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Preparing teachers for parent engagement: role of teacher educators in Canada

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ABSTRACT

Parent engagement has long been considered important for students' academic achievement and well-being. To ensure strength-based parent engagement, it is important for teachers to be prepared to work with parents. This study reports findings from interviews with Canadian teacher educators to better understand their role in preparing teachers for parent engagement. Teacher educators consider readiness for parent engagement a vital competence for teachers but find it difficult to secure a permanent place for parent engagement in the curriculum. Recommendations include the integrated parent engagement framework centred around a parent engagement policy and parent engagement requirements for teacher education programmes and teacher certification.

Introduction

Parent engagement in children's learning, education, and schooling (Goodall, 2018; Stitt & Brooks, 2014) has attracted the attention of educational researchers and policymakers internationally for several decades due to its role in students' academic achievement and well-being (Boonk et al., 2018; Kim, 2022; Wilder, 2013), potential for equity and school-improvement (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Jeynes, 2012; Rawolle et al., 2016), and its overall significance for inequality in education (Calarco, 2018; Lareau, 2011). In many English-speaking countries, policy initiatives were introduced to encourage parent engagement in schooling (Antony-Newman, 2019a; Hamlin & Flessa, 2016; Mapp, 2012) and school councils and parental involvement committees became mandatory in several jurisdictions (Government of Ontario, 2000; Scottish Government, 2006).

It is also vital to distinguish between parental involvement with schools, which mainly supports school agenda (e.g. volunteering, fundraising, attending school events), and parent engagement with children's learning, which emphasises the agency of parents (e.g. talking about school, arranging extracurricular activities and tutoring, creating learning opportunities at home) (Goodall, 2018, 2022).

At the same time, a body of literature has emerged that highlights the crucial role of teachers and administrators in parent-school communication and the encouragement of parent engagement that would benefit students, parents, and educators (Bæck, 2010; Pushor & Amendt, 2018; Stroetinga et al., 2019). Teacher beliefs about parent engagement shape classroom practices that can either privilege the interests of schools with their emphasis on mandatory curriculum, assessment and accountability (Lawson, 2003; Stitt & Brooks, 2014) or centre on the needs of parents and students and bring the families' "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011) and "parent knowledge" (Pushor, 2015) of their children into school spaces. Prior research shows that all too often many teachers feel unprepared to effectively and collaboratively work with parents and families, especially when it comes to ethnoracial minorities, recent immigrants or working-class communities (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Evans, 2013; Mutton et al., 2018; Patte, 2011; Uludag, 2008). At the same time, there is increased pressure for teachers to be ready to engage with families and establish collaborative partnerships with parents and guardians (National Association for Family, School and Community Engagement, 2020; Saltmarsh et al., 2015). Against this backdrop, it is extremely important to improve the current level of understanding of the crucial role that university-based teacher educators play in preparing future teachers for parent engagement (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Teacher educators' beliefs about parent engagement and their ability to shape the teacher education curriculum are instrumental in ensuring that newly-qualified teachers are well-prepared for genuine engagement with their students' parents and families (Schnell et al., 2015). This study aims to provide better understanding of and potential improvement in preparing teacher candidates for parent engagement by providing data from the Canadian context based on interviews with nine teacher educators from seven provinces. It is guided by the concepts of (1) parent engagement and (2) teacher readiness for parent engagement as elements of the overarching conceptual framework.

Parent engagement and teachers' work

Over the last several decades, the nature of parenting in many Western countries has changed so much that parents are now not only expected to meet the material and emotional needs of their children (Gadsden et al., 2016), but also be actively involved in their children's education (Golden et al., 2021; Hays, 1996; Lareau, 2011). Normative parental involvement and engagement include activities at home (parenting, learning at home), in the community (collaborating with community), and at school (volunteering, communicating, decision-making) (Epstein, 2010). School-based activities are more prominent at the primary school level rather than when children reach secondary-school age with associated increased independence (Jensen & Minke, 2017). Parents of children with special education needs are particularly involved in advocacy for their children's education, because while they require additional support, all too often schools fail to provide such services (Burke & Hodapp, 2016). Educational researchers have analysed parent engagement in different ways based on their theoretical lens, positionality, and methodological preferences. Historically, the most dominant approach focused on the role of parent engagement in increasing the academic achievement of students (Epstein, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012, 2018). It has also been appealing to policymakers in

