves the active work on an objective for the child. For Sara, collaborative relationships occur when an event interferes with the daily routine and the student’s optimal learning capacity which requires both parents and teacher to work together. In her opinion, the teacher should always be ready for such collaborative relationships to occur since students have special needs and are more fragile to such events. She claims that the formal practices implemented by the institution reserve the status of parental cooperation whereby there is a constant two-way correspondence between the parents and the teachers. This ensures parent-teacher rapport and exchange of knowledge between the institution and the outside environment. Sara believes that daily parent-teacher relationships are not always considered collaborative relationships. However, she considers them as great opportunities to get to know the parents more. She trusts that investing time and effort in such daily relationships paves the way to better collaborative relationships. She adds that it is not an easy thing for many reasons including time, amount of paperwork, number
of students. Sara talks about her collaborative story with one of her students’ mother after discovering that his anxiety was standing in the way of his engagement in school activities.

**Tara**

This is Tara’s second year as a special educator. For her collaboration makes so much difference in the child’s life and the life of the teacher. However, true collaboration does not occur unless the teacher truly wants it since it is not something easy and not something she technically has time for especially if she has more than five students with special needs in the classroom. Tara confesses about a reality she encounters, and it is that as a teacher, it is impossible to collaborate with all parents in the same way if there is no adequate support from the system and the parents. Moreover, she believes that empathy is a powerful tool in her willingness to collaborate with the parents of her students. She talks about how putting herself in the parents’ shoes help her cope with her relationships with them. She has come to the point of understanding and accepting of the fact that there are parents who think differently, act differently and understand differently depending on their situation and lifestyle. Tara talks about a successful collaborative story she had with a mother that worked miracles on her student.

**Rana**

Coming from a new teacher, Rana makes an interesting observation regarding collaboration and professional development. She believes that as a teacher, instead of going up the ladder vertically, the teacher grows horizontally through her experiences and practices. Collaboration, being part of this experience, is crucial for professional development and experience. Rana believes that the more she has the chance to interact with different parents, the better she will become at it. Based on her experience, she felt that she needed more guidance and mentoring throughout her first year. She feels that teachers have a general tendency to collaborate; however, they are not equipped with the necessary skills and tools to do so. They are left alone to learn through experience. Rana talks about the processes of her collaborative relationship with one of her students. The mother was very educated and a professional in the field. Establishing contact with the mother was very challenging and intimidating for her; however, when she successfully and independently found her way through.
4.2.1 Summary of Common Themes

The teachers’ perceptions on the value and the act of collaborating with the parents in the institution as a result of lived experiences and vivid stories that come to their mind and that are presented in the next section using temporality. As a summary, all teachers describe the value of collaboration in their own way, but all agree that it is a challenging process due to several factors. These include organizational factors like lack of recognition, no time, work overload, lack of support, number of students and more; environmental factors mostly the different personalities and needs of parents and their children and personal factors which include personal willingness to collaborate, social skills, empathy, acceptance, and more.

4.3 Stories of Collaborative Relationships and the three phases of collaboration

In this section, I present the narratives told by the different teachers. This part constituted the bulk and majority of the interview time. The teachers were given a chance to choose, recall and tell a story about successful or unsuccessful collaborative relationships with parents of their students in the institution. Given a chance to choose and talk about these different stories implies the fact that these experiences had a say in the shaping of the teacher's perception on the meaning of collaboration in the context of the institution. As mentioned earlier, the different stories told had some common processes involved in the development of the collaborative relationships which I present according to the conceptual framework of my study that deals with schools as CAS. I present the processes and trajectories of the different collaborative relationships in three phases which include the pre-collaborative phase, the collaborative phase, and the post-collaborative phase. Although I present the data in temporal order, it is not linear meaning it is not necessary that one event led to the other.

In this study, I refer to the pre-collaborative phase as the phase between the time the teacher senses the need to collaborate, reaches out, receives the message and disseminates the message to other internal agents. The collaborative phase takes place after the meeting with the parents that sets the grounds for the collaboration. The journey begins during which conflicts and solutions may arise as you will see in the different stories. The latter ends with the result of the collaborative relationship being either successful or unsuccessful. Lastly, comes the post-
collaborative phase or the after effect. This phase deals with the information received from the collaborative relationships, whether or not it brings changes to the teachers’ practice on an individual or systemic level and how it does so. In most of the interviews, I asked and searched for answers for insight regarding this phase since not one of the teachers mentioned such information when they were narrating their stories.

4.3.1 The Pre-collaborative Phase

As a recap, from the patterns and events of the different stories, the pre-collaborative phase can be divided into three phases during which the teacher senses the need to reach out to the external environment, reaches out and establishes contact, receives messages about the environment and spreads it internally.

**Sensing the need to reach out**

From all the stories told, the teachers were usually the first ones to recognize changes in the students’ behaviors leading them to reach out. The nature of their job and their continuous presence with their students rendered them sensors. All the participants started off their story with the realization of change in the behavior of their student.

A few days into the start of the year, Omar, Norma’s new autistic student had started to demonstrate severe obsessive-compulsive behaviors (OCD) that impeded his ability to function within the classroom. Norma describes that in all her years of experience, she had never experienced such severe OCD behavior and she thought that it was urgent to reach out for Omar’s mother.

Meanwhile, Rana, who was still during her first year as a special educator, received a challenging 15-year-old girl with cognitive delay named Mira. Throughout Mira’s first week of school, her behavior was undoubtedly unbearable, and Rana felt the urgency to reach out for the mother to understand the situation and the cause behind this behavior.

Tara who was also as new to the profession established a certain curiosity towards one of her autistic students Haysam. The latter had a very disruptive behavior and severe disinterest in
everything around him related to school. Tara describes having developed a deep interest in Haysam, and she wanted to know more about him by talking to his mother.

Olivia, on the other hand, had started realizing deterioration in Jeremy’s mood a few months into the school year. Jeremy was an autistic student who suddenly started showing signs of depression like loss of appetite, disinterest in once enjoyable activities, frequent repetitive movements, and more. These changes were red flags for Olivia to reach out for Jeremy’s family.

Similarly, Sara had been sensing that her student Khalil repetitively got angry and anxious in sessions that involved academics. He would shiver and get all sweaty whenever he would know that a math or science session was coming up. This keen observation made by Sara made her want to reach out to Khalil’s family and work on his case.

Jen the last teacher I interviewed, realized that Elsa, her student, was not being provided with enough food and hygiene for the school day. This broke her heart and made her worried especially that her student Elsa was a young four years old with Down syndrome who still needed help in her daily living skills.

As stated earlier, the nature of the teachers’ profession rendered them in close contact with their student throughout the whole day and allowed them to receive messages from their students through their changes in their behavior and routine. Another thing to note is that every one of the teachers experienced the receiving of messages in different ways. With the right observation skills, the teachers were able to sense something change regarding the students and their entourage. Also, all of the teachers shared a sense of curiosity to know more and reach out to the parents of their students especially since their students could not state what was changed clearly.

Reaching out and establishing contact

Despite being the first to recognize the need to reach out and collaborate, not one of the teachers did that before asking and consulting the coordinator. One of the teachers, Jen elaborated on this point saying

“I can go give a direct call to the mother and visit her without the knowledge of the coordinator, but I do not … why? Because I am scared, I would be blamed for doing something wrong… it’s against the rules but it all depends however on whom you have as a department coordinator.”
From what Jen and the other teachers said, it was evident that there were a hierarchy and chain of command that stood in the way of teacher communicating directly with the external environment. Instead of directly talking to the parents, Jen and other teachers had to take the consensus of the section coordinator (also known as the manager) first. Moreover, in Jen’s opinion, depending on the manager’s personality and outlook, contact is either allowed or impeded. For Jen, fear of blame and restrictions in policies and procedures were impeding her from acting autonomously. Jen complains that teachers here at the school do not take enough autonomy in such duties as establishing open lines of communication with the parent. I could sense from Jen opposed this discrimination between the role of the coordinator and her role as a teacher. She believed that she knew the student more than the coordinator did. Also, Jen describes the process of taking the coordinator’s consent as daunting since the coordinator was always busy running from meeting to meeting and rarely at her office.

After taking permission from the coordinator, Jen called Elsa’s parents. She had already known about Elsa’s home situation briefly from the school social worker in one of her case study meetings. However, through the phone call with Elsa’s mother, Jen knew that the father had recently become very ill and could not provide income for the family anymore, so the mother was working instead. From that point onward, Jen realized that she had to face challenges and collaborate closely with the parents for Elsa’s sake.

Tara, similar to Jen, felt that there was ambiguity in whether or not the institution gives its teachers the total freedom to communicate freely with parents and take responsibility for their actions. She put it this way:

“It is weird that at times you sense you do have the freedom to do what you want, but at other times it is the total opposite. For example, even if I get the ok for contacting a parent or intervening in a specific way with a child; if I do wrong, fail or upset the parent I get held accountable, and I would need to do lots and lots of explaining. Oh, and whenever you do something wrong, the whole school know, and you would need much time repairing your imaq. It happened with my best friend who works here.”

Tara believes that the institution has a general blaming environment whereby there is very little room to make mistakes, especially with parents and administrators. Usually, if something wrong happens, gossip will spread internally, and the one who made a mistake will have to pay for it.
When Tara asked the coordinator for consent to talk to Haysam’s mother, the coordinator agreed but informed her that she would not be able to do anything for the student. The coordinator continued saying that many people including herself have tried to change Haysam but could not and she blamed the mother for working and not dedicating time for her son. Tara called the mother who seemed so happy that Tara had shown interest in her child. Tara had warmly received detailed description and information that served as key factors to her success story with Haysam. The mother had explained for Tara about Haysam’s narrow selection of interests which were a few games on the Ipad and listening to rap music. He also loved surfing the internet randomly for airlines and was obsessed with flight tracking on a phone application called “flight radar.” The mother knew that it was against school policy to use games and cell phones in the classroom and that is the main reason behind his infamous behavior.

