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Exploring Parent Perspective on Classroom Placements of Twins

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EXPLORING PARENT PERSPECTIVE ON CLASSROOM PLACEMENT OF TWINS

A Thesis

by

BERENIZ DELGADILLO

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Major Subject: Early Childhood Education

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

May 2022

EXPLORING PARENT PERSPECTIVE ON CLASSROOM PLACEMENT OF TWINS

A Thesis
by
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May 2022

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ABSTRACT

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The early childhood years are crucial for children's cognitive development and lay the foundation for future school achievement. Experiences during these years are also influential for their social and emotional development and personality growth. During the early years children benefit from experiences that impact all areas of development. The focus of this research study was to explore the perspectives of parents regarding early school placements of twins in South Texas. Parents and early childhood educators need to be aware of the impact of school and classroom placements on twins. The primary research question is: What are the experiences of South Texas parents with the classroom placement of their twins. The methodology included a general survey of parents of twins and an in depth targeted interview of a participating parent with a varied and unique experience with same and separated placements of their twins across three states. Twins' parents were surveyed utilizing a survey developed by Segal & Russell (1992). Findings demonstrate how the parents of twins surveyed are not specifically aware of school policies concerning classroom placement of twins and that most participants support same classroom placement in the early years.

Keywords: classroom placement, twins, twinship, monozygotic twins, social

DEDICATION

This thesis is lovingly dedicated to my twin sister, Brenda. I am immensely grateful to have you by my side. You will always be the best thing that happened to me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, committee members, my mother, Olivia, and my family for their support and guidance throughout my time spent on this thesis. I would also like to thank the mothers and twins who participated in my study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this context, classroom placement refers to twins who are educated in separate classrooms or enrolled together in the same classroom. The question of whether twins should be separated in school is difficult to answer. Despite the opinions held by many, the picture is still not clear about the impact of classroom placements on twins. The literature review reveals the need for more study, however, some findings from past research studies indicate that twins can benefit by being placed in the same classroom when they begin to attend school (Tully et al., (2003). This study aims to provide some clarity as it explores parent perspective on classroom placement of twins.

This transition can be difficult for some children who have never been away from home. For twins who have been accustomed to being together from birth to school entry, this transition can be even more difficult. Hay & Preedy (2006) found that prior to the start of school approximately 80% of the parents they surveyed, indicated that their children had never or very seldom been separated. Despite this knowledge, many early childhood professionals separate twins in a classroom setting. In the article by Beauchamp and Brooks (2003), authors discovered

“that many of our existing views of twinship are based on popularized stereotypic depictions of twins that are then used to drive educational policy and practice” (pg.429). As Lacina (2012) reveals “the notion that twins must be separated just because they are twins—that keeping them together will hinder their development and learning—is a myth” (pg. 81). During the past several decades, schools have met the needs of all children. For example, dual language learners and those with special needs. With an increasing US twin population, schools also need to be responsive and meet the unique needs of twins and their families. (Lacina, 2012). The lack of empirical evidence upon which to draw conclusions from is reasonably one of the factors that continue to hinder the guidance parents need for twin classroom placement. (Beauchamp & Brooks, 2013). As a result, this study is significant as it adds to the literature about the impact of classroom placements of twins according to parent perspectives.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The bond that twins share is one that is undeniable and thus, brings to question how best to nurture twin bonds in the school system. According to attachment theory, an attachment relationship is one in which a person uses the other as a target of proximity maintenance, a safe haven during times of distress, and a secure base from which to explore the world (Tancredy & Fraley, 2006). Understanding attachment theory can help to understand the bond twins share with each other. As Tancredy and Fraley (2006) found in their research, “twins, especially monozygotic twins, are especially attached to each other. Their relationship to each other has been characterized as intimate and as one that falls within the definitions of an attachment relationship” (pg. 108). Research findings indicate that most decisions regarding classroom separation are made to help decrease co-dependency between twins, however no concrete evidence was found to test this hypothesis. As Goymour (2017) states, “at present, it appears that decisions regarding classroom placement are primarily based on viewpoints, rather than any evidence-base” (pg. 6). Literature review findings demonstrated effects of classroom separation among twins and the severity of these findings were explored.