their school-improvement and education reform agenda (Leithwood & McElheron-Hopkins, 2004; Rawolle et al., 2016). Another school of thought centres the implications of parent engagement for social inequality in education (Calarco, 2018; Lareau, 2011; Reay, 2004) and builds on the concept of capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1986). Here, sociologists of education explore how the economic, cultural, and social capital of parents allows them to get engaged in their children's education in ways that are valued by the school system more and improve the educational experiences of their children (Crozier et al., 2011; Vincent, 2017). This approach to parent engagement analysis highlights the privileged position of parents from dominant backgrounds (White, middle-class, non-immigrant in most Western contexts) (Lareau, 2015). Finally, the third group of scholars emphasise the potential that parent engagement has for equity in schools (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). They go beyond highlighting the inequality inherent in parent engagement (Stitt & Brooks, 2014), and focus on identifying parent engagement practices and initiatives that increase the equitable educational outcomes for all students.

Due to the increased role of parents in their children's learning, but especially in their education and schooling (Goodall, 2018, 2022), working with parents in new ways has become an important element of teachers' work. Interestingly, such work with parents looks different based on the social and institutional context of schools.[1] In many communities suffering from poverty, schools are required to enact particular policies that engage parents in their children's schooling to increase students' academic achievement (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). On the other hand, teachers who work in relatively affluent areas, more often than not have to manage the scrutiny of privileged parents who are becoming increasingly active in such schools, ask for accommodations for their children, and attempt to influence the curriculum for all students (Calarco, 2020).

Policymakers expect teachers to engage parents from non-dominant groups (racial and ethnic minorities, parents affected by poverty, new immigrants) in order to assist in school improvement and raise general academic achievement of students (Leithwood & McElheron-Hopkins, 2004; New South Wales Government, 2017; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Parent involvement and engagement policies have been developed over the years to guide teachers in involving parents in the school-centred activities (Stitt & Brooks, 2014), for example volunteering in the classroom, attending curriculum nights and parent-teacher conferences, taking part in fundraising and school governance through councils (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010; Scottish Government, 2020). Such focus on school-centred activities not only dismisses the empirically proven benefits of involvement at home (setting high expectations, talking about school, fostering academic socialisation) (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012; Wilder, 2013), but further marginalises minority and immigrant parents who are more comfortable with home-based activities (Antony-Newman, 2019b). Are teachers prepared to engage with parents from non-dominant backgrounds for whom such school-centric initiatives (Lawson, 2003) have been designed? Are they ready to go beyond that and bring families' "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011) and "parent knowledge" (Pushor, 2015) of their children into the classroom and make engagement meaningful for parents and families? As far as the members of the teaching profession are predominantly White, middle-class, and non-immigrant (Ryan et al., 2009), the potential for misunderstanding

and deficit thinking towards linguistically and culturally diverse parents is high (James, 2010).

Teachers who work in affluent neighbourhoods often face a different dilemma. Middle-class parents equipped with high levels of economic, social, and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1986; Lareau, 2011) and worried about the chances of their children's upward social mobility (Weis et al., 2014) are now heavily involved in their children's education to secure their academic success (Lareau et al., 2016; Warikoo, 2022). Middle-class parents bring much needed resources to schools (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009), but their pursuit of academic excellence for their own children is at odds with teachers' stated goals of taking into account the needs of all children in their classrooms.[2] Middle-class parents not only advocate for their children and coach them to get concessions from teachers (e.g. extra help in class, deadline extensions) (Calarco, 2018), but also try to change policies in schools (e.g. homework rules) to the benefit of their children (Calarco, 2020).

As a result of increased expectations for parent engagement on the policy level (Government of Ontario, 2000; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015; Scottish Government, 2006), working with parents becomes one of the sources of moral distress for teachers and school leaders (Stelmach et al., 2021). Moral distress refers here to situations, where educators know what is the "right" thing to do but face institutional constraints for doing so (Stelmach et al., 2021). For example, teachers want to work with parents, but due to the spread of intensive parenting (Hays, 1996) and neoliberal reforms, where teachers are increasingly accountable to parents (Saltmarsh, 2015), teachers end up working against the parents (Stelmach et al., 2021). Such moral distress is caused not only by the changing relationships between parents and teachers but also by the lack of parent engagement preparation among teachers (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Evans, 2013; Uludag, 2008). Can teacher education programmes help prepare teacher candidates to be ready to work with parents and families?