Both teachers took permission from their coordinators, after explaining the situation and called the parents of their students to find out more about what was going on. They both recognized the urgency to know more about their students and collaborate with the parents. The knowledge they obtained from the parents gave them a push forward in embarking on their collaborative journey.

The case was quite different for Norma and Sara since the mothers they were involved with had challenging personalities that both teachers had to deal with differently. For Norma, other than the fact that she had to keep up with Omar, she “suffered” from his mother’s anxiety and constant need for reassurance.

“She used to call and text me several times throughout the day wanting to know everything that was going on with her son as if I were his shadow teacher. I shared my concern with my manager who advised me to call her and to make it clear that I could not receive her calls and messages during school hours. So, I called her and addressed her about Omar’s challenges and his need for professional consultation. Moreover, I reminded her that I only answer phone calls from 3 pm till 4 pm. I was trying to put some limits while at the same time show genuine interest and concern. Unfortunately, I was misunderstood, and it backfired drastically.”

Norma took the initiative and reached out to the mother of her student with the intentions to figure some way to help him out. Norma’s interaction with the anxious mother made the latter even more anxious to the extent of panic. The mother did not send Omar to school the next day.
nor the day after. This turning point had almost destroyed the relationship between the two and needed the interference of a third party. The outcome of this conversation with the mother was surely not predicted, and Norma was shocked.

Sara also had to put up with a challenging mother. When Sara contacted Khalil’s mother regarding his behavior, things escalated fast as the latter presented a highly skeptical attitude and started blaming Sara for teaching her son in a wrong way. For Sara, she expressed that she felt all alone primarily since the school did not support her as much as she expected throughout the process. When asked what kind of support she needed, Sara shared the sadness she felt when the coordinator stood with the mother and asked Sara to change her teaching method with Khalil. She claimed that the coordinator did not even come in and observe her interaction with Khalil in the classroom before judging.

As for Rana, it was not the mother’s attitude that was standing in the way of progress but the mother’s profile and social status.

“She was a VIP student whose mother was a well-known researcher and academic in the field of education. She has a Ph.D. and was good friends with the institution’s headmaster.”

Throughout the first few meetings with the mother, Rana felt intimidated from the mother’s profile and was not at all open towards sharing with the mother how much of a lousy time Mira was showing her. Rana confessed that her lack of experience and fear of being accused of not being good enough scared her from reaching out for the mother. Throughout her struggle to reach out, Rana bumped into a sample assignment on Pinterest that would help her to communicate with the mother about the issue without having to meet with her face to face. In the assignment, the parents were asked to write a text on how they perceive their child in terms of his strength, weaknesses, interests, etc. in addition to a section where they had to say what they expected from their child and if they had any comments about the child for the teacher. Rana got an agreement from the coordinator and sent it. A couple of days after sending the assignments, Rana got a rich response from Mira’s mother telling her many useful facts about Mira which made Rana more knowledgeable of the possible causes of Mira’s behavior. This helped her shape a well-fit class behavioral plan for Mira and enhanced Rana’s self-confidence and
willingness to meet up with the mother and discuss Mira educational and behavioral plan in the IEP meeting.

“The assignment I found on Pinterest helped me a lot with getting to know Mira from the perspective of her mother. It helped me understand the possible causes for Mira’s behaviors which made me intervene more successfully. I believe that this assignment is essential for all new teachers dealing with parents!”

For Rana, the assignment she sent to the mother acted as a means of communication with the external environment without the hassle of the power dynamics that was lingering between her and Mira’s mother. This communication method allowed Rana to gain more knowledge about Mira and the environment which led her to take proper measures and it also rendered her more self-confident.

Unlike all the teacher, Olivia’s situation and the way she reached out was completely different. Jeremy, Olivia’s autistic student, was diagnosed with depression due to unknown reasons. In a matter of months, Jeremy’s academic level of performance and engagement regressed drastically. He also started to lose appetite. Daily, Olivia and Jeremy’s aunt would meet daily and have small talks while the aunt dropped Jeremy off to school. Jeremy lived with his aunt who used to drop him and pick him up from school daily. These informal encounters allowed Olivia and the aunt to establish a close relationship. When Jeremy’s behavior started to change, they quickly communicated. This rushed the process of reaching out. Olivia adds

“My daily conversations with Codi (Jeremy’s aunt) were constructive in finding out the reason for Jeremy’s depression. It turned out that Jeremy’s parents were getting a divorce and Codi felt that he was blaming himself for that. This was a turning point for seeking proper help for him.”

Hence, the informal way Olivia and Codi interacted allowed the two to exchange information more easily between each other. They had a closer relationship due to their daily 10 minutes conversation in the playground.
Receiving and Disseminating the message

In all the narratives, receiving the messages about the student’s environment and the different people involved was just before the beginning of the collaborative journey. Although somehow, the teachers were the first to sense and receive the messages from the external environment, they were indeed not the ones that spread the information to the considered personnel, internally. Other than the coordinator, the personnel mostly prevalent to be involved in the process were professionals from the therapy team whom Norma and Jen claimed to be not enough to serve a large number of students at the institution. In fact, before sharing her story, and when she was asked how it was like to collaborate with parents in the institution, Jen says

“I am not sure how it works that so much recognition is given to the therapy team and their opinion when they make up maybe 10% of the whole institution. There are two psychologist and two social workers for all 200 students here. The funny matter is that most of the inquiries revolving around parents and students’ even teachers are addressed to and through them, not to mention top management.”

Jen hoped I would not take her wrong. She believed so much in the professionalism, qualification and skill set of the therapy department members and she had a good relationship with all of them. However, she thought that it was illogical how the processes took place. While coding and assimilating the data, I got an idea about what Jen implied in our interview. The bulk of the messages received from the environment via the teacher ended up in the offices of the different department coordinators, the school psychologists, and the school social workers.

Olivia, who was struggling with Jeremy’s depression, was to wait until the school psychologist met with the parents to take appropriate measures. This was also true for Norma and Sara with both their students and their mothers. Both teachers waited until the scheduling of parental guidance meetings and counseling sessions for the mothers and their sons took place respectively. Both teachers expressed not being called to be part of the meetings; it was only the coordinator and the psychologists who took all the information from the teachers and met with the mothers individually.

Jen, on the other hand, was asked to wait for an intervention from the social worker who scheduled an urgent home visit. She was asked by the coordinator to make sure Elsa received daily meals from the school cafeteria for free.
Not much internal spreading took place with regards to Rana and Tara. For Rana, the coordinator did not follow up with her on the assignment she had given to the parents. She only waited for Rana to send the tentative IEP report that was going to be discussed with the mother during the IEP meeting. As for Tara, even though she did tell her department coordinator about her talk with Haysam’s mother, not much importance was given to the subject. It was not new information for the coordinator. The latter was convinced with the therapists’ theory that Haysam was “spoiled” and needed a “strict father figure” at home and a shadow teacher at school. She even confessed to Tara that she was planning to put him on probation the next year if the mother did not comply with the recommendations.

4.3.2 The Collaborative Phase

From the different narratives, there was no linear sequential order to when the collaborative relationship between the parents and the teachers truly began. Although all the issues that called out for collaboration were discussed in meetings with parents at home or in school, not all the meetings included the teachers. Nevertheless, in one way or another, each teacher found her way on the track of collaboration with the parents towards a common goal. As you will see in this section, not all relationships were easy nor were they all successful. Most teachers nagged about the lack of internal support from the organization. However, common across all the collaborative journeys were the teachers’ willingness to progress and find a solution. Not all succeeded but most did succeed. Their collaborative journeys all began with a commotion that either calmed down or just kept going and ended in more conflict. The only relationships that started on a good note and ended that way were those of Rana and Mira’s mother as well as Tara and Khalil’s mother.

For Rana, the information provided in the assignment was beneficial. It gave Rana a chance to implement proper behavioral management for Mira in the classroom, and it enhanced Rana’s self-confidence and willingness to collaborate with the mother. On the scheduled date of the IEP meeting, Rana described herself as going in with full confidence and self-efficacy. The IEP meeting turned out to be very successful for Rana. However, there seemed to be different viewpoints between the therapist and the mother regarding Mira’s behavioral management. It was evident that there was a lack of communication between the therapy team and Rana herself.
However, Rana claims that none of them opened up about Mira with her even when they pulled her out of class for therapy sessions. After the meeting, Rana showed Mira’s mother the behavioral chart and the behavioral intervention plan. They discussed it and generalized it between the house and the school. Rana says,

“I never imagined that our relationship would develop into a very fruitful one. I mean the person I was once intimidated by has now become a dear mentor and supporter. This not only applies to Mira but also towards other students. For example, the mother always shares online articles with me and has recently shared an interesting book called ‘conscious discipline’ that truly shaped the way I deal with students in my classroom.”

The outcome of their relationship was not predicted and less certain to be this way. However, shared interdependency and common interest were crucial to the success of a fruitful relationship despite differences in power dynamics, roles, experience, and professional know-how. With proper communication with the environment and change in practice to fit the situation, Rana was able to establish grounds for a productive and resourceful relationship.

Tara’s relationship with Haysam and his mother also shaped her professional development and passion for special education. Tara described a feeling of self-motivation triggered by her belief in Haysam’s hidden potential and by his mother’s pleasant and welcoming attitude. Tara says,

“I look at Naya not as a mother but as an interested and devoted team member. She was open to new ideas, trustful, respectful and never gave up in times of failure of new ideas. She appreciated the effort I made, looked beyond my inexperience and cherished my will power most importantly she was a fountain of information regarding Haysam.”