The Impact of Classroom Placement Separation of Twins

Tully et al. (2004) reviewed the UK Twins Early Development Study and found in their sample of 7-year-old twins that twins who were separated, especially monozygotic twins had more internalizing problems such as being withdrawn, having somatic complaints, and being anxious or depressed. It should be noted that only monozygotic (MZ) twins were included in these analyses because according to Tully et al. (2004) MZ twins share 100% of their genetic make-up and shared environment. Results of this study showed that twins who were separated at school from their co-twin were more likely to be reported by their parents and teachers as having peer problems at school. Thus, having their co-twin with them in the same classroom gave twins a safe base from which to make other friends. Literature review revealed how early childhood professionals' separate twins based on opinions such as wanting to create independence among the twin dynamic, it should be noted that research has not yet yielded supporting evidence for such claims. According to the longitudinal study reviewed by Tully et al. (2003) "the rationale for encouraging separation appears to be based on the notion that the close social relationship between twins may be damaging for their development, and that separation may promote their individuality and independence" (pg. 116). However, the data revealed how "relative to twins not separated, twins who were separated in the first year of school had more internalizing problems and for monozygotic twins these problems persisted over time" (Tully et al., 2003, pg. 121). The authors shared how among internalized problems; twin's academic performance was also in jeopardy. Tully et al. (2003) revealed how twins who were separated had lower reading performances than twins not separated. From the study by DiLalla & Mullineaux (2008), the authors researched the effects of classroom environment on problem behaviors. Their research

revealed how separating twins at school impacts their behaviors. “Our results suggest that twins who are placed in separate classrooms from their co-twins may have more conduct disorder and peer problems” (DiLalla & Mullineaux, 2008, pg. 126).

Perspectives Among Parents of Twin Children and School Staff

The start of school for twin children brings to light the need for concrete evidence regarding school placement. Many parents rely on the knowledge of early childhood professionals to assist with the challenging decision that can affect their twin children. The literature examined indicated how there are few studies that exist that can guide such decision (Lancina, 2012). Brant (2018) concluded that these decisions should be made with both parties’ involvement due to negative consequences it can cause within the relationship of school and parents. Brant (2018) further states that “when schools are perceived to make classroom placement decisions without consulting parents, it risks undermining the parents’ sense of involvement, agency and relatedness in this process” (pg. 77).

School Success of Same and Separate Classroom Placements of Twins. The research conducted by Tully et al., (2003), investigated the effects of classroom separation on twins’ behavior, progress at school and their reading abilities. Data from the sample size of 1116 twin families was collected by studying three groups of twins at two points in time, at the start of school and again 18 months later. The findings revealed that early separation of twins resulted in twins internalizing problems and that they may benefit from not being separated in the early years. The study revealed how school separation can cause anxiety in twins and findings suggest

that initial school separation is not temporary as twins demonstrated these internalizing problems two years later (Tully et al., 2003). Another study by Goymour (2017), explored the relationship between identical and non-identical same-sex twins classroom placement by investigating the research evidence provided by the longitudinal study from twins in the United Kingdom over a period of 18 months, from the time they entered school at age 5. The twins in this study were placed into the following three groups: (1) Not Separated Group, twins who remained in the same classroom, (2) Separated Early Group, twins who were placed in separate classrooms, and (3) Separated Late Group, twins who were kept together early and then separated later.

Goymour's (2017) research concluded that there was some evidence to suggest that separated twins experience more academic problems than those who are not separated but stated how this systematic review cannot determine to what extent classroom placements are having an impact on the overall development of twins in school. Based on the themes that have emerged from the literature, parents of twin children should be involved in the decision regarding classroom placement. Early childhood professionals and parents can help twins' adjustment to school and thus, enhance school success. To thrive in a school setting, young children need to trust their environment including the adults and peers. As a result, parents and early childhood professionals are left without clear evidence of twin classroom placement. Consequently, more research into the impact of twin separation is needed.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methods were used for this study to document the experiences and opinions of twin parents regarding twin classroom placement. This research method was chosen to help explore parent perspective on classroom placement of twins. The methodology included five twins' parents who were surveyed utilizing the School Questionnaire for Mothers of Twins developed by Segal & Russell (1992). This questionnaire was chosen as authors questionnaire included items relevant to school policy and parental satisfaction regarding classroom placement of twins. This study also selected one of the participants to revisit purposely due to their experiences of classroom placement across three different states.