Pre-service teacher education and teachers' readiness for parent engagement

There is a growing body of international research showing that teacher candidates feel unprepared to work with parents and families after they complete their initial teacher education (ITE) programmes (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Jones, 2020; Mutton et al., 2018; Patte, 2011; Uludag, 2008; Unal & Unal, 2014; Willemse et al., 2016). The vast majority of teacher candidates and teacher educators mention that parent engagement is important and underline the urgent necessity to prepare teacher candidates to work with parents and families (Lehmann, 2018; Uludag, 2008; Willemse et al., 2016). Several studies show that parent engagement content helps increase the confidence, self-efficacy, and generally favourable disposition towards engaging parents among teacher candidates (Brown et al., 2014; de Bruïne et al., 2018; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Mehlig & Shumow, 2013). Nevertheless, there are several key barriers that limit the capacity of ITE programmes to adequately prepare future teachers for parent engagement.

Firstly, teacher educators mention the "crowded" ITE curriculum, which focuses on instruction, pedagogical content knowledge, which leaves not enough space for topics related to parental involvement and parent engagement (de Bruïne et al., 2018; Mutton

et al., 2018). The provision varies across jurisdictions and different ITE programmes, from not offering parent engagement content to having stand-alone courses or infusing parents-related content in other courses (Lehmann, 2018; Patte, 2011; Saltmarsh et al., 2015). Many teacher educators mention that in their context a separate parent engagement content will not be feasible due to lack of curricular space (de Bruïne et al., 2014). One possible solution could be in linking parent engagement content to field placements, which will also provide teacher candidates with practical experience of working with parents (Graue, 2005).

Another barrier to preparing teachers for transformative parent engagement lies in how teacher-educators and ITE curriculum developers conceptualise parent engagement in the first place. All too often the focus is placed mainly on communication with parents (Saltmarsh et al., 2015), where teachers' task is to inform parents about school activities, manage complaints, and encourage parents to extend the classroom learning to the home domain (Jones, 2020; Mehlig & Shumow, 2013; Willemse et al., 2016) at the expense of valuing parental home-based activities and rich parent knowledge (Pushor, 2015). Even a potentially democratic idea of Family-School Partnerships (FSP) is often treated in teacher education contexts as "partnership" where it is the agenda and interests of schools rather than families that take centre stage (Antony-Newman, 2019a).

To achieve the goal of preparing teacher candidates for transformative parent engagement that would validate home-based activities of families and bring parental funds of knowledge into classrooms rather than follow a technocratic model of school-centric partnerships (Lawson, 2003; Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011), we need to better understand the role of teacher educators, who have the capacity to prepare critically minded teachers that are aware of the crucial role that parents play in children's education and can meaningfully engage parents. This study addresses this goal and provides data from the Canadian context by answering the following questions: 1. How do teacher educators see their role in preparing future teachers to work with parents and families, especially from the minority and immigrant communities? 2. How do teacher educators approach parent engagement content in teacher education courses?

Methodology

To better understand beliefs and practices of teacher educators that shape their role in preparing teacher candidates for parent engagement, I interviewed nine university-based teacher educators that represent seven Canadian provinces (van Nuland, 2011). As a university-based educational researcher, I work with future teachers at the undergraduate level and current educators at the graduate level in programmes that do not directly lead to teacher certification. For the purposes of this study, I reached out to colleagues, who are affiliated with teacher education programmes that offer teacher certification. At the time of the interview, eight participants had doctorate degrees and occupied full-time faculty positions in departments of education of their respective universities, whereas one participant was a PhD candidate and taught part-time in the teacher education programme at the same university. As a result, all participants shared commitment to research-informed teacher education, which shaped their answers. The participants taught in public or private schools before transitioning to academia. The years of teacher education experiences ranged from two to 18 years and

participants taught on a variety of undergraduate and graduate programmes in Early Childhood Education, Literacy and Language Education, Educational Leadership, and Indigenous Studies. Seven participants were located in large urban areas across the country, while two represented smaller regional centres. Detailed information about the participants' teacher education experience is provided in Table 1 below.