Establishing open communication with the mother, showing genuine interest, and being flexible in terms of applying new approaches to fit Haysam’s needs and interest allowed both Tara and Naya towards success with Haysam. Tara had found her way through to some teaching approaches that involved the integration of academic concepts within the narrow scope of Haysam’s interests. At times, Tara would agree with Haysam’s mom to bring him early in the morning or keep him a little more time at school in the afternoon in order for Tara to work with
him. Some approaches would work while others would not, but gradually, Haysam became a success story in school. It turned out that as he developed trust with his teacher, he had become more accepting to compromise in return for positive reinforcements.

Although there was a very good relationship between Olivia and Jeremy’s aunt, it was just not enough to bring Jeremy out of his depression. Olivia recalls feeling separate and far from what was going on between Jeremy’s parents and the school psychologist; however, she was very close to Codi, his aunt. She kept their daily communication and encountered going since she felt empathetic towards them both. Codi and Olivia would exchange daily information between themselves over the phone and through the meeting. Olivia claims that they had become very close friends and went out a few times. With time, Olivia started to look up articles online and advice from blogs that would help Jeremy in class and at home. She would also get messages from the coordinator or Codi on possible progress in the treatment he was given. However, things were never the same again. Olivia says,

“Despite constant seeking and calling for help, there was not much I could further do. The reality of his family’s situation was something beyond my control although I tried my best.”

When I asked what she thought was the problem in all of this, Olivia confessed that the school psychologist and Jeremy’s family, as well as other school personnel, were not working as a team to deal with Jeremy’s case. Despite the excellent external communication between Olivia and Codi, there was a minimal exchange between the psychologist and Olivia internally, and little recognition was given on how to implement proper strategies for Jeremy at school not only at home.

Feeling empathetic and deeply touched as well, Jen went out of her way to help Elsa and her family through their hard time. She organized donations from friends and family, and she even got approval for several bake sales at school targeted to fund Elsa’s family. The school social worker and the management team mainly took over since there was a social action support program for students and their parents which Jen believed could be much more effective. They started providing her food from school and provided free afternoon sessions for her while her mother was at work. However, Elsa’s case still demands support up until today. Due to several cases like Elsa at the organization, the latter is struggling to find sponsorships and scholarships to
cover all the needy entirely. Students covered by the ministry of social affairs which come from poor socio-economic backgrounds need additional money for transportation, activities, and stationary. At the end of her story, Jen wisely says

“I believe that my choice of story for this interview was to depict that the reality we live in is sometimes harder than we think and needs effort from many resources to compensate... not only through parent-teacher collaboration but also through interprofessional collaboration and community-school collaboration. In cases like Elsa, one type of collaboration alone cannot be in optimal condition without the presence of others.”

Jen believes that in cases similar to that of Elsa whereby there are so many intertwining challenges including financial, psychological, socio-economical, etc. need the collaboration of people from different domains contributing to different levels. A person like Elsa needs the ministry of social affairs to cover tuition fees, sponsor for transportation and additional school expenses, a provider for food and clothes, medical care, insurance, etc. However, a person like Jen is of big help to people like Elsa. If it were not for her initiative and passion, Elsa would not have gotten this much aid. Most of the projects Jen described doing were out of her own will. Jen claims that more than 25% of the students at the NGO have similar financial difficulties and the load is getting larger and larger by the year. Jen believes that as an organization who has a social action support program, a lot more can be done in terms of collaborating with the community and setting up fundraising events; however, the school social worker has already too much on her plate. Jen thinks that another person should be assigned as a project manager and work in collaboration with all professional inside the organization.

As for Sara and Norma who dealt with the difficult mothers and their children both claim that they worked a lot on themselves to be patient, accepting and find a way through. Unlike most of the other teachers, Norma believed that her manager was flexible, empowering, and supportive and seemed to trust her.

“I am lucky to have ended up in the PV section with Nada (manager). She listens to my concerns, she is supportive, and most importantly she trusts me and my work. This makes me very comfortable in my work, and I am never afraid to take action.”
Norma says that due to her manager’s character and support, she rarely senses any competition and fear amongst the teachers in the department. They all work together as a team and what is suitable for one is suitable for all and vice versa. After the meeting with Omar’s mom with the psychologist and Nada, the latter gave Norma a recap about some of the main points discussed in the meeting. She assured Norma that Omar was going to start on medication for his OCD behavior. However, when Norma asked her about the mother’s anxiety, she told her that the psychologist suggested that the mother gets some sessions but did not emphasize a lot on the issue. In Norma’s opinion, since the psychologist was not really with Omar the whole time, he did not feel the urge to find a solution for the mother. His goal was to relieve Omar from his OCD symptoms and was not very concerned with the mother’s anxiety. Norma, on the other hand, was in daily contact with Omar and the mother was still demonstrating signs of anxiety. Norma thought that she should do something about it. She did some research and asked some of her colleagues for advice. As a solution, Norma decided to establish an exceptional communication system with her. After sharing her idea with Nada, she wrote her a daily report of Omar’s behavior throughout the different sessions of the day accompanied by 1 or 2 photos of Omar via WhatsApp. Norma says

“This report takes 3 minutes of my day to fill out, and the photos take 5 minutes in total to be taken and sent. These 8 minutes I lose do serve pretty well to comfort Omar’s mother. Our relationship evolved due to these small out of the norm means of communication.”

Norma’s new idea, although not within the typical structures of communication found in the school, was successful and efficiently relieved the mother from her anxiety symptoms. Luckily, Norma’s manager valued Norma’s idea, and she was glad of its results.

Unfortunately, this was not the case for Sara. As mentioned earlier, Sara’s department manager stood with Khalil’s mother and asked Sara to take into consideration the mother’s suggestion on changing her teaching methods with Khalil. Sara agreed to change her teaching methods to those that were suggested by the mother. The latter claimed that her son had been studying this way for years with her and that he would improve if Sara does so. Like Sara suspected, the changes did not affect Khalil’s anxiety at all. His anxiety worsened. Sara confessed that she felt hopeless and demotivated at that point especially since the mother was rigid and blaming Sara instead of
providing helpful information. After a few weeks of real struggle, the coordinator and one of the speech therapists joined Sara’s class for an observation focusing on Khalil’s behavior. Luckily, the class schedule that day had both an art and math session in sequence.

At first, during the art session, Khalil was doing fine, but when Sara mentioned that it was time for math, Khalil’s behavior drastically changed to the extent that Sara could not give a proper explanation of the content. From the observation, it was undeniable that there was a link between academics and Khalil’s behavior. Hence, Khalil’s mother was asked for an urgent meeting to discuss the matter at hand. For Sara, the IEP meeting went smoothly at first but escalated as soon as the team discussed with the mother the observation concerning Khalil’s behavior. Sara had shown the behavioral tracking chart she did for Khalil and showed her the evident pattern emerging from the chart. She asked the mother if she was spending much time with him in the afternoon doing extra academic work since on Fridays Khalil would be excited to go home while throughout the rest of the week, he would get tantrums whenever leaving school. The mother confessed that she did do a few hours of extra one on one academic lessons with her son. The therapists asked the mother if she could reduce one on one sessions and let Khalil have some free time for himself since they thought it was too much for him and that might be a cause for his frustration. Instead of giving and taking with the team, Khalil’s mom refused and said that her son is a success story and started to express to everyone on the team her unrealistic expectations of her son. Sara was sure that the mother was in denial of her son’s case and reality and this was backfiring on him. The meeting finished with no tacit solutions. Sara did not want the meeting to end this way, but for her, the mother was very rigid, had unrealistic expectations of her son, and could not function with Sara and the team. Instead of acting as a team member, she acted like a concerned and skeptical customer. After the meeting, the coordinator tried several times to break the ice and started to send the mother videos of Khalil in class. Instead of realizing the truth, the mother started to negotiate other factors that might be causing his behavior like the intensity of the light and so on. Instead of being consistent with the ‘very scientific and obvious’ factor that was causing Khalil’s anxiety, the coordinator started to take the mother’s explanation into consideration and asked Sara to comply once again.

“The thing I could not understand is that I am not the one taking the decisions although I am the teacher and I am the one spending most of the time with him. For
me, all my intentions were for the good of the student, but for my manager it was different. Her actions and decisions portrayed her intentions of not wanting to lose a customer."

If it were for Sara, she would have acted differently. Just like Sara did comply with the mother’s suggestions, the mother had to comply with what Sara and the team were suggesting. It is a two-way relationship. Sara believed that the coordinator should have taken different actions with the mother by either meeting with the mother again, sending Sara or the social worker for a home visit, etc. This struggle went on throughout the year, and Sara gradually started losing interest and motivation. The fact that she could not lead on the case and take proper and consistent decisions with support and trust had an impact on her relationship with Khalil and her profession.

4.3.3 Post-collaborative Phase: Implications on practice and transfer of information

In the interview, I ask the teachers the following questions:

*Did this collaboration lead to change/improvement in practice? If so, at what level? Purely individual? Or do you have the chance to discuss changes on an organizational level?*

Pondering on the questions, all teachers admitted that a change did occur in their practice. Most stated that it was a learning experience for them. However, mostly, changes and improvements tended to be on the personal level.

For example, Norma said

“To tell you the truth, I learned a lot. It made me realize the importance of being open, rational instead of emotional, proactive instead of reactive and to think outside the box. My ideas like the daily communication report and the photos were approved by the school but were not shared with other school personnel although there is an upcoming project.”

For Norma, her collaborative experience was a success and made her realize that being open, rational and proactive play an essential role in her job as a teacher. The communication system that she had established with the mother was not shared and discussed throughout the whole
insititution although she did mention that her coordinator wanted to initiate a project next year which is an online application for sharing photos and daily reports with parents.