Author Positionality

I believe that it is pertinent to acknowledge that my interest in exploring parent perspectives on twin classroom placement is personal. I am an identical twin. Upon school entry, my twin sister and I were placed in separate classrooms as per school's decision. My mother recalls being told by the school principal that this separation was to help my twin and I develop our own individualities. My mother being an immigrant to the United States, believed she had no other choice but to listen to the professionals. My twin sister and I had different experiences of being thus separated. The ride on the school bus every morning caused a lot of anxiety to my twin sister. Often, she would arrive at school physically sick and would be sent to the nurse's

office. My twin sister's experiences every morning, worried me. I wanted to take care of her. I remember thinking about her when I was in class. Was she still in the nurse's office? Was she sent home? Are they dismissing her symptoms again as being *chiflada*? (A word in Spanish that translates to being a spoiled brat). It was a cycle that affected us both. Precious classroom times which could have been utilized for learning and socializing with peers was spent in anxiety and apprehension. We both have managed to survive the early trauma of separation and have successfully pursued our careers, she as a nurse and I as an early childhood scholar. However, I have continued to question the school's decision to separate us. My current study is an exploration of parent perspective on classroom placement of twins; what guides their decision, and if they feel empowered to advocate in the best interest of their children.

Participants

The participants of this study needed to meet one criterion to participate which included being a parent or caregiver of twins. The participants involved were selected by the researcher by purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Using word of mouth through family and friends, participants were recruited in person or via text. Participants were explained the purpose of this study and were asked if they would like to volunteer using a telephone script (See Appendix B) and reading consent form (See Appendix C). If participants agreed to volunteer, a date and time was scheduled to administer the survey in person or via Zoom, a videotelephony program which allows one-to-one live chat sessions. This platform was used due to protect confidentiality as Zoom is protected with the Advanced Encryption Standard using a one-time key for that specific session when using a Zoom client (Zoom, 2022).

A total of five participants agreed to participate. Four surveys were administered via Zoom and one survey was administered in person. The data collection took place during a two-week period as accommodations were made to fit twin parent's schedule. The interviews to administer surveys were ten to fifteen minutes long. The single interview was thirty minutes long where the researcher interviewed participant about twin classroom placement experiences as twins have moved between three states.

Data Analysis. Data was collected via a six-question survey developed by Segal & Russel (1992). Parents of twins were administered survey individually at a time and date that best fit their availability. The responses collected of twin parents' experiences of twins' classroom placement and the twins' current classroom placement situation were based on the Questionnaire for Twin's Parent found in the Appendix A. The data was then prepared and organized to review by creating a table (See Table 1). Parent responses were compared and analyzed. These comparisons aided to identify any themes which aimed to help answer the research question in this study. The information collected from the single participant interview helped explore the classroom placement experiences of twins who have moved across three different states. The twins of this case study have attended schools in Louisiana, Ohio, and Texas.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The small sample size of this study limited a deep analysis of parent perspective on classroom placement. However, it did provide some interesting results. The results from the surveys were mixed.

Decisions Regarding Classroom Placement

From the five participants surveyed, only one mother stated that her twins were placed in separate classrooms as per school's decision. Parent stated that this decision was based on the reason that one twin would disrupt the classroom as well as their respective twin. One participant stated that their twins were placed in the same classroom as per school's decision due to both twins being diagnosed with autism. Two other participants stated that their twins were placed in the same classroom as per parent's decision. Only one participant had twins who were not yet in school, but the parent stated how she wanted to keep her twins together in the same classroom but was unaware of school policies regarding twin classroom placements.