After securing ethical clearance from my institution's research ethics board, I recruited participants via my personal network with a combination of a purposeful and snowballing sampling (Guest et al., 2013). All personally identifiable information was kept confidential and personal names were replaced by numerical descriptors (Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.). Semi-structured Zoom interviews ranged from 50 to 80 min in length, were recorded and transcribed. I asked participants about their own teaching career, beliefs about the importance of parent engagement, transition to academia and teacher education, the teacher education curriculum in their programmes, the place of parent engagement in courses they teach, and readiness of students to engage with parents after graduation. Interview data were coded thematically with a combination of a priori and emergent codes. A priori codes were developed based on the literature on parent engagement, teacher readiness to work with parents, and studies on preparing teachers for parent engagement. Examples of a priori codes included such items as *bringing parent knowledge in*, *home visits, barriers for engagement*. Emergent codes were represented by such items as *parent engagement competencies*, *ingrained resistance, pedagogical strategies for parent engagement*. Descriptive codes were refined to form categories (e.g. *readiness for parent engagement, curricular options for parent engagement, institutionalisation of parent engagement*), which were later used to answer the research questions of the study.

Findings

How do teacher educators see their role in preparing future teachers to work with parents and families, especially from the minority and immigrant communities? How do teacher educators approach parent engagement content in teacher education courses?

Findings presented below that help answer the research questions are structured around the two interrelated themes that emerged from the data: (1) teacher educators' beliefs about parent engagement and (2) curricular and pedagogical approaches to parent engagement component of teacher education they adopt when working

Table 1. Participants' teacher education experience.

Teacher educator	Years of university TE experience	Area of expertise	Programmes taught
Participant 1	5	Language education	Undergraduate Graduate
Participant 2	16	Educational leadership	Undergraduate Graduate
Participant 3	18	Early childhood education	Undergraduate Graduate certificate level
Participant 4	2	Literacy education	Undergraduate
Participant 5	4	Literacy education	Undergraduate Graduate
Participant 6	13	Indigenous studies	Undergraduate
Participant 7	4	Language arts	Undergraduate
Participant 8	7	Early childhood education	Undergraduate
Participant 9	10	Field placement	Undergraduate certificate level

with teacher candidates. First, it is crucial to understand the orientations that teacher educators have about parent engagement, before looking at how such orientations translate into practices aimed at preparing teacher candidates for parent engagement.

Teacher educators' beliefs about parent engagement

All participants in the study had teaching experience before becoming academics and have well-articulated beliefs about the value of parent engagement in children's learning, education, and schooling (Goodall, 2018). Most participants believe that parents play a foundational role in their children's learning, especially at home, and that the job of teachers is to value what families have to offer, open spaces for their knowledge, language, and culture, in other words to bring their "funds of knowledge" into the classroom (Moll et al., 1992; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011):

> I think that the parents' role in education is to do what they see fit to support their children in their culture, in their family, in their home. I think the onus is on the teacher to make space and to honor that understanding in the classroom. (Participant 7)

> Teachers need to validate and encourage the language, literacy, learning practices that are happening in families already, so we need to make sure that families do not feel they have to modify their language that they use in their home and cultural practices to meet some normative expectation. (Participant 5)

At the same time, two participants reiterated that boundaries between professional educators and parents do exist and mentioned the danger that intensive parenting (Hays, 1996) can undermine the professional authority of teachers without necessarily improving the school education. They say that the elevated level of oversight from highly involved parents creates additional stress for teachers (Stelmach et al., 2021). Demands for increased parent engagement in the neoliberal context with its growing accountability of both teachers and parents to the state (Vincent, 2017) should not, in their view, lead to outsourcing elements of teachers' work to parents:

> We have to respect the teaching profession as actually a very highly skilled profession and we cannot transfer the responsibilities for our teaching onto the parents. We can work with families to provide them with some ideas, suggestions on how they might work with their children. We can't just expect a parent to do that, to offload those responsibilities onto them. (Participant 5)

Teacher educators in this study are especially aware of the deeply unequal nature of parental involvement, where some families feel more welcome in schools than others (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Stitt & Brooks, 2014). Participants who work in the areas of language and literacy education specifically mentioned speakers of minority and immigrant languages, who are often constructed as "hard to reach" (Crozier & Davies, 2007), and how we need to change our mindset and embrace these parents:

> In terms of literacy and language teaching, I know that parents, especially parents from linguistic minority communities, they have the knowledge. They are making efforts to support their children's language and literacy development and those efforts are not within the radar of schools. (Participant 4)

> Students that we are preparing to be teachers need to make this kind of a bridge between the school system and the community, especially with parents from immigrant backgrounds and Indigenous background, because this is the population that is perceived as less active. (Participant 1)

Several participants have experience of working with Indigenous parents in their former capacity as classroom teachers. Now, when they are preparing the next generation of educators, their work is informed by this knowledge and special attention that has to be paid to Indigenous parents due to the intergenerational trauma caused by the residential school system (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015):

> An Indigenous mom said to me one time: I can't go to my children's school. I don't have the right words, and I don't have the right clothes. So they feel so lesser in our buildings sometimes, unless we work with them in different ways. (Participant 3)

> They're not leery of education, they're leery of educators and remember, I was an outsider, I'm a settler, I came not from their community and again it took them a while, a good year for them to say, okay, she's safe. (Participant 8)

They know that it is the role of teachers to take first steps and engage Indigenous parents in ways that would be meaningful for them and their children and disrupt the ongoing colonial practices in Canadian education in terms of school-family relationships, curriculum, and pedagogy (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2017).

The "hard to reach" label (Crozier & Davies, 2007) attached to parents who belong to racial and ethnic minorities, are affected by poverty or recently immigrated to Canada has been critiqued by educators in this study who have worked with families from these under-served communities and appreciate their investment in their children's education:

> The families who've been marginalized by the school system are the most exciting and richest to work with. They are eager to have a place and voice. They want to have a relationship. They want to know more about the school, and they want the best for their kids, and so I find their responses are always so warm. They often don't come to us because they don't have confidence in their language, or they don't know how the school system works, they haven't had good school experience. (Participant 3)

The data above show that teacher educators interviewed for this project value parent engagement as an important element of teachers' work, are aware of the inequality that is prominent in parent-teacher collaborations and pay special attention to disrupting the notion of "hard to reach" parents (Crozier & Davies, 2007), especially those coming from Indigenous and racially marginalised backgrounds.

Curricular and pedagogical approaches to parent engagement in teacher education

As we can see, teacher educators interviewed for this study have positive views of parent engagement (Uludag, 2008), have a deep understanding of how educational inequality shapes parent engagement among various groups of parents (Stitt & Brooks, 2014), and are committed to equity work in the field of parent engagement (Baquedano-López et al., 2013).

The next question here is how teacher educators translate such beliefs into their own teaching practices and what are the affordances available for them in departments of

education where they teach. It is important to mention that only one out of nine intervie-wees mentioned that in their own teacher education there was any sustained emphasis on parent engagement. Subsequently, this group of teacher educators had no prior examples and would have to show their curricular creativity by developing parent engagement content in their own contexts.

Prior international research shows that there are very few teacher education pro-grammes that have stand-alone courses dedicated to parent engagement (Graue, 2005; Saltmarsh et al., 2015). Data from this study confirm that the Canadian teacher education landscape is no different in this regard. Only two teacher educators (Participant 2 and Par-ticipant 3) managed to introduce dedicated parent engagement courses. The course developed by Participant 2 was a special topics course and never became a permanent course in their teacher education programme that is heavily focused on curriculum and instruction. Participant 3 had a chance to develop several courses for a particular Master of Education strand. In most cases, though, the presence of parent engagement content depends on a particular instructor teaching these courses:

> Then in all of the courses that I taught also at the undergraduate level, where it was maybe an elementary literacy course or children's literature, or whatever those were, then I infused parent engagement in all of those. So, in their required courses, if they happen to have me as an instructor, there was parent engagement infused in that, if they didn't have me, then there probably wasn't. Some instructors bring parental engagement, others do not. Depends on the professor. (Participant 3)

The "infusion" approach seems to be the most viable option for most teacher education programmes. This is what most of the participants have been doing in their courses. The infusion happens at the level of specific content, classroom activities, and assignments that teacher candidates have to complete. Teacher educators design activities where stu-dents would involve parents or community members and bring their knowledge into the classroom, which bridges the gap between the home and school domains:

> An example with Indigenous students will be explaining how they celebrate, how their com-munity celebrates harvest or Thanksgiving which is not really Thanksgiving. Any interviewing of parents or their elders in their community bringing field notes or bringing recordings to the classroom, playing the recordings and then explaining to other students, you know the data that they gathered. (Participant 1)

> So, in my teacher education classes, we do family photo voice projects, where I ask the stu-dents to work with the family and to learn from the parents: how they support their children's literacy learning at home and in community settings, so they work very closely with the family, have conversations, maybe even join their playdates, and then learn from the parents. (Participant 4).