Rana believed that the assignment she sent could be useful for all teachers dealing with new parents. She also implied that the assignment was now part of her current practice. However, when she was asked whether or not she shared this with anyone, she said

“*I do share my story with a few colleagues, and now I am sharing it with you, but that is about it (laugh) I am allowed to use this in my practice, but it was not generalized to all the institution.*”

It was realized that not all successful ideas were selected and generalized by the organization’s leaders. Rana’s idea was not selected to be shared on an organizational level although for Rana it helps a teacher especially with a new student or with a novice teacher. However, Rana says some of her colleagues believe it is very beneficial and they have started using it.

Another example is that of Tara. The latter complained about the fact that although her collaboration with Haysam’s mother was indeed a success story, she only shared it with a few friends from the department she worked in.

“I do not know how to put it…. It is that my story with Haysam and his mother was not appreciated (she makes a gesture of quote-unquote with her fingers on the word appreciated). I mean not appreciation for me as a teacher but the story as a success. I am sure that there are other students in the institution like Haysam whose teachers and parents could use some tips and advice.”

Tara, although a new teacher, believed that her successful collaborative story with Haysam’s mother could be of help to other teachers as well. From her experience, she had obtained some key points and tips worth sharing with the rest of her colleagues. She believed that the fact that she was still a new teacher impeded the recognition and sharing process.

Some of the teachers like Sara believed that more opportunities should be given to teachers to express their challenges and frustrations in issues concerning their students’ families.
“Most of the time, training and discussions are about advanced teaching interventions and behavioral management but rarely about parent-teacher collaboration or parental involvement.”

For Sara, the fact that she could not take decisions by herself in her collaborative endeavors with Khalil’s mother made her fail and lose interest. She believes that teachers should be recognized more as case managers and less as passive agents. Also, more opportunities should be given for teachers to share their challenges and experiences and they (as well as the management) should get more training on PTC.

Others like Jen believed that her collaborative journey with Elsa’s parents as well as the community taught her the value of external collaboration with different community organizations and resources. She believes that

“One hand cannot clap alone and that, especially in Lebanon, all Lebanese should work together for a better tomorrow given the current political and economic situation.”

She believes that S.E organizations should put more effort into establishing community awareness and ask for more community support through different programs, projects, and initiatives. However, even though she voiced her concern regarding this issue, it was not taken into consideration. She believes that a person other than the social therapist (who already has many things going on) should take the lead on the social action support program. She also believes that if NGOs such as SNI work on promotion of identity on social media and other forms of media, much more support can be provided to the organization and its needy students.

For Olivia, her collaborative endeavors with Jeremy’s family made her realize the discrepancies the organizations had in terms of internal communication and support.

“The teachers are overwhelmed with their daily tasks, the social worker is overloaded, and it is always like that. Teachers make up most of the staff in the school, but as the number of teachers increases, there is more need for internal support and communication with multidisciplinary professionals including the management team especially in special education.”
According to Olivia, the institution offers a resource of diverse professionals who can help on so many levels whether through their expertise or experience but there seems to be a missing link in internal communication and teamwork that could result in better outcomes. When I asked her about possible solutions for enhancing internal communication, she suggested a weekly class or general meetings.

Hence in general, from what was heard in the stories, improvement and change happen mostly on the individual level and rarely transfer to the organizational level. Usually, most discussions on parent-teacher relationships happen informally between two or more teachers but never in meetings that include the management team as well as several teachers. Even the informal meetings are not many as teachers are mostly overwhelmed with their daily tasks.

4.4 Summing up the findings

Throughout their different narrative, the teachers share their view on PTC and its value in the organization. They constructed and gave meaning to PTC from their lived experiences. In the first part of this chapter, all teachers describe the value of collaboration in their own way. However, they all agree that it is a challenging process given different structural, environmental and personal factors. Some of the structural factors the teachers mention include paperwork overload, student number overload, work overload, lack of time, lack of recognition and more. Some of the environmental factors included the sophisticated needs of parents and unstable socio-economic level. As for the personal factors teachers mentioned willingness of parents to collaborate, social skills, empathy, acceptance, and more.

The second part of the findings chapter describes processes of the development of collaborative relationships amongst the parents and the teachers. Using the temporality of events, I present the data in three phases of the collaborative process: the pre-collaborative phase, the collaborative phase, and the post-collaborative phase. Throughout these different phases, there is an exchange between the internal and external environment via the different agents which in this case are the teachers as internal agents and the parents as external ones.

From the study, it was found that all teachers sensed something wrong with the student and his environment. The teachers acted as sensors to the environment and were usually the first ones to
sense and feel the urge to reach out to the parents externally and the staff internally. Despite their role, some of the teachers felt that they were not recognized as essential elements and were left there waiting for something to be done from the therapy team and higher management which some narrators claimed to be not enough to serve a large number of students at the institution. Moreover, two of the teachers confess about being afraid of the blaming environment they are surrounded with especially if the section coordinator is not friendly and good enough.

After reaching out to the different parents each teacher in her own way, either the coordinators or the therapists take the lead while keeping the teacher intervention on hold. In many cases, meetings are held between parents, coordinators, and therapists without the presence of the teacher. Although the coordinators and therapist do not control the teacher’s daily interaction with the child’s environment, they do make the choices in such situations. Despite the diversity of situations collected in the narrative, teachers managed to find their way on the collaborative track with the parents; however not all these relationships were successful. Most teachers complained about the lack of internal support from the organization. However, shared across all the collaborative journeys were the teachers’ willingness to progress and find a solution. Also, it was found that open lines of communication between the teachers and parent and between the teachers and other school staff were necessary for the collaborative journey.

Finally, when asked whether or not they learned anything from their experiences in the stories all teachers admitted that a transformation did occur in their practice. Most stated that it was a learning experience for them. However, mostly, changes and improvements tended to be more on the personal level than on the structural level. A summary of these findings is found in table 2 (Appendix B).

In the next chapter, I analyze and discuss my findings with relevance to CAS frameworks establishing connections aiming to answer valuable questions related to the issue of PTC.
5. Discussion

I had mentioned earlier in the conceptual framework that I approach PTC by looking at the SN institution as a developing organism embedded and highly influenced by its environment that is constantly changing. In other words, I look at the organization from a complexity perspective as a complex adaptive system. This perspective on the organization is inspired from the ecological system’s perspective that looks at the child instead of the organization as an organism that is extremely influenced by the interactions that occur with and between his surrounding environments. As shown in the literature chapter, most of the studies on PTC are based on the ecological system’s perspective which encourages the development of collaboration between the school and the family given its crucial role in the healthy development of the child. In this chapter, I analyze the findings with an assumption that the collaboration occurring between and across the organization and its environment is a necessary element for organizational adaptation.

Given that teachers and parents form most of the collaborative relationships in the organization, I aim at investigating the processes of parent-teacher collaboration in one S.E institution in Lebanon. Through my interviews with six teachers working at the institution, I look into their reflections on experiences of successful and unsuccessful collaborative relationships with parents of their special needs students. Throughout the narratives, I focus on their reflections of the organizational support and the changes and learning experiences resulting from such collaborative relationships. In this chapter, I discuss and analyze the findings from the narratives by creating a discussion between the data and the reference literature on CAS, my conceptual framework and the main concepts used in this research. Concerning the three parts of my research question, this chapter will be divided into three areas of discussion which include: the processes involved in PTC at the organization, the organizational support taking place throughout the process, and the organizational learning processes resulting from PTC. I begin the discussion chapter by showing how the findings collected imply the complex adaptive nature of the S.E organization in this study. Then, I go about analyzing the processes involved in PTC at the organization as described by the teachers in relation to the literature on CAS involving insights from Morrison (2007) and Sandaker (2008). Afterward, I discuss the teacher’s reflections on the organizational support they experience throughout the process in relation to the literature on adaptive leadership style suggested by Northouse (2006) in the literature. Finally, I
discuss the learning processes taking place on an organizational and individual level with respect to the findings in the interviews and the literature on learning activity in CAS as described by Stacey (2003).

5.1 SNI holding characteristics of CAS

Several insights from the teachers’ descriptions contributed to the assumption that the S.E. institution in which I conducted my study holds several characteristics of CAS. To start with, some of the teachers compare today’s collaborative relationships to older days when the collaboration was easier. As described by the teachers, the organization has become much larger with many professionals consuming diverse roles that are still not enough to cater for a large number of students enrolled. These students are accompanied by a variety of special needs and situations that demand extra support especially since the country is facing challenges on the socio-economic and socio-political level. Moreover, some teachers describe a wide array of parents distributed on a spectrum ranging from parents who need a lot of the socio-economical and educational support to parents who are very educated and demand high-quality services. From their descriptions, the teachers point out the dynamic interplay that occurs within and between the organization and its unpredictable environment. In each of their stories, there is a description of dynamic non-linear interactions and information exchange between a number of diverse agents including therapists, managers, departments, teachers, parents, students, etc. Also, one of the stories reveals the immense dependency of the organization on larger systems including the government, ministry of social affairs and the community for student support and organizational continuity. The descriptions of these internal and external nested systems portray the core feature of CAS (Morrison, 2007; Axelrod and Cohen 2000). Furthermore, all the collaborative relationships that are narrated in the different stories resulted from an intention of response and adaptation to a change in the environment surrounding the student and the organization at a micro and macro level respectively. These findings imply that the S.E. organization in which I conduct my study holds characteristics of CAS. These characteristics include interconnectedness to a complex, unpredictable environment known for its political, economic and social fluctuations, nested systems, presence of dynamic non-linear interactions between agents within and across the organization, and a natural tendency for adaptation to changes in the environment (Keshavarz et al., 2010).
5.2 Processes involved in PTC at the Organization

The stories of collaborative processes told by the teachers are reflections of what they perceive as the reality of the social structures experienced in the organization. In general, the teachers value their collaboration with the parents of their students given its positive outcome on the student and their practice. However, they all express the difficulty in collaborating with parents due to challenges on the environmental, structural and personal level mentioned earlier in the findings chapter. Other than the factors they directly mentioned, some of the challenges were indirectly derived from their different stories. These challenges were mainly due to formal structures and managerial approaches related to the teachers’ interaction with the parents which will be discussed in the next header. It is worth reminding the reader that this study only portrays the perceptions of teachers and what they perceive as real. Hence, the aim of this discussion is not to judge processes as right or wrong but to reflect the reality of collaborative relationships experienced by the teachers in relation to the assumption that the organization holds characteristic of complex adaptive systems.