Desire To Keep Twins Together

When parents answered the survey question regarding the reasoning behind wanting to keep their twins together, most parents' responses were similar. Parents stated they wanted their

twins to have each other. One participant shared that their twins look for each other since birth. All participants responded that while early separation may not be desirable, they would consider separation at a higher grade level. Most parents recommended that seven years of age was best for separate classroom placement.

Familiarity With School Policy And Texas Law. Regarding school policy, two participants stated that their school does not have a policy concerning classroom placement of twins. The other three participants disclosed that they were uncertain regarding such policy. It is important for parents of twins to become aware of the twelve states that have laws giving parents the right to decide classroom placement for their twins (Lacina, 2012). The Twin Law signed into the legislature of the state of Texas in 2007 states:

The parent of multiple birth siblings who are assigned to the same grade level and school may request in writing, not later than the 14th day after the first day of enrollment, that the school place the siblings in the same classroom or in separate classrooms. (Texas House of Representatives)

Twin parents are unaware of such laws and are uninformed that they can advocate for their twins and decide what is best for each child. With an increasing population of twins, it is important for parents to recognize that they have The Twin Law that protects their rights.

Satisfaction With Placement. When responding to the question of whether they were content/satisfied with classroom placements of their twins, all parents answered that they were content/satisfied. The survey asked participants to answer whether twins should be in the same classroom or assigned to different classrooms during the early grades. Four participants answered that they recommended the same classroom placement. Only one participant answered

that twins should be assigned to different classrooms based on the twins possibly distracting each other. The question regarding parent's input for the age recommendation for separate classroom placement was calculated. The average mean of age was seven years of age. Table 1 shows the survey results.

Taking A Closer Look. One parent was selected for their unique experience with classroom placement for their twins in three different schools across three different states. The parent of eight-year-old twins who have recently moved to South Texas was asked to participate in a more depth interview session. The parent shared that the twins attended schools in Louisiana, Ohio, and Texas and had different experiences regarding twins' classroom placement in each state. Parent shared that in every state, she advocated for her twins to be in the same classroom but stated how that was not always possible for a variety of reasons. According to parent, when her twins entered kindergarten, the family was living in Ohio and the twins were placed in separate classrooms. Parent stated how the elementary school "did not want them together" and "said twins work better separated." When family moved to Louisiana, parent shared how the twins were allowed to be in the same classroom. According to the parent, when family moved to Texas, the academic school year was almost complete and regulations regarding classroom sizes may have impacted the school's decision to place the twins in separate classrooms. Parent stated how this resulted in the twins being upset when going to school and believed that keeping them together would have been the correct choice. Parent shared that this school year, she has decided to keep twins at home, and they are attending school virtually.

Parent stated that she believes twins need each other for support and provided examples of their strengths and weaknesses in certain academic subjects. As per parent, one twin has more strength in math subjects while one twin performs better in reading subjects. Throughout their academic career, parent explained how the twins have become their social support system and showed how it has helped with their grades as they motivate each other. The parent also explained how the twins are social and can make friends easily. She has not seen them or been told by their teacher that the twins isolate themselves from other children. When parent was asked what age twins should be placed in separate classrooms, the parent stated that nine years of age would be best for twins to be ready for separate classroom placement. Parent feared that early separation could cause twins harm but age nine, twins could understand why they would be placed in separate classrooms. During the single case study, researcher discovered how same and different classroom placements have impacted the twins emotionally and academically through parent responses.

Table 1

Questionnaire for Twins' Parent Results

Survey Question	Yes	No	Uncertain	Same	Different	School Decision	Parent Decision	NA
1. Does your twins' school have a policy concerning classroom placement of twins?		2	3					
2. If you answered yes to question #1, does the school's policy indicate that twins should be assigned to separate classrooms?								5
3. Do you agree with classroom placement policy?	2	3						
4. Are your twins currently assigned to the same classroom?	3	1						1
4b. Was this your choice, or the school's decision?						3	1	1
4c. If this decision regarding classroom placement was yours, what was the reason:	Participant 4: Twins first year of school in Pre-k 3, so I wanted them to be in the same class to have each other.							
4d. If this decision was made by the school, what was the reason:	Participant 1: Twin would distract class and their twin Participant 3: Twins have autism diagnosis Participant 5: Twins are attending school virtually							

Table 1, cont.