In some courses, parent engagement content is used not so much for specific activities but is an element of lectures, seminar readings and discussions, which also creates an opportunity for teacher candidates to start thinking about parents, their role in children's education and learning, and communication strategies that teachers can use to engage parents:

> I teach that course on kindergarten pedagogy, and in this course students learn about who they're teaching. These are openings for some good concentration on parents and parental involvement.

> We also have communication courses which are very key and that's why I take a good chunk out of that to talk about language and just how we communicate with parents and respectful communication and the language we use. We also have a writing course, so we have students write an email to a parent or a letter to a parent. (Participant 8)

Assessment is another avenue for bringing parent engagement in. This is an example given by Participant 7, where they initially used a communication assignment but then gradually understood that asking teacher candidates to explain a curricular term to parents in plain language provides opportunities for parent engagement around the issues of curriculum (Antony-Newman, 2020):

> There is an assignment where they have to explain what curriculum integration is to parents, and so it's basically a communication to parents translating teacher jargon and getting the register right to be engaging and opening up with parents. I have done that assignment with them for four years, but I didn't realize the impact until I saw it coming through in their pandemic work, so gradually, over time … I think that there were opportunities for discussion around family engagement. (Participant 7)

Although several interviewees mentioned the lack of dedicated parent engagement courses in their respective programmes, others were quick to underline that if you only talk about parents in one course out of many offered during the teacher education programme, there is a danger for teacher candidates of treating it as one item on a laundry list of courses: "Once I've taken the course I know everything I need to know about working with parents" (Participant 9). Subsequently, infusing the parent engagement content throughout a range of courses in the project might be a better solution for teacher candidates both in terms of raising awareness about the role of parents in children's education and learning and providing educators with tools for effective collaboration with families.

Overall, teacher educators interviewed for this study value parent engagement and are making sure that teacher candidates who take their classes are exposed to parent engagement content whether via the dedicated courses or through the content infused throughout the programme. Participants acknowledge that due to constraints of the packed curriculum more work is needed, and they are committed to show curricular creativity and advocate for policy changes to establish sustained parent engagement in teacher education programmes.

Discussion

As we see, teacher educators from seven Canadian provinces interviewed for this study have positive beliefs about parent engagement similar to many of their colleagues in other countries (Brown et al., 2014; de Bruïne et al., 2018; Mehlig & Shumow, 2013). Some of the participants have been working on including parent engagement content in their courses for many years, while others just recently discovered the importance of preparing teacher candidates to engage with parents and family members. The COVID-19 pandemic with its blurred lines between the worlds of home and school during the online learning period highlighted the crucial role of parent engagement even further (Calarco et al., 2021; Treviño et al., 2021), which was echoed by participants in this study as well. Teacher educators are aware that the engagement of some parents

results in higher "return" on their capital when it comes to the education of their children (Calarco, 2018; Lareau, 2011). In response, teacher educators are making sure that teachers they prepare are specifically ready to work with traditionally marginalised parents, including Indigenous parents and immigrant parents.

Faculty who work in the area of early childhood education in particular, pay significant attention to the role of parents in children's learning due to a more frequent communication between parents and educators and more visible parental presence in the school settings (Hornby, 2011; Jensen & Minke, 2017). Similarly, the area of language and literacy education, especially when focusing on minority and immigrant languages, lends itself well to focus on parents, who bring the family and community knowledge, language and culture into the mainstream schools (Little, 2020; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). In terms of programme structure, the curriculum in initial teacher education programmes is indeed packed with many courses seen as mandatory (de Bruïne et al., 2018; Mutton et al., 2018), so unless a new programme is developed or the existing provision is undergoing renewal and redesign, an infusion model of integrating parent engagement content in existing courses is the most feasible. Curriculum renewal offers opportunities to design programmes from scratch and embed parent engagement both in a standalone course and throughout the rest of the programme.