5.2.1 Formal structures and their constraints on variation and interaction

In all their narratives, the teachers claimed that they were the first to recognize the changes in their students and they were the first to sense the need of reaching out to the parents. This finding supports Morrison’s (2007) claims that teachers are the most knowledgeable of the links (i.e., students) between the internal and external environment in the school organization. In my analysis, this finding seems logical given the amount of time the teachers spend with their students throughout the day. Despite their key roles in sensing changes, the teachers in the study claimed that they were not acknowledged by the organization’s management since they lacked autonomy in open communication with the parents. Moreover, the teachers mentioned that there were organizational policies involved in communication with the parents which hindered teachers from reaching out to the parents without the permission of the section coordinator. Besides the daily formal modes of communication (i.e., agenda notes and IEP meetings), the teachers were not allowed to establish contact with the parents without the consensus and follow up of the department coordinator. All of the teachers claimed that they had to take permission from the department coordinator before reaching out and establishing direct contact with the
parents. Although it was merely impossible, the organizational policy required that the department coordinators know of and take decisions of all of the ‘out of the normal’ issues regarding the students and their parents.

In my analysis, this restriction on the establishment of unsupervised communication with the parents portrays willingness of the management to reduce interactions and variation of behavior occurring between agents and their environment. The fact that the section coordinators were the ones to give permission to the teachers to communicate with parents reflect hierarchy and lines of commands which favor formal lines of communication and controlled interaction. The presence of such a policy contradicts the organizational management that is suggested by Sandaker (2009) that fits complex adaptive systems. When Sandaker (2009) describes the paradigm shift in organizational management, she talks about the shift of managerial approaches to fit the complexity of the organization bearing in mind the variability in interaction and interactivity of the different elements involved on a micro and macro level. This does not appear to be the case in the institution where I conduct my study. The fact that the teachers had to take permission from the coordinators and the latter had the power to make decisions and control reveal a general impression of organizational intention to limiting interaction and constraining variation in agent behavior. Hence, it appeared to be that the way the S.N organization was managed conflicts with its complex nature. The fact that I did not interview someone from the management team to find out more about these limiting structural forms is a limitation of this study. Nevertheless, no matter what the reason behind the presence of such a policy, the institution seems to suffer from finding the balance between the constraint of behavioral variation and its permission. This complies with Sandaker (2009) who believes that when approaching variation in CAS there is the challenge of finding the balance between the constraint of variation to maximize standardization of processes and the permission of variation as the organization aspires for finding solutions in a continually changing environment.

5.2.2 Interaction and information exchange

Despite the reality of the constraining formal structures involved in the processes of PTC, most of the teachers managed to reach out to the parents in one way or another. Beyond the formal structures, the organization had its own structures of interactions that had emergent patterns.
From the analysis of the narratives, I found discrepancies in the implementation of the policy mentioned earlier. It was obvious that the management was not applying the control it had aspired for. In other words, it was logically impossible for the coordinators to control all interactions that had taken place between teachers and the parents on a daily basis due to the presence of diverse modes of communication and chances of interaction present at the organization. This complies with Keshavarz et al. (2010) which claim that there is a complex relationship between the formal “official” structures and the everyday emergent web of dynamic and non-linear interactions that take place in a complex adaptive system. Although all teachers did take consent to reach out to the parents, the coordinator was not capable of tracking and following up on all the interactions that took place between the teachers and the parents. There were different modes of communication channels for the exchange of information. Reaching out to the parents about issues concerning the student was mainly took several forms. Most of the teachers first initiated reach out through phone calls while others like Olivia had daily informal meetings in the playground with her student’s aunt. Rana and Norma had established a written communication system amongst them, and the parents which they claimed was very useful. This complies with the Morrison (2007) who opines that in schools considered CAS open lines of communications emerge and spread the messages coming from the external environment to the internal environment in many forms including written communication, informal encounters, visits to homes and visits to schools, formal meeting and associations, school events, informal meetings, etc. These open lines of communication were resourceful in the way information was exchanged between the internal and external environment; however, the interactions did not always have predictable outcomes. This also complies with the literature on CAS whereby interactions between agents are seen as unpredictable and prone to unexpected results.

5.2.3 Internal communication channels and dissemination of messages received

Despite the forms of interactions and outcomes of the interactions between the parents and the teachers, all of the latter received valuable information concerning the student. This is an indicator of how much exchange between the internal and external environment is essential for the student which ultimately has a positive effect on the adaptation of the organization. However, the process of information exchange is not effective without the presence of internal lines of
communication and coordination within the organization that allows for the dissemination of the information to the right people and the right time (Morrison, 2007). Mainly, in the different stories, the department coordinators played a key role in disseminating the messages received by the teachers internally in the organization. In fact, the process of spreading the messages was a subjective process directly linked to the decision of the coordinator. If the latter had seen it suitable for the message to be spread it would but if not then it would not. For example, with the case of Rana and Tara, the information they got from the parents was hardly recognized by the coordinator as valuable, so it was not spread to the therapists and other concerned personnel. In fact, in Rana’s case, the lack of proper message dissemination led to conflict between the mother and the therapists since there was clearly conflicting outlooks on the therapists’ perception of Mira and that of Rana. As for Tara, the information she gave out to the coordinator was seen by the latter as invaluable and were not spread to the therapy team which could have been of great help in supporting Tara on her journey with Haysam and the mother. As for the rest of the teachers, the coordinators did spread the message to the concerned personnel. In Jen’s case, the message was sent through the coordinator to the school social worker and administration. In Sara and Norma’s case, the messages were disseminated to the school psychologist through the coordinator as well.

5.2.4 Organizational actions on messages received

The actions taken by the organization in response to the messages received were not linear and straightforward. It involved a complex array of several internal decision makers other than the teachers. In fact, it was surprising to note that most of the messages received and disseminated internally in the organization were acted upon by the therapy team and coordinator with minimal communication and involvement of the teacher. There seemed to be a lack of internal communication and team decision making involving all concerned personnel to act upon the messages received. Not one of the teachers mentioned taking part in a meeting with the coordinators or therapists to discuss the issue at hand and take actions accordingly. On the contrary, teachers like Olivia and Sara were asked to lay back until given instructions to do otherwise. Given the nature of their presence with the students most of the time, it was hard for them to do so. Although they considered themselves to be main members of the team, they did
not feel that way. In Olivia’s case, as she continued communication with the aunt, the coordinator and school psychologist had decided to take action by meeting with Jeremy’s parents and working out a plan without Olivia’s presence. It was the same in Norma and Sara’s case, whereby the coordinator and school psychologist decided to meet with the mother and investigate the students’ behaviors without the presence of their teachers. Nevertheless, the difference between Norma and Sara’s case was that the former was kept in the loop of what was going on in the meetings. Moreover, Norma’s input and ideas were taken into consideration by the coordinator in an indirect way. She was given the freedom to implement her ideas in the classroom. Sara, on the other hand, had to comply with decisions and changes that she was against. As for Jen, she worked in parallel alongside the social worker and the school administration. She organized a bake sale for Elsa and provided her with daily meals; however, she did not feel that all of her ideas were taken into consideration by the school administration. On the other hand, in Tara and Rana’s case, the fact that they were all alone in collaboration with the parents, the actions they took on a personal level with regard to the information they received helped them reach desirable results. Overall, organizational changes did occur in response to the information received from the environment. However; in most cases, the teachers were not included in the decision making regarding that change process.

5.2.5 External information dissemination

Looking at the big picture one can derive that the teachers act as the active sensors to changes in the environment. They sense, retrieve and disseminate the information they get from the environment to the department coordinators which in turn select who, if any, other concerned personnel receive the messages as well. Although they play an active role as sensors and receivers of messages, teachers barely take active roles in decision-making processes concerning responses to these messages. In fact, in most of the cases, they act as passive agents that follow instructions from their department coordinator. In the case of Olivia and Sara, the collaborative relationship was more of parent-coordinator than that of PTC. Sara and Olivia only acted as passive agents who followed instructions and rarely took any decisions. As for Jen and Norma, it was more of parent-organization collaboration whereby the teachers’ ideas were taken into consideration, but they were not the direct decision makers who communicated and exchanged
intervention plans with the parents. As for Rana and Tara, their collaborative journeys with the parents without the involvement of the coordinator and therapy team portray a parent-teacher collaborative process whereby the teachers and the mothers shared ideas, set goals and worked together on their achievement. The teachers acted as internal agents who sensed and received messages, took decisions, worked on changes, and exchanged information with the external environment in a dynamic non-linear process. In my analysis, I do not regard the Rana and Tara’s collaborative relationships as the ideal although their stories do represent a parent-teacher collaboration. The reason I do not regard them as ideal is that internal inter-professional collaboration is important for the exchange of expert ideas and insights regarding the student and it could be beneficial for the organization as a whole especially if the professional exist within the same organization. This insight was given out by Olivia who believes that although SNI has a diverse number of professionals, there are not enough opportunities for communication between the professionals for better outcomes. Power imbalances, hierarchy, and intentions for control stand in the way of having a supportive environment that encourages inter-professional and cross-boundary collaborative relationships.