Questionnaire for Twins' Parent Results

Survey Question	Yes	No	Uncertain	Same	Different	School Decision	Parent Decision	NA
5. Do you think that twins should be in the same classroom or assigned to different classrooms during the early grades?				4	1			
6. What is the age you recommend for separate classroom placement.	Participant 1: 7-8 years old Participant 2: 7 years old Participant 3: 5 years old Participant 4: 11 years old Participant 5: 9 years old							

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Overall, the current study emphasizes the advantages of same classroom placement over separation. As researchers suggest, twins who were separated, especially monozygotic twins had more internalizing problems such as being withdrawn, having somatic complaints, and being anxious or depressed (Tully et al. 2004). DiLalla & Mullineaux (2008) found as well that “twins who are placed in separate classrooms from their co-twins may have more conduct disorder and peer problems” (DiLalla & Mullineaux, 2008, pg. 126).

If there is a need for classroom separation, the decision should be made well before the beginning of the school year. To help prepare twins that are entering a school setting, parents can support twin children in a variety of ways by providing twins with early separation experiences. As Tully et al. (2003) suggest:

Implications from the findings of this study is the need to fully prepare twins for the start of school and for possible separation. To assist with a smooth transition into school, twins may benefit from increasing periods of separation prior to the start of school. (pg. 123)

As the study revealed, schools can help families of twin children by working “collaboratively to monitor their ability to function dependently as a twin unit and independently without their twin” (Tully et al., 2003, pg. 49). As Lacina (2012) recommends, “twins need to gradually spend time apart so they will experience less of a shock when assigned to different classrooms and thus spend much of the day without their twin” (Lacina, 2012, pg. 81).

The literature reviewed on twin classroom placement indicates a great need for more research in this area. Limited as this study on parental perspective on classroom placement was, it nevertheless highlighted the lack of information available for parents both about the pros and cons of separation in early childhood school placements for children and information regarding federal/state and school policies. Research evidence on the detrimental effects of separation would help in parents feeling more equipped to advocate in the interest of their twins. Studies that dispel the common beliefs of twin interdependency may also provide educators with a more realistic understanding of twin bonding and attachment.

A common recommendation from authors of studies reviewed states that “it is important for parents and teachers to consider that twins can be offered opportunities to develop their independence within the same classroom, such as through the use of different peer groupings for activities” (pg. 41). One note from Tully et al. (2003) recommended that parents and teachers can monitor separated twins for signs of emotional distress or poor academic performance and that intervention may be needed for these situations. Due to the number of limited studies, the effects of classroom separation have on twins’ development is relatively unknown. For this reason, as Tully et al. (2003) states “it has become imperative to investigate the effects of classroom separation on twins’ behavior and their progress at school in order to provide an evidence base

that may assist school policies” (pg. 116). The studies reviewed provided an awareness of the effects of classroom separation for twins and found that effects can be long lasting. Lacina (2012) discovered twins separated in the early years of school often endure a great deal of anxiety. Such as “night terrors and a fear that something will happen to their twin, and those feelings are not temporary” (pg. 81). In my experience, my twin sister and I have both managed to survive the early trauma of separation but we both consider ourselves anxious people as adults as a result.

This study also shows the need for more research on this topic. Limitations due to small sample size made it difficult to determine if there are positive or negative effects of parent perspectives of twins who are placed in the same classroom. Future research studies should include more subjects to participate in research related to twins’ school achievement to be able to acquire quantitative research to determine other factors like academic achievement. Future research agenda will include long term study of these sets of twins and include the twin’s perspective about their experiences of classroom placement. Overall, most parents recommended that seven years of age was best for separate classroom placement. Most participants viewed the children’s need for support provided by their twin as a crucial consideration when twins started school. Considering how the survey demonstrated that most parents were not aware of their school twin classroom placement policy, it is important for parents to be involved in this decision process. According to state legislations and state laws, twelve states have laws giving parents the right to decide classroom placement for their twins (Lacina, 2012). Parents need to be aware about the rights they have regarding classroom placement of twins. As the interview of one twin parent demonstrated, the twins kept together in the same classroom provided an example of how