Several teacher educators mentioned that if parent engagement content is tied to a particular instructor and their interest in this topic, then there is always a risk that focus on parent engagement may not be sustained over time. What are the policy implications of this problem and possible solutions going forward? Several participants mentioned that one possible avenue could be institutionalising parent engagement at the level of policy, teacher education, and teacher standards/certification. In a federal country like Canada, education is run at the provincial and territorial level, which results in a high level of institutional diversity (Jones, 1997). Ontario has had a parent engagement policy since 2010 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), but other provinces do not have a similar document yet. Having a policy is not a panacea in itself as mentioned by Participant 3, but it is a good first step forward:

> I know policy in and of itself won't change anything, but it establishes an expectation. And then what starts to be put in place once we have an expectation. So, I've been in an ongoing conversation with our Minister of Education.

Teacher education is another area where institutionalisation of parent engagement can take place. Some steps are already taken in selected Canadian provinces. For example, the Ministry of Education in Quebec introduced readiness to cooperate with the family and education partners in the community as one of its 13 core competencies in the Reference Framework for Professional Competencies for Teachers that guides teacher education in the province (Ministry of Education, 2021). The Government of Ontario requires all teacher education programmes to prepare teacher candidates to build "professional relationships between and among members of the College, students, parents, the community, school staff and members of other professions" (Government of Ontario, 1996, para. 47). In the domain of teacher certification and standards, Alberta and British Columbia mention fostering effective relationships with parents and valuing parental involvement in their Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2020) and Professional Standards for BC Educators (BC Teachers' Council, 2019) respectively.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this exploratory study provides the first glimpse into beliefs and practices of Canadian university-based teacher educators in relation to their work preparing teacher candidates for parent engagement. Findings show that Canadian teacher educators are firm in their beliefs that parent engagement is beneficial for students' learning and important for families' sense of belonging in education. They are committed to including parent engagement content in their courses to ensure that teacher candidates are well-prepared to engage with parents when they embark on their teaching careers. Some teacher educators managed to add new courses to programmes at their institutions, but more often than not they rely on infusing the parent engagement content in existing courses across the curriculum. There is also a growing understanding that the reliance on the initiative of individual instructors who value parent engagement is not sufficient and the long-term sustainability of parent engagement content in teacher education programmes needs policy changes at the level of teacher certification and programme accreditation requirements to achieve the institutionalisation of parent engagement in teacher education.

Based on findings from this study and emergent literature in the field (Mutton et al., 2018; Saltmarsh et al., 2015), a major policy recommendation includes the introduction of the integrated parent engagement framework in all jurisdictions in Canada and internationally. Such a framework will include at least three elements: (1) parent engagement policy for teachers, school leaders, and board administrators; (2) requirements for parent engagement components in teacher education programmes; and (3) inclusion of parent engagement competencies in teacher standards/certification requirements (Antony-Newman, 2023). The development and enactment of such frameworks will eventually rest with faculties of education, teacher certification bodies, and educational policy-makers in respective jurisdictions.

In terms of research, more studies in the Canadian teacher education context are warranted to build on the present exploratory study and analyse the role that teacher educators play in preparing in-service teachers for parent engagement, where certified educators with classroom experience return to universities for additional or further education and professional development. Parent engagement is vital for students' achievement and well-being, parental self-efficacy and teacher professionalism (de Bruïne et al., 2014; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Jeynes, 2012), that is why we need to support teachers across their career span in establishing transformative and democratic parent engagement for all (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011).

Notes

1. The groups of parents presented below are far from homogenous. For example, Lareau et al. (2016) show the relative struggles of middle-class parents to activate their capital in education, while Siraj and Mayo (2014) highlight the educational success stories in families from non-dominant groups. Nevertheless, there is still utility in analyzing parent engagement through the lens of social class, race, and immigration status (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Lareau, 2011; Rollock et al., 2014). Moreover, at the policy level parents are constructed differently with engagement of parents from dominant groups seen as normative, while the actions of parents from non-dominant groups are viewed through a deficit lens and as requiring remedial efforts (Antony-Newman, 2019a).

2. Equitable and inclusive education has been a stated policy goal for quite some time (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009; Scottish Government, 2020), but the lived realities in classrooms show the unequal education provided to students based on their background ranging from curriculum (Anyon, 1981) to allocation of resources, teacher attention, and assessment (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000).

Disclosure statement

Ethics statement

I confirm that the study has been approved by the Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Board.

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