5.3 Organizational support throughout the process

Reading through the findings chapter, one could see that the teachers had to go through different and similar challenges throughout their collaborative relationship with the parents. These challenges varied in different situations but were mostly adaptive in nature. The characteristics of these challenges complied with descriptions of adaptive challenges. First, all of the teachers could not find out what was wrong with the student without contacting the parents mostly since the students had special needs and were not expressive. Second, for the teachers, the solutions for these challenges had no clear cut solution and needed support and time. They required changes on several levels including the relationship with the parents, flexibility in teaching approaches, openness to new roles and opinions, etc. Nevertheless, the approaches taken towards these adaptive challenges were not satisfactory. Most of the teachers, with a few exceptions, suffered from lack of internal support and recognition. With respect to the literature, when approaching adaptive challenges in CASs, there exist several leadership styles that could be of help in the
process. In this study, I had discussed adaptive leadership which suggests six leader behaviors favorable to be present for better adaptation (Northouse, 2016). These include getting on the balcony, differentiating between technical and adaptive challenges, creating an environment that promotes stress regulation, encouraging teachers that are going through a hard time to focus on the current job, giving work back to the people, and protecting leadership voices from below (Northouse, 2016). In this section, I do not aim to compare the behaviors of the leaders at the institutions to those suggested in adaptive leadership. This is not my intention since there could be many factors at interplay and this requires me to interview not only teachers but also coordinators, therapists, and parents. My intentions in this section are to portray the existing situation from the perspectives of the teachers and analyze them with respect to those suggested by adaptive leadership behavior. However, I do not prove or discredit any action with respect to the concepts. I only portray what the teachers reflect as the reality of the given situation. After all, the stories and reflections told by the teachers’ influence and are influenced by their own experiences within the organization.

5.3.1 Creating a suitable empowering and motivating environment

Throughout the interviews, there was a general impression of intimidation from the side of the teachers. Besides the presence of formal structures and hierarchy, the factor of fear was present in teachers like Sara, Jen, Rana, and others. This fear was due to several factors including the presence of a blaming environment which left the teachers with little room to make mistakes and take risks. The intensity of the blaming environment differed from one section to another depending on the personality and managerial approach of the coordinator in charge. Apparently, some sections like that of Norma had a supportive environment whereby the teachers were free to share new ideas with the coordinator without worrying about negative response or rejection. In Norma’s case, although the structural factors prohibited her from joining the meeting with the mother, coordinator and the psychologist. Her coordinator discussed with her all the information handled in the meeting and was supportive of Norma’s insights and ideas on the issue. Norma described her coordinator as being helpful, flexible, empowering, and supportive.

In other departments, however, the motivation to take action in innovative and creative ways was diminished from intimidation of being blamed in case something went wrong. For example, Tara
describes herself as making a courageous leap forward in going against the coordinator’s judgment and working with Haysam’s mother on her own account. If any conflict had risen from her collaborative journey with Haysam’s mother, Tara would have been directly blamed and held accountable for the situation. Moreover, she claims that she would have suffered a lot from gossip which quickly spread throughout the whole organization.

Other than the presence of a blaming environment, some teachers experienced a lack of internal psychological support in times where they needed it the most. For example, Rana’s novelty and lack of experience left her intimidated by the social status of Mira’s mother. The asymmetrical power dynamics that existed between her and the mother left her in total fear of approaching the mother and communicating with her. Rana mentions that there she was barely given any support regarding her situation and found herself working alone towards finding a solution. Rana found an idea on Pinterest which she claimed helped her to overcome the asymmetrical power dynamics present between her and the mother and embark on a smooth collaborative journey. Tara and Rana were one of few teachers who would take the initiative to work on themselves amidst a demotivating and blaming environment.

Moreover, teachers like Olivia and Sara were going through hard times which led to demotivation and frustration from the issue at hand especially since they felt that they did not listen to them. For Olivia, the fact that she was not being included on the collaborative team and instead of getting all the information from Jeremy’s aunt made her feel hopeless. She was given little recognition and no chance to express her hopelessness. Olivia claims that if it were not for her personal empathy towards Jeremy and her friendship with his aunt, she would not have continued with her personal endeavors to help Jeremy as much as possible. Similarly, Sara had been going through a very hard time coping with the challenging relationship she was facing with her student’s mother. She felt demotivated and showed it several times orally and through her actions, but she never got the encouragement she needed. On the contrary, her coordinator was contributing to her misery.

Some of the main behaviors of a leader as mentioned by Northouse (2016) is to create a suitable environment by allowing occasions for employees to share and discuss difficulties with a blame-free approach, and by empowering, motivating, orienting and protecting them. It is also mentioned that leaders should encourage employees going through adaptive challenges to focus
and continue working on their jobs. Again, as I mentioned earlier, I have limited my study to look into the perspectives of teachers; however, there could be many reasons why there is diversity in managerial approaches across the different sections. Many factors like coordinator competency level, pressure from higher management on the coordinator and poor teacher performance could play a role in the existence of such environments.

5.3.2 Acknowledging teachers’ opinion and letting them do their job

As implied in the different narratives, the coordinators have an active role in disseminating and acting upon changes in the environment. Because of the formal structures discussed at the beginning of the chapter, in most of the cases, the coordinators act as primary decision makers in issues including change and adaptation. Their role as coordinators allows them to exchange information from and to the different agents involved and take decisions concerning the situations accordingly. Unfortunately, this was not the case with all the coordinators mentioned in the narratives. Through the analysis process of the findings, I realized that all of the teachers, with a few exceptions, suffered from lack of recognition by the coordinators. For example, in Sara’s case, throughout the collaborative endeavors with the mother, the coordinator took the decisions on Sara’s behalf without taking Sara’s perspective on the issue at hand. Although Sara’s motive was for the good of the student, the coordinator took decisions that seemed to be generated from fear of losing a customer. This situation left Sara as a passive member who only followed instructions. This drained Sara and made her lose interest in her job and the student. Similarly, not allowing Olivia to have access to information regarding Jeremy’s progress in the sessions he was attending with the psychologist and not considering her work with Jeremy in the classroom as an effective contributor to his overall progress plan was giving Olivia a hard time. For Jen, although she was working alongside the social worker and school administration regarding Elsa’s case, her opinion on initiating projects for engagement with the community and more support was not acknowledged by the team which rendered her feeling unsatisfied towards the organization’s duties with Elsa. In general, not acknowledging the teachers’ opinions, ideas and role backfired on the general progress of the relationship and often ended with dissatisfaction on the teacher’s end. Since I interviewed teachers only, I do not have a clear idea on why most teachers are not given the trust and autonomy they need to go about collaborating with the
parents and doing their job in the way they find suitable in every situation. This could be related to a variety of factors that are beyond the realm of this study.

5.3.3 Encouraging teacher leadership

Throughout the different stories, when a few teachers were given a chance to go about making decisions and implementing them, successful collaborative relationships emerged. For example, in Norma’s story, the coordinator allowed room for Norma to implement and lead on her collaborative process with the mother despite the fact that their relationship started off with a conflict. The coordinator trusted Norma’s idea and willingness to find a solution. By giving Norma the chance to implement the unique communication system with the mother, satisfying results emerged which positively impacted Norma, the student and the parent and thus the organization as a whole. However, it is not always the case. By offering teachers trust to make decisions and go about doing their jobs, the coordinators take a risk which might end up with unsatisfying results. Teachers might take wrong decisions or make mistakes which could end up in negative outcomes, but the consequences of not allowing them to take leadership in situations regarding their students might have much more serious effects like the ones faced with Sara. When the coordinators gave the teachers a chance to take up leadership roles whether consciously like Norma’s case or unconsciously like Rana and Tara’s case, there appeared to be variety in actions taken and creativity in the ideas implemented. This complies with Axelrod and Cohen (2000) who suggest that in order to harness complexity, organizations would create opportunities where there could be a massive increase in the variety of suggested, proposed and implemented practices. Given the diversity of interactions taking place on a daily basis in the different departments at the organization, it is merely impossible for the coordinators to take the lead and procession of all the information exchange and decision-making processes happening between the teachers and the parents. Logically, allowing teachers to go about doing their jobs as leaders in the collaborative relationships with the parents allow for self-organization and adaptation although it involves a certain percentage of risk. Analyzing the different stories I could derive that allowing the teacher leadership and informal network dynamics to take place between the different agents instead of controlling and possessing it resulted in better outcomes regarding parent-teacher collaborative processes in general and teacher satisfaction in specific.
5.4 Adaptive Organization

Before sharing her story with me, Rana said that the more the teachers interact with the surrounding, the more they learn and the more they develop their experiences and practices. Her observation complies with Stacey (2003) who believes that learning occurs as a result of the interaction of interdependent individuals. For Rana, since collaboration allows for interaction and information exchange, it is crucial for professional development and experience. Rana believes that the more she has the chance to interact with different parents, the better of a teacher she will become. The interviews revealed that the learning process was emergent in nature. Learning resulted from the interactions of the teachers with the different agents including the parents. Across the different stories, we could see a repetitive pattern of interaction occurring between several agents in different situation which led to the emergence of new knowledge and changes in behaviors. All teachers claimed that they had learned something from their interaction which they believe have transformed them on the personal and professional level. This also complies with Stacey (2003) who mentions that in CAS when individuals interact together, knowledge and behavioral patterns emerge in the form of themes. These themes make up the individuals’ experiences of working together. Although they take the form of habits, these themes have the capacity to transform the individual and the system. This applies to teachers in this study who have gone through successful and unsuccessful collaborative relationships. For example, Norma claimed that her collaborative endeavors with the mother had taught her to be open, rational and proactive. For Tara, her interactions and information exchange with the mother allowed her to be more flexible in the application of teaching approaches which best fit individual student needs. For Jen, her interaction and collaboration with the different agents involved in helping Elsa made her realize the importance of increasing the network of collaborative relationship for more sustainability. Olivia’s experience, on the other hand, made her realize the importance of inter-professional communication and collaboration for better outcomes of the student. As for Sara, her daunting experience with the mother and the coordinator gave her a better understanding of the reality of her limitations as a teacher in that organization and the importance of team communication and opinion consideration. As much as learning had occurred on a personal level, the teachers claimed that not much learning had
occurred on a large scale level mainly because the teachers did not have the chance to share knowledge acquired with others in the organization and vice versa.