it has benefited twins positively. As parent explained, the twins have become their social support system and showed how it has helped with their grades as they motivate each other. This relationship describes what the literature review defines as attachment theory. An attachment relationship is one in which a person uses the other as a target of proximity maintenance, a safe haven during times of distress, and a secure base from which to explore the world (Tancredy & Fraley, 2006). The twins being together in the same classroom supported their overall development and learning. It is important to understand that children's development during the early years benefit from experiences that impact all areas of development. A caring community that understands the twin relationship and the implications of classroom separation should develop the services needed to maximize positive outcomes and minimize negative effects of twins' classroom placement.

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APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Questionnaire for Twins' Parent

The question of whether twins should be **separated** in school is difficult to answer. We are interested in learning your opinions on this topic. We also want to know if you are aware of the school's policy regarding twins' classroom placement.

1. Does your twins' school have a policy concerning classroom placement of twins?
Please circle your answer.

1. Yes

2. No

3. Uncertain

2. If you answered yes to question #1, does the school's policy indicate that twins should be assigned to separate classrooms? Please circle your answer.

1. Yes

2. No

3. Do you agree with classroom placement policy? Please circle your answer.

1. Yes

2. No

4a. Are your twins currently assigned to the same classroom? Please circle your answer.

1. Yes

2. No

4b. Was this your choice, or the school's decision? Please circle your answer.

1. My choice

2. School's decision

4c. If this decision regarding classroom placement was yours, what was the reason:

4d. If this decision was made by the school, what was the reason:

4 e . Are you content/satisfied with your twins' classroom placement?

Please circle your answer.

1. Yes

Why?

2. No

Why?

5. Do you think that twins should be in the *same* classroom or assigned to *different* classrooms during the early grades? Please circle your answer.

1. Same classroom

2. Different classroom

Why?

6. What is the age you recommend for separate classroom placement.

_____ years old.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley **Telephone Script**

Hello, my name is Bereniz Delgadillo. I am a (student/staff member) from The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV).

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of school entry classroom placement of twins. With your consent, I would like to conduct an interview which should take about fifteen minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary. I ask that you please try to answer all questions. However, if there are any questions that you would prefer to skip, simply let me know and I will just skip that question and go on to the next one.

All the information I receive from you by phone, including your name and any other identifying information, will be strictly confidential and will be kept under lock and key. I will not identify you or use any information that would make it possible for anyone to identify you in any presentation or written reports about this study.

There are no other expected risks to you for helping me with this study. There are also no expected benefits for you either.

Do you have any questions now? If you have questions later, please contact me by telephone at 956-739-3123 or by email at bereniz.delgadillo01@utrgv.edu.

You may also contact my faculty advisor Dr. Hilda Medrano, at 956-665-2533.

Do you agree to participate in this study?

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C



EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL ENTRY CLASSROOM PLACEMENTS OF TWINS

This research study is being conducted by Ms. *Bereniz Delgadillo*, *Family Services Coordinator* at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of early school placements of twins in South Texas.

Participation should take about fifteen minutes to complete.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. If there are any questions or parts of this study which you are uncomfortable completing, feel free to skip that question terminate your participation at any time without question or comment.

You must be a parent or caregiver to twins to participate. If you are not, please do not participate.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Protection (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, or if you feel that your rights as a participant were not adequately met by the researcher, please contact the IRB at (956) 665-3598 or irb@utrgv.edu.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Bereniz Delgadillo graduated from the University of Texas Pan-American with a degree in Rehabilitative Services with a Deaf Concentration in 2014. She also earned a Master of Early Childhood Education at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2022. She has advocacy and social justice at her core and is motivated to continue serving the needs of her community. Her goal is to continue advocating for young children and building intentional partnerships with families to create positive outcomes. In her spare time, Bereniz enjoys spending time with her family, reading, and volunteering with her partner at their local animal shelter. Bereniz Delgadillo resides in Edinburg, Texas and can be reached at bereniz.delgadillo01@utrgv.edu.