5.4.1 Selection and Sharing of Knowledge

All of the teachers, with no exceptions, asked for opportunities for better internal communication. Sara believes that more opportunities should be given for teachers to share their challenges and experiences of collaborative relationships with each other and with the school management team. She believes that more opportunities should be given to the teachers so they would voice their concern and share challenges. Similarly, Olivia believed that there should exist more occasions and multi-disciplinary meetings to discuss different cases and exchange different viewpoints from different professions who are all working on the same case. She aspires for a system of open communication between the teacher and other professionals whereby all team members working with the same student have access to valuable information and progress reports. Jen also suggested that general meetings and maybe a member club be established for teachers like her who are interested in the implementation of large scale community projects that could help support the organization. These suggestions from the teachers comply with Morrison (2007) who believes that in order to reach organizational learning capacity, school leaders should take into consideration the importance of the data exchange that takes place between agents by providing open lines of communication and proper internal communication systems. I believe that monthly school conferences discussing collaborative relationships could help create more opportunities for teachers to share knowledge and talk openly regarding this issue.

In addition, teachers like Tara, Norma, and Rana who succeeded in their collaborative relationships with ideas they think are helpful, and worth sharing complained of not getting the chance to do so unless with their close circle of colleagues. For Tara, she supposed that the fact that she was a novice teacher impeded the organization from recognizing and sharing her success story. While Rana was surprised by the fact that even though her assignment could be of great help for teachers, it was not shared; not even in the department, she worked in. As for Norma, her communication system did inspire the section coordinator to look into initiating a project of an online application platform for sharing photos and daily reports with parents. When managing
an organization from a complexity perspective, the management encourages interaction and variation in organizational behaviors. The selection, sharing, and replication of outstanding behaviors and performance and the selection, sharing, and discontinuation of negative ones is an act of organizational learning. Complying with the literature on CAS, the selection and the sharing of knowledge is an important hallmark in harnessing complexity in an organization (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). Agents and strategies are selected and recopied according to performance measures, as a means of exploitation given the latter’s significance in organizational adaptation (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000). Moreover, sharing the ideas and knowledge of all participants collectively makes the organization’s learning capacity synergistic where members learn from each other. The selection process can take several forms including the creation of social activities like prizes like “Collaborator of the year” in order to encourage the development and sharing of valued criteria and ideas related to collaboration (Axelrod & Cohen, 2000).

Nevertheless, with respect to my analysis, this could never happen if the organization management and the way policies and procedure are designed do not encourage behavioral variation and teacher leadership in interactions. It would be contradicting to implement the selection of ideas, agents and strategies if the organization still implements policies and formal structures that constraint teacher autonomy, decision making, creativity, and open communication internally and externally. Without the mindset of wanting to harness complexity through interaction and variation, it would not be beneficial to go about selecting and sharing knowledge and ideas.

5.5 Summary of discussion

This chapter was structured in a way that fits the three different areas of focus in the research question. Throughout the process, I engage in the discussion of finding related to these areas with respect to the literature and my own analysis. I begin the chapter by showing how the findings of this study imply that the S.E. organization holds characteristic of CAS including interconnectedness to a complex, unpredictable environment known for its political, economic and social fluctuations, nested systems, presence of dynamic non-linear interactions between agents within and across the organization, and a natural tendency for adaptation to changes in the
environment. In the first of the three areas, I discuss the process involved in the development of PTC at the organization. Despite their key roles in sensing changes in the environment, it seemed that organizational policies and formal structures impeded the teachers from initiating and maintain open communication with the parents without the permission and supervision of the section coordinator. These policies on communication reflect motives of organizational management to restrict interactions and variation of behavior occurring between agents and their environment. This contradicts the literature on CAS which encourages the development of managerial approaches to fit the complexity of the organization encouraging the variability in interaction and interactivity of the different elements involved on a micro and macro level.

Reasons behind the existence of such policies were not tackled in this study. Beyond the formal structures, the organization had its own structures of interactions that had emergent patterns. It was impossible for the coordinators to control all interactions that had taken place between teachers and the parents on a daily basis due to the presence of diverse modes of communication and chances of interaction present at the organization. However, the process of receiving, disseminating and acting upon the information received from the parents was not a smooth process for the teachers and, in many cases, impeded the development of the collaborative relationship. This was because hierarchy and imbalanced power dynamics took place between teachers and other internal agents (coordinators and therapists) who had more authority and chances to lead on and take action without the close involvement of the teacher.

This reality along with other reasons led teachers to believe that they rarely received any organizational and environmental support throughout their collaborative endeavors which I discuss in the second part of this chapter. The teachers were facing adaptive challenges which in turn needed support as they required change on many levels including their relationship with the parents, flexibility in teaching approaches, openness to new roles and opinions, etc. However, with respect to the teachers, the management approaches taken towards these adaptive challenges were not helpful. To start with, teachers complained about the lack of a suitable empowering and motivating environment. Some teachers provided a general impression of fear from a blaming environment and the spread of gossip. Other teachers complained from lack of psychological support and encouragement. In addition, there was evidence from the stories that the teachers’ opinions were not acknowledged and that they were not left to do their jobs. In other words, their
voice was not always heard, and they were not always given a chance to take the lead in their collaborative relationship with parents. These findings contradict the literature on adaptive leadership which suggests six leader behaviors that include: getting on the balcony, differentiation between technical and adaptive challenges, creating an environment that promotes stress regulation, encourages teachers that are going through a hard time to focus on the current job, give work back to the people concerned, and protecting leadership voices from below (Northouse, 2016).

In the last part of the chapter, I discuss the learning process involved in PTC at the organization. All teachers claimed that they had learned something from their interactions which they believe have transformed them on the personal and professional level. This learning process had emerged from the patterns of interaction that took place between the teachers and other external and internal agents. Although teachers confess to learning on an individual level, they claimed that not much of their knowledge was shared, selected or discussed. Some teachers were asking for the development of internal communication systems whereby knowledge can be shared equally and where challenges and experiences regarding collaborative relationships could be handled and discussed. I suggest monthly school conferences discussing collaborative relationships could help create more opportunities for teachers to share knowledge and talk openly regarding this issue. Other teachers aspired for sharing their success stories and ideas with other personnel. This complies with the concept of selection as a hallmark to harnessing complexity in CAS.
6. Conclusion

In this research, I aimed to get a better understanding of parent-teacher collaboration (PTC) in one special education institution located in Lebanon from the perspectives of the teachers working there. I was interested in investigating the processes involved in the development of their collaborative relationships with the parents. Through their stories of successful and unsuccessful collaborative relationships, I looked into how the teachers as employees perceived the role of their organization in supporting them with their collaborative endeavors and how the information they got out of their collaborative relationships influenced their practice on an individual level and organizational level.

I approached the study from a complexity perspective which looked at the S.E institution as a developing organism embedded, highly interacting and responding to its environment that is constantly changing. These concepts are the cornerstones of the complexity sciences that look at organizations as complex adaptive systems which are constantly changing, adapting, growing and developing through the interaction, dependence, and interconnectedness to their environment. The complex adaptive system framework in schools supports collaboration and networking internally and across the boundaries for adaptation and self-organizing purposes.

Using the narrative approach, I interview six teachers working in an S.E organization in Lebanon. From the analysis of their narratives and the conducted literature review, I answer research questions which consist of three areas including the processes involved in PTC at the organization, the organizational support taking place throughout the process, and the organizational learning processes resulting from PTC. The conclusions of the research conform to the research question and the major findings in each of the three areas.

In this chapter, I draw conclusions based on the analysis of the findings completed in the previous chapter with respect to the literature and conceptual framework. In this chapter, I also present the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research with a final reflection towards the end of the chapter.
6.1 Recommendations for practice: facilitating adaptive processes through PTC

As a recap from the findings, despite their key roles in sensing changes in the environment, it seemed that organizational policies and formal structures impeded the teachers from initiating and maintain open communication with the parents without the permission and supervision of the section coordinator. Hierarchy and imbalanced power dynamics between the teachers and other internal agents hindered the process of receiving, disseminating and acting upon the information received from the parents which in turn impeded the development of the collaborative relationship. Moreover, while the teachers were facing adaptive they claimed that the management approaches taken towards these adaptive challenges were not helpful. Finally, although teachers confess to learning on an individual level, they claimed that not much of their knowledge was shared, selected or discussed on an organizational level.

As a general conclusion, this study calls for a change in the managerial approach of the organization whereby leaders and managers should allow room and make fertile grounds for collaborative relationships between parents and teachers to prosper. This is established by changing the organizational practices to fit the complexity of the organization and its environment. In a nutshell, allowing and encouraging variation in behavior and interaction as well as selecting and sharing knowledge and ideas, the management of an organization can harness its complexity.

6.1.1 Favoring dynamic interaction and behavioral variability

Rather than applying policies and procedure that put constraints on interactions and variation, the organizational management of the SNI should change its formal structures to fit the complex nature of the organization. In other words, instead of exerting control on interactions, free and dynamic interactions taking place between teachers and parents should be embraced and encouraged establishing open lines of communication and information exchange. Beyond the formal structures of communication, it is logically impossible for the organizational management to control all interactions that take place between internal and external agents on a daily basis. From a complexity perspective on organizational management, there should exist a shift in the
mindset of organizational leaders and managers to favor dynamic interaction and behavioral variability between and across the different agents of the system by providing open lines of communication between the teachers and their environment.

Processes of receiving, disseminating and acting upon the information received from the environment should be revised to allow for the development of the collaborative relationship and organizational response to change. This could be accomplished by giving special attention to eliminating hierarchy in lines of command and imbalance in power dynamics between teachers and other internal agents (coordinators and therapists) who with respect to the findings in this study appear to have more authority and chances to lead on and take action without the close involvement of the teacher.

6.1.2 Implementation of complexity leadership behavior

Furthermore, for the promotion of a supportive environment that encourages collaborative practices and adaptation, several leadership styles could be implemented in the organization. One of the complexity leadership styles suggested in this study is that of adaptive leadership. This style favors certain behaviors of organizational leaders to help in the enhancement of parent-teacher collaborative relationships which, in many cases, require facing adaptive challenges.

First and foremost, the coordinator should act as supportive leaders by allowing the teachers to take the lead embracing their role as case leaders instead of trying to control them and taking decisions on their behalf. In other words, they should enable teachers to take possession of their own job and duties whereby they are allowed to solve their own problems. This does not mean that the coordinators lose control and track of situations. On the contrary, coordinators acting as leaders coordinate between different perspectives moving back and forth between the different people involved thus providing the teacher with objective, holistic perspectives on the situation. Hence, instead of taking over the teachers’ duties and roles, coordinators should protect leadership voices from below meaning they should listen and consider the ideas of teachers and accept them as leaders from below. Also, coordinators in the different departments should work on eliminating blaming environment by allowing teachers to take risks and decisions which do not always have positive
outcomes. They should be supportive and accepting of new creative ideas and motivate teachers who are going through a hard time to continue and focus on their work.

What I am suggesting with respect to the results of this study and their implications might sound abstract and unrealistic to achieve. This is true since such a shift cannot happen overnight. It is itself an adaptive challenge on the macro level. In my perspective, just as each of the teachers and classes is part of a department or larger system, the department coordinators and their departments are part of larger systems as well. Given that the organization in which I conduct my study holds several characteristics of CAS, one has to trust that small changes happening in one subsystem can affect the larger system and vice versa. It is only a matter of acceptance and trust to the adaptive nature and self-organizing nature of complex adaptive systems.

6.1.3 Selecting and sharing knowledge

Finally, with regards to the learning processes involved in PTC at the organization. All teachers expressed individual learning as a result of their interactions with the different agents in and across the system. As stated earlier, this learning process had emerged from the patterns of interaction that took place between the teachers and other external and internal agents. Hence, in order to enhance the learning capacity of the organization as a whole, knowledge should be selected and shared regularly. In this study, although teachers confess to learning on an individual level, they claimed that not much of their knowledge was shared, selected or discussed. Thus, more opportunities should be given for teachers and other school personnel to share their experiences and challenges with regards to the collaborative relationships with parents and their experiences of its internal and external process. Also, teachers’ insight should be taken into consideration so that changes occur accordingly. In the case of the S.E. organization where I conduct my study, I believe that monthly school conferences discussing collaborative relationships could help create more opportunities for teachers to share knowledge and talk openly regarding this issue.

As stated earlier, alongside variation and interaction, the process of selection is an important hallmark in harnessing complexity in an organization. Agents and strategies are selected and recopied according to performance measures, as a means of exploitation given the latter’s significant role in organizational adaptation.
6.2 Limitations of the study

There are several limitations to this study worth mentioning. To start with, the insights and conclusions of this study are one-sided and only involve the perceptions and reflections of the teachers. Also, the number of teachers I interview is relatively small concerning the validity of the understanding reflected by these teachers on the current situation. Also, there were many instances throughout the analyses process where I felt the need to obtain information from the managers, coordinators, therapists, and parents. For example, I wanted to know more about the reasons behind the implementation of the policies related to open-communication with parents from the coordinators and management team.

Moreover, I wanted to have an idea on the collaborative processes between the therapists, coordinators, and parents taking place in situations where there was minimal involvement of the teachers. Also, I believe that parental insights and reflection on their collaborative processes with agents from the organization could have contributed well to this study. Other than diversifying the interviewees, I consider the benefits of using other methods of approaching the same topic. Other than interview data I could have also used observational data. For example, if I had used observation, the data could also have been very interesting. Compared to an interview, through observation, the story or phenomenon reveals itself more freely and objectively. I could have observed, described and interpreted the different behaviors of the agents while being a background observer in their daily life. However, this is hard to achieve given several national constraints on classroom observation, meeting observations, and so on.

6.3 Recommendations for further research

There are several ways to develop this study further. Research targeted on evaluating the outcomes of the recommendations suggested by this study as well as their effectiveness in making the schools more adaptive can take place. Also, further studies can look at examples of innovations and changes in the school setting and understand how they take place. These studies could encounter adaptive processes that involve participation and recognition from people in formal management positions. Last but not least, further researches can investigate the policies
and their relationship to leaders such as coordinators who themselves could be subjects of centrally designed policies that often restrict variation.
Appendix A

Letter of consent

I have agreed to participate as an interviewee in this qualitative research study that serves as a master thesis.

I have read and understood the research question and the research purpose which involves parent-teacher collaboration in special education.

I have understood that the interview will be recorded electronically. I have been promised the right to withdraw from the interview at any time before or throughout it. I also have the right to refrain from answering questions I do not wish to answer.

I have been promised that my name and personal information will remain anonymous to all who read the study. I am aware of the fact that information and quotations from the interview could be used in the thesis and possibly in further publications.

I have permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

Participant

Signed……………………………………. Date……………….

Researcher

Signed……………………………………. Date……………….
## Appendix B

### Table 2

**Summary of findings throughout the three phases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-collaborative phase</th>
<th>Collaborative phase</th>
<th>Post-collaborative phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tara</strong></td>
<td><em>Sensing the need to reach out</em></td>
<td>- Showed personal interest and establishing open communication with the mother with no internal support.&lt;br&gt;- Put extra effort and was flexible in terms of applying new approaches to fit the student’s needs which lead to a successful collaboration</td>
<td>- She believed that the fact that she a novice teacher impeded the organization from recognizing and sharing her success story.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Severe disinterest in class subjects</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Experience of reaching out</strong></td>
<td>- Fear from the blaming environment &amp; gossip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Obtained helpful knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Message sent to the coordinator who showed no interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Receiving &amp; disseminating messages</strong></td>
<td>- Obtained helpful knowledge from the parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Message handed to social worker and management team</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jen</strong></td>
<td><em>Sensing the need to reach out</em></td>
<td>- From personal endeavors as well as internal support, she helped her student but failed in sustaining it.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- The student not provided with enough food and hygiene</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Experience of reaching out</strong></td>
<td>- She does not feel autonomous in such duties as establishing open lines of communication with the parents and community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Obtained helpful knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Message sent to the coordinator who showed no interest</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Receiving &amp; disseminating messages</strong></td>
<td>- Obtained helpful knowledge from the parent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Obtained helpful knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Message handed to social worker and management team</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Norma</strong></td>
<td><em>Sensing the need to reach out</em></td>
<td>- The psychologist convinced the mother to put the child on OCD medications.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- OCD of student &amp; anxious behavior of the mother</td>
<td>- With the support of the coordinator, the teacher established a successful daily communication system which relieved the mother’s anxiety.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Experience of reaching out</strong></td>
<td>- Reaching out to the mother had an unpredictable negative outcome</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Message disseminated to the coordinator and school psychologist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Receiving &amp; disseminating messages</strong></td>
<td>- Message disseminated to the coordinator and school psychologist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Sensing the need to reach out</td>
<td>Throughout the collaborative endeavors with the mother, the coordinator took the decisions on Sara’s behalf. Although Sara’s motive was the student, the coordinator’s decisions seemed to be generated from fear of losing a customer. - These events had demotivated Sara and made her lose hope.</td>
<td>She believed that teachers are not recognized as case managers but as passive agents. - More opportunities should be given for teachers to share their challenges and experiences and they (as well as the management) should get more training on PTC.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signs of anxiety during academic subjects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of reaching out</td>
<td>Conversation with mother escalated fast, and mother blamed the teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving &amp; disseminating messages</td>
<td>Message disseminated to the coordinator</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rana</td>
<td>Sensing the need to reach out</td>
<td>She implemented proper behavioral intervention plans for Mira in class and discussed confidently with her mother. This lead to a fruitful collaborative process. - Lack of internal communication between Rana and the therapy team resulted in conflict between the team and the mother.</td>
<td>Rana learned that her assignment idea is very helpful especially with new students and novice teachers. - Although successful, Rana’s idea was not selected to be shared on an organizational level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disruptive behavior of the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of reaching out</td>
<td>Lack of self-efficacy and the mother’s social status scared her - She sent an assignment for the mother to fill out about the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving &amp; disseminating messages</td>
<td>She received helpful information concerning the student’s behavior - Message sent to coordinator but not to therapists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Sensing the need to reach out</td>
<td>Olivia &amp; the aunt were collaborating while the psychologist and the parents were collaborating. However, there was no collaboration between the different collaborators</td>
<td>According to Olivia, although the organization has a diverse number of professionals, there are not enough opportunities for communication between the professionals for better outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signs of depression on student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of reaching out</td>
<td>Daily informal talks with the student’s aunt in the playground</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving &amp; disseminating messages</td>
<td>Message disseminated to the coordinator and school psychologist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Reference List


